

THE LUDIC GARDEN:
THE WORK OF PLAY IN COMPOSITION AND
RHETORIC

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Abstract: This dissertation explores the intersections between play and game studies and composition and rhetoric. Through an analysis of the provenance of the five canons of ancient rhetoric, invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery, this dissertation argues that new media, exemplified by video games, can help us reconceptualize and revitalize composition and rhetoric for our increasingly digital world. In Chapter 1, memory is examined in relation to identity and agency in order to demonstrate the productive overlaps between the act of writing and the act of playing. Invention is the focus of Chapter 2. Breaking down games into the constituent parts of materials, limits, and goals allows composers to create games that model systems or ideologies. Composers can then play these created games as a way to formulate, understand, and test their understanding of the world. Chapter 3 looks at style and differentiates between three types of style operating in digital games: representational style, procedural style, and ludic style. Emphasizing the actions and decisions of the player, ludic style can be a powerful tool to help composers identify, experience, and enact tropes and schemes. Chapter 4 looks at both arrangement and delivery and argues that in new media, the two happen simultaneously. Through an analysis of propaganda in video games, this chapter argues that the patterning of objects in games and subsequent delivery of the propaganda through the performance of the player represents a powerful new avenue to disseminate propaganda. The dissertation is concluded with Chapter 5, a pedagogical take on how the ancient canons of rhetoric can help identify conspicuous computing through the use of play and games to subvert hegemonic views and dominating ideologies. Taken as a whole, this dissertation demonstrates how play and writing can inform each other and promote understanding of the ways new media shapes how we communicate, how we make meaning of the digital world, and how we can use this to produce better writers, players, and citizens.

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CHAPTER I

DEVELOPING A LUDIC IDENTITY: PLAYING AND WRITING, WRITING AND PLAYING

Introduction

In a series of television commercials from 2002-2005, Nintendo advertised their newest console the Nintendo Gamecube with the tagline “Who Are You?” In the commercials, various people shuffle through their day before a descriptor appears above their head as if they were a non-playable character (NPC) in a video game. “Gladiator,” “Guardian,” and “Commander” are just a few of the optional identities Nintendo sought to cultivate with its ad series. After cutting in clips from various games related to the descriptors, the ad concludes with the line, “You are what you play.”

For scholars of rhetoric and composition, the idea that writing is intimately connected with who you are is not new. The oft quoted E.M. Forster line “How can I tell you what I think till [sic] I see what I say” has become axiomatic and demonstrative of the connection between writing and thinking. Others have taken that connection and pushed it further. Yagelski (2012) calls writing a way of being, invoking an ontological argument that when we write we are not the same subject as when we are not writing. While these claims can be hyperbolic at times--one can easily imagine a cantankerous, Popeye-esque “I am what I am and that’s who I am” response to these claims--they are founded on both theories of writing and actual practice, even in our postmodern age. Postmodernism has sought to destabilize the notion of a static identity, one

replaced with the idea of identity (and its constituents such as gender, class, and race) as a performative act that changes depending on a number of factors such as the setting, the participants, the purpose, and the politics (Butler, 1990). This stands in stark contrast with modernist notions of the self as a sovereign subject under complete control of the mind. Both the modernist and postmodernist theorizations of identity have come under scrutiny in the field of rhetoric and composition, particularly in regards to the provenance of these terms and their relationships to fields such as philosophy and cultural studies that often conflict with rhetoric and composition (Sánchez, 2017). While the question of who you are when you write will never be settled with complete satisfaction, I use it as a starting point to interrogate the idea of identity and memory and want to connect back to Nintendo's commercials. Who are you when you play? Who are you when you write? I argue that the identity you adopt when you write and the identity you adopt when you play are remarkably similar. More than just idle coincidence, the similarities between these two states of being have the potential to provide insight into the primary object of study in composition, the writer.

I do not mean to suggest that writing is the same thing as playing or that writing can be made easier by tricking our brains into thinking that writing is a form of playing, rather I argue that playing and writing draw on the same cognitive resources; they enact processes that produce texts that can be meaningful, developmental, persuasive, and/or expressive; and rely on distinctions between inside and outside that are not readily obvious to observers. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the productive similarities between writing and playing across four dimensions. First, they are both processes that rely on iteration, revision, and audience-based reasoning. Second, in the same way that writing represents praxis (Yagelski, 2012) , so too does play rely on transtemporal approaches that engage the subject in terms of

past experiences, present action, and future outcomes. Third, both represent complex, situated ecologies where the writer/player must define contexts, goals, and constraints in order to succeed. Fourth, just as writing has the tendency to become heuristical (Britton, 1980), play can lead to new ways of thinking and creating. Taken together, these four points demonstrate that playing games in a reflective manner can lead to a more thorough understanding of writing through an understanding of the processes and forces that bring writing into existence and open new possibilities for using play to transform the ways we interact with the world. To that end, in this chapter I identify memory, identity, and narrative as the constituting forces that unite writing and play into a symbiotic whole.

To return once more to the Nintendo advertisements that opened this chapter, games and play are often advertised in a way that highlights their transformative potential. In a similar manner, the textbooks used in writing classrooms flaunt a similar possibility. Titles such as *Everyone's an Author*, *Everyday Writer*, *Curious Writer*, and *Writing Worth Reading* seek to cultivate the liminality of writing by suggesting transformations from consumer to producer, from begrudging participant to willful enthusiast. Shira Chess (2017) analyzes video game advertisements as a way of identifying the social and cultural forces that shape the game industry. She formulates the notion of designed identity and defines it as “a hybrid outcome of industry conventions, textual constructs, and audience placements in the design and structure of video games” (p. 31). It is only a small stretch to say that the textbooks we use in our composition courses offer up a similar designed identity of who we think students are and how writing can empower them. It is this common ground that I seek to explore and analyze.

In James Paul Gee's (2003) landmark book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, he describes how video games embody good learning practices and offers suggestions for embedding these practices of video games into our educational structures. He even connects video game play to identity, arguing that "video games recruit identities and encourage identity work and reflection on identities in clear and powerful ways" (p. 51). He demonstrates this by using the example of a student in a science class needing to adapt the identity of a scientist rather than a student in order to enact the knowledge they seek to gain. Here, I take Gee's work and apply it outside of secondary educational contexts. Gee, a linguist by training and literacy scholar by trade, has already done the work of identifying many of the principles uniting game design and pedagogy, but rather than delve deeper into the connection between video games and learning, I would like to examine the connection between play and writing as a way to forward one particular avenue of education, writing studies.

To that end, this chapter will first lay out the most salient connections between writing and play before moving on to theorizing a new type of identity for players and composers. Drawing on the work of Ulmer (2006) and his insistence to develop new words via anagram and portmanteau to describe the new conditions of writing in our increasingly networked, digital world, I propose a theorization of *playgents*, a combination of players and agents, and then identify four areas of crossover between the actions of players and agents resulting in the formation of the playgent identity. I conclude this chapter with a short discussion on the implications this work has for future scholarship in both rhetoric and composition and play and game studies.

Finding the Flow

One of the most fertile grounds of intersection between writing studies and game studies is the concept of flow. First theorized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow refers to the idea that as people perform tasks they move across two continuums. One stretches from low skill to high skill while the other runs from low challenge to high challenge. Across these two axes, people may find themselves in a variety of mental states. If the challenge is too high and the skill is too low, people become anxious. If their skill is too high and the challenge too low, the result is that people become apathetic or bored. Flow states are able to be achieved when the skill level of the person matches or is comparable to the difficulty of the task they are trying to perform. These states of mind are characterized by high levels of engagement, absorption, and a lack of consideration to other forces vying for attention such as hunger. Csikszentmihalyi developed his conception of flow through first noticing it in games of chess he played. He then studied the creative processes of artists to formalize his theory. It is easy to see then why his work is of such great interest to both those in game studies where developers often see flow as the holy grail of game design, and in writing studies where much scholarly attention has been given to breaking down the cognitive and material processes of developing a text. Flow as a concept has been used in writing studies to determine the complexity of tasks for English Language Learners (ELL) (Minyoung, 2018), the development of students as co-teachers (Mielke and Rush, 2016), analyzing inquiry via narrative writing (Fink and Drake, 2016), and disrupting distraction in student writers (Sumaya and Darling, 2018) amongst others. What all this literature has in common is its identification of flow as a desirable state that can be cultivated to help provide writers with sustained attention and inquiry in their writing tasks. However, flow is not a solution unto

itself. Just like boredom can be productive by offering a space for reflection and processing and anxiety can cause us to recalibrate and attempt new strategies, the purpose of flow is to offer a temporary respite because if you stay in a flow state long enough, even that becomes boring. Developing writing assignments and identity work, as Gee puts it, is one way to offer composers access to these flow states.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identifies several requirements for achieving a state of flow including clear goals at every step, immediate and discernible feedback, a balance between challenges and skills, a merging of action and awareness, and no worry of failure (which places flow outside of assessed work but still in the realm of activities and teachable skills). Each of the works in writing studies mentioned here provide different frameworks to tackle the challenges inherent to producing flow states such as readily providing feedback through self-correction procedures, peer review, and instructor dialogue; integrating different perspectives and experiences into the course curriculum to allow for a more diverse range of skills to emerge; and allowing for more experiential writing that is free from assessment. While each of these attempts to reliably produce a flow state, none of them provide a holistic and iterable methodology for producing flow states across a variety of writing and composing tasks. It is my goal in this chapter to describe such a framework by first comparing the act of writing to the act of play and then analyzing the ramifications this has on identity formation and the act of production. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) ultimate goal for flow states is to create an autotelic state where the subject performs an act because the act itself is rewarding intrinsically instead of through externalized rewards. Finding the common ground between play and writing, positioning composers as playgents, allows for easier access to this autotelic state.

Games, where the inspiration for Csikszentmihalyi's flow derived from, have also been equally invested in the idea of a flow state. Raph Koster (2014) argues that the word "fun" is just one aspect involved in the process of learning. As used here, games are beneficial because they act as a sort of container for play. Koster equates flow states with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development in that they both seek to bolster skills by providing appropriate challenges. Others such as Katherine Isbister (2017) and Alistair Soutter and Michael Hitchens (2016) see flow in digital games as connected to the emotional resonance with an avatar or character in-game. Still others have looked at how flow operates in a cooperative context with multiple players working together to achieve the same goal (Kaye, 2016; Raphael, Bachen, and Hernández-Ramos, 2012). The goal of these analyses of games and flow states is largely an attempt to reverse-engineer the flow state so that designers can create systems and mechanics that players find pleasurable. While the focus in game studies has been on how to design a system to induce flow, writing studies has taken up flow for an alternative reason: to help understand why some learners are able to juggle complex, cognitive tasks while others struggle under similar conditions. Regardless of how flow is positioned, it remains an important theoretical concept that is always concerned with managing the difficulty of a task in relation to the subject's own skill level. The work done on flow in game studies can then be seen as a way to plan ahead and design systems--including assignments and courses--that meet players where they are at rather than force them to adopt tasks they are not ready for or familiar with. Writing studies can then use this information to assist writers in the formation of an identity they can enact in the moment of production or meaning making.

In order to demonstrate the utility of such a formation, I will provide a brief summation of the contemporary discourse around memory and identity in writing studies. In particular, I am interested in how memory leads to the formation of identities and how those identities allow for agency through discursivity, textuality, and materiality. Once this throughline has been established, I will turn once again to game studies scholarship in order to demonstrate how play allows for the rapid and iterable creation and dissolution of identities through the idea of the magic circle and a lusory attitude.

Memory, Identity, and Agency

Rhetoric and composition has long had an interest in both memory and identity. There exists an intimate connection between memory and identity which is actualized through individual agency in the literate act of production or consumption. This chapter proposes a new type of identity, one that functions as a meta identity, the playgent.

Memory is the fourth of the five ancient canons of rhetoric, and the canon that has most often been ignored in contemporary scholarship. Collin Gifford Brooke (2009) attributes this lack of attention to memory with its equation to storage. He argues that “although memory is a canon that focuses our attention on the relationship between discourse and time, the treatment of memory as storage spatializes the canon, reducing it to the single axis of presence and absence” (p. 148). The reduction of memory to storage leaves little room for development of theories of memory in writing because the brain is seen as a database with a simple search function that we invoke to recall materials. In order to break free from this reduction, Brooke seeks to align memory not with *chronos*, the continuing marching on of time, but rather with *kairos*, the ability to find the precise moment and conditions to perform a persuasive act. He concludes with a call for future scholars, stating,

“Construction has not been an emphasis in our considerations of the rhetorical canon of memory” (p. 151). Ultimately, Brooke argues for persistence as a practice of memory for new media, defining persistence as “the practice of retaining particular ideas, keywords, or concepts across multiple texts, be they websites, journal articles, or chapters of the same book “ (p. 157). Memory is not a static configuration or resource that the rhetor or composer draws upon in a time of need. In its place, memory as a practice seeks to use the concept of memory to allow for kairotic moments to erupt into discourse and achieve expressive or persuasive potential. In seeking to answer Brooke’s call for construction to be part of the canon of memory, this chapter uses memory as a practice in line with Brooke’s description as opposed to memory as a function.

Memory as an act of meaning making has received much scholarly attention as of late. This has primarily be seen in the attention rhetoricians have paid toward public monuments (Bruggeman, 2008; Davis, 2016; Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, 2010; Nora, 1989). While these scholars take different approaches and perspectives, each finds a common ground in the idea that public monuments do not constitute a solidified and consolidated static memory, rather these public monuments actively work toward the construction of a shared public memory. In addition to this work on museums and public monuments, Gregory Ulmer (2006) has performed similar analysis in regards to how digital monuments actively create memory. Again here we see the ways in which memory has been reconfigured in contemporary rhetoric and composition to be a form of construction and not just consumption. The idea that memory is something we use as a locus to form the narratives that we use to understand the world around us leads to a strong connection between memory and identity.

While I am not the first to forge a connection between memory, identity, and agency, what I want to focus on here is how this relationship works, particularly when thought of in light of narrative and the production of texts, a slight shift in contrast to the focus on monuments and public memory in much of the scholarship. Burgess and Ivanic (2010) argue that “writing is an act of identity” (p. 228). The ability to produce texts is always dependent on the writer adopting, enacting, and questioning various identities in order to meet the needs of the rhetorical situation.

Burgess and Ivanic (2010) define five different levels of identification that happen in literate acts: socially available possibilities for selfhood, the autobiographical self of the writer, the discursal self, the authorial self, and the perceived writer. While their ultimate goal is to show how these aspects of identification operate on unique timescales, I will use their work to describe how memory operates within each of these aspects and works toward the construction of identity. The socially available possibilities for selfhood refers to the social space in which the writer operates. It requires the writer to be engaged with memory to understand and analyze historical trends and connotations while navigating the various roles and tropes associated with her self or the topic at hand. The autobiographical self of the writer refers more directly to the writer’s own lived, embodied experience including their past experiences, values, beliefs, and social standing. Here, the writer engages with memory by drawing on her own experiential knowledge and often times requires a temporary yet cohesive sense of self to be constructed in order to fit the current situation. The discursal self constructed through the act of production refers to the values, beliefs, and choices embedded in the text itself. Memory operates within the discursal self to clarify purpose, adhere or reject genre conventions, or navigate denotation and connotation to craft an

effective text. The fourth aspect of identification in writing is the authorial self. According to Burgess and Ivanič (2010), “this aspect of identity differs from the discursive self in that it may be constructed through particular ways of using language that are not tied to specific discourses but implicated in social relationships of power in a more general way” (p. 240). The writer must reflect and recall how power is negotiated through the use of language in order to understand their own ethos and sense of authority. Finally, the identity of the perceived writer refers to the creation of a “writer” in the reader’s mind as they navigate a text. Memory allows for the synthesis of patterns and formulation of knowledge about how they experience their writing process contrasted with what they know about others’ writing processes. What these five aspects demonstrate is that memory is intimately connected with identity and the process of identification, which Burgess and Ivanič argue is located in the act of writing. Writing--and Burgess and Ivanič are quick to point out that this applies to any act of literacy--then becomes a way to actualize memory into various identities that may be adopted or discarded depending on the demands of the writer’s current rhetorical situation. The identity of the playwright is still actualized through memory and the acts of production highlighted by Burgess and Ivanič, but allows for the rapid traversal between alternative identities and literate acts.

Memory is intimately connected with identity, and thinking of the terms as interrelated allows for greater clarity on what it is compositionists study and how we as rhetoricians talk about texts and society. Drawing on the work of sociologist Manuel Castells, composition scholar Raul Sánchez (2017) argues that memory will play an increasingly large role in our understanding of who we are and how we find agency in the world. He argues that “it seems undeniable that in increasingly deterritorialized information

and material environments, people will keep searching for ways to define themselves socially, culturally, politically, and individually. And they will do this by making texts of all kinds. They will do this by writing” (p. 11). As the world around us becomes increasingly digitized, our connection to physical place is diminished. Part of the thrill of new media applications like augmented reality (AR) is their ability to connect the actual with the virtual. However, AR apps like Pokémon GO (Niantic, 2016) and Google Translate’s (Google) on the fly pictorial translations do not seek to further a connection to actual places. Instead, these AR apps use the virtual to overwrite the actual, a concept I explore further in Chapter 5. A tree planted in honor of a beloved professor becomes a Poké Stop for players to gain berries and potions while the menu of a French patisserie becomes a garble of English on a cell phone screen. AR then will not be a renaissance of place-based discovery or identity-formation because these apps are based on a simple premise: the virtual is more exciting or more useful than the actual. There is, however, one area where the virtual and the actual--the real and the make-believe--stand on equal footing: the magic circle.

The Magic of Magic Circles

The magic circle is the idea that play takes place in an area separate from the rules, conventions, and mores of society. The term was first used by Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga (1980) as one of the many ways that societies delineate play and work. For Huizinga, the magic circle and other constructs such as the sacred spaces in churches, the courtroom, and the lines on a soccer field operated in a way that allows those inside the circle to adopt new identities (the schoolchild becomes the soccer star, the mother becomes the judge, etc.). Huizinga argues in his landmark work *Homo Ludens* (1980) that play precedes and gives rise to culture. Many of the cultural aspects he analyzes--poetry, war, law, religion,

and more--no longer bare the marks of play or games unless they are viewed in light of the consecrated place or magic circle. While Huizinga was ambivalent on whether magic circles provided clarity or merely obfuscated political and societal machinations, the term has become popular with scholars in game studies as a way to understand the disconnect between actual and virtual worlds. Edward Castronova (2005) argues that the distinction between actual and virtual has becoming increasingly meaningless and less important as the two merge and twist together in our digital society. While I agree that magic circles have diffused and widened to the point where it is hard to determine what is part of a game and what is merely the pageantry of society, the idea of the magic circle still has great utility in helping facilitate how play and games enact changes to identity. Even when the magic circle is critiqued such as in Mia Consalvo's (2009) "There Is No Magic Circle," it is done so on the basis that players do not necessarily always follow the rules of a game. Consalvo argues that examining the practices and justifications of cheaters in digital games denigrates the usefulness of magic circles by showing how even the rules, one of the defining features of games, are an imaginary construct that can be followed or ignored at will. However, even this argument demonstrates the utility of the magic circle in helping understand how identity operates within a magic circle.

In Consalvo's argument, she is focused on the practices of cheaters, which is one of three categories proposed by Bernard Suits (1978) as those who are not truly playing. Using his definition of a game, Suits examines three types of behaviors that disintegrate gameplay. These are triflers, cheaters, and spoilsports. For Suits, triflers are players who follow the rules but do not actively seek to accomplish the game's goals, cheaters are players who actively pursue the goals while not acknowledging or following the rules, and spoilsports adhere to

neither the rules nor the goals of the game. Here then the magic circle functions not as some permanent marker separating play from society. In its place is a circle that defines different identities in terms of their actions: players, triflers, cheaters, and spoilsports. The cheater in a game only adopts that identity when inside the magic circle. Once the game stops, hard feelings may still exist, but the individual is no longer a cheater. It is this aspect of the magic circle, its ability to force cognization of identity, that I am most interested in.

To summarize, I have analyzed the conception of the magic circle in play and game studies. For the purposes of this dissertation, the magic circle operates as a semi-permeable barrier between the real world and the game world. What matters is not so much the barrier itself, but the fact that the barrier requires the adoption of new identities which can be reflected upon both inside and outside of the circle. This act of reflection and becoming aware of the iterability of identity via the magic circle gives players a sense of agency. When connected with acts of production such as writing an essay, recording a podcast, or designing a game, the continual awareness of the fluidity of identity and its creation/destruction cycle through writing, produces the figure I term the playgent.

This leads to the question of exactly what the identity of a playgent is. I previously mentioned the idea of a meta identity that is derived from a ludic identity. I want to explicate what this ludic identity is and how I am differentiating it from other, similar terms. To do this, I will look at Jos De Mul's scholarship on projecting identity and abductive reasoning as well as how Cole develops an ontological process for identity formation in digital games.

The term "ludic identity" has been used in at least two different contexts relating to game studies, and both act as approximations of how I define the term though they differ slightly in scope and intention. The term has been used by Enrico Gandolfi (2015) with an

anthropological focus to understand the attitudes and perceptions towards games and play. Gandolfi uses ludic identity in this way in order to demonstrate the importance of games to societal and cultural identity. This is important work, but it differs with my conception of identity, one grounded in rhetoric and composition, that views identity as closely intertwined with agency and enacted through literate acts. Jos de Mul (2015) in his essay “The Game of Life: Narrative and Ludic Identity Formation in Computer Games” formulates a definition of ludic identity that is much closer to how I will be using it here in the field of rhetoric and composition. de Mul, a digital games scholar, builds off of the theorization of narrative identity in an effort to highlight how meaning is made from digital games. Whereas narrative identity is concerned with constructing the past via story in order to understand the present situation, a ludic identity is concerned with examining future possibilities in order to gain a clearer conception of the subject’s current position. de Mul (2015) argues that part of the mindset needed to make meaning in video games comes from the subject’s ability to accurately conceptualize, represent, and summarize how the player’s current situation constricts or expands future possible choices. For example, in the game Tetris, the player must rapidly analyze the current placement of their blocks in order to discern the best possible positions for the incoming tetrad block. In some games, this can be quite simple, but in many games it becomes increasingly complex. In applying this type of thinking from game studies and into English departments, Astrid Ensslin (2014) identifies the possible complexity of players trying to analyze a particular situation as being a battle between hyper attention and deep attention. Hyper attention is concerned with analyzing and discerning large amounts of information or data simultaneously such as when the player is dodging dozens of incoming projectiles while firing back and trying to eliminate enemies or when a

reader is navigating web pages with ads, video clips, hyperlinks, and user comments. Deep attention, on the other hand, is the type of sustained attention that is necessary to accomplish a single task or focus on a single text such as a poem or in a game when attending to tasks such as shopping or inventory management. The defining of a ludic identity as being related to the future instead of discerning the past is a powerful theorization that has much in common with design thinking and abductive reasoning (Cross, 2007). It demonstrates the way the medium of digital games can be productive outside of merely being “fun,” but it does not encompass acts of production and how the ludic identity is actualized via agency. In order to come to a fuller understanding of what a ludic identity is and its utility for writing studies, it is necessary to view a ludic identity both in terms of the agency it provides as well as how this identity is formed. To do so, I will look at Sara Cole’s (2017) work on games and ontology to describe how the identity is formed as well as Ulmer’s (2005) and Holmevik’s (2012) on electracity to demonstrate how agency configures into identity.

Part of the work identity achieves is due to what Heidegger (1996) identifies as “self-constancy.” Self-constancy is the idea that identity remains similar when compared differentially but also identity is not fixed and is instead a continuous construction that subject builds in order to make sense of their place in the world. While de Mul’s definition possesses the active component of identity--that we continually make and remake our various identities--it does not define how the identity is formed in the first place. Both Gandolfi (2015) and de Mul (2015) suggest that an interest in play and games is enough to form a ludic identity for the former whereas the ludic identity is already formed *a priori* in the latter. Cole (2017), however takes a different approach. Drawing on media studies, ontology, and sociolinguistics, Cole theorizes that identity is formed in relation to gameplay through

ergodic ontogeny, which she defines as, “individual identity and ideology construction as a response to interactive digital play” (p. xv). She argues that considerations of both popular and academic notions of play and games are necessary to fully understand how this process transpires. In order to fully access all these aspects, Cole argues that “the construction of identity through ergodic ontogeny relies on players’ connections with in-game characters, levels of immersion in digital/virtual environments, feelings of player agency through actions and narrative, and the crucial differences between experiences of the virtual and the real” (3). Ergodic ontogeny relies on more than just the narrative pulled from the medium as with film and alphabetic texts. Similarly, considerations of just the formal aspects of play--what is deemed the ludological perspective-- do not fully capture the transformative potential of play in interactive media.

For these reasons, Cole revisits the long waged debate in play and game studies of the dichotomy between narrative and formal-rule based played. To resolve this long standing debate, Cole relies on Espen Aarseth’s formulation of the ergodic as opposed to a strict narrativist or formalist interpretation. Ergodics refers to the non-trivial effort needed to navigate through a text, which in the case of digital games refers to the actual act of playing and the need for the player to provide substantial input in order to fully traverse the text. However, ergodics goes beyond just the formal rules for traversing interactive media to include how the act of navigating influences the players perception of the text. Ultimately, Cole argues that as the user plays with interactive media, they undertake a thorough exploration of the media’s affordances--both formally and narratologically. As others such as Gee (2007) and Bogost (2007) have pointed out, the act of playing leads to direct and indirect learning. The importance of Cole’s work is in showing that “this learning process and

personal/individual involvement is part of a game's allure and establishes a connection between play experiences and reality that ultimately leads to ergodic ontogeny" (82). While Cole does not use the terminology of ludic identity, it is clear that ergodic ontogeny leads to a conceptualization of identity based on who you are when you play and how play affects identity. What is most useful for my purposes here is how the various modalities and affordances of games--the avatars, virtual environments, player agency, etc.--contribute to the construction of identity. We now have two of the three pieces in place for a fuller, richer understanding of what a ludic identity is. From de Mul, we have an understanding that ludic identities enable a type of thinking about future situations and possibilities in order to better and fully discern the current position. From Cole we have a list of the various elements and factors that happen in game that lead to the formation of such an identity in the first place. The final piece needed to establish a full definition of ludic identity is in regards to agency.

At its core, identity is about the ability to express oneself or enact change in the world. Composition and rhetoric scholar Raúl Sánchez argues that "identity's connection to agency makes it relevant to our field's mission to know the vicissitudes of writing so that we may help empower as many people--as many writers--as possible" (p. 10). It is then both a necessity of clear definition and moral imperative to the field to connect identity and agency. Here I will rely on the work of Ulmer (2006) and Holmevik (2012) to round out my expanded definition of ludic identity. In *Electronic Monuments* (2006), Ulmer identified a new type of writerly subject, the egent. The egent uses the means and affordances of digital technology to enact change in virtual environments. The egent enacts change through the use of emotion and responds to Barthes's (1980) notion of the punctum to create texts rather than through the studium which relies on culture, politics, and linguistics. Because play is always

embodied--it relies on non-trivial movement and requires the player to engage their individual body with the world, be it virtual or actual, around them, the egent's reliance on emotion and punctum is particularly applicable to how agency is configured through play. According to Holmevik (2012), the egent operates through the choral code. Chora represents "a personal space that conflates place and memory" (p. 56). For eagents, choral code "connects the place of invention (virtual) with the function of memory and meaning (also virtual). As memory, choral code prescribes possibilities; it does not determine actions. Rather, it enables and empowers eagents...to define as many outcomes as they can find ways to use the code's program" (p.56-57). Once again, the connection between memory and identity is made. Choral code here functions analogously to de Mul's ludic identity. What this demonstrates is that de Mul's positioning of ludic identity is only one aspect of a fuller, richer description.

If, as Sánchez (2017) suggests, "to write is to apply, or perhaps set in motion, particular manifestations of the relationship between words and things" (p. 33), then eagents and players share in the ability to manifest new relationships through their literate acts. The figure of the eagent, of which the digital games player is one specific subset, illuminates the ways in which players can find their own agency through production. The emotions of play and the embodied experience of the player provide the basis for a ludic identity and the eagent describes how they turn these experiences into texts.

I have now described what ludic identity is concerned with via de Mul (2015), how identity is constructed in games via Cole (2017), and how agency is actualized through the figure of the eagent via Ulmer (2005) and Holmevik (2012). This allows me to formalize my definition of ludic identity: a sense of self derived through interactions in game environments

that allows the subject to discern their current position through the analysis of what types of emotions, texts, and experiences they are capable of creating or replicating. From there, I can theorize the function of the playgent. Combining agents with players, the playgent is able to navigate between a narrative identity wherein she uses story to make sense of the past and inform their current situation and a ludic identity where she analyzes future possibilities in order to better understand the position, the chora, she currently inhabits. The playgent is always concerned with temporal and spatial matters, and it is through the act of production, be it via play or via writing, that the playgent is able to gain agency.

In the next section, I want to expand on what it means for playgents to produce and how traditional acts of composition--namely, writing--share similar features and functions to acts of playing. What this will allow is a framework for how playgents can gain competency in related acts of meaning making. Essentially, I argue that the figure of the playgent allows for play to inform the act of writing and writing to inform the act of play. I will demonstrate this by showing four dimensions in which play and writing draw on similar cognitive and experiential processes. My methods here are intersectional. I derive my conclusions through looking at areas in which writing studies and game studies come to similar conclusions about a subject, primarily identity and agency through very different means. These means include case studies, pedagogy, literary theory, and philosophy. After describing each area of overlap, I will then theorize potential uses for the field of rhetoric and composition.

Iterative Processes

Play and writing are both conceived of as processes and, because of this, each is centered on concerns of iteration, audience, and revision. Ever since Donald Murray's (1972) essay called for educators to "Teach Writing as a Process not a Product," the field of rhetoric

and composition has moved away from models that focused solely on the end product of acts of writing. In its place were pedagogies focused on pre-writing, drafting, and revising as equally important to the final product a writer produces. Murray's essay is so influential, it has become the *de facto* approach to teaching writing in higher education. While viewing writing as a process allows for student learning to become the central focus of the classroom as opposed to student assessment or grades, it also opens up new possibilities for finding productive crossover between writing and other disciplines that value and teach knowledge formulation through a process-based approach. This has led to scholarship examining the overlap between design studies and writing (Leverenz, 2014) and machine learning and writing (Bamakan, Nurgaliev, and Qu, 2019). Leverenz (2014) argues that writing as a form of problem-solving may have fallen out of favor in rhetoric and composition, but design thinking can help address the flaws, in particular the relative simplicity of the problems posed, to such an approach. She writes, "Learning how to work on hard problems in a creative way is a skill that can transfer to future writing situations if students are made conscious of and given opportunities to reflect on what they're doing" (p. 6). Her ultimate solution to the "wicked" problem of teaching writing is to position production "as a recursive process of defining problems and proposing divergent solutions could lead to more engagement" (p. 7). For Leverenz and other scholars who seek to find interdisciplinary solutions to demystifying the process of writing, divergent thinking and abductive reasoning--where the subject addresses the problem through formulating solutions rather than through examining already existing approaches--are the keys. While Leverenz offers a few practical solutions to get students into the proper state of mind for divergent solutions and abductive reasoning such as providing appropriate restraints via a Pecha Kucha type presentation or

rapid prototyping via quickly produced drafts free of assessment, I would like to add another: playing games.

Games and the magic circles they inscribe allow for play to take form. Within the context of the magic circle, play allows subjects to adopt new identities which can then be used to formulate new ways of thinking about problem-solving. In her analysis of the digital game industry and their marketing towards women, Chess (2017) adapts the second-wave feminist slogan “the personal is political” for our current times. She argues that in what some scholars (Zimmerman, 2003) have deemed the “ludic century,” the playful is also political. She writes, “the playful is political because the playful is about the bending of boundaries, the remapping of identity, and the rethinking of traditional roles” (p. 176). Play is reconfigured as a potentially subversive and resistant stance to dominant ideologies. This is not because there exist more games and more players now than at any other time in human history, but because play and game studies have been able to demonstrate how play resists capitalist notions of efficiency and structured leisure time, the rigidity of identity, and centralized forms of production.

