PERFORMANCE THROUGH AN AVATAR: EXPLORING AFFECT AND IDEOLOGY THROUGH NARRATIVE IN VIDEOGAMES

DAVID OWEN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

NOVEMBER 2015

Abstract

Videogames are a major source of popular cultural narratives surpassing even Hollywood films. Videogames, however, cast the player as the active agent within the narrative as opposed to film, television, and traditional theatre where the separation between performer and audience is clearly demarcated. This dissertation investigates the affective potential of videogames realized through the relationship of the player and the avatar within the game world. Specifically, I look at the avatar as an affective conduit for the player, how the feedback between the player and avatar creates a cybernetic relationship, how this relationship changes the player, and how this change potentially augments the player's interpretation of reality—virtual and otherwise. It is through this changed (and augmented) interpretation of reality that socio/political ideological meanings—intentional or not—may be absorbed by the player. Ethnographic research conducted with six volunteer participants combined with my own autoethnographic research into several recent popular videogames is intersected with theories of affect, embodiment, and ideology. My findings suggest that experience with the virtual realities of game worlds is one step removed from actual experience. Since videogames are composed of representations, the ideological positions embedded within those representations are not simply presented and understood like traditional theatre, film, and television, but are embodied by the player through the avatar as (nearly direct) experience. Theatre, film, and television have rich critical histories and this study of the player's performance through the avatar as an affective conduit and receiver/transmitter of ideology joins the growing critical body of work regarding the newer storytelling medium of videogames.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Zaara Owen. You are my inspiration and the fresh lens through which I see the world.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the unwavering support and keen critical eyes of my advisor, Dr. Laura Levin, and my committee members, Dr. Marlis Schweitzer and Professor Don Sinclair. Your faith in my project and your rigorous yet always positive guidance helped keep me on track throughout the process. In addition, I wish to thank the Graduate Program in Theatre and Performance Studies at York University for trusting in me and taking the chance on such an interdisciplinary project such as this.

I wish to acknowledge my six volunteers for giving me your time and energy for my research. It may not seem like much to some to *have to* play videogames for two hours and then watch yourself play for the betterment of humankind. However, your contribution adds an essential dimension to my project that I could not do without.

I also wish to acknowledge the support of my father, Doug Owen. You may not always understand what I am pursuing but you never question why. I know many times you never thought you would see me finish school, but here we are. Now, for a post-doc!

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the support at various points of Gaia Willis for starting me on this path and Kyla Zerbes for helping me to see this project through. This has been a bumpy journey in many ways but I have you both to thank for seeing this project to its fruition.

To all of you, thank you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

> When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things standout. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?
>
> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*

I was seven years old when I saw the original *Star Wars* movie at the cinema with my Dad. My imagination exploded with possibility seeing that fantastic universe unfold in front of my eyes. I vividly remember raising my legs to get out of the way of the tie-fighters whenever they flew toward the screen and out of the lower part of the shot. To my seven year old mind, my legs were dangling dangerously in the *Star Wars* universe. This was also the same year my parents bought my sister and me an Atari 2600 game system.

I do theatre. I write, direct, and act in plays. Performing a role for an audience is not the same as playing a videogame. There is a fundamental aesthetic difference in that one is made to be *played* while the other is meant to be appreciated by others. While it is true videogames are designed for *playing*, I am investigating the *performance* that also occurs within that digital space. Steven Dixon gives an excellent example of the connection yet difference between the two in his book *Digital Performance*. In the chapter on "Performing Interactivity," he writes:

> As users, we enter into a performative relationship with a digital design "we perform the design, as we would a musical instrument." Although this is a potent and apt metaphor for certain installations, we would note its slight hyperbole: one

> generally plays a musical instrument, one does not perform it, and there is a significant difference between the two concepts. (560)

I agree with Dixon that there is an important distinction to be made between playing and performing. I wish to add, though, that whenever I play a musical instrument, I am performing. Similarly, whenever I play a videogame, a performance occurs. Building on Richard Schechner's definition of performance as a "restored behavior" that is "always subject to revision" (36-37), I maintain that in a videogame the performance is realized through the use of an avatar and rendered on screen instead of "restored" using physical bodies in real spaces. What is more, both the performer and the audience to that performance is the same person: the player. It may be more accurate to think of the player as the initiator of the performance action through an avatar and also the audience or critical witness to that action. This coincides nicely with Marvin Carlson's statement that "all performance involves a conscious of doubleness." Carlson writes that:

> Normally this comparison is made by an observer of the action – the theatre public, the school's teacher, the scientist – but the double consciousness, not the external observation, is what is most central. An athlete, for example, may be aware of his own performance, placing it against a mental standard. Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self. (italics original, 71)

The doubleness involved with the player's performance within the game world arises from the fact that the same individual initiating the avatar's actions is also the one enjoying and evaluating

the performance of those actions. The difference in this case rests in the mediated distance between the corporeal player and the virtual avatar.

Considering the performative aspect of videogames, I recognize myriad benefits of applying performance studies theory as well as the well-tested wheels of theatre and theatrical criticism to the new storytelling kid on the block, videogames. Videogames place the audience in the role of protagonist in such a way that, as Michael Causey observes the "issue turns from witnessing the other to being the other" (197). In some ways this can be similar to interactive theatre where the audience has some input into how the narrative unfolds except for the opportunity for the player/audience to also observe herself performing through the avatar. The aesthetic (and affective) difference I am stressing resides in how I feel when I embody a role in a live performance for an audience compared to when I feel I am the central character in a narrative unfolding before my eyes due to my actions. Dixon succinctly claims: "a key distinguishing feature is that the audience's identification with the character is closer within a videogame than in traditional theater [*sic*] (even though game characters tend to lack theater characters' psychological complexities and depths): the audience is the participant, the participant is the player, the player is the character" (601). I agree with Dixon that the identification is closer for the audience within a videogame but depart from Dixon by acknowledging that *because* the game character lacks depth in a traditionally theatrical sense, the player is allowed to impose or interpret her own psychological complexities onto the game character she is playing. The character performs actions that propel the narrative. The player is allowed to fill-in her own "why" to justify those actions if the game does not implicitly do so.

Several decades after watching *Star Wars* with my Dad, I no longer raise my legs to get out of the way of objects flying at me in movies (despite the valiant efforts of 3D film

technology) but I *do* make involuntary little hops in my seat when, as Jason Brody, I attempt longer jumps in *Far Cry 3* (2012) and I often reflexively say 'ouch' when a giant hits *me* with a club in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011). After years of viewing and creating theatre and passively watching countless movies, my *matured* mind no longer confuses the boundaries of the fiction of the play or movie and my own corporeal body. However, videogames provide me with the moments that allow me to forget those boundaries and extend the borders (or perceived location) of my physical body. This is a relatively new form of suspension of disbelief. The contract I choose to enter into with the videogame is one that goes further than the theatrical or cinematic model where I choose to simply believe in the fiction. In a videogame I am choosing to *join* the fiction, to imagine that the fiction affects me, personally, and that I identify as an extension of myself, the placeholder I see and hear in the game world—my avatar.

The Avatar, Affect, and Proprioception

This dissertation investigates the performance of narrative, affect, and identity through an avatar in computer-mediated environments. Specifically, I am looking at the relationship between affect and ideology in videogames in order to consider gaming's potential to either support or subvert different political, social, or even personal agendas. I begin in the early chapters engaging with phenomenological questions about the player and the game world and ideas of agency building up to a relationship between affect and ideology and how that relationship is consolidated through performative means. The performance itself resides in the way the videogame player moves through the game environment via a virtual body (avatar). The avatar does not independently move and feel but is the means through which the player's

movement and feeling is expressed within the game environment and the events unfolding within that virtual world. The avatar's body may be visible in third person perspective including over-the-shoulder games[1] such as the *Gears of War* games, the *Assassin's Creed* games, the *Grand Theft Auto* games; God's eye view games[2] like the *Diablo* games, the *Deathspank* games, *The Sims* series; and side-scrolling games[3] like *Limbo* (2010), *Braid* (2008), and *Guacamelee* (2013). Alternately the body may be implied as present but outside the line of sight as in first-person-shooters (FPS)[4] like the *Halo* games, the *Call of Duty* games, and the *Far Cry* games; or may be abstract and absent as found in more casual games like *Peggle* (2007), *Candy Crush Saga* (2012), and *Plants vs Zombies* (2009).[5]

Videogames play with your *proprioception*, a concept central to the work of Brian Massumi, and the term for the sensation of knowing where the borders of your body lie. For example, when driving a car the sense of how far the body of the car extends in front and behind you is an expansion of your proprioception to include the borders of the car. In that sense, the body of the car feels like an extension of your body. Likewise, proprioception also explains the

[1] Over-the-shoulder games are so called because the player's view of the game world is often placed just behind the avatar. The player sees the avatar within the game world but within close proximity. The player literally sees the action over the shoulder of the avatar.

[2] God's eye view games are so called due to the fact the player's perspective of the game world and of the player's avatar is more distant than over-the-shoulder games and usually at an elevated position. This allows the player to be privy to a greater view of the game world from a more omniscient distance.

[3] Side-scrolling games are a design throw-back to early two dimensional videogames. The game world is revealed along an X/Y axis (left/right, up/down) without a third dimension into the world along a Z axis. The player sees the (simply rendered) avatar within the (simplified) game world and is able to see much more of the world than the avatar. These games tend to be more conceptually abstract and lend themselves well to spatial and logic puzzles.

[4] First person shooters (FPSs) are so called due to the fact they provide the player the same perspective as the avatar within the game world. The avatar is not wholly visible, though often the avatar's hands, arms, and sometimes lower body are. The player is privy to the same information as the avatar. Games with first person perspective often, but not always, involve shooting.

[5] Despite the fact the player's body is not seen in these games, all three imply the presence of the player through their light narrative treatment. *Peggle* is framed with a concept of the player progressing through the "Peggle Institute," *Candy Crush Saga* is premised with the task of completing the little girl's journey, and *Plants vs Zombies* implies you, the player, supply the brains residing inside the house you are defending from the zombie invasion. Regarding the last game, the assumed presence of the player in the game world (though unseen) also justifies the fact your neighbour, Crazy Dave, speaks to *you* between attacks and that you cultivate and presumably *enjoy* a Zen garden.

sensation of tensing your muscles or sympathetically moving while observing physical activity in another body. In other disciplines such as dance, this latter definition is also known as kinesthetic empathy. According to the University of Manchester website, *The Watching Dance Project*, "Spectators of dance experience kinesthetic empathy when, even while sitting still, they feel they are participating in the movements they observe, and experience related feelings and ideas" ("Watching"). I do not mean to underplay kinesthetic empathy as an important aspect of proprioception but because I focus more on the first definition—the perceived extension of the boundaries of the body—I will be using the term proprioception throughout this dissertation. My attention on the player's feeling of extension or projection into the game world will become clearer in the discussion of the extended mind theory to come. The concept of proprioception is essential to my research and, with the theories of affect to follow, provides the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

Whether or not the avatar body is visible to the player, every game encourages the player to *feel* something. Even simple abstract games such as the last three mentioned above provide the player with a sense of accomplishment or frustration regarding her ability to successfully hit all the orange balls, clear the required jelly, or defend her house (and brains). In narrative-driven videogames, however, the affective potential of gameplay is expanded greatly through the use of Aristotelian forms of empathy, rising action and suspense, and the complex rewards inherent in blurring the player's identity through role-play. What is more, videogames stand apart, affectively, from other media due to the combination of narrative elements and game elements. Narrative elements can include forms of traditional Aristotelian narrative (plot, character, theme) but also include spatial narrative as a form of narrative dependent on exploration as defined by Lev Manovich, and environmental storytelling where the narrative is embedded ubiquitously

throughout an environment like a Disney theme park as defined by Don Carson. Add these forms of narrative to the ludic elements—the rules of the game, scoring, knowing what is needed to win—and videogames quickly become an important and quickly expanding form of performance unique to the circumstances created by the ubiquity of digital media in the early 21st century.

Follow the Money

The sophistication of game writing and game design has grown over the last decade to the point where the player's immersion within the game environment through complex storylines and empathic provocation rivals that of theatre and film. The appeal and enjoyment of videogames is further bolstered by the competitive, skill testing, and logically challenging ludic elements of the game situations. Within the last decade, videogames have surpassed Hollywood films in revenue and have also become an influential source of contemporary popular cultural narratives. This phenomenon was reported as early as 2010 by Kate Taylor for the *Toronto Star* that the Canadian interactive media industry "is worth about $4 billion annually and employs some 50,000 people" ("Canada's Video Game"). More recently, the 2014 Entertainment Software Association (ESA) brochure states that consumer spending on videogames and accessories was $21.53 billion in 2013. These impressive numbers speak not only to the financial impact of the gaming industry but, taken together, shows Canada's influential role as the third largest videogame producing country in the world. In fact, signs boasting Canada's position as the third largest videogame producing country were proudly displayed throughout the gaming section of the recent Fan Expo Canada 2014. I am not implying that the amount of money involved is the reason this area of research is important. However, I want to emphasize that the

profits are an indication of a larger cultural phenomenon. In the past, videogames were made based on the intellectual property of popular movies, like *GoldenEye 007* (1997), numerous *Star Wars* games, and Atari's famous financial disaster *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). Now, while many games are still based on movies, the entertainment industry also offers consumers movies based on popular games, like the movie *Doom* that was released in 2005 (based on the DOOM games that were first released in 1993), the *Tomb Raider* series, the *Resident Evil* series, *Silent Hill* (1999), and the recently released *Pixels* (2015) as a form of homage to early videogames. In addition to adapting game stories and characters, designers are adopting narrative strategies found in games into the narrative conventions of film and television (not to mention the increasingly popular trope of traversing multiple simultaneous realities in shows such as *Orphan Black* and *Star Gate* and movies like *Inception*, *Sucker Punch*, and *eXistenZ*). The *Doom* movie mentioned above went as far as including an extended sequence rendered entirely through computer graphics placing the audience in first person perspective to directly imitate the game experience within the movie.

Sir Ben Kingsley, referring to his role in *Fable III* (2010)—created, compiled and rendered digitally within the videogame using motion capture and voice acting—said "This is revolutionary for me. It has to become part of the actor's vocabulary. We have to join in…or perish" (G4TV). I agree with Kingsley that the entertainment industry and the ideas surrounding performance are changing quickly. Videogames are culturally and economically significant in North America, Europe and Asia, which means that there is a demand for an informed pedagogical approach to digital performance and a critical discourse regarding the field of videogame design and critique. I am joining the conversation surrounding this burgeoning field and intend for my voice to stand out as a gaming theatre scholar in the aftermath of the release of

Microsoft's Xbox One and Sony's PlayStation 4—both released during November of 2013. The stakes (and financial backing) involved in winning the hearts and thumbs of the masses couldn't be higher. In fact, *Forbes* described in spring 2013 that the giant electronics companies squaring off is a competition to win the "hearts, minds and living rooms" of consumers. The online article in *Forbes* by Daniel Griffiths claims "this may well be the last major console launch, and the last major head-to-head between devices expected to remain on the market for up to a decade by Microsoft and Sony. In fact, at the end of that decade Microsoft and Sony may well not exist in their current forms" ("With the Xbox One"). A lot has happened in the last year since the consoles launched including the alleged hacking of Sony Pictures by North Korea and the wake-up call over trolling and misogyny in the videogame industry brought on by #GamerGate. These two events plus other side-effects of the competition to win the hearts and thumbs of players are discussed at length in the following chapters. Early indications are that these mega-corporations and the videogame industry they support are not going away any time soon. The need for an informed and critically sophisticated playership has never been greater.

A Historical Survey of Performance Studies and Videogames

The genealogy of performance studies research on videogames often begins with Janet Murray's seminal book from 1997, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. In it, she traces multi-form stories back to authors like Jorge Luis Borges' 1941 work *The Garden of Forking Paths* (30) and the influence of early game designers like Brenda Laurel. Laurel holds the world's first PhD in interactive narrative (60) and wrote the ground-breaking book *Computers as Theatre* (1991). A decade later the field of videogame studies seemed mired in a debate between two opposing

camps: the ludologists who defined videogames by their game rules, and the narratologists who believed videogames are a new form of storytelling that happen to include ludic elements. Clara Fernandez Vara, referencing Gonzalo Frasca, writes "it was a debate that never took place, and was mainly based on a series of misunderstandings" (35). She explains it this way:

> The opposing sides of this debate were the so-called ludology and narratology. On the one end, ludology was supposed to be the study of games, and videogames by extension, with the aim of understanding their nature. Some ludologists seemed fervently opposed to the suggestion that games could be a new type of storytelling. The presumed opponents, the narratologists (or narrativist, as Frasca refers to them) approached games with the analytical tools provided by fields such as literature and game studies, considering them a new form of narrative. (35-6)

The fracas over this debate is exemplified by the essays collected in several anthologies published by the MIT Press during the mid-2000s including *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (2004) and *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (2007). These collections are composed of work by some of the leading theorists in videogame studies such as Jesper Juul, Celia Pearce, Eric Zimmerman, Gonzalo Frasca, Espen Aarseth, and Markku Eskelinen. These anthologies also attempt to mirror the interactive nature of their subject matter by including several email responses by scholars like Brenda Laurel, Janet Murray, Richard Schechner, and Will Wright who strive to defend game narrative in the face of the ludic onslaught within these pages. These theorists are responding to articles like Michael Mateas' "A Preliminary Poetics for Interactive Drama and Games"; here, Mateas repurposes (and truncates) Aristotle's *Poetics* to prove his thesis that games cannot and should not tell stories. Will Wright—one of the gaming industry's most successful and innovative individuals—

responds with: “My aspirations for this new form are not about telling better stories but about allowing players to ‘play’ better stories within artificial worlds” (13). Continuing from a performance perspective, Richard Schechner responds to Markku Eskelinen’s article, “Towards Conputer Game Studies” with:

> Eskelinen wants to drive a wedge between ordinary narration and what happens in a game. I don’t think the categories are so easily separable. Of course in a novel or a play, etc., there are “characters” and the story is predetermined for the most part (though in theater [*sic*] the precise way of playing the story—of staging, line reading, and the rest—varies enormously from production to production and even performance to performance); but also in apparently open games various kinds of narrations are involved.” (195)

As a theatre practitioner, scholar, and gamer, I am similarly surprised by what I see as a dismissal of narrative. I am concerned about the persistent omission of performance as an aspect of games that merits scholarly attention—the *moving* and *feeling*! This absence is what propels me to work on videogames through a focus on the player’s performance through the avatar and how that performance affects the player.

More than two decades after Brenda Laurel’s *Computers as Theatre*, and a decade after the “debate that never was,” the computational power of computers and game systems enable more sophisticated attempts at verisimilitude, narrative complexity, and virtual storytelling. A recent goal of videogame studies was to establish videogames as a legitimate art form as evidenced by the publication of books like *Videogames and Art* edited by Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchell (2007) and *The Art of Videogames* by Grant Tavinor (2009). This dissertation

intends to move forward from that position of establishing videogames as art and to demonstrate how the theatrical model can inform a fresh perspective on what games can do artistically. I demonstrate that videogames are a different kind of theatre—just as cosplay and many enactments of fandom are pushing the envelopes of theatre and performance practices. I use the concept of proprioception, coupled with narrative agency, to create a new way of looking at affect in regards to participatory narrative such as videogames. According to Dixon, "While there has not been total silence from theater [*sic*] and performance academics, the voices broaching the subject have so far been few and in terms of their impact, they have been relatively quiet" (621). Let this dissertation stand as a loud and clear voice from the theatre camp. Who better to comment on placing oneself within fictional worlds and role-playing? Theatre people play videogames too.

A positive outcome of the "debate" was that it claimed important academic ground for the study of videogames through definitions, terms, and rigorously competitive scholarship. Just as the pursuit of theatre in higher education was merely an extra-curricular activity on university campuses until the early 20th century, film was only considered worthy of serious study after the Second World War, and new media departments started to emerge in the late 20th century, so too, videogames are transitioning from being perceived as a frivolous pastime to a serious field of inquiry. I see a historical parallel for acceptance that occurred to the other storytelling media of theatre, film, and new media happening now to videogames. The "debate that never was" was instrumental in bringing critical attention to videogames and substantially quickening the historical interval between rejection and acceptance. This dissertation joins the flurry of recent scholarship on videogames from the less travelled path of theatrical and performance studies. In

short, I am describing the theatrical experience of the player through a dramaturgical[6] approach to videogames.

Much of the work contributing to the acceptance of videogames as a serious field of inquiry has been created during the last decade. This multitude of writing uses a variety of theoretical approaches from a range of disciplines. Some examples include Steven Jones' book *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies*, where he treats videogames as a form of text and conducts his analysis from his perspective as an English professor. In *Ethnographies of the Videogame: Gender, Narrative and Praxis*, Helen Thornham uses her training as a sociologist to analyze gender and power relations between videogame players. Books such as Tom Bissell's *Extra Lives* and Zach Waggoner's *My Avatar, My Self* approach game analysis from an auto-ethnographical subject position reflecting their backgrounds as writers. Books such as *Philosophy through Video Games*, *The Meaning of Video Games*, *The Art of Videogames*, *Videogames and Art*, and *Playing with Videogames* are written from philosophical and/or psychological positions analyzing the ideas these games explore and the affect they produce. Of course, the work of scholars like Lev Manovich, Sue-Ellen Case, and Steve Dixon cannot be overlooked in how they bring their extensive scholarship on film, theatre, and new media, respectively, to bear on videogames and interactive fiction.

As a case in point, Steve Dixon's *Digital Performance* is an excellent and exhaustive text featuring twenty-six chapters on all aspects of digitally mediated performance. Yet within his book, only one chapter focuses specifically on videogames (it is also one of the shortest) even though within it Dixon says that "the artistic and narrative potentials of videogames are underdeveloped" (609), that "videogames are a most prolific, effective, and developing form of

[6] The study of structure and interaction of representations in the performance of a story.

popular theater [*sic*]" (620), and that "videogames, whether console-based or online, embody the most expansive and successful display of involvement in theater-based concerns that the world has ever witnessed" (620). Dixon's focus in his single chapter centers on the influence of videogames on live performance such as introducing game (algorithmic) structures to live performance as well as narrative through exploration and goal orientations. My dramaturgical approach to videogames differs from his in that I am looking at videogames throughout this study, and specifically the performance *through* an avatar in the game world as a form of experiencing narrative—a virtual theatre. My investigation of the affective potential of the medium as a performance studies scholar with a theatre background is strategically poised to make an important intervention in both performance studies (including games) and theatre.

Methodology and Chapter Breakdown

Each player's experience of playing a game is unique and can never be *exactly* reproduced. As Grant Tavinor describes in *The Art of Videogames*, some authorial control is given over to the player simply by influencing what is rendered on screen by the player's movement through the game space (46). More importantly, the player's experience is also unique due to the fact the player's affective state involving proprioception and subconscious/involuntary reactions will be different even while playing the same game on multiple occasions.

My understanding of affect and affective states arises from the work of both Brian Massumi and Erin Hurley. I am combining Massumi's interpretations of Spinoza's investigations of affect—with his focus on intensity and how signifying affect (i.e. to codify affect as emotions defined by psychology) results in a paradox (Massumi 24)—with the work of Hurley who

focuses on the subjective experience before it is "socially readable" (Hurley 17) as emotion. To clarify this, Hurley reminds us that:

> 'Affect' refers to an organism's autonomic reaction to an environmental change; this reaction is a subjective experience, meaning that only the person whose blood is rushing to his or her extremities can feel it; this uncontrollable, embodied, individual experience may result in an emotional expression, such as a grimace or wide-eyed paralysis; the emotional expression displays the subjected affective response in a socially readable way. (17)

Since no two game sessions will be the same because of differences in what is rendered onscreen, environmental changes, and differences in the affective state of the player each time, I embrace a broadly ethnographic methodology that includes interviewing other players, recording game sessions for analysis, and my own auto-ethnographic game experiences.

A key component of my research for this dissertation involved videotaping six players as they were gaming and played back the video during the two hour interview portion noting what they observed in themselves as they played. For each of my volunteers, the research sessions consisted of video recording them playing for two hours. I then had them watch the recording of themselves playing and to comment on the reactions, if any, they saw themselves making while they played. I was present in the room as they played and also as they viewed themselves play afterward. I had broad open-ended questions prepared if needed but I generally let my volunteers take the conversation where they wished based on what they saw in themselves in the way of body position, gestures, and what they said during gameplay.

Elaborating further, I chose to not hold back information regarding my study to my participants. I did this for two reasons. The first is that playing videogames on consoles is often a solitary activity with the player's focus on the game itself. I wanted to draw from my volunteers observations they may not otherwise be cognizant of or articulate for themselves. I felt it necessary to let them know what I wanted them to watch for and to engage in conversation with me about what they observe in themselves. Specifically, I was looking for moments when they address the avatar as 'I' or 'me' or when they make physical movements, gestures, or expressions that demonstrate a proprioceptive connection between themselves and their avatar. While playing videogames alone, these moments are seldom noticed by the player largely because during these moments the player is most acutely focused on events within the game world. Seeing themselves on video is one step to self-observation, engaging them in conversation about the gameplay and what they were experiencing at the time is a further step to articulate those observations. Video recording the player playing as well as audio recording the conversation while watching after ensured those fleeting moments and the observations surrounding them were all captured.

The second reason I didn't hold back details about my research was that I felt it helped relax my participants to know more about the focus of the study and to become freer in their observations. I found, especially since there was a video recorder involved, that they seemed concerned about doing it right—whatever that is. When I explained we would watch the gameplay after and talk about what we see together, this helped dispel some of the mystery or intimidation of an unseen observer after the fact. I am aware that whenever a recording device is used, the behaviour of the people cognizant of the fact they are being recorded changes. I wanted to remove as many sources of intimidation as possible so I was open with what my study is

about, I chose people I knew already, and I hoped as we talked freely in casual conversation the impact of the third eye of the camera would be less.

In the chapters that follow, I combine this ethnographic work with a close semiological and (virtually) phenomenological reading of several narrative rich role-playing, adventure and first person shooter console games. I focus on how the game narrative unfolds using ludic elements of exploration and challenge completion in tandem with character development, and the use of cut-scene exposition from my own gameplay experience as well as that of my interview subjects. I am inspired by the strong example of Zach Waggoner's *My Avatar, My Self* in which he demonstrates the efficacy of using a well-positioned and informed academic voice within his self-analysis of games. These are further tempered with specific case studies wherein he interviews other players about their experiences. I have emulated the model set by Waggoner in my research here but with my own focus on affect and ideology conveyed through videogame narrative.

Affect theory, influenced largely by Hurley and Massumi, comprises the conceptual spine of the dissertation from which I explore several related ideas. The next chapter—"Digital Like Me"—begins by establishing the phenomenological relationship between the body and affect. Informing the affective response to online interactions and in-game responses to digital characters I start by looking into the work of Philip Auslander and Herbert Blau. Auslander reworks the concept of liveness—the fact that videogames, websites, and automated entities respond to us in real time and *feel* live—in light of digitally augmented communication. Blau focuses on the virtual promise of the body inherent within the use of avatars and telepresence; the feeling of presence in distant places through digital means. The player, embodied virtually as the avatar within the game environment, performs within both the parameters of the game rules

and the game story[7] to achieve the desired effect (and consequently the desired *affective* response from the player). I use examples from my interview subjects and my own experience to discuss the crossover between an empathic observer and an immersed performer. The concept of immersion is defined and how it informs the player's relationship to the game world. This involves a close reading of several games and gameplay by my volunteers to draw out both the traditional literary, theatrical, and filmic narrative techniques employed as well as the ludic methods unique to videogames used to enhance immersion, character empathy, and player affect.

Taking the concept of immersion further, the third chapter—"Cyborg Like Me"—focuses on the gamer's perception (and performance) of self within the game environment. The concept of the cyborg is a useful tool to discuss enhanced perception through digital means especially when examining the relationship between gamers and gaming environments and the construction of narrative in gaming contexts. I discuss the idea of the gamer's sense of self, projected into the game-world exploring the extended mind theory, and the concept of proprioception. Following Lev Manovich's lead, I view the videogame as an interface and address the construction of narrative as an algorithmic (computational) interaction with a database. In this light, interaction becomes a form of procedural narrative in the sense that the gamer relates to both the real and virtual worlds. According to Donna Haraway in her book, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, "a cyborg is a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine" (1). Gabriella Giannachi embellishes Haraway's definition in that the cyborg is "able to bridge the gap between the real and representation, between social reality and fiction" (47). I demonstrate that the material gamer interfaces with the database and the projected sense of presence felt by the gamer becomes part

[7] Unless the player is "gaming" the game. This can take the form of "modding" the game somehow or is intentionally playing against the game to "break it" or to repurpose it for her own unique use. This may also be read as a co-creative act.

of the virtual world. I investigate open world virtual environments found in such games as *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) and *Tomb Raider* (2013). The virtual narrative and interaction through the algorithms (rules) provides a sense of agency within the game world. Procedural narrative is created through an algorithmic interface with a database. The human is subsumed into the technological. Human interaction becomes algorithmic. The pleasure of augmentation is seductive. The post-human—augmented through digital means—provides the affect of intelligence, power, and speed unattainable with the biological body alone.

The fourth chapter—"The Illusion of Agency in a Virtual Environment"—explores the idea of how control over the narrative of a game implies input in the creation of the narrative itself. To the player, however, the feeling of having input in the game story—the *affect* of narrative agency—is an illusion akin to suspension of disbelief in theatre. The player *wants* to believe that her actions *matter* within the game environment and have a verifiable impact on the outcome. On some level, the theatergoer knows she is watching actors on stage. Likewise, the game player knows that designers have predetermined the options available to her within the game narrative. Even a seemingly endless open-ended game like *Spore* (2008), with the player starting out as a single-celled organism leading eventually to colonize distant stars with her now advanced civilization, steers the player down specific narrative paths each with a finite number of choices (though multitudinous in their range and interaction). In narrative-rich role-playing games like the *Mass Effect* series, the *Fallout* series, and the *Elder Scrolls* series, the illusion of agency for the player is the affect of being in control, of becoming immersed within the game story and environment, and of becoming emotionally invested in the outcome of the story. A sense of having agency within the game—influence over events and narrative choices that matter—inspires emotional investment and a willingness to immerse. Concluding this section I

look to Jean-Francois Lyotard's work regarding Kant's definition of the sublime in the context of videogames as an immersive art. Just as Lyotard seeks to explore the limits of conceptuality in modern art using Kant's ideas, I see Lyotard's ideas as a method of understanding videogames as an affective means to achieve sensations beyond the scope of normal human experience. This can be seen as a re-purposing of Augusto Boal's term "spect-actor" as a bridge between the actor as the one who acts and the spectator as the one who observes. Videogames cast the player in both roles as a spect-actor and instead of glimpsing concepts otherwise unattainable (an experience both painful and pleasurable), allow the player to feel that she is performing actions (virtually) that would be impossible/unattainable in her physical body and in the physical world as she knows it.

The last chapter—"Winning the Hearts and Thumbs of the People"—discusses the aesthetic outcome of affect and immersion from an ideological perspective. Some games encourage critical engagement with prevalent ideologies. For example the *Bioshock* franchise, inspired by the writings of Ayn Rand, is a critique of political idealism and utopian social engineering. The *Fable* franchise, a fantastic fairytale-like world, foregrounds the construction of gender and encourages experimentation with gender roles to the point where cross-dressing and same sex relationships are treated as normal or are even expected within the course of the game. Other games, however, reinforce capitalist individualism and US-centrism, including the *Gears of War* franchise and *Halo* franchise, both placed in fantastic militaristic universes with seemingly insurmountable odds against the protagonists. The *Grand Theft Auto* games offer a parodic reproduction of the underground criminal element found in major US cities. I take the idea further to include examples that encourage the player to engage the subject matter as more than a mere game and to incite real world actions in the player. These include *America's Army*

(2002), the US Army's free-to-play recruitment tool, and *Under Siege* (2005), a game made by Akfar Studios where the player is a Palestinian freedom fighter. How is affect created and manipulated to serve or challenge ideology? Can affect created through game immersion produce new ideological orientations within players? What means are available to the player to maintain a critical distance from the worlds represented on screen despite the fact videogames are designed to encourage projection into these virtual spaces?

The performing body (virtual or otherwise) within a game situation not only responds to game rules (the ludic elements) but also to the narrative and environment (narratological elements) circumscribed as a commodity (games created for profit by multi-national corporations) reflecting an ideological position (intentionally or not). There is a strong parallel between gaming and theatre in that an actor on stage follows stage conventions (*ludi*) to present a story (narrative that reflects an ideological position) to an audience in order to sell tickets. The affective difference between traditional theatre and videogames is that the audience (player) isn't only encouraged to empathize with the protagonist but to animate/enliven/act as the protagonist. Intentionally or not, whether to sell games and merchandise or to challenge (or reinforce) dominant ideologies, the immersive potential of videogames can be a powerful tool to win the hearts and minds of players in the real world as well as the virtual.

Gamer Grrrlz

The following includes details that I need to point out before we enter the main discussion. First, I'd like to explain why I use the feminine pronoun when speaking about generic gamers throughout this dissertation, especially since I self-identify as male. There are

three reasons. The first is that hundreds of years of academic writing has privileged the male pronoun as the reader and pursuer of advanced studies. What this creates is an illusion that academia is the domain of men. For example, if every book on mathematics addresses the reader as 'he' then the expectation is that mathematicians are male. I intend for this dissertation to join the growing amount of scholarly work that uses the feminine pronoun. These works stand against the historical imbalance and better reflect the growing number of women on university and college campuses around the world. I expect the majority of the readers of this dissertation will be women. Out of respect for my future readers, I address them as 'she' instead of a default male gendered address.

The second reason is to help bring attention to the fact women play and make games almost as much as men. According to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) 2014 industry statistics release, in 2013 59% of Americans play videogames, the average age of those players is 31 and women comprise 48% of those gamers (2-3). Likewise, according to the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) website the average age of gamers around the world is 34. Women comprise 40% of the gamers worldwide and that number is growing. The stereotype of the gamer as a lone adolescent male playing a first person shooter (FPS) is inaccurate. According to these recent statistics, it is *as likely* to think of a videogame player as a middle-aged woman playing on her tablet or smart phone or with friends on her Wii console. I do not wish to alienate the male readers of my work, but my use of the feminine pronoun is due to the fact I am intentionally writing for a predominantly female readership. I am writing for the female players but also for the up-and-coming female game designers and developers needed to right the gender imbalance in the videogame industry. I want this work to help change the videogame industry in positive ways. It is intended to work in tandem with groups like Frag

Dolls and Dames That Make Games, which not only support the creation of videogames by women but also promote women in the gaming industry.

The third reason is personal. My daughter, Zaara, is an avid gamer at age ten. She is growing up surrounded by videogames as her primary entertainment source. She often makes up her own game designs complete with concept art and dreams of making games in the future. This dissertation is intended to further inspire her and those like her to the potential of videogames as an art form. In many ways, I am writing this for her.

Next Gen Relevancy

Even though I have been preparing to write this dissertation for years, I waited until the winter of 2014 to conduct my game session interviews with my volunteers in order to coincide with the release of the Sony PlayStation 4 (PS4) and Microsoft's Xbox One. These new systems have immense computational power and are capable of rendering photorealistic images and astounding audio fidelity unlike any system before. They are designed to rival the experience of playing on high end gaming pcs except using large screen high definition televisions and home stereo systems. The marketing for both promises greater immersion through realistic rendering and flawless gameplay. The new consoles can deliver larger, more detailed game worlds and have the capability of supporting more complex and branching narrative options as well. As a personal side-quest for this dissertation, I was curious to find out if I noticed any substantial difference between the quality of immersion between the old and new consoles. In short, by asking my volunteers to play on the new systems it: a) ensured that the volunteers had a fresh perspective playing the games since they were recently released, b) allowed me to see if the

added computational power of the new consoles regarding photorealism or sound fidelity had any noticeable effect on the player's experience regarding immersion, identification with the avatar, or proprioception, and c) makes my research more current and relevant in the coming years for future readers as it will be more likely that their own experience of gaming will be on the newer consoles rather than the older systems.

My Six Brave Volunteers

As stated above I conducted six game sessions and interviews with volunteers drawn from people I know personally. Because the gameplay session time was precious, I didn't want to spend it with my volunteers needing time to open-up to a stranger. Using people I already knew, I thought they would be more free and candid with their gameplay and observations of themselves. The sample size is small due to the important fact I am looking for qualitative results regarding proprioception and immersion rather than seeking quantitative proof regarding the universality of proprioceptive projection or exploring similarities in how or why people become immersed in virtual spaces. Though they would be excellent areas to investigate, I chose to conduct a more intimate study to document the unconscious slippages when the player identified herself unconsciously as the avatar. The secondary reason I kept the sample to six is related to scheduling and time allotment. Each game session with the participant was a total of four hours (described below). Afterward, more than twice that time was needed to transcribe the audio from each session. Due to the narrow window of time following the release of the new consoles, to ensure my volunteers had little or no experience with the titles on these systems, I decided six was the optimal number for this study.

My volunteers vary in age from the mid-20s to the mid-40s, exhibit a range of education levels from almost-completed high school to post-secondary degrees, and come from a variety of occupations from academia, white collar jobs, and the service industry. Their identities are protected as per the research ethics guidelines set out by the Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC) so false names are used for the three men and three women who participated in my research. The game sessions were comprised of playing a videogame (of their choice) for up to two hours while being videotaped. When the two hours were complete, the video was played back and my participant and I discussed what we saw on the video in relation to what the participant thought they were doing and how they felt at the time.

Even though I had several major game titles available as well as downloaded Indie games for my participants to choose from, all six opted to play the same three titles. As a research project this may seem too tidy and coincidental to be true, but it is. Having both next generation systems available, some of the choice of games played was influenced by the opportunity to try an unfamiliar system. However, I did not detect a strong bias toward one system over the other in my six volunteers. Solange chose to play *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2013) on the PS4. She had some second-hand experience of the previous *Assassin's Creed* games through watching her husband but hadn't played the game or earlier versions herself. She plays console games occasionally and said she had been playing another game a couple weeks before our game session. Iris chose to play *Tomb Raider* (2013) on the Xbox One. This game is the first of the "reboot" of the *Tomb Raider* series that features greater realism and a heavier emphasis on combat than previous *Tomb Raider* games. The prior releases were more focused on puzzle-solving. Iris had played the original *Tomb Raider* games on PC during the 1990s but hadn't tried the new version. She admitted that she doesn't play videogames very often and had been playing

one of the *Lego* games with her partner on his PS3 during the weeks prior to the game session. She did this out of concern for seeming like a complete newbie to me. Daphne is familiar with the Playstation controllers and plays often. She prefers first person shooters like *Call of Duty* (2003) and often plays online with and against other people. She was the only one of my six participants who chose to play more than one game during our session. She started with *Assassin's Creed* on the PS4 and then switched to *Dead Rising 3* (2013) on the Xbox One. Ferdinand also chose to play *Dead Rising 3* on the Xbox One. He, too, is an avid gamer and plays a popular over-the-shoulder shooter most every day with friends. Interestingly, he was the one who came to the gaming session apologizing in advance warning me that he wouldn't be showing any emotion or reactions while playing. It turned out that he was one of my most animated participants. Specifically, whenever his character caught on fire he would suddenly lean forward and exclaim, "*I'm on fire!*" Trevor chose *Tomb Raider* on the Xbox One because he had played all the original Tomb Raiders on PC and loved the puzzle-solving aspect of the game. He used to play often but hadn't played much in recent months. My sixth participant, Gurmeet, plays often, both solitarily and with others cooperatively online. He came to the gaming session eager to play *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* as he had played and enjoyed the previous three *Assassin's Creed* games.

The next three chapters each contain two case-studies. These case studies are comprised of my own auto-ethnographic experience with the specific games as well as the research findings from the six game sessions and accompanying interviews. The next chapter—"Digital Like Me"—deals with the phenomenology of videogames and includes a case study for *BioShock* (2007) describing my own experience in the undersea city of Rapture and a case study for *Dead Rising 3* involving the reactions of Daphne and Ferdinand. Chapter three—"Cyborg Like Me"—

deals with the concept of the gamer as cyborg and the phenomenon of projecting the perception of presence into the game world. *Tomb Raider* is one of the case studies in this chapter and involves the reactions of Iris and Trevor. The other case study in Chapter Three involves my experience playing *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. The case study for *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* comes in chapter four—"The Illusion of Agency in a Virtual Environment"—dealing with agency and involve the experiences of Solange, Daphne, and Gurmeet. There is also a case study dealing with the online environment called *Second Life.* Chapter five deals with ideology and while using several game examples, does not feature case studies like the previous chapters. Chapter five does, however, contain the conclusion for this dissertation.

I'm On Fire!

Let us turn again to affect. Allow me to share two analogies regarding affect and videogames. When I teach an acting class or a class on public speaking, I find the students to be free, expressive, and creative when they rehearse but often become stiff as boards when it comes time to perform. When I observe this happening I have, on several occasions, asked a student to walk along a line on the floor. The class watches as he or she does this task easily. I ask, what is the difference between walking that thin line on the floor and walking the same line elevated like a tightrope? Obviously a tightrope is high up and the fear of falling is utmost in the mind of the walker. The fear of falling adds incredible pressure not to make a mistake, not to slip, and the attention to each movement and placement of the feet is intense. Changing that one environmental condition—altitude—changes everything about the walker's experience of the action. The situation is affected greatly. I tell the students that elevating this line on the floor

high into the air would be a tangible difference whereas being afraid to perform in front of the same people you have been in the same room with while rehearsing is only a perception. The students say it is different because when performing everyone is looking at you. That is only partially true, I say; you were not invisible to each other prior to now. What is truly different is the focused gaze the performer is under. This is not just scrutiny by others, which is most often empathetic and friendly, but self-scrutiny which is often overly critical—the fear of *failing*. This too, is an affective change in the situation. In this case, however, the environmental change is one of perception. Labelling what happens next as "a performance" changes how it is interpreted. The actions performed may be the same as in rehearsal but the experience will feel very different to the performer largely because of the self-awareness that this is the one chance to not slip-up, so-to-speak. Performance anxiety is very real to these fledgling actors and public speakers. The dry mouths, pounding hearts, and sweating palms are measurable affects arising from a perceived change in the environment caused by, in the classroom setting, a few words from the instructor. Of course, the students feel great relief when it is over. As experience of performing grows, the perception of the affect caused by performance may turn into what is received as a *thrill*. It is this focused attention and the *thrill* of performing that seasoned actors (and public speakers) can't live without.

There is also intense focused attention on your performance in a videogame when you are performing in front of yourself. Because the performance happens onscreen realized through an avatar, the performance is, literally, in front of you. You are both the empathic witness to the performance and also the self-critical eye trying your best not to "slip-up." Let us step back and consider how far we have come since *Space War* (1961), identified as the first videogame ever made created by MIT researcher Steve Russell (Juul 3). This first game was little more than

moving dots around a screen as was the first commercially successful game, *Pong* (1972). However, as soon as you tell the player *you* are *that* dot it is no longer such a simple matter. Everything changes! To claim videogames are simply moving dots around a screen would be like stating that movies are nothing more than light and shadow.

Space War features three shapes on the screen at all times, two triangles and a circle. You are one triangle and it represents your spaceship. The other triangle represents your friend's ship (it is a two player game) and she is trying to destroy you before you destroy her; and don't crash into the sun represented by the circle in the center of the screen. Now, this is drama! There is conflict, setting, stakes and, most importantly, competition and fun! The narrative couldn't be simpler but it is all that is needed to transport the player from one side of the screen to the other—from an MIT computer lab to a spaceship careening through space.

We are still moving bright dots around the screen but now they are intricate clusters of bright dots and the representations they create are immensely detailed. Current computational power allows visual representations to be photo-realistic, the narratives in some videogames rival movies and television in complexity, and for the player the affective potential of being both the protagonist and the audience can be thrilling in a way not possible before now. Videogames don't physically transport you yet you can feel transported, just as I don't need to actually have an acting student walk a tightrope to demonstrate performance anxiety. The moving dots on the screen coupled with what they mean change the perception of the gamer into a virtual performer complete with the focused attention and performance anxiety—what Jane McGonigal calls "*eustress*" or "hard fun" (32)—that comes with it. It is this *thrill* that seasoned gamers can't live without. It is the thrill of *being there* I felt when I was seven at *Star Wars* with my Dad. It is videogames, more than any other medium, that give me the feeling of being there, now.

Chapter Two: Digital Like Me

> The virtual body is an inherently theatrical entity, and there is an enormous amount of suspension of disbelief going on in relation to it. Let us make our own position clear from the outset. There is no disembodiment, images are still just images, virtual worlds are still clunky, and the web is still primarily a lot of Web pages rather than a *Neuromancer*-style, high-adrenaline, mind-blowing cyberspace of swimming databodies—at least to those who do not easily separate their minds from their bodies.
>
> Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance*

In videogame situations, the player is asked to not only empathize with the active agent in the narrative (the game character) but also see herself as the active agent (performing actions through the character as her avatar, even if not visible as in first-person shooters). The narrative stops when the player/actor stops providing input through actions and decisions.[8] This *feeling* of agency and the *empathic* connection to not only the player's avatar but also, potentially, other non-player characters (NPCs) within the game world is a strong indicator of the feeling of telepresence within the game world, the affective power of the videogame medium, and the role narrative plays in its creation.

This chapter looks specifically at the avatar as an affective conduit for the player. I examine the concept of liveness, telepresence, and the mind and body split debate as important ideas involved in creating immersion in videogames—the sense of being immersed within the game world and entering a period of *flow* in the sense of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's

[8] It is important to note, there are a growing number of games (especially persistent worlds in MMORPGs and online social games) where narrative aspects within the game world continue independently of input of the player, even while the player's computer, console or portable device is offline. With that in mind, the role of the player as the active agent in *her* individual narrative experience is still dependent on her input even though the virtual world appears to continue with or without her participation.

psychological term for a period of optimal experience. I discuss flow and immersion in greater depth later in this chapter. Of course, to feel immersed in the game implies a willingness to be affected by not only the game narrative but also the game world. *BioShock* (2007), is the primary case study, and I use it to focus not only on its now famous narrative twists but also the highly affecting environment the game creates for the player. The case study for *Dead Rising 3* (2013) follows using the findings from the games session interviews I conducted with my volunteers.

If this investigation into performance through an avatar in videogames were an elaborate puzzle, this chapter provides three important 'anchor' pieces. The first piece involves an update to Philip Auslander's concept of liveness to specifically include videogames and related exceptions left out of his previous definition. The second provides a more nuanced definition of immersion involving the concepts of the extended-self combined with Csikszentmihalyi's flow. The third piece of the puzzle is the differentiation between the various perspectives the player can have in relation to her avatar within the narrative.

Liveness, immersion, and flow are not new concepts to videogames but their application here is intended to move the larger conversation forward. Indeed, I saw Csikszentmihalyi present his research on flow in the context of videogames at the Future Worlds Conference at Brock University in 2007. Interestingly, that was also the first videogame conference I presented at, which started me on my interdisciplinary academic path applying theatre and performance training to videogames. His lecture impressed me greatly. Since then I have seen his work referenced by game theorists regarding rising challenge, maintaining flow for diverse play styles, and other ludic concerns. In this dissertation, I focus on the flow experience in tandem with projection into the virtual environment. Later in this chapter, I discuss the combined effect of

flow and projection on the player and this is the cornerstone of the more nuanced definition of immersion to come.

If this investigation were an elaborate puzzle, we have opened the box and poured the pieces out onto the table. This chapter contains the three important pieces described above and, like most puzzles, there are many other pieces also needed to make a coherent picture. The next section features a major piece without which this puzzle would be meaningless.

The Avatar

The word *avatar* derives from the idea of a god or a supernatural being taking physical form on earth. Steve Dixon calls the computer avatar a "graphical stand-in for the human body within virtual worlds" and likens it to a "manipulable mannequin" (259). According to Dixon "The term *avatar* derives from the Hindu scriptures, being the bodily incarnation of deities. The Sanskrit *Avatara* translates as a descent, the passing down of the gods from heaven to the material world" (italics original, 259). In a similar way, the player *moves and feels* in virtual form through the avatar in the game space. Indicated by Dixon's reference to William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* in the epigraph above, through the influence of the cyberpunk fiction of writers like Gibson and Neal Stephenson, the term avatar has gained special caché in reference to virtual spaces. The term aligns easily with theatre where the player suspends her disbelief to engage and immerse within the fictional world. The corporeal body of the player remains in the real world while the thinking/feeling projected sense of the player's physical presence is extended into the game world in the virtual body of the avatar. The player is cast as the active agent/protagonist in the game fiction through the use of the avatar as both sender and receiver of

information/stimulus. The avatar is the liminal space between the corporeal body in the real world and the fictional body within the game world.

At first glance, the projection of the player into the game world might appear to indicate a separation of mind and body as per the philosophy of René Descartes. Some scholars pursue this idea but it is not the approach I support. On a superficial level the Cartesian detachment of the player's mind and body is being increasingly undermined by the development of motion sensing/tracking interfaces like the Xbox Kinect, Playstation Move, and Wii controllers. All three involve moving the real body of the player to guide the movements of the avatar in game space. It is increasingly difficult to assume that only the player's mind is projected into the game world through digital means. Moving beyond the superficial and addressing the feeling of telepresence within the virtual game world on the level of proprioception (extending the sense of the boundaries of the body), I suggest that we look past the Cartesian vivisection of mind and body and I propose, instead, the idea of extended presence (both physical and mental) within the virtual space. This chapter intends to demonstrate how the player projects herself within the game world and show how, in doing so, the player's experiences also affect her identity in real life (RL). The next chapter picks up this idea of projection and advances it to examine the formation of a cyborg/cybernetic relationship due to the feedback loop created between the player and the avatar.

The player not only empathizes with the active agent but is the active agent. In other words, she turns from "witnessing the other to being the other" (Dixon 496). Herbert Blau calls this suspension of disbelief within virtual environments "consensual hallucination" (perhaps also influenced by the writing of William Gibson) and makes the connection to the body this way:

> If cyberspace itself is the consensual hallucination that is the consummation of virtual technologies, the hallucinatory consensus extends to notions of performance disassociated from the mundane gravity of the corporeal body. But just as cyberspace is unthinkable without the alphabetic and mathematical system of representation that supports and sustains the logocentricism presumably displaced, so the dematerialized figures are unthinkable without the bodily presence presumably vanished. (543-44)

The essential ingredient Blau correctly emphasizes is bodily presence and the sensations, feelings, and actions it conveys. Without referencing some form of body, even if absent, cyberspace would not exist. Ideas of presence, virtual space, and agency would be meaningless without the body in both virtual and corporeal form.

I want to emphasize the phenomenological relationship between the body and affect, virtual or otherwise, as a powerful means to not only expose players to novel experiences but through them, create change in the player. Change can come in the form of affective reactions in the player in the short-term but over time, these can lead to behavioural and ideological changes as I will discuss in the final chapter. Creating change in the receiver is not unlike other traditional narrative art forms in their capacity to affect cultural and social change. However, videogames differ from traditional art forms in the way they blur the distinction between audience and performer as both the performance and the appreciation of that performance reside within the same person. The player assumes a dual role of both protagonist and audience as opposed to other narrative-driven entertainments such as stage, film, written texts, and to some extent sporting events where the separation of audience and performer is usually clearly demarcated. The feeling of *being* the protagonist in the fiction can leave a very deep impression on the player

and beyond being just entertainment (I do not believe there is such a thing as *just* entertainment) videogames can be used to promote ideological positions. Again, the transmission and reception of ideology is the focus of chapter five. For now, returning to Blau and the need for the body to give meaning to the space within cyberspace, the avatar is an icon for the player's presence within the fictional world and also the site of the performance. The player, embodied virtually as the avatar within the game environment, performs within both the parameters of the game rules and the game story[9] to achieve the desired effect (and consequently affect) of *being* in a virtual space.

The Mind and Body Split

Before I progress further I want to make clear my stance regarding the Cartesian mind and body split as opposed to a theory unifying the mind and body in its experience of its environment. While the real player never enters the game world physically, based on statements made by my game session volunteers and my own experience, I see little difference between the phenomenology of a physical or virtual environment when it comes to the player's experience of it registered in the mind and body of the player/performer. For example, my memories and dreams involving moments from videogames or about game worlds never involve a screen or indicate I am outside looking in. They place me there, inside the fiction. Grant Waggoner, in his book *My Avatar, My Self*, reminds us that Espen Aarseth wrote: "The user assumes the role of the main character and, therefore, will not come to see this person as an other, or as a person at all, but rather as a remote-controlled extension of herself" (37). Steve Dixon, writing about the

[9] As mentioned before, unless the player is "gaming" the game wherein she is intentionally playing against the game's intended design.

work of intermedial performance artist Susan Kozel in *Digital Performance*, says Kozel "theorizes the virtual body as an alternative, yet still material body, inescapably connected to its corporeal embodiment" (218). Dixon reminds us that according to Kozel "It becomes more and more difficult to sustain a clear distinction between truth and falsity when the phenomenology, or direct experience, of technology is taken into account; when, according to Marshall McLuhan, the contours of our own extended bodies are found in our technologies" (219). My dreams and memories place me within the game world because I registered myself as being present in the virtual space.

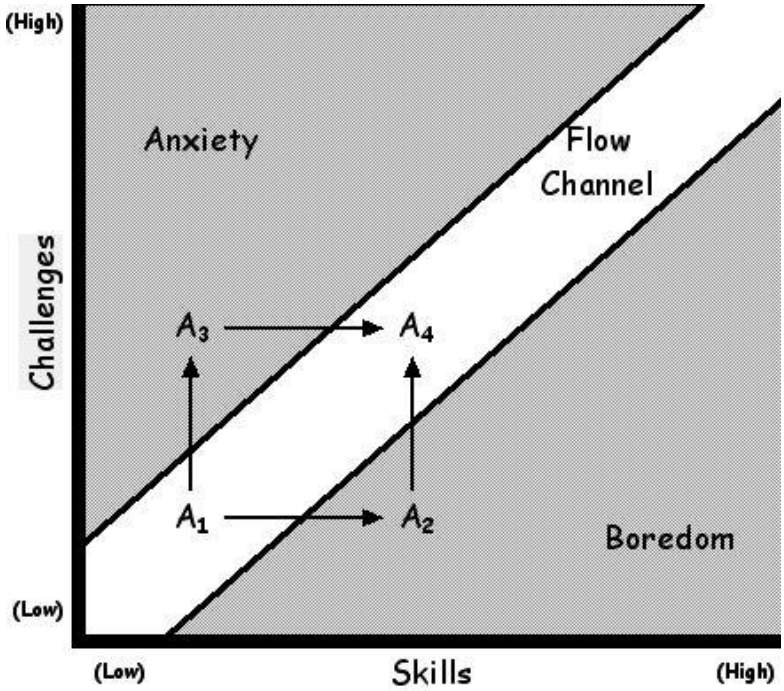
Imagine the mind/body split taken to the extreme. A game that is truly immersive would have the player leave her body behind and fully embody the virtual body. This idea reminds me of the dystopian vision of the *near* future in the movie *Surrogates* (2009) where people leave their real bodies at home and "commute" to work and conduct business in their surrogate bodies—essentially living *for* them. The disembodied Cartesian mind and body split invokes the image of the drooling, barely conscious gamer sprawled on the couch or hunched in front of the computer monitor while their highly active (and often athletic) avatar does all the moving and feeling for the gamer; often at the expense of personal hygiene, missed meals, and lack of sleep.

The differentiation I am making here is that the avatar becomes an extension of the player as mentioned above and that there is no disassociation between the player's conscious self and her body. It is true that a compelling videogame can cause the player to lose track of time and this can sometimes result in poor personal hygiene, missed meals, and a lack of sleep. However, I attribute that to experiencing a state of flow while playing rather than leaving the body behind on the couch.

Flow

As an active gamer I can attest to several occurrences of losing myself within a game and I see those occurrences as examples of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow—an experience of intense focus and high productivity—not an instance of my mind leaving my physical body behind in favor of a virtual one. According to the chart below, reproduced from of Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience*, attaining a state of flow is dependent on changing variables of skill level and challenge. The chart shows a range called the flow channel rising diagonally from low skill and low challenge to high skill and high challenge. If someone with low skill attempts something that has high challenge, this will cause anxiety in the participant and flow will not result. If someone with high skill attempts something that is a low challenge, boredom will set in and again, flow will not result. Ideally, flow is achieved when skill and challenge are in balance and challenge increases as the skill level of the participant also increases keeping the participant in a state of flow.

Figure 1: Flow Chart



From Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience
by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (page 74)

Allow me two quick examples of how flow works. Imagine my friend and I decide to both take up tennis at the same time. We are both novices when we go onto the court and start

whacking the ball back and forth as best we can. Our skill levels are equal so we are evenly matched while playing. We have fun, partially because we don't take it too seriously, and the afternoon flies by fast. We experience flow.

