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Video games have served as a subject around which a litany of highly contentious and divisive questions have emerged; many of them revolving around issues of gender, violence, addiction and distinctions between work and play. Given the rapidity with which the video game juggernaut has taken up firm residence in North American culture, it should come as no surprise that such questions have been quick to surface and ferment among academic circles. Within the span of a decade we have moved from an era where the 8-bit gallivanting of a colorful fictional plumber reigned as the supreme exemplar of video gameplay, to an age where the 'grinding'[1] ethos, now so prevalent in massively multiplayer games, is ostensibly more reflective of the modes of production that earmark late-capitalism than of traditional notions of gameplay (Dibbell, 2006; Castronova, 2005). As such, researchers continue to wrestle with the distinctions between ludus and narrative, meanings and effects, work and play as they fixate on the artifact of the video game and the cultural reverberations that occur as a seeming result and/or correlate of video gameplay. However, the discussion here stems from a slightly different paradigm of inquiry by asking, 'what is it that informs and shapes the design of video games?'

The above question on its own is one of decisively unmanageable scope, but there are a number of lenses and frameworks that one can use to perhaps gain some insight on game design practice.

This research will draw on one framework in particular: that of Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'language-games'. In short, this research will use Wittgenstein's language-game concept as a lens through which one might examine how design epistemologies (the way designers *know* game design and its conventions) are influenced and reinforced by the way designers talk, write, ask questions about and *conduct* game design. This work is a first effort to explore the usefulness of such a framework for purposes of understanding more about the manner in which language influences design as well as notions of play in current and burgeoning genres.

To this point, there has been a trickling emergence of philosophical work that deals with game design and its practice and it is this author's intention to contribute to that developing field of research. This paper will employ a Wittgensteinian framework in what is hopefully a refreshing approach to examining game design: an approach concerned with questions of epistemology that incorporate Wittgenstein's insights on meaning and language. It will be offered here that even the questions asked within particular design paradigms[2] are based on an epistemology which is intimately tied to

language and the 'grammar' both spoken *and* practiced within them (i.e. rules, norms, terminology and conventions).

Wittgenstein often spoke of concepts as 'tools' to be used. This paper endeavors to utilize *his* concept in precisely such a manner.

A Brief Look at Language Games

Recent theorizing around games and notions of play has drawn from a pool of mid-20th century scholars including such notables as Johann Huizinga, Gregory Bateson, Robert Fagan, Roger Caillois and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Through his articulation of language and its practice as a type of game, Wittgenstein has been both adopted and critiqued[3] for purposes of circumscribing what are now commonly held as the necessary constituents of games including their systemic nature and the acquiescence of their participants to an agreed-upon rule structure: a set of rules which Wittgenstein likens to the 'grammar' of language (Salen and Zimmerman, 2001;Suits, 1978; Juul, 2005; Wittgenstein, 1953; Finch, 2001; Brenner, 1999). However, the relatively recent consideration of Wittgenstein's work as a fundament of modern game theory is at very least intriguing given that it was Wittgenstein who originally turned to games as a model for the dynamics, boundaries and rule-based activities of language. Perhaps no less peculiar is this paper's intent to use Wittgenstein's language-game analogy to help further understand that which informs the design of games.

Understanding language on the model of games, Wittgenstein asserts that games, like languages, are rule-based modes of practice that are to be considered part of their own "form of life" (1953, p. 11). This is not to say that 'form of life' is a designation exclusive to games or even languages, but acknowledging games as being embedded within 'forms of life' is undoubtedly the first step in using Wittgenstein's concept of language-games as a lens to examine game design praxis.

Forms of Life and the 'Builder's Language'

Wittgenstein's detailing of language-games and forms of life supports the idea that a language-game itself is not only a culmination of words and utterances, but a meaningful activity: a practice that intones a particular organic quality and which is ontologically rooted in the dynamism of those participating. It is an activity capable of changing, evolving and growing through it very conduct.

A nebulous and yet fundamental concept, 'forms of life'[4] to Wittgenstein is what enables language-games to function as they do: it is the fertile soil that allows the growth and development of language-games and acts as the basis from which language grows and develops. It is the underlying foundation for human understanding and meaningful exchanges within particular conditions and cultural contexts and thus for language-games themselves (Brenner, 1999; Finch, 2001). It is the "common behavior of mankind" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 82).