The magic circle and the play it thereby affords is dependent on the formation of both an identity--the ludic identity--as well as a specific state of mind that is often deemed “the lusory attitude” (Suits, 1978). Suits defines the lusory attitude as “the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (p. 54). The lusory attitude then is what is needed to get students thinking divergently and using abductive reasoning. David Myers (2017) builds off of Suits’s definition and argues that “the lusory attitude is a mode of cognition, a way of thinking about and interpreting games and gameplay: a way of being in the world” (p. 46). For Myers, lusory attitude is similar to the “suspension of disbelief” that readers partake in

when reading fiction, but the lusory attitude is a more radical mindset because it requires greater empathy and “a more active assertion of belief in the game’s particular meanings and values” (p. 60). This is similar to Gee’s (2007) claim that video games embody good learning practices because the game always makes the player believe they are capable of accomplishing the goals set out before them. When a player steps into a magic circle and adopts a lusory attitude, they must do so with the genuine belief that they have the potential to win or succeed at the game.

While always adopted in the act of playing, the lusory attitude need not be dependent on the playing of a game. If we can position the act of writing as taking place in its own magic circle, then we can encourage students to see the writing process as dependent on the active assertion that they can accomplish the tasks they have set for themselves. This notion of expanding magic circles until society as a whole adopts a lusory attitude is the final area of examination in the utopia Suits describes. He imagines a world where carpenters are playing games by nailing shingles to roofs until the carpenter barely notices the repetitive act of driving nail through shingle with hammer. Brendan Keogh (2018) draws on the power of the lusory attitude and gameplay to force the player to “actively make belief” (p. 38) and, in doing so, bridge the gap between the virtual world and the actual world. Through his analysis of how casual mobile games are experienced, Keogh argues that we are always constructing belief--adopting a lusory attitude--when we enact with virtual or cyber worlds. What this demonstrates is that the utility of the lusory attitude is applicable beyond games. Students do not need to “play” a paper, but the adoption of a lusory attitude allows for the ludic identity to come to the forefront. In turn, this enables composers to draw on the power of divergent thinking and abductive reasoning to approach the production of their texts. What this could

potentially could look like in the classroom is students identifying as many solutions as possible and staying much longer in an exploratory phase where the work backwards from solutions to see how they address problems. Instead of having a solution in mind and working toward, students stay in a state of productive uncertainty and genuinely build toward a fuller understanding of their and their topic's rhetorical situation. In this way, students formulate an argument about what they want to know or want to discover instead of arguing from what they already believe to be true. In the next section, I expand on this bridging of actual and virtual through the incorporation of time into the processes of writing and play.

Play and Writing as Praxis

This chapter positions play and writing forms of praxis that reaches across time and memory in order for composers to gain a better understanding of who they were, who they are, and who they want to be. In responding to the question of why writing seems to have had so little a transformative effect on students even when writing is becoming increasingly common, Robert Yagelski (2012) argues that “we simply don’t teach writing in ways that give students access to its transformative power; we don’t allow them to experience writing as a way of making sense of themselves and the world around them” (p. 189). Yagelski’s solution to the problem of students not viewing writing as transformative is to reposition writing not as a rote procedure but rather as a form of praxis. He draws on the work of critical pedagogist Paulo Freire to explain how “language and literacy are integral to--indeed, essential to--that process of action and reflection” (p. 190). For Freire (2000), we are always “in the process of becoming” fully human, which is a condition where the oppressed reject their oppression and oppressors without adopting the harmful hierarchies, hegemonies, and ideologies that lead to subjugation and oppression in the first place. In many ways, the work

of Freire and Yagelski is akin to the work done by the lusory attitude. In each, the focus is on the active construction of belief, meaning, and identity. In positioning writing as praxis, Yagelski (2012) extends the act of writing beyond the present moment. He argues, “Writing somehow brings together past, present, and future. Not the text we produce as a result of writing, but the act of writing in the moment. When we write, no matter what we are writing about, we call on the past and anticipate the future even as we inhabit the present; at the same time, we engage in an act that is both deeply intellectual and overtly physical” (p. 192). As I argued earlier in this chapter, this is the function of the playgent: bridging the gap between narrative identity that relies on the past to inform the present and ludic identity that analyzes future possibilities to describe the present situation. What I will now show is that play too is a form of praxis, and experience in one way of being--because for Yagelski writing is “an ontological act” as is play for many game and play scholars--should be able to inform other potentialities for being and identifying.

Play is a way of existing in the world (Fink, 2016). Scholars such as Rachel Shields (2015) have argued that an ontological understanding of play has the potential to underscore the transformative power of play. For Shields, the experience of play is often beyond language, but understanding play as way of being can force us to adapt language practices in an attempt to bring forth the symbolization of these feelings. Play then literally becomes akin to the connective power of writing. As Yagelski (2012) states, “Writing is inherently an act of connection. What emerges as we write in the moment is a multifaceted sense of self that is connected, through language, to other selves and to the world we share” (p. 193). Of course, the process of bringing experience into language is itself an act of translation, one that does not always go as smoothly as planned. However, just because some experiences or emotions

or incapable of being captured in written discourse, does not mean they are themselves ineffable. Shields (2015) ultimately argues that play as a force allows us to consider alternatives to dominant hegemonies and interpolated ideologies. Play, then, becomes a different way of expressing oneself, an idea I will return to in Chapter 4. In laying out his conception of object-oriented ontology (OOO), Ian Bogost (2012) argues that “writing is only one form of being” (p. 90). In order to fully understand the world around us, the world that exists outside of the self, memory, and identity, we need different modalities and mediums to fully express the pantheon of human experience. Play is one such option.

It may be argued that play is a simple, ephemeral act that can not claim the power of the written word. However, part of the argument I am making here is that play is not only a way of experiencing and existing in the world, but also an act of production. Joshua Daniel-Wariya (2016) argues that play is frequent feature of new media related to computation’s ability to make content that is endlessly repeatable, customizable, interactive, and radically variable. He argues that play as a form of production functions as a non-discursive language. Gee (2007) argues for play as a form of production owing to the fact that it forces players to engage with the “design grammar” of a particular semiotic domain. Through this engagement and production, players interact with various systems of belief and values. Huizinga, (1978), in examining the play-forms of art, connects play to production and performance. For Huizinga, culture is derived from play, and art, as the paragon of culture, is dependent on its ability to be played or performed for an audience in order to have any affect. We enact our identities--performativity in post-modern thought--through performance which always has an element of play to it, even if deadly serious play. Viewing both writing and play as praxis, as events that span temporal scales and allow us to draw on past experiences, the present

situation, and future possibilities, underscores the importance of memory and identity to both play and writing. Positioning them both as praxis means that they are actions or events instead of products, which allows for the enactment of a theory of memory and identity in which we draw on the past to inform the present in order to imagine who or what we will need to be in the future.

Models, Systems, and Texts

Play and writing both represent complex, situated ecologies where the writer or player must define contexts, goals, and constraints in order to succeed. Writing and play both represent embodied acts that force subjects to become cognizant of how their own experiences shape their current perspective. In his revitalization of the canons of rhetoric for our age of new media, Brooke (2009) argues for memory in the digital age to be a function of persistence. He defines persistence as, “the practice of retaining particular ideas, keywords, or concepts across multiple texts, be they websites, journal articles, or chapters of the same book” (p. 157). Each individual student comes to the classroom with their own repertoire of these ideas, keywords and concepts. What the idea of embodiment has brought to writing studies is that the writer never comes to the act of writing as *tabula rasa*, rather the writer brings their own attitudes, experiences, and beliefs to the act of writing. In discussing both the act of writing and the act of teaching writing, Melanie Kill (2006) argues that “the relational nature of identity, which places individuals in the situation of depending on others to serve both as reference points and sources of validation for their presentations of self” requires students to think in terms of relations or systems (p. 232). The ability for rhetorical memory to weave threads across these disparate factors gives credence to the fact the memory is more than just an analogy for digital storage. Each individual writer inhabits a

unique body and life experience, meaning that each writer must individually identify what constraints, contexts, and goals exist in their literate acts. The task of teaching such an individualized subject would seem nearly impossible. Fortunately, we have a number of phrases and terminal screens we use to simplify this process. These include genre, the rhetorical situation, and heuristics and hermeneutics. In light of these terms, reading and writing can be thought of as the production and consumption of texts as a system of rule-bound structures, genres, and contexts that can be acknowledged, adhered to, or defied. This is remarkably similar to how free play operates within the context of games, and I would like to draw out how games and play give players a greater understanding of systems and situated ecologies which can in turn be brought back to writing studies to aid writers.

In Eric Zimmerman's (2013) "Manifesto for the Ludic Century," he identifies systems thinking as a key literacy for the 21st century. As our society becomes increasingly digitized and networked, where even your kitchen sink is connected to the internet, the ability to think about complex interactions in terms of systems will be essential. Zimmerman argues, "The ways that we work and communicate, research and learn, socialize and romance, conduct our finances and communicate with our governments, are all intimately intertwined with complex systems of information...While every poem or every song is certainly a system, games are dynamic systems in a much more literal sense" (n.p.) Digital games rely on computation and rule sets to create the illusion of virtual space. Because digital games are entirely rule-bound--you can't use your hands in a soccer game like *Fifa '18*, you must adhere to the possibilities and rules the game affords--their rigidity effectively mirrors the processes in which a composer begins the act of writing. The writer must use intelligible language, follow a set syntax, obey or purposefully subvert genre conventions, and design the

document in a way that allows for usability. There then exists productive crossover in how a writer can think strategically about how they want a reader to experience a text and how videogames promote thinking on a systemic level.

Games work best when they balance the line between predictability and randomness. In this way, they seek to constantly create the flow state between boredom--predictability--and anxiety--randomness. DeVane, Durga, and Squire (2010) see games as the best way for students to engage in systems-oriented reasoning, essentially making meaning from the vast amount of information games display. Each game operates according to a system's set of rules or a model's simulation of the world brought into effect through rules. DeVane et al. (2010) argue that when approached with a critical mindset "players learn to infer the properties of its underlying relational model (or, put otherwise, its ideological world). As educators, we design experiences so that players learn to make inferences about those models and negotiate their meanings within real-world social and cultural systems" (p. 4). Games are always models and thus represent approximations of how an individual or team of designers believes the world works, should work, or could work. In much the same way, in the act of writing, we attempt to make sense of the chaos of the world in a way where our internal perceptions can become externalized. This is the work of memory and identity. In formulating a theory of identity to assist composition scholars in bridging theory and pedagogy, Sánchez (2017) argues that identity describes "the relationship between the inside and the outside of writing at the moment of a text's creation--that is, during an individual act of writing" (p. 9). Models, simulations, and texts all seek to operate as a way of connecting the writer's experience with the social world. Digital games have been demonstrated as a particularly powerful way of engaging learners and composers in critical reflection on how

the connection between inside and outside operates. Adopting the identity of the playgent allows for memory to draw on the disparities between inside and outside in previous experiences in playing as well as the less obvious task of bridging inner and outer speech. Indeed, thinking about how texts function both as and within systems is yet another possible outcome for the playgent identity, one I explore further in Chapter 3.

Heuristical Writing/Heuristical Play

The final avenue of intersection between play and writing this chapter analyzes is both tendency of both to become heuristical and lead to new ways of thinking and creating. While I explore this connection in more depth in the following chapter (Chapter 2) and develop a framework for using play to invent, it is worth highlighting how discovery has been positioned as both a function of writing and a function of play.

Writing is more than the act of committing ideas to a text in order to outsource the act of storage as Plato feared. Walter J. Ong (1986) argues that writing is a technology that reshapes how we think which ultimately gives rise to the idea of objectivity. When we write, we separate our thoughts from our thinking by turning thoughts into printed words or symbols. While this can be alienating and give rise to bureaucracy, it also allows for literate peoples to develop standardized procedures, like the Scientific Method, for studying the world. For Ong, the technology of writing is ultimately beneficial, and he concludes his essay by arguing that “writing is a consciousness-raising and humanizing technology” (p. 31). Writing then is not simply a way of expressing one’s thoughts, but an entirely new way of thinking that gives rise to new disciplines such as science arising from philosophy and logic as well as a new way of experiencing the world.

Because the technology of writing has been ingrained in literate societies, writing has the tendency to produce more writing. Drawing on analysis between oral and literate cultures in a matter similar to Ong, James Britton argues that “once a writer’s words appear on the page...they act primarily as a stimulus to *continuing*--to further writing, that is” (p. 62). He formulates the idea of “spontaneous shaping” to describe writing’s tendency to produce more writing. He argues, “When we come to write, what is delivered to the pen is in part already shaped, stamped with the image of our own ways of perceiving. But the intention to *share*, inherent in spontaneous utterance, sets up a demand for further shaping” (p. 63). Using data from experiments where writers were forced to cover up each word after it was written, Britton was able to show that the act of symbolizing thoughts led to new ways of thinking about those thoughts, new interpretations or definitions, or a need for clarity of previously written ideas.

The idea that writing is heuristical--that it iterates and evolves--is a powerful conception of the importance of writing to both the individual (the inside) and the social and material world (the outside). In their influential study of discovery, Linda Flower and John R. Hayes (1980) argue that writing “produces new insight and new ideas” (p. 22). Through analysis of how writers approach problems, Flower and Hayes determined that discovery wasn’t some innate skill, but a talent that could be honed through the act of writing. Janet Emig (1977) makes a similar claim. She argues that writing is a unique mode of learning because it is an active process that engages with personal experience and must construct its own contexts in order to be properly understood. For Emig, writing is itself inventional, but she also claims that writing operates in a way distinct from other mediums such as orality. Here I will argue that the claims Emig and other rhetoric and composition scholars make

about the heuristic quality of writing is not unique to the act of writing but also shared by the act of playing.

The idea that learning is connected to play is not new. Brian Sutton-Smith's (1997) review of the rhetorics of play indeed shows a vast range of scholars and disciplines connecting to play to learning. From child psychologists to zoologists, empirical and theoretical efforts have been made to demonstrate how play and learning are connected. Accepting the widely held premise that play is connected to learning especially in the newborn and young, I will demonstrate how play is also connected to the very idea of discovery and invention.

Many scholars who study play do so through observation of children, and while I do not mean to suggest that the students, subjects, writers, and composers I talk about in this project should be compared to children, it is clear that the uninhibited play of children can act as a window into the primal power of play. Through their observations of newborns and toddlers, Elinor Goldschmied and Sonia Jackson (1994) formulated what they deemed "heuristic play." Heuristic play is achieved when a group of young children are given a range of objects with no direction or prescription for playing. What Goldschmied and Jackson found through their observations was that children were able to take any object--be it a common household object such as roll of tape or a natural object such as a pinecone--and create ways of playing with it. Cardboard paper tubes became trumpets or imaginary tunnels. Through the act of play, the children transformed the objects around them and invented new uses for everyday objects. To quote Yoda from *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, "Truly wonderful the mind of a child is." Yet, it is not solely the child's mind but rather free play that allows children to invent and create, and the same holds true for humans of all ages.

As previously stated, play is a way of being and experiencing the world. Adoption of a lusory attitude necessary for play requires the active construction of belief. Creating belief, itself a heuristical act, is a very powerful mode of cognition. What it leads to is the ability to adopt new positions where belief and disbelief must be considered, discarded, or reinforced. David Myers calls this “an indication of imagination” (p. 79). In order to play a game, we must create the contexts and identity with which we will inhabit the magic circle. All play is dependent upon these acts of invention. In this way, play operates in a way counter to narrative, mirroring the opposite perspectives of narrative and ludic identity. Myers argues that “games and fiction engage belief--and disbelief--in fundamentally different ways” (p. 65). Both play and writing are dependent on our ability to actively believe or disbelieve and, in doing so, create and shape both our interior identities and the exterior material world.

Conclusion

The common ground shared by both play and writing is perhaps larger than previously thought. I have demonstrated four areas in which there is productive overlap between the two acts and modes of cognition. They are: their reliance on iteration, process, and audience; their positioning as praxis and transtemporal forms of thinking; their representation of complex, situated ecologies; and their inherent heuristical nature. Through the figure of the playgent, a meta identity, I have attempted to bridge narrative identity and ludic identity in order to demonstrate how play and writing rely on similar cognitive and material means and seek to arrive at the ends of identity formation, invention, and systems thinking.

If, as previously mentioned, the focus on memory in rhetorical studies has been shifted from the individual act of memorization, an analogy akin to data storage, and onto the

work of collective memory in monuments, museums, and other areas of shared cultural knowledge, where does that leave the study of memory in regards to the individual on the micro level? I believe the answer lies in the oft repeated anecdote of Simonides. Simonides, as per Quintilian and other ancient rhetoricians, was able to memorize the exact positioning of his friends and colleagues when the building they were in collapsed. Because of his memory, Simonides was able to correctly identify each of the bodies and allow for the proper funeral rites for the deceased individuals. Bradford Vivian (2018) argues that this anecdote typifies how the ancients thought of memory, stating, “*ars memoriae*, in a pre-modern episteme, implied a distributed system of information storage, retrieval, and communication. Oratorical performance activated virtual relays between physical and mental space, speech and imagination, soma and psyche” (p. 288). Games and play have the potential to reinvigorate contemporary thinking on memory by returning to the spatialized conceptions of antiquity. Digital games and play require the traversal of virtual space in a way alphabetic texts do not. The ludic identity and the figure of the playgent can rely on this spatial and temporal movement as a way to draw together disparate ideas, forge new connections, and find new patterns.

CHAPTER II

THE GAME OF INVENTING: LUDIC HEURISTICS, ONTOLOGICAL PLAY, AND PLEASURABLE RESEARCH

Introduction

As educators, we are often charged with identifying problems facing our students--trouble coming up with a suitable topic, difficulty in developing examples to illustrate arguments, or organizing an essay in a way that makes sense to both writer and reader. Good teachers are often excellent problem solvers who understand the constraints of their particular classroom, identify the needs of the students, and then set appropriate goals and motivations to meet specific objectives. This has traditionally taken the form of alphabetic texts that adhere to academic genres, but the multimodal turn in rhetoric and composition has seen a rise in the number of approaches to textual production and meaning making. In particular, the field of computers and writing has sought to “change people’s relationship to technology in and out of classroom settings” (Breaux, 2017, p. 29). One possible solution to the challenge of reshaping subjects’ relationship with technology is the process of making. Makers produce goods, texts, and other artifacts outside of the typical commercialized manufacturing process. They create their objects for a variety of reasons including craft and folk traditions, the desire for self-sufficiency, economic concerns, and a more intimate connection to their products. Technological advancements in the world of game engines--tools used to construct games themselves without

having to manually code each and every aspect of the game--have positioned digital games as a potentially new avenue for makers to express themselves.

Centered on the idea of students as makers, this essay analyzes the possibilities for developing new invention practices for creating texts that don't merely position play as subservient to invention, but rather utilize play and the making of games in order to teach and theorize invention itself. Ultimately, this essay develops a model using the tools of digital studies with a low barrier of entry for teachers to help students break away from simply arguing from deeply held beliefs and into more, complex and nuanced forms of argumentation.

Coming up with ideas can be a challenge for any composer, and students may feel like the constraints of any particular situation or assignment makes the workload unmanageable. Imagine then this scenario: You are a young graduate student at a small, private college. A group of eighteen athletes on various teams such as football, baseball, and lacrosse have become bored by the regiment of calisthenics, marching, and apparatus work used to keep them in shape as well as burn off their extra energy. Confined to a small gymnasium during the dead of winter, you must develop a game that is physically taxing and exhilarating yet does not have the violence of rugby or football when played on a much smaller field. The game must be challenging and skillful, yet easy to learn and teach to others. Finally, the game has to be confined to the space of the gymnasium and must be playable under artificial lighting.

This was the task given to James Naismith in 1891 by Luther Halsey Gulick the "father of physical education." The solution to the problem was the game of basketball, which quickly became one of the most popular sports in the world. Today, Naismith's game born out of necessity and limitations generates billions of dollars in revenue and commercial opportunities. In the United States alone, the NBA generated \$7.37 billion dollars of revenue for the 2016-2017 season (Statista, 2018).

There is a certain genius to the thirteen simple rules Naismith constructed to form the game of basketball nearly 130 years ago. Naismith, much like the contemporary teacher in either primary, secondary, or higher education, faced considerable restraints to reach his goal of creating a game that Gulick needed to “be interesting, easy to learn, and easy to play in the winter and by artificial light” (Springfield College, 2017, p. 1). Based on the constraint of the gymnasium, he ruled out games where balls are small and hard to see under the artificial lights of 1891 (ie. baseball) as well as games that needed large open spaces to be played effectively and less violently (ie. rugby, soccer, and American football). Based on the goal of keeping the athletes in good physical condition, he needed them to run up and down the gymnasium, so Naismith decided on having two goals on opposite ends of the court. The final limitation that Naismith faced was adding depth and skill to the game. If the goals were as they are in rugby or soccer, players would be able to chuck the ball from one end to the other--as a gymnasium is much smaller than a soccer pitch--with brute force trumping fine skill. Here is where Naismith’s brilliance was put on display.

Faced with such a problem, Naismith remembered a folk game he played as a child called Duck on the Rock (Associated Press, 2006). While the game is simple, Naismith noted a common strategy among the better players. They would throw their rocks in a soft arc so that even if the rock missed the target of the “duck,” the distance they would have to run to retrieve their rocks would be much shorter than those who threw the rocks in a hard line drive. What could potentially be a hazardous game of the “it” player dodging missiles from their friends turned into a game of strategy and skill. Naismith took this lesson from Duck on the Rock and applied it to his new game of “basket ball.” Instead of giving the players a goal that was perpendicular to the playing field such as in soccer or the goalposts in football, he made the goals horizontal to the playing surface. With a pair of empty peach baskets hung to the gymnasium railing ten feet above the floor, Naismith had the element of skill, control, and finesse that would be needed to make the game interesting.

Forty five short years after the invention of his game, Naismith threw the opening jump ball for the first Olympic basketball game in 1936. Having satisfied his mentor's demand for a new game and inventing what would become a multi-billion dollar industry is enough to make this anecdote remarkable, but the story of the invention of basketball has the potential to influence and reshape how writing teachers approach problems in our own classrooms. Taking Naismith's example as a starting point, in this essay I construct an iterable and adaptive heuristic for developing games based on a conceptualization of the materials in use, the limits and means imposed on to the game, and the goals for successful completion of the game. I argue that this heuristic will present writing instructors with a new mode for teaching invention, one that combines the pleasures of play with the spark of discovery.

In my ten plus years of teaching in first-year composition programs as well as working as a consultant in multiple writing centers, one problem seems to stop student writing more than any other: having a "good" idea. We can teach about argumentative structures, sentence construction, effective organization, deft integration of sources, audience-based writing, and proper tone until every student has several notebooks full of practical advice, but if they don't have an idea on how to start or what to write about, those lectures and activities on various aspects of the writing purpose have no use. The problem of "getting started" has always been an issue of concern to teachers of writing (Brooke, 2009). Carter (2003) and Bawarshi (2003) question the very notion of a "beginning" to writing and the problems inherent to positioning invention as taking place before the act of genuine writing. Other scholars have looked at the influence of place (Esposito, 2012) and the need for complex, "wicked" problems that students may not be equipped to write about at their current skill level (Leverenz, 2014).

Why do writers often struggle with coming up with a novel topic or innovative take on an old debate? I argue that the answer to this question lies in the story of Naismith's invention of basketball. In order to get at this solution, I want to pose a question with a similar exigency though entirely different scope: Why are we so bad at inventing new games? If Naismith, a

second-year graduate student who had switched disciplines from theology to physical education, under duress by his graduate advisor, and faced with a set of constraints that were deemed insurmountable by his colleagues who had failed on several occasions to come up with a game to meet Gulick's criteria, was able to create one of the world's most popular sports over a few winter evenings in Springfield, MA, why are we so bad at coming up with novel arguments, expressive essays, or interesting new sports?

There is a considerable amount of research and scholarship that demonstrates that students struggle to come up with unique topics and innovative arguments (Brooks et al., 2017; Crowley and Hawhee, 2009; Esposito, 2016). Mirra, Morrell, & Filipiak (2018) argue that a focus on consumption rather than production, especially in digital contexts, prevents students from developing the skills needed for a true literacy and, thus, cuts them off from the challenges of creation, the thrill of discovery, and the development of intellectual curiosity (Mirra, Morrell, & Filipiak, 2018).

This separation of consumption and production is especially prevalent in regards to digital games. In composition and rhetoric, games are typically positioned as another type of text to be analyzed (Adams, 2009; J. Alexander, 2009; P. Alexander, 2017; Ostenson, 2013). Games are rightfully praised as a nascent medium worthy of critical attention, but that attention is almost always focused on the context of playing and analyzing games. This paper seeks to fill in the other half of a gaming literacy by creating a framework for composers to create their own meaningful games. While other researchers have brought the creation of games into the classroom (Ballentine, 2015), this approach differs greatly because it focuses not on the writing tasks involved with making a game, but rather how the creation of games via an iterable heuristic allows for the subsequent discovery of new knowledge.

Drawing on examples from diverse fields such as visual design, leisure studies, human-computer interaction, and multimodal composition, this article examines the potential for the development of "ludic heuristics," which allow composers and rhetors to both create and analyze

texts through the process of inventing their own games. As one of our society's newest forms of media, digital games have the potential to foster a deeper understanding of the role digital literacies and new media play in shaping our lives. While the field of rhetoric and composition has a long history of using innovative methods applied to grammar (Christensen, 1963), reappropriation and remix (Palmeri, 2012), and form (Lanham, 2006), there is little research on the application of heuristics to develop play both as an end and as a means in composing digital and multimodal texts. As scholars such as Rebekah Shultz Colby (2017) have noted, there is a push to use digital games in the classroom, though there is very little established in terms of actual implementation, best practice, and pedagogical foundation for the inclusion of games.

In order to establish and build off this foundation, I construct a framework where games are composed of materials, limits, and goals. Once these components have been analyzed and explored, the composer plays the game in order to understand the "possibility space" afforded to the player and can then develop novel arguments, conclusions, and insights into how the materials, limits, and goals recursively influence each other through feedback loops. This framework of imitation, systems thinking (DeVane et al., 2010), and rhetorical analysis via Bogost's (2007) procedural rhetoric has the potential to lead to the production of a diverse array of applications, texts, and new media compositions. Ultimately, I argue that the integration of playfulness and play can be effective methods to explore our situated, material world as well as to identify the machinations and procedures of conceptual models, most notably ideologies and systems, which then can lead to the production of innovative texts, novel arguments, and new media/multimodal compositions.

Tracing the History of Games and Invention

In order to gain a fuller understanding of how play can be used to create both games and innovative arguments, it is necessary to establish a series of definitions for what play and games are and how they have been viewed in both a historical and contemporary context. Because games and play have numerous, colloquial definitions and because the heuristic for developing

games relies on the individual components of games to form the whole, a thorough understanding of games allows for the development of a networked, ecological view of how meaning is created through play. From there, I will move on to a discussion of how play and games become rhetorical as well as how they have been used in the rhetoric and composition classroom. Finally, I will touch on a number of interdisciplinary intersections that elucidate the connections between games, play, writing, and invention by looking at multimodal composition, design thinking, object-oriented ontology, and systems thinking. The framework generated by synthesizing these various fields of study will allow me to demonstrate how an understanding of the composition of games and the building blocks of play foster invention.

It is nearly impossible to talk about definitions of play and games without mentioning the contribution of Johan Huizinga. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1971) was one of the first serious academic examinations of play. Drawing from anthropology and cultural studies, Huizinga defines play as happening in a separate, created space he called "the magic circle." The rules, costumes, and motivations for entering the magic circle simulate an environment with very low stakes but plenty of opportunity for creativity and freedom. Huizinga goes so far as to say that culture does not produce play but rather that play gives rise to culture. Play is not a diversion or frivolous activity. Play, for Huizinga and the legions of play and games scholars that followed him, is a productive resource that has created and shaped our cultural understanding of law, war, poetry, philosophy, and art. It is this creative potential of play that this paper is most interested in.

Following in the footsteps of Huizinga, French sociologist Roger Caillois (2001) looked at the cultural forms play shapes and devised a taxonomy of games. While his defining of games into four categories of *agon*, *alea*, *ilinx*, and *mimicry*, is often cited, this paper is more interested in his formulation of the continuum on which all games lay. On one end of this imagined continuum, Caillois identified a form of play he deemed *paidia*. *Paidia* refers to spontaneous, malleable, and improvisational play such as in children's games of make believe where the rules frequently change and new identities are adopted as needed. At the other end of the spectrum,

Caillois identified *ludus*. Ludus is a more formalized version of play. It requires fixed rules which then allow the players to rely on skill, ingenuity, effort and practice. Each of these types of play, ludus and paidia, have different strengths and benefits. The spontaneous power of play rests in paidia. It allows for any event or material to be turned into play. A forked stick can become a sling shot while a longer, straighter stick may become a sword through the power of paidia. On the other hand, ludus, which is structured and potentially systematic, makes play experiences repeatable through a sort of standardization. While this work is largely taxonomical, it is the potential for traversal back and forth between paidia and ludus that interests us here.

Caillois (2001) goes on to define the relationship between paidia and ludus stating, “[Ludus] is complementary to and a refinement of paidia, which it disciplines and enriches. It provides an occasion for training and normally leads to the acquisition of a special skill, a particular mastery of the operation of one or another contraption or the discovery of a satisfactory solution to problems of a more conventional type” (p. 29). There is tremendous potential in utilizing ludus to help composers acquire a “special skill” or a “particular mastery.” Too often this takes the form of gamification where actions are motivated by certain elements of games such as reward schedules, leaderboards, points, and badges. However, gamification implemented in this matter negates the spontaneous and often unpredictable nature of paidia that is initially required before its essence can be distilled into the repeatable performances of ludus. How then to traverse back and forth along the continuum of ludus and paidia to allow for creative improvisation and spontaneity but also allow for repeated experiences and the mastery of a skill? I argue that the answer is to have potential composers and rhetors create their own games based upon the materials they are engaging with; the limits imposed by genre, embodiment, and sociopolitical contexts; and the goals they set for themselves both beyond the game--pre-lusory goals--and within the game itself--lusory goals. The act of creating these types of systems allows for the play of paidia to assert itself while ludus irrupts from the formalized nature of the game and the potential for repeated playthroughs.

I will demonstrate the potential and utility of this claim later in the paper, but first I will examine how invention has been formulated in general and in writing studies in particular in order to gain insight as to how inventing games can function as both a heuristic and a hermeneutic.

As one of the five canons of rhetoric, invention has a long tradition of definitions, theorizations, and implementations. While a thorough overview of invention as a canon of rhetoric is beyond the scope of this essay, there are several key authors and articles that illuminate either the importance of invention to composition or how our digital age has influenced perceptions and practices of invention.

One of the earliest and longest-lasting discussions of invention and its relation to composing begins with Aristotle's *topoi* (Gutiérrez, 2012). Aristotle developed a list of 28 categories broken down into common and special groups. The intention behind this list of topics was to give rhetors the preparation and training in developing arguments based off of a wide range of circumstances and situations they may find themselves in. While Aristotle's *topoi* are useful, contemporary views on invention do not typically locate the genesis of invention in the discovery of a list of topics on which to develop responses. Some scholars such as Crosswhite (2011) and Bacha (2016) have sought to expand the scope of *topoi* to include the writer's embodied situation, but for the most part, contemporary scholars have moved beyond generating lists of topics as a primary means of invention. In its place, scholars have sought to identify how the digital world has influenced invention (Holmevik, 2012), how social and cultural contexts define the possibilities for invention (LeFevre, 1987), and how genre and identity dictate invention strategies (Bawarshi, 2003).