My friend decides she loves tennis so she hires a trainer and practices several times a week. I do not. The next time we meet to play she is much more skilled than I am. This afternoon of tennis is very different, not fun for either of us, and seems to go on too long. The reasons are: I am not a challenge for my friend so she quickly bores from easily winning every game. Likewise, I am frustrated because no matter how hard I try, my friend bests me on every serve.

Now, I decide to also get a trainer and practice rigorously. In a couple months we decide to try playing once again, only this time as tennis players who know what we are doing. This time we know the rules, we have developed skills, and we expect more of our own performance as well as our opponent's. Because we are more closely matched we challenge each other. We have fun but this time it is different. We are more competitive and more serious about the game than before. We are intensely focused and don't realize time seems to disappear. Flow is achieved.

Turning to an example from a videogame, I recently started playing a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) on the Xbox One called *Neverwinter* (2013). I had never played this game before. The first sections of the game, through simple quests, introduced me to the controller layout and how to move around, manipulate objects, and engage in combat. As the game progressed it quickly introduced me to more complex combat moves as well as more challenging foes to battle. The map quickly opened up to larger and more complex areas to explore—including the main city—and introduced many new levels to the

gameplay including professions, buying and selling items, and daily quests like player versus player (PvP) skirmishes. As I level up, so do the challenges the game presents to me. There is never a lack of things to do and monsters to defeat. Like the tennis example above, flow is achieved when there is enough challenge to not be boring but not too much challenge to be frustrating. Now I have been playing for a couple weeks, I am doing highly skilled moves in dungeons combatting dragons with several other adventures. My skills and abilities ramped up quickly as did the challenge which is why I have experienced flow on several occasions playing this game.

The examples of learning tennis with my friend and of playing *Neverwinter* are meant to demonstrate that the flow experience is something most of us have experienced at some point in some context and how it can be applied to games—videogames in particular. Let us look again at Csikszentmihalyi's theory but this time with a closer look at the player's projection into the virtual environment of the game space.

Csikszentmihalyi's term for optimal experience, flow, makes no separation between the mind and body. In fact, he argues it is proof of the unity of the two performing together at their best. He writes, "The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we *make* happen" (3). By voluntarily challenging ourselves to push or test our limits we achieve this special state where we sustain intense focus, the outside world seems to disappear, and time is transformed—often hours go by in what feels like a few minutes. Specifically in relation to the player's connection to the avatar within the game world, flow encourages a deeper connection between the virtual body and the player in the sense their mediated separation blurs into one identity. Csikszentmihalyi writes:

> Flow helps to integrate the self because in that state of deep concentration consciousness is unusually well ordered. Thoughts, intentions, feelings, and all the senses are focused on the same goal. Experience is in harmony. And when the flow episode is over, one feels more "together" than before, not only internally but also with respect to other people and to the world in general. (41)

The body, virtual or otherwise, and the mental activity of the player perform as one. In Csikszentmihalyi's words, self-consciousness disappears (62). This idea is further supported by Erin Hurley's statement in *Theatre & Feeling* that "To the human brain, observation and experience – or, put differently, simulation and reality – are, effectively, the same thing" (31). My statement earlier regarding "losing myself" within games does not indicate a separation of my mind and body but rather supports the idea of a unity between my mind and the virtual body of the avatar acting as surrogate to my corporeal one holding the controller. This is an apt definition of the term *immersion* that will be an important concept throughout the rest of this dissertation. In short, immersion is the willingness to project oneself into the virtual environment and to (be able to) suspend disbelief in favor of the fiction presented. At this point, I want to emphasize the unifying force of experiencing flow conditions during gameplay between the avatar and the player. Speaking specifically of the virtual phenomenon of projecting oneself into virtual environments, the philosophers Jon Cogburn and Mark Silcox, write:

> Through video games and online communities, we are now developing ways to spatio-temporally extend ourselves that until recently would have seemed implausible in a science fiction novel. And in the non-diegetic realm one may come to realize that talk of "losing oneself" in another person or experience is not

> metaphorical, but rather a literal description of how our extended selves interact, overlap, and combine with one another. (16)

Moving further away from the Cartesian mind and body separation, let us explore the concept of the extended self.

The Extended Self

David Hume was a Scottish philosopher writing in the mid-18th Century and a major opponent to the rationalist philosophy of thinkers like René Descartes. Hume felt that desire rather than reason governed behaviour and that instead of the existence of an essential "I" we are products of our collected experience, memories and impulses. Hume's ideas have been central to what is often referred to as the extended mind theory and is the groundwork of contemporary philosophers like Andy Clark and David Chalmers who delve further into the phenomenology of being. Their work, based on Hume, extends the collection of experiences to include those mediated through digital means. Jon Cogburn and Mark Wilcox in *Philosophy through Video Games* (13) sum up this reapplication of Hume's ideas to inform a post-humanist view of the self. They write:

> The argument to what philosophers call "the extended mind thesis" is very quick. The mind paradigmatically performs computational tasks such as figuring out the date of one's dental appointment and balancing one's checkbook. If Clark and Chalmers are correct, the brain often does not do this kind of thing very well by itself. Rather, the brain frequently helps the body to externalize the task so that one can exploit the environment to help, for example, by writing on a calendar or

> clicking buttons on a calculator. The computational processes are thus performed by both the brain and the body, working in tandem with the external environment. In these circumstances, it begins to seem completely arbitrary to identify the mind with *just* the brain rather than with the brain, the body, and the environment *taken together*." (13)

This view of the extended mind as a product of the mind, body, and external environment fits well with Slavoj Žižek's belief that "it is meaningless to imagine a human being as a biological entity *without* the complex network of his or her tools—such a notion is the same as, say, a goose without its feathers" (italics original, 19). It also resonates with Csikszentmihalyi's view of the self in relation to his theory of flow. Csikszentmihalyi writes, "The self is no ordinary piece of information, however. In fact, it contains everything else that has passed through consciousness: all the memories, actions, desires, pleasures, and pains are included in it. And more than anything else, the self represents the hierarchy of goals that we have built up, bit by bit, over the years" (34). The concept of the extended self is central to immersive videogames, that is, games designed to encourage suspension of disbelief in the player coupled with efforts to keep the player challenged in balance with skill level. They are made to make the player feel they are present within the game. Cogburn and Silcox write "for the same reason that it makes sense to view external objects in our immediate environment as proper parts of our thoughts, why not think of external entities like characters that we play in *D&D* or *World of Warcraft* as parts of our very selves" (14)? Considering that virtual space becomes part of our immediate environment, it is not only the external entities that shape our selves but the digital environments and inherent props within them that mold our experience. The mind and body move and feel as a unit. The boundaries of my sense of physical presence changes. My proprioception is altered. I

never cease to feel my real body or the fact that I am holding a controller playing a game much like a theatre attendee or film-goer never completely forgets they are watching actors on stage or a projection on a screen.

Taking Samuel Coleridge's traditional idea of suspension of disbelief further, I choose to immerse in the virtual world; I want to believe in the truth of the fiction. While never denying my corporeal presence my *sense* of presence is extended into the game world. My virtual body is my avatar in the original Hindu meaning of the word described above in that through its use I can experience a form of telepresence in that other world. There is not a disembodiment as the Cartesians espouse, but it is more accurate to think of virtual presence as a duality as Steve Dixon claims. He writes:

> Irrespective of the medium, performance's ontology has for centuries been virtual and simulacral, and the flesh of even the virtual performer remains too solid, and will not melt. Performers generally also share this perception, since their actions in recording images for their virtual body manifestations constitute fully embodied actions of body and mind. Contrary to prevalent critical assumptions, we do not believe the performing virtual body is either less authentic than the live, nor is it disembodied from the performer. (215)

Authenticity implies an original referent and though the performance may occur virtually and in a virtual environment, the virtual performer's actions and telepresence are simulations of the original.

The duality between the virtual performer and simulacral performer can be understood metaphorically using the pop culture example of the movie *Tron* (1982). In the movie, the real

world character of Kevin Flynn played by Jeff Bridges is captured and pulled into the virtual environment of Mainframe. Flynn's presence within Mainframe is virtual. Flynn's body, his physical presence within Mainframe, is at the same time a simulacra of the character of Flynn from the real world. The real world referent of Flynn informs our understanding of the simulated Flynn within Mainframe. Compare this to the character of Tron, played by Bruce Boxleitner, who is *only* a virtual character. Tron is a program and has no existence outside Mainframe. There is no real world Tron to reference and subsequently simulate. Tron is virtual while Flynn is both virtual and simulacral. Flynn, a User in *Tron*'s terminology, is like every player of every videogame, in that the avatar within the game is both a virtual representation of the player and a simulacra of the player within the game world. In fact, as a metaphor, the movie *Tron* can also demonstrate the concept of flow in that Flynn spends several days inside Mainframe but only seconds have passed when he emerges from the computer returning to the real world at the conclusion of the film. *Tron* is an Expressionist dream of immersing oneself completely within a videogame—both in mind and in body.

At this point let us return to the main idea of the chapter that the avatar is the affective conduit for the player. We examined the unity of the mind and body tempered with the concept of flow as a means to understand the connection between the player and her virtual body within the game world. Now it is time to change the approach to the relationship between the avatar and the player and give attention to the important concepts of liveness and its cousin, presence. Both these terms have surfaced already and before we can go further in our exploration of how videogames affect players we need to look closely at what it means to be *live* and how it is possible to feel presence at a distance or *telepresence*.

Bodies in Time: Liveness and the Virtual Aura

As I mentioned in the first chapter, Steve Dixon's book *Digital Performance* contains one chapter on videogames and I am hoping to spur the conversation about performance and videogames onward. In his twenty-six chapter tome there is also a chapter on liveness wherein he gives a concise summation of the liveness debate, or what he calls the "problem" of liveness (115). He sets up a compelling four-way tug of war between Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes and between Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan. This chapter is not meant as a critique of Dixon's book but as a leap forward from the fertile ideas he introduces. I see Dixon's problem as a paradox: inspiring further discourse yet without a definitive solution. In particular I drill down into the ideas of temporal and spatial simultaneity in light of recent developments in the areas of intermedial performance, the ubiquity of social media, and the aesthetic influence of videogames on contemporary culture. Motion capture, the use of video-mapping, holograms on live stages, continuous global connectivity, and algorithmic rendering of sound and images further complicates the paradox of liveness. Auslander has updated his work once already between the two editions of his important book, *Liveness*. Here I create a further update to Auslander's concept of liveness to render it even more relevant to contemporary performance, virtual or otherwise.

Let me begin by demonstrating how Benjamin's prophetic work, written in 1936, is still relevant today. The first section of his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" talks about photographic technology advancing to the point where it can keep up with spoken language. During that time, he was writing of the impact of motion pictures. For us now, it is only within the last two decades that digital information could enter the home fast

enough to not only carry spoken language in real time (internet voice chat) but also the moving images to accompany them (Skype, webcams, and streaming video).

Benjamin writes of how the more removed we are from the original art work through mechanical reproduction, the more its aura is dissipated. The concept of the aura is key to understanding Benjamin's focus on the life or soul of the work of art. For instance, it is believed by some that people have auras—unique signatures of a person's energy or presence—that emanate invisibly (some people claim to be able to see or read auras) from the body. In the same way, an original painting like the *Mona Lisa* would have an aura whereas scans, photographs, or other means of mechanically reproducing the *image* of the painting would not. The image is the same but would not contain the aura of the original. The affect of being in the presence of the original is missing. Images can be reproduced *ad infinitum* but not its aura which grows weaker with every copy. It is in the third section of his essay that he says, "every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" (III). Applying Benjamin's words to my own experience, nothing smacks of images devoid of aura like using Google Street View to virtually "stroll" down a street in Paris while sitting in front of my computer.

The third prophetic idea I want to bring forward is echoed in a G4TV interview about *Fable III* (2011) with Sir Ben Kingsley, Christopher Fry, John Cleese, and several other A-list British actors. In it they speak eloquently about the fragmented nature of voice acting for video games and how the skill to do it well must be added to acting training today (G4TV). This fragmentation is what Benjamin saw happening to the film actor's performance assembled from many performances at a later time in an editing suite. Benjamin writes: "The stage actor identifies himself with the character of his role. The film actor very often is denied this

opportunity. […] Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays" (IX). Now, concerning computer animated film and the 21st century's newest art form, videogames, the actor is alone in a room with a microphone and a page of lines. The performance is fragmented so much that even the alternating lines of dialogue within a scene are compiled later.

Let us take Benjamin's ideas and hold it in opposition to Roland Barthes' claim that a photograph is a "certificate of presence" (Barthes 87). In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Barthes writes, "Painting can feign reality without having seen it […] in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (italics original, 76). In light of digital technology, holographic projections, motion capture, and algorithmic rules governing what is displayed, the guarantee of the original thing *being there* cannot be assumed. Due to the fact photo-realism is achievable through computer software alone without the need of an original subject, photo-realistic images on a screen can be (and should be) considered more akin to Barthes' idea of the painter feigning reality.

Consider the difference between watching/playing Willem Defoe's character in *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013) and that of watching Sonny and Cher's "appearance" on *The Scooby-doo Show* (Episode 108: *The Secret of Shark Island*) from 1972. Defoe's performance was recorded using motion capture technology, which turned the features of his face and body into a series of coordinates to be rendered algorithmically during gameplay. Sonny and Cher's "performances" were drawn by hand and the only aspect performed by Sonny and Cher was their voices. The thrill of seeing Defoe in the game is similar to the thrill I felt seeing Sonny and Cher on *The Scooby-Doo Show* when I was a kid. However, the aura feels different between the two. It is not simply the difference in fidelity to the image of the performers but somehow the motion captured

performance seems more authentic in the sense of how much of the performer seems to have been captured and reproduced. As Benjamin would have it, it is more infused with aura. However, for Barthes, reducing Defoe to a set of data to be compiled and manipulated back into a form we recognize as Defoe seems far removed from the guarantee of the original thing *being there*. Of course, neither Benjamin nor Barthes played videogames or watched *Scooby-Doo* (it is possible Barthes did, but to my knowledge, he did not write on the topic) and this comes from my personal comparison of the two experiences. However, considering the fact that Sony's publicity machine promoting *Beyond Two Souls* invested time and money to inform gamers of the great expense and technological prowess used to capture Defoe's *real* performance, I am confident I am not alone in noting the affective difference between the two. It was important to Sony to make it clear the game studio didn't simply draw his likeness with a computer, giving it authenticity and distancing it from regular animation, i.e. how Sonny and Cher were drawn by hand.

Cross referencing the Benjamin and Barthes dialogue, let us revisit Philip Auslander's claim from his important work, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, 2nd Edition.* In it he writes:

> We are now at a point at which liveness can no longer be defined purely in terms of either the presence of living human beings before each other or physical and temporal relationships between them. The emerging definition of liveness may be built primarily around the audience's affective experience. To the extent that websites and other virtual entities respond to us in real time, they *feel* live to us, and this may be the kind of liveness we now value. (112)

In short, websites feel live and the affect of liveness is what we now value. Dixon holds Auslander's ideas up against those of Peggy Phelan. She says in *Unmarked* (1993) that: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance" (italics original, 146). To be fair to Phelan, her book came out when the World Wide Web was in its infancy and the first edition of Auslander's book was published during the dot-com boom at the end of the decade. It makes sense that Phelan's idea of reproduction belongs more in the realm of mechanical reproduction than Auslander's and his inclusion of digital reproduction and broadcasting. With that said, borrowing Barthes' use of the word *feigned*, it could be said that the feeling of liveness Auslander writes of is a feigned liveness we now value while Phelan joins with Barthes in mourning for an object that *was really there*—a unique performance that occurred and will never occur again. Holding the *feeling* of liveness by virtual performers up against a live performance with actors *really there* onstage, the difference is clear. However, intermedial performance's integration of real bodies with holograms and video-mapping—the projection of images onto three-dimensional objects onstage—complicates the affect of liveness. The performance onstage is a combination of real and virtual. It creates a unique performance, but the mix of real and virtual troubles the idea of an original referent and the idea of presence.

In 2012 I saw a production of Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Lemieux Pilon 4D Art's *La Belle et la Bête* at the Luminato Festival in Toronto. In it I saw several instances of live actors interacting with holograms. In some cases, the hologram was the image of the live actor sharing the stage. The experience prompted me to ask, can a hologram be considered present? What if the hologram interacts with—is even responsive to—the live bodies onstage? This is when I

knew the concept of liveness needed to catch up to performances like these. I see my project as an extension of the work of contemporary performance critics like Amelia Jones, Sarah Bay-Cheng, and Sue-Ellen Case and how they demonstrate that digital technology has changed the playing field immensely regarding not only performance but also how we negotiate our day-to-day interactions with other people. The inclusion of intermedial performance may seem tangential to videogames at first glance but the technology involved and the audience's expectations of what is possible because of examples like these forces us to re-examine the concept of liveness, both in real and virtual environments. In fact, I see playing videogames as a form of intermedial performance in that the technology and the performances made possible with it are inseparable. I address this further in the following chapters. For now, let me say interaction with virtual entities in actual spaces is not limited to witnessing holograms on stage. Research is underway now involving projecting videogame content in the form of holograms into the physical spaces inhabited by the player, not to mention the recent development of 3D headsets like the Occulus Rift and similar immersive technologies being developed by Sony and Samsung that remove any sensory reminder of a physical world outside the virtual one.

Let us turn again to videogames within virtual worlds. According to Auslander's logic, videogames respond to us in real time and so they feel live. With the increasing popularity and ease of creating and sharing screen-shots and gameplay videos on video platforms and community spaces like *Twitch* and *Upload* or the share button on the PS4 controllers, the issue of liveness is again at the forefront. Watching the television or monitor while a player is playing feels different than watching a gameplay video after the fact on the same screen. Live gameplay hails a different form of attention than recorded and shared screen-shots and gameplay video.

The difference was made clear to me when I had the opportunity to see e-sports firsthand last year at Fan Expo Canada 2014. It was the Intel Extreme Masters elite pro gaming tour *Starcraft II* tournament. At the Expo, hundreds of onlookers sat or stood to watch (it was standing room only for most of the final day) the two competitors playing while inside their respective booths. Their game was projected on three massive screens above them—the center screen for highlights and commentary and the two side screens to monitor each player's perspective. There were live commentators on a stage between the booths and the other competitors waited in an area behind the screens, visible but separate from the crowd. It was much like a sporting event where the competition is mediated through large screens above the participants only in this case, the images shown are of a virtual game space. It was immediately clear to me, however, that the images on the screen, through at first glance no different from recorded gameplay footage, were holding the rapt attention of the throng of onlookers because it was live. It was being created in the moment and the outcome had yet to be determined. It hailed a different way of viewing, not unlike other live sports broadcasts. The thousands of onlookers who watched the *Starcraft II* tournament projected live onto the massive screen above the players at Fan Expo 2014 in Toronto would probably agree, live gameplay emits a stronger/different aura.

Just as video archives of live theatre lack the aura of the original play—archival footage of even the best theatrical performances never fail to appear lacking an essential element—watching uploaded gameplay videos lacks the immediacy (aura) of the live game being played and rendered in real time. This adds a whole new level to the Auslander/Phelan split. There is something embedded within the liveness of the live stage play and the live gameplay that is lost when captured as video. Benjamin would argue that the aura is dissipated with reproduction.

Barthes would argue that the archival footage of the play proves it had really happened but the same cannot be said, exactly, of a virtual event such as a videogame. Revisiting Phelan's claim that a performance can never be reproduced, when considering videogames her insights seem to have claimed new ground in the virtual and become strangely entangled with those of her greatest critic, Auslander. Videogames *feel* live (Auslander) in the moment of playing as they react to the player in real time but the same loss occurs virtually (Phelan) when the performance is captured. The reproduced videogame footage lacks the aura (Benjamin) of being an original moment never to be exactly duplicated again. According to Amy Jensen, "Benjamin's term as it is applied in a theatrical context refers to the immediate presence of actor and audience acting together to produce a unique moment" (105). Jensen nods to Phelan regarding the production of a unique moment but here in the context of videogames the actor and audience are the same person embodied in the player. The player, mediated through an avatar, produces a unique moment. The aura of live gameplay is a form of virtual presence not unlike the real corporeal presence of Phelan's live performers or the presence of the original art piece as in the writing of Walter Benjamin. Building on Auslander's statement earlier, it is the virtual presence of gameplay happening in the moment, responding to us in real time, that gives us the affect of presence in a live but virtual world. The liveness feels real but the virtual world has no verifiable referent as per Barthes. This may be the kind of liveness *and* presence we now value both while playing videogames and, if Sherry Turkle is right, in our day-to-day social interactions. In fact, despite knowing they aren't real, Turkle's research participants have described interactions with robots and virtual entities as being "alive enough" (26).

Now that the conceptual pot is stirred, let us regain our bearings with Philip Auslander's six categories of liveness, which he describes in his book on the subject. Auslander's table from

2008, reproduced below (see table 1), may benefit from a few updates, itself updated from the first edition from the late 1990s.

Table 1: The historical development of the concept of liveness.

Type of liveness	Significant characteristics	Cultural forms
"Classic" liveness.	Physical co-presence of performers and audience; temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience of the moment.	Theatre, concerts, dance, sports, etc.
Live broadcast.	Temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience of event as it occurs.	Radio, television, Internet, etc.
Live recording.	Temporal gap between production and reception; possibility of infinite repetition.	LP, CD, film, DVD, etc.
Internet liveness.	Sense of co-presence among users.	Internet-based media.
Social liveness.	Sense of connection to others.	Mobile phones, instant messaging, etc.
Website "goes live."	Feedback between technology and user.	Websites, interactive media, chatterbots, etc.

Source: Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, 2nd Edition.* New York: Routledge, 2008. 61. Print.

Auslander's classic liveness covers what we would consider traditional theatre, concerts, and other live events like sports. The purest example I can think of is Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre involving only actors and audience sharing a space—temporal simultaneity and physical co-presence. A live broadcast involves physical separation but temporal simultaneity. Live recording is removed a step further with physical and temporal distance and the possibility of infinite repetition. This falls squarely into Benjamin's arena involving a loss of aura through mechanical reproduction. Internet liveness covers Internet media and, according to Auslander, involves everything from breaking news with a massive audience to small chat rooms involving only a few people (61). This is live streaming of internet-based media giving a sense of temporal immediacy. Social liveness takes us into a more abstract realm of liveness in the sense of *feeling*

connected to everyone through social media; the knowledge that you can be reached or can reach anyone at any time through instant messaging, texting, or cellular technology. This is a form of temporal simultaneity plus a sense of global presence through constant connectivity but, according to Turkle, this comes at the expense of also being removed from our immediate surroundings. Turkle writes: "A 'place' used to comprise a physical space and the people within it. What is a place if those who are physically present have their attention on the absent" (155-56)? The last item on Auslander's list is what he calls "website 'liveness'" and he defines it as feedback between technology and the user (61). He makes the important point that the technology is not actually live but *feels* live because it reacts to us in real time. He lists websites and interactive media as falling under this category. I would include chatterbots found in text-based chat rooms—programs designed to mimic human conversation as though they are real people. The ELIZA program from 1966 falls under this category and will be discussed further regarding agency in chapter four. Solitary videogames also belong to this group and perhaps Auslander might consider them an extension of interactive media. A more appropriate name for this category would be *digital* liveness as these are all examples of software responding to the user in real time. This concludes Auslander's six categories.

Revisiting liveness is important to understanding the player's relationship with her avatar and how playing a videogame can make her feel like she is present within a game world. The next section looks at several examples of digital performance and computer mediated immersive environments that fall outside Auslander's categories as they are above. This prompts an update of the concept of liveness to account for these examples; as well, a more accurate definition of liveness allows us to create a more nuanced concept of immersion and the opportunity to understand how the avatar acts as an affective conduit for the player.

Appearing as though she stepped out of a videogame or anime film, Hatsune Miku is a virtual Japanese pop star who performs *live* to thousands of screaming fans in real concert venues. YouTube contains a plethora of videos of Ms. Miku performing, many professionally produced by her production team. I refer to her as Ms. Miku for lack of a better form of address since she is a 3D hologram projection of impressive scale (sometimes more than six meters in height) and her singing voice is a composite of several voices processed through Vocaloid software. She is rendered in real time during the concert by a team of people off-stage while she sings to the music produced by real musicians who share the stage with her. Because she is rendered *live,* she can and does respond to the audience. No two performances are exactly the same. Similarly to the example I gave earlier of the use of holograms in *La Belle et la Bête,* Ms. Miku's performances do not easily fit under Auslander's category of "classic" liveness involving events like theatre and concerts. Again, can a hologram be present? The performance shares the same space and time as the audience but important aspects are virtual. This undermines Auslander's criteria of co-presence but not the creation of Phelan's unique experience. Benjamin could argue seeing her "live" gives her the aura of the original art piece but Barthes would be hard pressed to find the original referent.

Due to examples like *La Belle et la Bête* and Hatsune Miku I suggest a new category of Augmented Classic Liveness to deal with examples involving holograms sharing the stage with live performers. This category may also cover live performances that involve the use of live digital technology like video-mapping, video-scratching, live mixing (i.e. concerts given by DJs), and even intermedial performances by groups like Blast Theory, Theatre Replacement, and The Electric Company. These last three examples of intermedial performance groups involve the inclusion of live social media in their productions and are described by scholars like Kim

McLeod in articles like "iTalk, YouListen, WePerform: Participatory Media on the Canadian Stage" for *The Canadian Theatre Review* (2014) and recent books like *Performing Mixed Reality* by Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi (2011). This is an important patch needed to cover a growing rip in the fabric of liveness as we traditionally understand it.

Moving down Auslander's table, I propose to update his categories of live broadcast and live recording with the subheadings of Virtual Live Broadcast and Virtual Live Recording. The first includes examples of live streaming of videogame play and live virtual performances (like concerts or theatre happening in spaces like *Second Life* [2003]). The second would involve the recording and reproduction of the same through digital broadcasting channels like YouTube, *Upload*, or *Twitch*.

The categories of internet liveness and social liveness are highly intertwined considering that it is possible to comment on or link to virtually everything on the internet through social media. These two categories should be combined and broadened with special attention to the phenomenon of trending on *Twitter* as well as *Facebook's* newsfeed. This new category is simply Internet/Social Liveness and focuses on a culture of feedback and sharing. As for Auslander's last category, as I mentioned above, "website 'liveness'" should become Digital Liveness as his examples and mine all involve software responding to the user in real time. However, there is one more category needed.

Allow me to introduce the final category of Virtual Liveness. Building on Auslander's foundation I recognize an important gap involving online virtual spaces that use avatars as indexes for real people. I point to both social spaces without specific game premises like *Second Life* and *IMVU* (2004), and Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) like

World of Warcraft (2004), *Eve Online* (2003), *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (2011), and *Elder Scrolls Online* (2014) among numerous examples. I have seen plays in virtual theatres and held tutorials with students in *Second Life*. I have adventured with friends in *World of Warcraft*. I plan to become immersed in *Elder Scrolls Online* with new friends and allies when I complete this dissertation. I speak from experience that it feels different sharing a virtual environment with other people. Using Benjamin's term, the avatar carries some of the aura of the originating player. However, there is no original thing there, as per Barthes; it is a simulacra. These environments create unique experiences, never to be exactly duplicated, as per Phelan. What you and they do in the virtual environment is not wholly predictable (just like real life) yet it is all mediated through technology at a safe distance. There are varying degrees of role-playing happening in these spaces but regardless, everything within them is performed and witnessed by at least the player (as both active agent and audience) and at the most—in the case of virtual concerts, theatrical productions, large raiding parties, etc.—massive audiences of people through their avatars.

In short, building on Auslander, the new categories of liveness I propose are: Classic Liveness, Augmented Classic Liveness, Live (and virtually live) Broadcast, Live (and virtually live) Recording, Internet/Social Liveness, Digital Liveness, and Virtual Liveness. These seven categories and their updated characteristics are in the chart below (see table 2). Returning to Dixon's aesthetic tug-of-war, this brief tangent from affect into the concept of liveness is not intended to choose a victor but to use the tensions of their various positions to help keep the term 'liveness' relevant. Phelan's notion of how performance cannot be reproduced applies even in the virtual realm. Barthes' original object is further obfuscated by ones and zeroes. Benjamin's concept of the aura finds new purchase through the virtual presence created by avatars. Lastly,

Auslander's work is a valuable foundation but can benefit from the update I describe in an attempt to close the aesthetic holes caused by intermedial performance, the ubiquity of social media, and the growing impact of videogames on notions of narrative and audience reception alike.

Table 2: The updated concept of liveness

Type of liveness	**Significant characteristics**	**Cultural forms**
"Classic" liveness.	Physical co-presence of performers and audience; temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience of the moment.	Theatre, concerts, dance, sports, etc.
Augmented "Classic" liveness.	Physical co-presence of performers plus the use of digital technology.	Holograms, video-mapping, video-scratching, live mixing, intermedial performances.
(Virtual) Live broadcast.	Temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience of event as it occurs.	Radio, television, Internet, including live digital streaming, etc.
(Virtual) Live recording.	Temporal gap between production and reception; possibility of infinite repetition.	LP, CD, film, DVD, and uploading of purely digital performances.
Internet liveness/Social liveness.	Sense of co-presence among users and a sense of connection to others.	Internet-based media in tandem with Mobile phones, instant messaging, etc.
Digital liveness.	Feedback between technology and user.	Websites, interactive media, chatterbots, and solitary videogames.
Virtual liveness.	Online virtual environments using avatars as indexes for temporally simultaneous yet physically separate actual people.	Three dimensional digital social spaces as well as MMORPGs.

We have moved on from having websites feel live to us and into the realm of feeling projected into virtual environments. These spaces are populated by not only digitally live fictional characters (NPCs) but virtually live actual people who may be playing as themselves or

performing a role within the game fiction. Either way, they are performing and reacting to the player in real time. You are live to them and they are live (real or not) to you. Feeling live in the game world implies the inclusion of a feeling thing that feels in that space; a body. As mentioned earlier, Blau's "consensual hallucination" of cyberspace is "unthinkable without the bodily presence presumably vanished" (543-44). Cyberspace is meaningless without the promise of a body, virtual or otherwise, and that body feels live in that space or the space feels live to the body. Revisiting Massumi at the start of the dissertation, a body "moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving" (1). Let us turn now to *presence*.

Bodies in Space: Presence

Presence, like liveness, means different things in different contexts. Steve Dixon reminds us that cultural commentators use presence to "distinguish the material, auratic, proximal 'real,'" performance studies scholars use the word "to denote the flesh-and-blood performer, there with you in the same shared physical space," and he claims within cybertheory "its meaning shifts to include ideas of telematics and deferred, online presence, relating it to agency rather than to direct witnessing" (132). In this section I discuss the performance studies definition of presence filtered through an affective lens and its relationship to immersion. The feeling of being inside the game world while the flesh-and-blood performer is holding the controller is a form of telepresence that deserves closer scrutiny. The cybertheory version of presence is explored in the next chapter on the gamer as cyborg, where the telepresence of the player is a form of augmentation achieved through the coupling of biology and electronics. I discuss telepresence in relation to agency in chapter four.

I stated earlier that immersion is the willingness to project oneself into the virtual environment and to suspend disbelief in favour of the fiction presented. We have, however, moved beyond Samuel Coleridge's classic idea of how the theatre audience enters a contract with the performers to suspend their disbelief while the performers strive to do everything in their power to uphold the fiction. In this traditional relationship between performers and audience, the actors attempt to stay in character and everyone tries to pretend the painted flats are the cold stone walls of Elsinore Castle. In contrast, now we are looking at the relationship of the player to the game environment and her avatar within it. The player is placed within the environment as the protagonist but there is still an important reliance on the player suspending her disbelief regarding the fiction presented. This is especially true for narrative rich videogames that attempt to create immersive environments. The player wants to believe in the fictional world presented to her and that the game designers have taken all the steps necessary to provide a virtual world with a consistent inner logic and a minimum of glitches and distractions. This, of course, is not all that is required to create immersion. One can become immersed in a game of chess, a good novel, or a walk through the park.

I maintain that there are three conditions that need to be met to create immersion into a game world. The first is the willingness to be immersed and this involves entering the contract to accept the temporary truth of the fiction and suspend disbelief. It is always possible for a viewer to close her eyes during a scary scene in a horror movie; a reader may put the book down or a gamer may choose to turn off the console. Likewise, the contract is broken if the videogame (or novel, or play, or…) fails to provide a consistent diegesis. If an actor corpses on stage, the contract is broken. If the videogame freezes, the illusion is broken and the gamer is pulled out of the fiction by a piece of glitchy software.

The second condition is a compelling reason to engage. While reading a novel, are the story, settings, characters, and events new and interesting enough to draw the reader past the words on the page and into the lives they describe? What is it about *this* production of *Romeo and Juliet* that brings tears to my eyes even though I have seen (and performed in) several productions before? Why is the videogame industry so concerned with photorealism, motion-capturing of celebrity performances, and providing narrative choice to the player? These are all attempts to engage the audience further. Videogames have the ability to not only provide compelling narratives but also to allow the player to discover them through her actions, choices, and exploration. This is a level of engagement not usually found in traditional storytelling mediums where the narrative is fixed but is shared by recent forays into immersive performance by site specific and intermedial performance companies like Punchdrunk, Electric Company, and The Builders Association that incorporate game structures into their work. This changing engagement is the subject of articles like Randy Gener's "Electric Campfires: The Builders Association signals through the flames with messages for a hyper-mediated world" for *American Theatre* (2008) and the recently published book by James Frieze and Rosemary Klich titled *Playing a Punchdrunk Game: Immersive Theatre and Videogames* from Palgrave MacMillan (2015). It is interesting how these theatre/performance companies are recognizing the popularity, or at least ubiquity, of the type of liveness people are experiencing in videogames and how they are attempting to reproduce that type of 'virtual' liveness, and presence, in physical space. Josephine Machon writes succinctly on this topic in her book *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (2009). This new level of engagement, achieved through digital means, allows the participant (no longer simply an audience member or spectator) to drive the narrative forward through her input or actions, and encourages a deeper engagement with the narrative and

its outcome. The concept of participant driven narrative is explored in more depth in chapter four.

The third and last condition for immersion is to be in a state of flow as described earlier. If you lose yourself to the game, or get caught up in the film, or are amazed the last act felt like it was only a few minutes when it was really an hour, you have experienced flow. If, however, the game is too easy or too difficult, if the play is too slow or incomprehensible, if the movie is too cerebral or insulting, the flow condition won't be met. Simply put, an environment may be immersive like the annual Virtual Stage productions of *The Zombie Syndrome* in Vancouver are: surrounded by zombies, with fog machines, flashing lights, and soldiers ushering you to safe zones; but if you are texting your friends and talking about your day during the performance, you are not experiencing flow and are not immersed.

When these three conditions are met—willing suspension of disbelief, a compelling reason to engage, and achieving the condition of flow—immersion results. Videogame developers work hard to provide the compelling reason to engage and strive to make sure the game functions properly so as to not break the contract with the player who is willing to immerse. A large portion of why I play videogames is to experience the immersive environments the game developers have created. I crave the novel affect of being in new, bizarre, and exotic locations. Other media can provide me with compelling narratives but videogames can provide both the narrative and the feeling of being there. Presence.

The affective power of videogames depends on the placement of the player's avatar within the game space. The virtual body (visible or not), as a projection or expansion of the fictionalized corporeal body of the player, acts as an empathic bridge into the game world. For

example, when a player "plays" Markus Fenix in *Gears of War* (2006), the player's body within the game world is Markus's—his body is both his as a fictional entity and the player's as the active agent within the game. In game situations, the player is not only asked to empathize with the active agent in the narrative but *is* the active agent. Lev Manovich states in his book *The Language of New Media*: "Instead of narration and description, we may be better off thinking about games in terms of *narrative actions* and *exploration*. Rather than being narrated to, the player herself has to perform actions to move narrative forward […] If the player does nothing, the narrative stops" (italics original, 247). The abilities of the virtual body and its subsequent engagement as the identity of the player-character is learned and created through its use in game-play. Different forms of visual, aural and tactile bio-feedback unique to the medium of gaming are used to encourage this immersive engagement.

There are two angles from which to approach the topic of immersion: the player's perspectival relationship to the image of the character and the player's narrative position in relation to the character. The player's narrative position involves the perception of the virtual body either in the third-person or from a first-person perspective. In the third-person, there is a dualistic perception of the character because the character is visible to the player at the same time that it embodies the player's performance like in the example of Markus Fenix above. In the first person, however, the assumed (unseen) body of the character is mentally superimposed on that of the player's as though the player were in the game environment, not unlike the immersive site-specific and intermedial theatre created by the companies also mentioned above. Just as we don't watch ourselves interact with our real surroundings, in the first person a player easily perceives him/herself as *being* the character.

The player's perspectival relationship to the avatar changes the quality of how the avatar acts as an affective conduit. The difference in the quality of engagement between first person and third person is similar to the difference between Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's terms of immediacy and hypermediacy. For them, immediacy means the user is unaware of the technology being used whereas for hypermediacy, the user is aware she is using it. In first person, the player's perspective is the same as the avatar's (unseen) body. Specifically, Bolter and Grusin write that "immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented: sitting in the race car or standing on a mountaintop" (6). Third person perspective would fall under hypermediacy in that the avatar is always visible and the player would have the dual identification with it as both 'me' and 'not me.'

Regarding third person perspective where the player's character (and avatar) is visible, there are three levels of engagement with the image of the virtual body. The first involves the creation of a character that appears constant throughout game-play. This is the most static. The second level involves having a virtual body that changes through game-play based on choices and actions of the player. Allowing the player to see the outcome of her actions reflected in her virtual body is a form of bio-feedback and suggests a lingering sense of responsibility for her actions. The third level involves a body that visibly changes and whose performance is affected by forces outside the player's control such as age, injury, and moral compass. In reference to the second and third levels of engagement I place particular emphasis on games that use the trope of choosing between good and evil actions to affect narrative paths. The added level of moral choice is a powerful affective trigger and one I see used increasingly in large-budget commercial games. An investigation of affect and videogames would not be complete without engaging the

player with ethical choices that define her character's moral alignment and ultimately influence her narrative path.

It is important to establish early that there is a spectrum of tactics and approaches available to videogames rather than set up a false impression that all videogames affect the player the same way. To do so would be akin to claiming that all styles and genres of film affect viewers the same way. It is true that all videogames can affect the player but they differ greatly in how they attempt to create immersion. There are many variables at play when considering player affect and immersion in relation to the avatar. Not the least among these is the effect "camera" placement has on the relationship to the avatar found in third person games as well as the added levels of affect felt through the social aspect of videogames from online play and related voice and text chat to conversations happening within the same room during split screen coop and competitive play. Regarding the first, articles like Penny Patton's article from 2011 titled "A Matter of Perspective – The Importance of Camera Placement in Virtual Environments" for *Second Life Viewer*, the online forum for *Second Life* and "Seeing is Believing: How Camera Placement Can Make or Break Video Games" for the blog, *Analytical Otaku*, from 2012, speak to the attention given to camera angles within game design and the effect those choices of perspective can have on the game experience. The latter variables, involving the social aspect of game play and how that contributes and/or complicates notions of narrative, immersion, and affective experience for the player is the subject of disparate videogame studies carried out by scholars such as Jesper Juul and Sherry Turkle, among many others. These studies lead me to ask: how does conversation in the same room while playing together affect the experience of game play differently than voice chat during online play or only interacting with other players in-game without any RL contact? Each of these variables is worthy of in-depth study but I came to

realize that to investigate all these variables is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I made the decision to limit my research to solitary game play involving narrative rich console games and in doing so, I found it useful to hone my discussion of player perspective to follow in the next three sections using the categories of first, second, and third person perspectives borrowed from literary tradition. I apply those three categories to demonstrate how they manifest themselves in videogames and focus on the new variations videogames bring to first, second, and third person perspective storytelling. With that said, I do spend some time discussing "camera" placement in third person perspective largely because there are important differences in game design between "over-the-shoulder" perspective and "god's-eye view" games, and I do devote a substantial portion of the fourth chapter on the social aspect of videogame play and how that affects the player's experience as concept of immersion including a case study involving *Second Life*. With this caveat in mind, please consider the following three sections on first, second, and third narrative perspective in relation to the player and her avatar as a foundational survey to build on in the following chapters.

First Person Perspective

Perspective hinges on the player's relationship to the avatar—the player's in-game character—and how that avatar is realized in the game world. In literature first person perspective is identified by the use of "I" and revealing the inner thoughts of the protagonist. (i.e. I went to the store and bought some milk. I couldn't wait to get back home!) This is realized in film by having the camera take the position of the protagonist within the action—as in moving slowly down the dark hallway in a thriller—or hearing the private thoughts of the protagonist as

a contextual voice-over that only the audience is privy to. In videogames, first person perspective is most commonly associated with first-person shooters. It is thought to be the most immersive narrative perspective in games in that the perspective of the avatar is the same (or as close as possible) as that of the player's view through the video screen. The computational power needed to render a fully three-dimensional perspective on screen from the player's perspective within the game world wasn't available until the early 1990s. However, when first person perspective became technologically possible it changed the gaming industry forever. According to Tom Bissell, "the enabling of true, in-game, three-dimensional movement was as climacteric [*sic*] a development for the medium as the discovery of perspective was for painting" (100). The body of the avatar is (mostly) unseen but implied as present within the game world just like we assume/feel our real body is consistently present even when not consciously observing it. The first case study involving *BioShock* (2007) is a good example of a videogame in first person perspective.

Having the player mentally superimpose her body over that of a virtual body in the first person perspective encourages her to feel that the actions and events are happening to her in an immediate way. However, the downside is that the body is not visible to allow the actions and results to be shown to the player. Many games using the first person perspective use aural and tactile cues to signal when the virtual body is engaged in an action or taking damage.

Doom III (2004) is structured like a horror film and literally takes the player to Hell and back. In fact, it takes the horror film cliché of "don't go to the basement alone" to the extreme. Before the release of the game I recall numerous media stories about how detailed graphically the id Tech 4 engine (the software used at the core of the game) was and how much attention Id Software gave to create a highly affecting immersive experience through the atmosphere,

lighting effects, and interactivity of the environment. However, when I played the game, the role the body played in creating immersion was a throw-back to the earlier renditions of *Doom* and games like it. I found that the body is simply a means to carry weapons and a window into the environment. The character reacts audibly when hurt and the controller vibrates to reinforce the idea of being hit but the functionality of the virtual body is unaffected unless dead. Like the virtual bodies in *Halo* (2001), *Half-Life* (1998) and many other first person shooters, the body in *Doom III* remains fully functional until all the "health" is gone at which point there is no functionality.

A game like *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth* (2005) places the role of the body first in the creation of immersion within a first person perspective game. The Bethesda Software website for their game states "to increase the sense of immersion, there is no interface or 'HUD'[10] on screen at any time during normal gameplay. Instead, more intuitive methods are available for you to assess your condition, ammunition levels, and other relevant information" ("Call of Cthulhu"). What they mean by intuitive methods is that when the character of Jack Walters, virtually embodied by the player, sustains damage not only are the familiar audio and tactile cues present like sounds of impact and having the controller vibrate, but the character limps, moves slower, is less capable of performing tasks, and his vision is affected (blood can be seen)—originating from the virtual body of the player. Not only are these aspects used to give the experience a heightened level of verisimilitude regarding the physiognomy of the virtual body but the game has been designed to take the player into the mind of the protagonist through the use of insanity effects. Depending on what Jack Walters (and the player through him)

[10] Heads-Up Display. This is a persistent display usually found in the corners or edges of the screen that most commonly provides the player with important information regarding her avatar like health, ammunition, readied weapons or abilities, map location, etc. To use Bolter and Grusin's term, the player's view of the HUD while also sharing the view of the game world with the avatar is an example of hypermediacy.

encounters during the game, effects like feeling his heartbeat in the controller, dizziness, talking to himself, hearing voices, hallucinating, and ultimately causing himself injury can be experienced. The player's task in playing the game is to not only keep the character progressing through the game and healthy physically but also to keep him sane. Whereas the effectiveness of having monsters jump out of the shadows at you in *Doom III* can become repetitive and boring, the immersive technique of taking the player into the mind of the character can be highly effective. A parallel in filmic storytelling would be the difference in aesthetic approach between a splatter film and a psychological thriller. *Doom III* tries to scare the player through atmosphere and surprise whereas *Call of Cthulhu* relies more on the player's empathic connection to her avatar and engagement with the narrative.

Second Person Perspective

Second person perspective is rare compared to the other two options and in literature is indicated by the didactic use of "you." (i.e. You go to the store and buy some milk. You are eager to get back home!) Choose your own adventure books that require *you* to make a choice at the end of each page identify the reader as a) an entity that is both essential but separate from the story itself, and b) necessary to move the narrative forward through didactic prompting. Several early text-based games like the *Zork* series (1977-1982) had this relationship with the player. When playing *Zork* the rooms or areas you move into are described to you through text and up to you to imagine. An example of the text from *Zork* is: "You are in an open field west of a big white house with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox here." The text is followed by a

prompt and text commands are needed to spawn further lines of text.[11] In many ways, the early text-based games like *Zork* are electronic versions of the choose-your-own-adventure books. In theatre, direct audience address is often in second-person especially when "you" is used to make it clear that *this* audience is invoked, or specific audience members, and not an abstract generic audience.

Many of the plays of Daniel MacIvor and Ronnie Burkett exhibit clear moments of direct audience address that place the audience in second-person perspective to the world of the play. When I saw MacIvor perform *House* at the University of Alberta in the mid-90s, I remember distinct moments in his one person show where he would gain eye-contact with individual audience members and address them directly (in character). This was in contrast to other moments in the show where he would be simply face out and deliver lines that were expository in nature. In a similar way, I saw Ronnie Burkett perform *Tinka's New Dress* in Calgary during the late-90s. In his marionette theatre play, most of the show involved the play's several puppet characters interacting with each other but interspersed between sections of dialogue Burkett would launch into extended moments of raunchy and outrageous improvised material. Most of the improvised material was directed to specific audience members and made it clear the puppet speaking (Burkett was partially visible to the audience above the marionettes throughout and would sometimes intentionally reveal his face) was in the same space as the audience. This implied the audience was either part of the fictional world of the play or the puppets were "live" in the real world of the audience. This intentional blurring of fiction and reality, like MacIvor did in *House*, was achieved through the use of direct address of the audience in second-person.

[11] *Zork* is available to play free online at thcnet.net/zork/index.php.

Cinema has few pure examples of second person perspective but experiments like the 1947 film noir, *Lady in the Lake,* exist as curious exceptions. In this film the camera moves through the film's locations as though it is the protagonist and the characters directly address the camera (and audience) as the (silent) character of Marlowe. In contemporary games like *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (2006) and *Fallout 3* (2008), the dialogue trees with their direct address of you, the player/character, plus the didactic approach of the language is much more akin to second person perspective than the dialogue choices further interpreted through the (visible) character in games like *Mass Effect* (2007).

Third Person Perspective

Third person perspective has the player witness the protagonist from a critical distance. (i.e. Dave went to the store to buy some milk. He seemed eager to get back home.) In literature the protagonist's actions are observed by the reader and the author's interpretations may be shared as well. Most movies use this narrative perspective. In videogames, third person perspective comes in several forms: over-the-shoulder games like the second case study at the end of this chapter involving *Dead Rising 3* (2014); God's-eye-view games like *The Sims* (2000), *Civilization V* (2010), and *Starcraft II* (2010); and 2D scrollers which have no direct parallel in literature or film like *Braid* (2008), *Limbo* (2010), and *Guacamelee* (2013). Two essential differences set the third person perspective apart from first and second person perspectives: the avatar is visible to the player (even if abstract and/or a group) and the player is encouraged to not only identify *as* the avatar but also empathize *with* her/him/it as a separate entity.

It is important to acknowledge that many games change narrative perspective within the course of the game experience. Sometimes this works to great advantage like in the *Gears of War* series (2006-2013)—the gameplay is over-the-shoulder third person but many of the cut scenes are presented in first person, encouraging the player to feel an even closer connection to the principle characters of Fenix and Dom. In the case of *Doom III*—a game not known for its narrative sophistication—the cut-scenes actually work to alienate the player from the avatar by switching from the intimate first person perspective during gameplay to a more distanced third person perspective during the cinematics. The issue of cut-scenes, specifically, will be addressed in chapter four. Regarding *Doom III*, I find it jarring to zoom back into the head of the protagonist at the end of the cut-scenes. In contrast to games that switch narrative stance, games like *BioShock* (first person) and *Dead Space* (2008) (third person) maintain a single perspective throughout the game—even in their inventory systems—that supports the player's immersive bond with the avatar. To complicate matters further, some games give the player the choice between first- or third- person perspectives like *Fallout 3* and *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

Among games that use the third-person perspective there are some important variations that complicate the idea of simply viewing the body of the protagonist within the three dimensional environment. Some allow the player to design the look of the face and body, some show visual changes to the body as the game progresses, and others use an unchanging body as the player's instrument to interact with the game environment. Games in this last category with a predetermined and unchanging body like the *Splinter Cell* (2002-2013) and *Tomb Raider* (1996-2014) series' allow the player to witness the body perform skillful and acrobatic moves. However, as a site of information, this category contains the least information. Like the first person shooters mentioned above, the body is fully functional regardless of health and stops

functioning only when dead. The player has little or no input into the appearance of the character and, like watching a film, is encouraged to derive pleasure from objectifying and possessing the virtual body. This is especially true in the case of Lara Croft and I return to discuss her at length later in the dissertation.

Games like *World of Warcraft (WoW)* (2004-present) and the *Elder Scrolls* series (2002-present) involve virtual bodies that change very little during gameplay except for visible accessories like weapons, clothing, and armor; however they offer a large palette of options to customize the look of the character at the start of the game. In my own experience, the immersive value of personalizing my character allows me to feel a strong sense of connection and ownership of the character. I see the thrill of choosing the appearance of my avatar as having a parallel to playing with dolls and imagining them in different situations, being them to a certain degree, and exploring pretend situations. This is especially amplified by games like the *Fable* series that reward players with experimenting with different looks, costumes, or even gender roles.[12] These dolls are virtual play things to be dressed and manipulated and also an index for the player within the game world for other players to interact/play with. The player becomes known by her chosen online identity with her chosen features and abilities. There is a further blending of the pretend play of dolls, customization, and choice of virtual characters, and the real body of the player/participant in the activity known as cosplay. This, too, is a ripe topic for further research in light of articles like "The Effects of Avatar-based Customization on Player Identification" by Selen Turkay and Charles Kinzer in the *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (2014) and Anne Peirson-Smith's "Fashioning the Fantastical Self: An Examination of the Cosplay Dress-up Phenomenon in Southeast Asia" for *Fashion*

[12] The topic of playing with gender in *Fable* is discussed further in chapter five.

Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture (2013). The point here is that a close connection is initially created by an investment in the appearance of the character for various personal reasons and reinforced during gameplay through the interaction with others in the game environment. The image of the character is the visual index for the telepresence of the player. Once created and engaged with the gameplay, the character is usually visually static. Further immersion is derived according to how the player interacts with others online. I turn now to third person games that employ dynamic bodies within their game design.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (2004) features an elaborate story about Carl Johnson's (CJ's) quest to unravel his mother's murder while negotiating his own survival between rival gangs on one side and staying out of trouble with the police on the other. *GTA: San Andreas* uses several techniques possible only in interactive games. On an abstract level, the game keeps track of several aspects of Carl's social and physical profiles like sex appeal, wealth, and most importantly, respect. Changes to Carl's strength, fitness, clothes, and body adornment choices are represented immediately and also affect gameplay. If the player chooses to have Carl eat several pizzas in a short time, the outcome of this action is immediately shown visibly in that he grows noticeably fat and flabby. In addition, Carl's performance is also affected in that he can't run as fast and tires easily. A form of virtual bio-feedback is achieved and a lingering cause and effect relationship to the choices of the player reinforces the symbiosis between Carl and the player. In Soraya Murray's article "High Art/Low Life: the Art of Playing *Grand Theft Auto,*" she writes:

> With *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, a player is responsible to an increased degree for a simulated body that requires regular food and exercise, and that can be clothed and adorned with tattoos and hairstyles. This is a body that shifts with

> varying stimuli such as a healthy versus junk food diet. […] This is a body that adapts based on aerobic versus strength-building exertions, whose driving skills and attractiveness to the opposite sex increase with experience, and whose muscles swell with exercise, or whose stomach bloats with overeating. (95-6)

I agree with Murray in that she sees the changes in the avatar body of Carl as "satirically emulating the social pressures associated with superficial appearances and materialism" (96) but I also see the body as a complex locus of feedback to the player's choices. Here we have a much more nuanced relationship between the player and her dynamic avatar in that many factors are at work that affect the gameplay, the player's experience of the game, and the narrative possibilities open to her. The outcome of some choices are known immediately like available clothing choices in the shops or what missions are unlocked whereas others take longer to be felt such as whether Carl is attractive enough to have a relationship and what narrative possibilities that opens up.

Compared to when I have played videogames with static avatars, I was surprised by how this level of complexity involved me on a deeper level. I felt more *attached* to Carl on a personal level. The verisimilitude attempted by the game designers in how the virtual body of Carl reacts to the player's choices during gameplay, coupled with the freely exploratory nature of the game environment, created, for me, a highly interactive and immersive experience. Normally mundane activities like eating, buying clothes, changing hairstyles, and getting tattoos are precisely the aspects of individuality that I connected with on a personal level. The fact that these choices affect the game narrative reinforces their importance in this game touted as a parody of American society. Elaborating further on this, chapter five features a substantial section devoted to the *Grand Theft Auto* games and whether they function as parody or, instead, promote a

cynical neoliberal perspective on late capitalist America. For our purposes here discussing the player's relationship to the avatar, I see Carl Johnson as a Sim from the wrong side of the tracks who is prone to violence and belongs to a gang. However, Carl has what other Sims do not: a compelling pre-authored story.

Fable (2004) shares many similarities with *GTA: San Andreas* in that the player has the ability to make choices regarding what and how often the character eats, what she or he wears, and what hairstyles and tattoos she or he has. These choices, like those involving Carl Johnson, affect the character's abilities to succeed in the game and how the game reacts to the character. In addition, the structure of the game is also similar in that the player can choose to accept quests or freely explore the game environment. Where *Fable* and *GTA: San Andreas* differ is how in *Fable* the character must make choices between good and evil actions. The player knows if the actions are meant to be good or evil immediately by seeing how her avatar's morality meter moves and, at various stages, how her alignment affects her appearance. Some examples of evil actions are eating live chicks or killing innocent villagers, whereas doing benevolent tasks and completing good quests, will affect the morality meter positively. In this way, *Fable* is similar to *Knights of the Old Republic* (2003) in that good or evil choices and actions change the game experience and to some extent the narrative arch of the game. What's more, the body is the visual indicator of the ethical alignment. The more good or evil the character is, the more good or evil the character appears. In *Knights* an extremely good character stands straight, seems brighter, and has a subtle halo above his or her head. An evil character looks pale, cold, hunched/distorted, and if evil enough, will leave a trail of flames. In *Fable*, the visual difference between good and evil is represented both on the person of the character through the appearance of either a halo or horns and also in how other characters react to him or her. As the game

progresses, depending on the deeds accomplished and actions the character takes, characters in the game will either fall in love with her or him or run away in fear. The outcomes of physical and ethical choices within the game are carried with the body as a means of communicating game progress to the player.

The fact that the physical and ethical choices also affect the character's "social" life is an aspect of player engagement that is of particular interest. Ethical choices in game narrative engage the player on an intellectually higher level and encourage immersion not only due to the promise of physical outcomes but also from more abstract rewards like charity, graciousness and honour. Referring to Kierkegaard's opposition of aesthetic and ethical existence as applied to game situations, Richard Stivers reminds us that:

> Aesthetic existence is principally about enjoyment: to live for the moment, to lose oneself in the pleasure of the moment is the aesthete's goal. […] A purely aesthetical approach to life, Kierkegaard observes, is ethically indifferent to others. When one is not ethically bound to others, one is free to relate to them as if in a game, attempting to gain the advantage. (10)

This aesthetic approach to life can be used to define "the dark side" within the Star Wars mythos found in *Knights*. Stivers continues and defines ethical existence by writing:

> When one is ethically victorious, one overcomes selfishness. […] For Kierkegaard there is no freedom without responsibility and moral authority because humans are naturally selfish. Freedom involves conflict, not the least of which is the conflict with excessive authority. Too little and too much authority diminish the possibility of freedom. (10)

Giving in to every whim without restraint in the real world will result in a removal of individual freedom. Acting without restraint in a game like *Knights* and *Fable* likewise reduces the options available to the player. Learning restraint, weighting options, making ethical decisions involves the player in ways most games that came before them did not. Accomplishing goals using methods that are understood as "right" and "wrong" provides a thrill either from "being bad" or from "doing the right thing." Speaking from my own experience, I often enjoy playing a game more than once using characters that are intentionally "good" or "bad" and taking enjoyment from how the experience of the game differs between the two. The point I wish to emphasize, however, is not just that this technique encourages further gameplay but that the game designers for *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Fable* experimented with the body as a site of visual indication of ethical alignment; an important advancement in game design and in strengthening the player's engagement with her avatar. The body is used as a visual index for the character's moral compass and ethical inner life resulting from the player's input.