> our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses […] to imagine language is to imagine a form of life (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 8)

Wittgenstein aims to make it clear that the term language-game "is meant to bring into prominence that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life", it is the "whole consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven" (1953, p. 11; 1953, p. 5). It is salient to note that language-games are *embedded within* forms of life: that is to say that language-games are something that occur *within* a particular form of life. Hence, game design may be considered part of the forms of life of 'design', or 'commerce', or 'cultural production': the boundaries between forms of life, and language-games in particular, are innately blurred over one another (Wittgenstein, 1953). Language-games are 'active' and are made comprehensible by the form of life in which they are nested (Finch, 2001).

Language-games are thus constantly protean and culturally situated phenomena rooted in action, in practice, and this notion is exemplified by Wittgenstein's allegory of the 'builder's language': a series of fictional exchanges in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which depict two individuals communicating with one another in an effort to build a structure from a collection of materials. Builder scenarios feature one individual who gives instructions to the other, who through a common understanding, must retrieve the appropriate materials and supply them as asked. Wittgenstein makes use of the builders' language vignettes in order to explicitly bring the resulting praxis that stems from language exchange to the fore, but he also does so to accentuate in particular how the use of language constructs and reinforces meanings within a particular language-game. To Wittgenstein, language moulds and massages the contextual reality shared by its users and it is here where the notion of epistemology begins to emerge in Wittgenstein's discussion of language-games.

Knowing and Meaning

It should be noted that despite this paper's aims, Wittgenstein in his later work does not trouble himself explicitly with the question of epistemology per se, but with the question of *meanings* (this research speaks only to his later, post-*Tractatus* work[5]). Wittgenstein's own approach is one that endeavors to remove the veil of metaphysics and to do away with the a priori. Knowledge according to Wittgenstein is rooted in the meanings established and expressed contextually through language by those who generate and share those meanings (Wittgenstein, 1953; Finch, 2001; Brenner, 1999). There is no greater transcendental knowledge to possess. Wittgenstein believes the word "know" itself defies the shackles of the metaphysical and there can be no proof of any given 'perfect' knowledge outside of a given set of contextualized conventions because such 'superior' or transcendental truths cannot be spoken or expressed (Wittgenstein, 1953; Finch, 2001).

To Wittgenstein, issues of meaning precede issues of knowledge: we already 'know'

because we must 'know'--to say we 'know' is in effect an unnecessary doubling or expression of redundancy of that which sense data has already afforded us in every day contexts. H.L. Finch writes that "the certainties of normal human life do not need to be further justified and in trusting them, we make no mistakes for they define what 'mistakes' are just as they define what 'knowing' and 'doubting' are" (2001, p. 113). Language becomes the form with which we express and describe our knowledge and which subsequently reinforces it. The meanings and descriptions that become associated with words through the use of rules consequently shape conventions: the shifting rule-based foundations of language-games. It is language and its meanings that serve as the supporting pillar of our own epistemologies and as a result, language can cement a given epistemology and paradigms within it through the adoption and use of its conventions. Wittgenstein cites the example of philosophy itself, noting that the reason we are "still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks…[is] because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions" (1980, p. 15). Wittgenstein might argue that this same example could be readily mapped onto what are oft-referred to as derivative design practices of commercial game designers. However, before applying Wittgenstein in any which way to game design, it must be clarified as to what we mean by 'game design'.

Game design: the Building of Semotic Domains

With a sense of Wittgenstein's epistemology in tow, outlining what constitutes 'game design' is crucial. What can we learn by mobilizing Wittgenstein's 'language games' approach to epistemology as a way to interrogate game design and the intentional structuring of games themselves? At first glance, as with many other processes, activities and rituals, game design(s) has its own languages: its own terminologies, its own discourses, its own way of addressing phenomena within the field, within a genre and within a method of development (i.e. programming tools). The way that game design is spoken about in and among designers also often varies between different development platforms, different target audiences and of course, different designers. There are also the languages of the practice of design: the manipulation and exchange of formal language transformed into action, the formation of design conventions, the following of rules, the concretization of company procedures, the abidance of etiquette, colloquial banter and the development of neologistic terminology. All of these things are situated within, even as they situate the very act of design: they are the languages and the activities constitutive of the language-game of 'game design'. The idea of looking at the way which language shapes the way we speak and ask questions within any 'form of life' as outlined in Wittgenstein's example of Greek philosophy already demonstrates a glimmer of relevance to game design--but what is it that game designers are actually doing?