While discussions and development of the *topoi* dominated early discussions of invention, they were not the only views on discovery and creation taken by classical scholars. In an examination of the literature on invention in the Roman age, Leff (1983) identifies Cicero as one of the chief scholars who both expanded Aristotle's theories of invention and disrupted

them. In Leff's analysis of Cicero, invention is positioned as part of a process, much in line with contemporary views of composing. Instead of viewing topics as definitive starting points, Cicero urged rhetors to discover the material of the argument by focusing on logical connections between topics rather than expounding on a singular topic. It is this focus on both the materials and the various connections between them and other actors that is most useful for the formulation of a ludic heuristic. As we will see, focusing on the materiality of an object is one of the primary ways in which play is enacted and games are developed. Nearly two thousand years later, Bogost (2016) makes a similar argument: play allows us to see the connections between disparate objects. The holes in a wiffle ball interacting with air turbulence and rotational velocity results in a pitching style that can make even Major Leaguers miss wildly. The ability to turn the spontaneity of tossing a ball into a repeatable act of skill and control where a veteran wiffle ball pitcher can make a curveball drop two feet in the air as it crosses the plate is where the power of invention and focus on materials come into being. One does not need to understand the math and physics behind the curveball, but if it is explained to them, an experienced wiffle ball pitcher will immediately have a better intuitive understanding of the situation.

While the the connection between games and invention has been made before (Gee, 2003), the focus of my argument is new because it focuses on the active creation of games and not just on their reception. Scholars such as Colby (2017) and Robison (2008) advocate for student-created games as a way to demonstrate the potential of persuasive games or as an act of multimodal composition. However, the focus here is on invention itself, with play positioned as a “pleasurable” form of research that allows composers to compare their self-created model against the real-world implementation. This allows for critique and discovery of what Finn (2017) deems the “implementation gap” that exists between any digitized model and its real-life counterpart. Analyzing the materials of a topic can lead to the creation of a game where the player organically discovers how the system works and what types of arguments can be produced from the materials. This type of creation and reflection goes beyond what Ensslin (2014) notes as

a conflation of playfulness and play, with the former defined as “happening primarily in readers’ (and writers’) minds as they interact with a text” (p. 28) and the latter defined by its formal structures and need for embodied movement. Because these are actual games that are being created and not just a particular frame of mind being sought after, the ludic heuristic pushes past what Ensslin deems a banking model where an expert doles out information to students and into the active creation of new knowledge in the creator.

In his influential essay on prewriting, Rohman (1964) positions the problem of invention as a “puzzle form” where the solution often arrives from the composer being able to establish and understand the patterns that comprised the puzzle. Game designer Raph Koster (2014) makes a similar argument about where fun is derived from in games. To Koster, games force players to recognize patterns and then extrapolate those patterns to new novel situations. As long as a game can continue to add small variations to the patterns and problems presented, the player will continue to have what Koster calls “fun,” a pleasure derived from learning something new. So, if the problem of invention is a puzzle solved through pattern recognition, induction, and deduction, and games operate best when they force players to intuit patterns and then extrapolate solutions based on these patterns, it would seem that playing games is one way to unravel the dilemma of how we can bring about a flexible but structured, repeatable but iterative procedure for inventing. Games, through both their creation and their subsequent play, represent what Lauer (1979) identifies as the features of a strong heuristic: applicability to diverse situations (games can be about any topic or idea from saving princesses to folding proteins), flexible in their processes (creating games involves looking at materials, limits, and goals in an ecological, regressive manner), and highly generative (games produce gameplay, reflection, analysis, paratexts, social relationships, and more).

Starting in the 1980s, scholars began to investigate how computers could be used to foster invention practices. Diane Langston (1986) sought to break away from traditional pen and paper based invention strategies and into a “new paradigm” of digital inventional practices

focused on the interaction between various actors and systems. With the new paradigm set, many scholars sought to implement Langston's advice into their pedagogy. James Strickland (1992) catalogued available software that could be used by students and teachers to aid in invention and argued (Strickland, 1985) that computers could be used to expedite the invention process. The investigation of the potential for computers to aid in invention continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s, culminating in Ulmer's (2002) theorization of *electracy*. Electracy is a literacy for the digital age that recognizes the importance of medium to signification, but electracy is more than just a digital literacy. It is a shift in how we make meaning and come to realizations about the world around us and our role in it. Whereas traditional alphabetic literacy has been used to augment our understanding of the scientific world, electracy is more concerned with affective response, embodiment, and the individual's own situated mind.

Drawing on the work of Ulmer, Jan Holmevik (2012) examines the role of play in contributing to electracy. Deriving from Ulmer's Apparatus Theory of orality, literacy, and electracy, Holmevik connects play to the act of invention, noting that "to play means to invent by heuristic means" (p. 6). The values of the electrate age fall on a continuum of pleasure/pain with individuals typically seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Games, to Holmevik and many play and game studies scholars, represent a stable, repeatable way to explore possible solutions to problems, effectively becoming a type of heuristic in and of themselves. The problems that games can solve, especially at the level of commercial or AAA games, is limited. As Koster (2014) puts it, the vast majority of games are about primitive survival skill such as estimating the distance needed to clear a stream of water or chasm, estimating the path of a projectile, and identifying possible threats in an environment. However, this does not mean that games are limited to inventing solutions solely based on survival skills. If we as instructors and educators can get potential rhetors to create their own games, then the possibility for various skills to be mastered--such as identifying the relationship between actors in a system--as well as the potential for the creator to gain new insights into the conceptual model they are creating. In this way, having

students play the game of inventing and then play the invented game allows for traversal back and forth across the spectrum of *paidia* and *ludus*.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify and define what I mean when I say “inventing a game.” I do not mean to suggest that we teach our students as if they were potential game developers or programmers, lecturing them on colliders, classes, and the mathematics of raycasting. What I intend is for students, in composition classes and beyond, to explore the possibilities of all the various types of games we humans play: role-playing games, tic-tac-toe, The Floor is Lava, tag, puzzles, mazes, board games, mobile games, and more. The idea that games can tackle serious issues is not new. Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer (2010) identify ways journalists can create games on issues such as fast food franchising, voter disenfranchisement, and international pirating. What is new is having students create games to better formulate, understand, and create their arguments.

In Bernard Suits’s (1978) monumental work *The Grasshopper: Life, Games, and Utopia*, he defines games as being as an “attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [preludary goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]” (p. 41). This definition works in tandem with Bogost’s (2016) assertion in *Play Anything* that we make the unmanageable or unpleasurable into the manageable and pleasurable by finding the limits and rules already present around us and then engaging them on their own terms. Coupled with Holmevik’s (2012) assertion that elective invention is more akin to a form of play than a type of research, I propose that games can be constructed from materials, limits, and goals--both a simplification of some of Suits’s original definition as well as an expansion based on Bogost’s work. Playing the created game enacts a type of research in to how accurate the game models the materials in question as well as discovering new possible solutions via goals.

I will approach each of these three aspects separately in order to clarify what I exactly mean as well as to demonstrate how combining and playing with these three variables has the potential to develop arguments and foster understanding of systems and ideologies. From there, I will analyze a popular commercial game, a serious or persuasive game, as well as a student project as a demonstration and assessment of the effectiveness of this heuristic.

Playing with Materials

Our networked, digital world has a tendency to feel so complex and inexplicable that it produces apathy or ignorant bliss. Having students compartmentalize, summarize, and explicate the materials around them can foster a greater understanding of both *how* and *why* the world works the way it does. Wallowing in the otherness of the people, places, and technologies that surround us can actually help with fostering deep understanding. The philosophies of object-oriented ontology (OOO) and speculative realism have gained increased attention in the academic community over the past decade. It is easy to see why given the nature of our digital age. As Ed Finn (2017) argues, we now look at code and digital devices as source of magic in a way similar to how medieval populations viewed the cathedral or icons of the saints. Our belief in the objectivity of code and the neutrality of digital devices has been shaken by recent events such as the Equifax privacy breach, Amazon Echo's passive collection of private conversations, and Facebook's cooperation with Cambridge Analytica. While each of these produced plenty of negative press for the offending companies, services, and devices, the blame was largely shifted to individuals or accidental failures instead of focusing on the systemic processes and shifty business practices. OOO offers a sort of escape from deterministic views of technology. Because OOO positions each object as its own individual entity capable of expressing itself in a multitude of ways while still concealing a near-infinite amount of facets from whatever object is observing or interacting with it, OOO has the potential to reshape not just how we interact with objects, but also our expectations and perceptions of the object. This is an important stance when it comes to viewing the materials of which games and arguments are made.

Drawing on Bogost's (2012) work in *Alien Phenomenology*, I use his definition for objects as a proxy for the materials in the ludic heuristic. Bogost defines objects as "encompass[ing] *anything whatsoever*, from physical matter (a Slurpee frozen beverage) to properties (frozenness) to marketplaces (the convenience store industry) to symbols (the Slurpee brand name) to ideas (a best guess about where to find a 7-11)" (p. 23-4). While this definition is purposely broad, it offers a new way of conceiving the materials used to construct an argument. While materials, limits, and goals can all fall under the category of *object* under this definition, dividing objects into the three aforementioned groups allows composers to breakdown large systems or ideologies such as capitalism or feminism into more manageable chunks. These divisions then allow the composer to approach each element of an object in a more discrete way, especially when it comes to objects often taken for granted in play and game studies, such as embodiment and the potential of the computer as a metamedium. It may seem reductive or even irresponsible to have students work with truncated or simplified models, but this work of summarizing and simplifying is necessary for any form of computation. All computer code and algorithms are simplifications of complex processes that attempt to appear objective. This leads to Finn's (2017) aforementioned implementation gap which results from the theoretical ideas of code, algorithm, and simulation being implemented into the complex, often messy world we live in. Understanding and attending to the implementation gap between the model of the materials the student has created and how the materials actually operate is one way to achieve "algorithmic reading," which Finn defines as "a way to contend with both the inherent complexity of computation and the ambiguity that ensues when that complexity intersects with human culture" (p. 2). No model or algorithm is ever entirely accurate, and having students reckon with disparities between societal understanding and computational media leads to a more critical literacy of technology

While focused on larger issues such as what it means to exist and how we construct knowledge, Bogost's (2012) *Alien Phenomenology* applies particularly well to the creation of

games. Bogost urges people to adopt the identity of a carpenter when attempting to understand how an object makes itself known or conceals aspects of itself. He argues that as a carpenter, the composer

must contend with the material resistance of his/her chosen form, making the object itself become the philosophy...Carpentry entails making things that explain how things make their world. Like scientific experiments and engineering prototypes, the stuffs produced by carpentry are not mere accidents, waypoints on the way to something else. Instead, they are themselves earnest entries into philosophical discourse. (p. 93)

Tasking composers with making a game is one particular way of adopting the carpenter identity argued for by Bogost and encouraged by rhetoric scholars such as Scot Barnett and Casey Boyle (2017). The identification of materials as the first step in the ludic heuristic allows for both a low-stakes, exploratory and spontaneous sense of research while also providing a logical starting point for an area of inquiry.

At this stage, composers do not need to have identified an argument, stance, or position. They need only to identify what the system, concept, or ideology they would like to analyze. This can take many forms such as feminism, food deserts, wastewater storage, water desalination, grammar, urban planning, late capitalism, Homecoming week, microaggressions, student fees, and refugee crises. Because invention always takes place in a situated context (Bawarshi, 2003), the student can begin to note of the features of their materials that they interact with and experience most frequently. Generating lists, a strategy that Bogost (2012) locates in much of the writing of Latour, “remind us that no matter how fluidly a system may operate, its members nevertheless remain utterly isolated, mutual aliens” (p. 40). Identifying the components of any material allows the composer to see the amount of variables they need to represent in their game as well as the potential for seemingly disparate objects to interact with each other, a hallmark of discovery learning (DuFour and Marzano, 2011). As an example, a student may take a very broad

material such as capitalism and break it down into a list consisting of wages, labor, capital, means of production, competition, factories, employees, managers, and class inequality. The list need not be exhaustive. One of the tenets of Bogost's (2012) formulation of OOO is that objects are both inexhaustible--they can react, change, pair, and interact with an infinite number of other objects, always revealing new or different aspects of the original object-- and incalculable--they recede infinitely into themselves like a black hole, never entirely knowable by any other object. Attempting to enumerate each and every object within the concept, system, or ideology is not only impossible, but also impedes any work the composer may currently be doing. With this list in hand and a general understanding of each component, the student can then break down components even further or begin to trace the connections between pairings or triplings that may have not been readily apparent. This is the basis for how materials are discovered and utilized in the ludic heuristic.

Finding the Limits

The second aspect to the ludic heuristic is limits. Limits are perhaps the most essential part of play. While in contemporary discourse and thought, play is considered to be a free activity unbound from the constrictions of the real world, play and game studies scholars have long argued for the importance of rules and limits. As Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003) argue, rules do not inhibit play, rather rules make play possible. In a similar manner, limits allow for invention to move from a sort of free play where anything goes and into an iterable, structurible, and teachable process of discovery.

I have chosen here to use the term "limits" rather than "rules" because of both the conflation of rules with bureaucracy in contemporary discourse as well as the fact that limits connotes exploration and experimentation rather than rigid, cut and dried statements. In addition to the conflation and connotation, limits better describe the outer reaches of ideologies than rules. It would be impossible to define the "rules" of feminism, but one can identify several limits such as the glass ceiling, the wage gap, and religious practices such as female genital mutilation or the

Catholic Church barring women from holding positions of power. For these reasons, I have chosen to term the second component of the ludic heuristic as identifying limits.

Limits not only make play possible but also fun, and it is the electrated tendency to see issues in terms of pleasure/pain (Holmevik, 2012) that makes games a viable medium to create texts and arguments. Bogost (2016) argues that “by adopting, inventing, constructing, and reconfiguring the material and conceptual limits around us, we can fashion novelty from anything at all” (p. 223). For Bogost, all limits derive from the material, and he often uses the terms “constraint” or “material resistance” in a way analogous to how I am using “limits.” Limits can be found everywhere--they are another subset of objects after all--but take on a prominent position when considered in terms of form, medium, and genre. When applied to form, we typically identify limits as affordances, when applied to medium we often refer to it as interface, and when we talk of genre, the limits become the conventions.

Limits can be derived both naturally--the height a human can jump in a track and field competition--and artificially--players, except the goalie, are not allowed to use their hands in soccer. However, just because limits are artificial or contrived does not mean that they are random or done without purpose. Suits (1978) uses the metaphor of a line to denote the space carved out by a game's limits. He argues, “For both *that* the lines are drawn and also *where* they are drawn have important consequences not only for the type, but also for the quality, of the game to be played. It might be said that drawing such lines skillfully (and therefore not arbitrarily) is the very essence of the gamewrights's craft” (p. 30). A game without defined limits is just everyday life. A game with limits too narrowly defined ends up reducing the possibility space and transforming a player's autonomy into automation as is the case with tic-tac-toe, which ends in a draw amongst players with equal amounts of experience playing the game and eventually ceases to be a game at all. Playing with the materials to discover their limits and then translating those limits into the rules is where the electrated potential of play lies.

In fact, Bogost (2016) goes so far as to say that “art doesn’t take form *despite* material resistance [limits], but *thanks* to it” (161). The pleasure derived from playing a game is the player being able to stake out the expanse of the possibility space, identify its limits, and then manipulate those restraints to gain the best possible advantage in the game. Think here of how a player becomes accustomed to Mario’s jump in the popular *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985-Present) series. The player is given a series of low-stake obstacles such as a block on the ground that must be leaped over in order to continue the level. After surpassing the obstacle, the player encounters an enemy Goomba that walks slowly toward Mario. The player must now time their jump to correspond to the moving enemy. The player, using their past two experiences of clearing a block and clearing an enemy, now has an understanding of the height, speed, range, and utility of Mario’s jump. Combining momentum, obstacles, and precision, the player tests the limits of Mario’s jump and ends up with an amount of self-satisfaction when they are finally able to successfully maneuver Mario across the deadly pits. Presenting the player with a series of tools and then gradually expanding the implementations of those tools is a fundamental principle of game design. Rarely is the player told what to do in order to successfully complete a level. In place of didactic tutorials, the player must experiment with the systems and limits present in a Mario game in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the various materials interact. Play literally becomes a form of research.

The sense of discovery fostered by play functions as a means of understanding the writer’s own situated perspective of the world as well as any simulation they create based on that perspective. It is important to note that when creating and defining limits in a game that the composer is both attempting to identify the real-world constraints such as capitalism’s separation of laborers and the means of production as well as how these limits can be represented in the medium. Suits (1978) identifies two different types of limits in games: constitutive rules and rules of skill. Constitutive rules “set out all the conditions which must be met in playing the game” while rules of skill operate “within the area circumscribed by constitutive rules” (p. 37). He uses

baseball as an example with “three strikes and you’re out” being a constitutive rule while “keep your eye on the ball” is a rule of skill. These two different types of limits correspond directly with the goals. While limits are derived from the materials of the game, the goals are the motivating factor for both playing and understanding the game.

Bogost (2016) argues that feeling out the limits of a possibility space is where the pleasure of play comes from. When constructing the limits for a game, the composer must be aware of how those limits encourage certain types of activity while discouraging others. Limits then become a form of genre convention. Just as a sestina places exacting demands on the poet, identifying limits helps the composer and player understand how the form itself contributes to the meaning.

Constructing the Goals

One of the most powerful forms of psychological motivation is goal-setting (Landers, Bauer, and Callan, 2017). Goals can help actualize the steps in a process or incentivize big picture thinking. Thus, it is important to consider how the goals are used to motivate players while still presenting a course of action that engages with the materials and limits.

Goals in games operate in at least two ways: to motivate the player to undertake the given task and to force a level of expertise onto the player. The typical motivation in the former is that of Caillois’s (2001) *agon*. The goal is to win the game. In terms of the latter, the goal often requires adopting less than efficient means--using feet instead of hands in soccer--that allows for mastery of a new type of movement, understanding, or skill. Suits (1978) argues that in a good game, it is necessary to have both types of goals operating simultaneously. He writes, “There must be an end which is distinct from winning because it is the restriction of means to this other end which makes winning possible and also defines, in any given game, what it means to win” (p. 34). Here the goals influence the utilization and adoption of materials and limits but remain distinct from them. Whatever the composer has defined as the materials and limits of capitalism, the goal they set for the player in playing the game is largely independent of the materials and

more related to the composer's own situated experience. Taking over a factory and seizing the means of production is just as legitimate a goal as stockpiling as much personal wealth as possible. While both goals are legitimate, each one will push the player to reconsider how they interact with the materials and limits. The goal is often the first thing talked about when describing a game (for example, in basketball, the goal is to win by putting the ball in the hoop), but it purposely comes last in the ludic heuristic because they largely dictate *why* the game is played while materials and limits dictate *how* the game is played. In discovering how a particular ideology or system works, composers can identify what goals are desirable for them or for the player.

In a sense, this is what Gee (2003) means when he says that video games embody good learning because they *always* believe in the power of the player. Whatever goals a game sets for the player, the player must be able to achieve them in some way. This gives rise to what Cross (2007) terms "designerly ways of knowing." He aligns this with the tradition of abductive thinking and argues that in defining problems and setting goals in design thinking these "are not problems for which all the necessary information is, or ever can be, available to the problem-solver...it will always be possible to go on analyzing 'the problem', but the designer's task is to produce 'the solution'" (p.23-24). The goal then is to use the creation of games as an act of both composition and design with the end goal being to describe the situation in a way that "both defines the limits of the problem and suggest the nature of its possible solution" (p. 24). Because each player will approach a game based on their own particular preferences, games that are well-crafted offer not only multiple potential solutions but also multiple potential paths toward that goal. In this way, when composers begin to play the games they have created, they must think of multiple solutions and not just reach for the lowest hanging fruit.

In one of the landmark essays of game studies, Bartle (1996) identifies four types of players present in most games. He names them after the suits in a deck of playing cards: hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades and assigns a particular trait to each group. In order, the four traits

are: socializers, achievers, killers, and explorers. While these groups are not definitive or mutually exclusive, they provide an excellent framework for the composer to situate the various goals they formulate for their game and how different types of people will approach the play. Much in the same way that Suits (1978) defines the skillful drawing of limits as essential to the game wright's craft, goals in a game can be multiple and should not be arbitrary. There has been considerable interest in bringing some of the principles of design thinking into the writing classroom, and part of why creating games is an effective heuristic for generating novel arguments is due to games' potential to offer multiple solutions to "wicked" problems that are hard to define (Leverenz, 2014).

To summarize, I have argued that having potential rhetors consider the materials, limits, and goals of a system or ideology and then construct a game from those parts allows for a type of play/research where they explore the representation they have created to find new solutions, and thus new arguments.

The Ludic Heuristic in Action

I will now analyze each of the three previously mentioned categories of games-- commercial game (*The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo, 2017)), serious game (*The Best Amendment* (Molle Industria, 2013)), and student-created game (*Rescue Willy!* (2018))--to discern how each identifies and represents the materials, limits, and goals present in order to enact a form of play/research. I have chosen these three games to use as sites of analysis not because they are each exemplary or representative of their chosen category, but rather because each game attempts to communicate with the player through the act of play rather than through didactic proselytizing or heavy-handed narrativization. Play, as Holmevik (2012) reminds us, can be a way of experiencing the world with fresh eyes. These games do not directly spell out their systems, mechanics, or interactions to the player. Rather, they are discovered through repeated play.

The latest installment in the long running *The Legend of Zelda* series (Nintendo, 1986-2017), *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (*BotW*) represents a departure from linear, action-based puzzles to an open world complete with an in-depth crafting system. Because this game took several years, a hundred employees, and tens of millions of dollars to create, a full analysis of each of its materials, limits, and goals is beyond the scope of this paper. However, as a representative from the genre of games called emergent or immersive sims, a close analysis of a few of the games key materials will stand as a proxy for the games larger systems and materials. In particular, I am interested in the materials and systems that are new to the *Zelda* series and were introduced in *BotW*. The most notable of these are the weather systems, magnetism, momentum, and electrical conductivity, though in order to preserve brevity, I will focus only on the weather. *BotW* engages with weather as a material that is broken down into several constituent parts including temperature, elevation, pressure, moisture, and climate. Each of these can be further broken down further, such as temperature consisting of five different variables: freezing, chilly, neutral, hot, and burning, and each of these materials of the weather system can interact and influence the other variables. For example, as the player climbs higher, the temperature moves from neutral to chilly to freezing depending on the elevation (Fig. 1), or when in the desert climate, days are hot and nights are chilly (Fig. 2).



Figure 1. Link freezing in mountainous terrain.



Figure 2. Link dressed for the desert daytime heat.

The varying characteristics of the weather system (the material) are then used to help set and delineate the various limits of the game. To survive chilly and freezing temperatures, the player must have cold-weather equipment or must craft and consume heat-based potions or risk being killed from the cold. Players may be tempted to climb the highest peak they can find at the beginning of the game, but the limits in place on both the player's stamina and the weather system mean that as the player attempts to summit the mountain, their life will slowly dwindle away before they get there.

Both the materials and limits help influence how the goals are achieved. Shrines, which allow the player to expand their stamina or health pool once completed, are a common goal in

BotW, and several Shrines are placed in prominent positions on top of peaks. They are easily visible but tantalizingly out of reach due to the game's limits. The goal of the Shrine drives players to come up with potential solutions for reaching a high-elevation Shrine. They can gain money to buy new clothes to stay warm, they can kill fire lizards to make potions, cook food to regain health as it slowly depletes in the cold, upgrade gear to make climbing faster, or try to beat lower-elevation Shrines to build up their health pool. Each of these different solutions to the goal of getting to the Shrine forces the player to play/research the game's representation of weather and formulate, via what Cross (2007) calls abductive thinking, many potential solutions to the problem to see which one best fits their current situation, play style, progression, and resources. In this way, *BotW* both motivates players to learn through the act of play as well as develop a networked understanding of how the game's various materials and limits act upon each other while still remaining discrete, ultimately unknowable entities.

While *BotW* focuses on rather mundane materials such as physics and weather, many indie, serious, or persuasive games take a similar approach to a very different end. These types of games often encourage the player to explore a particular ideology or system and come to their own conclusions about the way it works in the world. One such notable example of this type of game is *The Best Amendment (TBA)*. *TBA* is a simple shooter game, often called a "bullet hell" or "sh'mup" due to the nature of how the game is played, that attempts to produce an argument through play about the Second Amendment. (Fig. 3).

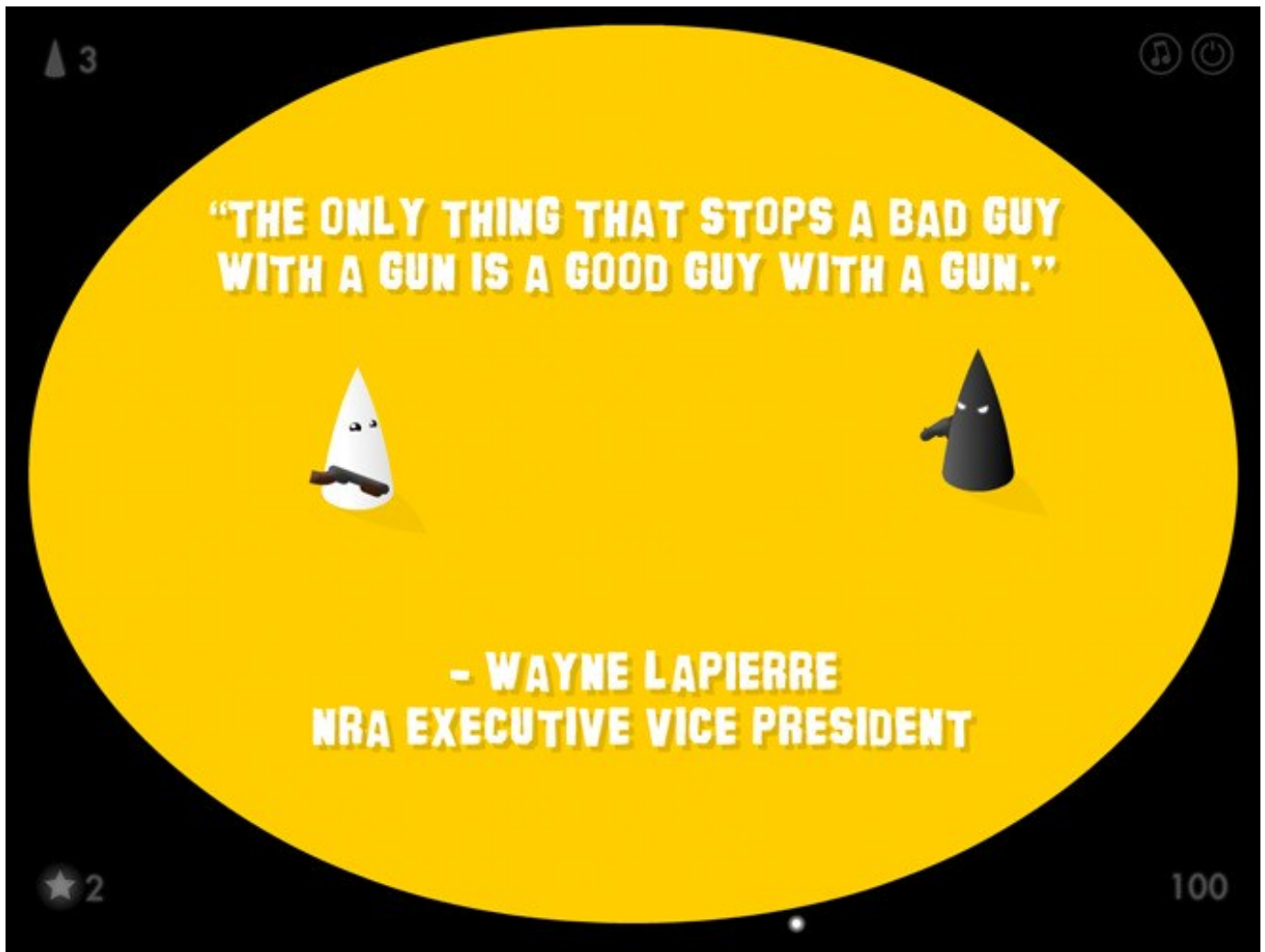


Figure 3. The opening screen of TBA.

TBA starts out with the player dressed in a white robe similar to that worn by Klansmen and armed with a simple pistol. Once the lights turn on, the player navigates around a small room and must defeat enemies dressed in black robes to collect stars. The first level of the game offers one such enemy. If the player defeats the enemy, a random quote such as “The only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” pops up and they move on to the second level. The player is occasionally given a different weapon--from assault rifles to shotguns to grenade launchers--and must now defeat two black-robed enemies. This pattern continues until eventually the screen is overrun with black-robed enemies and the player is defeated. Upon death, a screen pops up that says “You have been accidentally killed by your past self. You are not

thinking fourth dimensionally!” The “trick” to the game is that each of the black-robed enemies is actually your former self from the previous level. Whatever weapon the player had, whatever shots they fired, and wherever they moved is replicated exactly. When the player eventually dies, it is only because a past version of themselves has fired a bullet in a previous level that now plays out in real time to kill them in the current level.

TBA engages with the materials and limits of firearms, movement, and, most importantly, time to help construct its argument about the efficacy of arming citizens to stop mass shootings. In terms of firearms, the game gives the player a new weapon on each level, and through playing, killing, and avoiding death, the player can make clear judgments about the limitations of different types of weapons. Pistols get the job done, but the continuous spray of an assault rifle makes a level much easier. Shotguns are good for up close encounters, but the bazooka can take out groups of enemies easily from far away. With the goal being both simple and common to video games--kill the enemies to collect their loot and advance to the next level--the game’s materials and limits make an argument for the effectiveness of explosives and automated weapons. This closely aligns with current takes on gun control that seek to limit what types of guns are available to the public.

While this type of argument comes close to what many consider common sense--less effective guns will lead to less deadly public shootings--it is the game’s innovative exploration of the materiality and limits of time that truly makes a unique argument through play. The game engages with the real world limit of recognition and time by having the enemies actually be the player’s previous movement and firing. If and when the player is killed during a level, it is because they failed to recognize their former movement patterns and “mistook” themselves for an enemy. An astute player will soon come to recognize that the more they move and fire, the harder they make achieving the goal for themselves. By playing the game, the player can explore the concept that “the only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” and

come to their own conclusions about whether or not this is a legitimate position to argue from based on the materials and limits of firearms and temporality.

What these two examples demonstrate is that the ludic heuristic is capable of analyzing and creating arguments based on the understanding of the materials, goals, and limits. For *BotW*, players are able to reason about the networked nature of the world Link lives in and extrapolate those claims onto our own ecological understanding of the world. *TBA* offers a different type of understanding and interpretation based on its components and the player's own perspective. A player could reasonably assume that if they developed enough skill (either in game or in the real world), they would be able to stop all of the shootings. A player with a different perspective and embodied experience might reasonably argue that there is too much left to chance and the hands of time for any firearm-based intervention to be reliable. The ludic heuristic is flexible and able to be applied to many situations, but its true utility shines most in the creation of new games.

The final game I would like to look at in terms of the ludic heuristic is a game made by a student in my Advanced Composition class. In that class, we researched, analyzed, and discussed what entails a digital literacy. One of the four units was centered on play and interactivity as features in a digital literacy, and for a capstone project, students made a game drawing on the principles of the ludic heuristic I have described and exploration of the materials, limits, and goals of their system or ideology. The student-created game *Rescue Willy!* attempts to turn illegal whale poaching and plastic pollution into a game. The player controls a whale avatar named Willy who must navigate a Pac-Man like maze to eat krill (students were encouraged to modify or adapt simpler games to form their own). In place of Pac-Man's four ghosts are four poachers who chase after the player. As the game continues, garbage patches appear that slow down the player character or make movement through the garbage patch impossible. As time goes on and the plastic garbage accumulates, it becomes harder and harder for the player to avoid the poachers.