Ethical choices, immersion, and affecting environments tie in well with the following two case studies. The first focuses on my auto-ethnographic account of playing *BioShock* and the second case study is composed from the ethnographic research arising from two of my volunteer subjects playing *Dead Rising 3. BioShock* is the first case study because I often refer to this game throughout this dissertation. It is an important reference for this chapter because it speaks to narrative perspective, proprioception, and the projection of the player into a highly affective environment. It is also important for later chapters regarding issues of player agency and the engagement of ideology through affective means. The second case study featuring *Dead Rising 3* reveals some important moments of proprioceptive slippage between my volunteers and their

avatars. These are demonstrated by verbal or physical indications that the boundaries of their corporeal and virtual bodies were, at times, combined or superimposed.

Case Study One: *BioShock*

The original *BioShock* videogame, developed by 2K Games and released in 2007 (the first of the current trilogy), is critically acclaimed and highly innovative compared to other games available at the time. This is demonstrated by the fact it achieved one of the highest scores ever on Metacritic.com and won Xbox 360 Game of the Year for 2007 ("BioShock"). Ken Levine, the lead writer and creative mind behind the concept of the *BioShock* games, is known for taking socio/political philosophical concepts and pushing them to dystopian extremes in previous games like the *System Shock* series (1994-1999) and *Deus Ex* (2000). Most reviews and promotional materials refer to the fact the *BioShock* universe is a dystopian vision based on the extreme individualism of Ayn Rand. (I will revisit the ideological critique within *BioShock* in chapter five.)

The videogame begins aboard an airplane flying above the Atlantic Ocean in 1960. The player is cast as the character of Jack and the world is seen in first person through Jack's perspective. The game is consistently in first person perspective throughout including cut-scenes. Within moments the plane crashes into the ocean. Jack survives and swims to a nearby artificial island. He discovers the island is a docking bay for bathyspheres (small spherical deep-sea submersibles) built to traverse between the ocean's surface and the undersea city of Rapture.

The city of Rapture is a utopian creation of Andrew Ryan. As the name implies from Christian mythology, the city is a place of ascension (or to descend in this case, under the ocean)

for the chosen few escaping the bonds of mundane mortal existence on earth. Ken Levine, in an interview from 2007 said the character of Andrew Ryan—an anagram of Ayn Rand—is a "combination of several historical figures together, like Howard Hughes and Ayn Rand" (Gillen). Ryan built the underwater city to create a haven for science and discovery free from governmental and theological control and interference. The grandiose architecture and ubiquitous inspirational art is heavily influenced by the Art Deco movement reflecting Ryan's utopian vision for a future led by unhindered innovation. Construction began in the 1940s, prospered during the 1950s but now, in 1960, the utopia has turned to dystopia. The remaining population are nearly all insane from unchecked gene-splicing to give themselves extraordinary powers like telekinesis and pyrokinesis. They are known as *splicers*. The city is falling apart physically from an all-out civil war between the forces loyal to Ryan and those following the leader of the workers rebellion, Fontaine.

Encouraged by the character of Atlas via a two-way radio, the player, as Jack, rides a bathysphere to Rapture. Atlas claims Jack's family is being held captive by Andrew Ryan within Rapture and that he, Atlas, will help Jack save his family by guiding him through the crumbling city and overcoming the ferocious splicers along the way. Atlas instructs Jack to use a plasmid—the self-administered method of altering one's own DNA (gene-splicing)—in order to become imbued with fantastic powers to better defend himself and save his family. An important detail about the game premise and its mechanics is that plasmids are created through the use of a substance called *ADAM*. The Christian reference is intentional considering the accompanying mana-like substance needed to use the abilities provided by ADAM is called *EVE*. ADAM is created through the combined metabolism formed from the symbiotic relationship of a rare sea-slug and pre-pubescent girls. These little girls are called *Little Sisters*. They roam Rapture with

large syringes collecting the raw material for ADAM from the corpses strewn around from past battles. The Little Sisters are small and have the ability to appear and disappear via the ubiquitous system of air ducts throughout the city. These Little Sisters display the unusual symptoms of glowing eyes, pale skin, and are impervious to normal injury because of the slug living within them. What is more, each Little Sister is guarded by a *Big Daddy*. The sole purpose of the Big Daddys is to protect the Little Sisters from being *harvested* by the roaming splicers—or Jack! They make no distinction between the two. The Big Daddys are immensely powerful but won't attack unless they or the Little Sisters are attacked. The clincher is, without ADAM, Jack (as well as the splicers) cannot collect plasmids (abilities) and subsequently become more powerful against the increasingly powerful foes found in each new area. The Little Sisters can't be harvested until their Big Daddy is killed. Atlas, via the radio, encourages Jack to kill the Little Sisters (he claims the symbiotic relationship with the slug has made them into monsters) and harvest all the ADAM they contain, thus becoming powerful faster and saving his family quicker. Another character, Dr. Brigid Tanenbaum, pleads with Jack (also over the radio) to *save* the little girls by using a serum freeing the girls from the slug. However, this means Jack will receive only half of the ADAM. Atlas claims Dr. Tanenbaum can't be trusted and that she was instrumental in the discovery of the sea-slug and the creation of the Little Sisters using orphaned girls. I will return to discuss the ethical choice regarding saving or harvesting the Little Sisters shortly.

Before I discuss further narrative events of the game, allow me to switch gears and describe my personal experience with the most impressive character in *BioShock*: the city of Rapture. Many game environments contain elements that are impressive but I had never encountered an environment as affective as being inside this crumbling dystopian horror. My

wife at the time would watch me play—and was eager to know what was happening in the game—but couldn't bring herself to hold the controller. The thought of being trapped inside a crumbling underwater city populated by insane gun-toting splicers with supernatural powers was too much for her to bear.

Rapture is a character unto itself with its panoramic underwater vistas, grandiose Art Deco architecture, its utopian statuary, and optimistic political posters juxtaposed by the damaged structures being crushed slowly by the unrelenting weight of water, distorted partial lighting, grotesque graffiti, and bodies strewn about. It is immediately claustrophobic and unsettling. The ocean is always just outside the cracked and leaking windows. The strange echoes of distant crashes, gunfire, and screaming is mixed with haunting whale calls as they glide gracefully overhead. The unnatural lighting casts strange shadows in which splicers are often hiding contrasts with brightly lit areas revealing grotesque displays by the insane population superimposed on the utopian aesthetic vision of Andrew Ryan. When I play the game, the space affects me greatly. My hands often involuntarily shake during intense battles and I jump at several points during the game. I have had dreams of being inside Rapture.

The splicers are truly crazy. Coming around corners or observing them from a distant vantage point, I can hear them talking to themselves revealing their delusional state of mind and unhinged pathology. What is more, they are fast and grotesque in their movements. Some have the ability to climb walls or do incredible acrobatic feats so how they attack (and from where) is not always predictable. Many wear party masks and costume pieces like it is a grotesque masquerade party. The explanation given for the masks and costumes is the fact the civil war broke out on New Year's Eve, 1959, but the incongruity of seeing them worn by the grotesque splicers is highly unsettling. They remind me of images from Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining*

(1980). There are violent and insane messages written on the walls in what looks like blood and throughout the game, tape recorders[13] are found that not only provide expository information regarding the conflict, Rapture, and the immediate goals, but also reveal personal stories of the people of Rapture and their descent into madness.

About halfway through the game I discover—during a particularly gruesome scene where the control of my character is temporarily taken from me and used to beat Andrew Ryan to death with a golf club—that everything I thought was true is a lie. In fact, I have been lied to all along. Atlas is not my friend helping me to succeed in my goals. Atlas is really Fontaine and I am being used as an instrument to fulfill his goals of taking control of the city. The family I am trying to save never existed. They are an implanted memory to entice me to Rapture and unwittingly do Fontaine's bidding. I have been raised as a weapon programmed to perform any action prefaced by the phrase, "will you kindly."

Andrew Ryan had been expecting my arrival and was calmly practicing his putt in his office when I found him. It seems everyone knew I was coming except for me! Ryan, being a man of vision, chose to end his life rather than fall into Fontaine's hands. He used the trigger phrase, "will you kindly," to force me to kill him with the golf club. In the fictional narrative Jack had been duped and I, in the performance text of my experience as both protagonist and audience, had been too.

In most games, plays, films, etc., characters are often dishonest with each other but usually the audience has the privileged position of knowing what is true. One of the most

[13] The use of tape-recorders replaced the reliance on having the player pause the gameplay to read notes, files, or diaries to learn the backstory. Because the exposition revealed from playing the tapes can be heard while the player is still engaged with the environment, this contributes to an uninterrupted immersive experience. In addition, the use of tape-recorders fits with the game's premise of being focused on scientific innovation during the mid-20th Century and would have been new cutting-edge technology when Rapture was built.

deceptive characters in the western canon, Iago, lies to everyone throughout *Othello* **except** when he speaks directly to the audience during his soliloquies. Another example, especially in light of *BioShock's* Christian references, is Judas Iscariot and his deception of Jesus. In both cases, the audience is aware of the deception while it is happening. In contrast, in Harold Pinter's play, *The Birthday Party*, the characters of Goldberg and McCann never say where they are from or how they know Stanley. Stanley, likewise, is greatly disturbed by Goldberg and McCann's visit but doesn't say what their relationship to him is or why he seems to have been hiding from them. In this example, the characters know the truth of the situation but the audience is left in the dark. When Goldberg and McCann break Stanley's glasses and subsequently take him away, the audience is in the same position as the characters of Meg and Petey, the landlords of the boarding house, regarding why. This is a disturbing position for the audience to be in especially when we, as audience members, are accustomed to know the motivations of characters and the truth of the situation. This same uncomfortable sensation was how I felt when I discovered that Atlas lied. This game, already a highly affective experience through the claustrophobic atmosphere of Rapture, affected me in a way no videogame had before. I am used to being the one doing the manipulating in virtual environments, not being the one manipulated. Levine created a game in which, for the first time, the player doesn't know the whole truth and is duped/manipulated by the non-player character (NPC) of Atlas/Fontaine who does. Levine troubled my assumption that what the game tells you is true and the situation is created as fair.

BioShock is not a game that comes up with neat solutions nor does it demand that reality make sense. With that said, it still fulfills prevalent game conventions in that there is an obligatory boss fight at the end of the game, with Fontaine, and an answer, though unsettling, to the dramatic question of the player's true identity. What I want to emphasize, however, is how

effective the unexpected narrative twists were due to the strategy of placing the player in the unusual position of not knowing the score. It provided truly jaw dropping experiences within the game that, as opposed to most other triple-A games (broad release, large budget commercial games), were not due to the size of the explosions or ferocity of the level boss. The sophistication of the writing within *BioShock* stood head and shoulders above the other games released at the time. In my opinion, the narrative sophistication of Levine's videogame set a new standard for videogame writing and I have seen several videogames released after *BioShock* that attempt to emulate Levine's narrative twist.

BioShock affected me strongly due to the strong atmosphere created by the virtual environment of Rapture. It was also unusual from other games in how the character of Atlas intentionally deceived and manipulated me when up to that point videogames had trained me to accept what game characters tell me is true. Let me return now to the ethical choice given to the player at the core of *BioShock* and how it affected the gameplay experience for me.

When I played the game I saved all the little girls. I had to. I couldn't bring myself to kill them. I knew it was just a game and the Little Sisters were really ones and zeroes but I couldn't ignore what those ones and zeroes represented. I couldn't play the game as an aesthete like Richard Stivers described above. I was caught fast in the ethical grip of the game premise. I could hear them chatting away to their Big Daddy with endearing little girl voices in the distance and they often sported pigtails and a cute dresses. They looked and sounded so much like my own daughter I couldn't help but make a strong connection. In addition, my wife at the time was very vocal that I couldn't *dare* kill the little girls. She also became invested in my choice even though the game was too scary for her to play herself. I don't think my ex-wife and I are alone in making this connection to real children when it comes to wanting to save and protect the girls.

During the moments within the game when I actively saved the girls, the game showed their appearance return to what could be considered a more natural or normal state. Specifically, their eyes stop glowing and their skin colour returned to more naturally healthy hue. They thanked me immediately after saving them and then they slipped away to a nearby duct and presumably somewhere safe. Later in the game I entered the nursery area, an area of safety ensured by Dr Tanenbaum, and saw all the girls playing that I had saved up to that point. They talked to me and thanked me while playing dolls and board games.[14] According to walkthroughs (step-by-step instructions of the gameplay) of *BioShock*, if the girls are killed this area is eerily empty. I already felt a strong sense of accomplishment with each girl I saved. Seeing the girls later in the game happily playing in the safety of the nursery was especially satisfying. This all makes sense, not just because I am a parent, but because I consider myself an ethical member of society. However, the part that surprised me by how much the game affected me was the moment that brought this 40ish year old gamer to copious tears at the end of the game.

I beat Fontaine (who was earlier pretending to be Atlas) and completed the game on the first try. That sounds impressive but it was not a graceful win and I barely survived. As the battle ensued and I figured out what I needed to do to beat Fontaine (who turned out to be a grotesque self-made abomination), I ran low on health and ammunition. The little girls I had saved started sending health and ammunition to me through the duct openings. What is more, at the end the little girls ran out, *en masse*, and jumped on Fontaine, helping me finish him off. I was very relieved to see them and for their help. I cheered when they appeared and leaped on Fontaine. I was barely alive dressed in the Big Daddy suit I had donned for the battle. I had, essentially,

[14] The game is a dystopian version of the 1950s/60s and the gendering of the girls is stereotypically normal. Disturbingly normal in an otherwise highly unusual and threatening world.

become a Big Daddy through the course of the game.[15] The montage that followed, however, brought me to tears. We went to the surface of the ocean in the sunshine where I witnessed the little girls see the sun for the first time (shown in first person perspective). Next, there was a montage with narration of how the girls integrated into society, were educated, had families, etc. and the final image was of my hand—large and battered in a Big Daddy glove—holding the tiny delicate hands of the girls that grew, held diplomas, wore rings, and finally held my hand at the end of my life. This is essentially the dream of most fathers that their child grows up educated and successful with a family of her own. I was shown in a short montage the fruits of my ethical choice. The fact that I chose to save the girls was so much more important than just simply gaining ADAM to power-up. My choice and struggle allowed these girls to live full and happy lives, to grow and develop, to feel the warmth of the sun on their faces. I was surprised by how the game made me weep on the couch in a way I hadn't been moved by a movie or play in years.

Looking back, I believe there are three major reasons why this game created such a strong reaction for me. The first reason is shared by well-written novels, plays, and movies in that I was caught up in a compelling story, effectively told, about characters I was invested in. The second involves what Jane McGonigal calls *eustress* or "hard fun." According to McGonigal:

> During *eustress*, we aren't experiencing fear or pessimism. We've generated the stressful situation on purpose, so we're confident and optimistic. When we choose our hard work, we enjoy the stimulation and activation. It makes us want to dive

[15] The fact the game casts the player as a *paterfamilias* by the end of the game (especially if the girls are saved) seems to be a strong affirmation of patriarchal norms. The game contains many Christian references and Ayn Rand's writing promotes rather traditional notions of gender roles. These influences, for good or bad, also inform the ending. With that said, I see the inclusion of Big Sisters in *BioShock 2* by Levine and his design team as a way of trying to address or challenge a patriarchal reading of the games.

> in, join together, and get things done. And this optimistic invigoration is way more mood-boosting than relaxing. As long as we feel capable of meeting the challenge, we report being highly motivated, extremely interested, and positively engaged by stressful situations. And these are the key emotional states that correspond with overall well-being and life satisfaction. (32)

I had placed myself intentionally in a stressful situation and overcame the challenge. The game was not easy and at times, highly stressful (not to mention scary!), but my need to help the girls, solve the question of my own identity, and bring the madman Fontaine to justice compelled me to finish the game.

The third reason is concerned with how deeply I had unknowingly extended myself into the world of the game. With my experience of *BioShock* to lead us, let us briefly return to Descartes and Hume. *I* fought Fontaine, *my* hand held the hands of the girls, *I* went with them to the ocean's surface to see the sun. *I* also watched a montage and cried on my couch. And of course, *I* am reliving the moment and describing it to you now. Which is the real me? All of them? Only the one on the couch? Only the one in the game? As we discussed, Descartes and Hume have very different answers. According to Descartes, the "I" in "I think therefore I am" is singular. Any perceptions of being in more than one place at once or transported to a virtual space are at best deceptions created by my imperfect interpretation of my senses or, at worst, wishful thinking—a lie. Hume, however, argues that the entity I identify as me is a collection of experiences accumulated over time. To Hume's point of view, all the above statements are true and part of my experience. I agree with Cogburn and Wilcox that the experience of the physical environment, virtual or otherwise, is also part of this accumulated identity. The phenomenological approach of a unified mind-body-self is particularly important when dealing

with proprioception and the player experiencing an expanded (or dualistic) sense of self in the virtual space of the game world. There is little room for proprioception in Descartes' interpretation. Cogburn and Silcox write "the self is not, then, some special kind of entity that undergoes or persists through all of the changes in our perceptions, emotions, and memories; rather, it is simply a concept that we use to refer to the sum of all those things taken together" (10). Therefore, according to Descartes, to claim I saved the little girls in *BioShock* is a lie or I was deceived into believing I did. According to Hume, however, the experience I had, projecting myself into the game world through my plasmid wielding avatar, was real in the sense that I experienced it as a result of my actions and it now informs my identity. I greatly prefer the idea that I performed those actions with fantastic powers and demonstrations of uncanny ability and that the experience is now part of who I am. I see this as an ultimately more positive perspective than being deceived by the game and/or myself.

Case Study Two: *Dead Rising 3*

Dead Rising 3, developed by Capcom Vancouver and released on November 22, 2013, the same day as the Xbox One, is a zombie apocalypse survival game with a strange sense of humour. In addition to the requisite hordes of shambling zombies this game includes the interesting element of combining objects to create specialized weapons, vehicles, costumes, medicines, and even food stuffs. Some of these items are funny and/or bizarre like rocket propelled boxing gloves, a party bus that shoots bouncing explosives, and rotating Teddy bear turrets dual-wielding machine guns while playing music on a ghetto-blaster. The player is cast as Nick, a good-guy local mechanic with a knack for MacGyvor-ing unusual things together, trying

to help his friends, and escape the zombie-infested city before the government levels it with nuclear weapons within a few days. The game is played in the third person with Nick continuously in view. This game is meant to be action-packed but also meant to be fun as it doesn't take itself seriously like *The Last of Us* (2013) or *The Walking Dead* (2010) television series. The game is meant to be replayed several times as it is virtually impossible to escape the city before it is destroyed in the time allowed at a low (initial) level. However, the blueprints found, skills gained, and abilities unlocked with each attempt carry forward to the next attempt so the game grows more intense (and ludicrous) the more the game is played. Mowing down thousands of zombies on the freeway with a flame-throwing stream-roller/motorcycle is an example of the type of over-the-top action I have experienced personally.

Two of my research volunteers, Ferdinand and Daphne, chose to play *Dead Rising 3*. Daphne's experience with the game was shorter as she switched games partway through the two hour session. Neither participant had played this game before. Both went through a period of getting used to the controls before they started to relax and fully engage with the game. During the playback portion of the research session I asked both to flag moments when they particularly identified with their avatar and to also watch for involuntary movements they may not have been aware of while playing. All the following quotations are from their respective game research sessions.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Ferdinand insisted when we started the game session that he was going to skew my results since he says he doesn't react to games at all. This is why it was especially funny/ironic when we both observed him visibly react and exclaim "I'm on fire!" whenever his avatar ignited. With that said, the following are some of his statements while he observed himself playing.

Near the beginning of the playback Ferdinand said, “I generally don’t move in my seat, you know some actually—when they actually make a move they turn their controller—people generally make a turn in their seat when they make a turn. I generally don’t do that. Generally not.” This was his expectation of himself as he played but he soon saw he was not as neutral as he thought. “I look a little worried there! [Laughs].” As the game session continued, perhaps as an explanation for being more emotive that he realized, Ferdinand revealed that:

> Basically when I play a game I sit down and spend an hour going through, like reading, you know what I mean? All this stuff I’m doing right now, I’m doing on the fly. I would never have done this normally, never. [I] sit down, see if I can learn the controls first, see if I can map the stuff…you know, I would have read all of that stuff and then started it.

He continued the thought a short time later with “before I started playing *Diablo [III]* I read the whole pamphlet and read about it online and THEN I started playing it.”

At this point, Ferdinand got to a place in the game when he discovered it is possible to shake off the zombies by shaking the controller. He observed in himself that “Until the point it makes you move, I don’t really move.” Starting to get used to the controls and after picking up the many objects strewn around the game world to see what they did, I revealed to him that if he makes Nick eat meat, the zombies become more attracted to you and the opposite happens if the avatar eats vegetables. Ferdinand became excited about that dynamic in the game. “That’s so funny! Is that true? Is that in the game? About the meat and veggies? Really?!? How did you find that out, though? How do you know that’s true? …Is energy drink a meat or a vegetable?”

By this point Ferdinand was starting to become familiar with the controls. He said, "You know what I love? I don't even think about my hands. It just happens. It's just in my head, you know? My hands are going totally automatically. It's Bizarre. …I mean right now I am for sure not thinking about what button I'm pressing, I'm not thinking about it at all." He was relaxing into the controls, making the mechanical knowledge of which button to push more unconscious. This was accentuated by the occasional burst of movement when he shook the controller to shake zombies off Nick's virtual body. "It is so silly it makes you do that." Also commenting on the game design, "Why can't I hold two guns at the same time? Seriously! I should be able to hold two AKs if I wanted to! That makes me crazy when games don't do that. You have two hands and two of the same weapons. I mean its fucking obvious!" At this point in the game, Ferdinand was leaving the initial portion of the game designed to train the player on how to control the avatar and entering into the main narrative. In the game Nick escapes from a zombie containment area and witnesses a zombie infested jetliner narrowly miss him and crash onto the freeway. A cut-scene links these two areas of the game. "You know, if you didn't know I was playing a videogame, you'd think I was just watching tv." As Nick, Ferdinand started wading into the numerous zombies on the freeway, Ferdinand said:

> You know what though? If you weren't with me, you'd hardly see anything, you know what I mean? I mean if something really extreme happened that pissed me off, then I'd be all 'You fucker!' But aside from that, really, it's all in my head. If you weren't with me you wouldn't be able to tell. It would be like I'd be sitting there almost zombie-like.

From his statement I interpret that what he was observing in himself differed from how he imagined he behaved physically and vocally while playing. It is possible he was more animated

in front of the camera because of his awareness of being recorded however, shortly after saying the previous statement we both observed Ferdinand's reaction to Nick catching on fire and trying to douse the flames. I commented on it and Ferdinand said, "Yeah, yeah, and I totally would have done that if I was by myself, too." We both laughed. As Ferdinand was becoming accustomed to the gameplay he started experimenting by throwing gas cans into the zombie hordes and shooting them with a handgun to make them explode. He was frustrated the game didn't allow him to toss and shoot in one motion. However, this experiment uncovered the fact that many things in the game are placed strategically to catch fire and/or explode. This includes the zombies that start running when on fire igniting other zombies which ignites overturned cars, propane tanks, etc. Needless to say, there were suddenly many opportunities for Ferdinand's character to catch fire and for Ferdinand to visibly and audibly react.

As the game progressed Ferdinand engaged more with the fiction of the game world and less with the mechanics of how the game worked. He started talking to Nick, the characters Nick met up with, and even the zombies. "Yeah, I'm talking to the dudes, I'm talking to the characters, eh? It's like what I wish they would do, you know?" When we observed further instances of Ferdinand talking to the game characters he said:

> I love how I talk to the dudes, eh? I talk to them, I don't know why I do it. …I do it with every game too, eh? …I think the reason I do it is that it's me wishing that they know what I want from them. It's me verbalizing that that's what I want and I hope that they know that. …Also too, I notice when I die sometimes or when something stupid happens. I'll say 'Oh, come on!' And that's me talking to the Xbox. Right? That's me saying, 'Hey, fuck me Xbox, that's bullshit! Why did you let that happen?' You know?

This observation prompted a conversation about the difference between talking about the game and its mechanics early in the game session, talking to the characters in the game as we were witnessing, and his last statement regarding talking to the Xbox itself. It was becoming clear that Ferdinand's level of engagement with the game—and the console itself—was more nuanced than passively watching television and that it definitely wasn't "just in my head" as he earlier claimed.

Near the conclusion of watching the video of Ferdinand playing, he said:

> See, I always think it's funny when I see somebody going like this [turning the controller] with their controller. They are trying to look around a corner and they are going like this to the screen. I think it's hilarious. I mean what are you doing? What that means is that the screen is confusing their brain so much that they actually believe…their brain actually thinks if they go like this they will see around the corner. I learned a long time ago when I was a kid, it's better to remain this way and to use your eyes. You get better action out of it. I think I learned that when I was like six. So to me, if I see people still doing it, I'm like what are you doing?

Ferdinand came to the game session with years of experience playing videogames and even he caught himself moving and emoting more than he imagined he did in his mind's eye. He plays videogames regularly—several times a week—so it follows that his confidence in playing, willingness to experiment with the game environment, willingness to comment on the game design, and his self-image as a gamer is well developed. The fact we both noticed distinct moments of proprioceptive reactions is a good indicator that even seasoned gamers can and do

project themselves into the game world despite, sometimes, their best efforts or their preconceived idea of their level of engagement.

Daphne is also an experienced gamer and her time playing *Dead Rising 3* was shorter than Ferdinand's. She went through an initial period of learning the controls but then engaged quickly with her avatar and the game narrative. I observed in her a faster transition between speaking about the game generally and about her avatar as Nick into statements referring to actions in-game as her own or talking back to the game as though she were him. Specifically, near the start of the game when she learned to shake the controller to shake off the zombies she said, "It makes you shake it?" Here she is referring to the game itself. Shortly after I pointed out to her she said "Pick it up, Dude!" to her avatar when she was trying to make him pick up an object. She said, "Yes! [I was] Giving him shit!" Daphne flew through the introduction portion of the game picking up the controls quickly and progressing to the part where she escaped from the zombie containment area and into the area where she witnesses the plane crash. While this was all happening, escaping from a zombie horde and narrowly missing being crushed by a crashing plane, she said, "He's kind of cute, isn't he? …Kind-of cute in a bad boy way." This tells me Daphne's engagement with the game is on several levels at once. This is reinforced by the fact soon after she observed herself use 'I' in reference to her avatar. "See, when I'm lost I'm like, where do *I* go, not where does *he* go?"

Daphne passed the crashed plane in moments, a section that took Ferdinand and me almost an hour, and upon leaping in her first vehicle, she exclaimed "I love this game! Awesome!" I commented how quickly she is progressing she revealed "I fly through games first

and then go back. Or I play a game on easy and go back to challenging myself." This statement made me realize the importance of taking play-style into account when designing and researching videogames. This game seems designed ideally for players like Daphne in that it requires players to undertake several rounds of playing before they can fully succeed. While we were watching the video of her playing the videogame afterward I commented that she grew comfortable with the controls around the same time that she switched from talking *to* the character and switched to using *I,* she said, "It's true. I am him, he is me." A short while later, seemingly to emphasize the point, while interacting with a non-player character (NPC) she and I observed Daphne on the video say "Thanks Bitch, thanks for the info. And I'm looking for cans of paint!"

As the gameplay session continued, following the excitement of mowing down zombies with a steamroller, Daphne said "I like Nick. I like *being* Nick. Definitely, he's a cool character." I asked how she felt about playing Nick considering the game doesn't give the option of playing a female character. She responded with:

> I appreciate *Call of Duty* and *Ghosts*. You can pick being a girl, so obviously I would pick being a girl to feel more like it's me. Not some big black dude, you know? Well, you don't feel like it's really you. …So that's important to me when you have characters you can pick—a female character, hello!

Daphne is neither big nor black so her statement is particularly interesting. Perhaps this reveals what, to her, would be most dissonant for her to relate to in a game character and she may have had a specific instance in mind. Her preference to be given the choice of gender as well as race, is clear. With that said, her identification with Nick was not hindered greatly as the game went

on. During the last few minutes of the game session Daphne found a safe house wherein she could change Nick's outfit. Upon changing she said, "Oh nice, look at me!" Outside she found a muscle car she could drive. "It is like it's inviting me…luring me." After careening around the neighbourhood and crashing the car, I asked about how often she noticed she used 'I' while playing, she said "I totaled *my* car. It's not *a* car. It's *my* car." (emphasis original).

Daphne thoroughly enjoyed the game and seemed very willing to engage with the somewhat outrageous premise and over-the-top gameplay. She responded strongly to it. The last comment she had during the session, commenting on her posture and facial expression while playing was "I'm right into it. You can tell." Daphne didn't come to the game session with a pre-determined idea of how she does or doesn't respond to videogames. While she hadn't played this game before, she plays videogames often which aided her in picking up the controls quickly and understanding the game mechanics. At the same time she was open and willing to verbalize her reactions to the game as well as voice her projected reactions to the characters within the game.

Conclusion

The title of the chapter, "Digital Like Me," is a reference to a nonfiction book *Black Like Me*, written in 1961 by John Howard Griffin. Mr. Griffin was a white journalist who artificially darkened his skin so he could pose as a black man and immerse himself in black culture and write about the experience. I use the reference here, not to make light of the original book and its important racial critique, but to draw an unusual parallel between the avatar who cannot leave the virtual environment and the player who visits the virtual environment *as* the avatar and can pass between the real and virtual worlds whenever she chooses. The reference to Mr. Griffin's book is

an attempt to make strange—in the sense of *Verfrumdung*—the relationship between the player and her avatar.

The case studies within this chapter demonstrated moments of strong projection into the game world by the player. While playing *BioShock*, I was surprised by how much the game affected me as demonstrated by my uncontrolled display of emotion at the conclusion. I attribute my surge of emotion to be my body's way of dealing with all the affective elements of the game coming together at the end and the intense release I felt as a result. Regarding *Dead Rising 3*, both Ferdinand and Daphne demonstrated moments of projection into the game space by exclamations of "I'm on fire!" by Ferdinand or, in both cases, talking to the non-player characters as though they were present with them in the virtual environment.

This chapter focused on the anchor pieces of liveness, flow, and the extended self and how they all contribute to the concept of immersion. A clear understanding of immersion helps ground a solid analysis of the player's relationship to her avatar as an affective conduit. The avatar is the player's virtual body within the game space, allowing her to project her sense of presence there facilitated by her actions. Using the puzzle metaphor, defining the avatar, the concept of flow, the idea of the extended self, liveness, presence, and the various perspectives the player may have in relation to the avatar in the game space, the edges of the puzzle are in place. The next chapter, "Cyborg Like Me," starts to fill in the rest of the puzzle in the sense of digging deeper into the player's relationship to the avatar. In the next chapter, we move past the player simply projecting herself into the game world. The next chapter explores this projection as a complicated relationship affecting the player in the sense of augmentation through digital means and the avatar as more than simply a window to another world.

Chapter Three: Cyborg Like Me

> Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.
>
> William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

William Gibson prophetically wrote the science fiction classic, *Neuromancer*, in the early 1980s, years before the Internet, as we know it, existed. Gibson's databodies, billions of points of light in clusters and constellations, may not exactly be the reality of cyberspace today, but we do have myriad forms of graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system exhibiting unthinkable complexity and often realized using an avatar. I am curious to know what Gibson thinks now in 2015 of our ability to fly across Azeroth on a hired Griffin gliding over cities populated by people from around the world while logged into one of hundreds of *World of Warcraft* servers. As Gibson said above, cyberspace is a graphic representation of data in a *human system*. The human system he refers to is the interaction between representations in cyberspace—"a consensual hallucination"—sustained through mediated participation of real-life people alongside computer programs. The difference between the two is often hard to detect. I take Gibson's vision of the (at the time) near future and couple it with Lev Manovitch's statement that "[T]*he visual culture of a computer age is cinematographic in its appearance, digital on the level of its material, and computational (i.e., software driven) in its logic*" (emphasis original, 180) to propel us further into ideas of telepresence, proprioception, and how virtual environments like those found in narrative rich videogames can affect the player.

The previous chapter discussed the phenomenon of the player feeling a sense of presence within the game world (telepresence) and defined the idea of virtual liveness. This chapter leaps forward from that conceptual stepping stone and treats the relationship between the player and her avatar as an augmentative one created through the continuous feedback loop between the two. By augmentation I mean that the player's perception of herself and her interaction with the environment—both real and virtual—is enhanced through virtual means. A new cyborg entity is created, greater than the sum of its parts. The avatar is meaningless without the player and the player's experience of the game world is achievable only through the avatar, visible or not depending on the player's perspective. The avatar in tandem with the player is composed of both human and machine. In this sense I am using Patrick Lichty's understanding of Norbert Wiener's definition of "cybernetics" as "any self-regulating system that is set up by a stimulus and response through continuous feedback" (351-52). Ideal for my analysis of the performance relationship between the player and her avatar, Lichty writes that "performance is a cybernetic system in that it creates a self-regulating system of cognitive exchange between the performers' actions and audience response" (352). The player is no longer simply the subject within the unfolding narrative and the avatar is no longer simply an object to be manipulated within the virtual environment. The resulting entity interacting with the game world experiences what Brian Massumi calls a "quasi corporeality" (61). Following Lichty, the cognitive exchange creates an enhancement of the player as both performer and audience to that performance. The cybernetic augmentation of the player is the ability to see "oneself *as others see one*" (emphasis original, Massumi 47). The difference lies in the relationship between the object and the subject in what Massumi calls mirror-vision and movement-vision. "*Mirror-vision* is by definition partial. There is a single axis of sight. You see yourself from one angle at a time and never effectively in

movement" (emphasis original, 48). Mirror-vision is the clear demarcation of the subject viewing and the object being viewed, like looking at your own reflection in a mirror or your own image on the screen as you look toward the webcam. Just like a child trying to catch a glimpse of the back of her head in the mirror by turning quick enough or as an adult trying to catch a glimpse of herself in a moment of computational lag between the webcam and the image on the screen *as others see you* these attempts are efforts to break the bonds of mirror-vision. It is an attempt at movement-vision. Massumi writes:

> [Movement-vision] is an opening onto a sphere of transformation in which a de-objectified movement fuses with a de-subjectified observer. This larger processuality, this *real movement,* includes the perspective from which it is seen. But the perspective is that of a *virtual observer* that is one only with the movement (of the subject's self-departure). (emphasis original, 51)

The ability to see yourself move from the same vantage point as others may see you move in real time is an augmentation achieved through the cybernetic relationship—a feedback loop—between the player and her avatar. The avatar body may look nothing like the player's corporeal body. What is important is when the player, while viewing the avatar on screen or the superimposed position of the player and avatar in the case of first-person perspective, identifies with the avatar as in *that is me,* this is when the movement of the avatar is also the movement—the *real movement* mentioned by Massumi above—of the player. This is not the same as seeing oneself caught on video or film. Though made-strange (*Verfremdung*) in the sense of forcing the viewer to see herself in a new and strange light, a recorded/filmed image is non-responsive. It is a document of movement past. The movement of an avatar is happening now. It is both the object of the player's gaze and the representation of the player as subject. This is my

understanding of Massumi's statement regarding de-objectified movement fused with a de-subjectified observer. I see this fusion, or synthesis in the Hegelian sense, of the subject and object as an augmentation. The player and avatar, together, form a single cybernetic unity or quasi-corporeality greater than the sum of its parts. Massumi writes:

> The dimension of proprioception lies midway between stimulus and response, in a region where infolded tactile encounter meets externalizing response to the qualities gathered by all five senses. It performs a synthesis of those intersecting pathways in the medium of the flesh, thus opening to its own quasi corporeality. (61)

This idea of a synthesis complicates the duality of the virtual and the simulacral discussed earlier. Quasi-corporeality adds a whole new dimension to the concept of the extended self, defined in the previous chapter. This chapter explores a new entity that is neither one nor the other, subject or object, but more than the sum of the two. A cyborg. The next chapter moves past Massumi's quasi-corporeality and focuses on the affect of having agency in videogames in this form. The final chapter takes a step further into how ideological positions embedded within the fictional representations of videogames affect the player. The examination of ideology in videogames in the last chapter leads to an exploration of Artaud's concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) as pure presence and an end result of the quasi-corporeality introduced here.

In the following analysis I use the term *gamer* as someone who plays videogames, in the sense of how I see myself as a gamer, but I realize the term gamer has gained negative connotations recently due to the so-called #GamerGate movement. I have decided not to remove the word 'gamer' from my research but I want to be clear that while I still call myself and others

gamers, I do not support the misogyny and hate associated with the hashtag #GamerGate. There is considerably more discussion regarding #GamerGate in chapter five, "Ideology in Videogames," in reference to anti-social ideologies and quasi-corporeality causing a profound disconnection between actual corporeal victims and what is appropriate in civil society. In my usage here, a gamer is someone who plays videogames regularly or semi-regularly and enjoys the experience of visiting virtual environments alone or with friends through the use of an avatar.

In this chapter I continue with a historical look at the concept of the cyborg and apply it to the discussion of performance through an avatar in virtual environments. Following the analysis of the concept of cyborg and the definition of the gamer as cyborg, I open the conversation up to include the gamification of RL (real life) and live performances through digital means, specifically with the superimposition of game IPs (intellectual property) onto multiple platforms and the persistence of virtual worlds even while not actually playing. The chapter concludes with two case studies: an autoethnographic account of my own experience playing *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, and the ethnographic research findings of the two volunteers who chose to play *Tomb Raider*.

The Rise of the Cyborg

The idea of the cyborg is a productive tool for examining both the relations between gamers and gaming environments, as well as the construction of narrative in gaming contexts. The traditional image of a cyborg as part living organism and part machine can be re-imagined and expanded to include the virtual augmentation of the living organism through digital technology. Though not directly wired to our brain or implanted within our tissue, digital

technology changes and augments our interpretation of reality (virtual and otherwise) and informs our interactions with the world and those around us. To follow this line of inquiry, I shall clarify several key terms and ideas before moving forward into a proper analysis. First, I define the concept of the cyborg followed by the changing notions of narrative. This is an essential foundation to understand the idea of creating player agency, which will be explored at length in the next chapter. I revisit the concept of proprioception and the idea of the gamer's sense of self projected into the game-world. This leads to addressing the construction of narrative through algorithmic (computational) interaction with a database and procedural narrative in the sense of how the gamer relates to both the real and virtual worlds.

Donna Haraway, a leading scholar of cyborg culture, writes "a cyborg is a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine" (1). She specifies that cyborgs are special kinds of hybrid entities that arose following World War II made of "ourselves and other organic creatures in our unchosen 'high-technological' guise as information systems, texts, and ergonomically controlled labouring, desiring, and reproducing systems" (1). It is important to note the concept of the cyborg arose following World War II, indeed, at the same point in history that the postmodern, defined by Jean-Francois Lyotard as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv), began to take shape. Haraway uses the liminal cyborg as an entity between (or of multiple) identities to foreground her insightful work on race, gender and class. The concept of the cyborg also paved the way for new discourses in art, performance, and audience reception such as Gabriella Giannachi's *Virtual Theatre* where she embellishes on Haraway by claiming that her "definition presented the cyborg not only as a hybrid of organic, biological and non-organic forms, but as a creature able to bridge the gap between the real and representation, between social reality and fiction" (47). The cyborg is an entity that is part human and part machine, some

of each but not wholly one or the other. As Jennifer Parker-Starbuck reminds us the first cyborg was a white rat with a drug-dispensing pump in its tail and the goal behind its creation was to "improve human systems" ultimately "leaving man free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel" (18). Using technology to repair, automate or more frequently, enhance the human body and its senses, devices designed to improve human systems (many of them digital) have been integrated into our lives to the point where anyone with a smart phone, Internet access, or even glasses can be considered a cyborg.

Gamers are cyborgs. They use technology to project themselves into virtual (synthetic) worlds and/or use it to augment the real world as in Augmented Reality Games (ARGs). In both cases technology is used to mediate the environment, virtual or real, and while doing so, opens the possibility of exploring an alternative identity. This identity is often a character that belongs within the virtual game world. At this point several concepts need to be defined to help illustrate the gamer's performance as a "cybernetic system" (Lichty 352). I use the word 'projected' to describe feeling present in a mediated space; what is projected is not only the gamer's sense of *being* there but also the identity of the gamer *there* to be witnessed by other players. This implies the concept of telepresence which I will address further shortly. In addition, the concepts of narrative and agency are key to understanding this cybernetic performance and though addressed in other chapters, deserve attention here specifically in relation to the gamer as cyborg. First, who or what is in the game world?

Referring to players within game worlds, Brenda Laurel in her famous book, *Computers as Theatre*, states: "People who are participating in the representation aren't audience members anymore. It's not that the audience joins the actors on the stage; it's that they *become* actors – and the notion of 'passive' observers disappears" (17). The gamer has a two-fold role as both

participant within the game world and as a witness to the events as they unfold. This split role is further complicated by the fact that the player (most likely) is also performing a role within the game story. Again, this invokes the idea of movement-vision earlier defined by Massumi and the unique position of the player as both de-objectified and de-subjectified. Let us remember the work of Cogburn and Silcox and their application of Hume's extended mind theory to argue the duality within the gamer in the previous chapter. The gamer is a hybrid creature composed of both corporeal and virtual experiences and is greater, as a result, than a sum of its parts. Building on this duality—the extended self as opposed to a mind and body split (see chapter two)—this multiple subject position including virtual experiences achieved through digital means effectively makes the gamer a cyborg.

Let us address the same issue of multiplicity from a psychological perspective. Sarah-Lynn Bowman discusses the beneficial aspects of role-playing within fictional worlds through Robert Assagioli's theory of psychosynthesis. She says his view of psychotherapy embraces our multiple "sub-personalities." Instead of emphasizing a pathology of dissociative behaviour, as the Cartesian mind and body split would, Bowman and Assagioli insist "that each of us emulates particular roles throughout our lives. Proper exploration of these roles and integration of each of their functions will allow human beings to achieve a sense of the *Transpersonal*, or spiritual unity" (emphasis original, Bowman 142-3). Therefore, psychosynthesis offers another explanation of how this multiplicity of identities can be reconciled within the single hybrid entity of the cyborg gamer.

The arguments above support the connection between the real body holding the controller, the virtual body within the game world (the gamer's avatar), and the character the virtual body represents (the fictional identity befitting the game story). However, the cyborg is

more than simply the sum of its parts. What is interesting is the ability for the gamer to feel present within the game world; to project a sense of being there. The extension of the gamer's presence into the virtual world points to the gamer's proprioception—"the sense that tells us where the boundaries of our bodies are" (Birringer 158)—and is enhanced or augmented through the use of digital technology as he described previously. This extended subjectivity is addressed by Helen Thornham in her *Ethnographies of the Videogame*. In it she writes:

> Once the body 'is no longer lived but 'disassembled and reassembled' [through technology], the concept of an embodied subjectivity becomes impossible to maintain.' Yet this is precisely what the gamer – as cyborg needs to imagine – an embodied and lived subjectivity, but one that can be (to a certain extent) if not disassembled and reassembled, then at least *lived* through technology. (emphasis original, 113)

This assembled subjectivity is, at least temporarily, affectively within the game world and depending on the expectations latent within that world's design, performs according to the parameters given it. Elinor Fuchs is referring to postmodern performance in her book *The Death of Character* but her sentiments apply equally well here in that the players in these virtual theatres are "creating cybernetic dramas that push notions of 'presence' into new, disembodied, territories. In these worlds, speech and writing, body and idea, presence and print, know nothing of former boundary disputes and appear in post-deconstructionist fusion" (91). Whether it is called a post-deconstruction fusion, psychosynthesis, or a case of an extended self, the player's sense of where her boundaries lie are extended or at least blurred and the player's subject position (as both subject and object) is projected into the virtual world—a form of telepresence.

What is it to be *present* in a virtual space? Lev Manovich is a leading scholar in new media and grapples with this question in his seminal book, *The Language of New Media.* In it he writes: "If we look at the word itself, *telepresence* means presence at a distance. But presence where? [...] Telepresence encompasses two different situations – being 'present' in a synthetic computer-generated environment (what is commonly referred to as 'virtual reality') and being 'present' in a real remote physical location via a live video image" (emphasis original, 165). Manovich's definition of telepresence places the gamer within the virtual world with a projected body (as in a proprioceptive extension of the boundaries of the gamer's body) and a sense of being there in the space ready to act or be acted upon within the game parameters. To cause change within the game world implies an active agent and an unfolding narrative. These are terms that need further attention and will be discussed at length in the next chapter but to aid us in our discussion of the cyborg gamer, a brief description of narrative and agency is needed.

Let us turn from presence to narrative, briefly, to examine Jesper Juul's six definitions in his book *Half Real*. He describes narrative as: the presentation of a number of events, a fixed and predetermined sequence of events, a specific type of sequence of events, specific type of theme, as any kind of setting or fictional world, and as the way we make sense of the world (156-57). According to Juul's list, even being present in a fictional world adheres to the last three definitions of narrative. To act within the space creates novel events and adds the third definition. This comes as no surprise to Caroline Bassett who believes "narrative remains *central* to what we do in an information-saturated world" and that "narrative is at the heart of the operations of everyday life and everyday culture within a world where digital culture is becoming pervasive" (emphasis original, 8). Helen Thornham adds that "the conception of narrative as lived praxis therefore takes ontological narrative to its extreme. It is perhaps the

furthest removed theorization of narrative from structural narratology or narrative as diegetic story" (98). This sheds some light on why traditional definitions of narrative ill-fit the type of narrative found in new cybernetic media—media that creates a continuous feedback loop between the performer and audience, in this case, the player and her avatar. The sense of presence and ability to affect change within the game world doesn't mesh with the aesthetics of film, literature, or most forms of traditional theatre—this makes narrative as lived praxis a way of interpreting reality—a cyber-reality; one that is not quite real but not simply fiction. To help make this idea concrete, Grant Tavinor has succinctly identified a key difference between (passive) film and (interactive) media like videogames. He makes the delineation between when the video is actually rendered and connects it with narrative agency. He writes:

> We might think this is the location of the key difference between videogame fictions and (most) traditional fictions: whereas in a computer graphics movie the audience encounters the fiction after it has been rendered, in videogames the player joins the process before that point, having a (partial) input into exactly what is rendered on the screen. Some of the fictive control usually allotted to the writer, director, or production crew is ceded to the player. (46)

Being aware that her input makes meaningful choices within the game world that only she, the gamer, will uniquely witness/experience is a form of agency.

It is true that the virtual world is a pre-authored space but the telepresence of the unique subject position of the gamer interpreting and interacting with the game parameters creates a novel experience—a unique cyber-reality. Ian Bogost reminds us that "player agency in games of

all kinds leads to unique interpretations of play experiences; in proceduralist works, such meaning generation is spurred by the knowledge that a specific human being set the work's processes into motion" (17). Knowing reality through lived praxis ties-in well with Brian Massumi's idea of agency. He writes "the base meaning of the word 'agency' in this context is the expression of intelligence in needful or useful action" (128). Videogames are rife with *useful actions* within their diegetic frames and the constant call for *expressions of intelligence* in social media makes identity formed from praxis especially intensive.

Virtual communities created and maintained through the aid of computers and smart phones also imply a projection of identity into a mediated space. The difference in the quality of projection between solitary videogames, social games, and social media depends less on graphical rendering than it does on role-play and identity creation. I contend that graphically simpler social games offer fewer opportunities for the player to extend her sense of proprioception but the simplicity of the games allow for more gamer-initiated content and subsequent role-play. The gap between the concept the game presents and the actual game experience is much wider. What is required of the player to suspend disbelief is altered but the fact remains that (at least some) of the other characters the player meets in the fictional game space are other actual players having similar game experiences from their unique perspectives. Specifically, I am thinking of the difference between immersive highly rendered (traditionally solitary) console games as opposed to social games found on *Facebook* or handheld devices. Console games tend to have highly detailed game worlds but the role-playing opportunities are limited/delimited. Social games involve interaction with actual people (though often temporally separate) but are graphically and narratively sparse. However, as both the graphic ability of tablets and handheld devices and the social interconnectivity of the newer generation of consoles

increases, this separation is quickly diminishing. Blurring the social with the fictional narrative becomes especially true when game IPs like the *Mass Effect* or *Assassin's Creed* franchises enjoy several iterations of their game worlds over multiple gaming platforms creating not just a social aspect to the previously solitary game experiences but also making the game fictions persistent even while the player is away from her console. Amy Jenson elaborates on the performative expectation of social media and online social environments with:

> Internet technologies have allowed people to create a new public space. Online, people can build the environments that support new forms of socialization, and therefore new forms of performance. In fact, with each post being carefully staged to communicate a precise message, the forms and conventions of performance are required in these new public spaces. (66)

In short, the player launching her fleet as Commander Sheppard from the same phone she receives texts from friends blurs the line between the virtual and the real. Tracking friends' progress in games while also playing reinforces and projects the assembled subjectivity of the player. The extended self (telepresence) of the cyber-gamer is material for and shared over the network.

Better Living through Algorithms

The gamer is real, at least in the sense of a real referent, but the gamer's identity projected into the game world (social or not) is virtual and simulacral. Technology allows the gamer to expand her sense of self into the virtual space to feel present there and to even increase

her proprioception to include that of the virtual body. This is achieved through a sense of agency within the narrative. Computers are databases and according to Lev Manovich, "creating a work in new media can be understood as the construction of an interface to a database" (226). The interface to the database is what the gamer interacts with, it is the game world or narrative premise and, being a game, there are rules in the form of algorithms. Marc Downie from the OpenEnded Group, an interactive performance artist, said in an interview that "algorithms *are* rules – nothing more" (emphasis original, Birringer 268). The narrative is virtual and created with algorithms. The database is real, the rules governing its access are virtual. The gamer's identity online or in game is virtual while the real (material) gamer is holding the controller. Lev Manovich takes this idea further by stating:

> Database (the paradigm) is given material existence, while narrative (the syntagm) is dematerialised. Paradigm is privileged, syntagm is downplayed. Paradigm is real; syntagm, virtual. [...] The narrative is constructed by linking elements of this database in a particular order, that is, by designing a trajectory leading from one element to another. On the material level, a narrative is just a set of links; the elements themselves remain stored in the database. Thus the narrative is virtual while the database exists materially. (231)

Following Manovich's logic, the material gamer interfaces with the database and the projected identity and telepresence of the gamer become part of the virtual world. The narrative is virtual and interaction with the algorithms (rules) provides a sense of agency within the game world. Procedural narrative is created through an algorithmic interface with a database. As I mentioned

earlier, the human is subsumed into the technological. Human interaction becomes algorithmic. The pleasure of augmentation is seductive.

Regarding the input of the human into the network, Brian Massumi writes prophetically that:

> Whether peripheral or integrated, human agency enters the network as a local input of free variation: in other words, a variation not subordinated to the programming of the self-network. The variation is "free" in the sense that it is a given for the network, which itself expends nothing to produce it. Something for nothing: the human becomes a raw material or *natural resource* for the network. [...] Alternatively, it can be considered a *capture*, because as a raw material the human is fed into a process it isn't in a position to direct (or even digest). (emphasis original, 130)

The human, the subjective position of the player, is captured or subsumed into the virtual world. It provides the virtual world with meaning in the sense of the narrative created and consumed while at the same time, seduces the player with an augmented sense of self within the virtual. This augmentation performs on many levels: what the avatar can do within the game world, what the player *feels* she can achieve through the avatar, and also what the real gamer can do in the sense of interacting with other databases and real people through the use of mediating technology. Zack Waggoner astutely reminds us of Marvin Minsky's prophetic words from 1989 in that "Our connection to the real world is very thin, and our connection with the artificial world is going to be more intimate and satisfying than anything that's come before" (Waggoner 162). The intimacy Minsky refers to is the feeling of agency and subsequent sense of virtual

empowerment found in the gamer as cyborg. I return to this topic of empowerment through agency in the next chapter when I also address the possibility of achieving the sublime through a videogame experience.

Before the idea of the gamer as cyborg sounds like a utopian dream of endless possibility let us turn the coin over and consider the possible downside of fraying our already thin connection to the real world. Just as we like to gaze at the bright face of the moon in the night sky and let its shining light propel our dreams of life in the stars, the dark unseen side of the moon is always there behind it, hidden in the shadows.

The Dark Side of the Coin

I feel a sinking sense of dread when I realize I have forgotten my smartphone at home. It feels like I left an appendage behind. I would find a payphone (do they still exist?) and call home to check but I realize I can't remember any phone numbers, they are all saved in my phone. I can't text to say I'm ok. I can't IM without my handheld device. Where was I going? I don't have Google maps at my finger-tips. I am forced to adapt…to re-adapt. Few moments affect me more regarding how my smartphone is an extension of my brain than when I leave it behind. With augmentation comes dependence. Without it, I am a crippled cyborg. The void left gives me a momentary feeling of panic. It is not the fear of losing the phone, as such, but a feeling of disorientation like opening my eyes and not knowing where I am. Dropped off the grid. Invisible. If Ray Kurzweil is correct, computers will be powerful enough by the mid-21st century to upload our personalities. Is this the ultimate goal of The Cloud? Will we *live* in the The Cloud? What

happens if we leave our handheld devices at home then? Will we be able to leave them behind or will we be wearing them…or will they be physically implanted, impossible to leave behind?

Site-specific performance uses a found environment to inform/enrich the performance and likewise, the performance imprints a new level of meaning to the existing environment. Augmented Reality Games (ARGs) change the participant's perception and interaction with the environment through information fed to them through digital devices. For example, the food court at the base of my office tower may be where my co-workers and I usually eat our lunch but *right now*, through texts, I learn that my co-workers are waiting for me there to bring them the anti-dote during a zombie-survival team-building ARG. Similarly, videogames create expansive immersive environments for the player to enter into and explore, performing often supernatural abilities[16], and experiencing situations well-outside our normal sphere of opportunities. These experiences in-turn inform our RL personalities, sometimes overtly in the case of cosplay and fan conventions, just as our RL personalities inform who we are in-game. This dual directional influence (feedback loop) is reinforced by game fictions that persist while not actively playing and also occupy multiple platforms that often encroach into our everyday use of digital media in RL. Computers, including everything from the GPS in your car to the search engine on your laptop (or Smart TV!), change our perception of reality. I know people who intentionally leave their smartphones at home to *drop off the grid* as a temporary respite—a nostalgic vacation to a not-so-distant past—from digital augmentation. We are all cyborgs.

The next chapter focuses on the concepts of agency and narrative. First, however, let me draw your attention to the two following case studies. The first involves my own experience of

[16] Even most realistic combat games allow for the player to be hit by bullets several times before being killed. This, in itself, is a super-natural power.

playing *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* and the affective experience I had of feeling like I was *living* in a virtual world. The second case study focuses on the findings of my game session research involving two of my volunteers who both chose to play *Tomb Raider.* Like the previous game session case studies, I reproduce here, quoted verbatim, many of the statements the volunteers uttered while watching themselves play to communicate not only what they say but to get a sense of how they said it. Perhaps it is my experience as a playwright that has convinced me that how someone speaks is often as important as what they say. I recognize the choice of words, phrasing, and verbal rhythm of each individual not only reveals his or her distinct personality but also contains clues regarding their affective state. Also, in light of my discussion throughout this chapter of the cybernetic nature of the relationship between the player and the avatar, I emphasize those statements that either point toward or away from moments of recognition of the connection between the two.

Case Study Three: *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (2011) is an elaboration of the fictional world born from *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (2006) and *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (2002) before it. The province of Skyrim is an expansive place divided into several regions, each with its own city or town ruled by a Jarl. Skyrim is a northern region on the continent of Tamriel on the planet of Nirn and the northern parts of Skyrim are blanketed in perpetual winter. Other parts of Skyrim are either fiercely mountainous, feature expansive plains, or are composed of lush regions. There are many rivers and bodies of water traversing the land dotted by ruins of past civilizations from both recent and ancient history. Travel is mostly done on foot though riding horses or hiring a

carriage can expedite getting around. The scenery is beautifully rendered, the weather changes dramatically based on latitude and elevation, and the sky offers dramatic views of windswept clouds, aurora borealis, and often two large moons. This is a land rife with history, teeming with animals (many hostile) and many races of intelligent beings among which are several varieties of Elves, Humans, Orcs, Khajit (cat-people), and Argonians (lizard people)—of which the player may choose to be within the game.

The game begins with the character knowing virtually the same amount of information as the player. The opening scene finds the player's character captive with other prisoners in a wagon on the way to execution. The player witnesses a beheading and is next on the block when a dragon interrupts the execution as it attacks the town. The player's name, race, and class are chosen by the time the player has escaped the burning town. At this point, the player is encouraged to go first to the neighbouring town to warn them of the dragon but is free to go wherever she wishes. The world is open for exploration.

