Critical Issues

Imaginative Research in a Changing World

Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment

Edited by

Daniel Riha

Inter-Disciplinary Press

Publishing Creative Research

Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment

Critical Issues

A *Critical Issues* research and publications project.
http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/critical-issues/

The Cyber Hub
'Videogames Cultures'

2010

Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment

Edited by

Daniel Riha

Inter-Disciplinary Press

Oxford, United Kingdom

http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/publishing/id-press/

The *Inter-Disciplinary Press* is part of *Inter-Disciplinary.Net* – a global network for research and publishing. The *Inter-Disciplinary Press* aims to promote and encourage the kind of work which is collaborative, innovative, imaginative, and which provides an exemplar for inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary publishing.

Inter-Disciplinary Press, Priory House, 149B Wroslyn Road, Freeland, Oxfordshire. OX29 8HR, United Kingdom.
+44 (0)1993 882087

ISBN: 978-1-84888-040-5
First published in the United Kingdom in eBook format in 2010. First Edition.

Table of Contents

Part IV: Gender and the Changing Role of the Player

Introduction

Daniel Riha

The papers in this volume reflect the debates that progressed during the *1st Global Conference on Videogames Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment*, held as a part of Cyber Hub activity at Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom in July 2009. Accordingly, the edited collection of papers provides a snapshot of the event.

The research on videogames attracts an increasing number of scholars from a variety of academic disciplines and areas of expertise. The conference itself reflected this fact and provided further evidence that the field of videogame studies is truly interdisciplinary in nature.

Throughout the conference, four main topics were developed as prevailing themes in the papers and subsequent discussions. The consideration of different gaming concepts remains a central interest of videogame studies, as new gaming models appear constantly, including recently successful MMOGs, augmented reality gaming, alternate reality gaming or haptic games.

The vaguely defined area of serious games presents another dominant research trend. Although serious games don't occupy a major part of the videogame market, they have gained increased attention from academics. The current generation of students represents an increasing challenge to traditional literacy education, as this generation of digital natives might also be characterised as a generation of visual thinkers. How will educators promote the continued adoption of educational content in an age of visual media, when the text as a traditional medium is becoming more and more unpopular? The reality is that the majority of young people are playing videogames on a daily basis. Accordingly, going forward, serious games, ranging from simple educational Flash-based online games to highly advanced 3-D social impact simulations, might serve as more than occasional educational support in the form of training simulations, becoming an effective and more attractive tool for delivering general literacies via an alternative distribution channel.

In the frames of videogames and virtual worlds, many types of cultural activities flourish. The discussions at the 2009 conference focused on the controversial field of adult videogame cultures, pornography, horror and propaganda games. Obviously, not all gaming content is controversial, but even unintended training in virtual murder in FPS and dissocial behaviours in MMOGs trigger discussions concerning the ethical agenda of videogames.

Videogames have long been perceived as a male-dominated field of entertainment. In the last decade, however, many videogame genres and titles have increasingly attracted female players, and currently the number of female players is comparable to their male counterparts. Videogames such as SIMS have become so popular among young girls that females now constitute the majority of SIMS

players. It is generally assumed that the increasing variability and intermix of videogame genres will open the field to attract even more female players in the future.

In an effort to reflect the primary topics of the conference discussed above, the 11 chapters of the book have been organised into 4 parts:

Part I: Concepts of Gaming
Part II: Serious Games and Social Impact Simulations
Part III: Videogame Cultures
Part IV: Gender and the Changing Role of the Player

The first part presents three papers focused on the concepts of gaming:

Gaspar Pujol Nicolau, in his essay 'Enriching Online Board Games: An Anthropological Perspective', discusses the advantages and failures of online board games. While these games offer a chance to find a perfect opponent, the player's experience is being diminished, often resulting in losing control over the game and leaving the player feeling that his or her intervention doesn't have a real impact on the gameplay.

Matthew Beale,'No 'I' in Team: The Era of Cooperative Gaming', points to the fact that massive multi-player online games are becoming the prevailing form in current and future gaming. He explores different modes of cooperation in games and how these modes have an impact on the gameplay, including the subversive use of forced cooperation scenarios.

Adam W. Ruch, 'World of Warcraft: A Game of Motion', examines the parameters of one of world's most popular multiplayer videogames – WoW. He argues that WoW offers a new paradigm of gaming, a socio-competitive type of videogame, wherein a player's game quickly comes to an end if he or she rejects socialising activities. The author continues by identifying and discussing three possible categories for future gaming, including computerized puzzles and two representational categories focused on the social basis of videogames. He concludes with the proposition that videogames represent a 'heterogeneous mass' of cases, which need to be studied on their own terms.

The book's second part considers several important issues in the field of serious games:

Dana R. Herrera and András Margitay-Becht, 'Do it Yourself Learning: Case Studies of Gaming as Education in Virtual Worlds', present a case for how increasingly popular massive multi-user online games and virtual worlds are not only replicating real life cultural activities, but might also be studied from point of view of economics.

Daniel Riha, 'The Role of the Quest in Serious Gaming', investigates the specifics of quest implementation in serious interactive 3-D settings, with special focus on the interactive documentary. The activity of questing within computer

games is considered, using as an example its implementation within several serious interactive 3-D productions.

Thomas Riegler, 'On the Virtual Frontlines: Computer Games and the 'War on Terror'', examines the issue of the use of videogames for the specific purpose of propaganda, and argues that these cultural products are too often used to support the view that violence is the best option for resolving conflicts. In support of this position, the author provides as evidence cases from the videogames Kuma War, War on Terror, Counter-Strike, Ghost Recon, and Rainbow Six, where the enemy is commonly designed according to western perspectives and stereotypes.

The third part includes three papers that analyse controversial issues in videogames and gameplay:

Michelle Martinez and Tyler Manolovitz, 'Pornography of Gaming', consider the current state and future of the most controversial contents in recent videogames – sexual violence and rape – as designed in the frames of the Japanese *hentai* genre. The authors consider also the various responses such videogames have received from the public.

Ewan Kirkland, 'Maternal Engulfment in Horror Videogames', applies Freudian psychoanalysis to explore horror videogames. He explores the field of space, narrative and the avatars in the videogames *Clock Tower 3*, *Silent Hill 3*, *The Suffering*, *Haunting Ground* and *Silent Hill*.

Monica Evans, 'Murder, Ransom, Theft, and Grief: Understanding Digital Ethics in Games', compares the ethics of single-player and multi-player videogames. She argues that while in single-player videogames ethical decisions are heavily influenced by videogame design structure, in multi-player videogames players come to ethical dilemmas through social interaction.

The two case studies in part four examine gender issues as related to the videogames Rock Band and FIFA09:

Kristen B. Miller, 'Girl Gamers Rock!: The Role of the Female in Rock Band's World of Virtual Musicians', presents a case study of the videogame Rock Band, where the initial assumption that this game might attract more female players was not positively confirmed. The study revealed that certain differences exist between male and female players of Rock Band.

Riikka Turtiainen, 'Man to Man: Sports (Games) and Female Characters', in her chapter discusses gender issues related to the almost realistic representation of gender in popular football videogames. Although almost half of today's players are females, in the case of AAA sport videogames players can configure all various details of the body, but can't play as a female football player avatar. This issue has been generalized as stereotypical gender role to be transmitted from the conventions of conventional media like television to videogame worlds.

Part I:

Concepts of Gaming

Enriching Online Board Games: An Anthropological Perspective

Gaspar Pujol Nicolau

Abstract
In the later years, we have attended to the rebirth of board games, with thousands being designed and published every year. However, this rebirth comes in a moment with an increasingly isolated population, which leads to a seemingly dichotomial dead end. In other words, even though you can play alone with puzzles or solitaires, there is no better challenge than finding a worthy opponent for playing. Once we find this worthy opponent, we want to keep him close, but often this opponent is too far away to play. Some solutions (as playing by mail) just try to fix this problem, but become too slow to really enjoy the game. It is no surprise that, as soon as Internet was available to the main public, board games jumped into the online scene. Therefore, it would seem that the idea of online board games is a perfect solution for this problem - the opportunity to play with people from around the world anywhere, anytime. However, the possibilities of online board gaming have many limitations that impoverish the playing experience. Knowing that nothing would ever beat actually playing face to face, we want to analyse which concrete elements would improve the playing experience. For doing so, first we would remember the origins of online board gaming platforms. Following this, we would analyse the most prominent current gaming platforms for playing board games online, showing their lacks according to anthropological needs. At the same time, we would propose a series of improvements that would help to humanly enrich the gaming experience. So in short, this communication reflects the needs of a growing number of players, mainly focusing in their anthropological needs translated into the software (and hardware) improvements that they would require to enrich their gaming experience.

Key Words: Board games, videogames, anthropology, artificial intelligence.

*****

Even though you can play alone with puzzles or solitaires, there is no better challenge than finding a worthy opponent for playing, but often this opponent is too far away to play. Some solutions just try to fix this problem, but become too slow to really enjoy the game. Therefore, it would seem that the idea of online board games is a perfect solution for this problem: the opportunity to play with people from around the world anywhere, anytime. However, the possibilities of online board gaming have many limitations that impoverish the playing experience. Knowing that nothing would ever beat actually playing face to face, we want to analyse which concrete elements would improve the playing experience.

At the same time, we would propose a series of improvements that would help to humanly enrich the gaming experience.

We humans prefer to play together rather than alone and share the joy of the game. Even though there are many solitaire games, the number of games requiring opponents is much greater because of the challenge and the fun the opponent presents. When we play alone (with solitaires or single-player computer games) we need to substitute the challenge and the fun given by the opponent with something else, a hidden mechanism that acts as the 'soul of the hidden adversary'. In other words, even though you can play alone with puzzles or solitaires, there is no better challenge than finding a worthy opponent for playing. In fact, that's the essence of gaming - players enjoy games because they provide a challenge. Games can entertain players over time, differently each time they play, while engaging their minds in an entirely different way than a book, movie, or other form of art. They force players to think actively, to try out different solutions to problems, to understand a given problem or game mechanism.