Rescue Willy! took as its materials illegal whaling, whale migration routes, and ocean plastic pollution. In her statement of purpose, the student wrote that she was trying to show how

“the ocean also fills with more and more trash every day, making it harder for many species of marine life to survive.” The initial game started out as just a whale navigating mazes and being disrupted by growing garbage patches. While the student had a good idea of how the materials of ocean pollution contributed to limits such as reducing movement, changing migration patterns, and weaker gestational health in some marine species, she also realized that the game was not fun without a stronger goal. She wanted the whale to be chased, a classic video game set up, and to eat as much krill as possible to complete the level. Because of the shifting of her goals for the game, she needed to introduce a new set of materials. That is where the poachers came in. Drawing inspiration both from the ghosts in Pacman and a real-world article on illegal whaling, the student decided to add an additional goal: avoid the poachers as well as eat the krill. This changed an interactive simulation about avoiding garbage and into a true game. The student’s overall purpose for the game then shifted to learning “about how illegal hunting and fishing affects endangered species and how important it is to dispose of trash in an environmentally friendly way.” This realization arrived from the very medium in which the student was working: the computer. Because the game could not have both krill and plastic pollution occupying the same space on the screen, the student realized that the more pollution is present, the less food sources there are. After playing her game, she began to see the two systems of plastic pollution and illegal whaling as connected. As part of her statement of purpose, she needed to elaborate on ways she saw this being expanded upon in the future, and the student began to make even more connections between questionable practices and the future of the diversity of species on Earth. Her proposal for expansion was to make a second set of levels centered on a character named Larry the Lion who would have to contend with poachers as well as tourist safari trucks.

Ultimately, the student was able to see the relationships between various systems as contributing to larger problems that we often feel powerless against. One negative act we are all culpable of--dumping plastics into our water--contributes and aids an act that we generally find despicable--illegal whaling and poaching. Through crafting a game and attempting to make the

play of that game pleasurable, the student ended up with a more nuanced and in-depth overall argument. This is the goal of the ludic heuristic.

Conclusion

This paper has argued for a ludic heuristic comprised of materials, limits, and goals that can be used to create serious or persuasive games. From there, I have demonstrated how these games represent systems and ideologies so that by playing the game, a player can develop insights and conclusions about the representation that can then lead to future arguments, connections, and innovative texts. While it is always our job as composition and rhetoric instructors to push our students to engage, research, and reflect on the world around them, having our students create games represents a unique but repeatable way to explore. In particular, I believe this type of new media composing is increasingly important as a form of invention in our networked, digital world because it gives students exposure to systems thinking, engages with ideologies that they either adhere to or need to recognize in the real world, and ultimately resituates how we think of the act of composing in the composition classroom.

This potential to resituate how games are positioned in the classroom--no more are they just texts to be analyzed or diversions to make learning "fun"-- closely aligns with New London Group's (1996) call for an equal emphasis on reception and production. It also tracts closely with the way scholars outside of rhetoric and composition have viewed the potential for games. One common understanding of the potential for games in learning is their ability to help with systems thinking. DeVane et al. (2010) define systems thinking as "an approach to understanding complex phenomena and problems that considers how elements of an order relate to each other and the function of the order as a whole" (p. 5). A diverse range of fields are invested in systems thinking including education, ecology, and economics. If the world we live really is becoming increasingly networked and connected, it is essential to develop skills in our students to understand how the world around them works. DeVane et al. (2010) argue that games closely resemble how real-world systems work. To truly understand these operations, students must not only analyze but

also create. The ludic heuristic represents one such attempt to offer a low-bar to entry to the world of game making for serious purposes. DeVane et al. (2010) argue that “the core idea here is that by building (often times dynamic) representations of systems, learners come to understand the relationships among sub-components of systems...acting in a simulated system (particularly when learners have *goals* within such rule-based systems) helps learners develop meta-understandings of the meaning-making model underlying the system” (p. 6). Having students create their own games based off of real-world systems and then research those representations through play represents a potentially pleasurable take on systems thinking.

In the early 2000s, Geoffrey Sirc (2002) made a bold call to return composition to its counter-cultural roots. Sirc sought to see composition as a “happening.” Games can be one such option of alternative composition that is culturally relevant, useful for a workforce that is becoming increasingly gamified, and helps students understand how the world works. Games and play are not a panacea to cure the ills of the world or the composition and rhetoric classroom. However, having students create games based off of an investigation of a models materials, limits, and goals can help us better understand what we want out of the systems around us. Unlike Naismith in the early 1890s, our students are not all bored athletes looking for a way to break up the monotony of winter training. However, much like Naismith, we must meet our students where they stand in this increasingly complex world and develop new ways of thinking about the act of composing and how we as instructors can help them.

CHAPTER III

TOWARD A LUDIC STYLE: COMPLEX OBJECTS, DYNAMIC VERBS, AND THE FREEDOM OF POSSIBILITY SPACES

Introduction

In the early 90s, a war was raging. Its battles took place on televisions, in living rooms, and across schoolyard playgrounds. Fortunately, the stakes in this war were not life or death.

However, to me, a young boy growing up in the middle of the US, thoughts of an untimely death mattered little when compared to the importance of being cool. In an era where media tells us that our consumer choices define who we are, think of the Mac vs PC commercials or bumper stickers that say “You wouldn’t understand / It’s a JEEP thing” and you’re on the right track, nothing seemed more important to young me than the so-called “Console Wars” between Sega and Nintendo.

On the playground, there were the Sega kids and the Nintendo kids. Having cut my teeth on the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and watching my older brothers and father play hours of Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda, and Tecmo Bowl and logging plenty of hours myself, I stood firmly on the side of Nintendo. With the release of the Sega Genesis in 1988 and the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) in 1990, the console wars spun off into a full-blown cultural battle. Metonymized by their mascots, Sega’s Sonic the Hedgehog and Nintendo’s Mario, the companies seemed to represent opposite ends of a spectrum. On one side was the edgy, hip, cool, in-your-face Sega, exemplified by the idle animation of their mascot Sonic who

would impatiently tap his foot and wag his finger at the player if they spent too long not moving the Blue Blur who had to go fast. On the other side was Mario, a humble, portly plumber whose defining characteristic was the not-all-that exciting ability to jump. It wasn't only in the mascots. This divide showed up in ad campaigns where Nintendo touted fun for the whole family whereas Sega promoted their custom "blast processing" and claimed to do what Nintendo didn't.

GENESIS DOES WHAT NINTENDON'T.

ARCADE GAMES:



Super Monaco GP™ Michael Jackson's Moonwalker™ E-SWAT™

SPORTS GAMES:



Joe Montana Football™ Pat Riley Basketball™ James "Buster" Douglas Knockout Boxing™

ADVENTURE GAMES: **STRATEGY GAMES:** **ACTION GAMES:**



The Sword of Vermilion™ Columns™ Dynamite Duke™

Get the hottest new video games going. Arcade, sports, adventure, strategy and action hits available only on the 16-bit Genesis System by Sega.®

Today's latest blockbuster arcade hits like Super Monaco GP.™ Climb into the cockpit of the world's fastest Grand Prix machines as you race wheel to wheel through the streets at over two-hundred miles per hour. Or take on the evil villain Mr. Big in Michael Jackson's Moonwalker™ as you use dance-kicks, hat-tricks and finally transform into a powerful robot that does it all. Or become a Cybercop in E-SWAT™ and clean up the city besieged by mad terrorists.

Get ready for the most action-packed sports games ever. In Joe Montana Football,™ check out the defense, make the call, fake a pass and scramble for a touchdown. Or force your opponent to move inside your left hook and nail him with an uppercut that puts him on the mat in James "Buster" Douglas Knockout Boxing.™ Or in Pat Riley Basketball,™ get the ball with seven seconds left in the game, drive the length of the court, slam-dunk and draw the foul which you make to break the tie.

In The Sword of Vermilion,™ make your way through 14 towns and 14 maze in this adventure thriller where encounters with the evil demons are played in real time on the hand controller. And dazzle your friends with your skills on the puzzle game Columns.™ Or become the ultimate commando warrior in Dynamite Duke™ as you blast the enemy from an over-your-shoulder first person view.

There's only one true 16-bit system and it's got the hottest video game hits going. You can only play these on Genesis by Sega. Genesis does what Nintendo doesn't.



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Fig. 4. Sega advertisement from the heart of the Console Wars.

I wanted to be cool. I wanted my classmates to think I was cool. But there was something about Nintendo that drew me in and I refused to let go. What was it about their games that made a young boy forsake his mission to be cool and fall in love with an Italian plumber who eats mushrooms in order to save a woman in a pink dress? The answer I will argue for here is style,

but perhaps not style as it is traditionally conceived, especially by corporate advertisers who continue to insist in the manner of French naturalist the Comte de Buffon “style is the man himself.”

As one of the five canons of ancient rhetoric, style’s popularity--whether style is “in style or not”-- has risen and fallen as changes to modes and mediums allowed for the reintroduction of style or its potential dissolution into the very mediums in which it operates. Over the past decade and a half, composition and rhetoric has shown an increased attention to style. Unfortunately, this attention has largely come as a form of bemoaning the state of stylistic study and pedagogy in contemporary rhetoric and composition courses. As one of the most prominent current scholars of style, Paul Butler has written several books that attempt to explain either why style has fallen out of favor in the classroom or how style can be revitalized in our digital age. In *Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Composition and Rhetoric* (2008), Butler traces the long history of style as a canon of rhetoric in order to argue that style was an essential component of the process movement in composition rather than being an obstructive impediment to natural self expression. In arguing for the continued relevance of style, Butler seeks to focus on the “productive and inventive uses of style” as opposed to a configuration of style as accouterment or ornamentation (2008, p. 21). Two years later in his edited collection *Style in Rhetoric and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook* (2010), Butler anthologizes a number of ancient and contemporary voices on style in order to help bring about a needed renaissance for style, particularly in relation to how style operates in digital contexts (2010). While Butler hoped to spark a revival through his dedicated work on the provenance and potential of style, the results over the past ten years have been lackluster. Style remains relegated to small chunks of textbooks, often stashed away next to the bits about citation guides, and few articles and even fewer book-length works have followed in the path that Butler has blazed.

That is not to say that no recent work on style exists. Many scholars have sought to apply style as a productive practice in their composition and rhetoric courses (Carillo, 2010; Holcomb

and Killingsworth, 2010), while others have focused on the merging of style and content in the digital age (Brooke, 2009; Arroyo, 2013). While the differences between these two approaches are many, what they each have in common is a foundational belief in style as an essential practice and component of contemporary discourse. This chapter follows in the footsteps of these scholars by asking what style can mean in relation to evolving digital technologies, specifically videogames, and how the study of style in the realm of digital games can help students understand the importance of style as figured by the ancients.

Some scholars have argued that the lack of scholarship in regards to style is directly related to both the visual turn of composition and rhetoric as well as the digitization of language and communication. Elizabeth Weiser (2005) postulates that “the de-emphasis of the text, both in preferred research methodology and in rhetorical orientation, has led to a tremendous downturn in publishable articles on style” (p. 35). Where one might see a potential wasting away of style as it has traditionally been figured, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how awareness of style in regards to multimodal composition, exemplified here through the analysis of digital games, offers an exciting array of new possibilities for understanding style’s importance to contemporary communication. This chapter engages with digital games as one possible avenue for developing an overall stylistics of multimodal composing. The lack of traditional alphabetic text in multimodal compositions does not mean that style is absent--one need only think of the difference in style of two artists in the same genre such as abstract painters Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Rather, style has been diffused and amalgamated with other aspects of information. The possibility to study style in this regard, as one that uses but is not limited by alphabetic text, is one goal of this chapter.

While the revitalization of style through the study of interface (Brooke, 2009) and collaborative content building (Arroyo, 2013), is one possible path for the future of style scholarship, this chapter seeks to connect traditional practices and productions of style as put forth by Butler (2008) and Holcomb and Killingsworth (2010) to the way we both produce

meaning and understand expression in our digital age. In her analysis of how postmodernism has affected and mostly been ignored in composition and rhetoric pedagogy, Kathleen M. Vandenberg (2017) argues that “the teaching of style, in many classrooms, however, remains marginalized--the time needed to introduce students to stylistic terminology and offer them enough practice in recognizing or internalizing a variety of syntactical structures is substantial...and often absent in the postmodern classroom, with its focus on the situated individual and possibilities for political and social change” (p. 81). Indeed, the adherence to a teaching practice where students are required to memorize ancient lists of figures and tropes feels antiquated, part of the “banking model” of education that has long since fallen out of fashion in rhetoric and composition. However, if as Butler, Holcomb and Killingsworth, and Carillo all argue is true--that there is great analytical and productive potential in the study of style--then there must be a way to teach students the terminology, structure, and function of style in the contemporary postmodern classroom. As I have argued in earlier chapters, play is always an embodied experience, and using play as a way to teach style can get at the potential for expression and persuasion in contexts that are still focused on “the situated individual and possibilities for political and social change” (Vandenberg, 2017, p. 81). Rather than have students *know* tables of figures, schemes, and tropes, the embodied experience of play gives composers the opportunity to *feel* how these operate. This has the potential to produce understanding as opposed to rote memorization.

This chapter proposes a method of stylistic analysis applied to the play of digital games in order to understand how both style is conceived and understood. Termed ludic style, this stylistic analysis applied to videogames presents a fruitful opportunity for composers to develop analytical skills beyond locating arguments in texts as well as an embodied understanding of how tropes and figures can be used to influence, persuade, and express. Because of their multimodal nature, digital games move composers beyond privileging alphabetic texts and into a fuller

understanding of how text, sound, image, and gesture can be combined in new media to offer new opportunities to composers.

Styled, Styles, Will Style

Discussion of the rhetorical dimensions of style date back to the ancient Greeks who included it as the third canon of rhetoric. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully summarize the history of style, and other sources such as Butler's (2008) *Out of Style* already perform this duty admirably, I present a brief recap of how style has been positioned by several prominent Greek and Roman scholars before moving to contemporary discussions on style in order to demonstrate a useful way for accounting for style in video games, one that has the potential in our digital age to truly provide a renaissance for style in multimodal composition and new media.

As part of the "available means of persuasion," Aristotle contrasted poetic styles with a prose style that would be used in common interactions, primarily spoken word. Since rhetoric was primarily concerned with orality in its infancy, Aristotle's juxtaposition of poetry and prose was particularly relevant. Unlike poetry with its carefully planned and crafted phrases, prose was viewed as a more natural form of expression, and the style with which it was expressed was expected to match its spontaneous situation and rationally engage with the audience. In "On Prose Style," Aristotle writes, "Let the virtue of style be defined as 'to be clear' and neither flat nor above the dignity of the subject, but appropriate" (2010, p. 18). To Aristotle, the power of style in regards to persuasion is its potential for clarity and meeting the particular occasion. Like many of his Greek contemporaries and followers, Aristotle was suspicious of style and its potential for abuse. He regarded flashy styles as deceptive and argued that "authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally" (2010, p. 19). The imperative to use style in a responsible way, one that doesn't lend itself to trickery and glossed over falsehoods, can still be seen today such as in the oft quoted *The Elements of Style* by Strunk

and White (2016) where they declare as their twelfth rule, “Use definite, specific, concrete language.” While this influence is still felt and taught to this day, it has also been heavily influenced by the ancient Romans who looked upon style in line with what the Sophists taught as opposed to the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.

Even before Socrates began his questioning, Gorgias, one of the earliest Sophists for which accurate records remain, lectured and taught on the importance of style to persuasion and expression. While Socrates and the line of philosophers who followed in his wake were skeptical about the uses of style, Gorgias developed a number of figures of thought that used stylistic devices to emphasize his argument and persuade his audience. Crowley and Hawhee (2004) argue that “historians of rhetoric usually credit Gorgias with the discovery that extraordinary uses of language were persuasive in prose as well as poetry” (p. 279). Gorgias developed a system of figures and metaphors that could be used to gain influence and elevate prose from the ordinary to the extraordinary when the situation called for it. Aristotle, as previously mentioned, was skeptical of such uses of style, but ever the student, realized that these uses could be studied and categorized to help future rhetors. Drawing from this base, Roman philosophers such as Cicero and Quintilian drew on the Sophists’ claims about style to expand the lists of tropes, schemes, and figures available to rhetors.

Cicero was well aware of the critiques of style as flashy tactic to sneakily influence an audience, but, unlike Aristotle, Cicero saw this as one possible means of using style. He broke style down into three levels: a grand style full of flashy words and clever turns of phrase, a low style that was brash and spoke to the “common man,” and a middle style that pulled from both as needed. In *De Oratore*, Cicero focuses in on the middle style and contrasts them to the grand and low styles, arguing:

Between these two there is a mean and I may say tempered style, which uses neither the intellectual appeal of the [grand] class nor the fiery force of the [low style]; akin to both, excelling in neither, this style keeps the proverbial ‘even tenor of its way,’ bringing

nothing except ease and uniformity, or at most adding a few posies as in a garland, and diversifying the whole speech with simple ornaments of thought and diction. (2010, p. 37)

Cicero argued that the middle style was the most desirable for orators as it relied on ideas of appropriateness and occasion--knowing when to dip into the grand or low style--as well as correctness--simple language allowed for simple explanations while complex language was able to get at big ideas. While rarely articulated in terms of grand, middle, and low, Cicero's levels of style is still largely adhered to in contemporary times. Most students and politicians seem to agree that a bit of flash coupled with a bit of straight talking is the most efficient way to make an argument.

Quintilian built upon the ideas of Cicero and expanded them to include a taxonomy of stylistic moves rhetors could make. Quintilian championed the idea of imitation, an idea that would be taken up by compositionists at the start of the discipline's development in the 1960s. Quintilian argued that:

The beginnings of every kind of study are formed in accordance with some prescribed rule. We must indeed, be like or unlike those who excel; and nature rarely forms one *like*, though imitation does so frequently. But the very circumstance that renders the study of all subjects so much more easy to us than it was to those who had nothing to imitate, will prove a disadvantage to us unless it be turned to account with caution and judgment. (2010, p. 54)

Here, Quintilian both praises imitation as an excellent teacher but also argues that imitation in a rote or unengaged way will lead to simple minded rhetors who are unable to remain in control of their craft. In order to address the potential criticisms of imitation, Quintilian sought to expand the list of figures first developed by Gorgias. Quintilian taxonomized figures into two categories: figures of thought and figures of language. Crowley and Hawhee (2004) define the former as "involving artful changes in ideas, feelings, or conceptions; these figures depart from ordinary

patterns of moving an argument along,” while the latter is characterized by involving “unusual patternings of language, such as repetition or juxtaposition of similar words or constructions” (p. 285). The codification of these figures, along with tropes and schemes, represent one specific way style has been taught. While style was viewed by Quintilian and the Romans as a teachable art, it eventually fell out of fashion and was replaced in the Enlightenment era with a notion that style was inherent to the composer themselves and thus incapable of being taught. These two competing philosophies on the potential pedagogy of style are still seen today, as will be demonstrated as I jump forward from the Romans to the nascent development of composition and rhetoric as modern academic disciplines.

As composition and rhetoric formalized into academic disciplines with graduate programs in the field as opposed to being produced from literature programs, the approach to teaching--both in terms of practice and content--began to change as well. The history of the rise and reification of composition and rhetoric is the subject of James Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality*. Berlin (1987) argued that the field of rhetoric could be broken down into three approaches: current-traditional rhetoric, expressivism, and social epistemic. Each of these three approaches had different ways of forming knowledge, different goals for writing, and different ways of achieving these goals. Because of this, the position of style in rhetoric and composition has varied over the past half century.

Current traditional rhetoric, with its focus on error-free texts, product over process, and positioning writing as tapping into an objective reality, privileged style. In 1965, Louis T. Milic argued that there were “only three real theories of style” (p. 141). Milic identified these three theories as the ornate form that views style as decoration, individualist or psychological monism that views all writing and style as unchangeable and innate to the particular individual, and Crocean aesthetic monism that positions style as part of the inseparable connection of form and content. Of these three approaches, Milic endorsed the theory of ornate form. Scholars such as Richard Lanham (2006) and Vandenberg (2017) have rejected both Milic’s claim that there are

only three theories of style and that the theory of ornate forms through interdisciplinary work on the now accepted premise that writing is not a way of objectively representing reality and through the constant interplay of form and content. However, that does not mean that this period of scholarship on style is not still useful to us today.

While style in the current-traditional era was taught alongside grammar and correctness, it was also positioned as potentially inventive, an aspect of style that is important in our current process/post-process era. Teaching style in the contemporary classroom must be about more than just getting students to fancy up their texts. It must also be a way for them to generate and analyze content. One of the most enduring works from the current-traditional era is Francis Christensen's "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence." Christensen (1963) saw style as being teachable through imitation and sentence-combining. Students looked at sentences from canonical works and then added to the sentences and combined various sentences together in order to express their own thoughts. While the intense focus on sentence-level work has generally fallen out of favor in contemporary composition, the idea that students learn style through studying other texts, particularly texts they enjoy, is one that is important for this chapter. While much of current-traditional rhetoric is no longer relevant to the challenges of the contemporary classroom, the idea that style can be learned through studying a diverse array of texts has endured. This chapter positions videogames as an additional avenue for such learning to take place.

Expressivism followed in the wake of current-traditional rhetoric and sought to disrupt both the idea that students should be replicating "the masters" as well as the idea that writing reproduced an objective reality. In its place were ideas of inescapable subjectivity, an emphasis on a writer's individual voice, and a focus on the process of writing rather than the product. While writing studies as a whole has moved beyond expressivism, its legacy remains in the form of freewriting, process-based pedagogies, and an overall student-centered approach to the teaching of writing. One of the best known scholars and champions of expressivism was Peter Elbow. While Berlin found Elbow difficult to classify, scholars who have followed Berlin

identify Elbow as an expressivist for his intense focus on the individual as the source of knowledge creation even when that knowledge is used to denounce subjugation and dominant hegemonies. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow (1973) foregrounds the idea of a writer's individual "voice" and positions the development of that voice through free, creative, and often unassessed writing. While this work is important, it suffers from a fatal flaw. In the same way that current-traditional rhetoric positioned writing as capturing an objective reality, expressivism forwarded the notion that the world was entirely knowable to the individual even if that knowing was subjective. As scholars and teachers of composition and rhetoric, it is important to take the notion that expression of self--the goal of expressivist pedagogies--is important but ultimately impossible when taken in light of social constructionism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism. Expressivist views of style still endure, but rather than taking them whole cloth, this chapter engages with the notion that style is an important part of self-expression but only capable through social channels, technology, mediums, and modes, all of which shape, magnify, and distort an individual's intent.

Following style's provenance through current-traditional and expressivist rhetoric, one is able to see how style has been used productively if at times reductively in the composition and rhetoric classroom. Butler (2008) identifies this time as the "golden age" for scholarship and classroom-based experimentation on style. He argues that the the lessons and theories of style developed in this time are quite amenable to process theories of composition. The ultimate goal of much of Butler's scholarship on style and *Out of Style* in particular is to help ignite a renaissance in style studies. Unfortunately, this renaissance is still yet to happen, and the amount of contemporary scholarship on style is very low. What I offer here in this chapter is a way to formulate and analyze style in regards to digital texts and contexts.

I contend that any theory of style must account for both the writer's self-expression and the social forces that have conditioned the writing to be manifested at that particular time.

Berlin's final category of social epistemic rhetoric is marked by what is often called the "social

turn” of rhetoric in the 1980s. Berlin argues that this form of rhetoric is best viewed as transactional rather than a one-way conduit. This view encompasses all of rhetoric and composition, but in this chapter I will apply this specifically to style by looking at how style can be analyzed in digital games. While Berlin successfully describes a social-epistemic rhetoric based on a transactional theory of communication, it is necessary to move beyond the field of composition and rhetoric to define a transactional approach to style specifically.

In order to talk coherently about style in any context, the word must be defined, a task that has been undertaken by hundreds of individuals over thousands of years. As mentioned earlier, Aristotle defined the intentions of style as being “to make clear.” To the Comte de Buffon, style was the man himself. Scholars in rhetoric and composition have defined style in the 1970s as “purposeful attention to language at the sentence level” (Weiser, 1971, p. 26) all the way to Butler’s updated definition of style as “a series of both conscious and unconscious choices that writers make about everything from the words we use (diction) and their arrangement in sentences (syntax) to the tone with which we express our point of view (e.g., ironic, formal, or colloquial) and the way we achieve emphasis in a sentence” (2010, p. 1). It is clear that discussion of style can be contentious and produce varied definitions, but what the study of style in composition and rhetoric has been overly concerned with is an attention to alphabetic texts. In the same way that the field made a “social turn” in the 1980s, the “visual turn” in the late 2000s for the field presents an opportunity for the study of style to become transdisciplinary and multimodal. The next section delves into the possibility of developing a robust theory of style that can apply to acts of communication that are not constrained by the limitations of discursive communication.

A Brand New Style

One problem for any scholar working on style is how diffuse and multifarious the word is in our society. From fashion to film to football, the word style is used to describe such a wide array of activities and texts that it becomes impossible to pin down a single definition. While it is

well beyond the scope of this chapter to formally define style writ large, the focus here is on style in the act of creation, whether that is in alphabetic texts, infographics, or play. As previously mentioned, contemporary scholars of style have tended to focus on written language. For example, Butler in *Out of Style* defines style as “the deployment of rhetorical resources, in written discourse, to create and express meaning” (p. 3). Part of Butler’s emphasis on written discourse is an attempt to hedge off any colloquial definitions of style, but in doing so, he negates the potential for the development of style pedagogies in burgeoning fields in composition and rhetoric such as visual rhetoric and multimodal composition. That is not to say that the study of style has been ignored by digital rhetoricians and the like. Several scholars have approached the challenges of evolving mediums, multimodality, and electracy with an eye toward how these forms have the potential to embiggen and deepen our understanding of style.

Similar in magnitude to the shift from oral to literate culture, the change from literate to digital society has profoundly affected our understanding of what a text is, who can create it, and how these texts are created. One of the first scholars to document and describe this change was Gregory Ulmer. Ulmer first theorized electracy in his 1989 book *Teleteory* in an attempt to describe the range of possibilities inherent to new media and the possibilities for composing with digital tools as well as consuming digital texts. As part of this work, Ulmer looked at how meaning was formed and experienced across the three periods of orality, literacy, and electracy. From this he developed his apparatus theory which tracks how these changes happen and are taken up by the masses, and electracy, with its configuration of the eagent, is largely concerned with the masses. What is of most interest here is where Ulmer locates style in his apparatus theory. Contrasted with ritual in orality and method in literacy, the procedure for making meaning in electracy society is style (Holmevik, 2012, p. 7). The focus here is on the aesthetic quality of learning or how we take in information in the digital age and create digital texts. Rather than being concerned with properly performing a ritual such as listing the descendants of the hero in perfect order or a fixation on method such as applying the scientific empiricism to writing, the

procedure for making meaning in electracy is style in the sense that the decisions the composer makes about how the information is presented is as important as the information itself.

While Ulmer was one of the first to look at how new media reshapes our expectations for consumption and production, he is not the only scholar to look at how the canons of rhetoric have been reshaped by electronic media. Long time scholar of style Richard Lanham (2006) characterized the information age and the resulting development of electracy as a shift from an economy based on stuff to one based on attention. The primary means of gaining attention is through the use of style. While Lanham is quick to note that new media has transformed style while also greatly influenced by the idea of style itself, he criticizes uses of new media that merely remediate old ways of meaning making such as eBooks. In their place, Lanham envisions a future of where style and substance oscillate on a continuum, one where an adept consumer is able to differentiate as well as explicate. This becomes especially important when taken in light of the most successful form of new media: digital games. Yet, as Lanham points out, separating what is style from what is substance is not as simple as deciding what is “stuff” and what is “fluff.” The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how the theorization of a ludic style can assist players in not only a deeper understanding of the media they consume but also a deeper understanding of how these games construct arguments and affect players.

If style in the age of new media is an attempt to gain consumer attention, then it becomes necessary to understand how this positioning of style disrupts traditional notions of consumption and production. In *Lingua Fracta* (2009), Collin Gifford Brooke uses the idea of perspective as a way to demonstrate how our understanding of style has shifted. In our digital age, the site of style has shifted from discursive language and into the interface. He argues that “one of the things that new media interfaces do stylistically is to help us move from the abstracted, single perspective of the reader of a static text or the viewer of a painting to the multiple and partial perspectives necessary for many forms of new media” (p 114). The sizes of our screens, the variables in the algorithms, and the context in which we engage with content are varied for each individual.

While this may be seen as making any instance of stylistic analysis too idiosyncratic to be useful, Brooke sees this variability of interface as necessitating a need for perspective to be considered as it allows each individual user to bring their own embodied experience to a text with potentially valid interpretations. This is especially relevant for the study of style in videogames. One of the critiques against any method of analysis for digital games and a challenge every scholar of play and game studies must face is how to account for the potentially wildly different approaches a player may take to a game. Where one player may choose to approach a combat situation stealthily, a different player may go in with guns blazing. Envisioning style as part of a perspective that is shared across users but encountered individually allows for the development of a ludic style in the analysis of videogames.

Positioning style as a way to make meaning allows for an expansion of the canon. No more is style relegated to ornamentation or an imperative for clarity above all else. In its place is an understanding of how and why the message was crafted, an idea taken up in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Style then can be studied and understood in terms of a wide variety of new media, not just discursive alphabetic texts. Additionally, since the default behavior of electracy is play, then the opportunity to study play as a means for studying style is one particular affordance of new media. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the study of digital games. While his focus is on how play and electracy contribute to invention, Holmevik (2012) also briefly considers how electracy's emphasis on entertainment and development of procedure through style is made evident through the play of videogames. He argues that "entertainment continues to be one of the main reasons that people play games. Even the concept of serious games, which has gained traction in recent years, found its primary appeal to 'education' through entertainment. *Style* and image logic as opposed to ritual and method, afford the player aesthetic experiences that inspire new practices" (p. 20). If play is the default behavior of electracy and videogames allow for the player to be inspired into new practices of meaning making through an understanding of style, then it becomes necessary to develop a method of stylistic analysis for videogames that

encompasses not only the representational aspects of the game (graphics, sounds, music, etc.) and the formal rules (mechanics, limits, physics, etc.) but also how the player experiences them, what I deem “ludic style.”

Style and Videogames

Over the past twenty years, the academic study of games has found a burgeoning foothold in composition and rhetoric programs, design studies, human computer interaction, and cognitive psychology to name just a few. One of the first disciplines to apply a scholarly lens to games was literature studies. This created what is known as the narratology-ludology debate, which while remaining unsettled still proves contentious today among games studies scholars. While there is no true answer to the question of whether to interpret games through the formal elements (ludologists) or through the stories they tell (narratologists), Ian Bogost’s work in the mid to late 00s led to a new perspective on games. In his book *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, Bogost (2007) puts forth a theory of understanding games through their written processes. He deemed this theory “procedural rhetoric” and argued that since games are systems of authored procedures that they can have the same expressive and persuasive potential as other mediums such as essays, movies, speeches, and visual art. More so than these traditional forms of expression, videogames were uniquely positioned because “procedurality is a symbolic medium rather than a material one, procedural rhetorics can also make arguments about conceptual systems, like the model of consumer capitalism in *Animal Crossing*” (126). Beyond merging the divide in game studies by showing the regressive influences rules and story have on each other, he also firmly planted game studies in the field of rhetoric.

While this has led to increase in attention from rhetoricians as well as increased application of digital games in the composition classroom, few scholars have looked at the rhetorical dimensions of games and play outside of their procedurality. If play in games is indeed rhetorical, than how do the canons of rhetoric influence the production and reception of play. In particular, this chapter explores the possibilities of examining play in regards to the third canon of

rhetoric: style. I have spent the beginning of this chapter describing and analyzing how style has been configured from ancient Greece to the contemporary composition and rhetoric classroom with an eye towards how issues of new media and digital/multimodal composing have taken up the issue of style. Part of my emphasis has been on how the definition of style has oscillated between two poles throughout the ages but also how style is usefully individuated, increasingly applicable, and integral for developing analysis beyond argumentative reasoning. However, this still leaves the actual definition of style up for debate. As mentioned earlier, Berlin (1987) identified a shift in the mid to late 1980s in rhetoric and composition from the expressivist school to a social epistemic understanding of the field. What is particularly important for this chapter is the underlying assumption that communication is transactional and the writer is a constructed identity arising from the intersection of various social pressures, norms, and mores. This transactional positioning is closely aligned with posthumanism, but my interest here is not in furthering the claims of posthumanism, but rather the understanding that when one plays a game, they become part of a networked, cyborgian system where there is little use in differentiating between the user and the system (Keogh, 2017).