Skyrim is an open-world sandbox game. The actions of the character, the non-player characters (NPCs) the character meets and interacts with, and the areas explored reveal quests and missions for the character to pursue. These, in turn, provide opportunities to develop skills and level-up (becoming more powerful and able to take on more challenging quests), and ultimately develop the moral compass of the character through her actions. *Skyrim* is a sandbox in that the entire map is available for exploration and discovery. There are literally hundreds of locations embedded within the world of *Skyrim* and each provides some challenge, a new piece of information or at the least, contributes to the depth of the environment the player is experiencing. In fact, the player is free to ignore the main quest lines indefinitely and simply explore the terrain, build her skills, and meet people collecting quests and information. Taken to

the extreme, a player could devote all her time to chopping wood, picking flowers, catching butterflies, and cooking meals. With that said, there is an overarching story involving a struggle against foreign oppression, civil war, and the return of the dragons terrorizing the land. The player creates her character within the game world not only through the initial choices of race and class but also, and more individually, through behavioural choices, attitude toward others in conversations, and choices of which missions to pursue—who to help and who to thwart. These choices, in turn, affect the player's reputation, her "wanted status" by the law, and how the population of *Skyrim* react to the player's character. Changing into a werewolf or being detected as a vampire within a populated region will cause a strong hostile reaction against the player. Helping people will open more conversation possibilities with NPCs, giving better prices in shops and, sometimes, NPCs will offer to join you. A human will normally be welcome in any shop while being an elf or khajit may be met with distrust or hostility, ultimately limiting or changing your options for interaction. These details all contribute to a personal narrative of the game experience unique to each player and are intimately tied to the decisions and actions the player makes through her avatar.

In his book, *The Art of Videogames*, Grant Tavinor says:

> ...the most effective ways of drawing the player character into the narrative is where they are made responsible, if not for the content of the narrative, then for the discovery of the content. Videogames often present *narratives of disclosure or discovery.* This is to say that the player character's epistemic activities can be made to play a crucial role in their unearthing of the details of the narrative. (124)

He says elsewhere in his book regarding open-world sandbox games like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Oblivion* (*Skyrim's* predecessor) that much of the fun:

> ...is exploring and interacting with its detailed fictional environments, perhaps even ignoring the objective-driven activities or *missions* that are represented within that world, or even setting the terms of your own missions: how long can I avoid the cops if I enter this restricted area? James Newman calls this freeplay aspect of videogaming "paidea," contrasting it with "ludic" games such as chess where there are pre-specified goals and objectives. (emphasis original, 87)

The term "paidea" is useful for articulating the particular enjoyment of creating the character and learning what she (and ultimately the player) can do through her actions within the game world. This does not necessarily replace clear ludic goals or a sense of when the game is won, but in a game like *Skyrim* the rewards of paideaic play through exploration and character development are emphasized. I think it is because I was so free to choose how or when I engaged with the main story line compared to other more linear games, that I felt so much ownership and connection to my character. No other game since has given me such a sense that my avatar was an extension of myself in another world.

I started several characters but my most advanced and by far my favourite character in *Skyrim* is Tabitha, a female khajit (cat-person). She started the game as an *every-(cat)-woman* on the cart to the execution but now that she is level 45 (roughly half-way through the leveling process) she owns two houses and has adopted an orphan girl. The way I play her tends to be good in the sense that she is very willing to help people and her reputation in most parts of *Skyrim* is very positive. With that said, khajit, in general, are met with distrust because they are

anthropomorphic felines and well-suited to being thieves and assassins. While Tabitha enjoys a glowing reputation, she is secretly a member of the Thieves' Guild. What is more, she is also not only a vampire but a vampire lord, which, if commonly known would quickly turn her reputation. She must feed every few days to maintain her normal appearance and to travel in daylight. All of these details are secondary to the main story involving the Stormcloak rebellion against the Imperial army backed by the Tavinor (High Elf) oppressors, which, in turn, has caused the return of dragons to the land. My character, Tabitha, rife with startling contradictions within herself, virtually embodies the move away from cut and dried definitions of good or evil in videogame writing.

I had Skyrim dreams. I spent months playing the game (I haven't finished it…does anyone *finish* Skyrim?) and a few more while I was asleep in my dreams. The lush and detailed world of Skyrim, most of it heavily treed with a multitude of plants and grasses to pick, started to blend with the corporeal world of my everyday activities. In RL, I tweeted more than once that I barely suppressed the urge to leap off the streetcar to pick flowers for (virtual) potions in real front yards. It is true that the dialogue within the game is stiff and the random overheard conversations in the taverns and towns is simple and repetitive but the mood and atmosphere of being inside the world of Skyrim is compellingly rich and varied. I loved the thrill of entering the darkness of caves and ancient ruins to not only see who or what I would meet there but also for the excitement of being enclosed in a mysterious place that *felt* real, or at least substantial, cohesive, and present.

Skyrim was different than other games I have played. This one felt the most like my experience of playing the original table-top pencil and paper game *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) where my imagination supplied the rich environments my characters interacted with. Not since I

spent a summer playing *Fallout 3* (2008)—also by Bethesda Softworks—had I experienced the sensation of living in a game. The main plot regarding the return of the dragons (many of which I fought) and the Stormcloak rebellion were happening throughout the game but unlike other game experiences I have had where you are always in the center of the action, in this game, the history, the struggles of the rebellion, the dragons, etc., were happening *around me* in the fictional world. I was allowed the choice to directly engage or pursue my own interests. Sometimes the events forced me to participate due to where I was and who I was involved with and sometimes I was left to freely explore and/or pursue the many side-quests available for people with exploratory play styles like myself.

Skyrim took the idea of free play further than I had experienced before. I realize now the difficulty in writing travel books. How to put into words the experience, the sensation, the affect of being in a place? I can describe to you what it is like to stand in a wheat field in southern Alberta with the blue sky, the wind creating waves in the wheat, the smell of sage in the dry air, but it is not the same as experiencing it for yourself. Similarly, the windswept peaks, the lush valleys dotted by ancient ruins and statuary, the open fields west of the city of Whiterun, the blustery snow covered fields of Winterhold, and the aurora-borealis dancing before the dual moons of this world often made me pause and take in the view. How can I say you have to be there to fully appreciate without sounding trite? Beautiful sunsets occur around the world every day and each one could be considered a miracle in its own right. Similarly, while playing Skyrim, knowing rationally it was a videogame with representations of images rendered algorithmically for my particular game instance never to occur exactly the same way again, I felt I have experienced something special.

I estimate that I have spent about a year playing *Skyrim*. Most of that time was spent in exploration. I made a point to find as many of the 200+ locations marked on a map of the game world as I could. I purchased the strategy guide that included a map with all the named locations. What I discovered was that there were many *more* unnamed locations each with details, bits of history, or even events tied to them that didn't appear on the map. Spending that much time in that far off land feels to me like a trip I took and the experience of it informs who I am today. I still have my saved game file in case I ever want to visit *Skyrim* (and Tabitha) again. It is like keeping a photo album that I can always bring out and visit…except she is part of me now.

If I travelled to Australia for a year the experience would change me and inform the perception of myself and the world thereafter. Recalling Cogburn and Silcox's use of Hume's extended mind theory described in the previous chapter I recognize that my experience of spending a year as Tabitha in *Skyrim* is as much a part of who I am as if I had been in Australia for a year. The difference is that Australia exists in the real world[17] whereas *Skryim* is a fictional place rendered virtually through digital means. Australia may be captured on film and following Barthes' logic, *proven* it is there—a real referent. In contrast, there is no original referent of *Skyrim* to reproduce. It is hyperreal in the Baudrillardian sense but the experience I had there still informs who I am just the same. Spending a year in Australia would change me just as my time in *Skyrim* has. The full impact of this idea was driven home to me while editing this section of the dissertation. Because I was working on this case study on *Skyrim*, I posted a screen shot from *Skyrim* as my *Facebook* cover photo. Almost immediately one of my *Facebook* friends[18] commented that he had *been there*. He, like me, has his own experience of this virtual space and

[17] I have not been to Australia. I know of it mostly through mediated sources. I assume it is not a conspiracy of cartographers.

[18] *Facebook* friends are another ripe topic of exploration regarding the differences between the real and the virtual in our digital media saturated society.

was excited to communicate to me our shared experience of *being there*. Spending time visiting that distant (virtual) land is part of our identities. This is a different feeling of connection than reading the same book or watching the same film. For example, while finding other people who have read the *Harry Potter* books and watched the movies is fun—there is some connection from knowing the same stories—it is not the same as having been *in* the same game world as someone else. There is no blurring of identity between the reader and Harry Potter. The reader is not granted the power to explore Hogwarts or experience riding a broom on her own. Here, I felt I *was* in *Skyrim* having adventures *as* my avatar Tabitha. My *Facebook* friend and I have both been changed by our experiences (like travel to distant places can change a person). In this case, our realities are augmented by our experiences in virtual realities. I am enriched by my time as Tabitha and she does not exist without me. Tabitha is saved as ones and zeroes on a hard-drive to be brought out or put away as I choose like any other cybernetic implant or attachment. She is an enhancement I control but because of her, the perception of myself and what I can do is forever altered. Regardless of whether I play as her again, our cybernetic relationship stays with me, the affect of what it felt I could do *as* her, and the experiences I had while *being* her in *Skyrim* inform who I am.

Case Study Four: Tomb Raider

Of the fifteen games in the *Tomb Raider* series, with the latest installment released in 2015, there have been three videogames titled, simply, *Tomb Raider*. The first came out in 1996, the second in 2000, and the third was released in 2013. The 2013 game is considered a fresh start for the franchise with a more realistic (less doll-like) rendering of the protagonist and a focus on

gritty realism and suspense. The 2013 version of *Tomb Raider* originally came out for the Xbox 360 and PS3 but was later re-released with higher quality graphics and all the DLCs included for the Xbox One and PS4 consoles. It is this version of the game that two of my volunteers, Iris and Trevor, chose to play on the Xbox One.

As I mentioned before, the research sessions consisted of video recording the volunteers playing for two hours. I then had them watch the recording of themselves playing and to comment on the reactions, if any, they saw themselves making while they played. I was present in the room as they played and also as they viewed themselves play afterward. I had broad open-ended questions prepared if needed but I generally let my volunteers take the conversation where they wished based on what they saw in themselves in the way of body position, gestures, and what they said during gameplay.

Both Iris and Trevor have played earlier versions of *Tomb Raider* and neither had played this new version. They both enjoyed the previous games and were eager to try this one and see how it differed. Both play videogames occasionally, less now than they used to, they both claim, and neither had played on the latest generation of consoles before this. I focus on Trevor's session first and Iris's after for no reason other than Trevor's occurred first. All the quotes from the participants are from their respective individual game sessions.

Upon watching the video of Trevor starting the game I commented to him that he was taking to the controls quickly. He made a comparison to riding a bicycle and that "I completed, I think a couple times, *Tomb Raider* one through four or five." Soon into the game he realized this version not only looked more realistic but also had a more mature approach to the storytelling. We heard Trevor say on the video: "Did she just say shit? …I never heard a swear word in a

Tomb Raider before!" On the video we watched Trevor start the game story and figure out the controls. During this time he discovered the manipulable objects were highlighted as opposed to how they were more hidden and/or hard to see in the previous games. He commented that the new version focused more on combat and action than the previous games that were puzzle oriented. As we watched Trevor play he said:

> Oh man, I remember this one level in one of the Tomb Raiders where—I don't remember if it was actually a chess board but it was kind-of basically like a big-assed chess board that the pieces are like massive stone structures you have to, like, push into certain positions to open a door…and it took so long, like just struggling to push slowly across the board from one square to another and like again, pushing it to the square—did that do anything? No. Shit. Do another square.

Even though Trevor was expecting less action and more spatial puzzles, we observed that he learned the controls quickly as indicated by how rarely I noticed he looked at the controller to see which button to press.

We started to talk about the research while we watched the video and what I was specifically investigating. I told him I was interested in any reactions he might see himself make to the game and whether they adhered or didn't to what he remembered he was feeling while playing. He said, "I don't know how *expressive* I'm going to be with like shock and all that stuff. Generally I'm just kind-of like…meh." Later, indicating the footage we were watching early in the game when Lara is climbing out of the cave, he continued this thought by saying, "It's just, definitely like focus and concentration, especially when I realized it's like climb with the trigger

buttons and you have to move out of the way with boulders coming down and stuff. Yeah, focus, definitely." I explained to him that I wasn't looking for large or extreme reactions but that focus and stillness is just as valid. Also, I tried to find a range of experience levels in my volunteers and expected everyone to differ in many ways.

Once out of the cave, which also serves as a training area to guide the player through the controls and the mechanics of manipulating objects, there is a substantial cut-scene giving narrative exposition. I commented that Trevor appeared more relaxed in the video during this section. Specifically, he sat back in the chair instead of leaning forward toward the screen. He responded with:

> Yeah, because I don't have to worry about anything anymore. …That is one of the reasons why, for the most part with games that I am always leaning forward. One, because my eyesight is not that great and…yeah, I'm paying attention to what's going on because I am expecting—I am expecting to die at any point. Pretty much! Especially with all those bloody wolves coming out!

I asked him to expand about the wolves (they appear later in the game). He said, "They blend so well into the background, again it makes it nice and challenging, but I was having trouble even seeing where the hell they were until they were biting my face." The following area in the game opens up to a larger space with many features to explore including a tomb puzzle, roaming deer, and several hidden dream-catchers to be collected. At the point in the video when Trevor found the first dream-catcher he and I started talking about different styles of play. We discovered we both enjoy the exploratory aspect of videogames. Regarding the dream-catchers he said: "if I actually had the time to actually play this game all the way through I'd be trying to get all those

things, too, just searching around, like I know this way takes me to the next level but I'm not done here yet." Trevor spent a respectable amount of time—roughly a half hour—exploring the area, often without speaking, and searching the screen with focused concentration. His quick grasp of the controls aided him in moving about the space and manipulating objects easily. We observed that he didn't move on in the narrative until he had fully explored the environment which included collecting arrows, getting the bow from the corpse hanging from the tree, and also solving some challenging manoeuvers to find hidden items of interest. Also in this area, the game requires the player (as Lara) to hunt a deer for food. Trevor took great care in locating a deer, sneaking up on it without spooking it, and succeeded in killing it on his first attempt. Prompting him to articulate what was going on in his mind during this time in the video I commented on his care and focus to not only kill the deer successfully the first try—something both Iris and I had difficulty with—but also the fact he found all the hidden items. He said:

> Yeah, definitely, I always prefer games that take a little bit more thought involved—cause like, I've played the *Call of Duty* type games before and they're fun but definitely, like, if I'm doing a first person shooter like a military type of game I definitely prefer like…uh, *Splinter Cell* or something, where you can't just go guns blazing through it and kill everybody but the main thing is to be hanging off the ceiling in the dark shadows kind-of thing where people get by and the whole purpose of it is to sneakily just go through without getting spotted, kind-of thing, and then kill people from behind slowly and quietly and stuff like that.

I pointed out that he appeared to be the stillest when he was the most focused on the game. He responded with "yeah, I'm not really animated. I kind-of zone out." I asked him if zoned-out was the right term since he was leaning forward and concentrating intently. He said, "Yeah, for

whatever reason, if I'm like back here like this [sitting back in the chair, legs crossed] I feel like I'm going to screw up more. I don't feel like I'm paying as much attention as I should be." Soon after, at the start of the next area, there is one of the first sustained and truly intense action-filled events involving three wolves attacking Lara. It occurred soon after our conversation about focus and concentration and as the wolves were attacking Trevor he observed himself on the video saying that "I look like a fucking zombie! …Just deadpan." It seems as though, in Trevor's case, when he was most focused on the events in the game like combat and puzzle solving, he was the stillest physically. He was still but his muscles were taught. He adopted a posture of leaning forward and intense concentration on the screen.

After the event with the wolves we started talking about the sound in the game and how it changes dramatically depending on the area and the actions happening. Trevor made a connection to how it reminded him of Hollywood thrillers and how it sometimes spoils the surprise for him. He said:

> That's one thing, even in movies, that I wish they didn't do, where like the ominous music in the background with certain characters—ok, you just basically told me there's something sketchy about that guy that will come up in the future. It's more of a surprise if you think, you know, in movies or games, if you think everything is kind-of cool and all of a sudden he's fucking putting an axe in your back. It would be a lot more surprising.

As the video played we continued talking about the game in a more general sense and its design choices partially due to the fact that on the video Trevor wasn't displaying much variation in his movements and expressions. While watching himself play Trevor seemed more interested in

opening the conversation up to games in general. He divulged that what interested him originally in the previous *Tomb Raider* games, and what tends to be most engaging for him in general, are games that involve logic or spatial puzzles. Specifically, he said:

> It is a funny thing. I think is was L_____ or K_____, neither one of them have ever really gamed at all—played games—but uh, they were both joking around saying oh yeah I don't have time for games it's just a waste of time. I said to L_____ the last time she mentioned that, well it's the same amount of wasting time as watching a movie or reading a book or something but the one thing I like about certain games is that you are little bit more engaged as opposed to just watching a film—I love movies, but at the same time with puzzle solving games and stuff you're actually using your brain, you're thinking about it, you're not just kind-of walking through just mindless you know?

This took our conversation into the area of games that involve several narrative possibilities depending on the choices the player makes. We discovered we had both played *Fable III* and were both impressed with the narrative variations available to be explored in that game. Trevor said it well in that "it's like every little tiny thing you do is going to affect the outcome."

At this point in the video Trevor started a section of the game that was quite intense and involved moving between cover when the light from the flashlights of the searching bad guys is momentarily directed away from Lara's direction. It was a sustained and challenging section that culminated in Lara being discovered, struggling to free herself from a very threatening man—implying he intended to rape her—stealing his gun and shooting him in the head. This section lasted a couple minutes and, as opposed to earlier intense sections, during the flashlight sequence

Trevor leaned back in the chair and appeared relaxed. Trevor then leaned forward again upon shooting the would-be rapist. When we watched him play this section I pointed out that he looked uncannily unmoved when he shot the guy in the face. Trevor stoically replied with:

> That is the thing I never understood about people whining about violent videogames. It's like, unless it's already in your head, to be a little bit fucked up and violent, it's a videogame and you understand it. Like I can play a videogame and walk around like cutting open people's throats and slowly watching the blood drain out because it's a fucking videogame, I'm not thinking anything of it. It's funny but that doesn't mean I'm thinking about doing it in real life.

Trevor's cool intellectual distance to the fiction presented seemed to carry over into his lack of visible or aural reaction to the game. He did mention upon starting the game session that he tends not to be expressive and that he is "just kind-of like…meh." As opposed to Ferdinand in the second case study, Trevor was correct in that he showed little reaction to playing. I wonder how much of that was pre-determined. I know from personal experience that the presence of a video camera makes him self-conscious. I wonder if he was more guarded than usual because of the camera and of observing himself on video.

He revealed during the session he feels most engaged by games that involve puzzles and not as much by action. He was intellectually engaged with this game but except for the movement of his hands, focused scanning of the screen, and occasionally leaning back instead of leaning forward, his physical body exhibited little movement. He gave very few verbal cues that indicated he projected his sense of self onto his avatar. Leaning forward and scanning intently demonstrated definite alertness on his part but no clear moments of proprioceptive blurring

between his avatar and his corporeal body. I see Trevor's game session as valuable due to its contrast to the other sessions. As I mentioned in the introduction, I am conducting qualitative research rather than quantitative with my small sample of volunteers. Trevor's game session demonstrates how diverse individual affective reactions can be and that everyone is affected by videogames differently. Some, it seems, not at all. Perhaps if given longer to play the game or to play without being observed, Trevor may allowed himself to be affected by the game. He shared with me stories of times he had playing other games and may have made that connection. However, in the time allotted by our game session, I did not see him make a cybernetic connection to his avatar.

If I were to design and conduct a similar study in the future, I would focus more closely on the difference gender plays in expressions of affect. Specifically, I would look at Helen Thornham's methodology to see how it could better inform my own and also bring in material from theorists on gender and affect like Jill Dolan and Ann Cvetkovich. My female participants, generally, were more open to recognizing and describing moments they felt particularly affected by in the game play and when they felt proprioceptive connection with their avatars. My male participants, however, were diverse in their reactions. Ferdinand was very expressive, Gurmeet (featured in Case Study Six) was expressive in a confident (controlled) way, whereas Trevor showed very little expression at all. Just as all three of my female participants (and to some degree, Ferdinand, as well) commented and criticized their own appearance when seeing themselves on video, which could be attributed to a learned, gendered, behaviour, I question whether Trevor's lack of expression is as much a learned (male) behaviour—to not allow himself to show being affected.

In contrast to Trevor's stoic attitude, Iris was quite expressive, both physically and verbally, during her game session. Upon first seeing herself on video she said, "I am very conscious about how I hold my jaw. I can see that if I get really engrossed in something completely I just drop my jaw" and soon following she exclaimed, "Oh God, I do, like, the weirdest moves!" From her immediate reaction at seeing herself play, I extrapolate that she hadn't been conscious of how animated she was while playing and was surprised by what she saw. This is in contrast to Trevor who usually displays a calm demeanor and may or may not have consciously remained still knowing he was being recorded.

Iris was also more freely verbal in expressing her reactions to watching herself play and was reliving playing the game through the expressions she saw cross her face. For instance, within minutes of starting the game, Iris saw herself cringe and she declared "Oh, that was when I fell on the nail. Ok" and then she laughed. Following this there was a lengthy cut-scene with a good deal of exposition. She had mentioned to me she had played some of the old *Tomb Raider* games in the past. I asked her if she noticed much of a difference between the look of the cut-scenes and the actual gameplay compared to the previous games. She said:

> Yeah, actually, because the last time I played *Tomb Raider* it was 1996 or whenever it came out so there was a—and in other first person games that B____ plays anyway, even *Lord of the Rings*, there is a clear, distinct difference between the cinematic elements of it, or the narrative sequences, and the first person aspect. This one did not have the…this one wasn't as clear for me. Yeah, the quality was very similar.

Coming back from the lengthy cut-scene into the active gameplay, Iris's posture and attention toward the screen changed. She said, "I look so tense!" I offered that she appeared focused. She added:

> Yeah, yeah. I look like this really nerdy little kid or something. …Dissecting myself. My whole body is tense and is pretty much the opposite of the character I am playing even though I'm sort of.... Feeling the…it is amazing to me how much you sort of try to feel the embodiment—try to embody the character itself—but your own body is completely the opposite of the character.

Here, I took Iris's observation to mean that the tension she saw in her own body contrasted with the limber movement of her avatar. I offer that her tense corporeal body appeared to be in opposition to the character she was playing in that she felt she was moving freely as Lara Croft within the game. This was occurring during the initial portion of the game that happens within a cave and takes the player through the various controls to move and interact with the environment. The cave section serves as a training area. Iris said, "Ok, so this is me at the beginning. And I would say I am far more tense." I suggested that this may be because she was learning the controls as well as exploring the environment. "Yes. And I just don't generally… You can tell the tension. Look how I'm holding my jaw." Admittedly, this game is designed to be quite scary and the interior of the cave is meant to feel unsafe and claustrophobic. The lighting is disconcerting (lit by torches), flickering with deep shadows illuminating disturbing scenes of skeletons, primitive decoration, and refuse. In addition, the soundtrack is very suspenseful and Lara's breathing and vocalizations of discomfort are prominent. I believe learning the controls in this environment contributed to Iris's visible tension. Iris and I witnessed Iris on the recording visibly react to something happening to her in the game. She said, "I

winced, yeah." I pointed out she didn't wince during the cut-scenes even when they involved explosions. "No, no. It's true."

We continued watching and Iris said "sorry this made me think of the superficial girl in me but I am totally horrified of the nerdy faces I am making." I assured her of the anonymity of the test results and that no one but she and I would witness the "nerdy faces" she made. As I mentioned above, it is interesting to note that while all six of my volunteers voiced how unusual it was to watch themselves play, all three of the women and only one of the men commented negatively regarding their appearance as they played. I am not sure how much of the negative assessment of their appearance has to do with playing videogames, but I did notice the women were more critical of their appearance than the men in general. Again, this would be an interesting subject for further study.

By this time, Iris on the video recording was becoming more comfortable and fluid with the controls and the Iris who was watching with me started to make broader observations about herself and the game. She said:

> See, I'm relaxing more now. …Now that I know what is going on. …It's funny because when you are actually playing it versus to when you are listening—I have listened to this game being played and ALL it sounds like is her getting hurt. It sounds continuous when you're listening to it in the background. […] But in the actual game I was sort-of impressed there was a lot more running around and needing to hunt. You're not caught—I figured it would be constant *constant* escape from bad people. I am assuming that happens later.

I revealed to her that, yes, there are many instances of escaping capture later in the game and that, generally, I was impressed with the variety of gameplay the game provided. Iris said, "I'm still in the cave. It took me a while to get out of that cave." I assured her it didn't matter at all how far she made it in the game during our two hour session. Her observations of herself while playing were really the focus of the research. I explained that I chose two hour sessions because the games would be new to everyone and I chose people of varying experience levels. I estimated that two hours would be enough time to allow the player the chance to become comfortable enough with the controller so that it no longer interfered with the engagement with the narrative. Upon hearing this, Iris opened up to me and said:

> I haven't played a lot of first person games. I tend to play a lot of puzzle games like *Tetris*. *Bejewelled* is my latest addiction—I am so hooked on that—I tend not to play a lot of first person games generally because the guys in my life tend to play them and, you know, monopolize the controller. So the Sega Genesis we had growing up was my little brother's. But even then the first games we ever got were like *Lion King* or *Earth Worm Jim*; games where you were going left to right and there wasn't a Y-axis really. There were no three dimensions really. *Tomb Raider* was about as advanced as it got.

It was interesting to me that Iris's memory of playing games revealed not only a perspectival shift between two dimensions and three but also how videogames had been gendered for her at an early age. This kind of gendered exposure to games in the sense of who was monopolizing the controller is the focus of researchers like Helen Thornham whose work I refer to in other

sections.[19] It is curious to see this gendered hierarchy used as an explanation for what Iris felt contributed to her self-perceived shortcomings as a videogame player. I wonder, too, if there is more of a connection to her earlier comments regarding how "nerdy" she looks while playing and whether her confidence in her appearance also affects her perception of her skill level at playing videogames. While watching herself on the video she continued:

> My friends in high school and I played a lot of *007: Golden Eye* when that came out which I think is generally just the gun—although again the guys would just take over and the girls would kind-of eat popcorn and watch. So, the perspective thing is weird to me and takes some practice, something to get used to. I'm decent at Wii but awful at *Mario Kart*. I could just never make that work. It's hilarious. Anyway. But in terms of embodiment I find it really interesting it takes a while to get comfortable with it.

Again, perspective in videogames, and lack of exposure to and practice with games exhibiting a three-dimensional game world are connected in Iris's recounting of her seminal early gaming experiences. She is right that three-dimensional videogames—like all games—take practice and time to become comfortable with playing them. The gendered hierarchy of who got the controller and thusly got to be the more experienced player first is a telling imbalance that can lead to a later conclusion in gaming culture that boys are *better* than girls at videogames. Iris's statement reveals that this may not be the case and it may be, simply, that the boys were hogging the controllers. In my small sample of volunteers I saw no essential difference in gender regarding videogame playing prowess. The difference I saw in skill level came, instead, from how often

[19] There is a strong parallel here to Laura Levin's research into the gendering of participation and agency in live immersive performance, specifically her work concerning Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* in her recent publication *Performing Ground* (2014). The connection to Levin's work is important in light of my interpretation of videogames as a different kind of immersive performance.

each participant plays videogames. Daphne, Trevor, and Gurmeet all play regularly and so, were better at playing. Skill level was not important to my research and I sought a range of skill levels in my participants. In fact, the most confident and aggressive player (often thought of as male traits) in my group of six volunteers was Daphne. There may be a difference regarding gender in what is interesting to players about videogames—and how they are affective—but I, personally, saw no difference in ability based on gender.

Continuing with Iris's observation of herself playing she could see her physical attitude and facial expressions change in response to events within the game. "I'm running, I'm running, I'm about to fall. Something's going to happen I think." She continued by saying, "Ok, you can tell when I'm focusing REALLY hard is I immediately start to grind my teeth or like when I was a little kid, I'd stick my tongue out. That's how [laughs] that's how you can tell I'm really intensely focused." We shifted the conversation from direct observations of Iris reacting to specific events toward the more general affective cues the game provides. When I mentioned the atmosphere of the game Iris immediately stated: "It's the music. The music really *really* affects you. Yeah, the music is very much an affective cue in this game. The music and her, her screaming, her gasping—I'm trying to figure out how the heck they recorded that." By this time Iris was near the end of the cave (the initial portion of the game) which involved a wild looking man grabbing Lara's leg. The challenge was to struggle free before a cave-in crushes her. If successful, the wild man is crushed instead. Regarding this moment in the game, Iris had to attempt it several times. "I died again. Oh, this is where I had to press Y!" However, she was triumphant when she succeeded. "Oh yeah, he got impaled and I'm still running!" I asked her about that moment and what she saw in herself. "See how tight my neck gets, Geez. This is intense!" I pointed out she uncrossed her legs. "Yeah yeah yeah, I noticed I crossed my legs in

the more, the more relaxed I got towards the end. Oh, I'm out. I'm out!" Iris's observations of her intense focus while playing and reacting to the events within the game world demonstrated that she was physically responding to events happening to her avatar within the game world. As she became less conscious of the specific controls she needed to know and more focused on her avatar's movements I could see her connection to the virtual body she controlled was resonating viscerally in her own body. Iris was still self-conscious about watching herself play but we could also see how the game was starting to affect her corporeal body.

Escaping the cave was the first mini climax of the game. The game follows traditional Aristotelian play structure in that it is divided into scenes each with its own build in intensity to a climax before moving onto the next area again containing a similar build and release propelling the story forward. Now that Iris had escaped the cave, the new (outside) area initially provided a short respite from immediate danger and allowed her to move around and find objects. Having a moment to ponder the surroundings and get a clear look at her avatar, Iris said, "Yeah, I like that they didn't make her into a Barbie clone. The Angelina Jolie version was it? […] This is when I find stuff!" This reboot to the *Tomb Raider* franchise focused on adding realism and depth to the characters. Part of this attempt at realism was to render Lara Croft with less exaggerated dimensions—to make her look like more like an actual young woman rather than an over-sexualized doll—and to make her more susceptible to injury. In this game she is shown to be vulnerable both emotionally as well as physically in the sense of a well-rounded character rather than a mechanical doll.

Iris discovered the ruins of a crashed plane dangling vertically on a cliff-face. "Oh, this is the plane, eh? …Yeah, my legs are crossed now. I'm definitely more casual." This part of the

game is more like the previous *Tomb Raider* games in that the challenge is to find the correct path through the environment. It is a spatial puzzle involving climbing and jumping. Iris said:

> I'm about to jump off a cliff and die. …It's like a Wiley Coyote fall off the cliff. …Oh yeah, I see me leaning. …You really feel a sense of accomplish[ment] after you climb the plane. Which is funny because it is more left to right which is what I'm more used to in terms of games. I played Gameboy all the time, I did a lot of those games when I was a kid. I just skipped the whole 3D…

Her comment regarding leaning is important to note. While playing, her real body leaned the same direction she was controlling Lara to lean. This was also the same type of movement Ferdinand described during the second case study that he stopped doing years ago as he became a more experienced player of videogames. There were hints of movement like this in Iris before but this was the first clear blurring of Iris's proprioception of her corporeal body and that of her avatar. In addition, her statement about her sense of accomplishment from climbing the plane demonstrates her cybernetic connection (closed feedback loop) to her avatar. The implied 'I' that climbed the plane is both Iris and Lara. Iris climbed the plane *as* Lara and felt the sense of accomplishment *for* her avatar who performed the activity—a two way communication.

Having successfully negotiated the plane challenge, Iris was gaining confidence and it showed in her posture and facial expression. "See, I'm having more fun with it now. I'm not…, you know." Iris (playing the game) was moving through the forest following the path and both Iris and I watching heard her say something about expecting something to jump out and grab her.

> Yeah, I made a comment there that I am convinced someone's going to kill me. You get conditioned in the opening sequence to expect getting grabbed by random

> scary looking men. And again, I think part of it is from having listened to the game being played, too. Knowing there is a lot of it in there. …She breaths very heavily.

Again, the soundscape and music are strong affective cues in this game. Nothing jumped out at her at this moment but instead she found a sheltered area to rest followed by a cut-scene. Iris commented "notice how the music gets calmer and then… [cut-scene] and now I'm more relaxed. …Ok. This is where I notice I still have the…why am I pressing buttons there? I'm still very poised just in case. …So this is a young Lara Croft." The cut-scene finished and the next section involving the large area with the deer and dream-catchers (mentioned earlier) is introduced. "You can tell I'm more relaxed now because [I'm] holding the controller down on my lap instead of like that [held in front]. I'm not looking all hunched over." The first challenge in this area is to get the bow from the dead body hanging from a tall tree. The game allows Lara to get close and then a timed lean out toward the gently swinging body is required to grab the bow. I pointed out to Iris that as she was controlling Lara to reach over, so too was she moving the controller and extending her arms in the same direction. This was the second clear blurring of Iris's two bodies as one. "Oh yeah, fist pump moment there! That first moment when she picks up the bow."

Now she had the bow, of course, she had to kill a deer. "Oh this is where I'm trying to kill deer. Ok. I like this stage of the game because it's not as intense, it's not as competitive necessarily, you know what I mean, you can take your time and practice a little bit, get the hang of it." I asked Iris what this section of the game made her feel and she passionately replied:

> Deer killing was traumatic! I figured…that one kind-of surprised me because—especially first person shooter games, zombie games, *Call of Duty*, anything war related—you know you blow up people's brains out and they die gruesomely and you sort of say ah hah! Or at least that's what I understand from watching people play them. Or even *Lord of the Rings: Lego*, you—if you want to get something you just start whacking it and so I figured the deer—like, I would just kill it and it would be dead and I didn't realized I'd have this moment of regret or remorse and have to look it in the eye and apologize to it as it died. It seems very antithetical to a lot of these video games. Especially when buddy got crushed by the boulder.

Regarding the wild man who grabbed her in the cave I pointed out he was different because he attacked her. "It's true, it's true but I figure ok let's, you know, the deer there, let's—you got to eat, let's do this, the sort-of moment of humanity in there kind-of shocked me." I told Iris I thought it was interesting how she reacted to killing the deer and then immediately after, almost on cue, the game had Lara express a similar reaction. Iris replied:

> Well yeah. I felt totally victorious for killing this thing, you know Die! Die! Die! And then, especially after having to fire a few different arrows at it, and I got more antagonistic toward the deer the more they ran away and then yeah, when I finally got him I was thinking oh, you've given your life for me in this game! Ok.

After thinking further about how the game had somehow mirrored Iris's reaction to killing the deer with Lara Iris said:

> I found it kind-of funny that, I almost found that the game was exploiting my emotions when I had to look into the eye of the deer and watch it die. So I kind-of

> liked it that the game somewhat validated that by making the character feel the same way that it seems appropriate I guess. …And it also reminded me that it was a videogame and this character is doing what this character has to do.

I asked how killing the deer differed from killing the wolves a short while later in the game. "They were threatening my life." I asked if they were more like the wild man to her. She said:

> Yeah, no, no looking in the eye or anything like that. They were going to kill me. Well especially when you don't, when you first see the wolf and you don't realize what it is going to do—realize it is going to eat out your throat!—You know you do what you have to do. At that point—they are also really scary looking so—opposed to the deer which are nice majestic creatures.

After Iris killed the deer, instead of pushing forward with the narrative in the next area, she decided she needed to hunt more to collect more food. While stalking deer she didn't realize one was standing quite close to her side. It got spooked and kicked her before bounding away. Iris (on the recording) exclaimed "the deer kicked me!" I point this out to Iris and she said, "Yeah, die! Die fucker! We are not friends! …Yeah, that came as a shock." She agreed with me that when it kicked her in the game her vocal response was as though it had kicked *her*, personally. This was the third clear overlap of Iris's corporeal body and her virtual one.

Iris eventually succeeded in bringing down the second deer. Seeing herself do so, Iris opened up and said:

> You just killed Bambie's mother. Mission achieved. …The funny thing is I started getting hungry too. I won't lie, I started to get hungry while hunting deer. I don't know if this is really the case but I wasn't running in a straight line as much and I

> don't know if it was the game, it felt as though the game was making her run as if she were dizzy and weak from hunger. And that really bugged me, made me REALLY want to kill some deer. So I actually disliked it when I didn't get to eat, when all you got to see was it roasting on the spit. The smoking on the spit was not enough for me. Especially when she passes out two minutes later.

I don't know if the game actually makes Lara dizzy and weak with hunger during the hunting sequence of the game. Whether it did or didn't, this was Iris's perception of what was happening and part of her experience. The fact that Iris felt hunting deer made her hungry is an interesting unexpected affect. Extrapolating that feeling of hunger further by looking for hints in the game that Lara was also affected by hunger is a very interesting phenomenon, a side-effect of the feedback loop between Iris and her avatar I had not anticipated.

The next part of the game Iris encountered was a partially flooded tunnel she needed to traverse and explore to get to the next area. Within it the music and atmosphere change dramatically. Iris described it this way:

> The soundscape, the vocal soundscape is intense. Even when you get into water she is: "oh God!" you know? You're never comfortable. You're never comfortable you're only sort-of relieved when you get to roast your deer and hear some of this relieved breathing but you are never comfortable, really. …Even now the music, the music is beautiful but there is this constant breath underneath. Or you are walking through the water and all of a sudden she goes under and sputters. These little touches that just don't let you enjoy your surroundings too much.

She navigated the tunnel deftly and just before the gaming session was over she reached a point in the game where she finds one of her friends. She discovers her friend Sam (a small woman the same age as Lara) and a man her friend had recently met on the island talking casually by a fire. Iris found this to be very strange. So strange, she thought it might be a hallucination. She said:

> One of the reasons I kind-of wondered if this was a hallucination was it seems to me—I'm just analyzing—my nightmare brain is going here but it looks to me like she's too trusting of him. Why would she, a small—I'm a small petite woman—why would such a small girl or young woman be just hanging out with this dude? It's funny, I see the character Sam—my own body is a lot more like hers, you know, I'm not built like Lara Croft, so the character of Sam I sort of relate to more on an embodied level I guess. I wonder what it would be like to play as Sam, but yeah to me why would you be hanging out with this guy alone in the woods? It makes, it makes no sense.

Iris's reaction to this scene is different than the one I had when I encountered it. Iris immediately had a gut reaction to being alone with a strange man in the wilderness. She was affected by this situation as though she was the one in the environment with the man. Iris projected herself into the environment as Lara and felt the uneasiness Lara would have felt if the situation were real. I see Iris' reaction as an example of her cybernetic connection to her avatar, Lara. When I played the game, I thought it was odd to find Sam and the strange man at the fire, of course, but I didn't have the same visceral reaction to the potential physical danger that Iris felt. As it turns out Iris's instincts are correct. Further into the game the strange man is revealed to be more dangerous than most people can imagine. He is the leader of the island's deranged death cult and responsible for

many horrendous acts. Iris perceived this danger immediately by imagining herself as Sam and how wrong the situation felt.

Iris's game session ended while at that campfire. Her gameplay session held several moments where a distinct connection between her and her avatar was demonstrated. These moments arose once she was comfortable enough with the controls that she was no longer consciously thinking about pushing buttons but was engaged physically and mentally with escaping danger, climbing precarious trees, and hunting deer. As opposed to Trevor playing the same game, I saw in Iris a strong cybernetic relationship develop during the game session between her and her avatar, Lara Croft.

Conclusion

The title of this chapter, "Cyborg Like Me," like the previous chapter, is a nod to the book from 1961, *Black Like Me*. However, this chapter title also goes another step further insinuating a vague threat of assimilation by cyborg culture from the influence of pop culture references like The Borg from the *Star Trek* universe. Unlike the previous chapter that dealt with the player's choice to engage with the fictional virtual world in a videogame and to project herself into it through her avatar, this chapter goes a step further in describing how the relationship between player and avatar creates a "self-regulating system that is set up by a stimulus and response through continuous feedback" (Lichty 351-2). It is a feedback loop that has an affect on the player in the real world and changes her in the process. The player and her avatar, together, form a cybernetic relationship resulting in a part human-part machine entity that is greater than the sum of its parts.

However, as the results from the case studies show, this cybernetic relationship is not guaranteed. Whereas my experience playing *Skyrim* and Iris's game session both demonstrated moments of cybernetic augmentation through her proprioceptive connections and my frequent dreams of being in *Skyrim*, Trevor's cold intellectual distance (perhaps consciously) kept him from affectively crossing over the cybernetic divide. While we all seemed to enjoy the experience of playing, Iris and I freely threw ourselves into the virtual worlds whereas Trevor held back and maintained an analytical distance.

The last section before the case studies looked at the dark side of being cyborgs through the use of digital technology. The sinking feeling of leaving one's phone behind is not simply an inconvenience but a strongly affecting moment of being off the grid—to be forced to de-evolve back to simply human and adapt until the phone is found, the wifi is connected, the cell reception returns, etc. Regarding this phenomenon I make reference to not only interesting explorations of site-specific performance and augmented reality games but also to Sherry Turkle's warnings about how technology is changing our view not only of the world but also of each other.

While a few gamers like Trevor may try to resist, we are all cyborgs. Most of our daily interactions with real people are mediated through digital technology, the same media that provides our virtual experiences as well. We do not simply use digital technology, it also uses us. Using it augments our perception of reality but also changes us in the process. As mentioned earlier, Massumi reminds us that "the human becomes a raw material or *natural resource* for the network" (130). In the words of Captain Jean-Luc Picard when he was part of The Borg, "Resistance is futile!"

Chapter Four: The Illusion of Agency in a Virtual Environment

In 1966, MIT researcher Dr. Joseph Weizenbaum, created ELIZA, a computer program that imitates the behaviour of a psychotherapist. Interaction with ELIZA is conducted through text in the form of questions and answers. ELIZA questions, the participant answers. This early example of interactive software is a good point of reference for investigating the seductive allure of player agency, the focus of this chapter. In short, my position is that players of videogames want to suspend their disbelief just as theatre audiences want to be transported into the fiction performed before them. The power of feeling like an active agent in the narrative is not to be underestimated and, as ELIZA demonstrated at the time, the desire to engage with virtual entities can even override reason. Janet Murray describes this phenomenon of privileging the virtual in Weizenbaum's 1966 experiment. According to Murray, Weizenbaum's ELIZA was an early attempt at creating novel narrative experiences for the user and was designed to carry on a conversation under the guise of being a psychotherapist (69). Murray writes:

> To Weizenbaum's dismay, a wide range of people, including his own secretary, would "demand to be permitted to converse with the system in private, and would, after conversing with it for a time, insist, in spite of [Weizenbaum's] explanations, that the machine really understood them." Even sophisticated users "who knew very well that they were conversing with a machine" soon forgot that fact, just as theatergoers, in the grip of suspended belief, soon forget that the action they are witnessing is not 'real' (70-1).

Weizenbaum's secretary wanted to believe in the fictional reality of ELIZA as a therapist rather than the reality of ELIZA as a program. Regarding this experiment, Weizenbaum's secretary might be dismissed as an isolated example of gullibility or, especially filtered through the gender biases prevalent in the mid-1960s, represented somehow less rational than her male counterparts. However, in my experience at LAN parties (Local Area Network parties) and fan expos, males are just as eager (maybe more!) to privilege their virtual experiences over RL—even to the point of (what I would consider) fanaticism. The plethora of user created wikis, meet-ups, and costume play (cosplay) attest to this desire to extend the reality of these virtual fictions. Players of videogames want to believe in the reality of Albion, Ferelden, Azeroth, Aperture Science, Liberty City, Rapture, etc. and express their frustration (and amusement) in YouTube channels, blogs, chatrooms, the comment sections for the games themselves, and videoblogs like Glitchfest and Son of a Glitch. Players are not shy when a glitch in the game or an implausible plot device takes them out of the (virtually live) game world. Weizenbaum's secretary is not alone in wanting to dismiss the fact the fiction is not real.

Moving forward from wanting to believe in the fiction to creating the fiction, actual narrative agency in the sense of users creating completely novel narrative experiences may not be truly achievable yet. Even if it were, the *feeling* of being the one in-charge making the decisions in the game world is a powerful affect and, using Auslander's turn of phrase, may be the one we *value* more than actually creating the narrative content. The feeling I allude to is more than just the experience of agency through exploration and/or manipulating objects within a virtual environment. It is the range of sensations that arise from immersion (as defined in chapter two) and the potential to cause change as per the player's initiative—albeit in a pre-authored space. The illusion of agency involves having one feel like she is making novel decisions within

a virtual environment while remaining cognizant that the environment and the possibilities it offers are pre-determined by others. This illusion has the power to override reason, like in the example of ELIZA above, if the participant is willing to engage with the fiction similar to theatre-goers choosing to believe in the reality of the play. As author and gamer Tom Bissell says, "I *want* to be told a story—albeit one I happen to be part of and can affect, even if in small ways. If I wanted to *tell* a story, I would not be playing video games" (emphasis original, 39-40).

Agency can be defined as making decisions and performing actions *that matter* in a consistent diegesis. Massumi claims: "The base meaning of the word 'agency' in this context is the expression of intelligence in needful or useful action" (128). Ekman and Lankoski write: "A special case of unconscious emotion is related to the player's feeling of *agency*. Agency, here, refers to a perceived causality between one's actions and the events in the game" (188). I read "a special case of unconscious emotion" in Ekman and Lankoski's statement as meaning affect, special and unconscious because it has yet to be socialized by language or, at the very least, remains largely unintelligible within prevailing systems of meaning. In addition, the qualifiers regarding agency found in the previous sentences: "that matter," "useful," "perceived causality," imply that a judgment is required by the active agent as to the efficacy of her actions in relation to the *teloi*—goals and objectives—within the game. These goals are both personal to the player and authored by the game creators. This subject position is the connection between agency and affect. According to Murray, the active agent, or "interactor" as she calls it, "can experience one of the most exciting aspects of artistic creation—the thrill of exerting power over enticing and plastic materials. This is not authorship but agency" (153). Murray's separation of agency from authorship provides a good segue into an exploration of the relationship between narrative agency and its affect.

Literally, narrative agency implies input in the creation of the narrative itself. However, to the player, the feeling of having input in the game story—narrative agency—is an illusion akin to suspension of disbelief. The audience/player *wants* to believe her actions *matter* within the game environment and have *real* impact on the outcome. On some level the theatergoer knows she is watching actors on stage before her but she chooses to believe in the fiction presented. Likewise, the videogame player knows that every option available within the game narrative has been predetermined by the game designers but chooses to believe in the fiction presented and that her actions are important within the narrative and to herself. The illusion of agency for the player produces the affect of being in control, of becoming immersed within the game story and environment, and of becoming emotionally invested in the outcome of the story.

Nadav Lipkin, using Espen Aarseth's term of ergodic texts, says "the effort a player puts into the game is significant—it has meaning. Furthermore, the belief of illusion that the player is able to create one's own story means that *teloi*—ends, goals, objectives—are crucial components that differentiate non-ergodic texts from video games" (36). A sense of having agency within the game—control over events and narrative choices that matter—inspires emotional and affective investment and a willingness to immerse. Lipkin continues:

> These *teloi,* both explicit (such as instructions given in a tutorial) and implicit (a player's personal self-defined play objectives), create affects apart from the visual, auditory, haptic, and ergodic qualities of the text by establishing the sense of control (if not actual control) and creating drive in a manner uniquely distinct from nonergodic texts" (41).

The sense of control and feeling of agency that accompanies it, described by Lipkin, means that though the game itself is authored by the game developers and designers, the player has a sense of creating her own story within that authored universe—a co-creative act. What is more, the idea of losing oneself within a game-world and investing in the outcome of one's actions as the active agent in the narrative can be a sensation both pleasant and painful: a form of *sublime* experience unique to the medium of videogames. I develop this idea later in this chapter.

Considering the connection between suspension of disbelief and immersion, an interesting parallel between theatre and videogames exists. Just as not all styles of theatre demand the same suspension of disbelief—farce, melodrama, realism, musicals, etc. engage different sets of conventions and standards of plausibility for the audience—so too, not all games are equal in what they ask of the player to feel immersed while playing. Games of emergence like *Go*, *Chess*, *Civilization*, *Star Craft*, etc. (among many others) are games that unfold via the rules of the game, the game outcome is different with each play session, and narrative plays a secondary role to playing and succeeding at the game. Because the outcome depends on the implementation of the game's ludic elements (the rules or algorithms dictating play), permutations of the gameplay are immensely varied and the inclusion of narrative ranges from complimentary to secondary at best. For example, the faction the player chooses in *Star Craft* doesn't change how the game is played just like it doesn't matter in *Chess* whether the player chooses to play black or white. In these games of emergence, the game unfolds through the player's implementing of the game rules to outwit her opponent. This is different from games that feature narrative progression[20] where story is stressed over game rules. Games like first

[20] Known simply as games of progression.

person shooters (FPSs)[21] and role-playing games (RPGs), for example, require ludic systems to shape how the player interacts with the game world but their narrative elements are essential in that they: a) create empathy for the avatar, b) encourage immersion into the game world, and c) give a sense that the player's actions and decisions matter on a deeper, affective level.

Narrative defines *why* the actions matter. In games of progression, quests are often given to the player through interactions with characters within the game. Fulfilling these quests allow the player to *progress* to greater quests. Games of progression place a heavy emphasis on narrative to convey meaning within the gameplay, often feature detailed virtual environments, and place great importance on player immersion. Videogame scholar and designer Michael Mateas claims "agency is a necessary condition for immersion" (26). As agency is seen by game designers like Mateas to be instrumental in creating immersion—a sense of intense involvement or even entering/being part of the game world—I will isolate some of the strategies to create, if not agency itself, then its affect.

Janet Murray reminds us that "there is a distinction between playing a creative role within an authored environment and having authorship of the environment itself" (152) and speaks to the need for a more nuanced take on what it is to be an active agent. Just as I divided the concept of liveness into seven possible meanings (based on Auslander's six variations plus my own embellishments) in chapter two and explored Jesper Juul's six definitions of narrative (in chapter three), the concept of agency, likewise, needs to be re-examined. Hence, within this chapter I take another look at narrative and specifically define the concepts of **user-driven narrative**, **user-created narrative**, and **meaningful choice**. However, before progressing to discuss agency

[21] This is in relation to the campaign mode where the story of the game is explored. Other modes common to FPSs like player versus player, capture the flag, and area/arena combat are often more aptly considered to be emergent gameplay.

and affect, I want to take a step back and discern what sets videogames apart from other narrative forms. I would like to turn again to Roland Barthes, this time to use his quest to discern photography's fundamental challenge for the viewer as a model to ask the same of videogames. This may help inform our understanding of the player's relationship to her avatar and the narrative discovered through her actions within the game—both authored by the game designers and from her *paidea* (freeplay)—within the game world.

The *Noeme* of Videogames

In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes describes the *noeme*—the essential idea or thought—of a photograph as "that-has-been" (77). As I mentioned in chapter two, Barthes saw a photograph as a "certificate of presence" (87) and considered it the proof that an original referent was really there. Elsewhere in his reflections he observes that cinema is not the same as photography. It is a different art form and that in cinema "something *has passed* in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images: it is a different phenomenology, and therefore a different art which begins here, though derived from the first one" (78). Using Barthes' logic, I would argue that the *noeme* of cinema is movement: the thing *that-has-passed*. Cinema records the passage of time, is incomplete, or has no end point—like time—in that the pose of the still photograph is continually replaced by a stream of poses creating movement. Even in moments of stillness in film, the spectator scans the image for signs of movement: the rustling of leaves in the trees, the passing of clouds, and the blink of an eye. Film hails a different kind of gaze because the *noeme* of film is different.

Videogames are yet another art form and, like cinema's relationship to photography, have some aspects derived from the earlier ones. Following Barthes' logic, I ask, what is the essential idea or *noeme* of videogames? Videogames require input from the player and the game reacts to that input in real time so the *noeme* of videogames would need to be in the present rather than in past like that of photography and cinema. It implies *action* in that the player's decisions cause change in the virtual world and, because the game requires input from the player, the *noeme* of videogames would be in the form of a question rather than a statement of fact. Therefore, the fundamental idea or thought—the *noeme*—of videogames is *what-do-I-do?* This is often the first thing I ask when I start up a game or start a new area. The related question that I often ask is 'where am I?' which anticipates the next question, 'now that I am here, what options are available to me?' Again, this is a derivation of the *noeme* of *what-do-I-do?*, hailing a certain relationship to the narrative and way of interacting with the game.

Though he doesn't make a connection to Barthes's term, *noeme*, there has been some parallel work by games scholar Barry Atkins regarding what videogames prompt from the player. In his article from 2006 for *Games and Culture* titled "What Are We Really Looking At? The Future-Orientation of Video Game Play" he makes the assertion that videogames are "temporal events that exist only in their dialogic relationship with a player" (135). He writes that "the game gaze is always firmly fixed in a future-orientation," and through this he posits that the unfolding narrative in videogames prompts the player as the principal creator as the center of the experience with "what happens next if I" (127). I have come to the *noeme* of *what-do-I-do?* in videogames from Barthes's analysis of photographs as things that have passed. His analysis is centered in the past tense. My prompt of *what-do-I-do?* acknowledges the player's experience in the present moments while playing. Atkins arrives at a similar prompt, but his focus has a strong

emphasis on the future result rather than the present moment. Because my research is geared toward the feeling of presence within the game world and how that affects the player, I feel it is more apropos to focus on the *noeme* of videogames as a concept firmly placed in the present.

If the *noeme* of videogames is prompting the player to respond and to act, the relationship to performance and even theatre (virtual or otherwise) by the entity of spectator/actor has changed the rules for dramatic structure and the concept of character. No longer is this entity willing to sit back and observe but she learns by doing. There is an interesting parallel in the contemporary dramatic theory of Elinor Fuchs. She claims Brecht was radically Aristotelian in his "anti-Aristotelian" idea of subordinating character to plot. Regarding his notes on the Street Scene Fuchs writes "Brecht comments that 'the demonstrator [the actor] should derive his characters entirely from their actions.'" She continues her analysis on Brecht and contemporary theatre practice and discovers:

> Among the three tendencies I have identified in modern theater as distancing themselves from character, the metaphysical strand, with its ties to the mystery and morality play, is closer to traditional allegory than the Brechtian parable with its ironic relationship between actor and character, society and fable. (33)

Fuch's observation is useful for two reasons. The first is that action *leads to* character rather than derives *from* character (the psychological view). The second is that the idea of character moves into the realm of allegory. Consider a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) like *World of Warcraft* or a role-playing game like *Skyrim* described in the fourth case study. In these examples the player starts a character with few distinguishing characteristics and witnesses it develop over time through her actions and experiences derived from them. The

character is, initially, like an 'Everywoman' or 'Everyman.' The idea of allegorical characters levelling up[22] both their abilities but also their personas is a compelling notion considering, too, that the character is unique to the player and not exactly repeatable.

At a time when smart phones, tablets, Google Glasses, and ubiquitous internet are creating multiple simultaneous worlds in the minds of spectator/actors, the theatre of the picture-frame proscenium arch delineating a clear distinction between fiction and reality is a relic. According to performance scholar Amy Jensen "In this new theatre meaning is dependent upon continual and rapid negotiation between projected meaning and perceived meaning, reality is dependent upon the spectators' participation, and presence is no longer dependent upon temporal or spatial relationships" (189). Audience members are users of digital media (sometimes while in the theatre!) and are often also gamers. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the idea of the brick and mortar theatre has been exploded to include performances of fictional characters and game-related locations on TV screens, monitors, tablets, augmented reality scenarios, Live Action Role Play gatherings (LARPs), and cosplay events. There is a blurring of the audience and the performer into a spectator/actor as well as an explosion of the performance space into a multitude of possible performative environments, virtual and otherwise. As Johannes Birringer reminds us:

> Theatre culture and video game culture may not appear to form a natural symbiosis, at least not in an historical understanding of dramatic and choreographic practice. But having introduced the relationship of performance to

[22] The concept of "leveling up" is based on the idea that as a character gains experience through combat, completing tasks, or reaching physical or mental milestones, new abilities are unlocked. The more the character does, the better (faster, stronger, more skilled) she gets at doing things. Many games encourage the player to make choices as to what abilities are unlocked allowing for specialization befitting the player's style of play. How the player spends her "experience points" is another form of customization and expression.

> interactive media, it is unavoidable to ponder the interactive "action design" in video or computer games. (233)

The action design mentioned here ties back to the *noeme* of videogames, which sets it apart as a distinct art form from its antecedents. The essential question of *what-do-I-do?* pushes the player forward to not only drive or discover/uncover the narrative but, as Fuchs and Brecht before her claim, to derive the player's unique character through her actions.