The realness of the other players makes the experience of multi-player games more meaningful than any single-player game will ever do. Moreover, the presence of real players as opponents causes a tremendous change in the players' perceived importance of playing the game. Instead of just winning or losing the game in private, the social component of multi-player games, makes each win and loss a public affair and thus more significant. The potential for bragging rights increases tremendously since players have someone with whom they care to brag, and also increases the potential for shame after a resounding defeat. Regardless of whether they win or lose, the potential for glory and shame can make playing a multi-player game a much more emotional experience than engaging in a single-player experience.

Trained human opponents are much better than any AI we could design. They are there to outwit you and to improvise - to react in unexpected ways. They learn from both your and their actions and become better players as you play with them. This makes the game significantly more interactive since dealing with other humans is always a much more dynamic experience than interacting with a computer alone. In general, multi-player games, through the inclusion of multiple intelligent human players, contain a combination of emergence, novelty, and unpredictability that single-player games will never achieve regardless of how much artificial intelligence improves. The processing power of computers can enrich the development of a game in many ways. They can be used as lightning-fast graphic movers, random generators, handicap levellers, and rule managers at complexity levels that we can't yet understand. Despite all the technology, we still enjoy human interaction overall. We feel the need to play with an equal; online or real, nothing compares to a human opponent.

Once we find this worthy opponent, we want to play with him as often as possible. We want to keep him close. This same idea can be applied to every form

of game, electronic or board. However, in the case of board games the problem is that often this opponent is too far away to play. Some solutions (as playing by mail) just try to fix this problem, but become too slow or too fragmented to really enjoy the game. It is no surprise that, as soon as the Internet was available to the main public, board games jumped into the online scene. Therefore, it would seem that the idea of online board games is a perfect solution for the problem of distance - the opportunity to play with people from around the world anywhere, anytime.

However, at a first glance we see that playing online is very different from playing face-to-face. Although computers can improve part of the gaming experience through automatic resolution of tiring chores or complex calculi, online board gaming has many limitations that impoverish the playing experience at other (more anthropological) levels. Knowing that nothing would ever beat actually playing face-to-face, we want to analyse which concrete elements could be designed to improve the playing experience of online board games at human level. In doing so, we will find some key design elements that maybe can be extrapolated to a wider range of online games.

It's important to note that we are not delving into how to improve AI, or anything to do with core mechanics or with narrative. We are talking about how to design computer board games in order to maximize their 'human' factor. In taking into account and improving these anthropological design elements we would surely improve the feel and play of the game, making it far more enjoyable.

For doing so, first we would remember the origins of online gaming. Following this, we would analyse the most significant actual gaming platforms for playing board games online, showing their lacks according to anthropological needs. At the same time, we would propose a series of improvements that would help to humanly enrich the gaming experience.

All the improvements that we are proposing in the paragraphs below are in the field of interactivity; they belong to how the computer relates with the player. In fact, we must remember that in the case of online board games the interaction is between two or more humans through a computer. So what we are proposing is to minimize the impact of the computer as a perceived impediment to interaction, towards a more pleasant human-machine-human relationship. We want to shift the player's frame of mind from perceiving the computer as a nuisance to seeing it as a useful and desirable channel of communication and entertainment.

The origin of online board game playing has to be traced back to that of the email. Playing board games (mostly chess) via postal mail was a relatively common practice before the appearance of the Internet. As soon as emails were of common usage, there were people playing in the same way they did through paper mail. The shift from paper to electronic mail was a natural decision in this case. But, why was it so easy to shift from one to the other? What are the improvements that 'play-by-email' offer?

Human communication is almost always instantaneous. In our daily lives, we interact and communicate with hundreds of people. Most of the time, this interaction is unnoticed, instinctive. We only remember it when it fails, and we end up doing silly things like crashing head on with another person in the street. Verbal communication is a clear example; it has its pace, its rhythm. If this rhythm is interrupted or broken, we lose information. If we have to wait someone to reply we get easily upset. In that fraction of time, questions arise inside our mind. Has she heard me? Has he understood me? Has the communication channel been broken somehow?

Translating this idea to games in general, it is easy to see how they can be seen as a channel of communication between players. They also have a pace, a rhythm that has to be followed with the minimum number of interruptions. If not, the same kinds of questions arise. What have been the results of my play? Do I finally win or not? Did this movement surprise her? The fastest we can have the answer, the better. Of course, if the answer comes in a language that we can directly interpret without too much effort, even better! This has been the evolution of long-range communication channels. We have shifted from non-verbal communication, through written postcards to Morse, telephone, mobile telephone and videoconference. All these improvements aim to the same idea - making long range communication systems converge to the fluidness and speed of direct face to face communication.

This is how play by e-mail (local and web) utilities are a first step to speed up long distance gaming. They evolved from simple text written movements (Ex. in the case of Chess, Qxb5) taken from their paper counterparts to more complex languages that have to be created and interpreted by specialised software. These programs such as Cyberboard, Aide de Camp, or websites such as *spielbyweb.com*, *mabiweb.com*, *youplay.it*, *boiteajeux.net* allow the player to locally plan his moves though a graphical interface. Then, they create a summary of the player's movements and send it to the other players' email. Then, when all the emails are fed to the software, it graphically generates in each computer the movements of the rest of the players. This is a first step to improve communication, but obviously it is still too slow and impersonal compared to playing face to face. So, which should the next improvement be?

In order to understand the next level of improvement we have to go back to the origins of online game-playing. The appearance of MUDs (Multi User Dungeons) was a revolution in the 80s. Even though not properly board games, as Role Playing Games they share lots of interesting elements to analyze. MUDs are text-based games in which several human characters interact in real time among them and with a pre-programmed world. They are the ancestors of MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) such as *World of Warcraft* or *Second Life*. Of course, MUDs were a revolution because they were a much better

experience than a single player dungeon crawling game. But why were they more successful than single player games?

The difference was (and still is) of course, human factor. The possibilities that human interaction offers still can't be completely emulated by any piece of software. A human player is better than an AI because of his unpredictability, meaningful interaction, learning capabilities, but overall to his ability to communicate. Here we see how real time human interaction is one of the key elements for the success of these games. We can share the gaming experience in real time with our fellow players, and see them react to our decisions.

At a board gaming level, this same need made online applications evolve from PBEM to real time. This change allowed a faster data communication but, at the same time, helped instant human communication through chats. Real time online board games are available in websites such as *brettspielwelt.de*, *gametableonline.com* or *games.asobrain.com*. There are also programs such as *VASSAL* which allow a greater degree of flexibility and communication. Anyway, this technology only allows a certain degree of improvement. On the one hand, written chats are slow and prone to misunderstandings compared to oral communication. Even though with the introduction of smileys certain language nuances can be mended, written communication is still incomplete. In fact, the lack of audio support in these games is usually solved by other programs such as *Skype*, *Messenger* or *Roger Wilco*.

The interface is clearly more realistic that pure text but it is still incomplete. In a completely flat interface such as a computer screen or TV it is much easier to present a top-to-bottom point of view than to simulate a believable 3D environment. As board games are mostly flat and the only vertical accidents are the playing pieces, it is clearly a clever design solution to present it in this way. But anyway, when we see a completely flat, top-to-bottom game we have to make the effort to believe that the pieces 'will not fall' from the screen. Which is the lack in this case?

In an absorbing activity such as playing, there is a shared will to maintain the suspension of disbelief. This is the mental state in which you decide to believe that fiction is reality, for the duration of the activity (movie, book, or video game). This is achieved through a consistent world that immerses the player, with no unexpected surprises. Movies have to be coherent, immersive; books must not end abruptly, nor have missing pages; a game has to minimize loading times, etc.

This means that the environment does not have to be truly 'realistic' but coherent. Cartoons, as an example, are not realistic at all, but follow certain internal coherence that must not be broken for them to have sense. If we want a meaningful playing experience of online board gaming, we have to give the players the best playing environment. We have to think that in this kind of games the suspension of disbelief reaches another level. It isn't just believing that a board game has become 'reality' but believing that a computer game is a board game that

has become ‘reality’. This ‘magic circle’ is broken by everything that destroys the in-game ‘harmony’ or that remembers the player that he is not actually playing face to face. So realism and coherence must complement one another in designing player interfaces.

One of the more evident faults in realism is the lack of direct interaction with the pieces and the board. As the board and pieces are virtual, they cannot be fully experienced. Actually ‘handling the cool bits’, touching, smelling, hearing them is impossible, so this need can’t be directly fulfilled by online playing. Anyway, some approaches can be taken to mend this. Playing bits can be programmed to act as they are supposed to, realistically. Pieces can sound as if they were made of wood or plastic, we can hear cards being shuffled and dealt or dice being thrown. In real life we can put a piece anywhere, even between squares. Why not design it this way? We know that computers can simulate randomness, but let the player actually throw the dice and believe he can affect randomness.

The next generation of online board gaming is based on this idea: allow a great degree of interaction among players through an almost invisible interface, giving at the same time a realistic feel of the board. This is the case of applications such as *Zuntzu*, or the board games programmed for *Xbox Live*. The first is a completely rules-agnostic environment in which players can manage the gaming elements freely. It has embedded audio/video capabilities, allowing the players to see and hear other players’ actions. Pieces and cards stack, and can be turned around and over easily. Every playing element can be placed anywhere on the board, without restriction. The subjective view of the board, although still flat, can be panned or zoomed in and out.

In the case of *Xbox Live* games, they are hardcoded implementations of commercial board games (*Settlers of Catan, Caylus, Ticket to Ride*). In these games, the board is a 3D simulation of the real board, even adding sometimes additional graphical ‘fluff’ to enrich the experience. They also incorporate audio/video capabilities allowing a much better interaction than the previous one. In some of the games, players have the same or even more importance that the board itself.

Anyway, in both cases it seems that most of, but not all of the above mentioned anthropological needs are taken into account. Therefore, following all the expounded ideas we want to propose a series of improvements which could be the basis of new online board gaming engines. In doing so, we surely will make future online board game applications more humanly appealing. As we announced before, the improvements that we propose are not part of core mechanics nor of the narrative part of the game. They are always related in how the players interact among them and with the game through the computer.