Since videogames are predicated on the use of machines by humans and, whether you consider the state of the field to be in the process or postprocess era, the act of composing is predicated on the transactional, there should be a way to analyze these manifestations of style in videogames using both the lineage and provenance of style. While I will not be bold enough to say that there can be only one definition of style, a definition of style that is predicated on the works of previous scholars as well as interdisciplinary efforts would be most fitting for the purposes of this chapter. With my focus on the transactional nature of style, it fits in line well with Andrea Olinger's assertion that "if style is constructed, modified, and maintained through interactions, we need ways of capturing these processes" (2016, p. 122). Video games' reliance on interaction to convey meaning means that a formulation of style in games needs to be one that is centered on this premise. To that end, I use Olinger's (2016) definition of style, which she

defines as “the dynamic co-construction of typified indexical meanings (types of people, practices, situations, texts) perceived in a single sign or a cluster of signs and influenced by participant’s language ideologies” (p. 125).

Olinger demonstrates that style is transactional, a type of negotiation between producer and consumer, and “thus highlights not only that style is the performance of identity (or alignment with particular typified indexical meanings) but also that style’s meanings are constantly jostling one another and being reshaped” (p. 126). How these jostlings typically occur is through the interplay of language ideologies and indexical meanings. Olinger argues, “Language ideologies shape the choices that composers and speakers make when they select semiotic forms and when they and readers and interlocutors perceive indexical meanings in those forms” (p. 126). With the death of authorial intent and static media comes the realization that meaning is constantly being negotiated at different points in its circulation, and style plays a large role in helping us catalogue those fluidities. Finally, Olinger’s definition of style is not restricted to discursive or alphabetic texts. Her definition positions meaning as happening through a single sign or a cluster of signs because “stylistic meanings are perceived and performed through any kind of sign, not simply through language” (p. 127). The end result of such a definition of style is that it allows for a wider range of texts to be analyzed, in particular new media texts that are themselves dynamic and comprised of a wide variety of modes and signs. This makes her definition particularly suitable to analyzing style in regards to videogames. But what exactly are we analyzing when we apply stylistic analysis to videogames?

In regards to play and videogames, style has typically been used colloquially in three ways: art style in terms of graphics and visual presentation, such as a realistic style or a pixelated-retro style; player style, as explained through the landmark games studies article “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs” by Richard Bartles (1996); and generic style, which situates games according to their modes of play such as first-person shooter or platformer. However, colloquial definitions of style, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, are often

lacking. The question then becomes: where can style as part of the rhetorical canon be located in videogames? For style to become rhetorical in this sense, it must rely on the agency of the player. In Bartles's classification of player types, he saw the four traits as achiever, explorer, socializer, and killer. These are the attitudes and expectations that a player brings to a game not how their choices influence the game. And it is that idea of choice, a concept closely related to the Burkeian idea of selectivity, where gamers begin to act rhetorically in their play. To that end, I propose three ways in which style operates in videogames: representational style, procedural style, and ludic style. As will become clear, the focus in this chapter is on ludic style, and I will demonstrate why this facet has the most potential for the teaching and understanding of style by first arguing against representational and procedural style as potential objects of analysis.

Representational style refers to a game's animations, graphics, sound, music, and story. These are the traditional "aesthetic" qualities of games. There is certainly style in the art of a game, but that is produced by a game designer, music producer, or game artist. There is no consideration for how the player may introduce their own style into the art or representation of a game. That is not to say that the representational style is not important or does not affect the player. In *Playing with Feelings: Video Games and Affect*, Audrey Anable (2018) argues that the representational style of a video game has repercussions on how a game is perceived. She writes, "Video games compel us to act and to be acted upon...through the way these structures are given representational form visually, narratively, and aurally, and through the designed intimacy of their interfaces" (p. 52). The representational style thus becomes one way that the text reveals itself to players. It is closely aligned with the rhetorical appeal of pathos, and Anable correctly highlights how the representational style influences primary emotional aspects. It influences them, but it is unable to be influenced. It lacks the aspects of dynamic co-construction highlighted by Olinger. Representational style then becomes style as depicted by the ancients--at worst ornament and at best a directive to be clear. It is able to affect us as players, but it fails to fully grasp what it means for style to be rhetorical.

A distinctly different way to approach style in videogames is through their procedural style. Premised on Bogost's (2007) procedural rhetoric, procedural style refers to the rules, authored procedures, limits, and mechanics found in a game. Here too we run into similar problems when trying to locate agency in regards to procedural style. Akin to the rhetorical appeal of logos in ancient rhetoric, the procedural style provides the logics by which the game will be played. The player has no control over these options. For example, the height Mario can jump can not be changed by the player nor can a player choose to pick up the ball with the forward's hands in a game of *FIFA 2019* (Electronic Arts, 2018). Procedural style delineates the possibility space of a game with hard boundaries that can not be transgressed by the player. It acts as rules give from on high, immutable and accepted because they are unchangeable (though also necessary for one aspect of the power of play in videogames: their ability to be easily repeated). What both representational style and procedural style leave out is perhaps the most important part of the equation when it comes to locating style in the act of playing videogames: the player.

Lack of emphasis on player and the choices a player makes while engaging with the representational and procedural style of a game occludes the potential for style to be analyzed in videogames. In "Against Procedurality," Miguel Sicart (2011) critiques game studies reliance on procedural rhetoric because it negates the position of the player. Beyond missing a crucial piece of the puzzle, the way procedurality has been used in game studies obfuscates the design and analysis of ethics and politics in games. Procedurality collapses all the unique choices a player makes, all their embodied experiences, and all the possible interpretations of a game--including its style--into a singularity. Gone are Olinger's aspects of style that focus on language ideologies and how we react, respond, create, and code switch in all acts of creation, play included. Here then is the need for the development of the third style, the ludic style. Ludic style is how a player responds to the representational style through the procedural style and is then able to perform their identity. The possibility space of Bogost's procedural rhetoric is the rules to the game, the representational style is the field where the play takes place, and the ludic style is the actual play

of the player--how the individual approaches the challenges, obstacles, narratives, ethics, politics, limits, references, and mechanics of a game. Kristine Jørgensen (2013) argues that “in digital games, there is a tight connection between the game-system information and the gameworld...this boundary is fluid and gameworlds are flexible constructs where system information and fiction merge into each other, creating a unique form” (p. 5). If procedural style depicts the game-system information and representational style depicts the gameworld, then ludic style depicts the unique form sought after in Jørgensen’s argument. That form is the act of play created by digital games. It is where style as part of the rhetorical canon rests in regards to videogames. In the next section, I describe the methods I will use to analyze how style operates rhetorically in regards to the actual play of digital games.

Turning Play into Language

Using Olinger’s (2016) sociocultural definition of style, the analysis that follows identifies specific signs or clusters of signs--images, actions, sounds, narratives, and rules— that are shared and acted upon by both game and player (dynamic co-construction) and then catalogues them in terms of their typified indexical meanings in order to shed light on their engagement with particular language ideologies.

One of the few existing examples of stylistic analysis of videogames is Roger Travis’s (2012) article “Epic Style: Re-compositional Performance in the BioWare Digital RPG.” Travis uses performance theory and draws upon scholarship connecting Slavic bards with epic storytelling in ancient Greece to analyze how the modularity and choice-based decisions of BioWare RPGs engage in an “epic style” through the use of thematic chunking. He identifies particular “chunks” or set pieces in the games and how the dialogue choices input by the player shape or contextualize these chunks in order to establish a common theme through the story. While the analysis provided by Travis is excellent and demonstrates one possible fruitful way to perform stylistic analysis of videogames, its scope and methods are too narrow for a more broadly defined ludic style. The analysis necessitates games that have both individual dialogue choices or

dialogue wheel as well as a story told in the epic tradition. These requirements make his methods well-suited for BioWare role playing games but not adaptable enough for videogames as a whole. It is the goal of this chapter to provide a basis for stylistic analysis of any digital game, and to do so requires translating the common recurring elements of games into a language that is universal to all games.

An excellent way to look at this is through Anna Anthropy and Naomi Brandt's formulation of verbs and objects as essential design elements (2014). For Anthropy and Brandt, games become complex and diverse when the verbs--the actions that are allowed to a player--are combined with different objects--the elements verbs can interact with in the game. As an example, Mario's default verb is jump. Two of the simplest elements it can be combined with are holes and enemies. Jumping on an enemy produces death. Jumping over a hole produces continued life and progression. However, Mario's verb of jump becomes more complex. He is not confined to the simple action of jumping as seen in a game like *Ice Climbers*. Rather, Mario has control over his jump. He can perform a high jump, a low jump, a forward jump, and a backwards jump. He can combine direction and intensity to change his trajectory. In this way, jump becomes a complex verb. In further iterations in the Mario series, jump becomes even more complex. Mario is able to wall jump, long jump, triple jump, and backflip. Each of these verbs when combined with game objects such as huge gaps, multiple enemies in a line, or hard to reach stars, allows for the player to take their own specific approach to the game. In this way, the player is allowed to choose their style of play. A player who has mastered the triple jump is able to cross large expanses of levels without coming into contact with enemies. A player who has mastered the verb of wall jump can find game-breaking shortcuts. Furthermore, the elements of the game such as Koopa Troopas can be combined with jumps to perform the object such as death and gaining an item (a koopa shell) which can then again be combined with jump to produce the object of the shell flying toward more enemies and destroying them. In this way, verbs and objects can be seen as analogous to forming sentences. Players can develop and express their

style in a manner similar to Christensen's generative rhetoric where sentences are combined and expanded in order to create new ideas as well as more fully express them (2010).

Beyond just allowing for choice and complexity, the formulation of verbs and objects as a design language allows for the analogous application of classical schemes and tropes. For example, combining backward motion and a jump in a 3D Mario game allows for a backflip. This would be comparable to the scheme of anastrophe which Killingsworth and Holcomb define as "inverted order" (2010, p. 125). Rather than continually moving forward, the player forces Mario to go backwards in order to pass an obstacle that may have been too tall or too challenging for a normal player or a normal jump. Another example is the triple jump as a form of anaphora or the "repeating items at the beginning of a series of sentences" when Mario strings together the verbs jump, jump, and jump (Killingsworth and Holcomb, 2010, p. 126). The aforementioned effect of jumping on a Koopa Troopa, in this formulation of ludic style, becomes an act of polysyndeton where one verb combined with the same verb creates an object with a ripple effect. The trope of onomatopoeia is evident in many games, but is particularly salient in games such as The Legend of Zelda series where occasional on-screen movements perfectly mirror the player's input. This is best exemplified through the protagonist Link's spin attack. In order to perform the action, the player spins the analog stick of the controller in multiple, quick circles with the resulting action being that Link takes out his sword and spins around to damage enemies.

An excellent way to stretch the utility of such a formulation is to look at a game that has changed its representational style and procedural style but has retained its ludic style. The Metroid series from Nintendo is a great example. The series started out as a 2D sidescroller that gave players the freedom to explore an alien world. As technology progressed and 3D games became the standard, Nintendo took the bold move of bringing the game's protagonist Samus into a world with length, width, and depth. The Metroid Prime series was a leap forward for the games but still managed to give players the same "feel" as the previous 2D iterations. This is because the interactions between verbs and objects in the game allowed for the player to find a style similar to

what she had previously experienced, even though the game had a drastically different art style and catered to a different play style. The first three Metroid games are sidescrollers with pixelated graphics while the Prime series are 3D and from a first-person perspective.



Figure 5. A screenshot from Super Metroid in 2D pixelated art.

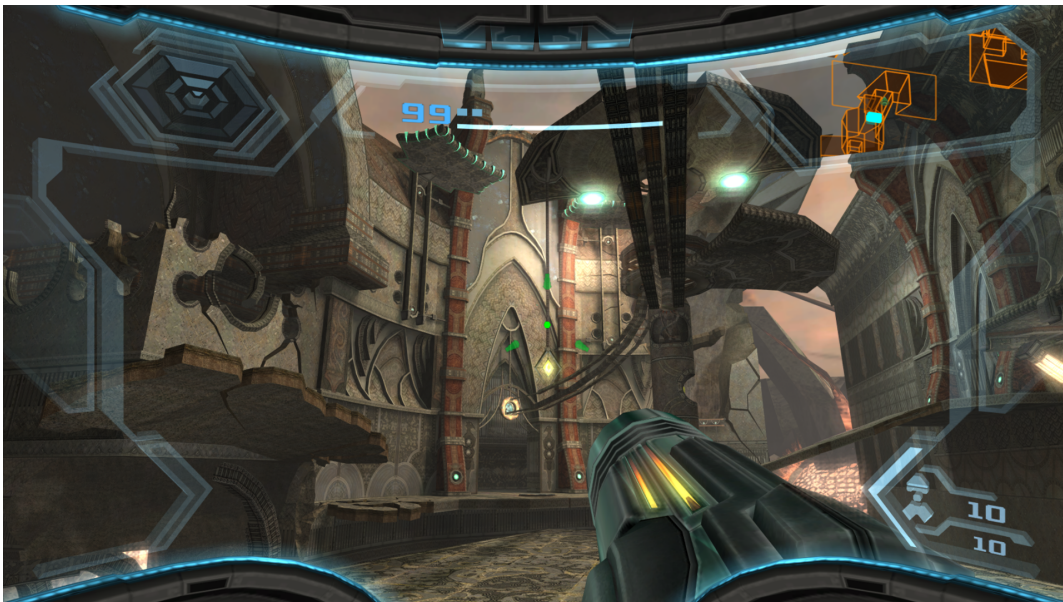


Figure 6. A screenshot from Metroid Prime showing its first-person perspective.

In terms of player styles, the first games catered toward Bartles's killers with plenty of enemies and chances for death while the Prime series was much more sparse, and its auto-lock on system for killing enemies forced the player into the explorer role. Despite these changes, the Prime series is well regarded because their ludic styles were so similar despite the vast differences I already mentioned. The verbs of shoot and jump allowed players to interact with the 3D space in ways that were remarkably similar to the 2D movement of the NES, SNES, and GameBoy versions. While much had changed, the way players experienced the game's main features, backtracking and exploration, remained the same, and expressions of style were allowed to continue across platforms.

Style in Videogames

The three videogames I have chosen to analyze in terms of their ludic style are Hyper Light Drifter (HLD), Overwatch (OW), and The Last of Us (TLOU). I have chosen these three games because they each occupy different points on the spectrum of representation from abstract to photorealistic with HLD being retro-inspired pixel art graphics, OW occupying a middle space as a hand-painted, cartoony take on traditional graphics, and TLOU positioned at the far end of the spectrum with hyper realistic graphics meant to identically replicate the real world. Additionally, each of these three games represent different takes on developers' approaches to producing games ranging from a small handful of independent developers in the case of HLD to a large multi-year team for OW to a massive one-off team on a multi-hundred million dollar half decade long development for TLOU. Even though the games have very different provenances, each of these games is highly regarded both commercially and critically. These reasons make them excellent examples for how ludic style operates in contemporary digital games.

Heartmachine Games released HLD in 2016 to wide acclaim. The game was praised for its difficult but fair combat, incredibly detailed pixel-art graphics, and post-apocalyptic setting. The game features no dialogue or alphabetic language. In its place, short scenes are flashed on the screen to reveal story and when the player's character, The Drifter, interacts with other non-

playable characters (NPCs), the dialogue boxes show only cryptic pictures. In the game's story, The Drifter is slowly dying of a mysterious, incurable illness. Before he dies, The Drifter sets out on a goal to rid the world of the corruption that led to the devastation seen in the game's many breathtaking vistas. Piles of bones, giant machines overgrown with moss, and ruined temples help set the mood. There are only three verbs available for The Drifter to perform: slash with a sword, shoot with a gun, and dash, a teleport-like ability that causes The Drifter to instantly move across short distances. The game has only a handful of objects to interact with, most notably enemies, boxes, platforms, and upgrade tokens. Within these narrow abilities and opportunities, the game creates a possibility space where players are allowed to approach encounters in their own particular ludic style as well as tackle objectives in a non-linear order.

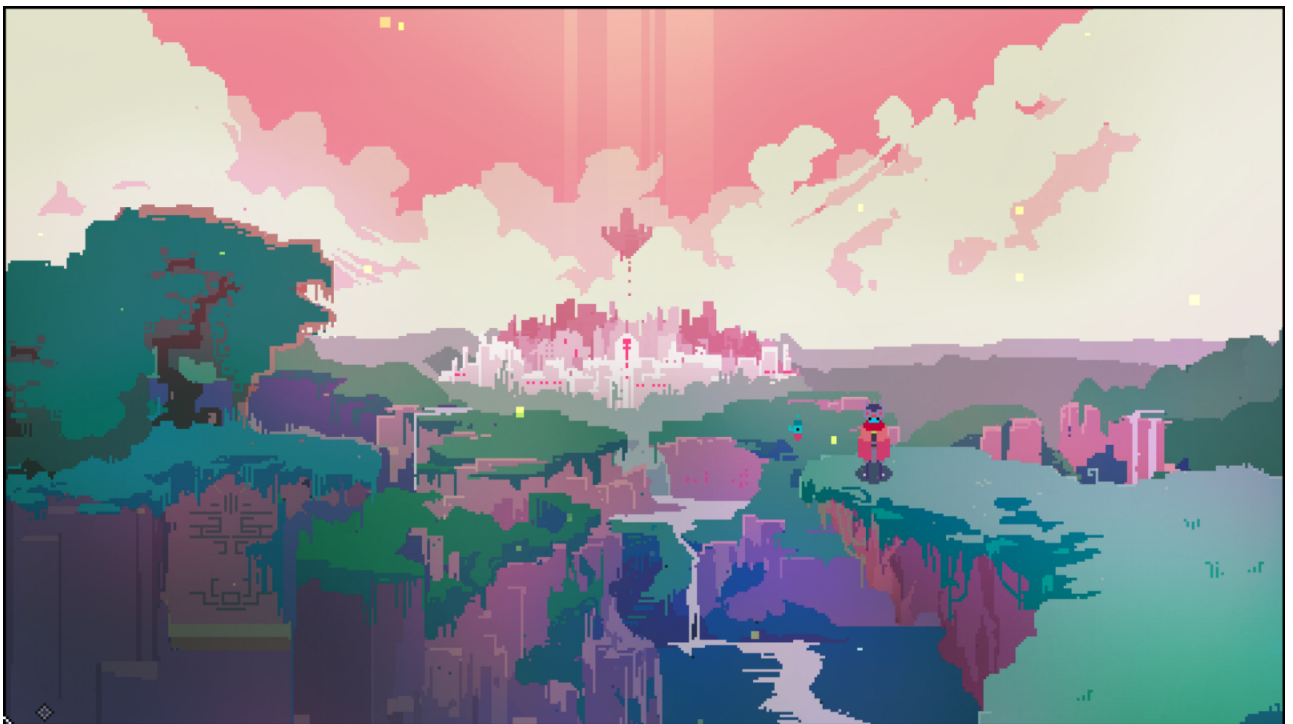


Fig 7. HLD's expansive vistas depicted in pixel art.

HLD's default mode of interaction is combat. Two thirds of the games available verbs are aimed at combat, and the third, dash, is a critical ability for both combat and exploration. While the small number of available verbs may seem to limit the potential for expressions of style, the

game does something interesting: it allows verbs to become objects. That is to say, the game's mechanics and underlying systems encourage the player to engage with all three verbs, often in a way that is nearly simultaneous. The most used ability in the game is the slash, a short attack with a sword that can destroy enemies, boxes, or crystals in the environment. The shoot verb is limited by the game's mechanics to have very limited ammunition. However, the player accumulates ammunition by making contact with enemies via the slash ability. If the player has additional space for extra gunshots, each time they make contact with an enemy via the slash ability, they gain an additional bullet to be used to help destroy additional enemies. The dash ability is also able to interact with the slash ability. Dashing and then immediately slashing produces a special attack that causes The Drifter to swing his sword in a much wider arc. Additionally, upgrade tokens hidden throughout the game allow for additional abilities to be applied to the standard set of three verbs such as "Reflect" which allows The Drifter to use the slash ability to deflect and send back enemy projectiles or double dash which allows The Drifter to perform multiple dashes in a row.

With just three verbs and a handful of object types to interact with, HLD encourages a rather bare-bones style of play that is based upon repetition, creative combinations, and adaptive situating/positioning. It's ludic style, how the player plays the game, would be in line with the low-style of the ancients. It is straightforward, values clarity, yet it has a surprising degree of flexibility. It allows for its simple combat system to be expanded upon through upgrades and the development of a combat style that encourages a slow burn with the occasional firework. For example, a player may approach a room full of enemies very carefully, slowly picking off one enemy at a time until they inevitably run out of ammunition. Then, the player must make a decision. They could charge in with a dash and start slashing as fast as possible as the enemies rush to the player, then after having built back up their ammo supply, unleash a flurry of shots to wipe out the last of the enemies. Or, they could reveal themselves to the enemy, get the enemy to shoot projectiles at them, and carefully deflect each shot back to its originator, before quickly

dashing to the remaining enemies who don't shoot projectiles to finish them off with a quick slash. Each approach, though wildly different and dependent upon a variety of representational (the shape of the room the combat takes place in) and procedural (the types and behaviors of the enemies present), is still aligned with the game's overall ludic style. Of course, when taken in light of the game's representational style— dripping neon, high-tempo synth soundtrack, and the satisfying smack of a slash compared to the dull pop of firing a shot--it is clear that the game is trying to push the player into adopting a particular style, yet it still allows for the player to enact their own ethos through the conscious decisions made.

The game's verbs, while relatively simple, still allow for a variety of tropes, schemes, and figures to be enacted. The previously mentioned deflect ability for the verb "slash" represents an excellent way for composers to get an embodied experience of anthimeria. The primary use of deflect is as a defensive action. The Drifter has limited health and deflecting incoming projectiles is an excellent way to stay alive. However, experienced players are able to take the defensive action of deflection and turn the missiles back on their makers. This mirrors anthimeria use of substituting one part of speech for another. Players are able to turn defense into offense when they have realized the potential possibility space afforded to them by the game's verbs.

Far away from the pixelated landscapes of HLD sits Blizzard's 2016 team-based shooter OW. Blizzard as a development company is known for revolutionizing genres through taking a niche category and making it palatable for the masses. They took the real-time strategy genre and spread it to kids across the US with Starcraft. They took the micromanagement and convolutedness of massive multiplayer online role playing games and streamlined it in World of Warcraft. OW represents a similar type of ambition. Drawing on the popularity of first-person shooters (FPS) where players take on a first-person perspective and are placed in high-conflict combat situations against another team of human players, Blizzard sought to add character, charm, and improvised teamwork to what was becoming a genre dominated by lone wolf military

shooters. With OW, the team at Blizzard largely succeeded, and the game has been continually updated and supported over the past three years.



Fig. 8. The cast of OW characters.

Unlike HLD with its three verbs, OW has a plethora. There are currently 30 individual characters, and each character has between four and six abilities in addition to the verbs “jump” and “melee,” which they all share. However, this does not mean that there are over 120 unique verbs. Since verbs dictate the types of actions performed, the available unique verbs in OW are closer to eleven. They include “shoot” which is shared by almost every character, “change horizontal movement” (Soldier: 76’s Sprint), “change vertical movement” (Widowmaker’s Grappling Hook), “heal” (Moirira’s Biotic Grasp), “boop” (Lucio’s Soundwave), “stun” (Brigitte’s Shield Bash), “shield” (D.Va’s Damage Matrix), “place turret” (Symmetra’s

Sentry Turret), “deflect” (Genji’s Deflect), “buff” (Mercy’s Caduceus Staff), and “debuff” (Zenyatta’s Orb of Destruction). These thirteen verbs provide the language by which the player’s experience in OW is written. In addition to these verbs, the game has only a small handful of objects. The game’s objects are other players, health packs, and the buildings/architecture. The primary way verbs are used is to interact with other players, either teammates or enemies. Health packs can only be consumed, buffed, or debuffed, and the buildings/architecture is only interacted with in terms of “change horizontal movement” and “change vertical movement.”

OW’s procedural style attempts to force player’s into one of three roles: tank, damage, or support. Every character is labelled as one of these three types, yet this does not entirely define how the player approaches the play of the game. That is determined by the player’s own ludic style. For example, there exists a type of ludic style for players of the support character Mercy called “Battle Mercy” that uses “buff” and “shoot” along with “change vertical movement” to allow for a ludic style that is focused on causing damage to enemies instead of healing teammates. What is most interesting to note about this is that in a way similar to how the representational style of HLD pushes players to adopt a flashy, high-risk/high-reward ludic style, the procedural style of OW pushes players to adopt a ludic style that closely aligns to the trio of tank, damage, and support. However, even high-level, competitive players have shown that the procedural style does not need to be slavishly adhered to. Characters such as Sombra, typified by OW as a damage character, are often played in a more supporting style. Sombra’s verbs are “shoot,” “change horizontal movement,” “buff,” and “debuff.” The character can output a tremendous amount of damage in a short amount of time and then escape the situation, however, high-level players noticed that the most unique and advantageous use of her verbs was to focus on buffing their team and debuffing the opposing team. It is because these professional players have spent enough time with the game that they have managed to see past the representational and procedural styles and develop their own particular ludic style, one that has proven more effective in terms of wins and losses.

OW's ludic style is one based on how space, positioning, and opportunity are read. Some players will see a firefight taking place and hop into the middle of the fray. Others will sneak around a flank and try to pick off a support character, still others will hang out in the back and attempt to use angles and architecture to gain a slight advantage in picking off opposing enemies. Developing a ludic style in OW is dependent on how one values elements such as movement speed, bullet spread, role identity amongst the team, and character size and appearance. This is akin to a middle-style in the ancient way of thinking. A type of style characterized by the understanding of *kairos* and the willingness to seize a particular moment and turn it into an opportunity.

Because of its emphasis on teamwork and role identity, OW presents a unique opportunity for composers to think about collaborative style, and I will highlight how the scheme of parallelism can be used in conjunction with other player's verbs. The most powerful abilities in OW are called ultimates. Over the course of a game, a player's ultimate charge builds until they reach 100% charge and are able to use a powerful, one-time ability. These typically work best when used in conjunction with others. One way parallelism, the act of placing grammatically equivalent phrases in coordinated series, is commonly enacted in OW is through the use of paired ultimates, with ultimates operating as grammatical equivalents to each other. The character of Zarya's ultimate is called Graviton Surge. She shoots out a miniature black hole that draws enemies towards it and then renders them incapable of moving. Hanzo's ultimate, Dragonstrike, shoots two spiraling dragons across a large area of the play field. When put parallel to Zarya's Graviton Surge, Dragonstrike has the potential to kill several enemies on the other team as opposed to when it is used on its own, a much less effective tactic as the Dragonstrike is easy to dodge and avoid.

On the far end of the representational style spectrum, far removed from the pixelated skulls and trees of HLD and the cartoonish, colorful characters of OW lies Naughty Dog's 2016 hit TLOU. The story takes place in a near-future where a fungal infection has turned most of the

human population into zombie-like creatures. The graphics are hyper realistic to the point that areas such as downtown Pittsburgh are recreated exactly and characters have sweat stains on their ragged clothing. The procedural style is similar. The game is full of brutal murders where the player presses a button and the main character on screen takes a brick and eviscerates the head of a fellow human. Access to guns and ammunition is limited, and the procedural style encourages close combat fighting and the use of stealth takedowns as a way to reinforce the harsh reality the protagonists find themselves in.

While the representational style and procedural style are closely aligned, the ludic style of the game does not adhere to the gritty, dark atmosphere and mechanics, which makes TLOU an excellent object of analysis for how a player can assert agency and express their own style even within the constraints of the possibility space. The game takes as its verbs “melee,” “shoot,” “inspect,” “craft,” “jump,” “carry,” “throw”, and “listen.”



Fig. 9. Joel uses Listening Mode in TLOU.

“Listen” may seem like an odd verb for a game about shooting zombies in the face and trying to save humanity, and it clues the player in to how they can play the game. By accessing the Listening Mode, the player is able to see through walls and around buildings if any zombie or human is making noise. The louder an object in the environment is, the more clearly the player will be able to see the outline. It shifts the game from a potentially middle or grand style and into a low style. The game’s actions sequences then become less about twitch reactions and

memorized routes of guards or sentries and more of a game about careful planning. Gone are the opportunities to rush in with a machine gun and lay down covering fire or combo attacks until the protagonist has kicked the head off of every last zombie. In its place is a slow, plodding ludic style that is built on careful deliberation and accurate assessment of the situation the player finds themselves in. In this way, the ludic style of a game like TLOU reflects a common critique of large, AAA games: while the world is grand and magnificent and the amount of abilities and verbs available to the player is robust, it allows for little actual expression in terms of ludic style and thus severely limits the choices and decisions a player makes while playing.

TLOU presents several opportunities for composers to enact schemes and tropes. An excellent example of this is through the use of the verb “throw.” In the game, players can use the “inspect” verb to acquire materials such as bottles, bricks, and cans. One of the game’s enemy types is called Clickers. Clickers are zombies who have fungal growth covering their eyes and instead rely on echolocation to find their prey. Players can enact the trope of *antonomasia* on Clickers by throwing an object in an area where the Clicker is listening. In the same way that *antonomasia* works as a way of replacing one word with another, the thrown bottle replaces the physical body of the player’s avatar. Even though a glass bottle breaking and human footsteps sound nothing alike, the game treats the objects as the same, and the act of replacement via *antonomasia* provides a way of showing the power similar yet different actions can have on an audience.

What these three analyses demonstrate is that ludic style is entirely different than how style is typically talked about in regards to videogames. Representational style in a high or grand style does not mirror the actual ludic style in games like TLOU. In regards to procedural style, a game with a rather limited procedural style such as HLD and its three verbs still has the potential for moments of grand expression and ample player choice. Style in regards to videogames and digital play can be expressed in multiple ways, but the theorization of ludic style and how it

differs from representational and procedural style illuminates how agency operates in new media as well as how play can be expressive.

Conclusion

This chapter has put forth the idea of further researching and analyzing videogames based on the idea of ludic style. Using classical schemes and tropes, it has shown how the introduction of complex verbs and objects allows for players to choose how to express themselves in a particular game. Defining a ludic style as part of the possibility space where players are free to express themselves via a game's verbs and objects allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which play is rhetorical and how classical rhetorical can be used to understand different potentials for play. If as Paul Butler suggests in *Out of Style* that "the job of composition studies is to develop writing through many processes" (141), then attention to how players compose their experiences through an expressive, ludic style is one more way to develop a robust process of composing.

While my days on the playground trying to prove to classmates how cool I was are thankfully in the past, the reputation of Nintendo has remained largely unchanged, as has my devotion to the company's games. Nintendo is often derided on online message boards as being "kiddie" or "out of touch." Nintendo as a company may never be cool. It will not have the edge of Sonic, the grittiness of Sony's first-party software such as TLOU or Uncharted, or the bombastic masculinity of Microsoft's Gears of War, but that doesn't matter. Nintendo may not be cool, but its games constantly encourage a ludic style where the player is free to express themselves in whatever way they see fit. And in that end, whether you're a major corporation, a teacher in the composition and rhetoric classroom, or an eight-year old schoolboy on the playground, that is about the coolest thing you can do.

As composition and rhetoric's scope continues to expand to include increasingly diverse forms of communication such as video games, there will be an increasing need to apply the tools

and strategies of our trade to new forms of media. Identifying how ancient schemes and tropes are experienced in digital games can help bridge the past to the present in our field. Ludic style's focus on the individual and her agency in playing a game coupled with the embodied, cybogan notion that game play is an interactive process can be seen as one of the many pylons necessary for the construction of such a bridge.

CHAPTER IV

ARRANGING POSTERS AND DELIVERING BULLETS: PROPAGANDA AS PLEASURE IN *WOLFENSTEIN II: THE NEW COLOSSUS*

Introduction.