The *noeme* of videogames prompts the player with the question *what-do-I-do?* and much of the answer to that prompt lies in moving through virtual space to reveal the narrative embedded within it. Exploring brings with it the affective cues of mood and atmosphere inherent within the virtual environment. This includes elements like colour palette, sound-scape, textures, physics, lighting, etc. and when used effectively as a whole, produces an atmosphere that is greater than the sum of its parts. The affect produced through mood and atmosphere contributes greatly to what makes an environment immersive. Don Carson's work designing theme parts for Disney Imagineering, texts focused on the intersection of performance, play, and architecture like *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism: The Next Level,* and recent scholarship on affective power of atmosphere like James Ash's article for *Geoforum,* "Rethinking affective atmospheres: Technology, perturbation and space times of the non-human" all speak to the subject of affect through atmosphere. Immersion is not simply intense focus (flow), pursuing actionable steps, and caring for the outcome, as defined earlier, but also the phenomenological setting the exploration takes place in. The set is instrumental in establishing the tone of the play just as the environment envelops the player (literally surrounding the avatar) with affective cues while present in the game world.

Immersive environments—virtual reality—are most often associated with pervasive MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) and console games like *Skyrim* but can also include a piece of theatre like Peter Stein's production of *As You Like It* in 1977 where "the viewers moved through a narrow, wet passageway covered in moss and trees and filled with the sounds of birds, emerging into a warehouse-sized environment replete with a real lake, a forest of 5-meter-high trees and dirt, hanging bridges, and bleachers for the viewers to sit" (Salter 65). The smell of the dirt in Stein's production is an affective cue signaling a transportation of the audience to another place. In this case, the journey to the performance space was through a narrow wet passageway (with the scent of moisture and a feeling of being in a cramped tunnel). In videogames, the transportation is through a screen, a window to another world,[23] but the affective power of the virtual environment—through sound, sight, and touch (controller vibration)—works in much the same way. Compare the diverse atmosphere of games like *Alan Wake* (2010) and the *Silent Hill* games (1999-2012) that are made to make the player feel as though she has entered a horror movie to that of bright and happy cartoon-like environment of *Super Mario 3D World* (2013). The contrast demonstrates the importance placed on affect in regard to environmental storytelling.

In his *Performance, Technology, & Science* Johannes Birringer lists five types of environments: 1. Interactive Environments, 2. Derived Environments, 3. Immersive Environments, 4. Networked Environments, and 5. Mixed Reality Environments (119). The virtual reality environments of *WoW* and *Skyrim* mentioned above fall under the third category while environmental storytelling, as used by Disney in their theme parks, and Peter Stein's immersive adaptation of Shakespeare fall under the fifth category. Don Carson, former Senior

[23] This idea is taken even further with virtual reality headsets like the Oculus Rift that attempts to remove the awareness and separation of the screen altogether.

Show Designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, describes environmental storytelling this way: "The story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through. It is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell." What I want to emphasize is the fact that all five categories present a space to be entered and interacted with by the participant and they all use technology on some level to achieve it.

Environmental storytelling is not unique to videogames and theme parks. Indeed, anyone who has ventured through a haunted house at Halloween or walked through a show home with a realtor has experienced an environment meant to tell a story through exploration. Since the 1980s when videogames entered the popular consciousness, several theorists have grappled with how narrative is tied to input from the player. In short, they have been negotiating how players respond to being hailed by this new medium with the *noeme* of *what-do-I-do*? In reference to virtual worlds, specifically, Brenda Laurel observed in 1991 that: "In many ways, the role of the graphic designer in human-computer interaction is parallel to the role of the theatrical scene designer. Both create representations of objects and environments that provide a context for action" (9). Following Laurel by six years, Janet Murray writes: "The new digital environments are characterized by their power to represent navigable space. Linear media such as books and films can portray space, either by verbal description or image, but only digital environments can present space that we can move through" (79). Writing a decade after Murray, Henry Jenkins adds "It makes sense to think of game designers less as storytellers than as narrative architects" (129). More recently in 2008, referring to the interactive environments he categorized earlier, Johannes Birringer makes a clear gesture toward gaming culture.

> That is to say, interactive users of such installations resemble players of videogames, and game structures (challenges, levels, control methods,

> progress/feedback, reward, etc.) provide fascinating semantic models (quest, pursuit, play, narrative space, or other spatial typologies, multiplayer experience) for a critical reflection on performance action. (204)

By defining the *noeme* of videogames as *what-do-I-do?*—a prompt to the player toward action—I am helping to define the hybridity Laurel and the others above are attempting to locate. Barthes' work contributed to bringing a nuanced differentiation to the way photography and film are viewed. Likewise, the *noeme* of videogames brings together the need for player action to move the narrative forward (agency) coupled with the idea of immersion within (affecting) virtual environments.

The next section takes a closer look at the relationship between affect and agency within videogames. Performing actions and making decisions are not necessarily affecting in themselves and being affected by a videogame does not depend solely on causing change. This is an important distinction for our understanding of narrative in relation to agency to follow.

But, How Does This Make You Feel?

If I asked you the question in the subtitle above, your answer would most likely be composed of words describing emotions or sensations or both. The process of putting into words a feeling or physiological change is already an intellectual exercise trying to make something purely subjective and phenomenological fit within linguistic and social parameters. Something is always lost in translation. An affect may trigger an emotion—a socially recognizable and codified response—but the emotion is a result of the affect felt. They are not the same. In his book *Parables for the Virtual* Massumi writes "Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym

for emotion. But one of the clearest lessons [. . .] is that emotion and affect [. . .] follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (27).

There is a marked difference between the two, emotion and affect, when you look at two examples from videogames. In *Gears of War 2* (2008) Dom's story arc involving finding his wife is emotionally provocative. The player is shown Dom's struggle to find her throughout the first and second games and reaches a climactic point during a cut-scene wherein he finally does. She is emaciated and broken, barely alive. The moment is handled deftly *as a piece of cinema*. However, other than motivating the player to attack the Locust—a race of vile monsters intent on wiping out humanity—with renewed vigor, it does little to affect the player's sense of agency within the game. In contrast, *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (2006) held few (if any) emotional moments for me as a player but I was deeply affected by my sense of being transported into the game world. The world felt so large, detailed, and complete, wherein I was able to (seemingly) go anywhere and do whatever I chose—I felt that I was transported to another place and time. By transported I mean that the more time I spent there, the more I felt that the avatar was my body in that world. My proprioception encompassed the (virtual) physicality of my avatar. I had dreams where I was in the game world, not dreams where I am before a screen but dreams where I was roaming the lush hills and exploring caverns casting spells from my own two hands. When I think back to the game I don't remember specific events so much as I remember moments that made me stop and take in the view or felt enclosed within a dungeon. This is a deeper phenomenological level of agency than simple emotional engagement as in the example of *Gears of War 2*.

BioShock is an example of a game that combines the two, affective atmosphere with compelling emotional moments. I described this game at length in the first case study in chapter

two and won't repeat it here but suffice it to say, this game engaged me emotionally through saving the little girls and also affected me through a feeling of being submerged deep underwater and sharing the claustrophobic space with truly unhinged Splicers. What is more, this is the first game that made me question whether I can trust what non-player characters (NPCs) tell me. As I described earlier, Atlas lied! And through that character, the game duped me. This narrative twist gave me feelings I hadn't dealt with in a game before and made me question my character's free will and ultimately my agency as a player. Because the game duped me through the clever use of narrative, this was not a wholly unpleasant revelation within the game, but rather a complex feeling that still resonates with me today. The complex nature of the sensation given by that moment in the game—one that I would describe as both highly engaging as well as very uncomfortable—invokes a parallel to Kant's definition of the sublime in art as an experience of both pain and pleasure. I will say more about the sublime in videogames at the end of the chapter. Dom's wife and the little girls had me emotionally invested in an empathic (Aristotelian) way, but I was affected by my deep immersion (projected in the proprioceptive sense) into the world of *Oblivion* and *BioShock*. Regarding this difference, Gibbs states "'Feeling' in this context seems to cover a range of meanings, from the sense of proprioception and affect in Massumi's sense of 'capacity' to a sense of understanding that seems to be the basis for empathy" (196). Affect means I was virtually *feeling* my body within the game space as well as deeply empathizing with my avatar in the situations it encountered as though I was the one present in the world.

The next section takes an in-depth look at narrative and its relationship to agency. An important aspect of the player's affective experience of the game world is her feeling of causing

meaningful change there. Before we move on, however, let us briefly integrate some concepts from the previous chapter to synthesize the ideas we have encountered thus far. The narrative strategies taken by different games have profound effects on how they are received by the player, the player's sense of agency within the diegesis, and the affective experience of the player. Specifically, I want to remind us of the difference between emergent gameplay and games of progression, and the many derivations of the latter category.

As I said earlier, games of emergence emphasize game rules over story. The player's sense of agency is not dependent on an unfolding narrative but rather on understanding and implementing the game rules skillfully. However, when it comes to narrative agency, I am concerned with games of progression that fall under three broad categories: linear 'beads-on-a-string' first person shooters (FPSs), open world role-playing games (RPGs), and hybrid games—a combination of the two. FPSs like *BioShock*, *Halo*, and *Doom III* (among many examples and variations) follow an Aristotelian model with a single linear plot, a single consistently heroic protagonist, and a series of episodes leading to a final climactic resolution. Open world (sandbox) games, RPGs like *Oblivion, Fallout 3*, and *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, are epic in the Homeric sense where the entire world (seems) open for exploration and the story events can (seemingly) unfold in any order. Lastly, hybrid games use a narrative strategy that is a combination of the two like *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age: Origins*, and *Red Dead Redemption* (2010). These games are similar to Shakespeare's plays in structure in that they involve multiple interweaving plots, span large expanses of time and space, and are often organized by a multiple act structure. Aarseth claims: "Storytelling has been, and still is, the dominant form of cultural expression. But it is not the only game in town, the only mode of discourse. It is quite possible, not to mention necessary, to identify other modes, games among them, as alternatives to

storytelling" (50). Games of progression are a new storytelling medium albeit with classical antecedents. The narrative elements not only convey the story but also deeply affect the player's sense of agency within the game story making the game *worth* playing.

The Moving Target of Narrative

Narrative is a slippery fish to grasp. Let us revisit from chapter three the six definitions of narrative compiled by Jesper Juul in his book *Half Real*. Briefly they are: 1. Narrative as the presentation of a number of events, 2. Narrative as a fixed and predetermined sequence of events, 3. Narrative as a specific type of sequence of events, 4. Narrative as a specific type of theme, 5. Narrative as a kind of setting or fictional world, and 6. Narrative as the way we make sense of the world (156-157). Juul's work is useful because it acknowledges that narrative is multi-faceted and constantly tested by both artists and new storytelling media such as videogames. For example, simply being present within a virtual world invokes Juul's fifth and sixth definitions of narrative. In this sense the player has the interpretative ability to make sense of the game world from her unique point of view. The first three definitions focus more on what would traditionally be considered an *authored* story or fictional setting. It implies a prepared narrative to be discovered by the player, not created by her. Juul's last two definitions allow some room for the player to feel narrative agency and even a sense of creativity regarding how to interpret and interact with the world. The player's recounting of her experiences to others after the fact could fall under both Juul's first and last definitions.

I am taking the discussion further by adding three important delineations of my own to enrich Juul's list of narrative definitions. They are: traditional narrative, user-*driven* narrative,

and user-*created* narrative. Traditional narrative found in (traditional) theatre, film, and literary fiction is fixed and observed by its audience as a finished product. User-*driven* narratives can include games and are the narratives of progression that result from previously authored game spaces and actions. The player makes decisions to navigate the story and space but the outcomes have been predetermined. The third, user-*created* narrative, is found in projects and experiments like *Façade* created by Mateas and Stern at MIT, the online virtual social space *Second Life,* and narrative generators like the program ELIZA mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. The traditional view of narrative emphasizes the first three of Juul's definitions. The second, involving user-*driven* narratives, involves all of Juul's definitions of narrative but provides the player (a sense of) narrative agency according to the last two definitions. The third, user-*created* narrative, gives the player full control over the narrative on all levels.

The differentiation I wish to make is that the first category, traditional narrative, is ill-suited to scholarly videogame criticism. The tension between traditional narrative and narrative that depends on player input underlines the uncomfortable relationship between games and their cinematic cut-scenes that, admittedly, often interrupt the *flow* (using Csikszentmihályi's term defined in chapter two) created by the game-play. During a cut-scene, which is a short scripted cinematic piece triggered by accomplishing a task within the game that introduces a new piece of information, the player is offered no opportunity to influence what is rendered on screen.

During my research game sessions, described in the case studies, all six participants without exception adopted a relaxed pose, as though watching a movie when a cut-scene was presented. When they observed themselves play, they all remarked on how they could see a change in their attention and posture when a cut-scene was shown. When player input was introduced again, my research subjects all adopted a more attentive posture and their gaze toward

the screen changed. It is important to note that the six participants played with only me present, played games of their choice, and watched themselves play afterward without knowledge of what had transpired during the other game sessions. These self-observations by my participants are included in the case studies. I mention it here to emphasize the fact they all had a similar reaction to cut-scenes and all remarked on the phenomenon while observing themselves.

Great strides have been made to incorporate important information about the story arc into the gameplay itself since the invention of videogames of progression. With that said, examples of poorly handled cut-scenes can still be found today and are very similar to the clumsy handling of exposition in plays and film. It is no surprise that a large portion of the early criticism aimed at videogames as a storytelling medium has focused on this traditional notion of narrative and the aesthetic challenge of the cut-scene. Allow me, in the following section, to delve deeper into the issue of cut-scenes and then return to the larger topic of narrative. The following section on cut-scenes, is itself, a form of cut-scene momentarily interrupting the flow of the discussion on narrative while providing useful information that will inform the larger topic of agency.

The Issue of Cut-scenes!

A distinction needs to be made between cut-scenes and story unveiled during actual gameplay. Tom Bissell in his book *Extra Lives* says that videogames with a narrative structure "usually employ two kinds of storytelling" (37). He says one is the framed narrative "doled out" in cut-scenes which "take control away from the gamer, who is forced to watch the scene unfold" (37). He continues with:

> The other, which some game designers and theoreticians refer to as the "ludonarrative," is unscripted and gamer-determined—the "fun" portions of the "played" game—usually amounts to some frenetic reconception of getting from point A to point B. The differences between the framed narrative and the ludonarrative are what make story in games so unmanageable: One is fixed, the other is fluid, and yet they are intended, however notionally, to work together. (37)

I agree with Bissell that cut-scenes take momentary control away from the gamer but I am not convinced that cut-scenes are necessarily antithetical to fun in gaming. Cut-scenes should not be done away with just as exposition in books or films, when handled well, need not interrupt the narrative flow. However, building on Bissell's term "ludonarrative" as the narrative that unfolds during gameplay, Zach Waggoner in his book, *My Avatar, My Self*, attributes a similar concept of "ergotic" literature to theorist Espen Aarseth. Waggoner, invoking Aarseth, says "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text [. . .] it requires hard work in the form of concentration as well as conscious instead of automatic adjustment of eye focus and distance" (33-4). It is this conscious instead of automatic adjustment of eye focus that my six game research participants observed in themselves while actively playing as opposed to passively watching cut-scenes. Waggoner writes that "Aarseth uses this term [ergotic] to help differentiate videogames from not only movies and television shows [. . .] but also from traditional novels and stories" (34). The "hard work" referred to above is the effort the player invests to move the narrative forward. The effort is instilled with a sense of importance. Success or failure hinges on the skill of the player. Regardless of whether the player's perspective (and identity) is superimposed onto the avatar as in a first person narrative or whether the player has some critical

(and empathic) distance from the avatar in the third person, Waggoner writes "the player becomes the main character of a cybertext in a way that a reader of a novel never does" (37). Waggoner quotes Aarseth: "The user assumes the role of the main character and, therefore, will not come to see this person as an other, or as a person at all, but rather as a remote-controlled extension of herself" (37). Cut-scenes may momentarily relieve the player of the responsibility of providing input but the relationship between the player and avatar remains the same. A well-used cut-scene can reward the work done and set up the next challenge while maintaining the player's position as active agent within the narrative.

In *Reality is Broken*, MIT researcher Jane McGonigal addresses the work involved in successfully moving forward in a videogame: "Satisfying work always *starts* with two things: **a clear goal** and **actionable next steps** toward achieving that goal. Having a clear goal motivates us to act: we know what we're supposed to do. And actionable next steps ensure that we can make progress toward the goal immediately" (emphasis original, 55). Again, a well-placed and concise cut-scene can provide the necessary context to keep the narrative flow going—what needs to be done and why it is important!

Bissell, however, is not alone in his dislike of cut-scenes in that they are/have been used too often, ineffectually, or as manipulative narrative bridges stringing together weak or awkward story arcs. From my own gameplay experience, I would place *Max Payne* (2008), *Duke Nukem Forever* (2011), and *Doom 3* (2004) on a list of weak story arcs dotted with uninspired cut-scenes. Granted, many early games did consider story as a marketing envelope or dressing for the ludic elements of the game but as videogames and videogame players have matured and become more sophisticated in their tastes and expectations, the quality of videogame writing has

improved exponentially. Bissell sums up the essential conflict between game and story—an echo of the ludology vs. narratology debate a decade ago—this way:

> Stories are about time passing and narrative progression. Games are about challenge, which frustrates the passing of time and impedes narrative progression. The story force wants to go forward and the "friction force" of challenge tries to hold story back. This is the conflict at the heart of the narrative game, one that game designers have thus far imperfectly addressed by making story the reward of a successfully met challenge. (93)

Bissell's description of the tension between challenge and progression is too simplistic. I believe, instead, that dramatic tension resides in the protagonist's struggle to attain her goals. Smart use of cut-scenes can provide a strategic respite from requiring input from the player to process what just happened and to prepare for the next event. This is not unlike a comedic scene following a serious dramatic scene to allow the audience to emotionally recharge. In addition, the cut-scene sets the stage by introducing characters, the location, defining the *teloi* and the stakes if they are not achieved. Overcoming obstacles and gathering information are essential to most narratives and stories would be lifeless, indeed, without some source of conflict. Bissell places the progression of narrative and the ludic challenges of the gameplay in opposition but I see them as working together to create a form of tension unique to videogames akin to its *noeme* as defined earlier. The friction force of challenge is the essence of dramatic tension and in the case of videogames, a pivotal ingredient of the story regarding whether the protagonist succeeds and advances or not. If cut-scenes are considered to be similar to long expository monologues like the kind found in 19th century dramas, then I share Bissell's frustration. But just as playwriting has changed and advanced (with exceptions, of course) since the plays of Ibsen and Chekhov, so

too has the writing and design of videogames made great strides since earlier, less sophisticated uses of cut-scenes in videogames. Misused or clumsy cut-scenes can affect the player's experience negatively, just as the over-use of black-outs between scenes in live theatre can affect the play. The momentum and performance energy needs to start afresh at the start of each scene after a blackout and the experience of the play can be tedious and frustrating. Likewise in videogames, concise and strategically used cut-scenes can be like leaping from stone to stone across a creek, momentarily pausing on each to regain balance and then propel forward. If the player's sense of agency is not interrupted, a well-placed cut-scene can aid in keeping the game's momentum and positively affect the player's experience.

Several recent examples demonstrate how different games address this issue of integrating narrative elements into the gameplay itself. On a simple level, one solution is to have expository information arrive via in-game com-links, audio recordings, and cell-phones while still moving through the virtual environment as in *Gears of War, BioShock, Dead Space* (2008), and *Splinter Cell*. Another solution is to introduce highly complex and engaging storylines coupled with high quality voice talent as in the *Mass Effect* games and *LA Noire* (2011)—both in third person where the avatar is seen and heard. However, having a complex storyline can backfire and make a game confusing as in the case of *Halo 3* (first person) or role-playing games where too many plot lines and quests are given for the player to keep track of. Another tactic is to have a strong linear story (with compelling and shocking twists) as in *BioShock* (described in Case Study One) and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (2010). Both videogames are presented in first person perspective. Alternately a videogame may have a simple but conceptually strong story open for the player's interpretation and imagination within a consistent game world as found in *Limbo* and *Braid*. These last two videogames are 2D scrollers.

BioShock, Amnesia: The Dark Descent, Limbo, and *Braid* all rely heavily on the affective elements of mood and atmosphere to compel the narrative forward. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the collapsing underwater city of Rapture was described earlier in the first case study. As another example, the darkly mysterious often eerily silent black and white world of *Limbo* feels like the space between life and death reflecting its enigmatic title. The player is not told who the little boy she controls is, where he is, or whether the boy is trapped in a nightmare, a dark fantasy, or a bleak afterlife. In these four examples the identity of the avatar is as much a puzzle to be solved as the game itself.

The other aspect of these four videogames I want to emphasize is how they all, while presenting conceptually strong and consistent game environments, take formal liberties departing from the norm of psychological motivation and photo-realism. *BioShock* is informed by a dystopian, Ayn Rand-inspired vision; *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* and *Limbo* are both darkly expressionistic in style; and *Braid* stands as an impressionistic vision. This newly arising awareness that style can be manipulated in addition to storyline is a refreshing and exciting turn in game design revealing an awakening awareness of atmosphere in relation to narrative and affect. Tom Bissell makes this observation about *Braid's* creator Jonathan Blow as an example of an artist painting with code rather than canvas. He writes: "a considered, impressionistic subversion of the 'realistic' has at last arrived, and Blow may be as spiritually close to a Seurat or Monet as the form is likely to get" (Bissell 100). Even the very gritty realistic game *Metro 2033*, a first person shooter designed in the Ukraine, dips into highly expressionistic visions revealing the inner emotional state of the protagonist. The contrast in styles helps emphasize the psychological/super-natural elements of the narrative. Perhaps because the game was made in

Europe, the designers were less hesitant to deviate from realism in their storytelling as some of their North American counterparts seem to be.

…End of the cut-scene about cut-scenes. Let us get back to the unfolding narrative about narrative!

User-Driven Narrative

Following traditional narrative, my second category, user-*driven* narrative, insinuates the need for the player to intentionally *suspend knowledge* that the outcomes have been pre-determined to allow her to become immersed in the game world as a present virtual reality. Let us revisit Janet Murray's statement that "there is a distinction between playing a creative role within an authored environment and having authorship of the environment itself" (152). The distinction here is that playing a creative role within an authored environment gives the player the affect that she is making choices and causing change that matters within the game world regardless of the fact that every choice within the game has been predetermined and tested. This is more than a sense of accomplishment but the appreciation of the journey accompanying the challenge.

A *flaneur* or *flaneuse*, using Benjamin's concept drawn from the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, doesn't create the city in which he or she strolls but the thrill of exploration and exposure to possibility is the ultimate goal of the activity. If I were to go to the store to buy milk, my goal is the acquisition of milk but the route I choose and the means I take to get there and back are my own. If I stride slowly down the street via a circuitous route looking for chance encounters with the people I pass and savouring the smells of cooking wafting from open

windows, I would have a very different experience than if I jumped in a car or rode a bicycle to the store. In each case I may accomplish my goal of buying milk but my individual memory of the journey and the sense of empowerment I feel through my choices would inform my affective memory beyond simply completing the task. In a videogame where exploration and attention to detail are paramount to accomplishing often complex tasks, the range of personal empowerment and individual choice in how they are overcome can be immense and highly rewarding. I offer this example in an attempt to convey how making choices that matter *to the player* are more than just solving challenges and the sense of accomplishment that can arise from it. This also includes (and I give preference to) the affect of being present within the game world and open to the pre-authored affective stimulus provided.

Another important question to ask regarding user-driven narrative is to what degree does the player have creative control within the parameters of the game? Most FPSs follow a beads-on-a-string model in that the events within the game follow in a linear fashion and occur in the same order for every player. A common way of referring to these types of games with very little creative control is that the game is "on rails" referring to the rigid path of rail cars through a theme park ride. The player may have a range of methods available to succeed in the present situation but the events within the game occur in the same order every time. Open world (sand-box) games and hybrid games allow greater creative control over the order of events and a much wider range of narrative possibilities for the individual player to experience. A game like *Dragon Age: Origins* is a good example of a hybrid game that strives to encourage playing the game several times in how it is structured. The game starts with six different origin stories for the player to choose from. The six possible character arcs within the game interweave so the player

can play through multiple times and not only cross the storylines of the other characters but also encounter a range of experiences depending on the character and its chosen origin story.

Regarding interweaving character arcs and plotlines, Shawn Edrei observes that:

> The fragmentation of plot linearity has a profound effect on the player's narrative experience, elevating the "reader" of the virtual text to the role of pseudo-author: while it is still impossible for the player to make a choice that has not been included in the game by its creators, there are still diegetic elements within that framework that can be manipulated. (99)

Edrei's idea of a pseudo-author is a useful term in unpacking the player's relationship to pre-authored games and differentiating it from players' individual play-style, expression of choice, and even concepts of role-play within the game world. The diegetic elements have been prepared but how they are manipulated within the game world—including order of events and choice of goals to pursue (or not)—is the crux of what I mean by user-*driven* narrative. The freedom of choice is again ramped up in open-world games like *WoW* and *Skyrim*. Edrei makes a clear comparison of the difference in pseudo-authorial control in the open-world game of *World of Warcraft* and the hybrid game, *Mass Effect 2*, created by the makers of *Dragon Age: Origins.* Referring to *WoW* he says:

> From an interactive standpoint, this is perhaps the ultimate expression of player control: the freedom to design a character and then determine not just what choices the character makes, but whether the character is required to choose at all. However, this approach requires the sacrifice of any coherent narrative structure—unlike *Mass Effect 2*, where the outcome of Shepard's confrontation

> with the villainous Collectors may vary but the battle itself occurs in every permutation, *World of Warcraft* does not impose any causal chain of events on its players. (105-6)

All commercial videogames that involve some narrative element (and almost all do) fall under this category of user-*driven* narrative. It is an important distinction to make, however, when comparing the relationship of the player/audience to the narrative as a pseudo-author as opposed to simply a receiver of traditional narrative or the experiments with user-*created* narrative I will discuss next.

User-Created Narrative

My third and last category involves user-*created* narrative and demonstrates attempts made by designers and theorists seeking to explore the possibility of creating complete narrative agency—in the sense of creating novel narrative experiences from scratch—in a computer mediated environment. I will use three specific examples to demonstrate the issue of providing complete narrative control to the user. The first is ELIZA, mentioned at the start of the chapter, a conversation generator posing as a psychotherapist using only text. The second is a program called *Façade* created by Mateas and Stern at MIT in 2005. *Façade* creates a three way conversation in a three dimensional interior setting between the user and a couple experiencing relationship issues. Admittedly, both these examples involve at least a narrative premise provided by the software creators. The third example, arguably more successful if not more popular, is *Second Life* (SL) (2003-present). This online social environment is aptly called *second* life because users can do most things there, virtually, than they can do in real life (RL).

This includes shopping, dating, and even working. I will examine *Second Life* in Case Study Five at the end of the chapter.

Before we go further, it is important to note that ELIZA, *Façade,* and *Second Life* are not really games. It is more accurate to think of them as pieces of software that act as narrative generators. Making this distinction may also aid in understanding the challenges inherent in attempting to provide the participant complete creative control/input. Based on seven definitions of games by several game scholars spanning from 1950 to 2004, Jesper Juul has compiled a new definition of games. According to Juul, every game has six features. They are:

> 1. *Rules*: Games are rule-based.
>
> 2. *Variable, quantifiable outcome*: Games have variable quantifiable outcomes.
>
> 3. *Valorization of outcome*: The different potential outcomes of the game are assigned different values, some positive and some negative.
>
> 4. *Player effort*: The player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome. (Games are challenging.)
>
> 5. *Player attached to outcome*: The player is emotionally attached to the outcome of the game in the sense that a player will be winner and "happy" in case of a positive outcome, but a loser and "unhappy" in case of a negative outcome.
>
> 6. *Negotiable consequences*: The same game [set of rules] can be played with or without real-life consequences. (36)

Applying ELIZA, *Façade,* and *Second Life* to Juul's list, none of them exhibit points two or three regarding valorizing quantifiable outcomes. None of them have clear goals to achieve

and thus allow the participant to know when the game is "won" or who is "winning." *Façade* presents a situation for the participant to interact with—joining a conversation with a couple experiencing relationship issues—but does not set up an expectation of which, if any, of the various possible outcomes of the interaction is preferred. On an abstract level, joining a conversation implies a set of rules, if only grammatically, but still, *Façade* is not a game because there is no indication of how to win or even which outcome to strive for. It is more like a conversation simulator. In addition, because *Façade* presents a prepared situation with a finite number of possible conclusions, it is restricted in giving the participant full authorial control.

Second Life, however, gives the participant almost complete authorial control—even to the point of being able to own her own land, create objects, and manipulate her appearance limited only by her ability to code and her own imagination. In fact, many people in SL aren't interested in that level of creativity or don't have the patience needed to code items from scratch. Instead, they purchase items made by others in *Second Life*. The purchase of virtual items (including land) with real money has created a virtual economy in the game (Linden dollars are used within the virtual world but are purchased with real currency through credit cards, PayPal, Bitcoin, etc.). Some people make a living with virtual businesses within SL and major organizations and corporations like IBM, Microsoft, the RCMP, and CSIS among many—as well as several universities—have recruitment stations "inworld." *Second Life,* however, has no pre-authored rules or goals to achieve. Everything within *Second Life* and the interactions that occur within it, are created by its participants. It is more of a narrative generator than *Façade* but, again, it is not a game. I will discuss *Second Life* further in Case Study Five at the end of this chapter.

ELIZA is a text-based program meant to mimic conversation. It is programmed to recognize key words and phrases supplied by the participant and to use the clues they provide to respond appropriately. ELIZA is more aptly thought of as an early example of a chatterbot like those found in today's text-based chatrooms. Again, there are no rules of engagement—other than grammatical ones—and there is no desired outcome to strive for. As Juul's list suggests, without established rules and quantifiable outcomes, the following items on his list of criteria to be a game are moot.

Videogame theorist James Newman claims the "adaptive, real-time 'narrative engine' remains science fiction" and that "current algorithmic sophistication makes it impossible for an AI agent to generate good plots in real time in response to the unpredictable actions of human participants" (102). Furthermore, speaking of Mateas and Stern's project at MIT, Stephen Jones notes: "*Façade* isn't technically a game because of its structure. It doesn't define a clear goal for the player, a way to win or lose, how to play better or worse games" (102). Based on the findings by these MIT researchers and looking back to the early experiment in text-based conversational software, ELIZA, it seems narrative agency—novel narrative created by the user having complete creative input and control—is: a) computationally impossible at the present time, b) not satisfying as a game due to a lack of ludic elements, and c) referring back to our discussion of Auslander in chapter two, not more important or even desirable than the affect of presence and liveness when interacting with virtual entities.

Taken to the literal extreme, complete narrative control would be akin to handing the player a pad of paper and a pencil—and saying go! Some impetus for participating needs to be present. Also, I agree with Newman and Jones that the idea of creating a highly detailed game-setting for a meaningful user-generated narrative is a highly daunting task for a single team of

developers or a stand-alone game system to handle both intellectually and technically. However, what Newman and Jones do not acknowledge is the phenomenon of cloud-sourcing and the combined computational—not to mention narrative generating—power of thousands or millions of participants/players. To be fair, Newman and Jones were both writing in 2008 when cloud-sourcing was in its infancy, but the point still stands. There is a great conceptual distance between the early experiments with narrative engines and contemporary examples of massive multiplayer online games, social gaming or, in the case of *Second Life*, a social environment with no formal game premise at all. The idea that the game should be housed in one location (i.e. a console) or even that the narrative be generated by/for one user seems to belong to the old-fashioned idea of a mainframe computers complete with spinning reel-to-reel tapes.

While complete authorial control may seem like an idea just out of reach, it is important to note three particularly interesting attempts to find a balance between user-created content and ludic elements. These following examples fit partway between user-*driven* narrative and user-*created* narrative. Will Wright's *Spore* (2008) attempts to provide the player with seemingly endless choices regarding the design and evolution of user-created virtual life-forms that can be shared to explore and compete with other user-created life-forms in a virtual universe. This game takes the player from designing a microscopic life-form to interstellar exploration. It feels like a virtual universe is open to the player with endless variation while in reality, each step along the process offers a finite amount of choice. The branching tree of possibilities within the game expands exponentially from the starting point but it is not true authorial control. The player is encouraged to be creative in her choices but it is not true content creation.

The recent and continuing craze over *Minecraft* (2009/2011) is important in the fact the game can be "played" as a regular game or experienced in "creation mode." In "creation mode,"

the player is free to create and share highly elaborate worlds limited, seemingly, only by the rudimentary graphics and imaginations of the creators. This mode can then be toggled to "play mode" for the creator and other players to try out. The game centers around collecting (mining) resources and creating items that will increase the player's chances of surviving encounters with monsters. The fact that the *game* portion of *Minecraft* can be turned off and enjoyed simply as a world design program is interesting not only from narrative generating perspective but also because its popularity arises (at least in part) *from* this very option.

Last, at the time of writing this, *Spark* (2014) recently went into Beta testing on the Xbox One console.[24] This game is designed to give the player creative control over her own world and creature creation and then allow her to share, visit, and compete with other players' online. This seems at first glance to be a re-envisioning of Wright's concept of escalating choice while combining the creative freedom of *Minecraft* but with clearer ludic elements—also controlled by the player(s). I will be watching this title regarding its development with great interest.

Full-on games like *World of Warcraft* (2004), *Eve Online* (2003), or *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (2011) all feature a narrative premise and specific goals/narrative elements to complete. This accounts for several of Juul's definitions of narrative and also fulfill his requirements to be a game. What these games also feature is a social element where interaction with other players is needed to succeed at a higher level. The interaction with other players is guided by the game premise and ludic elements in the sense of how the player is represented, what actions are available in-game, what choices are made available to the player by the game environment. Within that palette of choices supplied by the videogame, how the players interact—what bonds may develop, what stories are retold later, what interactions are memorable—has everything to

[24] I had the opportunity to participate in some initial beta testing gameplay through Xboxlive.

do with the sense of sharing an experience with others that is unique to that set of personalities. This addresses Juul's remaining definitions of narrative. The feeling of agency within the game is accentuated through the reactions of the other players working together. Knowing that choices and actions made within the game matter not only to the player but also to *other people* in the game world complicates the idea that a) every outcome has been pre-determined and b) the sense of agency is not wholly centered on succeeding in the game but also being part of a larger social group; of acceptance or competition with other people in real time.

In *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity*, Sarah-Lynn Bowman focuses predominantly on table-top gaming but her ideas relate equally well to computer mediated role-playing games (RPGs) in both solo play and online social environments. She makes an important distinction between traditional storytelling media and the relatively new phenomenon of narrative-based games, also known as games of progression. Her following quote is a good summation of the previous ideas and resonates well with Juul's narrative definitions:

> RPGs allow individuals to participate in the construction of their own narratives in a group practice of co-creation. In a traditional play, novel, or film, the author uses the medium to communicate a story to the members of an audience, who experience the narrative in a state of passive observation and are allowed only momentary expressions of affect. In role-playing, though an author might have created the original world in which the action takes place, the majority of the story develops through a continual process of involved interaction and creativity on the part of participants. Thus, the "audience" of a role-playing game invents the narrative as well as experiences it. (13)

The involved interaction and creativity of the participants is between other people in online social environments. They are creating their own shared experiences with and for each other. This at least partially explains the attraction of environments like *Second Life* and persistent online worlds like those found in *WoW*, and *Eve Online.*

Looking at the persistent popularity of pre-authored videogames in contrast to the experiments described above, it seems complete authorial control may not be an ideal sought after by most gamers or the gaming industry. What these examples show is that some pre-authorship encourages the player to engage. Taking that form of limited agency further exemplified by the popularity of MMORPGs, feeling creative (or at least effectual) in an existing environment may be more rewarding to the player than creating her own novel content. This is especially true when shared with other people. Tying back to earlier chapters, the feeling of agency then is not simply dependent on freedom of choice but feeling present in a virtual environment that is reactive to the choices the player makes. The affect of being an active agent—not simply through accomplishing tasks but feeling like taking part in the experience of a virtual environment—is further accentuated when it is shared by the avatars of other people. It is the difference between making novel choices and feeling like your choices affect others in novel ways. The affect of being an active agent in a shared virtual space makes the choices made there, meaningful.

Meaningful Choice

The first game that drew my attention to the immersive power of meaningful choice was *Knights of the Old Republic* (2003). The game is set in the *Star Wars* universe and promises a

wide spectrum of choice regarding alignment with the Light or Dark side. I realized how important having choice was to me when the game yanked that sense of agency away in what I felt was a very unsatisfying plot turn. Despite my efforts throughout the game, I became the villain, Revan, at the end. More recent games, however, have made great strides in giving a multiplicity of choice to the player. Tom Bissell supports this idea while describing his experience playing *Fallout 3* (2008):

> Megaton can serve as base of operations or be wiped off the face of the map shortly after one's arrival there by detonating its nuke in exchange for a handsome payment. [. . .] What this means is that the first several hours I spent inside *Fallout 3* were, in essence, optional. Even for an open-world game, this suggests an awesome range of narrative variability. (7)

It is not just the hours of game-play available within Megaton, but also the bearing the location *could have* in the greater game experience that is noteworthy. Adding my own experience of the game to Bissell's observation of the *optional* aspects of the game, I also found several of the side quests to be highly rewarding. For example, I derived a great satisfaction from ridding the wasteland of slavers. This is not solely due to the pragmatically rational idea that slavery is bad and should be eradicated but largely due to two additional and highly affective reasons: dealing with the slavers at all (to fight them or align with them) was *optional*, and how the non-player characters that populated the game related to me as a result was highly rewarding. A goal that I pursued for my own intrinsic reasons was reinforced by changes in dialogue options, cheaper prices for supplies at shops, and even having characters run up to my avatar to thank me for saving them or a family member. Being called a hero (even "savior of the wasteland") *felt* really good.

I describe a similar example of rewarding my own initially intrinsic choices in the earlier *BioShock* case study. Specifically I am referring to the choice of saving or "harvesting" (and killing) the little girls. I won't repeat the description here but due to my choices within *BioShock*, I experienced one of the most powerful moments I have had from playing a videogame. In short, at the conclusion of the game I was shown a montage specifically catering to my choice of saving the girls. It showed them (abstractly through images of their hands growing and changing) mature and implied they went on to have happy and successful lives. The montage made me cry. This was the first time a game affected me so strongly and I attribute it to the fact I saw the outcome of a choice I made come to fruition; a choice in which I invested myself.

Defeating the slavers and saving the little girls both affected me strongly but in both cases it was clear to me from my particular white male Canadian humanist libertarian socialist perspective which choice was "right" and which was "wrong." Writing for games is becoming more sophisticated—pushed onward by examples like these—where we now see choices given to the player that are more challenging in that the "right" choice is not nearly so obvious. The writing style of the *Mass Effect* games is a good example in that the moral compass of the protagonist (player) influences which dialogue choices become available. In addition, the moral alignment of NPCs is not always immediately clear as demonstrated in the game, *Skyrim*, also described in a prior case study. Characters are being drawn that more closely resemble life. Right and wrong is no longer black and white, and every character (seems) to have their own reasons for what they do/believe.

Let us continue the idea of intrinsic rewards and personal choice by returning to the idea of narrative through exploration, i.e. storytelling. Here I want to shift the focus to differences in style of play and game structure. *Gears of War 3* is a continuation of the *Gears of War* franchise

and differs from *Skyrim* in that it is a beads-on-a-string shooter. The scenes are episodic in that each location represents a certain goal and challenge that needs to be overcome and in doing, advances the storyline. The environments have a clear impact on the realization of what the challenge entails and the strategies to overcome it. The game starts on a ship and combat takes place both in interior and exterior settings. The setting changes to land where the enemies (lambent and locust) also differ in their numbers and ferocity requiring the use of weapons found in the area like mounted guns or catapults. The setting changes again to a ruined city that reveals its own unique challenges and enemies (mutated humans from emulsion exposure). In addition there are sections of gameplay that involve vehicular travel and combat and even periods aboard grotesque living airships. The environments require quick exploration and adaptation for within each location is the key to overcoming the current challenge. Each area also contains the next piece of the story and one of the accomplishments of the *Gears of War* franchise is the ability to marry story and environment. The environment does not simply provide affective elements of atmosphere and obstacles, but becomes the means to reveal important aspects of the story at crucial moments in the character narrative of Marcus Fenix.[25]

The ludic elements of *Gears of War 3* are much more prominent than the elements of *paidea* as described in *Skyrim* but the need to explore and traverse space within the game world is still acutely important to both the gameplay and narrative involvement. In *Space Time Play* Florian Schmidt says that "video games involve the player on many different levels, depending on the preferences of the use and the genre of the game" (147). This difference in play style directly affects the player's choices within the game and which choices are most meaningful. He

[25] A detailed ideological reading of *Gears of War* follows in chapter five. The environmental storytelling described here is especially important in the discussion of ideological critique since this method of conveying narrative circumvents many traditional critical strategies. The play style of the player also has an impact on whether the player engages the ideological positions presented by the videogame or if they are simply accepted as fact like the environment itself.

says that Richard A. Bartle, developer of the first MUD, "distinguishes between four types of player: the achiever, the explorer, the socializer and the killer. They all immerse—even in the same game—but in different ways" (147). I self-identify as an "explorer" so, for me, the elements of *paidea* in *Skyrim* are highly rewarding—spending months delving into each cave and catacomb I can find. Likewise, in *Gears* I look around each corner and dead end for the "Easter eggs" placed there by the game designers for players like myself. These "Easter eggs" are the COG tags, newspaper clippings, and special stashes or items that enrich the environment by providing an extra piece of information or intrigue. Other players, of course, relish the combat ("the killer") or overcoming the challenges quickly/efficiently ("the achiever")—both opportunities are present in *Skyrim* but offered in abundance in *Gears of War 3*.

Before I move onto the final sections of the chapter, allow me to briefly summarize that individual play style as well as game genre are important factors affecting the player's sense of agency and determine the autotelic activities and rewards the player seeks. Bartle's four categories described above are important differences to consider. An "achiever" and an "explorer" may play the same game but their experiences may differ widely. Likewise, elements of *paideaic* play may be present alongside a strong main story arc to allow for divergent play styles within the same intellectual property. With that said, the feeling of being effectual within a virtual environment in a way previously unknown or conceived by the player is highly individualistic. The sensation can be both pleasurable and uncomfortable as I indicated earlier. Videogames, like other forms of art, have the potential to expose the player to a sublime experience.

Unlocking the Sublime: The Ultimate Achievement

I turn now to the notion of the sublime in art as both an experience of pleasure and of pain for the receiver. Just as the experience of reading Joyce's *Ulysses* or viewing Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* may provoke unique and conflicting feelings, so too watching Hamlet's existential crisis or witnessing Oedipus emerge from his palace after gouging out his eyes is an experience not quite painful but not meant to please, either. Similarly, videogames are an art form and like other art forms hold the possibility of revealing the sublime to the beholder/player. However, the sublime in videogames differs from the other art forms due largely to its unique *noeme*. Building on Kant, Jean-Francois Lyotard reminds us in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* that the sublime not only "carries with it both pleasure and pain" but that "in it pleasure derives from pain" (77). According to Lyotard, the sublime arises from a conflict within a subject between the "faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to 'present' something" (77). Because the *noeme* of videogames is a challenge to the player to action, the struggle and uncertainty of success is coupled with a fictional premise within the virtual environment that could not be realized in the real world. Lyotard continues:

> Knowledge exists if, first, the statement is intelligible, and, second, if 'cases' can be derived from the experience which 'corresponds' to it. Beauty exists if a certain 'case' (the work of art), given first by the sensibility without any conceptual determination, the sentiment of pleasure independent of any interest the work may elicit, appeals to the principle of a universal consensus (which may never be attained). (77)

The exposure of the player to moments that I would call ‘sublime’ in videogames is not focused, necessarily, on giving the player a glimpse of what was previously un-representable or the reverse, representing the inconceivable. It is instead focused on giving the player the feeling that she is capable of something previously unattainable or the author of events heretofore inconceivable. Gaining knowledge from an experience that has no antecedent case can be an experience both pleasurable and painful. To be given a feeling of potency, skill, grace, or efficacy previously unknown in real life may also elicit this conflicted/complex experience within the player. The scale of this sensation may vary from micro examples like having supernatural climbing abilities in the *Assassin’s Creed* and *Tomb Raider* games to the ability to fly (*Second Life*), perform magic (*Elder Scrolls*), or wield unnatural powers (*BioShock*), to the macro examples of having tremendous influence or creating great change like freeing the wasteland of slavers in *Fallout 3* or saving the galaxy in the *Mass Effect* games. Speaking from experience, I spent countless hours in the *Mass Effect* universe struggling against a very challenging set of objectives. The scale of the narrative and the stakes involved took my breath away. Finally succeeding and saving the galaxy gave me a very intense and complex set of feelings that I had not known before. Likewise, after spending most of a summer exploring the wasteland of *Fallout 3*, I have rarely felt more proud or effectual than I did when I defeated the slavers and drove them from the area. This came at a time when I was feeling the opposite in my real life and the sharp contrast between the two gave me a perspective I can only describe as sublime.

The sublime in videogames derives from the player’s feeling of agency, affecting the game world through meaningful choices, which is both pleasurable and painful for the same reason that those choices have real observable outcomes within the game world intended or

otherwise. The feeling of having agency within the game world gives the player a sense of empowerment that may be impossible to achieve through other real world means. At the same time, that sense of empowerment can provide new insight into the real (non-virtual) world, conceived in the "safe" virtual reality of the game world. This goes beyond intrinsic pleasures of virtual *flaneury* or attaining autotelic goals for oneself. The sublime, here, points to gaining an experience of one's potential not otherwise attainable in real life.

The Last Word

Whether playing individually or with others in a contract of co-creation with an elaborate premise and story or not, the *feeling* of agency hinges on whether the player believes her choices—actions and decisions—matter in the unfolding of the story. Part of this relies on a consistent (and non-glitchy) diegesis. The rest depends on a compelling narrative infused with a multiplicity of choice that promises to affect the ultimate outcome. Zack Waggoner quotes one of his interview subjects as saying "I'll forgive a lot of other flaws—graphically or gameplay—if the narrative is there" (52). This explains how graphically inferior games on social media sites like *Facebook* or virtual spaces like *Second Life* can still evoke a strong bond to the player's avatar and to others within the game space. This can also explain how a game with a prepared story can be highly disappointing, even making the player feel betrayed, by a weak/manipulative plot turn, or a *deux ex machina* ending. This feeling of betrayal comes from having the contract broken and can feel similar to encountering invisible walls, finding a glitch in the game, or having the game crash. It yanks the player out of the game world and foregrounds the fact it is *only* a game, much like when an actor forgets her lines on stage or a set piece falls over revealing

the stage wall behind. The challenge facing game writers and designers is to stay ahead of an increasingly sophisticated gaming audience coupled with creating storylines involving moral or ethical choices available to the player. Ensuring a game is bug-free before launch is one challenge with technical and logistic limitations. Ensuring a game story is engaging and accessible for a wide range of players and player experience levels is a challenge on a wholly different level.[26] The concept of giving the player/audience a sense of agency through meaningful narrative choices/actions is relatively new, originating in the 1970s with table-top role-playing and whose legacy has been carried by videogames of progression.

Let us return to the *noeme* of videogames—the *what-do-I-do?*—prompting the player to action. It is through action, as per Fuchs, that character is discovered. The player is hailed to invest in the creation of the avatar as a unique reflection of her choices and to drive the narrative forward through both *paideaic* play and exploration as well as pre-authored *teloi* to be overcome. The performer and audience have been blurred into one entity—a spectator/actor. Lev Manovich is correct in asserting that "instead of narration and description, we may be better off thinking about games in terms of *narrative actions* and *exploration*" (italics original, 247) and that these are fascinating semantic models for performance action as Birringer asserts (204). In this new theatre/performance frame, whether the character is saving the world from The Locust, or catching butterflies, "If the player does nothing, the narrative stops" (Manovich 247).

[26] See the discussion of flow in chapter two.

Case Study Five: *Second Life*

I was first introduced to *Second Life* (SL) a few years ago when I was a graduate student at the University of Calgary. My playwriting professor, Clem Martini, invited us to a premiere of several short plays of his being performed in a virtual theatre within SL. It is free to download and create an avatar so I did prior to the virtual event. The performances were part of a digital performance class at the University of Calgary and many of the participants were students I had directed in my projects or interacted with as a teaching assistant.

Shortly before the performance I logged into *Second Life* from home and entered the coordinates for the theatre. I found myself—through my avatar—inside a large theatre with several other avatars. Seated in the audience (I mean literally seated in the orchestra seating area of a beautifully ornate virtual proscenium theatre) I started interacting with the avatars around me (through gestures and text chat). I discovered many of them were people I knew. The performances used sound as the actors performed the plays by speaking the lines and controlling the movements of their avatars. This experience was especially poignant for me for two reasons. The first reason was the thrill of watching a virtual performance in a virtual theatre. I expected I would feel this thrill beforehand. The second reason the experience stood out for me was the curious feeling I received from being recognized by my friends as "being there" and how I felt to be surrounded by avatars of people I knew. I had a strong feeling of sharing a communal experience while at the same time, aware of the mediated distance that I was not accustomed to. The experience made me acutely aware of Dixon's duality discussed in chapter two. The performance affected me in unexpected ways and I think this result of the exploration of Prof. Martini's plays in this virtual environment was one of the aims of the digital media class.

I had a more recent experience in SL when I was a guest lecturer in a popular culture class at York University on digital communication. During the tutorials following the lecture I took the students into *Second Life* to explore and experience the affect of being present, with fellow students, in a virtual environment. I am a theatre practitioner so, of course, I had us all meet first at the coordinates of Theatre on the Hill. It is a public area[27] with several types of theatre spaces including an elaborate proscenium theatre (similar to the one I had my first experience in years earlier) wherein virtual theatre groups perform. The students were asked to install *Second Life* and have an avatar ready for the tutorial and many had done so. Witnessing the excitement on the faces of the students when they saw their avatars appear on the large projection in the tutorial room (from my perspective) was powerful. It was a testament to the thrill of sharing a virtual space with fellow students while also being present in the same room in RL. From there we travelled to a virtual dance club where other SL'ers were dancing to a live virtual DJ and interacting. We visited Disney's area in SL, which is very elaborate, impressive, and highly commercialized. Finally, we visited virtual Toronto, consisting of a curious collection of reproductions of famous tourist destinations interspersed with several advertisements and many strange objects like a Superman doll on a flying track. This area allowed flying so we "flew" around Toronto.

I offer these two experiences as testimony to how *different* it felt to share a virtual space with other people and especially people I knew. Presence in a virtual environment during a solitary game experience can be highly affective. However, seeing the students in the tutorial virtually interact while also excitedly talking and gesturing to each other in the classroom made a strong impression on both them and me. This difference, the affect of being both present in a

[27] Many areas in *Second Life* are private areas that are invite only or visitors must pay to explore.

virtual space and also aware of how your presence affects others is proof of the power of online social gaming, or in the case of *Second Life*, simply being social. The term *online community* is often used in the media but the power of having a shared virtual experience with others is something I encourage everyone to experience to fully appreciate.

Considering again the difference between user-driven and user-created narrative agency, the social aspect and communal narrative invention alluded to by Bowman is of paramount importance. A virtual space like *Second Life*, featuring no pre-determined game premise, is probably the closest thing to a successful user-generated narrative engine at this time. As mentioned above, there is nothing in *Second Life* except what has been user-generated (with the exception of the generic start-up choices regarding the creation of the user's avatar). The shops, businesses, meeting places, activities, clubs, theatres, etc. that virtually exist within it are created by users to be enjoyed by other users. The fact that the space has attracted so many participants without an initial game to play is interesting. The "game" of *Second Life* is meant to be like life—hence the name—complete with many parallels to the real world like shopping, finding others with similar interests, and dating. The fact that the parallel world happening within this virtual environment sometimes occurs involving avatars made to look like any manner of creature including furry animals is a topic for discussion in itself and the subject of film documentaries like *Life 2.0* (2010). However, this phenomenon is a good example of how the rules of engagement and the *teloi*—goals and objectives—of the participants are not pre-authored but created by the users. Any ludic elements within *Second Life* are introduced by the players for the players. Graphically, *Second Life* is very rudimentary; the immersion and feeling of presence within the virtual world is created through the interaction with others sharing it. The affect of being in the virtual world hinges on the presence (or perceived presence) of others. The network

of social interaction becomes the game. Being there makes the player a part of the game in as much as they also become the game to the other players.

Massumi's work on affect is useful for understanding this two-fold role of the player as both affected by the game world and, by being there, affecting others. He says "the human becomes a raw material or *natural resource* for the network." He embellishes his point with: "If it is an exploitation, it is in the sense in which the word is used in mining and other extractive industries. Alternatively, it can be considered a *capture*, because as a raw material the human is fed into a process it isn't in a position to direct (or even digest)" (130). Applying Massumi's concept of the player as the resource, the social network created within the virtual space of *Second Life* is a generator of narrative to be consumed by the players creating it. The player is the resource of material as opposed to most commercial games with a predetermined premise and storyline. *Second Life*, itself, resides on a multitude of servers but the narrative content is constantly generated by the participants logged in.

Taking this further regarding agency and the authorship of virtual space, when I have visited SL I have usually assumed the role of tourist taking in the sights or a guide leading others. I distinctly remember the first few times I entered SL and taking some time initially pondering what I should do. The environment is wide open regarding how to spend time there but doesn't provide an overarching narrative to propel action. The *noeme* of videogames differs here in that in a game the player is (usually) always aware of what the main story line is and the choice, especially in sandbox games, rests in whether to pursue it or freely explore. In SL the *noeme* is turned fully onto the player to decide in that the narrative of her experience in SL is solely dependent on her choice of actions. This is why I consider SL one of the best and most successful examples of user-created narrative available today. It is truly an open-ended sandbox

even to the point where you can create your own toys within it. It is true that some areas in SL have been created that provide a game situation but they are created by other users and to visit them (and play) is a choice. There are many more areas within SL, built by users, which are made to simulate social spaces (like the dance club and theatre mentioned earlier). These are spaces where users can interact with other users and feel agency within the now social space on a different level. Here, the opportunity to represent oneself as one wishes—and even experiment with gender, sexuality, race, and other identities as explored in *Life 2.0* mentioned above—opens the door to the possibility of personal revelations and even the experience of a sublime moment.

Case Study Six: *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*

Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag was the game chosen by three of my game session volunteers. Solange and Gurmeet chose only this game while Daphne started with it and switched at the halfway point to *Dead Rising 3* (as described in the second case study). In all six of the game sessions the participants played for no longer than two hours. During that time I video-recorded them playing. After playing the game we watched the recording together and I noted the participant's reaction to seeing themselves play. I asked questions and conversed with them regarding what observations of themselves they made and whether their expressions, vocalizations, and movements met or differed from their expectations. Specifically I took special interest in statements the participants made involving slips in identity and proprioception between the participant and their avatar. All the quotes below are transcribed from the game sessions.

As a general note, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (henceforth known as ACIV) involves an extremely agile protagonist. Many of the comments made by all three volunteers were about a disconnection between the abilities of the avatar displayed and their own idea of plausibility and control over him. Also, as with the previous case studies, I attempted to capture *how* my volunteer participants spoke because I see word choice and phrasing as highly indicative of affective state. Affect is often that which words fail to express and those moments when my participants are seeking words, using colourful vocabulary, or interrupting their own thoughts, to me, are the most loaded with meaning. Based on the order of the sessions, I will begin with Solange's first, followed by Daphne's half session when she played ACIV, and end with Gurmeet's.

Solange considers herself an occasional videogame player and plays videogames a couple times a month depending on availability of time. Also, she is aware of what games are available and has a secondhand knowledge of several titles as her husband also plays. She came to the game session interested in trying ACIV but hadn't yet, nor had she played on the PS4.

Starting the game, the player is placed in the role of a pirate in the 18th Century Caribbean. One of the first observations Solange made about herself as she played was "Ok, so I *do* talk to myself." The game immediately places the player's avatar in a situation filled with action but does so as a means of introducing the controls and style of gameplay. Here, the game starts with the player's ship in the midst of a battle, complete with cannon fire and swashbuckling. However, the ship is lost and the avatar swims to shore where he, Edward Kenway, can explore and, through him, the player can become accustomed to running, jumping,

climbing, etc. Solange said, "I always find the first, like, five minutes of the gameplay when you are learning the gameplay and how to do it very frustrating, obviously, or confusing. …But this, even this exercise was actually quite easy…and I tend to enjoy games that tend to move along slowly." I commented that she looked focused. "Well, I don't like, yeah, I don't like screwing up too much, which is…especially early." She continued a short while later, referring to the initial battle, by saying: "I was feeling very focused, actually, on task. And I was feeling quite good and somewhat surprised when it hit sometimes because I didn't actually think it hit the target sometimes, on a couple of those. I thought, ah this won't be so bad." She went on to explain, perhaps feeling that she should be more confident with the controls, that "I also haven't been playing games too much lately except maybe *[Beyond] Two Souls* last week but that was minimal."