On the one hand, we have seen that it is an imperative to improve the channels of communication between players by any means possible. This is one of the key elements of enjoying an online board game, and without it the player will feel as

indifferent when playing against a human opponent as with a hardcoded AI. The idea is to let the players *communicate*. This communication has to go far beyond the moves of play. Socialization is a key feature of human interaction and board games. This can be achieved through text, but it is much better to let the players *hear* other players. If possible, let the players *see* other players, or at least they chosen avatars. Multiplayer games are interactive at many levels. Seeing other players' faces and bodies helps immersion and improves gameplay at a psychological level, even when these 'faces' are virtual.

We have also seen that it is very important to improve the look & feel of the game, always trying to get 'out of the way' of the players. The playing interface has to be designed to be minimalist, and never a nuisance for the players. The program must be seen as a channel of communication, as a tool, but never as a limitation to players' imagination. In order to keep the 'magic circle' the game must balance realism, 'fluff' and internal coherence. Even though extra sound and special effects can help to achieve a better playing experience they could also distract the players and break the 'magic circle'. The idea is to make the board game believable, not photorealistic.

It is also important to let the players feel that they are in control. Everything in an online board game could be calculated without the players' intervention. To minimize the impact of the software do to automate too much. If it isn't a truly boring mechanical chore let the players do it. Randomness must be generated by player's actions. They have to experiment and believe their influence so a good idea is not to generate throws for them. Let them see that their choices are meaningful, that have a real effect on game. Let them also apply their own rules: mark, but don't disallow cheating. This will allow variants and home rules, greatly improving the sense of being in control.

Finally, as playing with other people is the ultimate goal of online board games, a way of gathering and meeting new players has to be planned. Even though is preferable to play with and brag to known people, a players' hub will let you play with and against your friends or to find new opponents to challenge you. Maybe in this way you would find a proper opponent that suits you and gives you the perfect challenge.

Bibliography

Board Game Geek, *List of On-line Games*. Retrieved 8th July 2009, http://www.boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/On-line_Games.

de Andrés, T., *Homo Cybersapiens*. Eunsa, Navarra, 2002.

Crawford, C., *On Game Design*. New Riders, Berkeley, 2003.

—, *The Art of Computer Game Design*. Retrieved 8th July 2009, http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/peabody/game-book/Coverpage.html.

Díaz, J. M., 'Internet y los peligros del olvido del cuerpo', in *Filosofía y realidad virtual*. Moreno, C., Lorenzo R. & de Mingo, A. (eds), Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, Zaragoza, 2007.

Dreyfus, H., *What Computers (still) Can't Do*. MIT, Massachusetts, 1999.

—, *On the Internet*. Routledge, London, 2001.

Rollings, A. & Adams, E., *On Game Design*. New Riders, Berkeley, 2003.

Rouse, R., *Game Design: Theory & Practice*. Wordware Publishing, Plano, 2005.

Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E., *Rules of Play*. MIT, Massachusetts, 2004.

Villalón, J.J., 'Realidad y posibilidades de la creación virtual'. *Filosofía y realidad virtual*. Moreno, C., Lorenzo, R. & de Mingo, A. (eds), Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, Zaragoza, 2007.

Gaspar Pujol Nicolau, Associate Professor, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain.

No 'I' in Team: The Era of Cooperative Gaming

Matthew Beale

Abstract
This paper addresses the ways in which cooperative gaming is becoming a more prevalent and dynamic part of gaming in today's console generation. It traces the ways in which cooperative modes of play have moved from being simply additional game modes that were added to an already existing single player game to being the core gameplay element in many modern games, one where refusing to work along with teammates will inevitably result in loss. This paper explores how cooperative elements in games have evolved over the years and what it meant to be cooperative in games of the past and what it means to be now. I also explore the various forms of cooperation in specific genres of games including resource sharing in real-time strategy games and coordinated attacks and rescues in action-adventure games. The paper discusses how these types of cooperation reconfigure aspects of the gameplay and insist that the players no longer think of themselves as the sole motivation for the digital world-happenings around them. Additionally, the paper discusses how cooperative gameplay not only adds an engaging mechanic to gameplay, but can function as a strong device for narrative as well. I postulate that when players feel responsible for the well-being and survival of their teammates, cooperative gameplay can act as a device for character empathy and narrative structure. Conversely, I explore the ways the players subvert forced cooperation (such as 'griefing') and what they say about technology, design, and player behavior. Lastly, I talk about the pitfalls of cooperative gameplay and what games stand to lose if it is overused. The conclusion of the paper speculates on the future potential and possibilities for cooperative modes of gaming and how game designers might use it further enhance the gaming experience for the players.

Key Words: Cooperative gaming, cooperative gameplay, *Left 4 Dead*, griefing, griefer, empathy, narrative, teamwork.

*****

1. 'Can I Play, Too?'

The term 'cooperative gameplay' will be used frequently throughout this paper. Therefore, it is important that a working definition be established for the phrase. For the most part, with the notable exception of real-time strategy (RTS) games and the practice of resource sharing, the term 'cooperative gameplay' will refer to the engagement of two or more players in a task that necessitates working together to overcome an AI-controlled opponent - an algorithm of adversity, if you will - in order to achieve a set, shared goal (RTS games are a unique case for our discussion because they feature players - while cooperating to win against other human

players - also competing against the system of resource collecting and sharing that the game permits) . While there is a cooperative element that goes along with certain online versus modes of play, such as team deathmatch or capture the flag, where the player works with other human companions to defeat an opposing team comprised of other human players, this paper is concerned with the negotiation and conquer of a defined AI behavioral system by a group of human players rather than the defeat of a rival human team. The important distinction between these two forms of gameplay is that an AI-dictated system has a closed set of responses to the player's actions in any given situation that may be produced in the game, while human versus human gameplay is dictated solely by the player's opponents' choices at any given moment and can, of course, vary widely. In the former, a sense of cooperation among players is fostered by competing against a machine instead of the sense of competition and aggression that comes along with player-to-player competition.

This isn't to say that there can't be intra-team competition. Teammates will often compete against each other for statistics, rankings, virtual resources, and a plentitude of other rewards in the game world. However, the games with the best cooperative modes find ways to limit and regulate this competition among teammates so that they do not sacrifice the end-goal for the sake of short term, personal rewards.

There are several forms that cooperative gaming can take, even in just one genre of game. I will attempt to classify the major types of cooperation that take place across the gaming spectrum. I have classified the forms of cooperative gaming into five categories and organized them in a tiered format. Beginning with tier one, each subsequent tier incorporates aspects of the previous tier while building on them and adding new cooperative elements of its own.

A. Tier 1

A one-player game or a game that does not include the option for two players to play simultaneously. This category includes games such as *Super Mario Brothers* and *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

B. Tier 2

'Standard' two-player gameplay. This is the earliest and most well known type of cooperative gameplay. Essentially, the game just adds the second player to the single player game and allows the two players to simultaneously play alongside one another. The second player adds an additional means to assist in thwarting the game system, but isn't essential to defeating the game should one player had a sufficient level of skill to do so on their own. Some of the examples of this category are *Contra*, *Streets of Rage, Double Dragon II,* and *Doom*.

C. Tier 3

This form of cooperation involves the sharing of resources amongst players and is most often associated with real-time strategy games, although it can also be necessary in other genres as well. The players must work together to find, harvest, and effectively divide the resources that the game provides in order to win. This form of cooperation can be found in games such as *Age of Booty* and *Starcraft.*

D. Tier 4

This form of cooperative gameplay requires one player to revive the other should they suffer too much damage at any point in the game. The players are responsible for each other's well-being and cannot let the other die lest they desire for the game to become much more difficult. The most notable aspect of this type of cooperation is the way that one player must 'tag' their incapacitated teammate to allow them to rejoin the game. This is a relatively newer form of cooperation and includes games such as *Gears of War, Resident Evil 5,* and *Rock Band*.

E. Tier 5

At this highest tier of cooperative gameplay, the players have no choice but to rely on their teammates for assistance. All previous tiers present the possibility of the players succeeding, even if only one of them is actively participating in completing the game's set objective while the other simply follows along, although the probability of success might be excessively low in such cases. This tier, however, demands cooperation at all times. It may promote this through the possibility of certain scenarios appearing at random moments of gameplay or by utilizing obstacles in gameplay spaces that require cooperative interaction to move past. Unwillingness by a player to participate in a cooperative frame of mind for the entirety of the game will make the game unwinnable, unenjoyable, or, at the most extreme, unplayable for others. Games in this tier include *Left 4 Dead* and *Army of Two.*

2. Cooperative Gameplay and Narrative

Cooperative gameplay is not only just that-*gameplay*-but also a device through which developers can promote character development, narrative structure, and character empathy. Knowing that players are always going to bring their personalities, experiences, and ideologies to each game that they engage with, developers can design a play space within the game world with characters that are more permissible to the imbuement of the player's individual characteristics. This isn't an in-game, *D&D*-style of character building that I'm referring to, but rather one that occurs in the vein of Roland Barthes' concept of textuality where the player's and game character's identities entwine and mesh to create a new player/character between the work of the game and the player's perception of him or herself. Certainly, this sort of player/character building occurs in all games.

However, the degree to which it can happen is limited differently in each game. A game with a strongly defined lead character for its narrative, such as Solid Snake in the *Metal Gear Solid* series or Max Payne of the *Max Payne* series, offers less of an opportunity for the player to inject their own ideologies and motives into the character, while characters such as *Half Life's* Gordon Freeman or, as we'll explore later, the four main characters from *Left 4 Dead* are not as rigidly defined and imbued with the degree of ideology that characters of the former category are. This lack of vivid characterization invites the player to identify more deeply with the character than they possibly would if the character were more defined and possessed more of a back-story or motivation for their actions, often leading to a more pleasurable sense of 'play' from the game.