The Construction of Semiotic Domains

James Paul Gee, who has earned much academic renown for his book, *What Video Games Can Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* asserts that when one engages in the design of a game, one partakes in the construction of a semiotic space which requires its own form of literacy to design (Gee, 2001). Semiotic domains, in Gee's

own phrasing, are "any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities to communicate distinctive types of meanings" (2003, p. 18), or in the words of Jason Craft, "distinct and embodied contexts, matrices of environmental attributes and, crucially, social practices in which signs are given a distinct meaning, and in which a person can be literate" (Craft, 2004; Myers, 2003; Rieber, 1996). In other words, to Gee, the design of games can be conceived as the design of semiotic domains.

Gee outlines two particularly important aspects of semiotic domains. First, there is a literacy involved in the participation in a given domain, including the linguistic and practical conventions and knowledge of the rules, signs and meanings of those signs (Gee, 2001). Secondly, semiotic domains are *designed* spaces, and much like Wittgenstein, Gee places great emphasis on the *practice* that has gone into the construction of and participation in semiotic domains.

A semiotic domain then can denote the practice of anything from 'baseball' to 'stamp collecting' to 'stock market investing' and although Gee would note that videogames give access to their own semiotic domains, these domains have the potential to be designed and laden with subject matter that carries with them their own set of practices and multiple modalities. Lloyd Rieber argues that these domains, or 'microworlds' as he terms them can be designed or changed and he cites the example of a child's sandbox where different elements can either be added (such as buckets, shovels) or even changed (larger buckets, differently shaped shovels) (1996).

Considering the semiotic domain of Baseball as an example, the in-domain objects such as the baseball itself carries with them specific meanings in the context of the game and each of them are the subject of multiple modalities (i.e. hitting the ball with the bat to score points versus catching the ball off an opponent's hit before a bounce to gain an 'out'). Thus, the ball carries with it different and potentially nuanced meanings depending on the modality assumed in-game—modalities which vary by team position, individual in-game role etc.. Baseball is an exemplar of the way domain design determines what practices are crucial to functioning within them; practices which subsequently allow one to garner a literacy of that domain (Gee, 2003). Baseball, is in these ways, not so different from the 'builder's language'.

However, where Gee places his focus on the *playing* of games, this paper focuses on the *design* of those games. Gee adopts the phrase 'design grammars', which refers to the rules that organize elements in a system, setting the standards and rules for participation and production in that domain (Gee, 2001; Salen and Zimmerman, 2006). Wittgenstein describes grammar much in the same way theorists frequently describe play itself: the rules, degrees of freedom and the loopholes that support potentiality and possibility within language (Wittgenstein, 1953; Salen and Zimmerman, 2001). Grammar serves as the fundamental groundwork in the creation, negotiation and comprehensibility of semiotic domains.

Thus, conduct within a language-game can be conceived as the crafting and constant refining of semiotic domains and their respective grammars. What Wittgenstein essentially adds to Gee's own conceptualization of design is the epistemological ramifications of the 'grammar of design'. Being thoroughly entrenched in the language of a given language-game is to be bathed in the

conventions, accepted modalities and ideologies that support a way of knowing and taking part in the language-game itself.

The grammar of design

To this point theorists have found utility in using Wittgenstein to speak to the nature of games and play: drawing the parallels between language and games has served to delineate certain features about gameplay, rules and consensual meaning established between participants in a given game (Salen and Zimmerman, 2001; Suits, 1978; Juul, 2005). Wittgenstein however also serves to make concepts such as Huizenga's seemingly rigid 'magic circle' more palatable for some by articulating that the boundaries around and between language-games (and 'forms of life' for that matter) are blurred by their very nature (Huizenga, 1950). There of course also exists a blurring of lines between ideology and game design paradigms. Brian Sutton-Smith's work on the rhetoric of play goes a long way to emphasize and further articulate Wittgenstein's position as it pertains to epistemological discourses of persuasion.

Sutton-Smith does not aspire to unite various definitions of play into one widely stretched, canopying theory, but instead articulates the multifarious nature of play by outlining a number of rhetorical positions on what 'play' actually is, whether rooted in paradigms of animal behavior, gambling or otherwise (2001).   Sutton-Smith's divisions of these 'rhetorics of play' do not in any way serve to segregate or compartmentalize them from one another—after all, there are blurred lines between even these language-games. But this is precisely the central point of his work: play is communally conceivable only in a rhetorical manner, with rhetoric being a pivotal linguistic device of persuasion, which supports and upholds particular epistemologies. As such, rhetoric can perhaps best be considered another way of describing what the conventional use of language within a given paradigm already manages to surreptitiously accomplish.