By this time Solange was exploring the beach area and a cut-scene commenced involving an assassin that also washed up on shore. I commented that her gaze had changed into a more movie-watching look compared to her focused gaze while exploring. She agreed whole-heartedly. "Yeah! …I'm ready. …I've been doing that all along. It's not like it's hard to see…" As mentioned earlier, Solange's avatar is a character named Edward Kenway and he is surprisingly agile at climbing, jumping and running. She was starting to find it frustrating that Kenway seemed to be leaping on everything even when she didn't intend for him to. She said "I always find that first—when you are figuring out how to do stuff—cause nothing's intuitive. …I find that kind-of—because running and climbing are the same thing, I find that quite difficult to control. Yeah, *he* just wants to climb up." I asked her to elaborate what she was feeling regarding the disconnection between his actions and the lack of control over his leaping. "Frustrating, yeah. And I was referring to him as him, too, like, not me. He just kept doing things and running up

things and I hadn't figured out how to drop yet. So I was like, what?" It is telling that her feeling of lack of control over her avatar emphasizes a separation between her own position as player and that of her character.

As the game progressed and Solange explored several areas around the beach, the nearby village, and deeper into the jungle, she was starting to find moments when her control of Kenway aligned with her expectations. "I tend to just do a little nod when I think—when I think it is going well. When it is not going well I think my expression is [frown] much stronger." We both observed while exploring and looking for the many chests and items to find that there were times her posture and expressions looked particularly intense. "I'm leaning in to get a closer look. I don't know…" I commented that I noticed her breathing changes as Kenway does different actions, especially rigorous work like climbing palm trees and cliff-faces. Solange said "It is exhausting climbing up everything. That's funny. …I do a lot of pursing, lips folding." This was especially evident when she, as Kenway, would accomplish a particularly challenging maneuver and then visibly relax. "I totally didn't trust that I was going to do it right. I was like…ok."

Solange spent a short period of time becoming comfortable with the controls and then started to use the map feature of the game to locate items. The map is quite extensive, even during the beginning of the game, and there are many items marked. We started talking about different play styles and I mentioned one reason I purchased this game was for the exploring. Solange said:

> It's actually overwhelming like…I don't want to spend, you know—especially when I'm not that *good*—I don't want to spend all day looking for things when…but I'm also not the type to just do mission to mission to mission. So…but

> it's all about balance because you just spend so long trying to get everything. …When D___ is playing at least I make him tell me when he is going anywhere significant. I'm like, 'when you get into that church you call me…'

The idea that different areas are significant to the narrative of the game in addition to missions is a revealing choice of words in Solange's statement. Her play style is similar to mine in that I avoid leaving any nook or cranny unexplored in case they are important to the story, interesting as context, or contains some item that will give a future advantage to the avatar's abilities. I noted Solange's choice of the word *significant* to convey these meanings.

Observing herself she said "I think I move my head a lot more than I expected" and as she continued to play there were moments where her use of "I" implied a closer relationship to the game world. However, difficulty in controlling her avatar kept Kenway's movements separate from Solange's intentions. Regarding this she said "yeah, I definitely said, um, like when I was looking at the map I said where am I? Then yeah, I said, like, 'where are you going?' You're not me. I wouldn't do that." She was starting to place herself in relation to the map but not yet to superimpose herself with her avatar. However, as the game progressed, Solange started to become less self-conscious. She noticed that "I'm talking to myself a lot more now that the stakes are a bit higher."

At this point in the game, the assassin Kenway found earlier on the beach appeared and shot at her before running off. Following this the game prompts the player to give chase. I mentioned to Solange that when her avatar was shot, she reflexively said "Ouch!" Solange said, "Oh!" and laughed. "I feel like, yeah,…" and she completed her statement with an exaggerated gesture of moving the controller during the chase which she attempted more than once before

succeeding. The chase ends with a sword fight. Observing herself during the chase Solange said "I am so much more tense. …Yeah and I was not actually prepared to catch him, too. So, switching from running to killing." I commented that her breathing was very shallow. "I seem quite pleased that I just butchered that guy."

After catching the assassin, there is a cut-scene and then the game progresses to the next section involving a new area to explore and ending with dealing with several soldiers either with stealth or combat. During the exploration, we observed that Solange was talking quietly to herself as she played. I observed that sometimes her comments were directed at herself and sometimes toward her avatar in the game world. "There's a few times when I talk to myself—do this, do this—just sort of under my breath. I can see my mouth moving. …Yeah, I just went, [whispered] 'yessss.'" A few moments later she continued. "I find I tend to be, like, I tend to talk to myself anyway, you know, in like high emotion or stress types of situations. So, yeah I think I noticed during the game that I talk to myself a lot when I'm doing badly, 'come on, come on!' Yeah, I'm just mumbling to myself." At this point she encountered the soldiers. The change in her posture was immediate when a sword fight erupted. "A lot of tension in my neck. …Hunching over." During this fight, again, controlling Kenway was difficult and there was a clear distinction between Solange's comments toward herself and those directed toward her uncooperative avatar. She said, "He was bugging me here. He wasn't doing what I wanted him to."

The following section in ACIV involves steering a tall ship through a narrow harbour. This is another point in the game when it is designed to challenge the player while also learning

the controls.[28] The character of Steve Bonnet has joined the story and it is his ship. Solange felt nervous about Mr. Bonnet. "I felt more pressure not to break the ship. I thought how else will I get to Havana? …Yeah, and I sort of didn't want that guy yelling at me, either. [Imitating Steve Bonnet's voice] 'What are you doing?!?" However, Solange got the hang of steering the ship and she was soon in open water. "I assume there are a lot more boat sections in the game." Once out to sea, the map opens up to reveal the game spans all the Caribbean, from Florida to Venezuela. This impressed Solange but it was also intimidating. "That's the thing, I am always conflicted because I want to explore where I am but I'm also 'what other places are there?' I want to be there now—impatient." This feeling was short-lived, however, because Solange encountered the meta-story.

Allow me to interject here that I observed Solange's sense of agency within the game was being frustrated by that fact her avatar, Kenway, would climb everything against Solange's intentions. I wonder, if given more time like I had when I played ACIV, that Solange would grow to feel Kenway's climbing abilities become her own (a sublime experience) or, like me, enjoy sailing so much that she wouldn't want to leave the ship. When I first acquired the game I played up to a the point that Kenway was in Havana but then didn't play for a couple months—partially out of frustration with the game. Coming back to it, however, I reached a point where the scales tipped and I felt more agency than frustration toward the game and from there I experienced many periods of flow. I wonder if this game, more than the other games I had available for my participants to try, requires a longer period of courtship, so-to-speak, with the avatar before a strong bond is created.

[28] My own experience of sailing in this game was that it was challenging at first but highly rewarding after. I never wanted to leave my ship and sometimes played the game simply for the joy of sailing while my crew sang sea shanties.

The *Assassin's Creed* franchise is framed within a present day meta-story involving a major corporation that may or may not be run by the Templars. The idea behind the games is that the historical events are revisited memories of past generations of a line of assassins. In this version of the game, the major corporation is posing as a game company that is collecting memories to become the basis of videogames. I asked Solange facetiously, if this game company is collecting memories to make game experiences, is *this* game a collected memory? She was intrigued by that idea. "Based on somebody's experiences? Yeah, when I see news footage about *Assassin's Creed* I always want to know where it is set, though. …I feel like these offices are nicer than the [Ubi-Soft] offices in Montreal…like their dream offices." Solange, listening to the lengthy introduction to Abstergo Industries based in, ironically, Montreal, started to comment on weaknesses in the premise and started to become impatient. During this long cut-scene she said statements like: "I think it is interesting she said they are providing passive experiences. […] I hadn't actually been thinking about security… […] [Laughing] I'm rolling my eyes. Alright, I get it!"

After establishing that the game is premised within a larger present day story of a game development company mining memories, Solange was back in the 18th Century but this time in Havana. This is when the game really takes off including finding high towers to "synchronize" memories and performing a wide variety of side quests. The player is free to travel anywhere within the limits of the town and perform the side missions in any order. The main story can be engaged by the player whenever she chooses. Solange immediately found a place to "synchronize." "I do like the synchronize, how it gives you a little break and a nice view." She then engaged with a couple side quests. Most involve chasing at some point. "Yeah, and when I'm chasing I'm really moving this a lot, the controller." Regarding a particular catch-the-courier

quest she said, “Ah, I got so close so many times, I just kept letting him get away.” I told her I had chased that courier all over town. “Well I find it hard because the commands aren’t very intuitive, too, so I find it hard to stay watching him and then notice when it said to tackle him, I’d lose him looking—does it say yet, does it say yet?—just having two things to focus on was confusing.”

Solange explored Havana for a few minutes longer until her two hour session ended. After the video of her playing ended, Solange commented generally that “I hate it in games when you, like, you already know you are fucking up and then there’s always somebody there saying, ‘Aye, what are you doin’? You’re fucking up my boat!’ I’m not *trying* to destroy your boat!” It seems steering the ship out of the harbour made an impression on her. Again, I wonder if given more time—like I had when I first played the game—Solange would have had a stronger sense of agency from the game. As it was, though she had a few moments of proprioceptive connection between her and Kenway, most of her session consisted of tension between frustration over controlling her avatar and wanting to engage with the environment.

Let us turn now to Daphne’s experience of ACIV. Again, she started with this game and switched to *Dead Rising 3* halfway through. As mentioned in the other case study, Daphne considers herself a skilled gamer and plays often, usually FPSs online against other people. Perhaps it shows when immediately swimming to the beach she was asking me how to draw her sword. “That’s the first thing I got to do! Kill!”

Daphne was very impressed with the detailed graphics of the game: “Wow, this looks so good. Like it’s real.” However, she found the numerous cut-scenes tedious and remarked how

her impatience was shown in her facial expressions and posture. During an early cut-scene she said: “Look at how relaxed I am! I’m yawning, I’m tired. Just ate a big dinner.”

Daphne took to the controls early but still had moments, like Solange, where her character, Edward Kenway, would execute maneuvers she didn’t intend. With that said, she did catch herself referring to her avatar in the first person. “There! Where am *I* going?” However, this would quickly switch back to a separate “he” referring to Kenway when he would perform differently than intended. While exploring the initial areas near the beach she said, “yeah, he would automatically, uh, crouch. I thought I was hitting a crouch button. Yeah, that was weird” and seeing him clamber up trees, “[He’s] like a fucking monkey!”

Having discerned the style of this game differed from others she was used to playing we started to discuss individual play styles and games that suited them. According to the four categories defined earlier in the section on Meaningful Choice, where I self-identity as an “explorer,” I would place Daphne under the category of “killer.” During this discussion of style Daphne said:

> I’m more into combat. Like finding shit…eh, it stresses me out that I miss things and stuff. That just stresses me out. The feeling of, fuck, what if it was back there and I can’t go back, like, Damn, I probably just missed a bunch of shit. So yeah, I pretty much love the games where I just have to kill kill kill. Like it’s satisfying to me when I go into a room and there’s a shitload of things to kill. I’ll kill them all and then if the room’s empty, yes!, I conquered this room! …That’s why I’m going to like *Diablo* but I’m not because I have to find all the books and this and that—chests.

It is interesting that Daphne brought up the game *Diablo* (meaning *Diablo III*) since it is a remarkably balanced game for differing play styles. I, too, enjoy playing it for exactly the reasons Daphne said she wouldn't, but it also features intense combat and can be played with a clear emphasis on killing as many monsters as possible.

As Daphne continued to explore and learn the controls her attention began to wane. She asked:

> Have you seen that stupid movie called *Her*? Ok, well, it's based in the future and the guy is actually in the videogame so he has to run and this is how he runs and then he has to like grab things, you know, interact with characters but he's *in* the videogame. So it is like virtual—like Kinect—but he can sit on his chair, he doesn't have to stand. …You got to see it just for that, just to see how he played his videogames. *Her*! It's so stupid. *Her*. But the videogame in it is amazing. It's the future. …It's about a guy who falls in love with like Siri…

Daphne's description gives insight into an ideal of immersion she holds. Finding frustration in controlling her avatar in a game world that wasn't holding her attention, her mind went to an example of her ideal of complete control and immersion while playing.

At this time Daphne had come to the point of chasing and fighting the assassin mentioned earlier. I pointed out her breathing quickened during the chase scene. She dispatched him first try. Following this was the area with the soldiers. While she engaged with them we both remarked how she was talking to the soldiers while she fought and that she easily referred to herself in the first person. Referring to the sword fight she said, "You fuckers! …I didn't even know that guy was there behind me. …He shot me. I didn't know anybody was behind me. I

thought I had them all in front of me." Following this she pointed out several other instances where she spoke as though she were the one in the game world. "See, what would *I* do with the turtle" and ""Can I just go out and kill them all?"

Having dispatched the soldiers, she boarded Steve Bonnet's ship, sailed out to open sea and then the game presented her with the game within a game premise. She was less than impressed. "Now I'm like, "This is bullshit!!!" Look at my face, you missed it, my face was like this. …I remember I was trying to punch her out. …Yeah, there's lots of games where I died because I killed the good guy by accident." The game character she was trying to punch out was the receptionist showing Daphne's character around Abstergo Industries. I took this as a clear sign of her frustration with that game and this is when, from Daphne's prompting, we switched to *Dead Rising 3*.

Though Daphne took to the game quickly, she also felt a great deal of frustration toward the game from her lack of control over Kenway. She is used to controlling her movement through game spaces very well and her lack of agency over Kenway's movements and through him, the game, made her want to switch. When the game presented her with a sharp change in narrative direction—the story within a story premise—this further lack of control was too much for her. She gave up on ACIV in the hope of a more rewarding, affectively engaging, experience. For the second half of her game session, please see the second case study in chapter two involving *Dead Rising 3*.

Last but not least, Gurmeet considers himself as someone who plays videogames often and has played since being quite young. He had played a couple of the previous *Assassin's Creed*

games but not this one and not on a PS4. Most of his recent gaming experience is on the Xbox One but he also owns a PS3.

Gurmeet knew what to expect in the style of gameplay from the previous *Assassin's Creed* games. He progressed through the initial portion of the game learning the controls quickly. We both remarked at how visibly relaxed he looked during cut-scenes in contrast to how focused he appeared when exploring and looking at his inventory items. He leaned in especially when looking for chests. Gurmeet brought up the topic of different play styles. The conversation started with reference to *Skyrim*, a game we have both played and is described in Case Study Three. During this conversation Gurmeet described his play style this way:

> I'm a bit of a completionist. I'm trying to finish *Mass Effect 3* right now. I was playing [*Skyrim*], like, A LOT and then I just stopped. And playing it again I think I know why. It is so, like, heavy in terms of massive war, loss, and even stuff—I just put it down, it was too much to deal with at the time. …That's basically what happened to me so now my goal is to go back and finish it during Reading Week. I downloaded—there was a sale on some DLC, so I bought it on sale. It's some really good extra content, too.

Gurmeet self identifies as a completionist. This is a label I sometimes use for myself as well. To use Richard Bartle's four categories of game style described earlier: achiever, explorer, socializer, and killer, going by Gurmeet's description of his play style, I would place him under the achiever or an explorer like myself.

The section with the chase and fight involving the assassin arose. Gurmeet commented "What's going on with that music? Obviously something intense." The music in the game is a

strong affective cue. Gurmeet caught and dispatched the assassin on the first try. “I kicked his ass…and I wiped him off my shoe.” Observing himself during the chase and fight he said “I am leaning forward during the fight scenes. I always get a little nervous early on in games when you still haven’t quite got the hang of stuff yet and don’t want to get caught.”

As Gurmeet progressed, our conversation turned to the new consoles and the higher graphics quality. I asked whether he felt it really affects the player’s enjoyment of a game. Gurmeet said, “I don’t know. I’m not also really sure the super high graphics are all that important anyway. A good game is a good game, too, I mean, friggin’ *Call of Duty* every game is the same—sure the graphics are nice but it’s the same crap every game.” With that said, he did remark how detailed and impressive the graphics were in this game, especially when sailing out of the harbour to the open sea.

The section revealing the meta-story behind the game followed and Gurmeet remarked that he noticed he rolled his eyes when it came. He also offered an interesting observation regarding the relationship of the player to the avatar and how, in this game, the identity is further divided. Gurmeet said “In this case there’s a third ‘I’ which is the…whatever that guy is.” Gurmeet was referring to the “I” with the controller, the “I” in the game world (the character of Edward Kenway) and, in this case because of the meta-level of the game within a game, the “meta” protagonist using the Animus work station reliving the memories of Edward Kenway. The section involving Abstergo Industries in the present ended and Gurmeet moved forward to the edge of his seat even during the initial cut-scene when arriving at Havana. I commented that he looked eager. Gurmeet corrected me saying: “Probably skeptical.”

Once in town, Gurmeet started to explore. Upon passing a group of women, Gurmeet said "Hello Ladies" and immediately following, his avatar in-game said "Hello Ladies" too. We both remarked how it was interesting that he and the game character both reacted to the women in the same way. In this rendition of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, the protagonist, Kenway, is a pirate as opposed to Templars, noblemen, and trained assassin's in previous games. It was an interesting connection between Kenway and Gurmeet that Gurmeet seemed to take on some of Kenway's attitude shown here toward the group of women. However, when Gurmeet started engaging in side missions, many of which involved chasing, the separation between the avatar's identity and that of Gurmeet was clear. "Yeah I found the chase a little, uh, awkward at times, because you would run but then all of a sudden you'd perch on something—no, don't perch!— It's that "I/I divide." Gurmeet's coining of the term, the "I/I divide" started earlier with the three layers discussion involving the meta-story and turned into a useful concept that he continued to use throughout our session from then on.

Soon after, Gurmeet as Kenway, found himself in a bar fight and we both noticed that he started to refer to Kenway's movements as his own. "This is where I was trying to counter." This was also when we both noticed Gurmeet, while playing, was commenting how tired he was. I asked him if he could explain what was happening for him at that time. He said: "I think I make [that comment] a couple of times because this guy is always climbing and jumping and like... Although, do I say luckily its fiction? Luckily it's a computer, not real." To clarify I asked, so if I were doing it I'd be exhausted? There's an "I" doing it but [at the same time] not doing it. I should feel exhausted but I don't. Gurmeet responded, "I think, probably, the 'I am not' is reinforced in these games where it is a third person sort-of thing. Where there's that distinction,

right? Whereas maybe first person shooters—there's probably still the separation but…" Seeking to elaborate further Gurmeet offered that:

> *Mass Effect* is a good example of that, right, depending on what choices you make whether your scars will heal versus…Yeah, I noticed when I was whatever his name was injured in this, well, you couldn't pull yourself up as easily, right, you just had to hang and then I was like, "What? Why aren't you moving? [in a sarcastic "gamer" voice] Isn't that how videogames work? I should be able to take *numerous* bullets and be fine! [in his normal voice]...even though all it takes is one bullet to kill them.

We both agreed that there is a cognitive dissonance when the player witnesses the avatar accomplish incredible feats or suffer physical punishment without seeming to be affected. The missing affect is somehow registered in the player. The dissonance can be unsettling and a barrier to the suspension of disbelief and immersion.

Gurmeet had a few minutes left of his game session and attempted a couple more side quests. Before he finished, using his concept of the I/I divide and referring to a cool move he made as Kenway, Gurmeet said, "…Also, just communicating the fact I just did this really cool thing. But that was entirely accidental. …It was definitely like, it was definitely me/not me though at the same time. If it was like, uh, the fact it was entirely by accident makes it…." I think he meant to say that in this case, when Kenway behaved differently than Gurmeet intended, the avatar surpassed his expectations as opposed to the earlier examples of frustration over controlling Kenway. Gurmeet's play session, like Daphne's and Solange's before him,

demonstrated how important playstyle and proficiency in controlling the avatar is regarding feeling agency while playing.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to demonstrate that the feeling of agency the player experiences while exploring and performing actions within a pre-authored virtual space is an illusion, albeit a conscious one. Making choices that matter to the player in the context of the game narrative can give the player feelings of presence, potency, and creative accomplishment despite knowing her choices and subsequent outcomes have been predetermined. This form of suspension of disbelief is the contract the player enters into with the fiction presented. As we saw in the previous case study involving *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, all three of the participants who played the game wanted to engage with the game on a deeper present level but were often frustrated and taken out of the moment by difficulties in controlling their avatar. When they were given the plot twist that the game is a story within a story, they also found this quite jarring and it worked against forming a contract of suspension of disbelief between the player and the fiction. For Daphne, it was enough for her to switch to another game.

To help illustrate the new rules of engagement videogames present compared to more traditional narrative art forms, I summarized Jesper Juul's six definitions of narrative and then intersected them with three further layers of my own in relation to the player's creative input. Specifically, I compared traditional (pre-determined) narrative with what I define as user-driven narrative found in most videogames today and attempts at user-created narrative demonstrated in the examples I gave. These three categories, traditional narrative, user-driven narrative, and user-

created narrative were analyzed using my own repurposing of the term *noeme* inspired by Roland Barthes' application of the concept to photography. Whereas he determined the *noeme* of photography is proof of the subject *that-has-been*, I deduced that the *noeme* of videogames is a challenge to the player asking *what-do-I-do?* To illustrate the differences between the three categories I gave several examples of commercial videogames to illustrate user-driven narrative and the power of feeling effective in a pre-authored space. In contrast, regarding user-created narrative I used the early experiment of ELIZA from MIT in 1966, *Façade* from MIT in 2005, and *Second Life*, the user-generated online virtual environment created by Linden Labs. In the last example, agency hinges on the importance of sharing the virtual space—feeling the (tele)presence—of others. I describe my experience with *Second Life* in Case Study Five.

The *noeme* of videogames—the *what-do-I-do?*—prompting the player to make choices and perform actions as the protagonist is in conflict with its seeming nemesis, the cut-scene, that takes control away from the player temporarily. In the section on cut-scenes, itself a 'cut-scene' within the chapter, I do not condemn their use but instead make a comparison to exposition in plays and literature that, if handled clumsily, can interrupt the flow of the narrative rather than propel it forward. In videogames, this interruption can also interrupt the pacing of the game and interfere with the player's sense of immersion. When handled well, however, the cut-scene plays an important part in making the choices the player makes during play meaningful.

Case Study Six focused on Solange, Daphne, and Gurmeet playing *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and revealed much regarding the conflict between the *noeme* of videogames prompting the player to action and cut-scenes interrupting the flow. All three commented that they noticed definite differences in their attention toward the videogame when cut-scenes occurred—and they occur often in this game. All three also commented on how they felt a

disconnection between their own perception of their physical abilities and how extremely agile their avatar was during gameplay. This contrast was highlighted by the fact that their avatar—the character of Kenway—would often leap or climb structures without my participants intending him to, and this further interfered with their ability to connect proprioceptively with him. Lastly, the impact of a skillful use of narrative was also demonstrated by the fact *Assassin's Creed* features a heavy-handed plot twist involving a meta-story over the main story involving Kenway. In my experience, I enjoyed the meta-narrative level to the game overall, but during the play sessions of my three volunteers who chose this game, they all found it jarring. Again, it served to further distance them from immersing. As I mentioned before, in Daphne's case, it prompted her to move on to another game.

The disconnection between the movements of Kenway and how my participants intended for him to move goes beyond a momentary suspension of control during a cut-scene but implies a collapse of plausibility interfering with the player's proprioceptive projection onto the avatar. The player's feeling of agency is impeded through the technical design of the character of Kenway and his movements within the game. As I mentioned earlier, over time I overcame this disconnection in my experience of the game. Through prolonged exposure and practice I trained myself to adjust what I considered plausible within this game environment. I wonder, if given more time, my participants would have a similar experience. Of course, coupled with the jarring narrative twist of the game within a game, players like Daphne would not be willing to invest that much time and effort. However, this does bring up an interesting performance studies issue in that the range of possible physical movements programmed for a character (plus the dramaturgy surrounding the narrative) directly influence the feeling of agency for the player. Connections can be made to conversations taking place in performance studies around

participatory performance and the way in which the frame of the performance conditions the kind of agency that is made possible.[29]

The latter portions of the chapter prior to the two case studies turns toward the effect on the player when she feels a strong sense of agency within the virtual environment. What happens when everything falls into place and the player feels the avatar's abilities as her own? This sense of empowerment through agency continues where the last chapter regarding the gamer as cyborg left off. Here, I make the claim that when the player feels immersed (proprioceptive connection, experiencing flow, caught in a compelling series of events), is invested in the outcome of her choices in that they are meaningful to her personally, and through her avatar performs actions not otherwise attainable in real life, she exposes herself to the possibility of experiencing a sublime moment through gameplay. This phenomenon of attaining the sublime was not experienced during the two-hour game research sessions I held and, based on my own experience, is something that may only arise over prolonged exposure. Whenever I have felt what I would deem to be a sublime moment, it was only after playing a game long enough that the avatar's abilities and projection into the game environment become so deeply embodied within me, that there is no cognitive separation between the avatar and myself when the moment arises. I argue that this experience can be both painful and pleasurable much the same way the sublime in other artistic mediums can affect the receiver.

Moving now to the fifth and final chapter, I take all the aspects we have defined to this point regarding the player's affective relationship with her avatar and focus on how ideology

[29] Specifically, I mean Kim McLeod's article for *Theatre Research in Canada* regarding ambulatory theatre, podplays, and sounds walks titled, "Finding the New Radical: Digital Media, Oppositionality, and Political Interventions in Contemporary Canadian Theatre," Baz Kershaw's work on environmental theatre in *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events*," and Laura Levin's work on participatory theatre in *Performing Ground*.

may be transmitted through affective means in videogames. In most other narrative forms, the separation between the protagonist of the story and the audience is clear. Those other narrative forms like non-interactive theatre, film, and literature also have longer critical histories and established strategies for critical engagement. The art form of videogames is the new representational storytelling kid on the block. What new challenges arise when the audience is also the protagonist? How can critical distance be achieved when the player is caught up in the action, so-to-speak? The next chapter seeks to find useful critical strategies to educate both players of videogames and the gaming industry to ultimately create better and more politically productive videogames.

Chapter Five: Winning the Hearts and Thumbs of the People

Everything is art. Everything is politics.

—Ai Weiwei

How is affect created and manipulated to serve or challenge ideology? Can affect created through game immersion produce new ideological orientations within players? The previous chapters dealt with specific aspects of affect in relation to the avatar such as proprioception, immersion, cybernetic augmentation of the self (achieved as a feedback loop between player and avatar), agency, and the changing role narrative plays in relation to the medium of videogames. I discussed the phenomenon of virtual presence and telepresence achieved through computer mediated means. I broached the subject of attaining a sublime moment during a videogame wherein the player feels capable of feats normally impossible or glimpses omnipotence. This chapter is meant to bring all of these aspects together to focus on how, especially in the most powerfully affective moments of gameplay, ideology is transmitted through affective means, intentionally or not. Through this, I hope to shed some light on the possible pitfalls and hazards of this recent culture-shaping medium.

The tone of this chapter, as opposed to the previous four, is darker. I discuss embedded ideologies and world-views built into videogames that may play a contributing role in the misogyny and racial intolerance prevalent in social media and other online environments like forums and online competitive play. I draw attention to embedded ideologies as *possible* sources of real world violence against women and minorities originating from and empowered by the

(believed) anonymity of the internet and gamer IDs—as evidenced by the recent #GamerGate controversy and equally anti-social behaviours conducted through digital means. With that said, this chapter is not a condemnation of the videogame industry. It is a wake-up call and effort to expose the ideological forces at work on players of videogames extending the important work of outspoken critics like Anita Sarkeesian—herself a key target of threats and harassment connected to #GamerGate due to her penetrating and well-researched criticism of the gender bias and institutional misogyny of the videogame industry.

I think videogames are great fun, a highly affecting medium providing novel experiences and compelling storytelling, and that everyone should play them. According to the videogame industry surveys mentioned earlier, most of the world is![30] I consider myself a gamer—as someone who plays and enjoys playing videogames—and not someone who supports misogyny or hate. The fact that the term gamer has become intertwined with the latter due to the recent #GamerGate controversy plus years of representation of gamers (and by extension hackers) as antisocial and potentially dangerous by news media, film, and television concerns me deeply. It is true that internet trolls[31] are a major societal issue but I don't believe painting all gamers with the same brush is productive. This is especially true in light of the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) statistics that the average gamer is more likely to be middle-aged, gainfully employed, and female than an adolescent male living in his parent's basement. I haven't given up on the term "gamer" and hope this chapter will establish some important distinctions. With that in mind, however, I do see the majority of videogames on the market today privileging the individual, reinforcing a selfish neoliberal perception of reality, and this individual is most often

[30] By "world" I mean more than the English speaking western world but also Latin America, Australia, the Asian-Pacific countries, and Eastern Europe.
[31] Internet trolls are individuals who post comments or join online conversations with the purpose of disrupting ideas, sowing discord, and upsetting people.

white and male (or serving a white patriarchal master). Videogames have a greater audience than Hollywood films and just as movies are analyzed and criticized for their ideological messages, the stories and experiences provided by videogames deserve similar scrutiny.

Videogames are a product of a late capitalist society and reflect the values of the society that produces them. In this final chapter I make a connection between the avatar and the Body without Organs (BwO) originated by Antonin Artaud and taken up by Guattari and Deleuze. With that connection in mind I revisit Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and apply them in this late capitalist corporate context to videogames tempered by the insights of Linda Hutcheon, Ian Bogost, and Slavoj Žižek. It is my intention to show how all the affective mechanisms at work in creating immersion contribute to making games an immediate and personal vehicle for teaching, reinforcing, and in some cases challenging, ideology. In the examples to follow, I look specifically at a small sample of games that reinforce (or in some cases challenge) sexist, racist, heteronormative, and neoliberal ideologies.

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, some videogames encourage critical engagement with prevalent ideologies. Following Ai WeiWei's statement above that everything is art and everything is political, videogames are not alone in that they both communicate artistic expression as well as an ideological (political) perspective. In our late capitalist society, even something as (seemingly) innocuous as the clothes I choose to wear, communicate both my fashion sense (art) as well as what brands I wear and, by extension, support (politics). Wearing cheap shirts from Walmart (like my father) communicates as much information both artistically

and politically as does wearing a Ben Sherman shirt or Doc Martin shoes (as I do).[32] Videogames are not exempt from this same type of political coding and because they are often considered frivolous pastimes, deserve even closer scrutiny. The point is that all cultural forms, including videogames, are shaped by ideology in some way.

What makes videogames unique and the focus of this chapter, is the way they work with ideologically laden representations without the same critical distance offered by film, television, or traditional (fourth-wall) theatre. In film, television, and traditional theatre there is usually a clear distinction between the representation on the screen or the stage and the audience allowing for a critical distance by the viewer supported by an established critical history. It is true that videogames are also received through screens like film and television[33] but as I discussed in previous chapters, videogames have the unique property of immersing the player physically (through proprioceptive connection), emotionally, and affectively in the game world. Because the player is encouraged to feel present within the fiction and, essentially, get caught up in the action, videogames offer new challenges with respect to maintaining a critical perspective toward the ideological positions presented. It is this difference that makes it imperative to pay close attention to the range of ideologies that games promote. This study is not only concerned with how videogames cast the player as the protagonist and how that affects her (chapter two). It is not only concerned with how the experience of playing videogames also augments the player's perception of herself and her reality (chapter three). This chapter looks at the ways videogames can encourage certain orientations in players and influence a player's perception of herself and her reality through affective means.

[32] This area of research is beyond the scope of this dissertation but I must add there have been some recent important findings regarding how fashion communicates politically emerging from the field of fashion studies. Specifically, see the work of Joanne Entwistle, Valerie Steele, Angela McRobbie, and Caroline Evans.

[33] This distinction is being further challenged by recent experiments in videogames using Microsoft's Hololens as well as headset technology like The Optical Rift and Morpheus.

The following are just some of the games I will analyze regarding their embedded ideologies and in some cases overtly political intentions. The *BioShock* franchise, inspired by the writings of Ayn Rand, is a critique of political idealism and utopian social engineering. The *Fable* franchise features a fantastic fairytale-like world that foregrounds the construction of gender. *Fable* encourages experimentation with gender roles to the point where cross-dressing and same sex relationships are treated as normal and expected within the course of the game. Other games, however, reinforce capitalist individualism and US-centrism like the *Gears of War* franchise and the *Halo* franchise. Both are situated in fantastic hyper-masculinized militaristic universes with seemingly insurmountable odds against the protagonists. The *Grand Theft Auto* franchise is a parodic reproduction of the underground criminal element found in major US cities.[34] I ask: when are the politics that form virtual representations of gender, race, class, etc., overt and when are they hidden or even deceptive or manipulative in their intent? This takes us into examples of games as advertisements or even propaganda like *America's Army*, the US Army's free-to-play recruitment tool, and *Under Siege* (2005), a game made by Akfar Studios where the player is a Palestinian freedom fighter. Where does audience reception fit in this mix? If all videogames, like all art, convey ideology, is there a spectrum of challenge versus indoctrination that can be drawn? Can "bad" games be played critically and/or display redeeming qualities despite the intentions of the designers? Can games with good intentions be misused or misinterpreted to promote harmful or hateful positions? I do not support censorship. I believe ideas should not be feared. Instead, what frightens me is ignorance. My goal here is not to place limits on what games can and cannot include but instead to better inform game players and game

[34] All the *Grand Theft Auto* games are placed in fictional American cities with the one exception of *Grand Theft Auto: London, 1969* (1999) that is placed in London England in the historical time period of 1969. This is interesting not only because it may be the least known *GTA* game (at least in North America), but also that the company founders of Rockstar Games are, themselves, immigrants to the US from England.

designers of what games do to players and how that can affect them. The following analyses are offered as examples to add critical tools to the intellectual toolboxes of both gamers and game designers. From my perspective harmful hacking, trolling, and phenomena like #GamerGate come from places of skewed ideology, misinformed intentions, and (willful) ignorance. This chapter aims to promote the critical sophistication of gamers and the gaming industry and by doing so, help end the practice of trolling, put an end to the harassment exemplified by #GamerGate, and to help redeem the label of hacker from its often negative, anti-social connotation.

The chapter concludes with a look outward from the virtual reality offered by videogames into the real world. Gamer culture is discussed as both a changing and maturing concept exposing its ugly anti-social underbelly. As a side effect of prolonged immersion in fictional spaces and exposure to the often problematic ideologies embedded within them, I cite the hacking of Sony Pictures as well as the #GamerGate controversy as points of rupture. These are liminal cultural moments where behaviours accepted or tolerated in game situations are spilling into real life with real victims of the consequences.

This chapter works as a culmination of the dissertation in that it encapsulates all the concepts (puzzle pieces) that have come before like affect, proprioception, flow, immersion, the gamer as cyborg, agency, etc. and puts them to use with ideological readings of several games to reveal how videogames often have the player embody a politically problematic extended self. As the following examples show, sometimes this politically problematic extended self is intentionally created to draw attention to a social/political issue, but quite often it is simply presented to be embodied and absorbed into the psyche of the player. I invoke Artaud's Body without Organs as a strong image of pure presence/pure embodiment and how freeing that can

feel to the player. With that freedom, however, comes danger and the immediacy of embodiment makes the absorption of ideological messages equally immediate.

Videogames as an Ideological State Apparatus

In 1970 Louis Althusser published a highly influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in which he describes the means the ruling classes have at their disposal to maintain influence over the masses through coercive means rather than violence. Bogost argues that Althusser is continuing the work of the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci and that "Gramsci's notion of *hegemony* characterizes the ability of stronger social classes to impose a worldview on subordinate ones, so that the latter see that worldview as natural" (74). He makes the connection to Althusser clear with:

> Louis Althusser built on Gramsci's interest in the way ideas connect with material practice, arguing that economic systems tend first to their own procreation. He conceives of two types of institutions that carry this out in the modern capitalist state, the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), such as the police, courts, and army, and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as the church, the family, and the educational system. (74)

Althusser's essay was written around the same time as the invention of videogames and some of his categories can benefit from an update to better reflect the apparatuses found in contemporary society. Althusser's original list of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) places television and radio under communications ISA (96) and I extrapolate that theatre and film would fall under the category of cultural ISA. In short, influenced by the work of Jean Baudrillard a decade after

Althusser's influential essay, I put mass media, including videogames, under these last two categories as a means of conveying ideology supporting the prevailing hegemony.

The difference between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses is that RSAs function "by violence" and ISAs function "*by ideology*" (italics original, Althusser 97). Ideology, according to Althusser, "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (109). He clarifies this statement further in his essay by writing: "it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there" (111). To help clarify this Sturken and Cartwright remind us that for Althusser, "ideology does not simply reflect the conditions of the world, whether falsely or not. Rather, it is the case that without ideology we would have no means of thinking about or experiencing that thing we call 'reality'" (52). Bogost takes this idea of separating ideology from falsehood by making the connection to the work of Slavoj Žižek. Bogost's recent interpretation of Althusser is that "Ideology is not just a false representation of reality, it has become a part of reality itself, disfiguring it. Says Žižek, 'ideological' is not the 'false consciousness' of a social being but this being in so far as it is supported by 'false consciousness'" (Bogost 74).

While agreeing that Althusser's work on ideology has been very influential, Sturken and Cartwright argue that we have moved on and that going back to Althusser's concepts of ideology "can be seen as very disempowering as well" (53). They write that "if we are always already defined as subjects, and are interpellated to be who we are, then there is little hope for social change. In other words, the idea that we are already constructed as subjects does not allow us to feel that we have any *agency* in our lives" (italics original, 53). Videogames, however, do the

opposite in that they are designed to make the player feel that she has agency in virtual environments and, as I argued earlier, that feeling of agency may residually affect the player in real life. At the very least, the player's virtual experiences rendered through digital representations help inform her interpretation of reality, virtual or not. This is particularly important to our investigation of the virtuality of game worlds. Baudrillard argues that "whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum" (6). Videogames are simulations designed to represent virtual worlds and at the same time, provide the player the feeling of being an active agent there. Baudrillard was writing about how the mass media was providing a simulacra of reality through the endless repetition of images. At the time he wrote *Simulacra and Simulation*, videogames were in their infancy. Now, I would include videogames as an important component in the idea of mass media alongside film, television, and theatre. Summarizing Baudrillard, Hutcheon writes that "the mass media have neutralized reality by stages: first they *reflected* it; then they *masked* it and perverted it; next they had to *mask its absence*; and finally they produced instead the *simulacrum* of the real, the destruction of meaning and of all relation to reality" (33). As I have described in previous chapters, the lines between the real and the virtual are becoming increasingly blurred to the point where the two are inseparable.

According to Althusser, ideology is our imaginary relationship to the real world. Baudrillard turns the real into a simulacrum—representations freed from an original referent through reproduction. Finally, Bogost argues that this imaginary relationship has become our (simulated) reality itself. Therefore I see videogames as a perfect storm of postmodern expression. Videogames give the player an imaginary relationship to a simulated real.

Interactive media, including videogames, is the newest performative mass media. It is truly a *new media* as so many new academic departments sharing the name will attest. Because it is interactive, it is a more immediate experience than consuming moving pictures and sound and through the player's performative input, only one step removed from actual experience as Bogost claims in his work (35). In light of the work of Althusser and the others mentioned above, our experience is negotiated through our ideological position—our imaginary relationship to it. When this is moved one step into the realm of virtual reality, a reality completely composed of computer mediated and manipulated performances and representations, our imaginary relationship is further complicated. Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter noted in their research involving *Grand Theft Auto* that players slip between the real and the simulated, the virtual and the actual. They write:

> They found that *GTA* players, although of course aware of simulation, "slipped and segued viewpoints" in which the virtual and actual blur—an instance of how cities are "blended . . . with their portrayal." The result is that players inhabit what the authors term "the ludodrome," a "mediated space between immersion in urban simulation and a real world that is simultaneously generated, destabilized and blurred by . . . gameplay." (157)

Because of this slippage between the real and the simulated, the representations encountered in the "ludodrome" and the ideologies they espouse are also blurred as to what belongs in the real world and what should be interpreted as belonging only to the fiction within the virtual world. Anna Everett and S. Craig Watkins call games like *GTA* "racialized pedagogical zones" and how, at least partially due to the "richly detailed and textured urban landscapes they present, establish powerful learning environments that help situate how young gamers understand,

perform, and reproduce race and ethnicity" (142). The player cannot help but have moments of recognition between real urban environments and those represented virtually. This includes the behaviours and ideological perspectives associated with environments and narratives embedded in those environments as described in chapter four involving environmental storytelling. Connection to the real world can lend further meaning to the virtual world of the game. Indeed, I see this as one of the major draws to playing games like *GTA.* Moments of recognition between virtual environments and real world spaces can occur and likewise, meanings created in-game may carry over into RL, including attitudes toward race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.

Blurring the real and the virtual further are the inclusion of advertisements and product placements within videogames. Advertising a real world product within a virtual environment adds both a further level of realism to the virtual world but also a moment of meta-recognition for the player. The avatar looking at a billboard for Coke within the game world, for example, could never actually enjoy a Coke—the avatar has no cravings unless coded into its behaviour to communicate that fact to the player. It is the player who is (potentially) affected by it; she (might) crave and ultimately buy the product. To be expected, product placement in videogames is as prevalent as it is in film and television. Granted, it would seem unusual to play a racing game and see a virtual racetrack represented without advertisements lining the track. In that case, it would seem unnatural due to the ubiquity of advertising in sports. However, playing *Splinter Cell* and having the player's character, Sam Fisher, zip-line past an Axe Deodorant billboard emphasizes the fact that the avatar doesn't sweat but the player holding the controller does.

The player may confuse the lines between the real and the virtual, between fictional game worlds and actual places. Advertising may blur the lines between fiction and non-fiction. But when the videogame is intentionally made to reproduce/simulate reality to convey meaning to

the player, this is where we find ourselves on a slippery slope of manipulation. Flight simulators and other interactive software designed to train the player for real world equivalencies are one thing. Not all simulations are designed to persuade (though all representations do convey ideology). With that said, the game examples I give later in this chapter of *Tomb Raider*, *Gears of War*, and *Halo* demonstrate that even (perhaps) unintentionally, meanings are encoded—or at the very least contain meaning to be read and interpreted by the player—in how people, places, things, and their relationships to each other (and the player) are represented. Taken further, *The MacDonald's Game* and *Civilization Revolution* also described later, are both meant to convey specific meaning in regards to their real world referents. The procedural rhetoric of *The MacDonald's Game* is meant to demonstrate the evils of the fast food industry while *Civilization Revolution*, in a more subtle manner, espouses the virtues of (capitalist) democracy as peace-loving and prosperous.

Following this same logic but much less innocently, let us look at two examples of games that intentionally blur the lines between the real and the virtual to not just persuade the player but to move the player to action: *America's Army* (2002) and *Under Siege* (2005). These games are quite different in quality and substance but I mention them together because their real world equivalencies are real world conflicts and both are designed to inspire the player to act. *America's Army* is a free-to-play recruitment tool for the US Army. It is published by the US Army but, perhaps ironically, originally developed in Canada by Ubisoft. *Under Siege* is also designed as a recruitment tool of sorts in that it casts the player as a Palestinian Freedom Fighter fighting the Israeli Army. It was developed in Damascus by Afkar Media. It is important to note that *America's Army* was first released a few months after the attack of 9-11 in New York and that *Under Siege* was released at the end of the Second Intifada in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Also, I believe it is no coincidence that videogames, like these, designed to recruit real world soldiers, were released around the same time that the revenue from videogames surpassed that of Hollywood films.

What is concerning about these games is not that they are combat games—there are scores of combat simulators on the market—it is that they do not hide the fact they are meant to simulate real world situations and to ultimately persuade the player to join the fight in a corporeal RL way. I agree with Bogost that "given that the game is designed and marketed for teenagers, one might raise legitimate concerns that *America's Army* functions as propaganda" (79). It is the persuasive aspect of these two games' design that takes us on the slippery slope of manipulation I mentioned earlier.

The production value of *America's Army* is much higher than that of *Under Siege*. That is an understatement. *Under Siege* is little more than a modified version of the early 3D shooter, *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992). *America's Army*, on the other hand, has the financial backing of the US Army and was originally designed by arguably one of the top videogame production houses in North America. The difference in production cost and quality of the games is like comparing the resources used to create a propaganda pamphlet compared to the budget for Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) created for Hitler's Nationalist Socialist Party. The gameplay of *Under Siege* is reminiscent of the early *Wolfenstein* games; very pixilated with rudimentary graphics and sound. As a combat simulator, *Under Siege* is not realistic and relies heavily on the player's imagination and symbolic desire to play the role of a Palestinian freedom fighter. *America's Army* on the other hand, presents a highly immersive photorealistic virtual environment meant to both meet the expectations of players regarding exciting combat situations and attempt to accurately reproduce the performance of the weapons, vehicles, and the squad

experience. It is made to look as slick as any commercial combat game with the only difference being the inclusion of representing *the life* of a soldier in the game. This looks just as detailed and inviting to participate in as the combat. Bogost writes:

> In *America's Army*, ideology is made material in the realm of ideas. The game's persuasive goals are thus twofold. On the one hand, as a U.S. Army recruiting tool the game creates a representation of army life that draws interested youth into recruiting offices. On the other hand, as a manifestation of the ideology that propels the U.S. Army, the game encourages players to consider the logic of duty, honor, and singular global political truth as a desirable worldview. (79)

The game is "selling" not only the challenge and excitement of combat but the ideology behind what makes a good American soldier. This is especially true in light of the fact that much of modern warfare is mediated through computer screens and carried out by drones, distant gunships, and guided missiles effectively turning the reality of combat into a videogame. I will go further to say that even those players that do not go to the recruitment office to enlist physically are still indoctrinated with the values that support a military society in addition to ingraining the willingness to kill with the push of a button. The game is not only made available to be consumed as a piece of entertainment[35] but the opposite is also true in that it is designed to ultimately consume the player by persuading her to join the army. The affect of experiencing combat (and the life of an American soldier) virtually—though with great attention to verisimilitude—is meant to prepare the player for the affective experience of actual combat (and a soldier's life). The virtual embodiment is meant to make the real embodiment enticing but also

[35] *America's Army* is freely available to download. For the latest version plus game offshoots, mission editors, and online comics under the same name, visit www.americasarmy.com.

to make would-be soldiers comfortable with the virtuality of modern warfare. *America's Army* and *Under Siege* are designed to be bait for the player.[36] The bait—a fun videogame experience that resembles other escapist videogames—is to entice the player into a larger ideological trap.

Consuming the Avatar, Consuming the Player

As an ISA, videogames represent one of the most powerful apparatuses in the prevalent western hegemony of late capitalism. Not only are games produced and sold according to the traditional model of consumption but by playing the games, the player is asked to embody the iconic characters within the videogame narrative which, in turn, have value as cultural capital. Referring back to the first three chapters, the proprioceptive connection between the player and the avatar carries with it the affect of being present in the virtual environment and creates a cybernetic relationship (a feedback loop) between the player and avatar. The player's virtual experiences of who she is and what she can do augment her real world experiences—the cyborg gamer is greater than the sum of her parts. This augmentation is further nuanced by the fact that the games are commodities and the avatars embodied within them are often iconic symbols within the fictional narratives consumed. This is a topic I plan to pursue further following this dissertation but let me leverage this idea in the next section by saying that videogames, and the culture surrounding them (i.e. gamer culture), is a result of not only owning a copy of the game and the contents therein but also encouraging the gamer to align herself, ideologically, with the game character she plays. This ideological alignment is achieved through embodiment within the

[36] It is true players may engage in counter-play tactics creating their own particular performance texts in opposition to the dominant ideologies prevalent in the games. However, for most players, the dominant ideologies are part and parcel with the game experience.

game world and communicated outwardly by the player through merchandise connected to the game, attending conventions, and even dressing as the game character as in cosplay.

Gregory Little, in his "A Manifesto for Avatars" warns that "it is Kapital, not Krishna, that makes itself a body" and that:

> The vast majority of avatars inhabiting cyberspace today are drawn from the image database of advertising, fashion, and entertainment. These countless generic representations—big-breasted small-waisted babes, idealized perfect-skinned trim and tan hunks, Disney-derived characters, bowling pins, smiley faces, coffee cups, exotic animals, and steroid-driven snarling, hard-bodied war machines—are not just the tool of the user behind the screen, but covert instruments of multinational capitalism. (Little)

Dixon picks up on Little's argument and writes "people's identification with avatars constructed from trademark iconography and commodified imagery thus represents our ultimate desire to become commodities" (266). Playing the videogame, spending time and effort projected into the game world through the game's protagonist, the avatar is not only the window into the game world but also becomes a symbol of the time spent there and the experiences contained within it. The iconography of the game characters placed on the real bodies and living spaces of the player is done with the intention of transferring the cultural capital of having played the games to the real body of the player. This supports the capitalist agenda of not only selling the games and the related merchandise but also trapping the player in a cycle of continually consuming games and purchasing related merchandise to maintain her identity as one who plays videogames—a gamer.

Leigh Alexander in an online article for *Gamasutra* addresses the connection between gamer culture and consumption this way:

> It's young men [*sic*] queuing with plush mushroom hats and backpacks and jutting promo poster rolls. Queuing passionately for hours, at events around the world, to see the things that marketers want them to see. To find out whether they should buy things or not. They don't know how to dress or behave. Television cameras pan across these listless queues, and often catch the expressions of people who don't quite know why they themselves are standing there. (Alexander)

Alexander views gamers as a vacuous mass, awkward in social situations, united only in their consumption of games and the collection of related merchandise. Having recently attended Fan Expo Canada 2014 I can attest that there is some truth to her description. Expos are frenzies of consumption and desire, not only for purchasing *things*, but also for having photos taken with celebrities (actors, voice actors, game designers, comic book artists, etc.), further cementing the connection between the real body of the gamer with the fictional worlds experienced through the avatar. The games are recruiting players to become gamers—entering the cycle of consumption as a major component of gamer culture. Just like the games designed to recruit soldiers mentioned above, the commercial games featured at the conventions are also designed to move the player to action; in this case to buy. The videogame industry recruits players to consume and keep consuming, effectively being themselves consumed by the industry as a gaming commodity. A parallel can be made between the pattern of consumption involving wearing brand name clothing (and accessories) as an expression of social and economic capital and a similar desire of gamers to "wear" their favourite game merchandise as a way to express their game

choices and, by extension, communicate their shared virtual experiences. Agency here, comes in the form of whether to buy and what to purchase. Alternately, the gamer/consumer may turn the tables from collector to supplier of commodities by securing a retail booth or (more likely) constructing an elaborate cosplay costume with which others would have their pictures taken, thus becoming a collectible item, themselves.

Embellishing on Little, Dixon reminds us "that 'the mind/body dichotomy is a red herring' and that the most dangerous binary is the pairing of self and commodity" (266). However, Little's manifesto offers the avatar as a site of possibility for breaking this binary. In his essay he turns to Antonin Artaud's concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) as a means to side-step the cycle of consumption by disrupting the relationship between player and avatar. Little writes "Artaud sought a definition of the body that could resist the methods used to control and alter his consciousness—he desired to become unconsumable." Little invokes the BwO as a way to be impervious to ideological conditioning and indoctrination. Little, echoed later by Dixon, makes a connection between the avatar and the BwO in that each "mirrors post-biological structures that undermine anatomical classification, capitalist consumption, and tedious mind/body/commodity separations in support of a more distributed, nomadic, and emergent model of embodied consciousness." I take this idea of a more distributed model of embodied consciousness further in later sections. Just as Little and Dixon see an equivalency between the avatar and the BwO, I also see arising an equal but opposite subject in the body *with* organs holding the controller in what Deleuze and Guattari call the Desiring-Machine.

However, before I delve too deeply into the concept of the BwO as an expression of the player's relationship to her avatar, first allow me as I provide some important context to the

discussion with some ideological analyses of several big budget, wide release game titles. I shall return to the BwO later in the chapter.

Playing with Politics: Some Easy Targets

I offer the following three examples of *Tomb Raider, Gears of War,* and *Halo* under the category of "easy targets" because they are some of the longest running and most popular videogame franchises to date. The first *Tomb Raider* game came out in 1996 and there is yet another in the series due out this year (2015). *Gears of War* also came out in 1996 and there are two releases scheduled for 2015 and 2016. The *Halo* franchise is regarded as Microsoft's flagship game series. The first *Halo* game was released in 2001 and *Halo 5: Guardians* is also due out later this year. They are "easy targets" not only because I am making light of the fact that they are action games involving shooting but also because most players of videogames have played, will play, or have at least seen some iteration of these games before. Their action figures line toy store shelves and their images are on lunch boxes in schools. These game IPs carry a good deal of cultural capital and have been around long enough that they have earned both popular and critical attention.

Lara Croft is the protagonist of arguably the most successful videogame franchise to date, *Tomb Raider*. It stands apart from most other videogames in that it has featured the same female lead character in all its eleven (and counting) iterations. Several games give the player the choice to play a male or female character, like the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* series made by BioWare, but in most games, the protagonist is singularly male. *Tomb Raider* proved early in the development of videogames that a game need not feature a male protagonist to be successful.

Though, despite this fact, as Saarkesian has pointed out in her web series *Feminist Frequency*, most of the gaming industry still feels featuring a female protagonist in a videogame is too risky for large budget titles.

I have seen whole panels dedicated to the topic of Lara Croft at popular culture conferences and a great deal has been written on how Lara Croft is or is not an empowering role model for women. Some examples are articles like "A Feminist Reviews Tomb Raider's Lara Croft" in *Forbes* (2013), "'Take That, Bitches!' Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives" by Esther MacCallum-Stewart in *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* (2014), and books like *Lara Croft: Cyber Heroine* by Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky (2005). Lara Croft is an active character who is confident, physically strong and agile, and unlike most other videogames where the female character is a damsel in need of saving, Lara is the one doing the saving. There is an excellent discussion of this trope of the damsel in distress by Sarkeesian in *Feminist Frequency*, especially in the three episodes of "Damsels in Distress: Tropes vs Women in Video Games." While Croft is more active than most other female videogame characters, she is also an over-sexualized doll to be controlled by predominantly male players, as numerous scholars have pointed out. Erik Kain addresses this issue of game designers assuming all players are male and applies Sarkeesian's critique specifically to *Tomb Raider* in his article for *Forbes* titled "Anita Sarkeesian's 'Damsel In Distress' Feminist Frequency Video Is Excellent And Important – Here's Why" (2013). Early renditions of the game were criticized for the time and attention paid to the game physics surrounding boob jiggle, the fact that the majority of the player's view of Ms. Croft during the game is of her posterior, and that her breast size seemed to grow larger with each new release. However, the recent reboot of the franchise (featured in Case Study Four) focuses on greater

visual and narrative realism and has been largely celebrated by critics on sites like IGN and review shows like *Electric Playground* for giving Croft a deeper and more complex character. It shows her as a more well-rounded character who is not infallible—even humanly vulnerable at times—affected by the events happening to her and around her. This change also comes in a game that renders her appearance as more realistically proportioned. Though not without argument, Croft is often seen of as an example of a leading empowered female character standing amongst a large group of male protagonists.

The fact that the developers at Core Design and Crystal Dynamics made the choice to go with a strong female lead in an action/adventure game was, at the time, a bold political move. Croft was created during the mid-1990s following on the success, especially in England, of the character of Neneh Cherry from the *Tank Girl* graphic novels who, some say, was her inspiration. Whatever her origin, she still stands as one of the few female leads in videogames and this makes her a lightning rod for conversations about representations of gender and sexual stereotypes in the videogame industry. This is the overtly positive side of the political ideology of promoting gender equality behind the game. However, there are more questionable aspects of Lara Croft and what she represents politically that I want to foreground. Specifically, I want to bring out the game series' promotion of British (and by extension American) imperialist objectives and the over-riding promotion of patriarchal gender norms.

Lara Croft comes from privilege. Her family mansion, when it is shown, is a sprawling estate filled with artifacts collected by her, and her father before her. These have been accumulated from countless exotic locations and cultures from around the world. In her home, complete with housekeeping staff and butler, these artifacts are displayed like so many keepsakes of past adventures to be viewed or dismissed as the mood takes her (and the player). Her father,

also a famous "tomb raider," disappeared during one of his outings. Lara is following in his footsteps and continuing his legacy. Very little is said about Lara's mother. The structure of the household and Lara's career path follow a patriarchal foundation. She has taken her father's place.

Lara Croft is a British citizen. One revised version of her lineage lists her as Lady Lara Croft but the original and the most recent reboot of the franchise list her as not being connected to the British aristocracy. However, her privileged position exemplified by the sprawling estate and the fact she seems to have unlimited resources to afford travel whenever and wherever she wishes suggests she comes from England's upper class. She is well-educated, cultured, and wants for nothing. She is also white.

On the surface, venturing off to far away exotic locations to explore fantastic, elaborate, and often-ancient structures; and solve intriguing puzzles and mysteries sounds like high adventure. The fact that these adventures often involve collecting ancient artifacts imbued with magical/mystical/symbolic properties is also a great bonus rewarding her for her effort. It is the ultimate souvenir hunt combined with high adventure and thwarting bad guys to boot. Make no mistake, the *Tomb Raider* games are highly rewarding to play, the spatial puzzles can be mentally challenging, and the thrill of exploring (and conquering) exotic locations is seductive.