Although cooperative gameplay has existed in a variety of forms throughout the life of video games, it was *Left 4 Dead* (released in November 2008) that challenged its limits and reconceptualised how cooperative gameplay could be utilized as a narrative device. The game's story involves four survivors of a zombie apocalypse in a nondescript location who now must fight off hordes of the undead to escape the city. In homage to George Romero's classic zombie films, there are four scenarios from which the players much escape. However, these are not tiered and may be played in any order. While *Left 4 Dead* is not the first game to offer an option of this nature, the truly interesting element of game is that it does not feature any overarching storyline, character development, or plot twists built into its narrative. Indeed, it could be argued that the game does not even include a narrative, aside from 'survive.' Each scenario is hermetically sealed from interaction with the other and a player's actions in one do nothing to affect the story or gameplay in another. This lack of a developer-designed narrative leaves players with the freedom to produce their own and imagine the events that have left the survivors in these circumstances, or simply leave it out entirely and focus solely on the gameplay.

In tandem with the minimal exposition of plot in *Left 4 Dead* is the minimal level of character development. The game's main characters, while possessing their own personalities and characteristics as evidenced through their character models and the voice acting, are familiar stereotypes from society: a grizzled Vietnam war veteran, a tough, tattooed biker, a middle-class office worker, and a spunky 20-something from a privileged family. One of the great successes of the game is that, while the characters are interesting and memorable, the lack of in-depth back-story for any of them within the game provides a powerful vessel through which the player can immerse themselves into the game world. In this way and within this cooperative setting, I would argue that players can feel a greater empathy for their teammates, as well as a great sense of responsibility for their well-being and survival, due both to this minimal level of characterization and the gameplay mechanics that *Left 4 Dead* features which enhance the need for teamwork. It is

this mixture of the gameplay mechanics and character empathy that creates the powerful narrative force in the form of the cooperative gameplay of *Left 4 Dead*.

Firstly, take certain aspects of the gameplay mechanics. Upon first glance, *Left 4 Dead* could easily be mistaken as a standard, albeit high quality, first-person shooter. It features a first-person, over-the-gun barrel point of view from which the gamer engages the game world and his opponents. It is not until we take into account certain gameplay 'events' that we see how the game extends beyond the run-of-the-mill FPS. There are certain enemies in the game known as 'special infected.' These are zombies that possess abilities beyond that of the standard zombies that the players more frequently face. For example, one of these special infected, known as a 'Hunter,' has the ability to leap great distances and pounce on top of one of the player's characters, tackling them to the ground and using its claws to tear away at the player. When this happens, the pounced victim is unable to move or fight back against the Hunter and must wait to be rescued by another player who must shoot or punch the Hunter off of its victim. This is just one example of the teamwork that is necessary to survive a mission in the game. There are other special infected zombies that disrupt the players' strategy using methods different from the Hunter, but all of them require the team of survivors to rally and work together to save the incapacitated player. It is in this way that *Left 4 Dead's* gameplay mechanics function as both a narrative device and help to create character empathy. If a player does not stay close to his teammates and tries to run off on his own, he will certainly be caught by one of the special infected and, with none one around to save him, killed. The fact that players need one another to survive also promotes a collegial team atmosphere. In many other games, players can sometimes be verbally abusive to their own teammates for no reason other than their own distorted pleasure. However, should such behavior occur in *Left 4 Dead*, the other players have the option of simply not rescuing him when a special infected incapacitates him. Cordiality and clear communication become an absolute necessity when dealing with teammates, lest they leave you behind due to inappropriate behavior or language. In this way, the gameplay dynamics (i.e. the avenues of interaction available to the player between himself, the game, and the other players) influence player behavior and, through that, compel the emergent narrative of the game to emphasize themes such as group cohesion, team building, and sacrifice. These are not immediately built into the game, but must be developed by each unique team of four players every time a new game is played or they will not progress very far in the game world.

Secondly, *Left 4 Dead's* cooperative gameplay acts as a mechanism for developing character empathy. As previously discussed, the game's developers did not cultivate particularly powerful back-stories or motivation for the game's characters, preferring instead to craft a set of 'shell characters' that possess a degree of identification and recognition, yet lack many specific personal characteristics. In this way, the game invites the players to immerse themselves

more deeply in the game's characters and imbue them with their own attributes and personalities. Valve, the game's developer, has also shown how effective this characterization formula can be in its *Half Life* series. In *Left 4 Dead*, however, the formula is taken a step forward by being incorporated into a cooperative multiplayer game. Since the players themselves provide a great deal of the characters' personalities, when combined with the great emphasis that is placed on teamwork and the general feeling of fear and anticipation that the game produces, the feelings of general concern for the other players' well-being and survival become strongly influenced by the cooperative aspects of the gameplay. Players start to sympathize with one another due not only due to a shared goal (as in most cooperative games), but because the players' 'real-life' personalities are not overshadowed by those of the game characters'. Players are more compelled to identify with other players when they are attacked by a 'special infected' zombie because they know the feeling of being helpless and needing that support of one's teammates at such a time themselves. This is empathy as manufactured through gameplay rather than explicit narrative. Of course, saving a teammate is not an entirely selfless act since the game's difficulty becomes that much harder when there are only two or three players as opposed to four. Nonetheless, the strong sense compassion that is felt amongst teammates should be understood primarily as a hybridization of the gameplay mechanics, characterization, and players' individual personalities in order to reach the most fulfilling and comprehensive understanding of *Left 4 Dead*'s cooperative gameplay achievements.

3. Griefing

Despite the collegial atmosphere that all cooperative games seek to promote, there will always be players who wish for nothing more than to disrupt, subvert, and pervert the team's goals and its ability to achieve them. In the gaming community, these people are commonly referred to as 'griefers.' To be sure, this sort of behavior can occur in any game with a multiplayer element; however, it is particularly aggravating in team-based games where there is a certain degree of trust between players on the same team.

Griefing appears in many, many forms, but can be defined as 'the willfully antisocial behaviors seen in early massively multiplayer games like *Ultima Online* and first-person shooters like *Counter-Strike* (fragging your own teammates, for instance, or repeatedly killing a player many levels below you).'[1] Subsequently, a 'griefer' refers to 'a person who likes to cause problems [in a virtual world] for the sake of causing them.'[2] Griefing can be differentiated from simply frustrating other players by being a much better player than they are in that it is a *willful and conscious* disruption of gameplay. Indeed, although griefers may be playing in the same game world as other players, 'they're actually playing a different game altogether.'[3]

The majority of literature that has been written about griefing focuses on the harassment of players in the game world that, while not enemies, are also not necessarily allies. However, our concern with griefing in this paper is how it can affect the gameplay in a space where cooperation is a forced requirement rather than a choice. In other words, what happens when players choose to eschew the designers' perceived actions for them and subvert the cooperation that the game demands? We're speaking here about either an attempt to disrupt gameplay by directly attacking another member of the team or refusing to participate in the quest towards the goal of the mission or level. This raises even more questions regarding the forced nature of cooperation and implications regarding technology, design, and player behavior in a narrative-driven digital environment.

The forced cooperation that is required in games such as *Left 4 Dead* and *Army of Two* inherently posit that the world and the achievements that players gain within it are the result of teamwork. They operate from the ideology that rewards are to be gained by mutual sacrifice, dedication, and focus towards an identical goal. However, when one player refuses to support this ideology and pursues their own desires, the designed gameplay falls apart and reveals the need for 'limiting mechanisms' within the design. These 'limiting mechanisms' are measures that are necessary to counter malicious or unruly behavior that players might engage in to disrupt the core gameplay. The limiting mechanisms are a contingency plan available to the players in case one of them happens to turns to griefing during the course of the game. Of course, these limiting mechanisms themselves, such as the 'vote kick' option in many online games, where players can call a vote to eject a player from the game, can turn into a method of griefing if the majority of players decide to single out another player and punish him or her unjustifiably. Nevertheless, this is more of a rarity than the sole provocateur who makes it his goal to antagonize the entirety of the players on the game server.

Considering the measures that are necessary for games to maintain a cooperative atmosphere, one might wonder if there should even be games that demand players to bend to its whims of cooperation. Forced cooperative gameplay might be even more inviting to griefers since they thrive off of being the outsider in a group and watching their actions cause distress and agony to others. It is possible that they may thrive to an even greater degree due to the pleasure that might be derived through the dichotomy of cooperative expectation/griefer action. Or, at the very least, a griefer's actions under these conditions could be seen as more abusive since cooperation is the expected and required behavior. Referring to *Left 4 Dead's* survival mode, a gameplay mode in which players see how long they can survive against wave after wave of zombie hordes by developing strategies within the confines of a scenario's limited space and resources, user *Q-tank* posted the following message to an online gaming forum:

> I've decided to play the game a new way - fastest loss. My goal is to kill all my team members in under a minute. Or try it on hard mode - where you try to sabotage them without them knowing - breaking the doors off, opening the windows, sniping their gas cans/methane tanks, etc. Losing has never been so fun.[4]

Q-tank highlights the primary goal of griefing in this statement: to find new and diverse ways of completely and utterly crippling other players in the game. Not only that, but his actions reveal an essential facet of cooperative gameplay: *risk*. Players commit to this 'risk of subversion' anytime that they join a game that requires teamwork to complete it. Any form of play involves a degree of risk; the greater the degree of 'play' permitted between the game's participants, the greater the degree of risk that one player might abuse that permission of play. Combating the griefer's irreverent assaults means to recognize the degree to which one subjected themselves to the allowances of the game world. It is also advisable to avoid becoming enraged, as griefers tend to gain the most pleasure from such a response.

4. Conclusion

As we have seen, cooperative gameplay has long existed in video games. Now, however, we are witness to a shift in how game developers and players are thinking about cooperative gameplay and its possibilities. We have moved from cooperative gameplay that merely adds a second player to a single player game to cooperative gameplay that structures is entire narrative and gameplay mechanisms around it. *Left 4 Dead* has become the first game to ask and explore the topic of what cooperative gameplay can mean for digital storytelling. I expect that the future will present answers to the questions that it raises in the form of requiring more responsibility to teammates among players, altering narratives based upon decisions that the team has made as a group throughout the game, and rewarding or punishing players based upon how efficiently they operate as a team to engage with narrative goals. Certainly, cooperative gameplay only stands to become more popular as gamers continue to seek out new modes of interactive gameplay through which they can interact with their friends in ways other than simply virtually shooting them in the face.