To recapitulate, language-games are an exchange between participants which aid and assist in the development of the rules and grammars of a given language-game, building up an epistemology which shapes ways of describing things that convey similar meanings to all involved parties. These meanings are embedded in the social practices of the language-game participants and become adhered to those social practices much in the same way that Sutton-Smith's rhetoric's of play become communally fastened to a particular way of 'knowing' play—a 'knowing' which is also constructed through linguistic and rhetorical exchange and subsequent praxis by scholars in their respective fields. In this way, Sutton-Smith's notion of rhetoric and epistemologies of play and Wittgenstein's approach to meaning and the epistemologies derived from linguistic exchange exhibit a type of 'family resemblance' to one another, elucidating practice as being intrinsically enmeshed with the language exchanged between participants in a particular paradigm of inquiry.

If one looks to speak on the example mentioned at this paper's onset regarding design phenomena such as the 'grinding' ethos in current massively multiplayer online games, using Wittgenstein, one would need to consider the nature of such a

phenomenon starting with investigating the use of the term. Only after this can we explore the way language stems from and is translated into action and is subsequently held as a convention or norm within massively multiplayer game design paradigms.

The Language of 'Grinding' and 'Farming'

'Grinding' is a derogatory term given to repetitive and work-like tasks in MMO games. Grinding manages to be consistently present as a mandatory feature in massively multiplayer games despite constant player frustration, boredom and the quest to automate such grinding sessions through the use of scripts or macros: tools which are often provided by the game's own designers (not to say that such grinding is not enjoyable to some). Conceivably the very coining of the term 'grinding', its oft-noted exchange, the activity it invokes and the term's cultural currency epistemologically reifies the phenomenon of grinding in the context of MMO game design. 'Grinding' enters the language-game and subsequently serves to support and reinforce the notion of grinding and the paradigm from which it was born. It ossifies into something that is now an unquestioned element perpetually incorporated by designers, but also something that players now expect to be in a game themselves.

> …it is not only the results but also the *method* that tells us something about the world in which a measurement takes place. And in this very way the technique of use of a word gives us an idea of very general truths about the world in which it is used, of truths in fact which are so general that they don't strike people… (Wittgenstein in Brenner, 1999, p. 85)

Upon entering the language-game of game design for MMOs, grinding aspects become treated as a staple, a standard, a known quantity that comes part and parcel with the MMO package (Taylor, 2006; Juul 2005; Dibbell, 2006 & Castronova, 2005).

From both a design *and* player perspective, grinding in a way now partially defines the MMO genre (Dibbell, 2007; Zen of Design, 2007). Designed instances in which players are made to engage with repetitive and creatively pallid activities in a 'role-playing' environment can be found in a series of MMO games and are typically variants of "go kill X amount of these animals" or "deliver X item to X person". This model of unvaried routine is an archaic one on which MMO design has been founded for several years and yet it remains a design element that is rarely deviated from.[6]

Richard Garriott, lead designer of what may be considered the catalytic MMO of the last decade in *Ultima Online* acknowledges that MMO game design "has not changed over 10 years" (French, 2007). He continues, saying that "the fact that people use the nomenclature 'grinding' to describe what they do in online games is a bad sign" and that it persists in keeping designers cemented in stagnant design paradigms (Gamasutra, 2007). Wittgenstein might hasten to argue that Garriott is absolutely correct in that assertion, suggesting that 'grinding' nomenclature has sedimented 'grinding' within the layers of MMO design conventions. And such could be considered the case for a great many genres and their respective terminology. Terms such as 'rails' and 'damage per second' are fastened quite tightly to the language used by designers and players alike without care to their meaning or the ostensible design shortcomings they quite frequently (mis)represent.

But let us pause briefly, momentarily setting Wittgenstein aside and pursuing some semblance of economic reasoning to come to grips with the monetary rationale behind the implementation of grinding in design. Such reasoning would at least superficially suggest that the means of financial gain through the business models adopted by *Blizzard*[7] and others necessitate the need for designing grinding instances in their games simply because the increased time-investment made by players in such repetitive tasks tend to garner an increasingly steady financial commitment from their player contingent (Dibbell, 2006; Castronova, 2005; Zen of Design, 2007). However, following that argument, there are other games without subscription fees such as *Guild Wars,* which despite having their profit model based on episodic delivery rather than monthly fees, should not have any financial necessity for designing 'grindable' content into their games--and yet, grinding/farming remains evident in their current design model. What makes *Guild Wars* an even more compelling example is the fact that this was not always the case.