What the player is not encouraged to engage with is how this rich young white English woman feels entitled to barge into often culturally or religiously sacred places and steal whatever artifacts she chooses. This is especially problematic considering that this videogame is being played in a post-colonial world and marketed predominantly to players in colonial and post-colonial countries in Europe and North America. According to one website used to teach media

revision, "over 28 million copies of the Tomb Raider series [have been] sold worldwide" and that it is the "number one selling franchise in Europe and the US" (Tomb). But the game does not address important questions about the Croft's place within British imperial hierarchies. For example, where does Croft, and her father before her, fit with Britain's colonial past in light of the many countries throughout the world petitioning the British Museum to return stolen artifacts taken by centuries of British explorers with similar feelings of entitlement?

Following the work of Edward Said, I see playing *Tomb Raider* as an exercise of a western invader outwitting and ultimately taming the exotic (savage) other while claiming whatever objects are of value in the process. The fact that this is done by a young woman seeking adventure, out of sheer curiosity, and/or to combat bad guys (finding the artifact before it is found and used for evil intent by the antagonists) seems to obfuscate the parallel to historical British imperialism but it is imperialism nonetheless. In fact, historians of gender and imperialism like Antoinette Burton and Clare Midgley[37] argue that white women were often critical to the British imperialist project, often under the guise of feminism. This colonial history coupled with Britain's rigorous efforts during the 19th and early 20th centuries of tomb raiding and plundering exotic sites to bolster the holdings of the British Museum casts Croft's activities, and those of her father before her, in a very different light. An American parallel can be found in the *Indiana Jones* movies where, during the 1930s and 1940s Jones is saving the world from the Nazi's and thus, entitled to invade whatever space and take whatever artifact he deems necessary.

[37] See, specifically, Burton's *Burden of History: British Feminists, Indian Wormen, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (2002), and Midgley's *Gender and Imperialism* (1998).

Inspired further by Said's concept of Orientalism and Annie Coombes' book *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa* (2006), the imperialistic model of the civilizing west entitled to invade and conquer whatever foreign land necessary, in *Tomb Raider*, is further reinforced by the fact that the areas Lara Croft explores are devoid of people. This portrayal of foreign lands devoid of inhabitants is not unlike the imperialistic use of the artwork of the Group of Seven, described by Coombes, to tell a narrative of Canada as a broad, untamed, *empty* land available for the taking. The First Nations people were conveniently not part of the early narrative of Canada to attract immigrants. Similarly, Croft conveniently doesn't interact with any 'locals' who may take exception to her stealing their sacred objects. She sometimes encounters animals and even an occasional monster (i.e. dinosaurs), but these, again, are examples of the untamed wild in need of control or eradication by the civilizing western agent.

In short, *Tomb Raider*, espouses a western (British) imperialist ideology and is fed by tropes of taming the savage other by the superior (entitled) west. Part of the fun of playing *Tomb Raider* is feeding off the thrill of privilege and plundering the savage other, all while thwarting the bad guys who are pursuing the same goal but for *evil* ends. It is an opportunity to play the colonialist fantasy in the *safe* environment of a videogame (one conveniently devoid of angry colonial subjects). Playing with empire is not new to videogames. There is a rich history of games and stories involving empire created for Victorian children explored in the work of Rudyard Kipling and Frances Hogdson Burnett.[38] What is different now with videogames, and the subject of Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter's book, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (2009), is how the player is cast within the world depicted. In videogames, the

[38] See, specifically, Daphne Kutzer's *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books.*

player is affected more intimately by being enveloped by the representation of the game world and the ideologies embedded within. Regarding *Tomb Raider*, the embedded ideology reinforces the colonial memory of British rule and, through association, also supports the more culturally and economically oriented late-capitalist American imperialist agenda. This reading of the games and films is further supported by the fact that the *Tomb Raider* movies are made in Hollywood and not the UK, and that Lara Croft is played by the American actress Angelina Jolie who is known, now, not only for her film acting but also for her international humanitarian work and her penchant for adopting children from impoverished nations.[39]

The representation of the world in the *Tomb Raider* games is one that is both progressive in the sense that a strong female protagonist of an action/adventure game is treated as normal but should also be challenged for reinforcing an imperialist viewpoint of the west entitled to plunder the exotic untamed other. These representations are experienced firsthand by the player as she embodies the role of Lara Croft engrossed in the challenges of the game. The player's extended self within the game, embodying the politically problematic subject position, sees (and feels) the game environments (exotic untamed locations) from the same imperialist viewpoint as Croft. The affect of *being* Croft comes loaded with Croft's (hidden) imperialist agenda. The ideology is absorbed through action. Linda Hutcheon writes "according to the Althusserian view, ideology is a production of representations. Our common-sense presuppositions about the 'real' depend upon how that 'real' is described, how it is put into discourse and interpreted. There is nothing natural about the 'real' and there never was – even before the existence of mass media" (33).

[39] It is interesting to point out that while Lara Croft in the *Tomb Raider* games does not interact with the local populations of the places she visits, it was Angelina Jolie's interaction with the people of Cambodia that led to her adoption of a son from that country. It is important to keep the mediatized image of Angelina Jolie separate from the actual person.

Videogames are nothing but representations—rendered without the need of original referents in the Baudrillardian sense—and just as our presuppositions about the 'real' depend on how it is represented, so too our virtual representations join the larger discourse of negotiating the 'real.' This discourse is framed by ideology. Ian Bogost reminds us that "Gramsci allowed ideology to take on two meanings: one the expression of hierarchical authority, the other the more general expression of ideas that form our identities" (74). *Tomb Raider*, like all videogames and any other art form, conveys ideology; in the representations it creates and the relationships it presents between those representations. Again, the player is asked to embody a politically problematic extended self. The fact the *Tomb Raider* games present Croft's actions (and the player's through her) as non-problematic—justified as most imperialists feel they are—further reinforces the (hidden) imperialistic agenda underlying this action/adventure series. The affect of projecting herself into the avatar of Croft encourages the player to feel Croft's imperialistic actions are her own. Linda Hutcheon writes that postmodern representation is the following: "image, narrative, product of (and producer of) ideology" and that:

> It is a truism of sociology and cultural studies today to say that life in the postmodern world is utterly mediated through representations and that our age of satellites and computers has gone well beyond Benjamin's 'Age of Mechanical Reproduction' and its particular philosophical and artistic consequences and moved into a state of crisis in representation. (31)

Our view of the world is informed by how it is represented to us, and videogames are, I argue, one of the most immediate, newest, and least understood methods of representing simulated worlds to players. Theorists like Ian Bogost argue that videogames provide players with experiences that are only one step removed from actual experience. I go further to suggest that

considering our discussion of proprioception, the formation of a two-way feedback loop between the player and the avatar creating a cybernetic connection, and the concept of the extended self, the affect from the experience—even though one step removed as Bogost describes—is still part of the player and contributes to shaping her ideological perspective.

In the attempt to clarify experience one step removed further, Bogost understands videogames (and other computer mediated communications) as networks of unit operations working together to form procedural representations. According to him:

> Procedural representation is representation, and thus certainly not identical with actual experience. However, procedural representation can muster moving images and sound, and software and videogames are capable of generating moving images in accordance with complex rules that simulate real or imagined physical and cultural processes. Furthermore, procedural representations are often…interactive; they rely on user interaction as a mediator, something static and moving images cannot claim to do. These capacities would suggest that procedurality is more vivid than moving images and sound, and thus earns the second spot on the continuum, directly under actual experience. (35)

Taking Hutcheon's and Bogost's points further, both the 'real' and the virtual are understood through how they are represented and on that level, the ideology contained in their representations can be given similar weight. This similarity is further reinforced due to the immediacy of videogames as more vivid than moving pictures and sound—one step away from direct experience.

Let us speak further of this reciprocity between representations of the 'real' and the virtual by turning to another popular videogame franchise and discerning the ideological world view it (re)presents. Specifically, I mean the hyper-masculinized and militarized world view espoused by the *Gears of War* series.

Marcus Fenix is the main character of the *Gears of War* franchise and the one the player embodies the majority of the time. Marcus is the manliest game character I have played, out-manning even Duke Nukem and BJ Blazkowicz[40] in my experience. The first image of Marcus is of him behind bars for the crime of insubordination. I learned the reason for his incarceration after completing the trilogy. When I originally played the game I didn't know what he had done (possibly murder) but I was introduced to him as a character too dangerous to be freed, even in a lawless warzone. Marcus is let out by his friend and comrade, Dom, to join the desperate fight against The Locust—a gruesome humanoid race bent on ridding the world of humanity.

The world of the game is not Earth but a planet called Sera. However, there are few indications within the game that it is not Earth. What is more, the architecture of the mostly ruined cities is reminiscent of images of Europe during World War II. The fantastic setting of another planet gives plausibility to the fact The Locust use grotesque (and often immense) monsters against the Coalition of Ordered Governments (COG) forces to which Marcus and Dom belong. Marcus and his Delta Squad mates are literally cogs in a (Fascistic) military machine, hence the name *Gears of War.* One interpretation of the conflict, especially since The Locust literally emerge out of the ground, is that The Locust horde is the planet (or nature) corrupted and fighting back using monsters and exotic weaponry against the human (civilizing)

[40] BJ Blazkowicz is the protagonist of the *Wolfenstein* games (1981-2015) wherein he single-handedly eliminates countless Nazis. Duke Nukem is the protagonist of the series featuring his name (1991-2011). He saves the world from alien monsters while also fighting police rendered as walking pigs and visiting strip clubs. Both characters are hyper-masculinized but Duke Nukem takes his ultra-masculinity into blatantly misogynistic territory.

encroachment that relies on military machines and technology. There is a great emphasis placed on science as the COG forces' only chance to defeat the relentless Locust onslaught. Science will save humanity from nature—presented here as brutally hostile and in need of eradication. I mean no hyperbole when I ask: is this view of humanity against the natural world an extreme interpretation of the Christian viewpoint that the universe was created for mankind to be subdued and consumed as humans see fit?

Gears of War is a masculinist game. It is not that it is devoid of women—there are four female characters in the narrative arc that links the three main games and there are women among the surviving human population (The Stranded)—but they are circumscribed by masculine parameters set by the patriarchal militaristic ideological position of the game premise. Even The Stranded, both male and female, are feminized by how they are represented as weak and helpless compared to the overt masculinity of the COG forces as active and decisive (not to mention destructive and guarded emotionally). These parameters, in turn, also limit the range of expression available to the male characters.

Marcus Fenix is the protagonist of the series and the alpha male figure in the game. Dom is his best friend and ally. They have a long established 'bromance' that is never challenged. Marcus' role is to lead the squad which includes saving and confronting his father and his past, and ultimately saving humanity on Sera. Dom's goal is to find and save his wife, Maria. His goal does not oppose Marcus directly so they work well as a unit. Dom is the sensitive male allowed to display emotion while Marcus is always ready to make the tough call without allowing emotion to interfere.

Maria, Dom's missing wife, is the damsel in distress who needs to be saved. We know her only through Dom's memories and dreams—beautiful, carefree, and very feminine in appearance. Compared to the hyper-masculine bulging muscles, constant violent action, and gruff hard voices performed by the men in the game, images of Maria depict her as especially fragile and vulnerable with soft perfect skin and flowing hair. She cannot survive in this harsh world and must die. When she is found she is broken and past saving. Dom kills her to end her pain. Without Maria to save, Dom's reason for continuing is to help his remaining family: Marcus, Cole, Baird, and Carmine. Thus, his decision to sacrifice himself to save his squad mates in the third game is logical considering that they are all he has to live for.

The character of Anya is the confident and competent female voice of Central Command in the first game. In that game she is shown mostly through video conference links as beautiful (blonde and blue-eyed) as well as competent and intelligent. In addition to memories of Dom's wife, she is the only other female represented in the first game. Anya puts an attractive female face to the abstract idea of saving humanity. Her role in the first game is supportive in providing intelligence from Central Command.

As the plight of humanity worsens in the next two games Anya suits up and joins in the fight. In the COG body armor, her physical representation is masculinized yet her position as ideal woman is never lost. In all the dialogue involving Anya, the normally gruff language and sometimes crude humour used by the men, is noticeably cleaned up and respectful. It is noteworthy that the final lines of dialogue in the *Gears of War* trilogy (there are two additional titles that expand the main narrative arch of the three main games) are between Anya and Marcus. Having defeated the Locust Queen (more on her shortly!) Marcus asks what he will do now. Anya replies with "Just live." This points to how Marcus was most successful in his role as

hyper-masculine soldier and feels trepidation over how to behave in "normal" (i.e. male and female company) society; perhaps indicating he will once again be incarcerated as he was at the start of the series. I interpret Anya's reply as an indication she can/will be a civilizing influence on him and I read it to suggest that it is Marcus' (the ideal man) and Anya's (the ideal woman) responsibility to repopulate humanity on the planet.

The third female character is Samantha Byrne (Sam) and she is represented as a fierce tom-boy fighter. As a soldier, she is just as tough, competent, and competitive as any of the male members of Delta Squad. Other than Sam, there are only male members until Anya joins in the final fight. Sam's character is markedly different from Anya's in that the banter between her and the other members, especially Baird, is teasing/challenging and sexually charged. They often point to the fact she is a woman among these extremely masculine men. Sam, however, is no damsel to be saved and gives it as well as she gets it. Also, in her body armor, she is just as tough (and large) as any of the men, and equally proficient as a warrior. The fact that she has a pronounced Australian accent, striking features (including dreadlocks), and is often engaged in sexualized and testing banter (mostly with Baird, the squad joker) constantly reminds the player that she is a woman in a male world and expected to prove herself as such. To succeed in this world, Sam needs to not only behave like a man and be just as good at it, but be constantly challenged and often prove better. This is a throwback to a retroactive view of feminism when women were first making in-roads into male corporate culture and needed to beat men at their own game. Some of Camille Paglia's writing focuses on this subject, as does Naomi Wolf's book written in 1994, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How To Use It*. Critiques of this (now) retroactive view of feminism may be found in Rebecca Groothuis' *The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism* (1997) and Allan Johnson's *The Gender Knot:*

Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy (1997). Sam is a strong female character, yes, but her role in this narrative—how she is treated and expected to behave to fit in—represents a dated (patriarchal) view of gender relations.

The fourth and final female character in the *Gears of War* series is Queen Myrrah, the leader of The Locust horde, and the one behind the attempted eradication of humanity on Sera. Queen Myrrah is human though she leads an army of inhuman creatures that are almost all represented as male (and as muscular and violent as the COGs). She is hyper-sexualized in her appearance with exaggerated breasts and hips. She commands her consistently obedient army with power and confidence. Because of her sexualized appearance and unwavering confidence, I see these as indications that she is likely also dominant and voracious sexually. She is a woman controlled by no one but her own choices and thus a threat to this male world.

Queen Myrrah has some past involvement with Marcus' father, which further complicates Marcus' relationship with his dad. Marcus' father is originally thought to be dead but turns up secretly conducting research. The game narrative reveals that Marcus' father may be originally responsible for creating The Locust through misguided military experimentation. It is a topic for debate in online forums whether Queen Myrrah is really Marcus' mother but the official story from the game developers is that Myrrah's contact with Marcus' father came after Marcus' mother died in childbirth. Either way, the character of Queen Myrrah seems to combine the tropes of the wicked witch and the evil step-mother rolled into one. She is presented as evil through and through and must be destroyed. Indeed, the third and final game in the main story arc of the franchise ends immediately following the death of Queen Myrrah by Marcus' hand.

Marcus finishes what his father couldn't: he rids the world of this powerful and uncontrollable woman, and has an existential crisis when he realizes that he no longer has an enemy to destroy. This is when Anya steps in to save him with the suggestion of safe domestic heteronormative bliss.

The gender ideology embedded within the game sends a powerful message about reinforcing and perpetuating a patriarchal social structure. The game questions authority in the form of the government, which is revealed to have conducted genetic experiments that got out of control (and were covered up). The game also questions familial authority on the level of the responsibility of the son to atone for the sins of the father. I read this game as a good metaphor for a neoliberal view of American society. *Gears of War* teaches the importance of following orders, discipline, and perseverance while at the same time being suspicious of Big Government and hidden agenda(s). The player is shown that personal sacrifice is expected to accomplish what needs to be done (at whatever cost!), vigilance must be kept against elitist agendas and corrupt leadership at all times. What is more, "the enemy" can attack at any moment, from any direction (even within), and only your closest allies—proven in action—may be trusted.

There are further levels of interpretation that can be applied to the franchise. One is the representation of stereotypical racial tropes and how the only black character is not only physically impressive (a Thrashball [see: football] star) but also the comic relief. Analyzing these characters further is a worthwhile pursuit but for my purposes here, I want to demonstrate how videogames like this one involve representations that are loaded ideologically. This is true of other media but in videogames representations are not simply consumed but are, in fact, embodied by the player. As mentioned earlier, a sophisticated film-goer may have the experience and ability to hold what is viewed at a critical distance to see what strategies are in use to

construct the representations of gender, race, class, etc. on screen. Film has an established critical history that supports this level of sophistication. Through the concepts of immersion, agency, and proprioception, videogames involve the player on a much more immediate and personal level. Allow me to repeat Bogost's claim here that procedural representation, like those found in videogames, is "more vivid than moving images and sound, and thus earns the second spot on the continuum, directly under actual experience" (35). Playing *Gears of War* is one step away from directly experiencing being the alpha male in the pack. As I mentioned earlier, the player embodies a politically problematic extended self. My ideological critique of *Gears of War* goes a step further than simply identifying the ideological messages embedded within the game narrative but highlights that the player, by projecting herself into the avatar of Marcus Fenix, also embodies and assumes his position within the ideology of the game. The affect of being Marcus Fenix is laden with his ideological position and, in turn, affects his interactions with the other representations in the game environment.

Microsoft Corporation's flagship game franchise, *Halo*, is similar to *Gears of War* in that it presents a world (universe, really) nearly devoid of women. The doctor who created the Spartan super soldiers, of which Master Chief (the player's character) is the last one, is a woman. There are a few other minor female characters but most are introduced later in the series or in one of the comic book or novel offshoots of the main game series. The one major female character throughout the series is Cortana who is rendered as female but is actually a computer AI (artificial intelligence). The fact that she rides along with Master Chief as an upload into his helmet and speaks to him (and the player) directly as though she were in his head deserves a deep analysis in itself. Suffice it to say here, despite some gentle flirting during the game, Cortana and Master Chief's relationship is platonic but quite close.

With the exceptions mentioned above, all the soldiers on the side of the UEG (Unified Earth Government) are human males of various races (but mostly white). The UEG is headed by a President and all the UEG soldiers speak English and wear green battle fatigues. They look and sound like American soldiers. According to the online Halopedia the UEG is a representative democracy and…

> Traces its origins back to the early days of human colonization of the Sol System in the late 21st century. The organization was originally created by the United Nations in 2075 as an assembly of political leaders and brilliant minds and tasked with attempting to avert the crises of the next century by solving government unification issues of colonizing non-Earth territories. ("Unified Earth Government")

Though not stated overtly, the UEG represents a future where US-style politics and colonization not only conquered Earth but is also actively in the process of colonizing distant worlds. This imperialistic mentality seems to be a logical extension (from an American perspective) of the current (and past) US foreign policy in relation to the other sovereign nations on Earth.

There are two main opponents to Master Chief and the forces of the UEG in *Halo*: The Covenant and The Flood. The Flood is a parasitic scourge that mindlessly attacks all living beings it encounters turning them into Flood as well. This is similar to zombie outbreaks in other games and films but with a sci-fi twist. The Flood is mindless and feared by both the UEG and The Covenant. The Flood represents nature corrupted.

The Covenant forces, however, are *not* mindless. They are well organized, technologically advanced, and determined in their endless war against humanity. They are a

theocratic alliance of non-human species and led by religious leaders called The Prophets. The Covenant are religious fundamentalists who are quite willing to fight to the death. They are represented in the game as being predominantly purple in colour, armed with exotic weaponry, and are sometimes very challenging opponents.

Microsoft Studios and *Halo*'s game developers, Bungie and 343 Industries, attempted to obfuscate any connection to real world conflicts. To do this, they made The Covenant purple and clearly non-human and show The Flood as grotesque re-animated versions of both human and Covenant forces. According to a Wiki on *Halo* the company that originally designed The Covenant forces, Bungie, was inspired by reptilian, ursine, and avian characteristics and, together with the unusual colour and skin textures, meant to "separate the aliens from human architecture" ("Covenant"). I see this as a clever strategic move in that they would not risk tainting Microsoft Corporation's brand in foreign markets by making an overt piece of American propaganda. However, the character of Master Chief is a solitary hero (the last of his kind of manufactured super-soldiers) in a militaristic society. His enemies are religious fundamentalists on one hand and corrupted (i.e. untamed) nature on the other. While playing Master Chief, all the human characters the player encounters are part of the military. There is no civilian population shown in the game. Everyone is involved in the war effort. This is a fascist society. Master Chief, while being the biggest, strongest, and toughest of the UEG forces, is a team player, doesn't defy orders (unless Cortana advises him to), and never questions the motives of his superiors or his enemies. The Covenant and The Flood are simply enemies to be destroyed.

There are no civilian casualties. All the Covenant are involved in the war just as all the humans oppose the Covenant. There are no negotiations, only shoot on sight. The Covenant strive to rid the galaxy of the infidel humans and the humans fight to protect their colonies and

continue colonizing other worlds. What is more, this game universe is nearly devoid of women—the topic of sex is non-existent in the game—making this videogame universe seem eerily reminiscent to me of the homosocial representation of German society found in many of the films made by the UFA during the Third Reich.

Though innocent at first glance and very fun to play (my ex-wife and I played through the first three games together on co-op), *Halo* encourages an acceptance of a fascist society where women are all but invisible; a society hostile to both nature and religious faith. It presents religion as the foundation of dangerous extremism and nature as unpredictable and in need of eradication. When in the moment, shooting at the sometimes silly purple aliens,[41] the greater meanings of the representations can be missed. By stepping back and seeing *Halo* as originating from the point of view of one of the most powerful software companies in the world making games from the perspective of arguably the most powerful colonial power in the world, this game takes on much deeper meaning. It encourages the acceptance of some troubling positions.

Through the example of these three games, my hope is to show that even while not intending to, videogames, like all representative art, convey ideological positions. As Sturken and Cartwright remind us "the world is not simply reflected back to us through systems of representation, but that we actually construct the meaning of the material world through these systems" (13). The trick is to allow enough critical distance while still experiencing immersion during gameplay—one step away from directly experiencing the game world rendered through procedural representation. How can a player maintain critical distance from the representations on the screen when she is projected into that virtual space, the embodiment of a politically

[41] For example, The Unggoy, are small and squat, make silly noises, and often run from battles with their arms flailing.

problematic extended self? At this point I change directions slightly to discuss the intentional use of procedural representation to communicate ideas and present arguments. I am moving from representations discovered by the player through processes determined by algorithms to the intentional manipulation of those representations as an expression of what Ian Bogost calls procedural rhetoric.

Procedural Rhetoric

Bogost writes that "political videogames use procedural rhetorics to expose how political structures operate, or how they fail to operate, or how they could or should operate. Videogames that engage political topics codify the logic of a political system through procedural representation" (75). In this statement Bogost is referring to games that are designed to overtly engage in a political discourse but I wish to expand the idea that *all* videogames engage political topics since they are comprised of representations open for interpretation by players. The signs and symbols displayed on the screen are decided by both the parameters set by the game designers and also through the input of the player, realized through algorithmic procedures. No two game instances are exactly the same as mentioned in the previous chapters because the final ingredient needed to render the images and the events they represent on screen is the player's participation. This is what I referred to as procedural representation. What is important is the awareness that these representations are not only triggered and manipulated by the player but that they occur within a pre-authored space making those representations meaningful. The game world provides the context as well as the available options within it. It is the control of options within the world of the game that Bogost argues can be used, intentionally, to make a political

point. I say political meanings are made in videogames, intentionally or not, through the choices given to the player as well as those *not* given.

In his book *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, Bogost gives a nuanced definition of procedural rhetoric when he writes, "following the classic model, procedural rhetoric entails persuasion—to change opinion or action. Following the contemporary model, procedural rhetoric entails expression—to convey ideas effectively" (29). The classic model applies well to games that are overt in their attempt to make a point and ultimately encourage change in the player. The contemporary model applies to all videogames in that the narrative unfolding through the gameplay conveys not only the story being told but the expression of the ideologies surrounding the representations used to tell that story. Here are two examples to illuminate the concept of procedural rhetoric. The first is an example of *The MacDonald's Videogame* as described by Bogost. I reproduce it here because it is a succinct example of a political game engaging a specific issue. The rhetorical aspect of the game design is clear. The second is from my own experience playing *Civilization Revolution* and it reveals a political engagement that is more subtle in its persuasion.

> *The MacDonald's Videogame* mounts a procedural rhetoric about the necessity of corruption in the global fast food business, and the overwhelming temptation of greed, which leads to more corruption. In order to succeed in the long-term, the player must use growth hormones, he must coerce banana republics, and he must mount PR and lobbying campaigns. Furthermore, the temptation to destroy indigenous villages, launch bribery campaigns, recycle animal parts, and cover up health risks is tremendous, although the financial benefit from doing so is only marginal. […] The game makes a procedural argument about the inherent

> problems in the fast food industry, particularly the necessity of overstepping environmental and health-related boundaries. (Bogost 31)

In the example above, the choices given the player are designed to reveal the corrupting forces at work on fast food businesses striving to be competitive. The pressures the player feels, represented through the game premise in this safe virtual environment, are made to appear to be the same pressures occurring in the actual fast food industry. By placing the player in this position and making only these options available, the intent of the game designers to make a persuasive argument about the destructive nature of the fast food industry is clear.

Civilization Revolution (2008) is the console version of in the *Civilization* games created by Sid Meier. There are several off-shoots and expansion packs in the series but I will focus on my own experience playing the console version. This is a strategy game that literally starts the player at the dawn of recorded history with a settler and progresses to a point where the player has built a civilization over the course of history, complete with scientific and cultural discoveries. It is a resource management game wherein exploration opens up more resources but also the chance of encountering other growing civilizations. Alliances may be forged but wars often flare up. There are five ways to win the game: world domination through conquest, science victory, cultural victory, diplomatic victory, and time victory (having the highest score at the end of the game). There are *many* adjustable algorithms controlling the gameplay within *Civ* but I will focus on government types and the rhetorical comment provided by that particular set of parameters within the game's design.

When the game starts the player is only offered the choice of despotism. As her civilization advances (i.e. through discovering writing, commerce, mathematics, navigation,

metallurgy, mass transit, etc.) more advanced forms of government are unlocked and become available as choices. The choices are: despotism, republic, monarchy, democracy, fundamentalism, and communism. Democracy is one of the later forms of government in this virtual history even though, in reality, the ancient Greeks were the first to adopt it. Each government type has its pros and cons. For instance, science develops fastest under democracy and slowest under fundamentalism. Likewise, production is highest under democracy and low under monarchy or communism. What I found in my experience playing the game, however, were the subtle meanings embedded in the differences between government types. First, I didn't understand why democracy and republic were mutually exclusive. The United States as well as France and many other countries are republics *and* democracies. Also, it is telling that there is no option for socialism, only communism. I started to question the politics behind the game design when I realized a win under communism was nearly impossible and the system with the clear advantage to win the science, culture, diplomacy, and time victories was democracy. The game treats democracy as though it is synonymous with capitalism (complete with keeping the population happy with luxuries despite massive pollution) but doesn't label it as such. Why is capitalism not named but exists in practice under the label of democracy? What is more, why is communism an option whereas socialism is not? I wonder if socialism was left out to avoid the uncomfortable possibility of a socialist win scenario. Again, there are many socialist countries in the world today, especially in Northern Europe, and they, too, are democracies. Is this so players in Sweden can feel good about choosing democracy without having to choose between socialism and capitalism? Through the omission of socialism coupled with the far less advantageous choice of communism, the political bias of Sid Meier (an American citizen born in Canada) and his fellow game designers becomes clear.

The procedural rhetoric within *Civilization* heats up with going to war. When I played, my democracy would happily retaliate when I was attacked for one or two turns but would quickly change its mind. Also, under a democracy, my civilization would refuse to attack other civilizations. For me to do so I would either have to dissolve the government into anarchy and become a despot (ceasing production and scientific research) or change the government to fundamentalism quelling scientific advancement in the process.[42] The argument set up by this videogame through its procedural rhetoric is that democratic countries are peaceful and fundamentalism, like despotism, leads to war-mongering. This argument is, by no means, meant as a defense of despotism, far from it. However, I find the binary set up between democracy and fundamentalism problematic on two fronts. First, the United States has been at war with *someone*, usually under the premise of *protecting* democracy, for the majority of the 20th century. So far, the 21st century is proving the same. Britain, France, and Germany are not much better when it comes to avoiding conflict. My knowledge of world history doesn't support the claim made by *Civilization Revolution*. In fact, the game supports a myth that democracies are inherently peaceful. Again, the Ancient Greeks are a good example of how "peaceful" a democracy can be. Second, having the player equate fundamentalism with war is a disturbingly narrow viewpoint. My concern is that theocracies throughout the world, many of which appear to be fundamentalist from a western perspective, will be seen as threatening, irrational, and dangerous. At this time when religious, racial, and ethnic profiling and religious extremism seem to be on the rise, I am looking for ways to encourage understanding instead of divisiveness. I see the narrow binary between democracy and fundamentalism represented in this highly successful videogame as exacerbating tensions that exist throughout the world today.

[42] Choosing monarchy would allow me to go to war but at the cost of high corruption, low productivity, and low scientific advancement. The republic also resisted going to war and communism led to low productivity and unhappiness.

I am not alone in my critical view of games like *Civ*. Jorge Albor wrote a highly critical, and quite accurate, article for the online magazine *Experience Points* on the game wherein he states that "*Civilization V* is dangerously simplistic of identity groups at best, if not flat-out racist" ("Critical Eyes"). Another example is Peter Christiansen's article for another online magazine, *playthepast*, in which he deals directly with the ideology driving the ideological frames in a recent update to the game. He writes that "Videogames are inextricably bound to ideology. In most cases, this is not by design, but simply because game developers tend to create virtual worlds that reflect the particular way in which they see the real world" ("Designing"). He points out that though the series has touched on ideology in "different ways since its inception" this is the "first time that *Civ* has included a mechanic called 'ideology.'" In light of my ideological critique of the game above, I recognize I am not alone in feeling the position I was asked to embody while playing the game did not mesh well with my world view. Christiansen states "their procedural implementation makes for an interesting commentary on post-Cold War American views on the world" ("Designing").

I understand that *Civilization Revolution* is a videogame designed to provide hours of entertaining distraction. I don't mean to insinuate that Sid Meier and his team are intentionally trying to cause conflict, quite the opposite. I do, however, feel that it is important to equip ourselves with the critical tools to recognize the ideological positions presented by videogames for consumption. Referring again to David Hume and the extended mind concept in the second chapter, my experience in that game world becomes part of my overall experience. I know, rationally, the virtual world on the screen is a greatly simplified representation of real world events, ideas, civilizations, and giant swaths of history. To take it too seriously would be silly. As a simulation, however, it does contribute to my understanding of the world and the

interconnectedness of the representations within the game. In Bogost's example of *The MacDonald's Videogame* the intentional political message is clear. In my example of *Civ* I imagine that Sid Meier and his team of developers probably worked very hard to avoid making specific political statements through the gameplay. Their biases still show through, however. Gregory Jay reminds us that representation is a:

> Complex set of cultural *practices*, made up both of textual systems of knowledge and material or economic arrangements for the (re)production of knowledge. Representations may be said to be "powerful" in both senses, deriving their force from the conceptual and affective rhetoric of their use of signs *and* from the distribution of value and force determined by the institutions housing and producing them. (italics original, 11)

The knowledge I gain from playing this videogame, like all videogames, contributes to my overall identity and view of the world—virtual or otherwise.

I am reminded, here, of an early example given in Scott Magelssen's book, *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning.* In it he describes a live embodied role-play involving school children who are asked to reenact the events leading up to the US-led invasion of Granada in 1983. In describing the event Madelssen writes, "the students are told there are no right or wrong answers, but it quickly becomes clear that 'the whole thing is rigged to make what Ronald Reagan did in 1983 look like the most appealing option'" (2). Magelssen recounts that "when the student Reagan makes a choice that matches his historic counterpart, a cheerful bell dings with approval, and the docent affirms the excellent choice. Wrong choices, those that don't match Reagan's, are met with a harsh buzzer" (2). It is clear the procedural

rhetoric of the role-play is meant to convey a specific positive interpretation of the Reagan administration's choices leading up to the invasion of Granada.

Magelssen's book focuses on corporeally embodied role-play scenarios designed to convey meaning to the participants in an immediate, embodied, affective way. He writes that he adapted the term, "simming," from online gaming as a "simulated, immersive, performative environment" and that simming uses "theater [*sic*] and performance practices to stage environments in which participants played out a scripted or improvised narrative in order to gain or produce understanding of a situation and its context" (3). I see a similar "simming" occurring in the virtual environments realized through procedural rhetoric in the two examples I gave above. In the case of *The MacDonald's Videogame*, the situation demonstrated by the procedural rhetoric is designed to raise awareness in the player of the evils of the fast food industry. The player must make those evil decisions to succeed in the simulation. In the case of *Civilization Revolution*, the player must accept the fact that to win in this world simulator, she must adopt a (capitalist) democracy as the best option. The argument is set up using procedural rhetoric and the player learns through her (virtually) embodied affective experience that (capitalist) democracy is really the only option globally if one wants peace and prosperity. Maglessen's work focuses on live role-play whereas I am researching virtual embodiment, but I see very little, if any, difference between the affective experiences of the participant/player. Magelssen writes,

> Simmings need to reference the known world but be conspicuously unlike the world enough to offer a hopeful vision of what we might strive for—what Dolan describes as fleeting moments of "intense, sincere, generous romanticism" that inspire and move those gathered toward "feelings of possibility, hope, and political agency." (9)

Following Bogost's logic, the virtually embodied experience and the affect felt would not be more than one step removed from corporeally embodied role-play.

Earlier in the chapter I looked at three games and some of the embedded ideologies within them. Let us examine three more games with the idea of procedural rhetoric in mind to reveal how they play with politics in an attempt to *challenge* the player on a more complex level of engagement.

Playing with Politics: Levelling Up Complexity

Political engagement with the player is more overt in the *Grand Theft Auto*, *BioShock*, and *Fable* franchises. In these videogames, political ideas and assumptions are presented directly to the player in the course of navigating the games' narratives within their game worlds. I could have chosen from many games that present the player clear ideological positions to negotiate in their gameplay but I chose these three for their different levels of efficacy, strategic and artistic approaches, and their subject matter. I will deal with the more contentious of the three first, *Grand Theft Auto*, and then follow with *Fable III* and *BioShock: Infinity*.

I feel confident in assuming that most people reading this will have heard of *Grand Theft Auto*, if not played one of the iterations of the game: *GTA*s one through five as well as several DLCs, off-shoots, and *GTA Online*. I have played *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *GTA IV*, and the latest release *GTA V*. There is a good deal written on *GTA* already[43] and, like *Tomb Raider* mentioned earlier, I have also seen conference panels devoted to this game alone. I mention *GTA*

[43] Some examples are: Patrick Polasek's article for *Humanity & Society* titled "A Critical Race Review of Grand Theft Auto V" (2014), Mark Salter's "The Geographical Imaginations of Video Games: Diplomacy, Civilization, America's Army and Grand Theft Auto IV" for *Geopolitics* (2011), and Patrick Osborne's article for *Studies in Popular Culture* titled "Evaluating the Presence of Social Strain in Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto IV" (2011).

here not to repeat what others have covered but to query whether the videogame functions as a parody of American society or a celebration of racism, misogyny, and criminality. Is the game's ideological position as a parody of American society effective in its critique or is it more likely consumed as an expression of neoliberalism in a corrupt late capitalist society? In reference to my earlier discussion of the player embodying a politically problematic extended self, this game contains some of the most problematic content of all the games I look at in this study.

I self-identify as a left-leaning individual and I enjoy playing *GTA* (though I haven't completed any of the iterations yet). I agree with Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter when they write that "many politically left gamers like *GTA*. Admitting its rampant free-enterprise ethos and racial stereotyping, not to mention brutality, these players say that it is so 'over the top' as to become by its very extremity a comedic exposé of U.S. politics" (179). The game *is* 'over the top' in its caricature of American society and I enjoy playing the joke…but the joke doesn't end. It goes on and on. Perhaps this is the reason I tend to lose interest and move on to other games after a while. I get the joke. Extending it doesn't make it funnier. In fact, the joke is stretched so far it is no longer a parody but according to Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter "the category most relevant to the *GTA* franchise is cynicism" (181). Cynicism is a very useful term in this context. Stretching the joke to the point of cynicism strips it not only of its humour but also its efficacy as a parodic critique. The game fails to give an alternative to the violence and criminality. Writing of *GTA* Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter claim "what is excluded from its virtuality is *any* alternative to the rottenness" (italics original, 180). If an extreme position is upheld for much longer than necessary to establish itself as 'over the top,' the position becomes normalized or worse, celebrated.

I am reminded of a parallel example in the comedy of Andrew Dice Clay during the 1990s. His comedy is (he is still performing) shockingly sexist and misogynistic. His work has caused outrage in audiences and fellow performers[44] but he claims it is just an act; he is only playing a character. The issue is that it is *the only* character he presents. Is he or is he not really a misogynist? Since he presents only the one extreme position, the possibility of critique is lost and instead celebrates that position. I see his work as cynical toward gender relations (as well as racist and homophobic), backward in its representation of men, and ultimately damaging to both men and women.

There are similarities between the humour and parody of *GTA* and the comedy of Andrew Dice Clay. The first activity Conan O'Brian performed during his segment of "Clueless Gamer" featuring *GTA V* on *Late Night with Conan O'Brian* was to visit a strip joint. Watching O'Brian interacting with virtual strippers and subsequently getting thrown out of the virtual club for misbehaving drew attention, through humour, to the misogynist male fantasy the game is often seen as fulfilling. Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter write:

> *GTA* is a cynical game that simultaneously satirizes, indulges, and normalizes individual hyperpossessiveness, racialized stereotypes, and neoliberal violence in a self-cancellation that allows these elements to remain intact, a structure that is, in a very precise way, conservative. (181)

The question remains, is *GTA* a parody of American society, a clever critique of the failure of the American Dream and a bleak outlook for late capitalism? Or is it a neoliberal celebration of violence, misogyny, race relations, and criminality designed to reinforce a cynically conservative

[44] Both Nora Dunn and Sinead O'Connor refused to appear on *Saturday Night Live* the week Andrew Dice Clay was a guest.

view of society? Like other examples of good art, the answer is not obvious. In playing the game, the player is placed in the center of an extreme ideological position to be negotiated by the individual to critique or to accept. My position is that by 'buying into' the world of the game, the player must accept the racist and misogynistic position presented. To play the game, the player must embody these positions and carry out actions from the ideological positions the avatar(s) is/are placed in. Agency, and the affect that arises from it, is circumscribed by the racial, economic, class, and gendered pressures placed on the characters within these virtual environments; environments made to resemble actual American cities known to struggle with these same pressures. Because there are no other options, using Bogost's term, the procedural rhetoric of the game encourages this cynical acceptance. The parody is there (initially) but as the game progresses without a respite or alternative from "the rottenness" the possibility of critique is eroded by normalization.

Linda Hutcheon, writing from literary studies, makes some insightful claims about postmodern art, of which I see *GTA* as an example. Specifically, she illuminates how postmodern art can both critique through parody as well as reinforce that ideology through representation and immersion in the case of videogames:

> Postmodernism aims to be accessible through its overt and self-conscious parodic, historical, and reflexive forms and thus to be an effective force in our culture. Its complicitous critique, then situates the postmodern squarely within both economic capitalism and cultural humanism – two of the major dominants of much of the western world. What these two dominants have in common, as many have pointed out, are their patriarchal underpinnings. They also share a view of the relation of the

> individual to the social whole which is rather contradictory, to say the least. (Hutcheon 13)

Applied to *GTA*, the critique and reinforcement of capitalism is clear as well as the (white) male privilege in society which is ultimately unchallenged in the videogame. The player is asked to embody the avatar in a world where there is no hope of escape from the prevailing power structure. The player may succeed in the specific missions the game provides, and feel triumphant in doing so, but success is fleeting and only measured within an already corrupt society that does not change. The player embodies a role in a dysfunctional society that, shown through procedural rhetoric, is stacked against her and will not change. I feel an underlying weariness when I play these games that no matter how hard I struggle my efforts don't really make a difference. This is the cynicism I absorb through the feedback loop with my avatar and carry with me back into RL. Perhaps this is why I haven't finished the games.

Let us turn now to *Fable III*. This videogame is starkly different from the seedy underbelly of contemporary society featured in the last game in that it takes the player to the fantastic fairytale world of Albion. This game is published by Lionhead Studios out of England and is created by Peter Molyneux. The world of Albion is a vibrant place richly populated by a varied citizenry of men and women in the towns and fields and a host of creatures and monsters in the forests, hills, and caves. There are many levels to the gameplay and multiple storylines that are worthy of attention but I specifically want to focus on the range of expressions of gender and choices regarding sexual orientation available to the player. In short, cross-dressing is not only allowed but encouraged through achievements and some side-quests. Same sex relationships including marriage are possible and treated as normal in Albion. In fact, at the end of the main story arc, I found a potion that allowed me to permanently change my character's sex making a

replay of the game as the opposite sex possible. I was amazed and delighted when I discovered *Fable III* not only allowed me to explore fantastic locations, fight monsters, complete quests, and own businesses and houses, but to experiment with gender and sexuality in a very open, playful, and inclusive way as well.

A major aspect of *Fable III*'s game mechanics is the morality meter. This meter tracks the player's character's progression towards being good or evil depending on the choices made during gameplay. For example, killing innocent people or eating live chicks are activities that are considered evil while making donations to the treasury or helping the citizenry with benevolent tasks are considered good. I was delighted to see that cross-dressing, having multiple spouses, and relationships with either gender did not affect the character's morality. These activities, within the world of the game, are considered normal and without judgment. Instead of being treated as deviant behaviour (as is the case in some games), cross-dressing, for example, is rewarded with a game achievement. For those players who feel compelled to attain every achievement (i.e. Completionists/Achievers), to attain a 100% score, they must cross-dress as least once.

The player's morality affects which of the citizenry will be attracted to her and how strongly. This can result in NPCs running in fear or falling madly in love with the player's character, giving her gifts and pestering her to propose. Interestingly, the game assigns a variety of alignments and sexual orientations to the citizenry as well so even if the player performs her character as evil, there will be some citizens, both male and female, who will be attracted by that fact. In every town, the player encounters a number of citizens. By interacting with them, the player is able to inquire as to their alignment and sexual orientation. The options are gay, bi-sexual, and straight; the same orientations available to the player based on which relationships

are pursued within the game. If the player chooses to marry only the opposite sex, the game labels her character as straight. If the player chooses the same sex she is labeled as gay. Having multiple marriages with both sexes, of course, makes the player bi-sexual. The choice is up to the player and the game doesn't present a preference either way. What the game *does* present is a world where gender and sexual expression are freely chosen without judgment. The procedural rhetoric of the game makes an effective argument for a sexually inclusive society. In opposition to *GTA* that normalizes a cynical conservative view of society, *Fable III* normalizes a society composed of a range of expressions of gender and sexuality.

My interpretation of *Fable III* is that it is a welcome change from the majority of games I have played. For example, my ex-wife and I played through *Gears of War* together on co-op and we often joked about wishing Dom and Fenix would drop their guns and make-out as a radical departure from the hyper-(mono)-masculinity presented. In comparison to games like that, *Fable III* is a welcome breath of fresh air.

However, despite making a space for some experimentation of queerness in videogames, some feel *Fable III* did not go far enough. Adrienne Shaw argues that placing the onus on the player to experiment with gender and sexuality is a "very neoliberal approach to representation" in that it requires players to be responsible for "making their game characters go against male, heterosexual norms in game representation." She writes in her online article "The Lost Queer Potential of *Fable*" that:

> If the player need [*sic*] to push a "gay button," as game designer Anna Anthropy has termed it, to see same-sex relationships in games, then anyone who doesn't or is

> unaware that button exists can [*sic*] continues to consume the heteronormative dominated texts. (“The Lost”)

She agrees that *Fable* confronts the player with “more queerness than most games” but that it still represents an interpretative framework dominated by a male/female binary conforming to a traditional view of relationships. She writes:

> Games as fantasy spaces have the potential to disentangle queerness from experiences of violence and without relying on oversimplified notions of identity. If we conceptualize representation as important because it provides us a chance to imagine the world differently, why can’t that difference include a more open acceptance of gender and sexual diversity that is not only experienced in relation to binary labels, biology predetermining gender, and marriage as the ultimate goal of sexuality? (“The Lost”)

Shaw is correct that the game could have gone much further with its queerness. She calls for a more nuanced representation of gender and sexuality that is much less traditional in its expression or culmination. We both agree *Fable* gives the player more choice regarding gender and with that a sense of agency regarding gender expression not usually found in large budget, wide release videogames. Even though the game still upholds gender binaries and biology predetermining gender as Shaw points out, the game environment provides a space where experimentation with gender, embodied by the player through her avatar, is welcomed. This is not just representations of gender serving a potential critique of ideology but the fact it goes deeper—what it feels like to be present in such an open society—through embodiment. It is this embodied experience of a society open to gender experimentation that the player takes back with

her to RL. Shaw's issue, however, is that the game relies on the player to "push the gay button" to experience it.

In defense of *Fable*, it needs to be said that the game presents itself as a fairytale, and like most fairytales is informed by a simplified traditional view of gender and relationships. I see the fact the game introduces queerness to this fairytale world as a positive step. Just as world history and political orientations are greatly simplified in the *Civilization* games yet meaning is still communicated through their representations, the simplified society of *Fable III* allows experimentation and expression regarding gender and sexuality not often found in videogames. Here, again borrowing Magelssen's idea of simming, the role-play presented, though simplified, still provides an embodied experience with the power to affect the player. Bringing the conversation back to the main topic, the procedural rhetoric of *Fable III* creates a safe experimental environment, plus the affect of projecting herself into that world through the avatar, allowing the player the opportunity to explore expressions of gender and sexuality in an immediate embodied way.

The third example illustrating a leveling up of ideological complexity in videogames is the third game in the *BioShock* franchise, *BioShock: Infinite*. I gave a detailed explanation of the first *BioShock* game in Case Study One at the end of the second chapter so I won't go into specifics here. Let me just say that the series writer, Ken Levine, is known for taking politically charged ideological positions to their dystopian extremes. Here in *BioShock: Infinite*, the player is taken to a flying city of Columbia in the year of 1912. It is a deeply religious and racist city built for white Americans following a prophet known as Father Comstock. It is a historical fiction based on the possibility of the ideology of the pre-civil war American south reborn in a

city floating about the clouds high above the "Sodom below" that is often mentioned throughout the game.

Upon reaching the city the player's character, Booker DeWitt, finds himself in a church of sorts and is baptized before being allowed into the rest of Columbia. Within minutes of starting the game the player is confronted with a situation that I focus on here as illustrative of how the game forces the player to deal with the extreme politics of the game world. Rhetorically, as applied to procedural representations defined above, by fighting her way through the game world and narrative, the player is also fighting against the politics represented by that world. This game takes the player's extended self, embodied within the avatar, to struggle against the politically problematic premise, itself embodied in the environment. Specifically, encapsulated within the moments to follow are the politics of white supremacy, religious fanaticism, and cultural elitism.

Booker DeWitt finds himself at a fair in an area where many people are assembled in front of a band shell stage. Everyone is holding a baseball and everyone is white. There are women moving through the crowd giving out baseballs. One prompts DeWitt to take a ball. DeWitt refuses on the grounds he doesn't want to purchase one. She playfully chides him that they are always free and asks if he has been hiding under a rock. He takes a ball to discover the number 77 written on it. This is a lottery and all the baseballs are numbered. The announcer on stage calls for the lottery to begin and that the bowl be brought to him. When it is, he asks the crowd if the girl holding the bowl isn't "the prettiest white girl in all of Columbia." The announcer calls out the winner: number 77. DeWitt discovers his prize is the opportunity to throw the first ball. The curtains part to reveal a mixed race couple (a white man and a black woman), tied in place within a rudimentary set made to look like a mockery of a primitive

marriage (complete with monkeys and palm trees), struggling to get free. The game prompts the player to either throw the ball at the couple or to throw it at the announcer. What is more, there is a timer visibly counting down prompting a quick decision. When I played, I attempted to throw the ball at the announcer but the police nearby stopped me and recognized me as the "false prophet" from the mark on the back of my throwing hand. A graphically violent fight[45] ensued where I managed to escape. I learned later that the police will stop the player from throwing the ball regardless of the decision and also if the timer runs out.[46] I must say, though, that at the time, I had a very visceral reaction to not only the gross display of racist violence I found myself the locus of, but also in how I felt a crowd of people suddenly turn against me. From this point in the game, I was not only a marked man within Columbia, but it also instantly turned this bright and cheery city in the clouds into a white supremacist nightmare I was determined to bring down.

The moment described above from *BioShock: Infinite* shares many similarities with *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson (1948). The franchise creator, Ken Levine is well-read, so I am confident that my connection between to the two is no accident. In Jackson's story, the townsfolk of the unspecified small American town use slips of paper for the lottery and use rocks to murder the winner. In the videogame, the iconic American baseball is used to convey both the lottery number and is the killing instrument. In Jackson's story, the townsfolk don't know when the ritual started or why they perform. Here, too, this ritual stoning of multi-racial couples is implied as having happened often before, without question or thought from the people of Columbia. Both the story and the videogame are making a comment on blind faith and following orders without

[45] I was shocked at my penchant for snapping necks and extracting hearts from my opponents.
[46] The game proceeds much the same way regardless of the decision made at this point with one exception. At a point much later in the game, if the player chose to throw at the announcer, the player will encounter the couple who give him a piece of gear in thanks for saving them. They escaped during the ensuing fight, it seems. If the player chose to throw at the couple, a character working for the announcer will appear to give DeWitt a piece of gear and compliment him on his choice. If the timer ran out, neither happens.

thinking. Jackson's story is especially effective in its rhetorical strategy of allowing the reader to meet the residents of the town and witness their 'normalness' before showing them quickly turn against one of their own at the shocking end. This is especially poignant in light of it being published soon after WWII. In the case of Levine's videogame, the procedural rhetoric of the game design forces the player to confront her own feelings regarding race in an immediate and visceral way. Unlike the example of *Fable III* involving gender and sexuality, there is no way to play *BioShock: Infinite* without dealing with race and religious fanaticism. That moment in the game was one of the most affecting moments I have had playing a videogame. I threw the ball at the announcer before the time ran out but just barely. I was frozen—stunned from the outrageous situation I found myself in—and I can still recall the chill of dread for not only the helpless couple tied on the stage before me but also from my perception of the angry eyes of the crowd surrounding me. This is an affect I remember feeling in my own body. This is the horror of being at the center of an unthinking mob made immediate to me through my projection into that world.

The examples above are meant to demonstrate how videogames can be designed to at least provide the player the opportunity to confront, question, or play with ideological concepts within the virtual worlds the games offer. These worlds are, by necessity, simplifications of the worlds they represent but through their representations, ideology can be revealed and manipulated. The intentional manipulation of these representations in videogames to make an argument, expose a viewpoint, or to compel the player to explore alternative ways of seeing the virtual (and real) world and her place in it is a form of rhetoric, albeit rendered procedurally through algorithms. With these examples in mind as context for the ideas introduced at the start of the chapter, let us return to the topic of embodied presence within the virtual space and explore the concept of the Body without Organs.

The Avatar as the Body without Organs

In their *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari write that "desiring-machines make us an organism" (8). Desire emerges out of wants and needs. Some are abstract and never fully satisfied like the need to feel appreciated, important, or even loved. All of these are virtually achievable, at least symbolically, within videogames. Some are simply physical and the literal connection to the organs of the body is obvious. I mean specifically those moments where the flow of the game narrative is interrupted by the corporeal need of the player to eat or relieve herself. The avatar, in this case, patiently waits until the player once again picks up the controller.[47] Of course, the avatar itself feels neither patience nor impatience. That quality is projected onto the avatar by the player—just as the avatar isn't affected by the game world but the player is through the avatar. When recalling my own gaming experiences, I don't recall sitting on the couch but instead remember performing actions within the game world. This is largely why I video-recorded my volunteers while they were playing during my game research sessions. The players remembered what they were doing within the game world but the video record was needed to show them what they doing corporeally. Thinking of this phenomenon from a different angle, the avatar does not reminisce about how exciting certain moments during the game were, the player does as though she were there…and as we determined earlier, virtually she *was*.

The arc of this dissertation has come full circle originating at affect and returning to affect. If we allow the player holding the controller to be the desiring-machine then it may be juxtaposed with the avatar as the Body without Organs espoused by Little and Dixon. I wish to

[47] It is true some games reward the player while being inactive, like replenishing health, conducting research or construction, respawning items and creatures, or in the earlier example of *Fable*, collecting rent and revenue from in-game businesses. Regardless of being rewarded or not, the avatar, itself, is still inactive until the player returns.

go one step further by clarifying that the avatar, as the index for the player within the game world, is not, itself, the Body without Organs. The BwO is the *relationship* between the player and the image on the screen. It is the entity—a "third stage" to use Deleuze and Guattari's term—between the avatar and the player. It is the conceptual conduit that conveys intensity to the desiring-machine holding the controller and moving the narrative forward. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that Artaud discovered the BwO "one day, finding himself with no shape or form whatsoever, right there where he was at that moment" (8). He discovered a form of pure presence freed of the confines of his body. Analyzing this moment, Deleuze and Guattari write that the full Body without Organs is the "unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable" and that it is "nonproductive; nonetheless it is produced, at a certain place and a certain time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of producing and the product" (8). Furthermore, the BwO is:

> not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality. Above all, it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image. This imageless, organless body, the nonproductive, exists right there where it is produced, in the third stage of the binary-linear series. (8)

The full BwO is produced as a three way connective synthesis between it, the player, and the avatar. It is produced during gameplay as an affective experience, intangible except for the momentary autonomic reactions the player may have from the game experience. I see the full BwO as the aura lost when watching game clips after the fact. The body without image is captured only as a memory to the player completing the connective synthesis. The avatar *is* the BwO but not simply the virtual body on the screen. The avatar is the conceptual connected

synthesis of the virtual body and that of the player that renders the avatar meaningful. In the true meaning of the word, the avatar is a vessel occupied by the player in another world.

Seen from a different angle, the avatar, as the index of the player on screen, is pure image. The body without an image is the projected body of the player, the desiring-machine, within the game world. The body without an image is what makes the image on screen meaningful. Thousands of people have seen Lara Croft on a screen, but the memories and dreams of *being* Lara Croft are unique to each player's subject position of feeling present through her virtual body within the game world. Alluding to Artaud finding himself right there where he was, the player is right there, where she is in the game world…until she turns off the console.

The subject position unique to the BwO is created when the affective connection is made between the player and her avatar on screen. It is produced anew with each new game instance and tempered by each game world. It is like a child's experiment learning electricity using a battery, wires, and a small light bulb. The bulb only lights when the circuit is complete. The subject position is like the frail light of the bulb—fleeting and precious. Deleuze and Guattari speak of the subject position this way:

> It is a strange subject, however, with no fixed identity, wandering about over the body without organs, but always remaining peripheral to the desiring-machines, being defined by the share of the product it takes for itself, garnered here, there, and everywhere a reward in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state. (16)

Perhaps because the subject position afforded by the BwO is so intangible and personal that gamers strive to find ways to outwardly communicate that experience through consumerism as Little and Dixon claim. Perhaps they are attempting to attach permanence or tangibility to the peripheral subject by displaying related products claiming ownership or even donning costumes to transform their bodies in RL. The social awkwardness of gamers at conventions noted above by Alexander insinuates that these players may be investing more into their projected selves than their RL experiences.

I am guilty of this type of investment when I pre-order the collector's editions of games for the extra trinkets. For example, I feel a strong sense of reinforcement toward the reality of the *Fable* universe when I hold the coin from the *Fable 3* collector's package. This is the same reason I, and many like me, are clamoring now—almost a year in advance of the game's release—for the limited collector's edition of *Fallout 4*. I really want my own Pip-Boy 3000![48] Having that (imitation) device on my real arm will not only cause other players of *Fallout* to covet my purchase (identifying me as part of an exclusive club of sorts) but looking at the display on my real wrist mirroring the same action in the game, will make both my virtual experience more real and my real experience more virtual.