Notes

[1] J Dibbell, 'Mutilated Furries, Flying Phalluses: Put the Blame on Griefers, the Sociopaths of the Virtual World', *Wired*, January 18, 2008. Viewed on July 21, 2009. http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons.

[2] N Girard, 'Griefer Madness: Terrorizing Virtual Worlds', *Linux Insider*, September 19, 2007. Viewed on July 21, 2009. http://www.linuxinsider.com/story/59401.html?wlc=1248046662.
[3] Dibbell, loc. cit.
[4] Q-tank, Internet message board posting. *Something Awful*, April 20, 2009. Viewed on July 21, 2009. http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2886637&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=66.

Bibliography

Dibbell, J., 'Mutilated Furries, Flying Phalluses: Put the Blame on Griefers, the Sociopaths of the Virtual World.' *Wired*, January 18, 2008. Viewed on July 21, 2009. http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons.

Girard, N., 'Griefer Madness: Terrorizing Virtual Worlds'. *Linux Insider*. September 19, 2007. Viewed on July 21, 2009. http://www.linuxinsider.com/story/59401.html?wlc=1248046662.

Left 4 Dead. Xbox 360, Valve, Electronic Arts. 2008.

Q-tank, *Something Awful*, April 20, 2009. Viewed on July 21, 2009. http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2886637&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=66.

Matthew Beale is an instructor of English at Hongik University in South Korea. His research interests include the rhetoric of emergent narrative in digital games, comics, and graphic novels. He can be reached at matt.beale80@gmail.com.

World of Warcraft: A Game of Motion

Adam W. Ruch

Abstract
World of Warcraft is to date the world's most successful MMORPG, and represents the epitome of this genre. The massively multiplayer aspects of these shared worlds differentiate them from otherwise similar virtual environments sustained by other gaming software in two important ways. Firstly, MMOs never end; secondly the player does not and cannot affect the gameworld at large in meaningful, lasting ways. Instead of measuring victory in binary terms of final goals, the successful gameplay of *Warcraft* is a constant state of motion. Because this game is constantly played together by groups of people who rely upon or compete with each other, a particular pace of progression evolves. Players are not only measured by their accomplishments, but by how long those accomplishments took to complete. *Warcraft* is designed to be accessible by all players, so the majority of in-game tasks are more a commitment of time rather than practice or skill. Finally, the opportunity to complete the same tasks must be made available to all the game's players regardless of how many other players have passed that way before. *Warcraft,* then represents a new paradigm of gaming, as well as a new kind of textual object which is entirely concerned with the maintenance of a continuing experience, rather than of achieving any one particular objective.

Key Words: *World of Warcraft*, goals, gameplay, social norms, progression.

*****

I'm such a noob. By choice, as it happens in this particular case, but that doesn't make it any less true. The cartoonish, tailed and hoofed avatar who currently represents me is definitely a noob. As I write this I am making the long, arduous journey from Ironforge to the Wetlands for the first time. It's going to take me some time, I know, but I can't avoid it. I 'have' to do it. I have to sit, at my desk and watch a weird satyr with an axe and shield canter through the mountains for ten or fifteen minutes. Now *this* is playing! But at least I have some time to think while I run.

What am I doing here? I suppose we could start with the 'I' in the questions. Just who am I at the moment? Decidedly post-modern, I am definitely distributed in Turkle's terms.[1] I am not one, but many. I would not be widely recognized as Jaxalte, but as Jaxell? That might be another story. Certainly the guild I belong to would know me. But Jaxalte has no one to welcome him when he materializes into being in Azeroth. I don't play him much; I am usually on my druid, Jaxell. That makes this paladin my alt, and Jaxell my main. I have another level 70 shaman, and a 64 warrior, and a 49 mage… all 'me.' Or different shards of me.

If the world of *Ultima Online* can exist in shards, why not the players? Only my shards are not discreet replicas of the same, they are individuals who can be taken as whole, or when cast as a part of a greater whole, create the more mature being I've elsewhere described as a 'craftsman' of the MMO world. See Turkle[2], Dibbell[3,4] and my own work[5] for more in-depth discussions of online personalities. MMO gaming itself is covered at length by Castronova[6] and Taylor[7].

I am a peculiar alt, so far, a kind of 'escape' alt. This toon is lonesome deliberately, with no one holding me accountable for anything. Jaxalte is my flâneur. I spent the last two hours playing this massively multiplayer game alone. Anyone who has spent enough time in a guild situation will recognize the desire to escape the social network every so often. Jaxalte is my *disconnected self,* where I can play in solitude. I know many other players who have secret or semi-secret characters, some on entirely different servers.

So now with my shiny new set of level 32-ish armour hot off the auction house, I have set out across a wilderness I haven't conquered before, on this character. The one advantage I have is my player-mind still remembers the zone. I know where the town is, I vaguely remember the quests, so I can be far more efficient than my first (couple) time(s) through. Efficient, *instrumental* gameplay as it is known.

Warcraft is a game of motion. Part of the difficulty in exploring what *Warcraft* is lies in the game/world's fluid nature. Both the 'static' gameworld, the geography if you like, the set of information that tells me that *this* is in the game world, as well as the players and the social apparatus they produce, are in a constant state of flux.

The gameplay of *World of Warcraft* is unlike many other games in that *WoW* is not a set of contests contained within a match which begins and ends. Card games, sport games, even impromptu wrestling games between young siblings, these all have 'rounds' or 'matches' that can be pointed at and separated from each other. *WoW* is something beyond this, indeed, *WoW* contains this type of game inside itself. The PvP matches, of course, but even the individual group attacks on instances and bosses could be considered games themselves: 'We formed a raid at this time, we entered the dungeon, fought against the enemies and took on the boss ten minutes later. We got him down and called it a night.' Game over. Except not. After raids, one must replenish the consumables used during the encounter: healing potions, mana potions, flasks, bandages, various food. All this takes farming of materials and negotiations with the appropriate craftsmen in-game to manufacture the item. Above all else, a raider needs a steady cashflow to pay for the ever-increasing repair bills.[8]

Ask a druid out on the prowl for clefthoof leather. He'll be out there for a few hours. When you ask 'Why are you killing the same animal over and over?' they'll answer 'For the leather.' Not 'for fun,' not at all. Farming clefthoof leather is no fun. 'What do you need the leather for?' - 'For my Heavy Clefthoof set,' the rare-

quality crafted set noted as the standard for feral tanks in early raids. So why do we need a Heavy Clefthoof set? So we can go kill different monsters, over and over again.

The next logical question could be: What is the difference between killing clefthooves themselves, and the other monsters in the raid, that require a Clefthoof set? Well, just that. They are different, harder to access, more difficult to kill, and offer better loot. And of course, the desirability of that loot comes from the potential it has to lead the wearer to kill another higher tier of baddie later on. There is no functional difference between killing a clefthoof or Attunmen the Huntsman in Karazhan, only symbolic. Once properly equipped and accompanied by a handful of high-damage classes and a couple healers, the druid is pushing the same buttons on his action bar. So why is this so desirable that our druid friend would spend hours outside the raid mindlessly killing and re-killing the boring monster? Because *WoW* is a game about going (to new) places, and doing (new) things. It is a game of infinite forward motion.

WoW is based around a reasonably strict metaphor of 3-dimensional space which our corporeal avatars move through in more or less recognizable fashion. They walk, run, ride horses and can't jump in the air and fly like Superman (ie. *SecondLife*). We can't walk through walls, or teleport around as we see fit.[9] This is deliberate by game's creators, Blizzard, who have the power to give our avatars any ability they choose. Cyberspaces are contrived according to a set of arbitrary rules, which, in the case of a game, are designed to enforce game experiences. The reason we can't leap into the air and fly at any moment is so we appreciate it when we hit level 70 and can buy a flying mount. Now *that* is cool.

Azeroth functions, as Espen Aarseth describes, more like a theme park than an actual geography.[10] The physical space in the world is, though static, an active shaper in the game experience. The landscape acts as a kind of funnel, nudging the player this way and that, as he progresses through the levels. The 'zoned' nature of the game (as opposed to 'instanced' like *Guild Wars* or *Age of Conan*) gives us a feeling of being present in a wide, wild world, which is ours for the taking if only we were strong enough. As Aarseth points out, the zones of Azeroth are not, *spatially*, organized in sequence; the zone bordering Ashenvale to the north is not the next area a character should explore after completing the quests in Ashenvale. Nothing stops Jaxalte from strolling into Felwood- except for the bears that would tear him apart. We are only hindered in our mastery of this world by our own strength. That world invites us to move through it, only advises that we'd better come prepared.

So, back to my journey. I have now reached the level where I am mighty enough to venture to Dustwallow Marsh, to conquer another zone. Well, soon enough, I'm just getting started here. I *can* now stroll through the Wetlands or Ashenvale, and probably not even be molested by their denizens, such is my

power. Given time Jaxalte will be free to move about any area of Azeroth and eventually, Outland.

That is precisely the crux of the issue: 'given time' I will be able to explore the whole world. Assuming that one is clever enough to actually move, and not spend 15 weeks killing the very same boar over and over, all that is required to reach level 70 is time.[11] The time to complete tasks which are definitely within our character's power to complete. The game is designed to reward us for staying online, doing 'stuff' so does not discriminate the way the real world does. In reality, not all of us will become master blacksmiths capable of forging the Drakefist Hammer, but in *Warcraft*, the bulky male tauren has no advantage over the lithe blood elf woman when it comes to mining or smithing. Indeed, though twice an elven woman's size, my draenei paladin can't swing a hammer any harder. These visual physical attributes have no meaning in the gameworld. All things are equal, internally. This indicates that *Warcraft* is set up as a very consistent set of tasks that each character is given an identical opportunity to complete. The only question is how fast can you do it?

That is the key to the game: time. Not: 'Are you exalted with SSO?' but 'Are you exalted with SSO *yet?*' Anyone can do it, it just takes time, a little more time, and a little more, and a little more. Not just to be first, but to be 'on-track' or up to speed, or some other very soft, very subjective sort of measurement. Certainly I'm not the first person to level up a draenei paladin. But am I doing it at a reasonable pace? So far, I am. Only 2 days 3 hours total play time on this character, and I'm level 32. That's reasonable. That's efficient.