Imagine this scenario: you wait months for a book to be released, closely tracking its development through publishing houses trade journals and talks the author has given leading up to the big day. After standing in line at the bookstore, you secure your new prized possession--resisting the temptation to open it up and peek at its contents on the drive home. Finally, you get home, set the kettle for tea, and crack open your book and prepare to dive in. Only instead of the book beginning with a preface to set the scene for the fantastical intrigue or a cryptic introduction focusing on what could only be the plot's big bad villain, you are presented with a set of unskippable directions on how to read and complete the book. "Start at the top, left-most word and read each word in the line from left to right before dropping down to the next line words and reading them from left to right. Upon completion of one page of text, you will need to either move across the spine to the next page of words, or if on the right-most page, please turn the page so that you move through the book's pages in the same order, right to left, in the same manner as you read the individual words." Any reader encountering such instructions would be at best befuddled and at worst frustrated with the need to read and review such simple instructions before getting to the heart of the content. While this scenario may seem far fetched for the world of books, this dilemma has played out for decades in video games, and even though games as a

medium have been adopted on a global level, the use of tutorials and instructions in games does not seem to be going away.

Consider then one of the most famous levels in all of video game history: Super Mario Bros.'s World 1, Level 1 (Nintendo, 1985). The level features zero actual instructions or tutorials. It does not have text flash up on the screen indicating which button to press to jump. It does not highlight the goal of the game or the individual level. It doesn't detail the various mechanics, abilities, enemies, or powerups you will encounter when playing the game. Instead, it simply encourages you to play the game, and in doing so, becomes one of the best examples of a tutorial in all of video games.

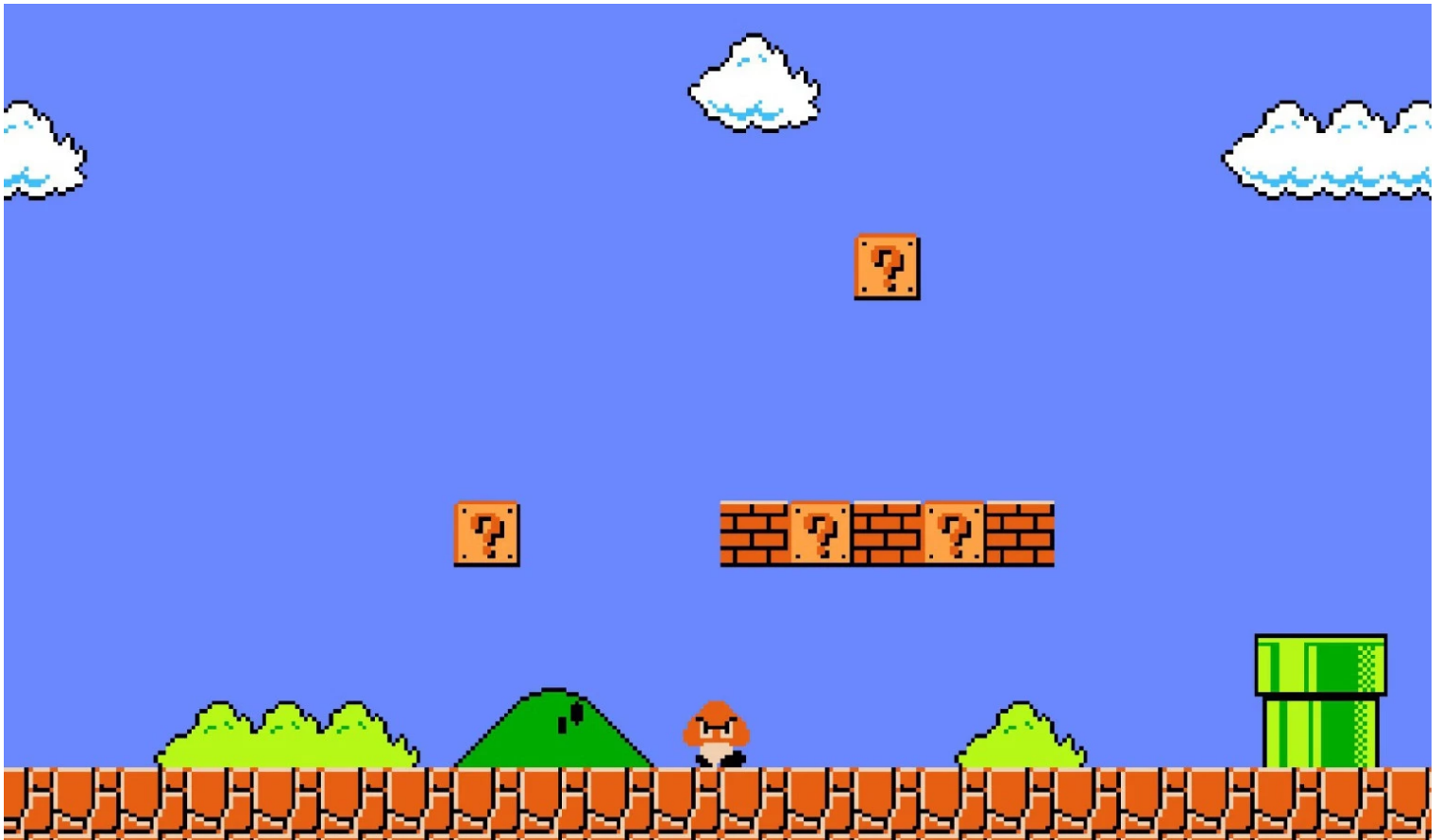


Fig. 10. The beginning of Super Mario Bros.'s Level 1-1 (Nintendo, 1985)

Here is how the level works. The player controls Mario, a small mustachioed man in overalls. The player may move Mario by pushing left or right. Moving in the left direction

produces no result. There is nothing to interact with and the screen remains static save for the player's avatar pushing up against an invisible wall to the left. When the player begins to move right, they encounter a scene with an enemy, the humble Goomba, slowly walking toward the player. Touching the Goomba from the side results in the immediate death of the player. Perhaps after trying to run through the Goomba, the player intuits that they must jump over the enemy in order to successfully continue the level. As their next life loads, the player moves right and, upon seeing the Goomba's approach, jumps to avoid it. However, the designers of the game have planned for just such a reaction and have carefully arranged the level's question mark blocks and bricks in a way that the player must jump and move to the right at the same time as they are under a question mark block. The result is that the player jumps into the question mark block, receives a coin from the block, and is immediately propelled downward where they land on the top of the Goomba, squishing it out of existence. The player is delivered instructions on how to play the game through the careful arrangement of the game's objects. They discover that question mark blocks and even bricks contain powerups when jumped into from below and that enemies kill Mario when hit from the side but are themselves killed when hit from the top. With this newfound knowledge in hand, the player then sees three more question mark blocks. Hitting the left-most block causes a Super Mushroom to appear and glide to the right. The Super Mushroom falls off the platform, ricochets off the green pipe, and is sent toward the player. With the remaining bricks above them, the player may try to jump over the mushroom, but the above bricks quickly deflect their trajectory and send them unavoidably plummeting into the Super Mushroom which turns out to be a powerup beneficial to the player and essential for passing the level. Without a single word of text and without the benefit of genre conventions which were being created by the game itself (Super Mario Bros. is largely credited with creating the platformer genre), the developers were able to get players to experience the rules of the game. They did this through the curious amalgamation of both arrangement and delivery.

Arrangement and delivery, the second and fifth canons of ancient rhetoric, come together to provide an embodied experience of instruction. By arranging the blocks, enemies, and powerups of the game and then relying on the player's actions to deliver and instantiate the lesson, the developers demonstrate the effectiveness of non-discursive communication. While Level 1-1 in Super Mario Bros. stands as one of the most famous and most effective examples of this type of direction giving, it has been used in countless games since. Video games, as one form of new media, have the potential to help scholars reconceptualize the ancient canons of rhetoric in light of our digital world.

Over the past two decades, digital scholars have turned their attention to how new media, digital distribution, and remediation have impacted how we make meaning and communicate with each other. Because of their emphasis on design, interaction, and circulation, these scholars have often attempted to discuss these issues in terms of both arrangement (design) and delivery (medium, distribution, and circulation). James Porter (2009) argues that digital delivery can best be conceived as happening across five *koinoi topoi*, which he identifies as body/identity, distribution/circulation, access/accessibility, interaction, and economics. However, he is quick to admit that “these *koinoi topoi* of delivery...do not do very much. To maximize their generative or productive power you must put them into dynamic interaction with one another and with other rhetorical topics” (p. 220). This chapter responds to this call by putting digital delivery in contact with digital arrangement. This positioning follows a long line of reasoning starting with Quintilian who noted the intimate relationship between arrangement and delivery even in the age of orality. In *Institutio Oratoria* (1953), Quintilian argues that “just as it is not sufficient for those who are erecting a building merely to collect stone and timber and other building materials, but skilled masons are required to arrange and place them.” The arrangement of the materials and the placement of those materials, their delivery as part of the overall composition of the house, are seen as giving each other meaning. This line of reasoning continues up to the modern day to the point where digital scholars such as Jay David Bolter (1993) argues that in digital composition

and rhetoric, arrangement is delivery. Scholars such as Collin Gifford Brooke (2009) have rejected this claim on the basis that “we encounter all texts in the context of space and time; it is not especially productive to imagine some as spatial and others as temporal. We should instead amend Bolter’s comment to read that every technology gives us not only a different space, but a different time as well” (p. 93). Brooke’s emphasis on temporality gives insight into what I will argue here. Arrangement and delivery, while remaining separate canons, happen at the same time in digital media, and therefore, must always be considered in conjunction with each other in digital media.

This chapter draws on scholarship that argues in the age of orality, style and delivery were often conflated (Jacobi, 2006) and in the age of literacy, arrangement and invention were seen as similar complementary processes (Frye, 1989). Following this provenancial line, I argue that in our current age of electracy and digital media, arrangement and delivery, while remaining separate entities, happen simultaneously. This merging reveals the challenges composers face in the contemporary moment when they must simultaneously account for how the materials should be most effectively arranged as well as how they will be delivered and experienced by the end user. In addition to this challenge, viewing arrangement and delivery as simultaneous processes also presents an opportunity for savvy composers and readers to understand the affordances of interactivity in new media. I will demonstrate this through first an examination of how arrangement and delivery have been discussed in composition and rhetoric and then an extended reading and demonstration of how the video game *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* blends arrangement and delivery together in order to disseminate political propaganda.

Putting Together the Pieces of Arrangement and Delivery

The ancients placed great importance in the canon of arrangement and viewed it as both “selecting the arguments to be used and arranging these in an order that was clear and persuasive” (Crowley and Hawhee, 2004, p. 257). In this way, arrangement’s feeling out the arguments to be used was closely connected to invention. The connection between these two placed both

invention and arrangement as part of the planning process for producing a speech. Because it was positioned as part of a plan, there were several different formulas or structures recommended by rhetoricians throughout antiquity. Mark Smeltzer (1996) argues that Gorgias was one of the first rhetors to demonstrate the utility of a four-part arrangement for arguments. These four parts were the introduction, the narration, the argument, and the conclusion. Other early philosophers developed their own arrangement structures such as Corax who “developed a three-part theory of arrangement for legislative speaking: introduction, argument, and conclusion” (p. 158). Still others such as Cicero identified a six-part arrangement structure consisting of introduction, statement of the issue, breaking down the issue into parts, the argument, the refutation of counter arguments, and a conclusion (Crowley and Hawhee, 2004). Regardless of how many different parts the overall arrangement was broken down into, the ancients saw these categories as adaptable as in the case with Gorgias where he breaks his own structure in order to “let each part function according to the needs of the situation” (Smeltzer, 1996, p. 163). This flexibility was seen as key to developing the canon of arrangement in a rhetor, but it has largely been lost in discussions of arrangement in the early stages of composition and rhetoric as an academic discipline. Discussions of arrangement became subsumed by discussions of genre, and the flexibility of arrangement for the ancients was replaced with conventions and standards of whatever particular genre the composer was using.

Scholarship on arrangement was replaced with scholarship on genre as it was deemed more applicable to the modern, open-admissions student, but that doesn't mean that arrangement as a canon was ignored. Instead, arrangement was expanded to address issues of space, organization, and audience-based reasoning. In particular, an emphasis on space is relevant for the topic at hand because of the ways new media remediates spatiality (Manovich, 2002) and writing has relied on spatial metaphors (Reynolds, 2007). Lauren Garskie (2017) looks at arrangement and space in terms of space as meaning-making, what is valued in a space, and how spaces are created. She argues that through studying the physical spaces where composition and

rhetoric is taught, we are better able to understand how space is remediated and utilized in multimodal composition. This is in line with other scholars such as Walls, Schopieray, and DeVoss (2009) who have argued that design thinking is the key to understanding how arrangement is enacted in new media. What all this scholarship on the revitalization of arrangement in the digital age has in common is an emphasis on the same flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness that the ancients sought to incorporate into their practice of arrangement. The difference between then and now, however, is that relationship between the text and its arrangement is not one of pure planning and deliberation. It is this relationship of enactment and performance, a relationship that allows for the simultaneous deployment of arrangement and delivery in digital contexts, one which is exemplified in this chapter through the study of digital games.

Delivery was revered by the ancient philosophers and rhetoricians such as Cicero and his followers (Jacobi, 2006), but as society became literate and books became the default way of transmitting information, delivery was seen as a relic of a bygone age. However, like with issues of memory, the turn from literacy to electracy has provided scholars with opportunities to rethink the importance of delivery to modern communication (Yancey, 2006). Kate Kessler describes this shift as, “In delivery of classical oral rhetoric, concern for audience and purpose was reflected in dress, gestures, expression, and vocal tone. In delivery of modern writing, concern for audience and purpose is reflected in font, format, style, tone, and writing conventions” (2005, p. 90). These were the focus in the composition and rhetoric classroom before the widespread adoption of computers, but in the same way that the digital pushed discussion of arrangement into areas of design and spatial reasoning, contemporary discussions of delivery have focused on issues of circulation and distribution.

One of the most influential pieces of contemporary scholarship on delivery in digital environments is Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss’s 2009 *Kairos* article “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery.” In this landmark essay, Ridolfo and DeVoss

make the overall argument that “composing in the digital age is different than traditional practices of composing. Rhetorical practices in a digital age are different than traditionally conceived. Electronic copying-and-pasting, downloading, and networked filesharing change the dynamics of writing and, importantly, of delivery” (p. 2). They position digital delivery as a rhetorical mode, capable of influencing and expressing in line with other modalities such as the linguistic, gestural, aural, and visual. They connect delivery to invention in the digital age, and in doing so, urge composers to think about the temporal matters connected to delivery through questions such as “how long will this take to be recomposed” and “what other mediums could this show up in.” While their idea of rhetorical velocity, composing texts with the hope in mind that the text will be consumed, remixed, and reappropriated for many different means, has been the lasting impact of their article, it is their focus on temporality that is of particular interest here. Their deliberate use of the term velocity denotes notions of the speed with which information travels in our digital age, but also connotes a sense of direction (from the physics-based definition of velocity from which the authors draw) that urges composers to think about spatial issues as well. It is the combination of both of these aspects--the spatial negotiations of arrangement and the temporal concerns of delivery--that collapse into each other and make any consideration of one aspect incomplete without careful analysis of the other. Nowhere is this more evident than in the play of digital games.

Overlapping Delivery and Arrangement

In our current digital age, arrangement and delivery happen simultaneously. This claim can be seen in something as simple as accessing a popular social media site such as Facebook. If one goes on a traditional PC, they will see one particular version of Facebook delivered to their desktop, arranged in a way with multiple columns offering up different types of information. Pull out your phone and tap the Facebook app and the content is delivered in a similar manner but with a very different arrangement. Finally, open a web browser on a mobile device such as Google Chrome and access the website via the url facebook.com to find yet another version of

Facebook with a different arrangement and delivery. Though all access the same content, the way that information is displayed and delivered to the user is different even though it all happens simultaneously. This poses challenges to those who would wish to study aspects of websites such as their design and utility as well as calling into question the universality of any particular close reading. However, it also offers up a powerful opportunity for producers and consumers who can leverage the power of both canons simultaneously to both enact their argument and produce an organic feeling of discovery when encountering that argument.

As previously mentioned, scholars have demonstrated the crossover between arrangement and delivery. Crowley and Hawhee (2004) argue that invention and development of punctuation stands as one of the first examples of this crossover, and I would argue that it is an example of the power of arrangement and delivery happening at the same time. While we are now thoroughly normalized to the uses of punctuation such as commas and semicolons, Crowley and Hawhee (2004) argue that in antiquity “rhetors, for example, marked places where speakers would pause to take a breath. The early origins of punctuation were therefore rhetorical” (p. 337). What is important to note here is both how even in older technologies such as writing and printing, there is a blending of arrangement and delivery--one accelerated by digital technologies--and also that these practices if not explicated and theorized can become unnoticed and thus underutilized by savvy composers. The same is true for the deployment of arrangement and delivery today.

In an effort to understand how the digital age has influenced and changed the canons of rhetoric, Brooke analyzes the potential for delivery to be more than just the means of transmitting a message. He argues, “Without an understanding of delivery as *performance*, we are left with an incomplete grasp of new media” (2009, p. 171). In traditional rhetoric, delivery is seen as a static act of transmission, a one-time event where text is presented as a representation of an objective reality. Understanding delivery as performance as with new media necessitates differentiating “that property of new media that draws us away from the ‘instance of reality,’ the one true rendering of reality in discourse, and closer to the ‘instance of discourse,’ where it is a particular

performance, one that constitutes, that is taking place” (Brooke, 2009, p. 192). Video games, as one instantiation of new media, offer an accessible entry into understanding delivery as performance. They are repeatable and with few exceptions, each player playing a game will perform the game in a different manner. My son will expertly shotgun opponents in *Fortnite* as he works his way toward “Victory Royale!” while I cower in bunkers and bushes hoping to outlast the crowd and steal a win at the very end. The “instance of discourse” here is the creation of the game itself through the delivery of gameplay, through the actual performance of playing the game.

The conception of delivery as performance, one bound by temporal manners as all performances must be, leads into a natural relationship with arrangement in new media. As the performance creates the text, it is displayed spatially, arranged to provide information, expression, or persuasion to the end user. When put in tandem, understanding arrangement and delivery as simultaneous processes operating both spatially and temporally has the ability to help readers identify potential affordances and leverage interactivity as will be evidenced in the analysis of propaganda in *Wolfenstein*. The power of this positioning is one possible way to seek the goal of Brooke’s (2009) reclassifying arrangement in new media as one of patterning. He argues, “One approach to arrangement in the context of new media, then, is to work ourselves free of the regularity of sequential media” (p. 97). Viewing arrangement as the spatial relationship between objects in a text which are instantiated at the moment of performance can then reveal potentially problematic uses of propaganda in interactive environments. And these environments are becoming increasingly universal and technologically sophisticated. As Porter (2009) writes, “Game-playing worlds and ‘second life worlds’ are environments supporting a wide variety of human interactions. We need a robust rhetoric of digital delivery to understand how to be an effective rhetorical participant in these environments” (p. 213). The simultaneity of arrangement and delivery argued for by this chapter is one such contribution to an understanding of how rhetoric is used in these games.

Drawing on Brooke's argument that arrangement in new media is accomplished through the discerning and establishing of patterns, video games operate as a kind of puzzle, one where the player attempts to understand the pattern ("grok the pattern" as game designer Raph Koster (2014) puts it) through their performance. Luke Arnett (2012) describes this relationship in his reading of *Life A User's Manual* and the video game *Braid* as "a semiotic system of communicative overtures from a puzzle maker to a puzzle solvers, based on the spatial relation of objects not only within the texts (i.e., the diegetic space of game and novel) but also within their meta-textual features (the arrangement of chapters, graphics, extra-diegetic pictographs, etc.)" (p. 434). In the next section, I use this connection between the textual and meta-textual features and their relationship to the game's patterns and overall gameplay (i.e., the performance), as a way to describe, identify, and analyze how a game such as *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* custom-made propaganda functions both implicitly and explicitly. The goal is to show how careful arrangement and pattern-placing can lead to an organic (though still intentionally designed) sense of discovery through the player's performance which has the potential to increase the efficacy of the propaganda itself even if unintentionally.

The Rise of Interactive Propaganda

There is an old saying among video game developers, "If you want to lessen the violence in your videogames, stop making them kill people and start making them kill zombies or Nazis." The evidence of this in videogames is clearly seen in popular shooters such as the *Call of Duty* franchise's recent return to WWII as a setting and the inclusion of a "Zombie Horde" mode, as well as in the DLC for *Red Dead Redemption* where the protagonist is charged with clearing the West of a zombie infection. While this is a common trick seen in videogames, one series has pioneered the slaughter of Nazis more than any other: *Wolfenstein*. Starting with *Castle Wolfenstein* (id Software, 1981), the series began as a stealth-based game about infiltrating Nazi strongholds. With *Wolfenstein 3D* (id Software, 1992), the series shifted genres to become a first-person shooter (FPS) from the perspective of common-man William "BJ" Blazkowicz, a US

soldier. From there, the series set up an alternate universe where Adolf Hitler is part robot with four machine guns for limbs. The series has continued throughout the years, filling in the alternate universe with lore and history until the soft reboot of the series with *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (Machine Games, 2014), which takes place in the 1960s in a world where the Axis powers won WWII. While scholars such as Schulzke (2016) have suggested that setting up an alternate universe as a way to move away from state-sponsored ideological violence in video games, recent events have brought the alternate reality of *Wolfenstein* closer in line to real world politics.

The demonstration, protest, and murder in Charlottesville, VA on August 12, 2017 pushed the revitalization of Nazism in the US to the forefront of the public consciousness. Suddenly, the alternate reality of a world filled with Nazis did not seem so far fetched. While the loss of life and rise of fascism should be the main takeaways from the Charlottesville Rally, it did put the soon to be released *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* (Machine Games, 2017) in the spotlight as members of the alt-right began to protest the game for being “too political.” While it may be laughable to some to have a game whose entire 36 year history is centered on killing members of a political party be suddenly deemed too political, it is worth interrogating these claims in light of the 2016 US presidential election and rise of neo-Nazis in the US. With claims of “fake news” and “alternative facts” filling up both social and mainstream media, calls for more thorough and nuanced analysis of propaganda have been seen as one way to potentially remedy the overall sense of distrust between citizens and state or political parties. Through an understanding of the simultaneity of arrangement and delivery, this chapter analyzes the use of propaganda in *Wolfenstein II* in two ways. First, I identify and analyze several examples of in-game propaganda posters that are arranged and patterned throughout the playable locations, which I deem explicit propaganda owing to the fact that it is clearly identifiable as political propaganda and is meant to increase the verisimilitude of the alternate universe in the game. Second, I describe the game’s possibility space to see how conceptual models and ideologies are

performed through the game's characters, narrative, and mechanics, a schema I define as implicit propaganda as its means are never fully stated to the player and are instead experienced by the player through the actions afforded to her. Ultimately, I argue that *Wolfenstein II* uses overt, explicit propaganda as a way to prime players' willingness to accept the implicit propaganda and dehumanize the enemy characters. While the explicit and implicit propaganda act in tandem with one system feeding into the other, I want to pay particular attention to how the interactive nature of video games functions as an effective form of political propaganda.

Before I begin my analysis, I want to make it clear that this chapter is not written in support of Nazism, fascism, or bigotry of any kind. By arguing for *Wolfenstein II* as a piece of propaganda, I do not mean to say that Nazism should be tolerated or violence against those who use the threat of violence to subjugate others is uncalled for, rather, my argument is focused on how tacit acceptance of violence as the sole solution to Nazism and fascism inevitably leads to more authoritarian, less tolerant societies. The argument of *Wolfenstein II's* propaganda is not so much anti-Nazi as it is pro-fascist. Whether this acceptance comes in the form of the procedural rhetorics of video games or Facebook posts is largely inconsequential. What matters more than the medium is the overall, societal definition of the problem and approach to an overly simplified solution. When, as in the *Wolfenstein* series, the only option is to kill or be killed, the potential for what Patricia Roberts-Miller (2017) deems "democratic deliberation" becomes impossible. With that caveat in place, I will begin by establishing a framework for the analysis of game's explicit propaganda through both a rhetorical and communications-based perspective. From there, I will use contemporary scholarship in play and game studies to demonstrate how the game's phenomenological representations and systems (Keogh, 2014) are delivered as an ideological construct that functions as pro-violence propaganda and reinforces the notion of American Exceptionalism.

As previously stated, *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* takes place in an alternate universe where Nazi Germany detonated atomic bombs in the USA and ended up winning WWII.

With the Nazis in control of the world, a small resistance movement, the Kreisau Circle, attempts to undermine the Nazis stranglehold. In the resistance's mobile U-Boat base and later in their underground command centers, pro-US propaganda is tacked to the walls. When entering Nazi controlled areas, pictures of fearsome tanks, proud Aryan boys and girls, and advertisements for pro-German game shows adorn the walls and street corners. The posters are clearly arranged to add a level of immersion to the gameworld, but they also show how propaganda, by both sides in the conflict, is essential to winning the war. In order to understand how these posters function, it is necessary to have a firm understanding of how propaganda works as a form of persuasion and why it is used by state-powers to influence the masses.

In order to understand how propaganda works and how it is used, rhetoricians, communications scholars, and philosophers have all sought to define propaganda. While there are several different interpretations, this chapter uses Thomas Huckin's (2016) definition as it does not rely on any field of specialization, rather, much like this chapter, it is a synthesis of several different fields and scholars. Huckin defines propaganda as "false or misleading information or ideas addressed to a mass audience by parties who thereby gain advantage. Propaganda is created and disseminated systematically and does not invite critical analysis or response" (p. 126). What this definition allows us to do is identify whether or not certain texts qualify as propaganda. If a text does fall within this purview, we will be able to analyze how exactly it goes about gaining advantage or not inviting critical analysis. The ultimate goal of this form of analysis is, as Huckin (2016) states, "to point out that such information is often misleading precisely because it hides important countervailing information through simple omission" (p. 127). Part of the work I will perform in my analysis is to identify the careful arrangement and concealment of this hidden information and how deliberate performance can reveal it. In addition to this, Jowett and O'Donnell's (2015) framework, from which Huckin draws inspiration for his previously mentioned composite definition, for analyzing propaganda will also be used. With regards to what I have deemed the game's explicit propaganda, I will pay particular attention to identifying "a set of

beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as for ways of perceiving and thinking that are agreed on to the point that they constitute a set of norms for a society that dictate what is desirable and what should be done” (Jowett & O’ Donnell, 2015, p. 315). In addition to identifying what ideologies are present and how the masses are persuaded to adopt a particular worldview, it is also important to identify the context in which the propaganda occurs in the game as “successful propaganda relates to the prevailing mood of the times; therefore, it is essential to understand the climate of the times” (Jowett & O’ Donnell, 2015, p. 316).

Boiling the Frog

Within the alternate universe of *Wolfenstein II*, there exist two distinct types of explicit propaganda. The first is historical, US-backed propaganda. This can be found in the atom-bombed ruins of the Empire State Building as well as the resistance’s commandeered U-Boat. The other distinct type is the posters put out by the Nazi party in response to their occupation of the US and the rest of the world. I will examine and analyze these two types of posters one after the other beginning with the US-backed propaganda.

The first bit of pro-US propaganda is on the mobile U-Boat base. While I have already been calling this propaganda, it is necessary to first place this within the realm of propaganda explicitly in order to analyze it as a piece of propaganda. Using Huckin’s definition of propaganda, we can clearly see that in the context of the game, a poster reading “The tide IS TURNING” is misleading. In this alternate universe, there was no turning of the Nazi tide, and Germany and the Axis were eventually successful in winning the war. The use of nondescript soldiers, often without any definable facial features other than a sense of being light-skinned, coupled with the way the posters appear to be cheaply mass produced means these are meant for a mass audience. Finally, they do not invite critical response as they often employ imperative statements that place clear, unquestionable demands on the audience such as “BACK THEM UP!”. The propagandist, the US government, clearly has a beneficial advantage here as seen in the “FOR OUR COUNTRY / ENLIST” as the US gains troops even though the individual

soldiers are likely to suffer physical and mental harm. All of this clearly marks the posters as pieces of propaganda even if the player is likely to agree with the posters.



Figure 11. A series of US Propaganda Posters in the commandeered U-Boat (Plunkett, 2017).

Because these posters fit the aforementioned definition of propaganda, they can be analyzed in terms of the ideologies that are being propagated. The posters make a clear case for continued support of the war effort. The “yes we can!” poster puts forth a set of beliefs that indicate that civilians’ moral and physical support of US soldiers is as important as the actual actions of the soldiers fighting in the war. The “FOR OUR COUNTRY!” poster has a different audience and thus a different set of beliefs. Its audience is young American men and relies on the values of patriotism and nationalism to get them to voluntarily enlist in the armed forces. Its use of the imperative “ENLIST” positions this as a demand instead of a choice. If one supports the country, then they must enlist and fight. In a similar way, the “MAKE EVERY BULLET COUNT!” poster places similar demands on the individual soldier. Rather than focus on broader goals and strategies of the war, it positions the soldier as making the right decision to place three bullets into the head of the opposing army. Since the gore and viscera that would accompany such a placement of bullets is missing, it presents the war effort as clean and simple. The individual soldier does not need to understand the enemy. The simply need to make sure that each shot they take is well-aimed and not “wasteful.” This lack of any actual effects to accompany the bullets highlights the deceptive nature of propaganda that Huckin (2015) mentions when asserting that misleading information is often the result of “simple omission” (p. 127). The soldiers are actively conditioned to think of the accuracy of their shooting rather than the fact that their accurate shooting will result in the death of their fellow human beings.

In addition to the propaganda posters on the commandeered U-Boat, a series of US propaganda posters can be seen in the resistance’s headquarters in the bombed out shell of the Empire State Building.



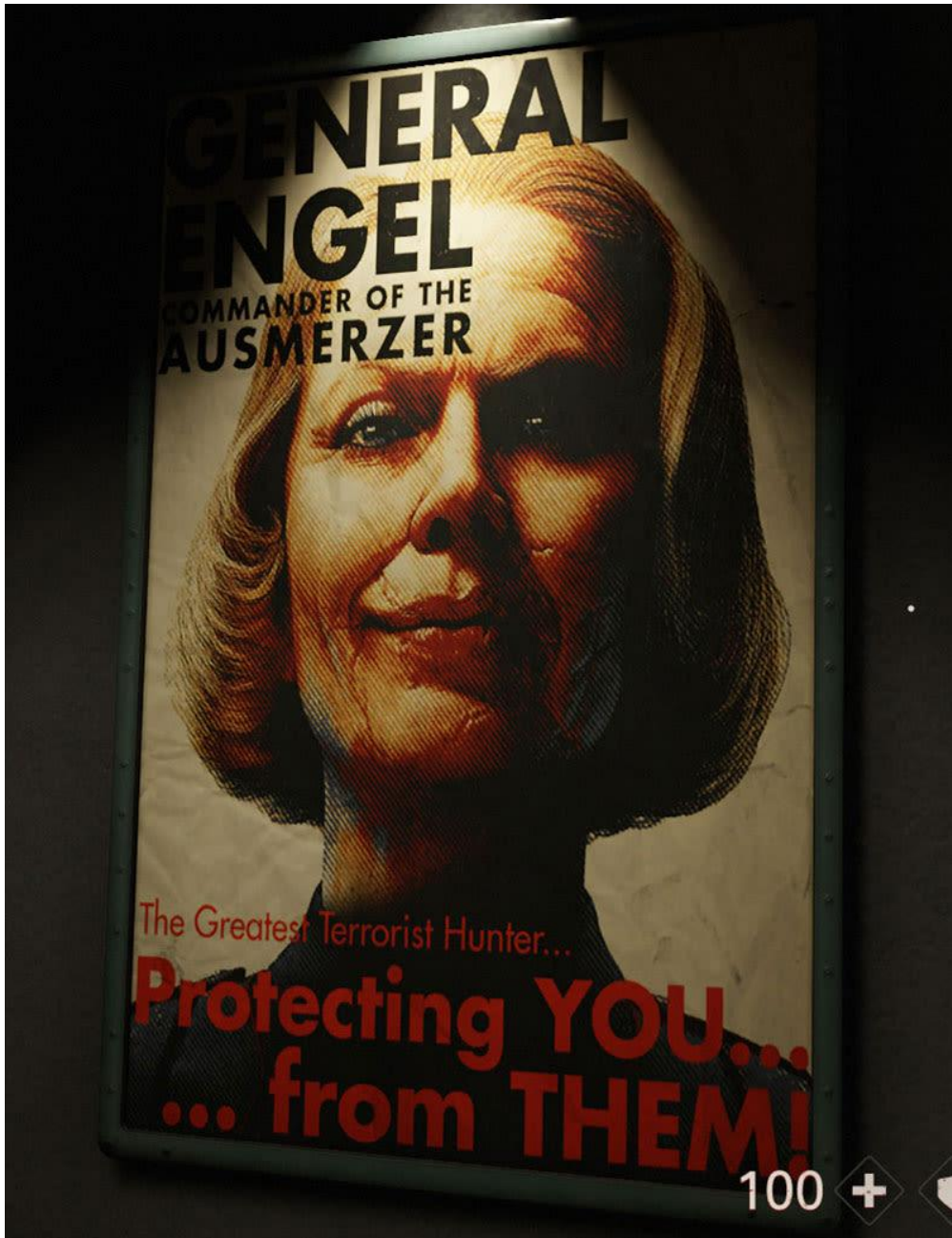
Figure 12. US propaganda posters in the Empire State Building (Plunkett, 2017).