Guild Wars and the Grind

Arenanet, the creators of *Guild Wars* originally trumpeted their game as one that privileged skill over time-invested by a player (Gamezone, 2005; GigaOm, 2006). There would be no subscription fee, no farming, there would be no grinding, there would be no loot-camping[8]. In the words of Guild Wars Community Manager, Gaile Gray, "Guild Wars is designed to eliminate the grind. […] You won't find '10,000 miles of virtual 3D terrain' to wander around in, nor find yourself writing macros and bots to chop wood for 10 hours a day while you play Mario Kart" (Gamezone, 2005).

The original *Guild Wars* was designed along an arc of progression which allowed a player to either explore on one's own, or to follow the game's story through instanced[9] mission completion that whisked the player both narratively and geographically through the game's content. 'Leveling' a character in the game was designed to be as transparent a process as possible since it was intended that level 20 be the quickly and naturally accessible maximum cap, making grinding and between-level anxiety among players less of a problem (Gamezone, 2005; GigaOm, 2006). *Guild Wars* was designed around a single-player styled progression infrastructure, which means leveling occurred seamlessly as in-game challenges would typically always match the level of a player at any given time if one was following the world's larger narrative[10]. Grinding for experience was largely unnecessary and grinding for gold (the game's primary currency) only became crucial in instances of saving up to buy the game's rarest armor or perfectly modfied weaponry from other players. There was no manner to determine what creature would drop the best item nor was there any sort of unique weaponry to desire; creatures in high-end areas typically produced randomly generated and randomly assigned high-end loot. This meant farming for specific items was minimized and 'spawn-camping'[11] was eliminated altogether. In other words *Guild Wars,* in some sense, was indeed designed to subvert the grind.

With the original game released in early 2005, *Guild Wars* sold exceptionally well and was widely considered a triumph. Following this success, *Arenanet* would ultimately release two more episodes or 'campaigns' in 2006, but there would be marked differences between those and the original game.

Factions and *Nightfall* as the following two campaigns would be named, would ultimately begin to incorporate conspicuous instances of grinding into their games. For example, both games would only permit progression in certain scenarios after X amount of points ('faction', 'sunspear points' etc.) had been accumulated through repeatable quests and creature kills. Such points also became necessary for the acquisition of in-game materials and armor.

Between the original *Guild Wars* and *Factions*, 'green' unique weapons were introduced which could only be obtained by defeating one particular creature in a specific instance. These weapons typically possessed the highest weapon specifications in-game and the rarest, most ornate designs making them far more desirable than previous high-end weaponry and making the 'farming' of these items a popular activity.

There was also the introduction of new 'prestige' titles that would display on a player-character how many creatures they had killed[12], how many high-end items they had found and how many in-game perishable items they had consumed (e.g. alcoholic items, which serve little or no gameplay purpose other than to assist in the achievement of this particular title track through its consumption)[13].

Within the first week of *Factions's* release, the term 'faction farming' or ''FF' became a staple in the exchanges between players in outposts and towns and soon after there emerged formalized player-made guides on how to farm points towards one's title track of choice with the greatest efficiency (Guildwiki, 2007).

With in-game progression and prestige now tied to grinding and farming, *Guild Wars's* subsequent iterations (including their most recent expansion pack, '*Eye of the North*') have found themselves succumbing to the time-invested/repetitive task completion model of design despite their no-subscription model not requiring such time-investments from their players. In fact, a player simply purchasing the game was (and still is) enough to live up to the financial expectations of *Arenanet* from their customers in terms of their no-subscription model. So why does the grind become inescapable even in a model that does not financially benefit from its presence?

One might speculate that implementing instances of grinding as a method of in-game achievement and progression is a design solution which is a hand-in-glove fit with a limited production time frame--and considering that *Arenanet* made promises of a new campaign every 6 months, this self-imposed time limit is certainly worth some consideration. After all, designing for the necessity of grinding certainly allows near infinite recycling of art assets whether it be textures, levels, models, NPCs and so forth. However, the game was sold on the premise that *Arenanet's* design directive would not reward time-investment over skill. Why regress back towards a paradigm which privileges grinding if one's advertised design mandate was to avoid it (Gamezone, 2005; GigaOm, 2006)?

A language-games approach would suggest that the implementation of particular mechanics and design schemas secure in praxis the use of particular terminology (e.g. Garriott's 'nomenclature'), forming the basis of a reifying rhetoric that justifies and upholds design epistemologies and it is this epistemological rhetoric which subsequently influences what is construed as 'play' by players *and* designers. And as Garriott implies, that rhetoric has been in place for at least a decade as it concerns

massively multiplayer online games.