The fact of *WoW*, in this later stage of its life cycle, is that there is so much to do. There are always more tasks to be done, especially for those of us who have more than one character. With the 2.4 Sunwell patch, Blizzard raised the Daily Quest limit from 10 to 25, and added a whole slew of new quests of that category. Daily quests seem to be too new to have been mentioned in literature so far, so allow me to do so, extending arguments that have been made elsewhere.

Daily Quests are repeatable missions which one can complete once a day, every day, for a solid 9-12 gold in return. They are usually very simple, much like the 'Collect 12 of these' or 'Kill ten of those' quests found throughout the earlier game. Doing ten of these a day netted a nice round 100 gold or so, very handy for the raiding character who, as I mentioned before, *really needed* a cashflow. Daily quests allowed a steady stream of predictable income, something the auction house and tradeskills were never quite so sure of. Now, a total of 25 'dailies' can be done per day, netting somewhere above 300 gold if one were to do all 25. I have personally never done 25 daily quests in a sitting. The highest I've reached was 18, and that took the better part of 3 hours.

Julian Dibbell, in *Play Money,* picked the wrong game to farm gold in![12]

I do not as yet have a word for the activity one does while 'on' *Warcraft;* is it a job, or work? Scott Rettberg suggests that *WoW* is a kind of theatre version of

corporate capitalism, and though his argument is strong, I wonder if there isn't a way to escape the tendency to discover something old in the new. My goal is to illuminate the new part of what is new, understand it, and perhaps take that away, rather than always interpret emergent arenas in the extant language of social analysis.[13]

The forward motion, without a destination, seems unique to MMO games. There are hundreds if not thousands of small destinations along the way, the Heavy Clefthoof Vest, for example. Or the first stack of leather you need for the vest. Or the skill points in the leatherworking profession you need to actually craft the thing in the first place. Towards endgame the goals become somewhat more stable, kill this boss, then learn the next fight, then kill that boss, next instance please. But that only lasts between patches and expansions, when new instances and bosses are added.

Even in-game character death can be explained in terms of forward motion. Death in video games has been a topic of much interest before, and the 'death' state in *Warcraft* is quite simply the temporary arrest of that forward motion which is the object of the game. While leveling up, in a solo environment, one usually dies because one takes on too many monsters simultaneously. If Jaxalte were able to effectively kill 5 or 10 monsters at once, my leveling process would be much faster. Death is the game's mechanism for regulating our progression. Similarly in raid situations, a guild who has not sufficiently practiced a boss fight, or spent sufficient time to repeatedly kill the bosses prior to gain the powerful loot required to take on this present enemy, will die. They will continue to die until they have either spent so much time on previous bosses that they severely outclass their present boss, or until they have practiced the strategies enough to get through with a more appropriate gear level. Either way, the game requires us as players to play at only a certain pace. So death is not like 'death' in the real world, or in a narrative, where once dead, a character or person is removed from the future of the story (or reality).[14] Instead the person is not removed at all, just altered into the form of a ghost. Ghosts can't do much other than run back to one's corpse, but that is not the same as being dead and gone.[15]

This is why players find themselves spending so much time in the game. The goals are quite succinct and easily kept in mind. They are many, as well, and layered. They often if not always overlap, so that only one goal is finished at a time, as not to present too convenient a stopping point. They are lastly exclusive and discreet, whereby very few actions possible in-game will actually satisfy two or more goals at once. And amid all this, there is the dampening effect of death to keep us from trying to go too fast. If you *do* try to take on all the mobs in that cave all at once, they will kill you, send your ghost back to the nearest Spirit Healer, and you have to either wait ten minutes for the rez-sickness to wear off, or make your way back to your corpse and start again.

So, while all other details of goals are variable, the one constant in *WoW* gameplay is the continuation of forward motion. This becomes quite obvious if one supposes a player who never leaves Elwynn Forest. While there is nothing preventing me, or anyone else, from living out my game-life killing Hogger over and over in Elwynn, or collecting stack after stack of Silverleaf, this would run directly counter to the 'object' of the game. Move on, move up, count ever higher numbers in your attribute panel. Trade up your hard-won gear for something slightly better. While I genuinely put my heart into ridding all of Nagrand of any clefthoof for several days to make my Clefthoof Vest, the minute I was able to, I vendored it and put on the Epic I'd gotten from the PVP Arena. So even the 'hand-crafted' item I had put many hours into held no sentimental value once there was an option to move forward.[16]

World of Warcraft (and other MMOs) represent a very particular kind of software, gaming experience, cultural object and social venue that is incomparable to a videogame like *Tetris*. Despite their shared nomenclature, *Warcraft* is much more like paper-based *Dungeons and Dragons* than *Tetris*. Up to now videogames have been grouped together based on their reliance on computer technology, but this is fallacious. We do not group everything that is written on paper together. Such a taxonomy does not *mean* anything, because Shakespeare's sonnets and an order form from a furniture warehouse are both written on paper.

I suggest three very broad categories that games will lean towards. I try not to draw hard lines between each, rather viewing the whole as a spectrum or continuum where certain examples highlight certain aspects at the expense of others. The first category are 'computerised puzzles' by which I mean games like *Tetris* which are no more than automatic, non-expressive games of analysis and quick decision-making. Games like these share more with non-electronic puzzles than with *Fable 2* or *Metal Gear Solid 4* or indeed *Warcraft*. Simply put, *Tetris* is a jigsaw puzzle with a timer.

The other two categories are bracketed together by their expressive nature. I argue that *Tetris* is abstract, geometrical, mathematical and as such not symbolic of anything in particular. The other two categories are most definitely representational. They project fictional worlds, to borrow Juul's term. Whether the world is an alien planet in *Spore*, Liberty City, or Wembley Stadium, the videogames use their representational power as media to symbolize something other than bits of light on a screen. The distinguishing factor I'd like to focus on within this representational category is the social nature of the games. Though many games today present both single- and multi-player modes, some are definitely biased in one direction or another. Some simply work better as competition between human players. Racing games, fighting games like Street Fighter, real-time strategy war games, and of course MMORPGs are all 'socio-competitive.' In hosting competition between human participants, these games must be structured differently as a software object, but also as a cultural one. They

invite a different kind of engagement to the players than the final kind of game, the single-player amalgamation of Action/Adventure/RPG/FPS/TPS represented by modern titles from *Grand Theft Auto 4* to *Bioshock* to Tom Clancy's various episodes.

Warcraft is a member of the middle group, the socio-competitive games, and perhaps the most convincing one. There simply is no way to continue playing *Warcraft* without socializing with other players. That community is the defining feature of how *Warcraft* functions as a videogame, and thus as a cultural object and expressive medium. The continuous forward motion is measured within and by that community, rather than against static goals as in other videogames. Finally, these categories are not firmly delineated and should be debated. What I hope to do is change the perspective of that debate enough to expand our ability to apprehend software entertainment as a heterogeneous mass of examples that need to be examined on their own terms. Their shared use of procedural computer technology is no more binding than the similarity between Shakespeare and the order form. Instead we must focus on how individual videogames are *used*, what kind of experiences the players have, rather than how they work. Examining any computer software in terms of function is fruitless when searching for cultural meaning; computers are general machines, their power is in their ability to reduce everything to the same ones and zeros.

Though other theories exist in game studies, such as Aarseth's[17] notions of ergodics and Henry Jenkins' narrative architecture,[18] the theory of motion is very specific to a game like *Warcraft*. Even other MMOs may lean more towards or away from this model, but as a way of understanding the monolith that is *Warcraft*, a theory of this level of specificity is appropriate. What this theory intends is to shift the focus away from concepts such as narrative in favour of something more uniquely videogame-oriented. This does not discount the possibility of investigating the stories videogames tell, but I do believe that the expressive nature of this game serves a different purpose.

Notes

[1] S Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Touchstone, New York, 1995.
[2] ibid.
[3] A Ruch, *The Player Identification Cycle in World of Warcraft*, Honours Thesis, 2004, available at http://www.flickeringcolours.net/cms/.
[4] J Dibbell, *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*, Henry Hold & Company, New York, 1998.
[5] J Dibbell, *Play Money or How I Quit my Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot*, Basic Books, New York, 2006.

[6] E Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Worlds*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005.
[7] TL Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2006.
[8] A Ruch 'World of Warcraft: A Game of Motion Notes,' at *Videogames and Cyberculture Wiki*, available at http://flickeringcolours.net/vgwiki/index.php?title=Warcraft:_A_Game_of_Motion, Accessed May, 2009.
[9] A Ruch, ibid.
[10] E Aarseth 'A Hollow World: *World of Warcraft* as Spatial Practice', *Digital Culture, Play and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader,* H Corneliussen, et. al. (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp 111-122.
[11] A Ruch, loc. cit.
[12] A Ruch, loc. cit.
[13] S Rettberg, 'Corporate Ideology in *World of Warcraft*', *Digital Culture, Play and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader,* H Corneliussen et. al. (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008.
[14] See Lisbeth Klastrup in Rettberg et al. for a detailed discussion of death in *WoW*.
[15] A Ruch, loc. cit.
[16] A Ruch, loc. cit.
[17] E Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997.
[18] H Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture', *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2004.

Bibliography

Aarseth, E., *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997.

—, 'A Hollow World: *World of Warcraft* as Spatial Practice'. *Digital Culture, Play and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader.* Corneliussen, H. et. al. (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008.

Castronova, E., *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Worlds*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005.

Dibbell, J., *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*. Henry Hold & Company, New York, 1998.

—, *Play Money or How I Quit my Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot*. Basic Books, New York, 2006.

Jenkins, H., 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture'. *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2004.

Klastrup, L., 'What Makes *World of Warcraft* a World? A Note on Death and Dying'. *Digital Culture, Play and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*. Corneliussen, H. et. al. (eds), The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008.