In these posters, the soldier is now much more identifiable. He is a white man with a sly smile on his face. The minimal text reads “JOIN / U.S. ARMY.” Again, the imperative nature of the sentence leaves little room for critical engagement with the propaganda. The other poster in this setting depicts a mushroom cloud against a silhouetted New York skyline. The text reads, “NUCLEAR ATTACK / Know the warning signals / Know your nearest / SHELTER.” While at first it may be easy to dismiss this as not being propaganda due to its informative rather than persuasive nature, it still functions as propaganda. As is clearly seen in the game--the context in which the player must interpret the poster’s message--the population of New York was devastated

by atomic bombs dropped by the Nazis. Knowing the warning signals and the nearest shelter did little to stop the Nazis from killing millions of New Yorkers. Rather than actually provide information, the poster creates a sense of paranoia about the looming danger of an atomic attack against the US. It attempts to placate the population by reassuring them that they will be safe against a nuclear attack while at the same time driving the war effort with the ever present threat of nuclear annihilation. This apparent contradiction between perceived safety and paranoia does not diminish the overall propagandistic effect of the poster. The US is positioned both as the protector of its people and as the only force possible of stopping the threat. The US is both a defender and an aggressor, an all powerful figure that can do no wrong. Its initial appearance as an informative poster rather than a persuasive one obfuscates its purpose while retaining the overall desired effect on the audience's perception of the US. What is particular interesting to note about the propaganda in the Empire State Building is that it is arranged in a way where players may never even encounter it. None of the posters are essential to the successful playing of the game, they aren't even necessary for understanding the game's story. Instead, the game's designers arrange them in a way that the player "discovers" them only if they go out of their way to look for additional lore or content. The player's performance becomes a means for experiencing the layout and accidentally encountering the propaganda. Failure to view arrangement and delivery as simultaneous processes means that a player may view the propaganda as only adding verisimilitude to the game's alternate universe instead of further inculcating them to the game's ideology.

While the US-backed propaganda is meant to endear the audience toward the individual soldier and support the cause, the Nazi propaganda in the game has an opposite effect. While it is hard to read and analyze Nazi propaganda from an objective point of view based on the genocidal atrocities that were committed in the real world, the Nazi-based propaganda in *Wolfenstein II* is purposefully bombastic and over the top. Rather than focus on individual soldiers or the need for a unified civilian effort in the war, the Nazi propaganda in the game emphasizes the technological

might of the Nazi empire and the superiority of the German-language and those of “Aryan” blood.



Wenn man Ihnen die letzte Zigarette anbietet, sind Sie auf der falschen Seite.

EINFACH ALLE RAUCHEN
WOLF

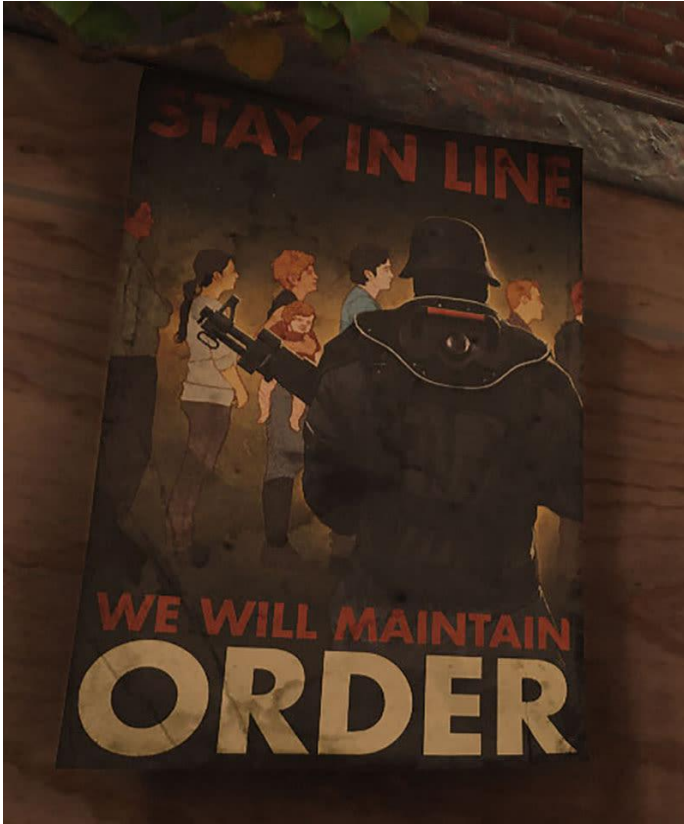
Die edelste Zigarette, die Sie jemals rauchen werden. Nur aus allerbestem Tabak. Genießen Sie den vollen, milden Geschmack. Können Sie sich heute und jeden Tag ein Päckchen. Die Qualität der sorgsam ausgewählten Tabaksorten wird sie vollends überzeugen.

WOLF

AUSMERZER

HERO OF THE LIBERATION WAR SINCE 1951

AUSMERZER



Figures 13, 14, 15, 16. Nazi Propaganda as seen in the United States in *Wolfenstein II* (Plunkett, 2017).

In these four posters, the attitudes and beliefs of the Nazi party are on full display. Frau Engel, the game's antagonist, is the only Nazi given an actual identity in any of the game's Nazi propaganda. The text reads, "The Greatest Terrorist Hunter... / Protecting YOU... / ... from THEM!" While the political agenda of much of the game's pro-Nazi propaganda is obvious, this poster highlights an important facet of demagoguery. Patricia Roberts-Miller (2017) identifies the hallmark of demagoguery as discourse that "polarizes a complicated political situation into us (good) and them (some of whom are deliberately evil and the rest of whom are dupes)" (p. 34). Beyond its participation in simplifying the problem of a resistance movement into a simple us vs. them situation, the Frau Engel poster also positions her face (scarred from the protagonist's previous actions in *Wolfenstein: The New Order*) as the prominent feature of the poster. Frau

Engel is a war hero and through the Nazi's propaganda becomes what Roberts-Miller (2017) deems a charismatic leader. The appeal of a charismatic leader, in terms relating specifically to demagoguery and propaganda, is that "charismatic leadership satisfies our desire to be part of something bigger, and, paradoxically, to hand all power over to someone else can make us feel more powerful because we think that person is a best version of ourselves" (p. 59). The propaganda positions Frau Engel as the thin line that separates the order and civility of the Nazis with the brutality and ruthlessness of the "terrorists" like the protagonist, BJ Blazkowicz. I will return to this image of Frau Engel later in the paper when discussing how the game's narrative is resolved, but for now, it is important to remember how she is given a face and personality in stark contrast to the rank and file Nazi soldiers depicted in the Nazi propaganda.

Of the dozens of examples of Nazi propaganda in the game, the soldier is always depicted as masked and almost inhuman. The Nazi soldiers are seen as ominous black shadows, robotic behemoths, or faceless purveyors of death to the "unclean." The Nazis become dehumanized in the propaganda posters to mirror their dehumanizing policies. It is this feature of the Nazi propaganda in *Wolfenstein II*, the dehumanization of the game's antagonist, that connects the explicit propaganda of the game's posters to the implicit propaganda in the game's mechanics, systems, and audiovisual representation. I will highlight this through what Brendan Keogh (2014) deems a "cybernetic approach" (p. 2) to video game analysis.

While many papers in game studies, particularly those with a critical or analytical focus, adopt Ian Bogost's (2007) procedural rhetoric as a methodology for analysis, I argue that this is not a particularly effective approach to analyzing what makes implicit propaganda in video games so effective. While procedural rhetoric helps describe the possibilities for play in a game and how conceptual models can be formed through a game's procedures, it does not fully take in to account the interactive nature of video games. Jowett and O' Donnell (2015) urge the propaganda analysis to pay particular attention to "special techniques to maximize effect" (p.323), and thus

Keogh's cybernetic model is more adept when considering how the player performs and thus is delivered the game's message.

Beyond the game's design and rules, there are elements of the system at work in furthering the ideology. Keogh (2014) argues that videogame critics should explore every phenomenological aspect of a game in order to fully understand its message. In "Across Worlds and Bodies: Criticism in the Age of Video Games," Keogh argues that "the affordances and constraints of videogame play, what the player can or cannot 'do,' only make sense in relation to the audiovisually constructed fictional world of the game, and it is not surprising that videogames would pick up representational strategies of other audiovisual media" (p. 6). He goes on to examine several different games and the way their rules and design interact with other media embedded in the game such as menu and user interface design, characters, and music. In doing so, he shows how these elements can bolster or unhinge a game's message and meaning.

In *Wolfenstein II*, the game's character's models and overarching narrative are the chief phenomenological elements that contribute to its implicit propaganda message. Through these systems and representations, the player's performance accepts the level of violence they inflict upon fellow human beings and continuously encourages this behavior--their just Nazis, and fictional, digital ones at that. However, instead of depoliticizing the slaughter of Nazis, the use of Nazis as the main antagonists actually increases the likelihood that players will see violence as the optimal solution. With regards to how videogame developers have used alternative, differently colored blood; zombies; and Nazis as less violent and morally justifiable, Carly Kocurek (2015) argues that one form of violence is simply replaced by another. She argues that "in presenting this neat cleaving of conquering heroes and monstrous villains, these attempts to minimise [sic] game violence may enact a different type of rhetorical violence, echoing the strategies of dehumanisation [sic] employed in propaganda campaigns" (p. 80). As seen in the previously mentioned Nazi propaganda posters, the Nazis become dehumanized, mechanical monsters. Kocurek (2015) goes on to argue that:

By dehumanising [sic] the victims of on-screen violence, alternative blood [and other similar schemes] presents victims as monstrous; although this is a deliberate strategy on the part of game designers, it is one that invokes--purposefully or otherwise--propaganda strategies that have long been used as a political strategy to justify the marginalisation [sic], abuse and even extermination of populations marked as 'undesirable.' (p. 80)

That the Nazi propaganda would choose to dehumanize its own soldiers indicates that the propaganda is arranged not for the in-world characters--the Nazis would want to win the hearts and minds of the populations they are subjugating, not portray themselves as monsters--but rather toward the player herself.

This analysis reveals the true target audience for the game's explicit propaganda and in doing so uncovers the ideologies operating through the gameplay and audiovisual elements. However, some critics have argued that this type of "unmasking" of ideologies is low-hanging fruit when it comes to videogame analysis. Schulzke (2017) urges critics to go "beyond the argument that games may present misleading visions of war to a project of identifying the relationships between the various ideas that are reflected in games" (p. 621). This chapter seeks to connect the arrangement of the obvious, explicit propaganda of the in-game posters with the implicit propaganda of the game's phenomenology, instantiated through the player's performance, in order to better understand the relationship between the two and why the player is willed toward dehumanizing the enemy. While the player may view their role in shaping the game's narrative as involving a great deal of agency, Schulzke (2017) argues that "games present ideological assumptions, yet their interactivity ensures that the ideologies are unfinished and susceptible to various strategies of critique or appropriation" (p. 617). Understanding how the game's explicit propaganda feeds into its implicit propaganda reveals the assumptions the game's designers want players to make in actually playing the game.

Of course, the player is not forced to play the game, and even in playing the game, they are not forced to accept the actions of the protagonist. The avatar does not directly represent the

real-world player. While much has been written about the connection between players and their avatars, I would like to focus on how the game becomes persuasive through its uses of propaganda. In his landmark essay “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd Bitzer (1968) argues that “a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (p. 8). The neo-Nazis who marched on Charlottesville would not be considered part of the rhetorical audience for *Wolfenstein II*, but others who may hold similar though less extreme views could potentially be persuaded. While Nazis are rightfully universally despised, the game must still persuade the player into thinking they are making the decision to brutalize the Nazi antagonists and then performing those actions. Coming from a philosophical background, Jason Stanley (2015) argues that “propaganda runs counter to rational principles. Insofar as a form of propaganda is a kind of manipulation or rational beings toward an end without engaging their rational will, it is a kind of deception” (p. 58). Rather than confront the player directly with the game’s overarching ideology, the game primes the player’s expectations by dehumanizing the enemies through the patterning of explicit propaganda. While gamers may not themselves initially be open to the persuasion of a game, the explicit propaganda in the game primes them to be persuaded and view the brutal murder of the Nazis as a good, inevitable thing.

Using Keogh’s (2014) cybernetic approach, one of the first audiovisual elements the player encounters is the character model of BJ Blazkowicz. While the game takes place largely in a first-person perspective, the player is first introduced to Blazkowicz from a third-person perspective so they can begin to identify with him as their avatar. This is a calculated arrangement made by the game’s designers. Creative Director for Machine Games, Jens Matthies stated in an interview that the portrayal and personality of Blazkowicz was created and introduced in this way because “the most important thing is to align the motives of the protagonist with the motives of the player...in order to do a really good story in a first-person shooter, it's important that you make the player feel like your protagonist feels...it's very important when we give the

protagonist something to do, that those motivations are mirrored by the player” (Graft, 2014). The game’s designers intentionally try to develop emotions and motivations in the player through the gameplay and the character’s control schemes. The end result of such a design is that player needs to become as hate-filled for the antagonists as Blazkowicz is. In this way, the game attempts to manipulate the player through the implicit propaganda of the game’s phenomenological aspects. Matthies goes on to explain the importance of this emotional connection, stating, “when the Nazi antagonist does something to [Blazkowicz], they also do it to you, as a player. So you care about it, and that gives you an emotional impetus to carry on the fight” (Graft, 214). It is not enough to play the game for “fun” or for its story. The designers would rather have your emotions drive the gameplay, and they prepare the player for this through the arrangement of explicit propaganda which simultaneously generates an emotional performance as the player experiences the implicit propaganda. Returning to Huckin’s definition of propaganda, we can see how this type of design does not invite critical response. Jason Farnam (2010) argues that violent videogames can be very persuasive in getting players to adopt an ideology of necessary and easily justifiable violence, but that this can potentially be subverted. This subversion becomes possible through the use of Brecht’s Alienation Effect. Farnam looks at *GTA: San Andreas* (Rockstar, 2004), but his conclusions about violence in videogames can be easily translated into *Wolfenstein II*. Farnam (2010) argues that “players will experience the game as an immersive interface that ultimately becomes a gang-violence simulator, or players will experience the game as a hypermediated space that satirizes the violence and the media that such violence alludes to..the key to the latter experience is the player’s interactions with the customization controls that allow an alteration of the [player’s] avatar” (p. 104). While many games allow for some degree of customization, *Wolfenstein II* works in the opposite way and seeks to map the avatar’s emotions and ideologies onto the player.

In addition to the the game’s character models and avatars, the overarching narrative forwards an ideology of American Exceptionalism and dehumanization of the antagonists. While

there are many moments that back up this analysis, I will focus on two. First, the resistance's plan for liberating the world from Nazi control is slowly developed throughout the game. While the points become more complex and involved, including infiltrating a movie filming on the planet Venus, the central focus of the resistance is to first liberate the United States from Nazi control and then use the US as a base for further operations. Throughout the game, liberating the US is paramount to establishing any future resistance. While there is no clear logic underlying this plan--the protagonist's could just as well use Canada, Mexico, the U.K., or any other non-Axis nation--it highlights the importance of accepting an ideology of American Exceptionalism. Only the US, with its ideals of freedom and justice for all, is capable of turning the tide against Nazism. Schulzke (2017), quoting Robinson, argues "that videogames focusing on the US military promote American Exceptionalism because they 'serve to position the player as a representative of the US state, upholding national values through the kinds of secret military action argued for by the Bush administration'" (p. 612). While many of the game's protagonist hail from locales such as Poland, France, and South Africa, it is the all-American soldier BJ Blazkowicz that must deliver the fatal blow to the Third Reich, and it is that fatal blow that concludes my analysis of the game's narrative.

In the game's final moments, Blazkowicz and the resistance sneak into a television studio where Frau Engel is appearing on a late night talk show. As the player carefully navigates to the front of the stage without being seen, Blazkowicz mutters to himself, "This needs to happen up close. For you, Caroline." This line echoes the game's opening where the resistance leader, Caroline, is brutally beheaded by Frau Engel. The game adopts an "eye for an eye" approach to justice. To match Frau Engel's beheading of Caroline with an axe, the player must sever Frau Engels arm with a hatchet before landing a blow directly to her face. As her skull splits in two and one eye shoots out of its socket, Blazkowicz feels like he has finally become the hero his mother always knew he was. In this moment, we also have the final revelation of the game's underlying ideology. The violence of the oppressors can only be stopped by equal or greater

amounts of violence from the oppressed. Paulo Freire saw this same, destructive ideology in struggles for liberation in South America. Freire (2001) states:

The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors... the very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model for humanity. This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of 'adhesion' to the oppressor. (p. 45)

In the final moments of victory, the player's must enact the same brutal ideology of necessary violence as the Nazis in order to defeat them.

Conclusion

As the game's end credits begin to roll, they are interspersed with a speech made by a member of the resistance. He appeals to a sense of American Exceptionalism and tells the live camera, "My fellow Americans. You were born in the land of the free. You fought the kings of old and broke them. You gave your lives for the simplest but most essential truth of all: give me liberty or give me death." As the game concludes, the player may feel victorious, but they have reached that victory by becoming the very thing they have spent the entire game fighting against. The explicit propaganda and implicit propaganda, in the same manner as arrangement and delivery in new media, have truly become an ouroboros. Violence has become a necessity, and the Nazis can only be beaten by becoming as brutal as they are. Only America, that once shining beacon of freedom, can save the world from Nazis.

While there is no evidence, and there likely never will be, linking video games to violent behavior, it is undeniable that videogames act as a form of propaganda and help shape how we think about violence even if we aren't willed to commit those acts. Just as every propaganda poster or million-dollar advertising campaign does not immediately convert to a fresh new recruit or the purchase of a new car, there is a cumulative effect to this type of "horizontal propaganda"

as Jacques Ellul (1973) termed it. Viewing arrangement and delivery as simultaneous processes in new media, one where the designers arrange the materials which are given meaning through the performance of the user, can help us better understand the process of transmission in horizontal propaganda. Roberts-Miller (2017) suggests that our current state of demagogues in power and neo-Nazis marching in the streets and murdering US citizens is the result of a culture that seeks to explain away complex problems with simple solutions of us vs. them. She suggests a return to true dialogue, deliberation, and argumentation as the way to subvert and disrupt this culture of demagoguery. Resisting the urge to become oppressors to end our own oppression and finding the humanity inside of each other instead of viewing the “them” as faceless, deplorable, monsters just might be the way the best way to start achieve this democratic deliberation.

CHAPTER V

CONSPICUOUS COMPUTING: GAMIFIED BODIES, PLAYFUL COMPOSITION, AND THE MONSTERS IN YOUR POCKET

Introduction

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated the utility of play and games in regards to the canons of rhetoric. Through a discussion of memory, agency, and identity, I began this project by examining the productive crossover between play and writing. Bridging the gap between a narrative identity that constructs the past via story in order to explain the present situation and a ludic identity that examines future possibilities as a means to describe the present moment, I have developed the figure of the playgent. Playgents find agency through play and use that agency to produce, either through performances of play in games or through the production of texts to express, persuade, or inform. In this chapter, I show how the figure of the playgent, through the idea of creative misuse and subversive play, can engage with the production of texts to interrogate dominant ideologies.

In the dissertation's second chapter, I focused on how play as a form of production can lead to new heuristics for formulating arguments. Breaking down games into the constituent parts of materials, limits, and goals, I demonstrated how composers are able to construct a game

and then explore the possibility space of said game to find innovative arguments. The examples provided in this chapter highlight how digital platforms and devices provide not only a new way of composing through thinking of embodiment and wearables, but also how play sets up systems that can be subverted to draw on the meaning making inherent to play as a productive force.

The third chapter positions both texts and games as systems that occasionally operate within other systems. Drawing on research into situated learning, rhetorical velocity, digital distribution, and Caillois's notion of *ilinx* in play, arrangement and delivery allow for a greater understanding of new media's affordances across networks. In this chapter, I take up this idea again in conjunction with the idea of limits producing creativity in composers. The term I define in this chapter, *conspicuous computing*, is a direct result of how play can help trace the paths of distribution and allow for a more fully engaged sense of arrangement and spatial reasoning.

In the previous chapter, Chapter 4, I draw on contemporary research on the canon of style to demonstrate how play functions as a medium. The texts I examine in this chapter result in the connection between a player enjoying a game, even if it is one of their own creation, and a desire to express oneself or assert individual agency on a societal level.

To summarize, this dissertation has shown both where play is located in the canons of rhetoric as well as how a deeper understanding of play and games fosters an appreciation for both classical and contemporary rhetoric. In what follows, I put these theorizations into practice to reveal how wearables and other compact digital devices such as smartphones open up new opportunities for composition and rhetoric in the digital age.

A Post-PC Age

As the keyboard and mouse are slowly replaced with smartphone voice commands, FitBit geolocators, and "digital crowns" such as the Apple Watch, compositionists are faced with the unique opportunity to incorporate new methods and processes for composing in their classrooms. With the rise of pocket-sized networked devices, wearables, and the inevitably increasing presence of the Internet of Things (IoT), students more accustomed to using their voice

or the tips of their fingers to compose than typing or writing by hand will soon enter the university.. While corporations aim for models of the perfect quantified self--what Shin and Biocca (2017) define as “engagement in the self-tracking of any kind of biological, physical, behavioral, or environmental information, either as individuals or in groups” (p. 62)--scholars and composers are finding unique new ways to use the affordances of technology such as wearables.

Further, as the need for a diverse approach to teaching writing and incorporating digital and multimodal composition becomes more prevalent, it will become increasingly important to understand the way these devices both project a notion of sophisticated technology but also limit the user’s ability to interact and understand the device’s affordances. As Ed Finn (2017) points out in *What Algorithms Want*, our metaphors for code as an objective structure and the algorithm as “the magical product of computation” make users willing to offload much of the mental work of using these devices and instead place “our faith into a series of implemented systems that promise to do the work of rationalism on our behalf” (p.8). The work of producing critical, self-reflective thought is central to the writing classroom and reshaping our relationship with our electronic devices now becomes part of the task of the compositionist in the 21st century.

This paper uses the term *conspicuous computing* to denote the phenomenon of wearable devices, often taking remediated forms, which proudly display, share, and advertise their ubiquitous computing while at the same time shifting the focus onto the device itself instead of on its potential as a productive medium. I argue that play coupled with the possibilities of new media wearables offer an effective way to counter conspicuous computing and produce outcomes in students to increase their digital literacy and understanding of our multimodal, networked, and digital world.

In ways similar to the attention and rise of Web 2.0 composition strategies including blogs, social media, and wikis in the late 00s and early teens, the incorporation and deployment of wearables in the composition classroom has not gone unnoticed, particularly by computers and writing scholars. The diverse array of approaches to wearables has included their use in peer

review (Tham, 2017), invention strategies (Duin, Moses, McGrath, & Tham, 2016), technical communications (Tham, 2015), and social media (Moore et al., 2016) amongst other approaches. While these approaches have proven to be fruitful, they all position the wearable as separate from the actual composing process, an aid or tool to be consulted before or after the composition. This paper analyzes the potential for wearables to be central to the composition process.

Just as there has been a marked rise in interest in wearables by compositionists and rhetoricians, so too have play and games found a stable foothold within in the field. This paper argues that the recent focus on play and games in composition presents a fruitful avenue for further exploration of the role of wearables in the classroom. With the publication of collections connecting play and games to composition and rhetoric including *Rhetoric/Composition/Play* (2013), *Computer Games and Technical Communication* (2014), and *Play/Write* (2016), instructors have a unique opportunity to combine two modes which many students will be familiar with: play and wearables. Building off of James Gee's (2007) groundbreaking work with games and literacy and Ian Bogost's (2007) formulation of procedural rhetoric, games and play have been used in composition to interrogate identity and performance (Nielsen, 2015), structure classes as games (Hodgson, 2013), perform multimodal analysis (Lieberman, 2010), and model collaborative writing (Shultz Colby & Colby, 2008) amongst other approaches. This paper seeks to use play and what Bogost (2016) defines as the "secret of games" to produce texts from wearable devices.

All of this, however, risks being obscured by the ways we commonly interact with these devices. As Finn (2017) argues, the technology we wear and carry with us "are authoring and creating, but they are also simplifying and abstracting, creating an interface layer between consumers and the messy process of, say, getting a cab or hiring a housekeeper" (p. 12). Our implicit trust in the devices around us and our insistence on the objectivity of their computation processes to get us from point A to point B, to match us with the right person, or to properly assess our health comes at a cost.

As we move into a “post-PC world” and attempt to find new ways to compose (Rieder, 2017), the inclusion of wearables in the composition classroom allows for students to be familiar with the technology they are using as well as preparing them for our networked, digital world. While composition and rhetoric scholars have separately examined the potential uses of wearables or play in the classroom, little to no scholarship yet exists as of this writing that combines the two with a theoretical or pedagogical focus.

To this end, this paper will first examine theoretical approaches and applications of wearables with specific attention paid to how they have been taken up in the field of composition theory and pedagogy. From there, the paper identifies specific aspects of software studies, procedurality, and game studies in order to understand the potential for play and games to move these conspicuous computers from commodified and gamified processes to productive possibility spaces for writing students. Finally, I look at a variety of composition models including the classical idea of *copia*, contemporary examples of using videogames to create visual art, and subverting surveillance technologies for creative misuse. This paper concludes with two short case studies of using wearables and mobile technology to produce innovative texts bound by the limits of the devices and a discussion of what such practices look in the classroom.

Conspicuous Consumption Leads to Conspicuous Computing

In 1977, medical researchers Neil McAlister and H. Dominic Covvey authored a short article for the Canadian Medical Association Journal on the perils of adopting computers in hospitals and doctor offices. They warned readers of flashy salesmen pushing computers into medical offices. These salesmen focused on the image and prestige of owning a new computer rather than on meeting the needs of practitioners and patients. They named this trend “conspicuous computing.” McAlister and Covvey went on to produce a short manuscript entitled *Computer Choices: Beware of Conspicuous Computing!* to be used as a guide for health organizations. While the pair had the best of intentions in seeking to inform administrators and

physicians about the perils of pouring thousands of dollars into fancy computer systems, they were struggling against the currents produced by the first personal computer, the Apple I, and the term “conspicuous computing” fell to the wayside.

This paper seeks to reinvigorate the term and examine its application to current mobile and networked computing practices. In particular, this paper argues that by erasing connections to space and place while simultaneously obfuscating the processes of computing produced by these devices, wearables have untethered users from their environment and seek to increase dependency in a regressive cycle that further ingratiates the device into the user’s everyday life. With the rise of wearables and their seemingly seamless integration into our daily lives, we have become inundated in conspicuous computing. As wearables’ physical representations take on a display that separates the product from its computing processes, such as the Apple Watch taking on the remediated form of a timekeeping device while providing ready-made responses to text messages such as “In a meeting” and “Yeah,” potential strategies for countering conspicuous computing lead to an explication of how our bodies are networked while at the same time offering the possibility for users to produce persuasive and expressive texts. Disrupting the disparity between the display and the actual data that is created and manipulated--the chasm between interface and intentions--offers the potential for new ways of composing which reject the notion of ubiquitous computing and authorless data.

The term conspicuous computing is a play on *fin de siècle* economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen’s conception of conspicuous consumption. In his landmark book *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (2013), Veblen examined the consumer practices of the *nouveau riche* fresh with money and capital from the Second Industrial Revolution. In their spending habits, he noticed that once a sustainable amount of wealth had been achieved, the main practices of this new class became a form of consumerism that was not concerned with actual products and services but rather the appearance of being able to afford certain products and services.

The ideas of appearance and display are central to both conspicuous consumption and conspicuous computing. In the introduction to the anthology *The Rhetorics of Display*, editor Lawrence J. Prelli (2006) uses Burke's selectivity to establish display as a function of rhetoric. Any iteration of display represents an act of selection amongst numerous other possible representations. When a display is conceived, it is done so in a particular way to put forth a certain purpose and to appeal to a specific audience. In addition, Prelli is quick to note that "whatever is revealed through display simultaneously conceals alternative possibilities" (p. 2). For Veblen and conspicuous consumption, display functions as a means of revealing social class and withdrawal from economically productive labor. In McAlister and Covvey's formulation of conspicuous computing, display became a way to demonstrate that a particular medical office was advanced and offered top-of-the-line services. They cautioned doctors and administrators about the pitfalls associated with such uncritical purchasing practices. As prebuilt, personal computers became the norm, this idea rightly fell into disuse. However, we now see a revitalization of the importance of display in modern day wearables. While scholars such as Jacob Craig (2016) have examined the importance of display in presenting information on a screen across multiple devices, few if any scholars have looked at the actual display, style, or appearance of wearables themselves and how these communicate--or conceal--meaning.

While there is a current lack of scholarship on the display of wearables, there exists a long tradition of critically interrogating the displays of traditional computers. Stuart Selber's (2004) *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* connects interface design to computer literacy acquisition while outside the field of rhetoric and composition, Lev Manovich (2013) has analyzed the iconography and UI of software such as *Photoshop* and *Illustrator*. Perhaps most notable, because of both its prescience and relevance, is Selfe and Selfe's (1994) "The Politics of Interface," which examines graphical user interfaces to understand potential power dynamics and ideologies in UI design. While Selfe and Selfe come to the conclusion that these interfaces represent structures of colonial and capitalist dominance, the modularity and algorithmically-driven customization of

media today compared to the PC from over twenty years gives us cause to return once again to the hidden structures of the devices we rely on.

One need only look at the public response to new wearable technologies to understand the importance of such a topic. When Google introduced its wearable Google Glass technology in 2013, it took only a few short weeks before the device was labeled intrusive and ostentatious. The neologism “glasshole” was quickly adopted as shorthand for someone who used Google Glass in ways that were not yet widely accepted such as snapping someone’s photo without their knowledge or consent (Honan, 2013). Over the next several years, wearables become more commonplace with the introduction of the Fitbit Flex later in 2013, the Apple Watch in 2015, and even game-based applications such as the Pokémon Go Plus accessory in 2016. While wearable technology has been quickly adopted, it has been unable to move away from its focus on display. These devices seek to remediate older forms of fashion and necessity such as the Apple Watch replicating a common watch and the Fitbit Flex resembling the once ubiquitous family of “Livestrong” bracelets. Even the Pokémon GO Plus accessory is designed to resemble a real life version of the in-game Poké Ball.

In this way, these wearables engage in conspicuous computing. Their remediated displays enact conspicuous computing by privileging the display of the device while concealing the actual functions and processes these products produce. Across the board, these devices offer very little in terms of controlled user input. They position the user as a chunk of data at worst or a reactionary button-pusher at best. Conspicuous computing then becomes both the process of displaying computing potential as well as covering up the actual composition and texts produced by embedded technologies. With this definition in place, it is possible to interrogate their creative and compositional potential, as well as their limits and constraints, in our daily lives as a way to break free from overly deterministic views of technology.

Wearables in the Classroom and Beyond

As computational media continue to shrink in size and grow in status, rhetoricians and compositionists must begin the work of breaking down the monolithic “computer.” We no longer have one conceptual idea of what a computer is and disrupting the notion of conspicuous computing allows composers to view wearables, mobile games, and the IoT as mediums of production and not just receptors and depositories of data or content.