Regarding this "strange subject" Žižek argues we don't go far enough. In his aptly named book *Organs Without Bodies* he encourages us to seek a pure subjectivity through external means. In short, if we never had to put down the controller to pee, we could leave the body on

[48] A Pip-Boy 3000 is a Personal Information Processor that the avatar wears on its wrist. It is essentially a wrist-worn computer. It is larger and bulkier than a wristwatch and is retro-cyber-punk in its design (complete with green text against a black screen like early DOS computers), befitting the premise of the *Fallout* games. In the game, the Pip-Boy displays the avatar's stats, skill trees, and a multitude of information about the game world. The collector's edition version of the Pip-Boy allows the player to place her smartphone within it, and with the accompanying app installed, the smartphone becomes the functioning display within the worn device.

the couch and *live* in that "third stage" as the BwO, defined by Deleuze and Guattari, between the player and the avatar. Žižek writes:

> Instead of bemoaning how the progressive externalization of our mental capacities in "objective" instruments (from writing on paper to relying on a computer) deprives us of human potentials, one should therefore focus on the liberating dimension of this externalization: the more our capacities are transposed onto external machines, the more we emerge as "pure" subjects, since this emptying equals the rise of substanceless subjectivity. It is only when we will be able to rely fully on "thinking machines" that we will be confronted with the void of subjectivity. (16)

I want to caution us at this point not to fall into the trap of the mind and body split. Žižek's position is an extreme vision of the extended mind (and body) thesis discussed in the second chapter coupled with chapter three's discussion of the gamer as cyborg. The multiplicity of identities and their related virtual realities experienced by players may be a factor in Alexander's observation of gamers' difficulty in negotiating them within this corporeal reality. The gamer, away from her computer or console, is much like the cyborg without her implant. Really, the computer/console/smartphone serves the same purpose as the implant but is an external tool. How the tool changes the player's view of reality, virtual or otherwise (and I argue all reality is subject to virtuality now thanks largely to Google), makes her a cyborg. Žižek writes "it is meaningless to imagine a human being as a biological entity *without* the complex network of his or her tools—such a notion is the same as, say, a goose without its feathers" (19). Just as the cyborg is greater than the sum of its parts, the BwO is created through the relationship of the player and her avatar. Riffing on Marx, Žižek writes "man is the totality of his social relations"

(19) and in a world where the majority of our social relations are mediated though a screen—with both "real" people and virtual entities—those relations are between Bodies without Organs within cyberspace.

Let us look at this cybernetic relationship from another angle. Several recent performance experiments use pre-existing physical locations augmented through the integration of social media and digital communication. They create similar relationships between the player/participant and her avatar except, in these cases, the corporeal bodies of the participants are placed within virtual fictions. One example is *The Zombie Syndrome* (2013) by Vancouver's Virtual Stage where participants were taken through several zombie-infested locations in Vancouver led by both live actors and information fed to them through smartphones. During the performance the participants were given the task to save the world from a zombie outbreak (i.e. win the game). Another example is *ZedTO* (2012) by Toronto's The Mission Business that combined a robust online presence in tandem with several live events that maintained a fictional premise for more than a year involving rogue multi-national corporations, unregulated bio-engineering, and a dystopian end-of-the-world scenario. Several contemporary performance companies like The Builder's Association from New York, The Electric Company Theatre from Vancouver, and Blast Theory from Brighton, UK[49] are known for their work that blurs the line between the real and the virtual through their experimentation with social media, digital technology, audience participation, and existing physical environments.

At the time of writing this, the popular CBC television series, *Murdoch Mysteries*, is combining videogames, television, social media, web video, and live performance through an

[49] For an excellent recent detailed analysis of digital performance in Canada, I suggest looking at the digital performance issue of *Canadian Theatre Review*, volume 159.

interactive web series called *Murdoch Mysteries: The Infernal Device* (2015). In it, the viewer is cast as a "special investigator" that not only watches video clips from the series but also needs to solve puzzles online regarding the cases and is invited to attend special live events across Canada at locations like Toronto's Railway Roundhouse, Vancouver's Gastown, Fort Edmonton Park, and the Molson Brewery in Montreal. The live events house major plot developments that inform the following video segments and solving the often challenging logic puzzles, word puzzles, reading comprehension challenges, etc., unlocks further clues for the participant. Attendance at the live events is not compulsory but the "special investigator" must solve the online puzzles to move the narrative forward much like a videogame. Reinforced by direct address from the video segments, the corporeal body of the participant is encouraged to feel part of the narrative provided through digital means and may even make that participation more tangible by attending the events in-person.

Let us return once more to Artaud and affect. Deleuze and Guattari see Artaud as someone who "sought to remain at that unbearable point where the mind touches matter and lives its every intensity, consumes it" (20). This is also an apt description of Artaud's ideal of his visceral art. His Theatre of Cruelty strove to affect its audience on a pre-socialized level of instinct and autonomic reaction. Discussing Artaud's situation Deleuze and Guattari write that "there is a schizophrenic experience of intensive quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable—a celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death, an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity stripped of all shape and form" (18). Both Artaud's life and his art focused on an obsessive (perhaps neurotic) fascination with feeling as intensely as possible without the dulling mediation of social

conventions or prescribed behaviours. He wanted pure affective experience. In other words he sought “naked intensity stripped of all shape and form” (18).

Massumi sees intensity as an essential aspect of affect. Specifically he writes that “intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things. Depth reactions belong more to the form/content (qualification) level, even though they also involve autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing” (25). Coupled with proprioception as the sense of where the boundaries of the body lay, the inclusion of the avatar as a projection of the player into the game world, the conceptual boundary of the Body without Organs is evoked. This reinforces the phenomenon I observed in my test subjects of exclaiming “ow!” when the avatar was shot or hit during gameplay. According to Massumi, intensity is “outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from generalized body surface like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops that travel the vertical path between head and heart” (25). It is the ‘interlooping’ I am driving at that the player experiences in those moments where the BwO is expressed and the affect can be filtered into a socialized (emotional) reaction. Speaking to the effort required to articulate in symbolic language something that defies description Massumi writes:

> In the absence of an asignifying philosophy of affect, it is all too easy for received psychological categories to slip back in, undoing the considerable deconstructive work that has been effectively carried out by poststructuralism. Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But one of the clearest lessons of the first story is that emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders. (27)

Projecting oneself into a virtual environment—an environment designed to encourage immersion—does adhere to a different logic than previous narrative media. I do not wish to make a parallel between playing videogames and Artaud's schizophrenia. However, we can benefit from Artaud's discovery of the BwO as a means to understand what videogames *do* to players in the sense of suspending disbelief and accepting other (virtual) realities as true within the context of the game premise.

Believing in multiple realities can be fractious and cause tensions or discord between the realities presented. This is different than getting lost in a fictional world while attending a play, watching a movie, or reading a book. In those cases the world of the fiction and that of reality are usually immediately discernible[50] and the audience's relationship to them is left unchallenged. In videogames the player is cast *within* the world of the fiction. Other than exiting to the title screen or options settings, the player—as the avatar—is surrounded by the fiction while playing. While immersed within the game world it is difficult (though not impossible) to maintain a critical distance from the fiction. Because the videogame narrative stops without input from the player, the player cannot simply look away to skip moments of the narrative. Videogames can be seen as a form of virtual Theatre of Cruelty. What is more, it is not simply a hallucination since the player chooses to expose herself to the sights and sounds of the game and it is not a delirium since she never imagines physically leaving the couch. The player may *feel* the game is hallucinatory or that the experience provided is delirious but the player chooses to engage. What the player doesn't choose, directly, is how she feels while playing. Regarding this difference, Deleuze and Guattari remind us that:

[50] There are, of course, exceptions to every rule and many plays, films, and books have sought to intentionally blur the line between fiction and reality. Respective examples are Pirandello's *Six Characters In Search Of An Author*, extra-diegetic references within movies implying the fiction extends outside the movie theatre, or Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* with "Don't Panic" on the cover and guide entries throughout the book implying it *is* a copy of the *Hitchhiker's Guide* the reader is holding.

> The basic phenomenon of hallucination (*I see, I hear*) and the basic phenomenon of delirium (*I think…*) presuppose an *I feel* at an even deeper level, which gives hallucinations their object and thought delirium its content—an "I feel that I am becoming a woman," "that I am becoming a god," and so on, which is neither delirious nor hallucinatory, but will project the hallucination or internalize the delirium. (18)

Many games are designed to make the player feel like a god. The game, *God of War* (2005) is an obvious example, but *Civilization* can encourage the player to feel this way as well. Many games allow the player a choice of playing a male or female character and in that virtual environment feel what it is like to be a man or woman in that world. *GTA* lets the player feel like a criminal.

Revisiting a rhetorical question from the second chapter, when a co-worker at the water cooler claims she slew a dragon with her guild in *WoW* the night before, is she lying or delusional? We determined in that chapter that her experience in the game informs who she is as a whole and is valid according to the extended mind theory. Nuanced further by the BwO we see that she is neither lying nor delusional for she really *felt* that she slew the dragon. She felt present within the game world, she experienced a connected synthesis with her avatar as a Body without Organs, and thus she *did* slay the dragon. Look out, there is a dragon-slayer standing at the water cooler with you!

The BwO can be freeing for the player, even empowering depending on the videogame premise. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it may expose the player to the possibility of a sublime moment. There is a dark side, however, to this phenomenon. Consider the embedded ideologies within videogames like the ones outlined above, coupled with the fact the player

virtually embodies her role within those ideologically loaded narratives, plus the anonymity afforded by gamerIDs and internet aliases. The skewed view of the world represented on screen at a safe, anonymous distance, *may* carry over into RL. The "third stage" entity created by the relationship of the player to her avatar can just as easily turn out to be a monster. The flip side to Bogost's claim that experiences within the virtual environments are only one step removed from actual experience is that the actions taken through digital means (including emails, tweets, and instant messages) also feel one step removed from the real world. Viewing the (computer-mediated) world from the perspective of the BwO, the differentiation between real people and game sprites can be blurred—especially when seen through the same screen. People susceptible to suggestion, with sociopathic tendencies, or socially underdeveloped may not (choose to) make this separation. They may see life the same way they would their virtual experiences. The downside to gamification is that the world becomes a game. However, unlike game sprites and avatars respawning after being killed, the harm done to real people is permanent.

Here, the dark side of Artaudian theory shows itself, particularly its racist and sexist dimensions. Videogames already encourage a selfish self-centered view of (virtual) reality in that (most) videogames depend on continual input from the player. Combine this feeling of self-importance with how videogames encourage the player to feel a sense of pure presence within the game world and it creates an artificially sociopathic environment. The experience of pure presence often also takes place via an expression of extreme violence—not simply due to violence depicted within the games but on the level of social/political violence. Violence against women in *Gears of War*. Violence against nature in *Gears of War* and *Halo*. Violence against the exotic other in *Tomb Raider*. And racial, ethnic, sexist, and class violence in *Grand Theft Auto.* The following sections look at possible side-effects of a sociopathic BwO in that the attitudes

and world-views found in videogames may be spilling over into real life. The feedback in the cybernetic feedback loop may overload the system and cause it to fail.

Hacking and Hate

My original intention for this chapter was to focus solely on ideology within videogames. However, during the last few months there have been several news events that I would be remiss not to mention. I feel it necessary to enlarge the conversation to include what I see as a rupture of ideological boundaries exposing behaviours acceptable (or tolerated) within videogames spilling into real world situations through social media and becoming entwined with gaming culture. Videogames are not created or received within a vacuum and the deeper my research takes me into ideology in videogames, the more I realize how these recent events are also connected. I draw your attention to the hacking of Sony Pictures over their film, *The Interview*, and the issues surrounding #GamerGate (specifically the sexually violent harassment and threats against Anita Sarkeesian, Brianna Wu, and Zoe Quinn).

I begin with hacking and hacking culture. Historically, to be called a 'hack' is a negative thing. It means that you did shoddy uninspired work and/or produced work for purely commercial/financial reasons, especially in the arts. To *get* 'hacked' is also negative. To get 'hacked' means that someone has broken into your personal (electronic) files, learned your passwords to mess with your identity, or that your software or electronic device has been corrupted or taken over by someone else. It means much the same thing for a company, like Sony, to get 'hacked' but on a far greater scale and cost. However the terms 'hacking' and 'hacker' (someone who 'hacks') also have positive connotations in the common vernacular

tempered with the neoliberal flavor of individual mischievousness, clandestine activities, and being somehow outside or against the system. Some recent (positive) updates to the concept include "life-hacking" where one attempts to improve one's life by breaking old habits or trying new behaviours (not unlike trying unconventional methods to succeed in videogames) or the recent rise of government sponsored "hackathons."[51] The image of the hacker is similar to the character of the rogue in fantasy fiction only applied to computers and technology—sometimes helpful, sometimes harmful, but always unpredictable. The meaning behind hacking, whether it is positive or negative, depends on who is doing the hacking, who is receiving the attack as the victim, and how it is perceived by the public. Again, a Robin Hood-esque hacker would be perceived as positive by all but his victim(s).

In popular usage, to be a hacker or have the ability to hack suggests a sophisticated skill set regarding computers and information technology (IT) coupled with an unconventional way of approaching problem-solving (and often the world). These are skills often taught and reinforced within videogames, designed to challenge the player with unusual situations and solutions, provided through digital means. These skills place hackers apart from most people. Indeed, law enforcement and spy agencies like CSIS actively recruit people with hacking skills. These agencies want to put those skills to use in the interests of the agency and also thwart the efforts of other hackers. We want to have the best Robin Hoods on our team.

In popular fiction the hacker has often been glorified as an anti-hero or a geeky side-kick who saves the day with his or her ability to circumvent the system; an underdog sticking it to 'The Man' in defense of the little people. One of the earliest and most famous portrayals of a

[51] In spring 2015, the City of Toronto hosted the first government and media sponsored "hackathon" bringing together software coders from across Canada to "build the best app utilizing federal government data" (CODE) with the intention of streamlining government services. Its intention was to "accelerate innovation and hacktivating open data." It was a 48-hour "coding sprint" organized by The Canadian Open Data Experience (CODE).

hacker is the protagonist in the movie *War Games* (1983) where a "young man finds a back door into a military central computer in which reality is confused with game-playing, possibly starting World War III" (IMDB). Since then the inclusion of a hacker character has become common place in most science fiction and espionage movies as well as videogame narratives. For example, Neo, the protagonist of *The Matrix* movies (1999-2003), is selected to save humanity because of his uncanny ability to hack computer systems. Ubisoft Montreal's 2014 game, *Watch Dogs*, casts the player as a freelance hacker that solves injustices above the law through his ability to hack any system with only his wits, WIFI, and a smartphone. The popularity of sites of resistance like *Wikileaks* and the hero status (albeit complicated) of people like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden attest to the complex role hackers play in the eyes of the general public. The image of an average hacker in popular media is usually a young attractive (though geeky) highly intelligent male with a superior knowledge of IT. However, this is not always the case and hacking is no longer a male-only activity. Female hackers like Angelina Jolie's character in *Hackers* (1995), the character of Veronica Mars from the series bearing the same name, and Lisbeth from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* books and movies are good examples. Regardless of the hacker's gender, he or she is often portrayed as also being someone who plays videogames (extremely well) making the association that the skills needed are related if not the same. The "outside-the-box" thinking of the hacker, often shown as slightly anti-social, is supported both by the assumption that their perspective of reality is informed more by virtual experiences than "real" ones—making it somehow less valid—but also highly sought after considering how much of the "real" world is informed/controlled by digital information. Hackers have the ability to play the real world like a game, often on the same devices, and often informed by the ideologies learned through the games played on them. This brings us to two recent real world events that I

interpret as examples of behaviours learned in videogames spilling over into reality with disturbing consequences.

In 2014 Sony Pictures, a Japanese company, made a comedy about assassinating one of the world's most paranoid and unpredictable dictators, Kim Jong-un of North Korea. The prudence of this decision is open for debate. Before the film was released Sony was hacked by a group called the Lizard Squad who is affiliated with another group called the Guardians of Peace. The Guardians of Peace insisted the release of the film be cancelled or stolen documents and emails would be circulated. Many documents *were* leaked, the film's release was cancelled and then reinstated (after a fashion). Sony endured several further attacks including denial of service (DoS) attacks on its Playstation Network.

According to Max Fisher and the news website *Vox*, the Lizard Squad "is an informal hacker collective that has been described as 'vocal, taunting and a bit obnoxious'" (Fisher). Fisher continues further in his article stating:

> The group has hacked a number of other video game-related targets, such as Xbox and EA Games. In all cases, Lizard Squad and its members taunted the targets and bragged online. Cole Stryker, the author of a book on hacking culture, previously told ABC News that Lizard Squad is known as "very trollish, prankstery." He added of the group's members, "I don't believe this person genuinely wants to be involved in geopolitics. I think this person is just having a laugh." In other words, the group has no clear agenda or record other than hacking to hack, and often targeting companies involved in video games—especially Sony.

The fact that the group[52] may have performed the attacks simply to show off or to "have a laugh" is cause for alarm on many levels not the least being that this thrill ride could have serious real world consequences. The other group, Guardians of Peace (GoP), appears to have a slightly more political goal in that it sent demands to Sony regarding the release of *The Interview* though that goal, too, seems dubious and also likely done for a lark. According to Andrew Roberts and the website, *Uproxx: Web Culture*, a week following the Sony hack GoP was: "Openly mocking the FBI for their investigation into the matter and the threats that forced the cancellation of *The Interview*. Guardians of Peace responded to the FBI with a message on Saturday, mocking their investigation and trolling them with a video that essentially called them idiots" ("Guardians"). I want to mark the occurrence of the words "mock," "taunting," and "trolling" in relation to these actions. They are treating the situation as a joke and treating Sony and the FBI as though they were opponents in *a game*. The parallel between the movie *War Games* and this group of hackers escalating tensions between North Korea and the US for fun is disturbing in their similarities considering the possible catastrophic outcomes. However, in the movie, the hackers work together to stop the nuclear war they accidentally initiated. In this case the hackers seem to want to stir up as much trouble as possible for "a laugh." I, personally, do not find it amusing to provoke an already paranoid country whose missiles can reach Sony's home, Japan.

#GamerGate

I don't understand #GamerGate. I mean, I understand women are being targeted with sexual harassment and threats against their lives under the flimsy guise of journalistic integrity in

[52] Or possibly an individual as indicated by Fisher's use of the phrase "this person."

videogame reporting under a hashtag banner of #GamerGate.[53] Specifically, I am referring to the three instances of gross unbridled harassment and abuse aimed at Anita Sarkeesian, Brianna Wu, and Zoe Quinn. These crimes exploded into the public consciousness with the coverage of it in *The New York Times* in the latter half of 2014. These events exposed the rampant issue of misogyny in the videogame industry and gamer culture and joined the larger ongoing conversation about gender equality and sexual harassment in North American society. What I don't understand is why would anyone align themselves with #GamerGate or even try to defend it? What could possibly be gained? How could the pursuit of journalistic integrity ever be placed on an even scale with threatening to rape and kill someone in their home? Or in the case of Sarkeesian, to threaten to cause "the deadliest school shooting in American history" in an email "which bore the moniker Marc Lépine, the name of a man who killed 14 women in a mass shooting in Montreal in 1989 before taking his own life" (Wingfield)? This is ludicrous. Nothing Sarkeesian, Wu, or Quinn could do would warrant such treatment. It seems, however, that their crimes are to speak openly against gender inequality in the gaming industry, to post articles and video blogs exposing sexism in videogames, and to create games that don't objectify women. In Quinn's case, she is also forced to suffer the wrath of a jilted ex-boyfriend who turned to the internet to destroy her life. It is infuriating to me that these things are happening in this day and age. I am embarrassed to be a man. What is more, speaking up about this issue defines (and dismisses) me as a 'social justice warrior.' Anna North at *The New York Times* says it best with:

> For those unfamiliar with the term "social justice warriors," Allegra Ringo does some explication at *Vice*. For certain segments of the gaming world, she writes,

[53] I am intentionally using the hashtag, #GamerGate, throughout this dissertation in response to hearing of colleagues' experiences at panels on this very topic being asked not to use it. They were asked to remove it for fear of having the conference's websites targeted by trolls and hackers. Censorship out of fear is alarming and cowardly. I state the hashtag, #GamerGate, at every opportunity to show I will not be intimidated. Voldemort! Voldemort! Voldemort!

> the term refers to "people who, according to Urbandictionary, engage in 'social justice arguments on the internet… in an effort to raise their own personal reputation.' In other words, SJWs don't hold strong principles, but they pretend to." Ms. Ringo takes issue with this formulation: "It's awfully convenient to have a term at the ready to dismiss women who bring up sexism, as in, 'You don't really care. As an SJW, you're just taking up this cause to make yourself look good!'" (North)

The SJW label is a deflection strategy meant to discredit and obfuscate. It is a ploy to confuse and distract from the main issue of misogyny and harassment in gaming culture. This is not unlike the #notallgamers hashtag that is riffing off the #notallmen backlash to opponents of sexual harassment in the larger societal conversation. Just as the not-all-men response derails meaningful conversation about rape, sexism, and misogyny, #notallgamers side-steps the real issue that the videogame industry is predominantly run by men and many of the games it produces are sexist and misogynist. There is a telling meme circulating through the #yesallwomen hashtag that is apropos here. It says "The point is not that ALL MEN harass women (we know they don't) the point is that ALL WOMEN have been harassed by men" (#YESALLWOMEN). The same is true of game culture. Playing videogames does not make one a misogynist. One does not have to hate women to enjoy videogames. But to deny that the gaming industry is misogynist is to be misguided, misinformed, or willfully ignorant. The reality is that internet sources are flooded with misinformation to confuse anyone who is earnestly attempting to discern the facts surrounding #GamerGate and misogyny in the videogame industry as a whole—including myself. What is undeniable is that the fact 8% of game developers are female is a gross imbalance considering nearly half of videogame players are

women. Wu said it best with "Gamergate is basically a group of boys that don't want girls in their videogame clubhouse" (Wu).

Another distraction strategy used by #GamerGaters involves hacking into the social media accounts of pro-feminist advocates and spreading contradictory and hateful statements under their names and IDs. Yet another strategy is to create numerous fake accounts to appear to have greater support for misogynist viewpoints and even go so far as to create a fictional female spokesperson to further undermine feminist arguments. Allegra Ringo, mentioned in the above quote, said in her article for *Vice* that:

> Vivian James is the fictional everywoman of gaming. She wears a striped hoodie and drinks Mountain Dew Throwback. Her name is a play on 'vidya games.' She's a regular person who wears jeans and spends too much time on the internet. And she was created out of spite by the historically anti-feminist gamers of 4chan." (Ringo)

What does this have to do with journalistic integrity in reporting on videogames? Nothing. What does this have to do with undermining attempts to promote gender equality in videogames and attack those who support equality? Everything.

Shortly after news of the harassment toward Sarkeesian, Wu, and Quinn surfaced, the *New York Times* published an article with a possible explanation for the anti-feminist backlash. The article claims the hate is arising out of resistance to the changing image of the gamer and the disappearance of an adolescent male gamer identity. According to Leigh Alexander "'Games culture' is a petri dish of people who know so little about how human social interaction and professional life works that they can concoct online 'wars' about social justice or 'game

journalism ethics'" (Alexander). Similarly to Lizard Squad and its attack on Sony Pictures, these attacks on real people with real consequences seem to be done for far less than legitimate reasons—perhaps only for a sociopathic thrill of having (destructive) power over someone else's life. Wu states in her web article for *xojane* that:

> The misogynists and the bullies and the sadist trolls of patriarchal gaming culture threatened to murder me and rape my corpse, and I did not back down. They tried to target my company's financial assets and I did not back down. They tried to impersonate me on Twitter in an attempt to professionally discredit me and I did not back down. (Wu)

Wu did not back down. However, in her article she names several women she knows personally in the videogame industry who did before news of #GamerGate's activities hit the mainstream media. Wu was interviewed on CNN, Sarkeesian appeared on *The Colbert Report*. #GamerGate is a household word now.

I want to emphasize the similarity between the tactics used by GamerGaters and those used by Lizard Squad and GoP—threats, stealing, and spreading of private information, and intimidation through any and all methods available. I suggest that since all these activities occur through computer screens and are all mediated through technology—often the same screens on which videogames are played and social media like *Twitter* and *Facebook* are viewed—that the lines of what is real and what is virtual are blurred. The augmentation of reality by digital means I described in positive terms in chapter three is shown here in its worst negative light. Could someone with sociopathic tendencies have less chance of feeling any emotion toward the real victims of harassment? Could someone like this have a detached view of these real victims at the

receiving end of the vitriol—like a game character? How much of this behaviour is a form of in-game character performance transferred from behaviours learned and ideologies absorbed through videogame play?

I assume that most trolls and malicious hackers behave differently when dealing with people face-to-face. Is the distance and perceived anonymity of the internet similar to the phenomenon of road rage arising in normally calm people when they get behind the wheel? As I have argued earlier, the affect the player feels while in virtual environments stays with her, changes her, and contributes to who she is and her perception of others.[54] I have described how the player's relationship to her avatar is a form of augmentation and can even open the player to an experience of the sublime. What happens, however, when the cyborg is no longer in control? What if its augmented perception allows it to feel it no longer needs to abide by real world societal expectations? It is clear more research is needed regarding affect and videogames and, by extension, the conflation of the real and the virtual. It seems the player's performance through an avatar can be seen as a form of performance of herself. The impetus behind this section is to remove the "safe" distance between the player and the avatar and make the player aware of her performance while being a Body without Organs. It is important to raise this awareness because when killed in videogames game sprites (non-player characters) and other online players respawn after a few seconds to continue playing. In the *game* of harassment, abuse, and threats, the damage is permanent.

[54] As the *New York Times* and others have suggested, it may also be true this violence is triggered by a challenge to the 'gamer' identity. It is likely, both causes are at play.

Conclusion

As the title of this dissertation attests, these five chapters explore the videogame player's performance through her avatar and how that performance affects her. The focus is on narrative-rich videogames and culminates in a discussion of how the embodied presence of the player in the game world—her affected subject position within a virtual environment—receives the ideologies embedded within the representative fictional space. The avatar is defined followed by the phenomenon of how the player's proprioception is altered by her projection into the virtual world through it. Proprioception, again, is the affective sense of where the boundaries of the body lie. While playing a videogame, the avatar's body and the player's body may overlap in that what happens to the avatar is received as happening to the player. The first chapter introduces my six volunteers who allowed me to videotape them while playing videogames and record their observations of themselves playing. Their sessions are featured in the case studies at the end of the second, third, and fourth chapters. From these case studies, I recorded my volunteers saying statements like "that deer stepped on me" or "he shot me" or "I'm on fire!" as evidence of this overlap of their corporeal body and the virtual body of the avatar.

The second chapter moves the discussion of proprioception and projection into the game worlds by discussing the extended self and the affective dimensions made possible by that phenomenological perspective. In addition, the theory of flow defined by Csikszentmihalyi, an updated definition of liveness based on Auslander's work, and a deeper discussion of presence within virtual spaces (telepresence) are discussed and culminate in a nuanced definition of immersion. It is my hope my contributions here concerning the changing understanding of liveness will join the recent work of Sarah Bay-Cheng, Sue-Ellen Case, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, among others, reflecting the continually changing

and maturing ways digital technology is being ubiquitously integrated into our daily activities—including playing videogames.

Chapter Three takes the concepts of liveness, telepresence, and immersion further by looking at digital technology as a means to not only project into virtual spaces but also to project outward an augmented view of actual physical spaces in RL. Here I make the case that this augmentation produces a cyborg entity out of the user of digital technology (the player) in that her view of reality and her interactions with it are altered (and enhanced) by technology. The devices that create this augmented reality may be external to the body but the change is internalized by the user and so is still a cybernetic relationship—creating an entity greater than the sum of its parts. I close the chapter with a discussion of algorithmic logic both within and outside virtual environments and the (often intentional) blurring of real life people and places with virtual characters and locations. This is an exciting area for further research especially as immersive technologies like the Occulus Rift come onto the market, AI is advancing at an astounding rate, and human/computer interfaces become increasingly more streamlined and unconscious to the user. Speaking of Kevin Warwick as the first cyberman, Žižek writes "*This* is the future: the combination of the human mind with the computer (rather than the replacement of the former by the latter)" (16).

The fourth chapter focuses on the affect of agency within videogames. The feeling the player receives that her choices within the game *matter* even though she knows, rationally, that every choice has been pre-authored and tested by the game developers. This is a form of suspension of disbelief specific to interactive media like videogames. Pursuing this line of thought I revisit Barthes' application of the *noeme* of photography and adapt it to videogames. As opposed to Barthes determining that the *noeme* of photography is its proof of the thing there,

I reveal that the *noeme* of videogames is a question prompting the player with '*what-do-I-do?*' With that question in mind, I take a fresh look at narrative in relation to videogames, address the issue of cut-scenes, and make the important distinction between user-driven narrative and user-created narrative. The chapter finishes with a discussion of meaningful choice and exposing the player to the possibility of experiencing a sublime moment while immersed in gameplay. The sublime, to me, is the highest artistic goal and also the most rewarding, if not complex, affective experience possible.

The final chapter brings the discussion to bear on ideology within videogames and the disarming use of affect and immersion to convey perspectives on gender, race, sexuality, class, religion, and political orientation. I cite the work of several theorists including Bogost, Althusser, Little, Dixon, Hutcheon, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guttari, and Žižek to inform my ideological reading of several videogames. I discuss how videogames use procedural rhetoric to make arguments through gameplay and I update Althusser's list of Ideological State Apparatuses to include videogames. From there I make the conceptual connection between Artaud's Body without Organs and the affective relationship between the player and the avatar. Again, the Body without Organs is an entity greater than the sum of its parts. This entity is the affective bridge between the couch and the game world. This is what allows the player to feel present in the virtual environment as her avatar. This is what opens up the possibility for the sublime moment. This entity is akin to the concept of the cyborg in chapter three. This entity could be a site of resistance to consumer culture as Little argues but it could also be a site of dangerous separation between reality and fiction as I look at hacking culture and the recent phenomenon of #GamerGate.

Videogames are a highly efficient and sophisticated Ideological State Apparatus. They are privately created like most entertainment media products but function as Althusser describes "above the law" and "by ideology" (97). As Hutcheon describes, representations convey ideology and videogames are the perfect Baudrillarian scenario of representations freed of original referents. The virtual worlds players are projected into are truly hyper-realities to be explored and consumed. Of course, the exploring is done through the avatar, a late capitalist rendering of Artaud's vision of a Body without Organs. The avatar has no need to eat, sleep, or even think. That is the role of the desiring machine on the other side of the screen holding the controller. As Deleuze and Guttari say, the "desiring machines make us organisms" (8). The avatar makes us a cyborg. If the desiring machine, seen as the corporeal player holding the controller on the couch didn't need to occasionally disconnect from the BwO, the avatar, as a virtual entity, would continue on without pause undaunted. All three are needed to maintain the circuit.

But continue on where? To do what? Pursue the task at hand, thwart the enemy, reach the goal. These are laid out in the form of procedural rhetoric as defined by Ian Bogost, forcing the player to understand the virtual world through specific rules and also a certain perspective due to what actions are available and which are absent. This, too, represents the virtual world, or the real world virtually represented, through an ideologically positioned lens.

As Little writes the "mind/body dichotomy is a red herring…the most dangerous binary is the pairing of self and commodity." We discovered in the previous chapter that the sublime in videogames comes at times of revelation regarding feats otherwise impossible for the player to achieve and that the revelation can be intoxicating. Those moments are done *as* the avatar and just as the thrill subsides the longing to hold onto that experience turns the player (once again) to

the avatar, this time readily available as a commodity or related consumable object, in an attempt to fill the void left behind. This is gamer culture. Not just the shared experience of time in virtual worlds, but the commodity culture surrounding it. My time in-world isn't real but this costume is, this prop is, this action figure has solidity in my hand.

I plan to conduct further research into the consumerism behind gaming culture and the liminal intersections between real world bodies and virtual ones driven by major corporations. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I will leave this ripe field open by observing that the individualistic and neoliberal ideologies found in most videogames is a reflection of the white, male, late capitalist ideologies of the giant corporations producing and distributing them.

I love playing videogames. I love how they make me feel. I love how they transport me to fantastic locations and allow me to perform incredible feats I would not otherwise have access to in non-virtual spaces. I believe the ability to immerse a player so deeply that she can be willingly lost in another world for sustained periods of time is a beautiful thing. This ability is afforded us through digital means unknown only decades ago. This ability is also a powerful means to convey ideas and sway opinions and should be treated with the same critical scrutiny as other entertainment media. I argue, because it addresses the player so immediately, perhaps it deserves more. I do not mean censorship but a healthy acknowledgement and conversation around the affective power of videogames and the possible effects they may have on players. This is why I feel phenomena like #GamerGate are so damaging on so many levels. The abuse hurled especially at feminist critics of videogames is unconscionable and it soils the integrity of the videogame industry as a whole.

Returning to the metaphor I introduced early in the dissertation, all the puzzle pieces have been picked-up, handled, and manipulated to place them in their appropriate position in the greater picture. Specifically, it is my hope that the ideas I have put forward here, filtered through my perspective as a theatre practitioner, will bring a fresh take on what videogames *do* to players and help explain their enjoyment as well as their place as an important storytelling medium in our late capitalist society.

I wish movies still had the ability to make me move my legs out of the way of the tie-fighters. However, the medium of videogames continues to affect me on that level of immediacy. I enjoy having my reality blurred with the world of the fiction. It is thrilling to have my proprioception extended into virtual environments. Now that my reality has been both fragmented and augmented through digital means I don't want to go back. I can't conceive of going back. I am a happy to be a cyborg.

Works Cited

343 Industries. *Halo 4.* Redmond: Microsoft Game Studios, 2012. Videogame.

4A Games. *Metro 2033.* Agoura Hills: THQ Inc., 2010. Videogame.

Aarseth, Espen. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergotic Literature.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997. Print.

---. "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation." *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. 45-55. Print.

Akfar Media. *Under Siege.* Damascus: Akfar Media, Ltd., 2005. Videogame.

Albor, Jorge. "Critical Eyes on Civilization." *EXP Experience Point: A Serious, but not Humorless, Conversation about Video Games*. 28 Dec. 2010. Web. 25 Jun. 2015.

Alexander, Leigh. "'Gamers' don't have to be your audience. 'Gamers' are over." *Gamasutra: The Art and Business of Making Games.* UBM Tech. 28 Aug. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.* Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 85-126. Print.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective.* Ed. Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 3-63. Print.

Aristotle. *The Poetics.* Trans. S. H. Butcher. N.P.: The Internet Classics Archive, 1994. Web. 14 Dec. 2010.

Ash, James. "Rethinking affective atmospheres: Technology, perturbation and space times of the non-human." *Geoforum* 49 (2013): 20-8. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 7 Jul. 2015.

Atari. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial.* Sunnyvale: Atari Inc., 1982. Videogame.

---. *Pong.* Sunnyvale: Atari Inc., 1972. Videogame.

Aktins, Barry. "What Are We Really Looking At? The Future-Orientation of Video Game Play." *Games and Culture*. 1.2 (2006): 127-140. Print.

"Augusto Boal & The Theater of The Oppressed." *Brecht Forum Archive.* n.d., Web. 12 Sep. 2014.

Auslander, Philip. "Live and Technologically Mediated Performance." *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies.* Ed. Tracy Davis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.

---. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, 2nd Edition.* New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography.* Trans. R. Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. Print.

Bassett, Caroline. *The Arc and the Machine.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. Print.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation.* Trans. by Sheila F. Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. Print.

Behemoth. *Alien Hominid.* San Diego: The Behemoth, 2004. Videogame.

Benford, Steve and Gabriella Giannachi. *Performing Mixed Reality.* Boston: MIT Press, 2011. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Trans. A. Blunden. *Marxist Literary Criticism.* UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television: 1998/2005. N.P., N.D. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.

Bethesda Game Studios. *Fallout 3*. Rockville: Bethesda Softworks, 2008. Videogame.

---. *Oblivion: The Elder Scrolls IV*. Rockville: Bethesda Softworks, 2006. Videogame.

---. *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Rockville: Bethesda Softworks, 2011. Videogame.

Bethesda Softworks. "*Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth - Game Information*." Bethesda Softworks Website. N.d. Web. 30 May 2007.

Bial, Henry, Ed. *The Performance Studies Reader.* New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

"BioShock Xbox 360." *Metacritic.com.* CBS Interactive Inc. N.d. Web. 6 Jul. 2015.

Bioware. *Dragon Age 2.* Red Wood City: Electronic Arts, 2011. Videogame.

---. *Dragon Age: Inquisition.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2014. Videogame.

---. *Dragon Age: Origins.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2009. Videogame.

---. *Mass Effect 2.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2009. Videogame.

---. *Mass Effect 3.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2012. Videogame.

---. *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2011. Videogame.

Birringer, Johannes. *Performance, Technology, and Science*. New York: PAJ Publications, 2008. Print.

Bissell, Tom. *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2010. Print.

Blau, Herbert. "Virtually Yours: Presence, Liveness, Lessness." *Critical Theory and Performance: Revised and Enlarged Edition.* Eds. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007. 532-46. Print.

Blow, Jonathan. *Braid.* Redmond: Microsoft Game Studios, 2008. Videogame.

Blizzard Enterainment. *Diablo III: Reaper of Souls.* Irvine: Blizzard Studios, 2014. Videogame.

---. *Star Craft.* Irvine: Blizzard Studios, 1998. Videogame.

---. *Star Craft II.* Irvine: Blizzard Studios, 2010. Videogame.

---. *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos.* Irvine: Blizzard Studios, 2002. Videogame.

---. *World of Warcraft.* Irvine: Blizzard Studios, 2004. Videogame.

Bogost, Ian. *How To Do Things with Videogames.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Print.

---. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames.* Boston: MIT Press, 2010. Print.

---. *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008. Print.

Bolter, Jay and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media.* Boston: MIT Press, 1999. Print.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010. Print.

Bungie Studios. *Halo 3*. Redmond: Microsoft Game Studios, 2007. Videogame.

Burton, Antoinette. *Burden of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Print.

Capcom. *Resident Evil 6.* Osaka: Capcom Co., 2012. Videogame.

Carlson, Marvin. "What is Performance?" *The Performance Studies Reader.* Ed. Henry Bial. New York: Routledge, 2004. 68-73. Print.

Carr, Diane, et al. *Computer Games: Text, Narrative and Play.* Cambridge: Polity, 2006. Print.

Carson, Don. "Environmental Storytelling: Creating Immersive 3D Worlds Using Lessons Learned from the Theme Park Industry." *Gamasutra: The Art & Business of Making Games*. 1 Mar. 2000. Web. 14 Dec. 2010.

Case, Sue-Ellen. *Performing Science and the Virtual.* New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Causey, Michael. "Postorganic Performance: The Appearance of Theater in Virtual Spaces." *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory.* Ed. M. Ryan. Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1999. 182-204. Print.

CCP Games. *Eve Online.* Reykjavik: Crowd Control Productions, 2003. Videogame.

Chapple, Freda and Chiel Kattenbelt. Ed. *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*. New York: Rodopi, 2006. Print.

Christiansen, Peter. "Designing Ideology." *Playthepast*. 05 Feb. Web. 25 Jun. 2015.

Clarke, Andy and Grethe Mitchell, ed. *Videogames and Art.* Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007. Print.

"CODE." *Canadian Open Data Experience: Largest Hackathon in Canadian History*. XMG Studio, Inc. 2015. Web. 2 Jul. 2015.

Cogburn, Jon and Mark Silcox. *Philosophy Through Video Games.* New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.

"Conan O'Brien Reviews 'Grand Theft Auto V.'" *Clueless Gamer*. Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, 19 Sep. 2013. Web. 2 Jul. 2015.

Coombes, Annie E. *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. Print.

Coonan, Clifford. "An Artist's Struggle for Justice in China." *Independent*. 27 Feb. 2010. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

"Covenant (Halo)." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.* Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 30 May. 2015. Web. 25 Jun. 2015.

Cryptic Studios. *Neverwinter.* Beijing: Perfect World, 2013. Videogame.

Crystal Dynamics. *Tomb Raider.* Shinjuku: Square Enix Holdings Co., 2013. Videogame.

Csikszenmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* New York: Harper Perrenial, 1990. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Trans. Robert Hurley, et. al. New York: Penguin Books, 1977. Print.

Dixon, Steve. *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007. Print.

DMA Design. *Grand Theft Auto: London, 1969.* New York: Take-Two Interactive Inc., 1999. Videogame.

Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991. Print.

Drinkbox Studios. *Guacamelee!* Toronto: Drinkbox Studios, 2013. Videogame.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick and Greig de Peuter. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.

Edrei, Shawn. "Press Start to Continue: The Effects of Pseudo-Authorial Control on Video Game Narratives." *CTRL-ALT-DEL: Essays on Control in Video Gaming.* Ed. Matthew Wysocki. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013. 96-107. Print.

Ekman, Igner and Petri Lankoski. "Hair-Raising Entertainment: Emotions, Sound, and Structure in *Silent Hill 2* and *Fatal Frame*." *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*. Ed. Bernard Perron. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009. 181-99. Print.

Epic Games. *Gears of War 2.* Redmond: Microsoft Games Studio, 2008. Videogame.

---. *Gears of War 3.* Redmond: Microsoft Games Studio, 2011. Videogame.

Eskelinen, Markku. *Cybertext Poetics: The Critical Landscape of New Media Literary Theory.* New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2012. Print.

"Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2014 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data." *Theesa.com.* Entertainment Software Association. N.d. Web. 13 Sep. 2014.

Everett, Anna & S. Craig Watkins. "The Power of Play: The Portrayals and Performance of Race in Video Games." *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning.* Ed. Katie Salen. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008. 141-66. Print.

Farmville. Zynga. N.d. Web. 12 Sept. 2010.

Firaxis Games. *Civilization V*. Novato: 2K Games, 2010. Videogame.

Fisher, Max. "Meet Lizard Squad, the group that may have helped North Korea hack Sony." *Vox.* Vox Media, Inc. 23 Dec. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.

Frieze, James and Rosemary Klich. *Playing a Punchdrunk Game: Immersive Theatre and Videogames.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print.

Fuchs Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. Print.

G4TV. "*Fable III* 'Voice Cast' Dev Diary Video." *G4TV Online.* 28 Sept. 2010. Web. 14 Dec. 2010.

Gener, Randy. "Electronic Campfires: The Builders Association signals through the flames with messages for a hyper-mediated world." *American Theatre.* Dec. (2008). Print.

Giannachi, Gabriella. *Virtual Theatres an Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Gibbs, Anna. "After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication." *The Affect Theory Reader.* Ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 186-205. Print.

Gillen, Kieron. "Exclusive: Ken Levine on the Making of BioShock." *Rock, Paper, Shotgun.* 20 Aug. 2007. N.p. Web. 6 Jul. 2015.

Grau, Oliver. *Virtual Art: from Illusion to Immersion.* Trans. Gloria Custance. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003. Print.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory Seigworth, Eds. *The Affect Theory Reader.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.

Griffiths, Daniel. "With The Xbox One, Microsoft May Win By Losing." *Forbes.com.* 22 May 2013. Web. 10 Sep. 2014.

Groothuis, Rebecca M. *The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism.* Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 1997. Print.

"Grrrl." *Oxforddictionaries.com.* Oxford University Press. 2015. Web. 26 Aug. 2015.

Halopedia. "Unified Earth Government." *Halowiki*. n.d. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Hamera, Judith, Ed. *Opening Acts: Performance in/as Communication and Cultural Studies.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006. Print.

Harraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* London: Free Association Books, 1991. Print.

Harrell, D. Fox. "GRIOT's Tales of Hainst and Seraphs: A Computational Narrative Generation System." *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media.* Ed. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. 177-82. Print.

Harrigan, Pat and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, Ed. *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007. Print.

Hothead Games. *Deathspank: Orphans of Justice.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, Inc., 2010. Videogame.

Houston, Andrew. *Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre.* Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2007. Print.

Hurley, Erin. *Theatre & Feeling.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Id Software. *Doom.* Santa Monica: Activision Game Studios, 1993. Videogame.

---. *Doom III.* Santa Monica: Activision Game Studios, 2005. Videogame.

IMDB. "WarGames" IMDB.com, Inc. n.d. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Ion Storm. *Deus Ex.* London: Eidos Interactive, 2000. Videogame.

Irrational Games. *Bioshock.* Novato: 2K Games, 2007. Videogame.

---. *BioShock Infinite.* Novato: 2K Games, 2013. Videogame.

Ivan Producoes. "HATSUNI MIKU A POP STAR VIRTUAL." Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, 9 Jan 2011. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.

Jackson, Shirley. *The Lottery and Other Stories.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1949. Print.

Jay, Gregory. "Knowledge, Power, Representation." *College English.* Vol. 56, No. 1. (Jan., 1994). 9-29. PDF. 28 Mar. 2015.

Jenkins, Henry. "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game.* Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004. 118-30. Print.

Jensen, Amy P. *Theatre in a Media Culture: Production, Performance and Perception Since 1970.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007. Print.

Johnson, Allan G. *The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997. Print.

Jones, Stephen. *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Studies.* New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Juul, Jesper. *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010. Print.

---. *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005. Print.

Kattenbelt, Chiel, et al. Ed. *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010. Print.

Kaye, Nick. *Postmodernism and Performance.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Print.

Kershaw, Baz. *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

King. *Candy Crush Saga.* London: King Digital Entertainment, 2012. Videogame.

Konami. *Silent Hill.* Tokyo: Konami, 1999. Videogame.

Kuling, Peter and Laura Levin. *Digital Performance. Spec. issue of Canadian Theatre Review* 159 (2014). Print.

Kurzweil, Ray. *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology.* New York: Penguin Books, 2005. Print.

Kutzer, M. Daphne. *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books.* London: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000. Print.

Laurel, Brenda. *Computers as Theatre.* Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1991. Print.

Lehman, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre.* Trans. Karen Jürs-Munby. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Levin, Laura. *Performing Ground.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Print.

Lichty, Patrick. "The Cybernetics of Performance and New Media Art." *Leonardo.* 33.5 (2000): 351-54. Print.

Linden Labs. *Second Life.* San Francisco: Linden Research, Inc., 2003. Videogame.

Lionhead Studios. *Fable II*. Redmond: Microsoft Game Studios, 2008. Videogame.

---. *Fable III.* Redmond: Microsoft Corporation, 2010. Videogame.

Lipkin, Nadav. "Controller Controls: Haptics, Ergon, Teloi and the Production of Affect in the Video Game Text." *CTRL-ALT-DEL: Essays on Control in Video Gaming.* Ed. Matthew Wysocki. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013. 34-45. Print.

Little, Gregory. "A Manifesto for Avatars." *Intertexts.* 3.2 (Fall 1999). N.p. Web. 14 Mar. 2015.

Looking Glass Studios. *System Shock.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 1994. Videogame.

Lundby, Knut, Ed. *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-representations in New Media.* New York: Peter Lang, 2008. Print.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime.* Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. Print.

---. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984. Print.

Machon, Josephine. *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Madigan, Jamie. "The Psychology of Immersion in Video Games." *PsychologyofGames.com.* N.p. 27 Jul. 2010. Web. 2 Jul. 2015.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001. Print.

Massumi, Brian. *Parable for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. Print.

Mateas, Michael. "A Preliminary Poetics for Interactive Drama and Games." *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. 19-33. Print.

Mateas, Michael and Andrew Stern. "Writing *Façade*: A Case Study in Procedural Authorship." *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media.* Ed. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. 183-207. Print.

Maxis Games. *The Sims.* Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2000. Videogame.

McGonigal, Jane. *Reality is Broken: Why Games Makes Us Better and How They Can Change the World.* New York: The Penguin Press, 2011. Print.

McLeod, Kimberley. "Finding the New Radical: Digital Media, Oppositionality, and Political Intervention in Contemporary Canadian Theatre." *Theatre Research in Canada*. 35.2 (2014): 203-20. Print.

---. "iTalk, YouListen, WePerform: Participatory Media on the Canadian Stage." *Canadian Theatre Review*. 159.Summer (2014): 13-8. Print.

Medelsson, Scott. *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014. Print.

Meier, Sid. *Civilization.* Alameda: Microprose, 1991. Videogame.

---. *Civilization Revolution.* Firaxis Games. Novato: 2K Games, 2008. Videogame.

---. *Civilization V*. Firaxis Games. Novato: 2K Games, 2010. Videogame.

Midgley, Clare. Ed. *Gender and Imperialism.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. Print.

Mission Business, The. *ZED.TO.* Intermedial Performance. Toronto. 2012.

Murray, Janet. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace.* New York: The Free Press, 1997. Print.

Murray, Soraya. "High Art/low Life The Art of Playing Grand Theft Auto." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art.* 27.2 (2005): 91-8. Print.

Nayar, Pramod K. Ed. *The New Media and Cybercultures Anthology.* Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Print.

Newman, James. *Playing with Videogames.* New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Nintendo EAD Tokyo. *Super Mario 3D World.* Tokyo: Nintendo, 2013. Videogame.

North, Anna. "Why a Video Game Critic Was Forced to Flee Her Home" *The New York Times: The Opinion Pages*. The New York Times Company. 29 Aug. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Northover, Wallace E. *Affect and Action: Their Ontogenetic Relation.* Toronto: APF Press, 2003. Print.

Osborne, Patrick. "Evaluating the Presence of Social Strain in Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto IV." *Studies in Popular Culture.* 34.1 (2011): 109-32. Print.

Owen, David. "The Illusion of Agency and the Affect of Control in Videogames." *CTRL-ALT-PLAY: Essays on Control in Video Gaming.* Ed. Matthew Wysocki. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013. 72-82. Print.

Parker-Starbuck, Jennifer. *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Patton, Penny. "A Matter of Perspective – The Importance of Camera Placement in Virtual Environments." *Second Life Viewer*. 11 Aug. 2011. Web. 4 Dec. 2015.

Peirson-Smith, Anne. "Fashioning the Fantastical Self: An Examination of the Cosplay Dress-up Phenomenon in Southest Asia." *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. 17.1 (2013): 77-111. Print.

Perron, Bernard and Mark J. Wolf. Ed. *Video Game Theory Reader Two.* New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance.* New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Playdead. *Limbo.* Copenhagen: Playdead Game Studio, 2010. Videogame.

Polasek, Patrick. "A Critical Race Review of Grand Theft Auto V." *Humanity & Society*. 38.2 (May 2014): 216-18. Print.

Pop Cap Games. *Bejeweled.* Seattle: Pop Cap Games, 2001. Videogame.

---. *Plants vs. Zombies.* Seattle: Pop Cap Games, 2009. Videogame.

Quantic Dream. *Beyond: Two Souls.* Tokyo: Sony Computer Entertainment, 2013. Videogame.

Rare. *GoldenEye 007.* Kyoto: Nintendo Co., 1997. Videogame.

Remedy Entertainment. *Alan Wake*. Redmond: Microsoft Game Studios, 2010. Videogame.

Reinelt, Janelle and Joseph Roach, Ed. *Critical Theory and Performance: Revised and Enlarged Edition.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007. Print.

Ricci, Michelle. *Murdock Mysteries: The Infernal Device*. Smokebomb Entertainment and Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 2015. Webseries. 2 Jul. 2015.

Ridout, Nicholas. *Theatre & Ethics.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Ringo, Allegra. "Meet the Female Gamer Mascot Born of Anti-Feminist Internet Drama." *Vice.* Vice Media LLC. 28 Aug. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Roberts, Andrew. "'Guardians of Peace' Is Now Trolling FBI Over Their Investigations Into The Sony Hacks." *UPROXX: Web Culture*. N.p. 21 Dec. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Rockstar North. *Grand Theft Auto IV.* Edinburgh: Rockstar Games, 2009. Videogame.

---. *Grand Theft Auto V.* New York: Rockstar Games, 2013. Videogame.

Rockstar San Diego. *Red Dead Redemption*. New York: Rockstar Games, 2010. Videogame.

Russell, Steve, et al. *Space War.* Boston: unpublished, 1962. Videogame.

Saarkesian, Anita. *FeministFrequency.com.* 22 Jun. 2015. Website. 7 Jul. 2015.

Salter, Chris and Peter Sellars. *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010. Print.

Salter, Mark. "The Geographical Imaginations of Video Games: Diplomacy, Civilization, America's Army and Grand Theft Auto IV." *Geopolitics.* 16.2 (2011): 359-88. Print.

SCE Santa Monica Studio. *God of War*. Tokyo: Sony Computer Entertainment, 2005. Videogame.

Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater and Anthropology.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985. Print.

---. "Response by Richard Schecher." *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game.* Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. 192-96. Print.

Schmidt, Florian. "Use Your Illusion: Immersion in Parallel Worlds." *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism: the Next Level.* Ed. Friedrick Von Borries, et al. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag AG, 2007. Print.

Scholder, Amy and Eric Zimmerman. Ed. *Re:play: Game Design + Game Culture.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2003. Print.

Scoobypedia. "The Secret of Shark Island." *Scoobydoo.wikia.com.* N.D. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.

"Seeing is Believing: How Camera Placement Can Make or Break Video Games." *Analytical Otaku*. 13 Dec. 2012. Web. 4 Dec. 2015.

Sidhu, Sikhbir and Brian Rothstein. *Peggle.* Seattle: Pop Cap Games, 2007. Videogame.

Shaw, Adrienne. "The Lost Queer Potential of Fable." *Culture Digitally.* 16 Oct. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Stivers, Richard. *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.

Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture.* Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

Tavinor, Grant. *The Art of Videogames.* West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, Ltd., 2009. Print.

Taylor, Kate. "Canada's Video Game is a Going Concern." *The Toronto Star.* 24 Sept. 2010. Web. 26 Sept. 2010.

Thompson, James. *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Thornham, Helen. *Ethnographies of the Videogame: Gender, Narrative and Praxis.* London: City University, 2011. Print.

"Tomb Raider." *Media Revision: MS4 Revision.* N.d. Web. 2 July. 2015.

Treyarch. *Call of Duty: World at War.* Santa Monica: Activision, 2008. Videogame.

Turkay, Selen and Charles Kinzer. "The Effects of Avatar-Based Customization on Player Identification. *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations.* 6.1 (2014): 1-25. Print.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together.* New York: Basic Books, 2011. Print.

Ubisoft Montreal. *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag.* Montreal: Ubisoft, 2013. Videogame.

---. *Far Cry 3.* Montreal: Ubisoft, 2012. Videogame.

---. *Far Cry 4.* Montreal: Ubisoft, 2014. Videogame.

---. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time.* Montreal: Ubisoft, 2003. Videogame.

---. *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory.* Montreal: Ubisoft, 2005. Videogame.

---. *Watch Dogs.* Montreal: Ubisoft, 2014. Videogame.

United States Army. *America's Army 3*. Huntsville: Army Game Studio, 2009. Videogame.

Urbanski, Heather. Ed. *Writing and the Digital Generation: Essays on New Media Rhetoric.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010. Print.

Vara, C. Fernandez. *The tribulations of adventure games: Integrating story into simulation through performance.* Diss. Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009. Dissertations & Theses: Full Text, ProQuest. Web. 25 Oct. 2010.

"Video Game Industry Statistics." ESRB: Entertainment Software Rating Board. 2014. Web. 2 Jul. 2015.

Visceral Games. *Dante's Inferno.* Redwood: Electronic Arts, 2010. Videogame.

Virtual Stage, The. *The Zombie Syndrome: On Death Island.* Intermedial Performance. Vancouver. 2013.

Von Borries, Friedrick, Steffen P. Walz, Matthias Bottger. Ed. *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism: the Next Level.* Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag AG, 2007. Print.

Waggoner, Zach. *My Avatar, My Self: Identity in Video Role-Playing Games.* Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2009. Print.

Wardript-Fruin, Noah and Pat Harrigan, Ed. *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004. Print.

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah and Nick Montfort. Ed. *New Media Reader.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003. Print.

"WarGames." *IMDB: Internet Movie Database.* IMDB.com. N.d. Web. 7 Jul. 2015.

"Watching Dance: Kinesthetic Empathy." *The Watching Dance Project*. University of Manchester. N.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

"What Defines the Player-Character?" *Kotaku.* N.p., 6 Sept. 2010. Web. 12 Sept. 2010.

Wickstrom, Maurya. *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions.* New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Wingfield, Nick. "Feminist Critics of Video Games Facing Threats in 'GamerGate' Campaign." *New York Times: Technology.* New York Times Company. 15 Oct. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

Wolf, Mark J. and Bernard Perron. Ed. *Video Game Theory Reader.* New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Wolf, Naomi. *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How To Use It.* Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1994. Print.

Wright, Will. “Response by Will Wright.” *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game.* Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. 12-4. Print.

Wu, Brianna. “IT HAPPENED TO ME: I've Been Forced Out Of My Home And Am Living In Constant Fear Because Of Relentless Death Threats From Gamergate.” *xojane.* 16 Oct. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

#YESALLWOMEN. N.d. JPEG. 28 Mar. 2015.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Zuckerberg, Mark, et al. 2004. *Facebook.* Palo Alto: Facebook, Inc., 2004. Software.