Rettberg, S., 'Corporate Ideology in *World of Warcraft*'. *Digital Culture, Play and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*. Corneliussen, H. et. al. (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008.

Ruch, A.W., *The Player Identification Cycle in World of Warcraft*. Honours Thesis, 2004, available at http://www.flickeringcolours.net/cms/.

Taylor, T.L., *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2006.

Turkle, S., *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Touchstone, New York, 1995.

Adam W. Ruch is currently writing his Ph.D. on a theoretical framework for videogame criticism. He lectures on videogames at Macquarie University, Sydney.

Part II:

Serious Games and Social Impact Simulations

Do-it-Yourself Learning: Case Studies of Gaming as Education in Virtual Worlds

Dana R. Herrera & András Margitay-Becht

Abstract
This article discusses the usage of virtual worlds in teaching social sciences. The authors will show that using this approach the students learn more with less effort than using the mainstream educational methods. For the full version of the article and other related works, go to http://www.gamesedu.net.

Key Words: Education, pedagogy, ludology, gaming, anthropology, economics.

*****

1. New Challenges in Higher Education

Over the course of the past few decades, educators worldwide are experiencing a new wave of challenges in higher education. These challenges come in many form, but are usually centred on two things. One recurring issue seems to be that the basic skill set of freshman are changing. Previously unknown skills like typing, document editing and managing/searching large amounts of data are becoming more and more commonplace, as the necessary tools for these activities are becoming readily accessible. At the same time, a set of rudimentary skills educators take for granted are not always at the disposal of the students. Whereas issues of lexical nature would already be alarming, the ever deteriorating levels of reading comprehension, writing skills, elementary logic and math sometimes force the changing of the curriculum.

The other, maybe even greater issue with higher education seems to be that of motivation. Students are increasingly viewing colleges not as a source of knowledge, but as a necessary evil towards a better paying job. This shift in goals and attitudes drastically change both the tone of the education, and the potential outcomes.

According to our colleagues from various countries from around the globe, these phenomena seem to be global.[1] [2] [3] Teachers from various parts of Europe, South Africa, Australia, South America etc. are reporting the same.[4] In this article we would like to introduce a method that revitalizes classrooms, increases student involvement and thus allows covering more material, deeper in depth.

2. The Roots of Challenges

It is our firm belief that there is no single cause for this new wave of challenges. We feel that the three dominant reasons are social changes, the ever-growing tendency of commercializing education, and the fact that the world is becoming more entertaining.

Probably the most noticeable change in higher education is the new mindset of the students. Based on surveys conducted among our students and on our experiences as advisors we feel that today's students have a deep understanding that 'they need an education' in order to 'make something of themselves', but this need is not strongly connected to any particular field or direction they want to take.[5]

In an earlier research, we expanded Jane Jacobs' structures of ethics to explore the peculiarities of education. Jacobs' system is based on contrasting the *guardian* ethics with the *commercial* ethics.[6] Our argument was that since knowledge can be shared without losing it, what's more, by sharing it knowledge can even *expand*, using the commercial ethic for education will lead to suboptimal results, since many of the costs the commercial ethics takes for granted do not even arise, while the immense benefit of learning-by-sharing is not taken into consideration. The result of applying commercial ethics to education in some cases lead to a kind of downward-competition of schools. Because of the above discussed drastic changes in the expectations of prospective students, it is in the best interest of universities to focus more and more on quantity instead of quality, getting large number of students and making them feel good instead of compelling them for hard work, since *commercially* that is feasible. This led to a situation when schools alone cannot develop higher requirements and more thorough education, since the multitude of competing schools offering the same degree with less work would put them out of business.

The last, but in our opinion greatest cause for the present day challenges in higher education is the drastic change in how we have fun. Traditionally fun, just as education, was originally more readily available to a privileged, upper class, not only because they had more time available for leisure activities, but also because traditional media of fun were hard to access. Technological progress slowly eroded these differences: books became cheaper, music became available for the public and movies appeared targeting the masses.[7] With the advent of computer games and later the Internet, the availability of engaging, immersive fun activities greatly increased.[8] Basic economic theory explains that rational individuals make choices according to the cost-benefit principle, where costs include the full *opportunity cost* of a decision. Opportunity cost is defined as the value that must be forgone in order to undertake an activity[9], and since we saw that more and more fun activities are available to individuals, the cost of attending school greatly increases, even if the actual monetary costs remain the same.[10]

3. Solution: Change the Focus in the Classroom

Whether explicitly realizing it or not, institutions of higher education have been dealing with the increasing opportunity cost using one of two approach. The traditional and easier way is targeting the cost of the activity to make it more 'affordable' in the cost-benefit approach by lowering the other components of the

overall costs to the students. While these approaches produce the intended result, making the given institution or program desirable, this approach has a serious drawback. In the face of reduced required effort, the overall gain from attending will also decrease; the students will learn less. If they face lower financial costs, that will lead to budgetary constraints in the institution, usually leading to similar reduction in the benefit of education. Since various levels of education build on each other, the problems caused by this const-centric approach go beyond the individual, and it also causes cascading issues, lowering the potential attainable skill level of all subsequent layers. In essence, it escalates undergraduate level issues to a graduate level.

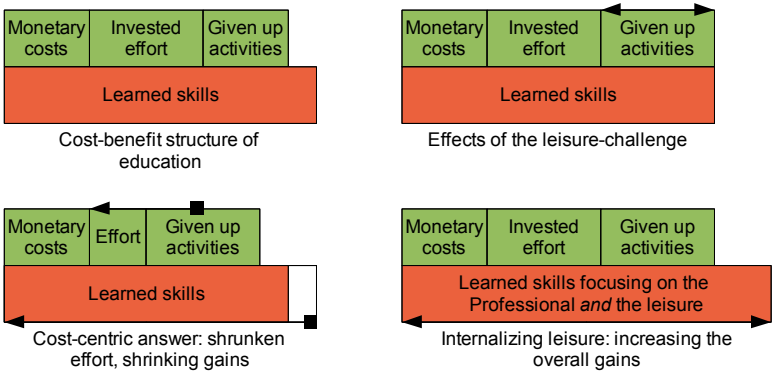

Figure 1: The Cost-Benefit Structure of Education

An alternative approach is not to reduce the cost, but increase the benefit of being part of a program. The most logical way of doing so is to focus on the issues which gave rise to the problem in the first place: the increased prevalence of leisure activities. These activities not only increase the opportunity cost of attending school, but also divert the attention of the students, so traditional education approaches have to fight this influence. Our suggestion is simple: since the students are immersed in these fun activities, they have great knowledge and intimate understanding of them, and can relate to them. If the classes are constructed in a fashion that *embraces* and focuses on these activities, the students can make their fun activities work *for* them, allowing them to teach themselves. Example courses could be 'Musical calculus', where the basics of function analysis could be discussed through an analysis of how music is created, performed, changed. Another sample course could be 'Physics in sports', where the basics like momentum could be discussed with relation to, say, playing tennis. A 'Theatrical economics' course could discuss the roles of needs, wants and choices while preparing a theatrical performance.

It is our firm belief that re-structuring the introductory level courses around leisure activities would enable the students to understand the importance of a certain field, since the application of said field would be introduced to them in a familiar environment. This would not only lead to better performance and deeper understanding of the introductory material, but would also help the students chose a profession or re-evaluate their chosen path in life, and would create enough interest in the field that would help internalize the more complex material presented during upper-division courses.

The introduction of this approach would provide some minor challenges for the institutions, as they would have to be ready to offer themed introductory courses for the students, but the instructors could (and should) use their own leisure activities and focus to develop the material, creating an enjoyable and immersive experience for all parties involved.

We find it important to stress that this approach is not suggested to *replace the conventional goals of education*. Many educators warned of the dangers of focusing on fun at the expense of covering the material, a practice that we ourselves try to fight.[11] We are going to show, however, that internalizing the students' interests can lead to a deeper, more thorough understanding of the classroom material, and also allows more complex issues to be tackled.

4. Educational Experiment: Use Recreational Games to Teach

The motivation for us to start this project was simple: both of us used examples from computer games in our everyday classroom practices, and the students seemed to enjoy this approach. If it works as stand-alone examples, why should we not build an entire class around this idea?

MMORPGs are, because of their very nature, comprised of thousands, tens of thousands of people playing together, interacting with each other on a very high level. During these interactions they build a lot of social constructs that parallel entities in the real world. A computer gamer is familiar with these constructs, uses or even forms them every day, but most of them fail to realize that these entities are shadows of physical-world institutions around them. Since most social sciences attempt to understand and explain these real-world social constructs, a lot of the theory, arguments and reasoning used in these fields can be applied to the virtual social constructs appearing in the synthetic worlds.

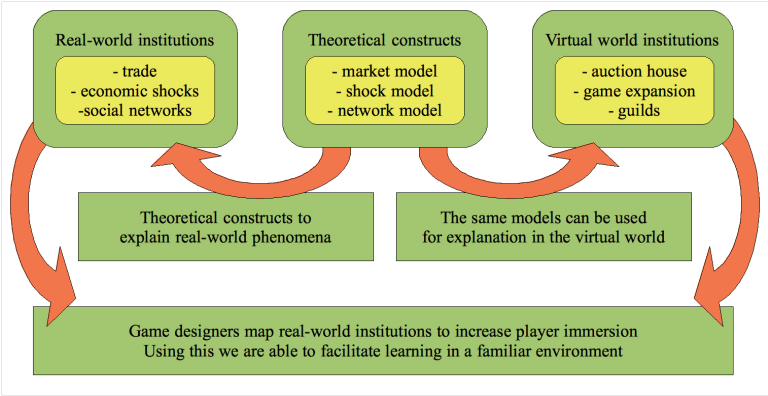

Figure 2: Using Virtual Worlds in the Education of Social Sciences

One great advantage of using MMORPGs for social modelling, simulation and education is the fact that they are closer to the actual physical world situations than most economic or social science model. The reason for this is simple: in order to simplify, most models start out by first simplifying humans and the humanoid decision making systems, usually expecting a near perfect mechanism uncharacteristic of humans. In the virtual worlds the decisions are made by real humans, with all the inherent flaws associated with it. Thus using virtual worlds in education we are not only teaching the students the theory of social sciences, but we can also pinpoint the failings of the introduced models, inspiring further thoughts and discussions.