As such, designers are continually subjugated to the rhetoric of their practice and become myopic after consistent engagement with a language-game that reinforces and justifies the existence of a phenomenon which may have no truly justifiable underpinning, but which carries an established shared meaning among players and designers alike (Taylor, 2006; Juul 2005 & Dibbell, 2006). Players also willingly give themselves to this phenomenon and in perhaps a Baudrillardian sense, the intertwining language-games of 'MMO game play' and 'game design' begin to frame the grind linguistically as a pure form of play: a simulation of what was once the legitimate article. In grinding's absence, the game then begins ceases to be a 'game' per se since the role of grinding as the simulacra has effectively replaced the play it now represents. Play loses its meaning in the language-game as 'the grind' replaces it, or in the words of Baudrillard himself, it is "an implosion of meaning—[and] this is where simulation begins" (1983, p. 57). For Wittgenstein, this is where the rules of the language-game begin to 'shift'. The question again is, 'why'?

Sutton-Smith's rhetorical analysis of play, much like Wittgenstein's philosophical construct of language-games, finds utility here as well in describing the nature of game design paradigms. In speaking about rhetorics of play Sutton Smith has the following to say:

> In general, each rhetoric has a historical source, a particular function, a distinctive ludic form and specialized players and advocates and is the context for specific academic disciplines. In addition, it's advocates and scholars manifest hegemonies both within their own form of play and towards other forms. (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 214)

> […]scholars also seem to have in common, wittingly or not, the way they manipulate these rhetorics to justify their own preoccupations with the different play forms. It is not just play that is susceptible to these ideological value systems but also that the scholars often need these rhetorics to license their own authority over the kinds of play with which they are concerned. (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 215)

Consider that this notion does not solely apply to the 'production of knowledge' that is the scholarly field of 'play' research within which scholars generate and manipulate rhetorics "wittingly or not", but much like Wittgenstein's notion of language-games, Sutton-Smith's notion applies to all 'forms of life' including that of design. Sutton-Smith's 'hegemonies' take root in language-games, which rhetorically solidify the epistemologies they're associated with as participants acquiesce to them and their associated ideologies. As David Smit asserts, to Wittgenstein, "all interpretations and arguments are not primarily a matter of establishing incontrovertible grounds for truth, but of persuasion" even if unbeknownst to those who proliferate them (1999, p. 43).

Without entirely de-politicizing the notion of 'hegemony', it should be noted that this paper discusses primarily commercial game design, in which case the hegemonic aspect of the language-games of design carry with them not only ideological weight, but also significant flows of power (Foucault, 1973; 1978). The practice of the language-game of game design is one which serves to further solidify itself through language and praxis, formulating conventions which become so deeply inscribed within language-games participants that they become difficult to deviate from. The

dominant paradigms reign from below, permeating other paradigms (e.g. *World of Warcraft's* lofty market/user base position among current MMOs). The more participants that invest in the language-game of the dominant paradigm, the more that the subsequent encroachment into similar paradigms becomes suffocating and as such, emerging epistemologies which often attempt to undergo a shift (such as *Guild Wars* and others) are highly susceptible to being implicitly undermined by the conventions already fastened in place through a communal acceptance and subsequent justification by that acceptance[14]. This is what Wittgenstein would refer to as the reaching 'bedrock': when participants in a language-game (in this case, game designers) have exhausted all other justifications for following a particular rule and are inclined to say "this is simply what I do" (1953, p. 72).

For Wittgenstein, we accept particular conventions as normative, but we do not agree to the meaning of these conventions because we necessarily understand them. "Meaning is not a matter of our assent. Without conventions, we could not understand in the first place" (Smit, 1991, p. 36). We tend to understand something because we become exposed to a series of contexts, activities and circumstances in which we establish the range of permissible meanings in and among a consensus (Wittgenstein, 1953; Smit, 1991; Finch 2001). Or to re-invoke Gee, meaning is "not in anyone's head, but embedded in the history and social practices of the group" (Gee, 1999, p. 105). Considering game design, rhetorical hegemonies may be established through the use of the language and resulting practice which make up the language-game of design, but these hegemonies--particularly their maintenance--are not necessarily to be considered the product of ill-inspired motivations.