In order for digital composition to remain relevant to student’s needs and skills, a move must be made away from to the idea of the wearable as a passive consumer device. Scholars such as Yancey and Spooner (1999) and Hardin (2001) have called for the critical engagement and analysis of media by students and teachers, and a similar move must now be made in our interrogation of how we access those mediums. Closely related is the New London Group’s (1996) call for an expansion of literacy to include not only the active and critical consumption of a language or system of meaning making but also the ability to produce texts from such a language or system. In the same way that our views on “phones” have outpaced our terminology for such devices, we must recognize the potential for expressive and persuasive composition from even the most mundane devices. We now view phones as a potentially productive medium (this paragraph was in fact written with two thumbs on my iPhone!). The same changes must occur across the range of wearables, smart devices, and the IoT.

As wearables rise in prominence and replace our PC-based interactions with something more networked, distributed, and yet personal, numerous scholars have taken up the task of incorporating wearables and networked writing into the composition classroom. This has primarily taken three forms: research on the application of wearables in the classroom, studying the possibilities of wearables and mobile computing in everyday life, and placing those habits and applications within writing studies both inside and outside of academia.

Several compositionists have integrated wearables into their teaching practices, most notably using Google Glass as ways to visualize and inhabit texts. Jason Chew Kit Tham (2017)

details how having students wear and use Google Glass during traditional peer review class sessions allowed for participants to bridge “the gap between speech/orality and writing/literacy...supporting a more authentic-mediated communication or response that is otherwise inadequate in bare writing” (p. 44). In Tham’s experience, the students were able to use Google Glass as a way to locate important passages through pictures and video as well as bring in gestural and body language to humanize the feedback they gave their peers. Ultimately, Tham emphasizes that “wearables can be effective learning tools that empower students to creatively think about writing as well as to allow greater collaboration. And by deploying and integrating wearables in the writing classroom, we are subsequently encouraging and preparing students to be reflective users of emerging technology” (p. 24). What is important for Tham is not the immediate gains for students but rather reflective engagement with new technologies rather than passive acceptance. In a similar vein, wearables such as Fitbit and augmented reality games such as Pokemon GO offer up new perspectives and ways of experiencing the world via an information rich, top-down map.

The transformative power of wearables in the composition classroom lies in the potential for users to oscillate between consumption and production, analysis and experience. Finding ways to disrupt conspicuous computing allows for movement within the spectrum of interactivity and immersion. On one end is immersion, which is typically associated with traditional media and the ways a viewer becomes engrossed in a movie, while on the other end is interactivity, typically associated with new media and refers to the active input of the viewer or user to influence the content itself. Of course, traditional media can be interactive such as in a Choose Your Own Adventure novel and new media can be immersive such as when a player of a video game sets down their controller to watch a particularly interesting movie-like cut scene. All media fall somewhere on this spectrum, but when it comes to new media, different devices attempt to persuade users as to where they fall on this spectrum through their user interfaces (UI), physical design and display, and modes of input. Devices which engage in conspicuous computing often

rely on remediating design and display such as resembling watches or wristbands and allow users little access to creating and manipulating the raw data generated by the device, either through obfuscating data walls or limited ability to compose in traditional means such as access to a virtual keyboard.

Moore et al. (2016) come to a similar conclusion in their survey of using traditional and digital technologies in the classroom. While Moore et al. do not discount traditional forms of composing such as pen and paper and word processing programs, they emphasize that the future is becoming increasingly digital. Composition scholars must work to integrate the new alongside the old and argue that “strategies for embracing the flexibility of these technologies should be a central component of writing curricula” (p. 9). As wearables and mobile devices become central to day-to-day interactions and computing, the need to both integrate and interrogate these technologies grows. In a manner similar to the push for multimodal composition in the 00s, wearable technologies in the classroom will continue to grow. It is up to teachers and scholars to identify the most efficient and useful ways to bring these into the curricula.

Beyond the classroom, rhetoric and composition scholars have sought ways to reinvigorate classical traditions through the use of wearables and mobile devices. Kalin and Frith (2016) invoke de Certeau, Cicero, and Quintilian to reformulate users’ relationship to digital mapping devices through the idea of the memory palace. Instead of becoming passive consumers following the dictates of computerized directions, Kalin and Frith argue that mobile devices can be used to complement memory rather than replace it. They explain how landmarks and notable buildings can be used to recreate a mental map of the digital traversing that takes place in an app such as Google Maps or Pokémon GO. The ability to use features of the landscape to aid in memory and expression is reflected in Miguel Sicart’s (2017) bold claim that “reality has always been augmented” (p. 30). The buildings and spaces around us are already “linked” to wealths of contextual and experiential knowledge. These rhetorical practices, both classical and

contemporary, demonstrate the potential power of using modern technology to enrich our thinking about issues of memory, place, and community.

Finally, scholars such as Stacey Pigg (2014) have used qualitative research and case studies to examine students' composing habits within networked social spaces. Pigg looks at two case studies where writers compose through, with, and against mobile technologies. Rather than view multitasking and social media as superfluous distractions, Pigg sees these various networked technologies as potential areas for invention and innovation. Never one to settle for easy answers, Pigg concludes, "Accounting for writing processes in a mobile, networked culture means facing the difficult task of tracing interactions with a wealth of materials" (p. 254). It is this wealth of materials that includes wearables that this paper seeks to interrogate. Tracing their interactions becomes the primary task in disrupting the notion of conspicuous computing and authorless writing. By examining the ways in which composers use technology instead of being used by technology, we are able to free ourselves from the inevitabilities of surveillance technologies such as those used by Fitbit and Pokémon GO.

Writing with/through Machines

While humans have always used technology to aid communication and composition (Ong, 1986), the growing prevalence of wearables, computers, and mobile devices have forced composition and rhetoric scholars to confront their use in the writing process. While this essay does not seek to cover the totality of ways in which machines and technology have been used in and outside the classroom, it is fruitful to look at two specific ways in which scholars have sought to include machines in the seemingly organic process of composition.

Philosopher, game designer, and digital humanities scholar Ian Bogost, who theorized the ways in which videogames make arguments in his formulation of "procedural rhetoric" (2007), has used computers and algorithms to help create poetry. In his book *A Slow Year: Game Poems* (2010), Bogost draws comparisons between haiku and videogames in order to understand the ways in which both rely on formula, expectation, and limits to create pleasurable experiences.

Bogost writes with machines in authoring procedures that can be used to create poems. While the 1,000 haiku included in *A Slow Year* are of varying quality, they are each undeniably haiku both formally and thematically. He writes, “These generated poems too are unusual, because I did not write them. Not in the usual way poetry gets written, at least, each word chosen deliberately and methodically by a human author. Instead, I wrote a computer program that generates haiku, authored such that the form and theme of its output matches the subjects explored in each of the seasonal challenges found in the videogame” (2010, p. x). Rather than struggling against the machine, Bogost wrestles with algorithms to create art. In a manner similar to Pigg’s conclusions from studying writing in networked social spaces, Bogost works with computers to create a consciously-authored product that he had no physical hand in creating. Algorithms in this sense become a further compositional technique to create persuasive and expressive texts.

With their ability to tirelessly iterate, new media devices and wearables can be used to help define the limits of a possibility space. James J. Brown Jr. (2014) looks to the classical tradition of rhetoric in order to use this computational creativity to revitalize heuristics through *copia*, the practice of developing iterations of a phrase in order to expand and amplify style. Drawing on Erasmus’s experiments with *copia*, Brown Jr. creates bots that author the same phrase over and over again with slight variations in phrasing, arrangement, and word choice. Brown Jr.’s practice of using *copia* is akin to writing with machines though he has less of a guiding hand in the works than Bogost owing to the simpler structure of a sentence compared to that of a haiku. While Bogost sees his algorithmic composition as creative and expressive, Brown Jr. uses computation to assist in invention. These are two ways in which scholars have used machines to assist with writing.

Just as work in writing with machines through their processes has expanded, so has writing through machines seen a growth in artistic and scholarly attention. One popular example of this is in the practice of machinima, which the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences (2005) defines as “real-world film-making techniques applied within an interactive virtual space

where characters and events can be either controlled by humans, scripts, or artificial intelligence.” Sierra (2016) examines using videogames and other digital applications to create texts in the classroom. While videogames have been incorporated into classrooms in many ways, including courses designed as games themselves, the process of using machinima to author texts reveals the potential for remix and creativity once composers are able to identify the underlying mechanisms and limits at work. Sierra argues that “using machinima in the classroom offers teachers and students a chance to look behind the screen, so to speak, and explore the theories and assertions that many contemporary theorists make about new media” (p. 215). If, as Tham (2017) suggests, that part of our work as composition teachers is to prepare students to be reflective users of new digital technologies, than working with popular forms such as videogames that students may already be familiar can be effective way to reinforce such practices. The question then becomes how to do this in the face of concealment provided by conspicuous computing.

Creative Misuse and Subversive Play

The past twenty years have seen a revitalization in interest toward play. Perhaps owing to the increasing dominance of the videogame industry in the USA over other forms of entertainment such as books and movies or the presence of computing devices such as mobile phones with sophisticated processors and graphics capabilities, games and play now have several journals such as *Game Studies*, *The Journal of Games Criticism*, and *The American Journal of Play* as well as the formation of a Standing Interest Group at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication--the Council for Play and Game Studies.

Just as likely as the economic and technological presence of play and games, their persuasive and political potential may be the reason for the increase in scholarly attention. While games have historically been viewed as taking place in a “magic circle” outside of societal conventions and mores (Huizinga, 1938), increasing attention has been paid to the transformative aspects of play. Joshua Daniel-Wariya (2016) posits a language of play that positions play itself as “a resource used by people to express attitudes, to share ideas, and to persuade others. Such

play is at stake at all levels of composing, including invention, production, consumption, distribution, and access” (p. 33). Daniel-Wariya argues that new media uniquely positioned to facilitate play because it offers endless repeatability, hyper customization, alien interactions, and variable assemblages. Understanding new media as a conduit for play can help students see their devices not as passive receptors of data or means to access content, but rather a possibility space, which Bogost defines as “all of the gestures made possible by a set of rules” (2008, p. 120) Exploring the possibility spaces of wearable devices is an effective way to disrupt to conspicuous computing and produce persuasive and expressive texts.

The two wearable devices I analyze in this text both include aspects of play. Pokémon GO is itself a game that tasks players with collecting as many digital monsters as possible, and Fitbit, while billing itself as a fitness device, utilizes gamification via goals, rankings, and digital rewards. Since these systems of conspicuous computing are already setup to induce play, they potential for creative misuse exists. In regards to the surveillance and tracking technologies, such as those used by Pokémon GO and Fitbit, new media scholar Farman (2014) defines creative misuse as, “A ludic response to a system that [is] largely understood as a surveillance tracking system...a redefinition in the imagined uses and daily practices of a technology” (p. 381). These systems can be as far ranging as GPS satellites to more local and voluntary applications such as FourSquare and Facebook check-ins.

Creative misuse takes the standard procedures of GPS tracking or a digital map and uses conscious composition to write with the system’s affordances. Farman places creative misuse as a mix of Benjamin’s *flaneur* and Derrida’s formulation of the *bricoleur*. When we use these technologies with purpose and intention we are able to wander the city with fresh eyes and add layers of context and meaning to our surroundings. Creative misuse becomes one possible way to disrupt conspicuous computing by allowing the user to become cognizant of the processes their wearable uses to author its data--such as maps or routes--and redefine public space. Farman identifies this potential as taking a surveillance technology and repurposing its texts. He argues

that creative misuses enables users “to reimagine the ways that space is given meaning. Locative games use this as a core tenant. They reimagine what a space means and how a technology can ultimately give new meaning to a space, especially when that technology is used in ways that run counter to the initial intentions of the medium’s designers” (p. 384). Creative misuse is inherently subversive and makes an ideal candidate for one way to bring the compositional potential of play into the classroom.

Resisting Commodification and Finding Our Limits

As wearables become further ingrained into our daily habits, the process of conspicuous computing will continue to grow. In a similar manner, one can look to other wearables such as the aforementioned fitness trackers and FourSquare log in systems as part of the gamification of society. However, many have derided and resisted this gamification, especially game and play studies scholars. Play scholar Frans Mäyra (2017) calls for a replacement of the commoditization of games--part of the larger project of corporations incorporating game-like elements into their platforms--through the use of ludification. Mäyra argues, “Whereas gamification is focused on the application of game-like elements into non-entertainment applications, the focus of ludification is on the spread of play as a practice, playfulness as an attitude and the supposedly growing role of playful designs in our everyday reality” (p. 47). Play is central to Farman’s (2014) formulation of creative misuse, and it is no coincidence that part of the larger project of wearables and conspicuous computing is to remove the subversive elements of play in favor of the commoditized elements of gamification. Without what Salen and Zimmerman (2003) identify as a “lusory attitude,” the potential for subversive misuse is impossible.

By concealing their processes and authored texts, wearables that engage in conspicuous computing seek to remove any sense of limits. While conventional wisdom would say that “play is free” or “play is fun without limits,” modern play scholars such as Ian Bogost would harshly disagree. In his book *Play Anything: The Pleasure of Limits, the Uses of Boredom, and the Secret of Games* (2016), Bogost argues that is the very confrontation with limits where gamers find fun.

He describes limits as the edges of the “magic circle” play scholars are so fond of referencing. He uses Gestalt psychology’s formulation of figure and ground as way of demonstrating how play can revitalize materials, objects, and routine. Just like in the figures where at one glance you see a lamp and upon further inspection you see two faces in profile, limits help us reconfigure the world around us and give us a sense of pleasure through discovering new interpretations. Bogost argues that “as former figures become ground, we have the opportunity to reframe them, to put them to new uses by taking them seriously for their promise and their threat. Limits aren’t limitations, not absolute ones. They’re just the stuff out of which stuff is made” (p. 203). The dangerous truth of conspicuous computers such as the Pokémon GO Plus (PGP) is that remove the possibility for encountering play’s limits. Rather than realizing the user is just out of reach of a powerful pokémon or discovering a new local cultural site set up as a Poké Stop, the player simply sees a blue or yellow light flash on their wrist. In this way, conspicuous computing removes pleasure from the system and reduces user engagement.

What follows is an analysis of two ways in which users have disrupted and subverted the conspicuous computing of Fitbit and Pokémon GO and how such practices can be integrated into the composition classroom.

Phallic Jogs and a Lame-Fish President

As Pigg (2014) demonstrates in “Emplacing Mobile Composing Habits: A Study of Academic Writing in Networked Social Spaces,” whenever we are engaging with networked spaces--either real such as cafes and academic classrooms or virtual such as social media or online game interfaces--we are never dealing with a neutral technology. Rather, “the spatial practices of negotiating social proximity, however, are not as simple as individuals choosing materials; they are always political, economic, infected by ideology, and bound in discourse... creating the material conditions to support learning involves affective and political negotiations (p. 262). The first of the two texts I will examine was composed by a runner named Claire Wyckoff who has blogged about her experiences running since 2014.

Using the locative technologies of fitness trackers such as Fitbit, users are able to have their routes tracked and record their pacing, mileage, and various biometrics such as heartbeat and caloric burn. These technologies engage in conspicuous computing in part by offering up ready-made charts and graphs for the user which in turn discourage any discovery of or play with the devices compositional affordances. Instead, these processes are outsourced to the wearable, “freeing” the user from have to consider such things as route planning, daily goals, and overall preparation for daily life or a fitness event.

While Kalin and Frith (2016) argue that there is the potential to use systems such as these to aid in the process of building a memory palace, a user is much more likely to be concerned with their pace and the hypnotic rhythm of putting one foot in front of the other than picking out notable features in the landscape or turning at specific landmarks. In this way, fitness trackers engage in conspicuous computing and reinforce a regressive cycle that invisibly engrains the wearable into the user’s daily life. Wyckoff utilizes creative misuse to disrupt this notion.

Instead of running random routes or relying on her fitness tracker to tell her when she has reached her target distance, Wyckoff engages in what she describes as “draw running”

(Lieberman, 2014). Most of what Wyckoff draw-runs is phalluses.

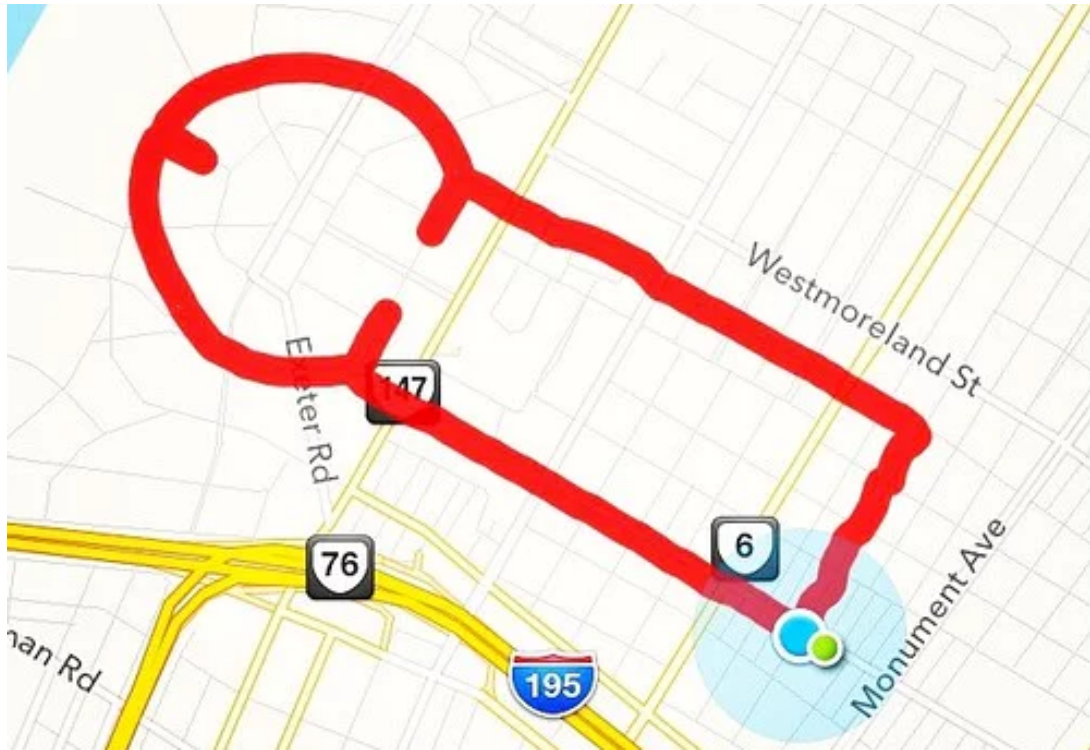


Figure 17. Wyckoff phallus run-drawing example.

However, she does not limit herself to just penises. While she has drawn space invaders, horses, and dogs, she also produced a detailed middle finger.



Figure 18. Wyckoff middle finger run-drawing.

While the run-drawings are meant to be comical, they also point to the political, cultural, and social issues that Pigg (2014) mentions. According to a 2016 survey by the magazine *Runner's World*, 43% of females report being harassed regularly while running, and 18% of female runners reported being sexually propositioned while running (Hamilton). Wyckoff is making a clear political statement with her drawings. Rather than internalizing the harassment, she calls out the double standard applied to women--be a socially-acceptable weight but experience harassment whenever you exercise.

Furthermore, in an interview with *Refinery29*, Wyckoff notes that a good deal of planning goes into each run-drawing (Lieberman, 2014). Rather than a passive acceptance of the affordances of her fitness tracker, Wyckoff keeps the application open throughout the run in order

to “monitor the progress and course correct as we run” (Lieberman, 2014). Rather than a passive acceptance of the “always on” function of a fitness tracker, Wyckoff moves beyond the simplest affordances of the wearable and positions it as a productive device. In this way, Wyckoff engages in creative misuse and disrupts the fitness trackers conspicuous computing in order to call out the culture of street harassment as well as gain a deeper understanding of the nuances of the wearables tracking system. She purposely authors these drawings through a combination of premeditated spatial navigation and a deeper understanding of the ways the wearable tracks her, such as different colors for different speeds.

For Wyckoff and anyone else interested in composing with fitness wearables, creative misuse represents one potential way of subverting and critiquing societal expectations. However, this type of compositional potential is not limited to those who want to plan out detailed runs and upload the results though. Players of the mobile game Pokémon GO have used the game to craft persuasive political, religious, and creative texts. As the summer of 2016 began in earnest, Niantic, a subsidiary company of Google (now Alphabet), launched the hit game in partnership with The Pokémon Company and Nintendo. Players all over the world were able to use a combination of augmented reality--where digital pokémon appeared to be inhabiting the user’s actual world--and locative gaming to scour parks, streets, and churches to find the game’s sometimes friendly monsters such as Charmander and Squirtle. While the public reaction to the game was one of alternating awe and consternation, some users of the game quickly grew tired of the game’s repetitive feedback loop and sought new ways to play.

One such player is Joshua Shull. In July of 2016, as the presidential primaries grew more and more contested, Shull took over arguably the world’s most coveted Pokémon Gym: the White House’s North Fountain on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue (Hernandez, 2016). In the world of Pokémon GO, players are able to battle others’ Pokémon for top billing in gyms. To claim a gym, the player must have high “CP” Pokémon which are typically the game’s strongest and rarest monsters. A typical player will place their strongest pokémon at the top of a gym in order to

secure it for their team. Shull took a different approach. He took the game’s weakest pokémon, Magikarp, and placed it as the leader of the White House gym. Rather than just an act of trolling, Shull named his Magikarp “The_Donald” in reference to the Republican frontrunner Donald Trump.



Figure 19. Magikarp in the White House Gym

In order to fully understand the political implications of such a statement, one must have a deep understanding of Pokémon GO’s ludic systems. Magikarp is the weakest pokémon in the

in-game universe. It possesses only one move, Splash, and that “attack” is unable to harm any pokémon. From a gameplay perspective, it is the worst possible pokémon to put into the White House gym. It is ineffectual to the point of being laughable. Shull is quoted in the *Kotaku* article, and he identifies the purpose behind putting the Magikarp named The_Donald as “I can take down and put my strongest 2000 CP pokémon in the White House, so what, that’s already been done...I wanted to do something unique, something memorable, something that would maybe both communicate something valuable while being humorous. Thus, The Donald” (Hernandez, 2016).

While this is an excellent example of a user composing in unique ways with digital media, it is not explicitly tied to the notion of conspicuous computing. That is where the Pokémon GO Plus wearable comes in. This wearable device, designed to look like an in-game poké ball, is worn on the user’s wrist and is designed to supplement the gameplay.



Figure 20. The Pokémon GO Plus wearable.

However, rather than supplement the gameplay, it erases any sense of play. While the main game relies on a feedback loop of finding Poké Stops at notable social, cultural, and historical

institutions in order to get items such as poké balls and then using said items to catch new pokémon, the PGP eliminates the need for the user to identify and engage with local landmarks and notable places. In its place is a blinking blue light and a small haptic motor. When the user comes within range of a Poké Stop, the light blinks and the user taps the button on the wearable to collect the items. When a player is within range of a catchable pokémon, the wearable flashes yellow, and the user pushes the button to catch the pokémon. Any sense of engagement with the local scene or actual play is removed. In this way, the PGP becomes another form of conspicuous computing. Players who are able to reject the easy sense of gamification provided by the PGP are able to push the limits of the game and make political statements as demonstrated by Shull.

Updates and Keeping Up to Date

As I finalized the drafts of this essay, a curious thing happened. Pokémon GO released a mandatory update that completely revamped its gyms and how players assign pokémon to watch over gyms. No longer does a single pokémon reign over a gym. In its place is a team of six pokémon from six individual players. The political statement made by Shull in the previous example is no longer a viable compositional strategy. In regards to the nature of new media, this should not be surprising. Media studies scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues in *Habitual New Media: Updating to Remain the Same* (2016) that new media is purposely updated to resist the kinds of mastery and understanding that habit produces. Habit, she argues, “is key to determining probabilities, for habits render past contingent repetitions into anticipatable connections” (p. 53). New media’s persistent drive toward progress positions updates as “central to disrupting and establishing context and habituation, to creating new habits of dependency” (p.3).

What then does this mean for the practical implementation of strategies for disrupting conspicuous computing and composing via play and wearables? The purpose of this paper is to position these devices and their affordances as part of a larger possibility space. Much as multimodal and digital composition pedagogies rely on a set of techniques and practices rather than technical knowledge of a particular piece of software, disrupting and subverting conspicuous

computing becomes an additional strategy that reshapes users' relationship with the technology around them.

In the classroom, this can take several forms, all of which focus on a two part strategy: identifying the compositional potential of a device through its affordances and playful exploration of the device's limits. For example, in my composition classroom, students are required to compose a literacy narrative. Using the aforementioned principles, a student can wear a fitness tracking device for several days to explore what kinds of data it collects, what data she is allowed to access, and what types of input or manipulation are allowed on her end. After exploring the device and its own methods of collecting data and producing texts, the student decides to write her narrative about understanding time in college. Here, the student must conceptualize a system similar to the schema programmed by Bogost (2010) for his "machined haiku" and must understand both the affordances of the wearable and the context of the assignment.

The student could wake up early Monday morning and start off with a brisk walk to simulate getting up to finish homework and get to class on time. The days may become more lethargic as the week drudges on, with the student sleeping in and not wearing the device during her walks to simulate missed classes. Thursday night becomes an opportunity to stay up late and get an early start on the weekend. Once Saturday arrives, the student again manipulates the data given to the device by having several friends wear it around while being as active as possible to simulate the energy and excitement of a game day on a state college campus. Here, the work of generating the data is outsourced to the device in a way similar to Brown's (2014) formulation of *copia*. While the idea and cognitive work are the student's, the device produces the bulk of the actual composition. She may then remove the device while she sleeps to manipulate the device into thinking she was up all night. Sunday again becomes a time of recovery and preparation for the week ahead with the student attempting to put as little movement on the device as possible. The result is a week's worth of manipulated data complete with sleeping patterns, movement maps, and heart rate charts.

Just as Sierra (2016) describes the potential for making art from videogames, the student has remixed and appropriated the images and data generously produced from the wearable to look at, through, and with the device. She can then construct a multimodal text that combines her descriptions of what each day represents before connecting the ebb and flow of a week to a larger understanding of the temporal demands of college life. In this way, the student has begun to visualize and trace the “interactions with a wealth of materials” that Pigg (2014) identifies as essential to understanding our networked society.

This process not only allows for students to engage in multimodal composition but also for a reflective inquiry into contemporary college culture, analysis of identity, and, because of an exploration of the limits of both her social support (finding people to perform the desired actions while wearing the device) and the device’s easily manipulated data collection, a deeper understanding of how the wearable device on her wrist is both fallible and subjective. While this is only one possible implementation, it demonstrates the potential for composition instructors to disrupt notions of conspicuous computing and push students to interrogate the computational media they carry with them on a daily basis.

Conclusion

Resisting the pull of conspicuous computing comes in the form of ludic subversion. When users confront the limitations of these devices, they are able to find pleasure in the ordinary. The ability to take what are becoming everyday-devices and use them to create innovative, playful, and often political texts is one such approach to resisting the commodification and “limitless” pull of wearables. While we have not yet reached the point where computer programming has become a true literacy (Vee, 2013), society in the USA is now at a time where it is more necessary than ever to be aware of what kind of texts and data are being created by the devices we use. Explicating the potential for wearables to compose new types of texts can be used as a bridge between what Vee (2013) identifies as material intelligences--a “technology-dependent communicative skill (p. 45)--and a true literacy of the ways in which

wearables and mobile devices operate. Vee builds on this notion in *Coding Literacy* (2017) and argues that the ability to code must be connected with a deeper understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the composer.

If we as composition instructors are charged with finding new, non-discursive texts for our students to compose and analyze, then looking to the devices and habits they are already familiar with is a fruitful approach. In order to teach our students to be reflective users of the technology that pervades our everyday life we must resist conspicuous computing through ludic subversion and the creation of playful texts. In 1977, McAllister and Covvey looked at medical technology and saw a world where “the truth is unimportant when the customer can be taught to believe in the transforming power of a product” (p. 184). In order to become more than just the meat attached to the machine, we must forge forward with creative practices which seek to build true digital literacies while fighting against the pull of conspicuous computing.

Conspicuous computing is one specific example of how play can be used to subvert and disrupt increasingly dominant ideologies such as the tacit acceptance of state surveillance. Play can be a powerful resource for both composers and teachers of writing studies. Viewing play as a productive resource and a powerful analytical tool opens up new possibilities. These possibilities expand and reveal themselves through an analysis of what happens when play is put into contact with memory, invention, arrangement, style, and delivery. The ancient canons of rhetoric are alive and well, even in our age of new media and electracy.

Play as a productive resource, can help composers at all stages of the writing process through invention strategies, spatializing composition, allowing for individual expression and complex analysis, identity work and metacognition, and an understanding of the temporal and performative nature of digital texts.

Our students play. We play. Everyone plays. It is up to us to show how play can be productive and how engaging with play at multiple points in both the writing process and through

the act of consumption/analysis. And we must always be concerned with both production and consumption.

Games have a great history of application in the classroom, and that can continue to expand as we develop new ways for students to engage with the creation, analysis, and interrogation of how games work, how games make us feel, and how we can communicate this to each other.

Throughout this dissertation, I have looked to the past to help determine a potential path for writing studies in the future. This act of looking at the past and analyzing the future is specific to play, part of the playgent identity, and has informed the methods by which I analyzed the ancient canons of rhetoric.

Through an analysis of the similarities of play and writing, I have described how memory works as a form of cognition to build identity through individual acts of agency. Embodied in the figure of the playgent, an identity that purposefully is fluid, this meta identity allows for the rapid traversal between alternative identities and literate acts. Constructing magic circles around games, activities, assignments, or common tasks allows for emergence of the playgent through magic circles forced cognization of identity. Playgents oscillate between narrative identity where story is used to construct the past and ludic identity where play is used to analyze the future.

Play is not only an analytical tool to interrogate identity, it can also be used to create and develop arguments as demonstrated in the second chapter. Like all literacies, understanding games requires both their consumption and their production. The ludic heuristic helps composers understand both sides of the coin. Breaking games down into materials, limits, and goals creates a flexible and iterable heuristic to help students create their own games. Creating games based off of systems and ideologies can give us a better understanding of our networked, digital world and lead to innovative arguments.

Style, a longstanding topic in the field of writing studies, applies to any rhetorical act, and the third chapter of this dissertation looks at what it means to apply style to an individual's acts of

play. Style in games has been talked about in terms of visual presentation, player style via personality traits, and generic style according to modes of play. I classify style in games in three ways: representational style, procedural style, and ludic style. Ludic style is how the player, regardless of personality or individual proclivities, chooses to play and engage with the game. Ludic stylistic analysis allows for a greater understanding of the possibility spaces, unique affordances of interaction, and an embodied understanding of how tropes, figures, and schemes operate.

As a new medium, digital games present challenges for those who wish to create or study them. New media texts in general demonstrate a peculiar feature: the simultaneity of arrangement and delivery. Through the unique affordances of digital games and they play they help create, ideologies and propagandistic messages may teem under the surface. Arrangement and delivery as simultaneous processes connects the spatial and the temporal in digital texts. Careful arrangement and pattern-placing can lead to an organic, though still designed, sense of discovery through the player's performance, potentially increasing the efficacy of propaganda.

Play is not a panacea to cure the ills of writing studies, higher education, or the world. What play does is give us a new lens for scholars of writing studies from which to view the world. Suits imagined a world where play becomes so widespread that work becomes a form of play. While his visions were utopic and will probably never fully come to fruition, this dissertation has sought to show how to make difficult tasks more accessible and more applicable to writing tasks in this new, ludic century.

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APPENDICES



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 09/19/2018
Application Number: AS-18-108
Proposal Title: Digital Literacy in the Classroom

Principal Investigator: Jacob Euteneuer
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Anna Sicari
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-3377, irb@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hugh Crethar'.

Hugh Crethar, Chair Institutional
Review Board

VITA

Jacob Euteneuer

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: THE LUDIC GARDEN: THE WORK OF PLAY IN COMPOSITION AND
RHETORIC

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in English at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at
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