One of the most significant examples of this might be that of genre, where the meanings behind original design conventions often dissipate and metamorphose, but their linguistic infrastructures remain sometimes keeping a genre alive in name, but not in practice. Such could be considered the case with the Adventure genre, whose modern day iterations arguably no longer correspond to the variety of gameplay and mechanics the term was originally appended to 20 years ago, but which maintains its status as a genre of the same name nonetheless[15]. The blurring of the genre language-games of Role-Playing and Adventure in particular has increased notably over years and Wittgenstein might surmise that these 'genre language-games' are unwittingly being played out without conscious understanding of the shifting 'etymological' underpinnings of the rules by which they operate.[16]

How then are we persuaded by the rhetoric of a language-game? A language-game approach would offer that we persuade one another--through agreement and concession, participants in a language-game establish, change and support rules as they traverse the "shifting landscape" that is the play of the language-game (Wittgenstein, 1953; Finch, 2001; Smit; 1999). We may either thoughtfully or capriciously consent to acknowledge or ignore, but we do so in the context of the various forms of life that pervade our daily activities whether it be the socio-political context of our daily living or the corporate environs of a given workplace.

Thus, although game design practitioners may be fully literate in the semiotic domains that they construct, they have internalized judgments inseparably from a mastery of their distinctive discursive competences, and in this way, without any explicit argumentation, justification or challenge, choices, decisions or dispositions, they have become embedded within their game design praxis. It is not until game

design practitioners engage in a communal reflexivity that conscious change can be truly made, and Wittgenstein recognizes the potential for conscious change both through mindfulness as well as powerful, controlling ideological agendas which can take hold through disinterest and apathy (1953). For Wittgenstein, it would seem that an epistemologically dislodging act is possible, but such an act cannot be committed privately: it requires a willing constituency who are willing to play a new language-game entirely or at very least, play the same game with different rules. This exercise of course requires one to become reflexively aware of the language/praxis one has already committed to.

This brings us to what is ultimately both a re-iteration of the above as well this work's culminating point: *'rhetorical hegemony' within a language-game is essentially the linguistic conventions, both through the exchange of language and the resulting practice (the vessels of ideology) that reinforce and cement the design epistemologies within which game designers construct semiotic domains: domains which intrinsically reflect those epistemologies.*

I would emphasize again that the language-game model does not only apply to what is 'spoken' during and about game design, but what is *'done'*--language-games intone that we speak and then consequently convey understanding and meaning through our actions. The manner (language and praxis) in which game design takes place is in essence founded on a hegemonic epistemology, constantly ideologically permeated, which is unique to a given genre, development protocols, manufactured marketing demands among many other things. These things serve as the epistemological grammar of design language-games.

CONCLUSION

This research attempts to wield a lens of examination in such a manner as to reveal what emerges from its usage. A Wittgensteinian lens helps us see that game design is constituted by the ways a discourse community speaks about and engages with its distinctive activities: language exchange *and practice* within a language-game can simply never be pried apart from one another as they are organically and intrinsically enmeshed with one another. The language of game design, the discourse around game design and the praxis of game design are all inseparable, their intersections blurred.

As such, this work has also attempted to call attention to the aforementioned statement that 'epistemological rhetoric subsequently influences what is construed as 'play' (or accepted as 'play') by players *and* designers'. And herein lies a central concern and further application of this framework.

When epistemologies (both design and ludic) are contributed, shared and consented to by designers and players in ways that aid in re-shaping communal meanings of play (e.g. the semiotic metamorphosis which sees grinding begin to 'mean' play within game communities), rhetorical hegemonies become expressed through gameplay; what I would term, *'ludic hegemonies'.* To rearticulate in Gramscian terms, there emerges an ostensible consent by players to accept the implicit ideologies that permeate the rules imposed by a game's design/designers--a consent which sees a

reappropriation of seemingly self-evident 'spontaneous' grammars (such as 'grinding') as 'normative' ones (Gramsci, 1971, Ives, 2004). Niels Helsloot writes:

> Gramsci is in line with Wittgenstein; normativity is not a matter of opinions, but of a form of life […] Norms and rules develop within a community, parallel to the political aims the community produces, in other words, to its self-definition. Normative grammar, and the efforts spent in patiently learning it, discipline people [.] (Helsloot, 1989, p. 557)

Looking at language, design and play through these Gramscian terms politically reaffirms and rearticulates Wittgenstein's notion of language-games and raises questions about what terms such as 'play' and 'grinding' actually mean to players and the role language plays in player consent to activities which have earned such pejorative nomenclature. Although this paper has focused on the role of language in epistemologies of game design, it invariably opens up new inquiries, most specifically, 'what is the role of language in the development of epistemologies of play'?

Potential avenues of inquiry aside, this work has strived to put forth a plausible framework regarding game design and language and has hopefully provided at least a modicum of potential application, but it is fully realized by this author that the application of this framework in greater depth and to more genres/phenomena other than grinding and MMOs is clearly necessary for furthering this line of investigation.

Although there are certainly investigative lenses other than this one, which can lend new perspectives on what influences and informs game design. Political economical lenses, cultural studies lenses and so on are exceptionally valuable tools for revealing new perspectives and allowing us to make more sense of what informs the game design process. This paper does not place a set value on any of these lenses nor does it suggest the possibility of any unifying discourse among them. Instead this paper suggests that a great many perspectives can grant us essentially what our senses permit us, as Wittgenstein himself might advocate. It's not about generating 'new' forms of knowledge, it's about changing the way we look at what's already there (Wittgenstein, 1953).

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Notes

[1]	A massively multiplayer online game colloquialism, *grinding* refers to the constant, repeated engagement (often with one or more already repetitive tasks) in the context of such games. These tasks are often partaken in for the acquisition of in-game experience points or in-game virtual goods. Such tasks can require a player to do as little as click a mouse while remaining stationary or even adopting the use of a specialized script or macro to automate the given task such that grinding can be conducted while unattended by the 'player'. The development and currency of such colloquialisms speak to the very heart of this work.

[2]	'Paradigms', for purposes of this paper, are those systems of belief and praxis nested in language-game participation. Language exchanged in a language-game and the shared meanings developed between language-game participants assist in developing and supporting a paradigm through established conventions, which in turn, re-affirm the epistemological rooting of that paradigm (Brenner, 1999).

[3]	Although Wittgenstein focused on the question which asked 'what things do games have in common', he never himself believed there to be a formal definition of a game. To Wittgenstein the meaning of 'game' could only be sought through an inquiry of its use.

4   "forms of life' is a concept which, although remains a core principle of Wittgenstein's later work, was still only mentioned five times in the entirety of the Philosophical Investigations (Finch, 2001).

5   Wittgenstein's earlier work was rooted in an ontological position which attempted to simplify language to its fundamental elements or 'simples'. It was his aim to use languages in its clearest and more precise form in order to state philosophical 'facts' about the world. Wittgenstein would ultimately abandon this linguistic/logical atomism and shift his focus from linguistic certainty to issues of meaning and the impossibility of transcendental certainty and facts (Wittgenstein, 2000).

6   This is not to say that elements of grinding cannot be located in games other than MMOs, but this author would suggest that few other genres are identified so clearly by their transparent adoption of this particular design element.

7   Or more recently known as 'Activision Blizzard'

8   Loot-camping refers to characters waiting around an area for particular loot to drop—whether earned by another player or themselves. Also known as 'ninja-ing', such an act is generally considered dishonorable by MMO player communities.

9   Instances refer to spaces in-game separate from the world which are shared by only a limited number of players.

10   There are of course some exceptions, the most prominent of which include those players who choose to 'run' ahead at a very low level. Such players 'twink' or 'speed-level' their characters in the more advanced stages with the help of veteran players.

11   This refers to players waiting in a particular area for a creature to spawn as to defeat it and take its loot. Guild Wars' instancing approach to design eliminated this from the outset.

12   Although not a literal 'kill-count', kill-related titles in Guild Wars are reflective of how many points were scored through obtainable bounties on particular creatures. E.g. 8 Sunspear points for every undead creature killed would count toward one's Sunspear title track.

13   It should be noted that achieving the 'Drunkard' title requires only that a player consume in-game alcohol in a town by double clicking on it repeatedly in their inventory. It should also be noted that the highest level of the 'Drunkard' title requires 10000 in-game minutes of character drunkenness, which translates into 6 days, 22 hours, and 40 minutes of real world time. (http://gw.gamewikis.org/wiki/Drunkard)

14   The position of *World of Warcraft* in the massively multiplayer online market is an ideal example of this.

15   Although adventure games still generally adhere to a 'special-case' design methodology, the focus of such games has arguably moved from an emphasis on exploration to an emphasis on 'enacted' narrative progression.

16   Of course we recognize that such a shift has taken place as would be evident in any meta-discourse which revolves around issues of genre, but the language-game leads nowhere without action: there is distinction in the language-game between knowing and doing and without the latter, a move in such a game is not completed (Brenner, 2001; Finch, 2001; Wittgenstein, 1953).