Our experiments were planned to encompass three semesters: the forerunner was a joint anthropology-economics class in St. Mary's College of California during the winter of 2008, then a follow-up course focusing on finance and production basics with a companion course in programming. The third attempt was a distance-education project with the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, which gave rise to the issues of the exportability of the method.

A. The Structure of the Courses

As stated above, we did not want to use the excuse of using virtual realities to reduce the workload on our students. For the four-week-long winter semester we selected a healthy dose of economics and anthropology from introductory textbooks, covering half a semester's worth of material in both fields. All students were required to use not one, but two virtual worlds. Popular choices were World of Warcraft or Second Life, and the then freshly released Hellgate: London (the producers of Hellgate, Flagship studios gave us gratis copies and free access to the game). As we were exploring the basics of anthropology and economics, the students identified the parallel institutions in both virtual worlds, which made it

easier to connect their in-game experiences with real-life scenarios. All students were also required to lead an on-line journal that contained not only their assignments but also their in-game achievements. By the end of the semester members of the class engaged in shared virtual adventures, and the course also lead to the formation of a computer gaming club on campus. To spice things up, we had three invited lecturers, discussing the implications of running a gaming web-site and socializing on-line. The guest of honour was game designer legend Bill Roper, who discussed the behind-the-scenes processes involved in creating World of Warcraft and Hellgate: London.

B. Results

The goal for the course was twofold. On the one hand, we wanted to make the learning experience more pleasant for our students, on the other we wanted to create an environment where they learned things easier and more in depth than before.

To be able to measure improvement objectively, we prepared a detailed questionnaire about various topics in anthropology and economics. This survey then was given to the students at the very first and the very last class as well, and we analyzed how they performed. The improvement was great in both subjects. As we had students who studied anthropology and economics before we could also assess how those new to the subjects performed compared to those who were already familiar with the field, and we found that in both subjects, without exception, those who never studied the field performed better by the end of the semester, than those who already studied the field did at the beginning. We find this proof that our approach leads to deeper understanding than the traditional methods.

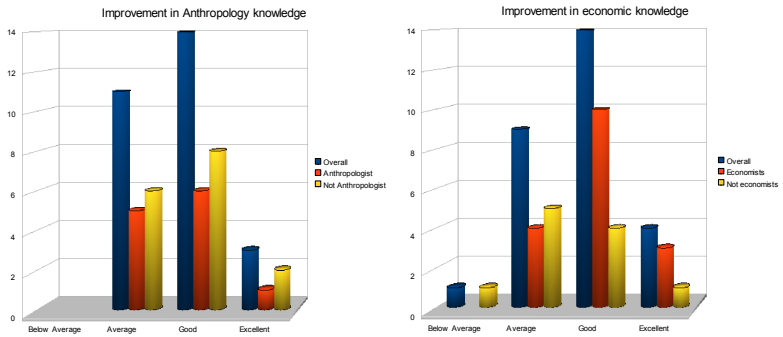

Figure 3: Improvement in Anthropology and Economics Knowledge. Average increase means an improvement that is expected in any college level course.

The raw data alone does not do justice to the improvement we witnessed. Students were always on time, they were attentive, and really pushed themselves to perform well. They turned in their large projects ahead of time to be able to do revisions on them, and their final papers clearly showed both their deep understanding of the topics discussed and a thorough mastery of the material. 10% of the students performed so well that we could send them to an undergraduate conference, where they got their own session to present their research.[12]

C. Follow-up Course and Results

The following academic year one of the authors held a similar class, this time focusing not on introductory economics but finance and production economics. Initially this task looked more challenging since the math involved in these fields is more complex, so the course became more academic in nature. In the new format the first week was devoted to introduction to calculus, the second week focused on finance, the third on production and we held student presentations on the fourth. The basic focus remained the same: the initial target of inquiry was always a phenomenon in a virtual world, and we introduced the theory in order to solve these virtual issues, following up with the connection to real-world scenarios.

The results were very similar to what we experienced a year before. Students who came in to the class with only a very rudimentary understanding of math were generating N→M functions and point-set mappings with relative ease by the end of the first week. Complex market mechanisms and optimal market behaviour was discussed by the end of the second week; knowledge that the students put to immediate good use in in-game situations. The complexities of the production mechanism could be illustrated using advanced math, and during the presentations at the end we witnessed some truly spectacular demonstrations. One student went so far, that instead of the suggested PPT format he showed a small video, held an in-game speech and also prepared a small flash-game to demonstrate the economic and social effects of gold farming.

5. Conclusions

Based on empirical evidence we found, that it is possible and extremely beneficial to construct introductory courses around a topic students are familiar with and enthusiastic about. This approach leads to not only a more pleasant classroom experience, but also enhanced learning outcomes for the students. The only requirement seems to be the willingness of the students to take part in a program like this, then many of the motivational and performance issues that plague higher education these days can be circumvented.

Notes

[1] S Kopf , et. al., 2005, pp. 551-556.
[2] S Glynn, et al., 2005, pp.150-170.
[3] H Nilsen, 2007, pp. 522-535.
[4] Read the testimonials of our co-authors in the anthology C Nygaard & C Holtham (eds), *Understanding Learning-Centered Higher Education,* Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen, 2008.
[5] At the beginning of each class, we like to present our students with an extensive survey assessing their background, interests, skills and goals to help tailor classroom experience to their needs. These surveys are anonymous, since we find it is more important that they feel free to honestly tell us what they like to do and what their focus is, than being able to connect this information with the individual.
[6] K Martinás, A Margitay-Becht, DR Herrera, 2008, pp. 1-9.
[7] This process can also be seen in tourism: from something unheard of it developed to be the de-facto recreation and recuperation activity, something that is not only desired or accessible, but even morally required for 'properly' having rest. See VL Smith, *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1989, pp22-23 or E Chambers, *Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism*, Waveland Press, Long Grove, 2000.
[8] This technological challenge is older than most would believe. Already in 1973, Richard Simms, Harold Sunderman, Reginald Hinley and Dale Young warned, that …students have grown up in an audio-visual world in which youngsters watch television for countless thousands of hours', a practice that both makes them more informed, and expect more of schools. R Simms, H Sunderman, R Hinley, D Young, 'Making School Fun Again', *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 12(4), Oct. 1973, pp. 238-241.
[9] Definition from RH Frank & BS Bernanke, *Principles of Microeconomics*, McGraw-Hill Irwin, New York, 2009, but similar definitions can be found in most introductory economics textbooks.
[10] Technically speaking the availability of more recreational activities does not mean that they are actually of higher value to the individuals engaging in them, so the correct statement should be that the cost of attending school is non-decreasing. However, if the newer recreational activities were of lesser value than older ones, nobody would engage in them, instead they would spend time doing what was available before. So the fact that the newer forms of recreation (blogging, tweeting, playing computer games, etc) are steadily spreading show, that these activities are indeed higher value activities for the individuals, who, in turn, perceive an increase in the cost of school attendance.
[11] An example for such opposition can be found in E Daaastol & C Jango 'One Person's Opinion: Should School Be Fun?', *The English Journal*, Vol. 84(2), February 1995, pp 15-16

[12] More on the structure of the class, the material covered and the personal improvements in DR Herrera, A Margitay-Becht, 'Fun is Learning', *Understanding Learning-centered Higher Education*, C Nygaard & C Holtham (eds), Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen, 2008, pp. 95-110.

Bibliography

American Medical Association, *Report 12 of the Council on Science and Public Health (A-07)*. Accessed, June 1, 2009 URL: http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/no-index/about-ama/17694.shtml.

Baer R.H., *Videogames in the Beginning*. Rolenta Press, New Jersey, 2005

Blizzard Entertainment, *WORLD OF WARCRAFT® SUBSCRIBER BASE REACHES 11.5 MILLION WORLDWIDE*. December 23, 2008, Accessed June 4th, 2009, URL: http://www.blizzard.com/us/press/081121.html.

Castronova, E., *Exodus to the Virtual World*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2007 pp. 137-208.

Chambers, E. *Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism*. Waveland Press, Long Grove, 2000.

Daaastol, E. & Jango, C., 'One Person's Opinion: Should School Be Fun?'. *The English Journal*. Vol. 84(2), February 1995, pp 15-16.

Frank, R.H. & Bernanke, B.S., *Principles of Microeconomics*. McGraw-Hill Irwin, New York, 2009.

Glynn, S., et. al., 'Motivation to Learn in General Education Programs'. *The Journal of General Education*. Vol. 54(2), (2005) pp.150-170.

Herrera, D.R. & Margitay-Becht, A., 'Fun is Learning'. *Understanding Learning-centered Higher Education*. Nygaard, C. & Holtham, C. (eds), Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen, 2008.

Kopf, S. et. al., 'Improving Activity and Motivation of Students with Innovative Teaching and Learning Technologies'. *International Conference on Methods and Technologies for Learning*. WIT Press, 2005.

Maguire, P., *Compulsive Gamers* 'Not Addicts'. BBC News. Last updated November 25, 2008, date of viewing: June 4, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7746471.stm.

Martinás, K., Margitay-Becht, A. & Herrera, D.R., 'Wealth, Groups, Ethics'. *Indecs*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 1-9.

Naone, E., 'Virtual Labor Lost: The Failure of a Highly Anticipated Multiplayer Game Shows the Limits of Academic Virtual Worlds'. *Technology Review*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Last updated December 5, 2007, Accessed May 25, 2009, http://beta.technologyreview.com/Infotech/19817/?a=f.

Nilsen, H., 'Motivation and Learning Strategies of IS Students: From Theory to Practice'. *Proceedings of the 2007 Computer Science and IT Education Conference*. Informing Science Institute, 2007.

Nygaard, C. & Holtham, C. (eds), *Understanding Learning-Centered Higher Education*. Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen, 2008.

PC Gaming Alliance, *PC Gaming Alliance Releases Horizon's Report Highlighting 18% PC Gaming Software Revenue Growth in 2008*. May 28, 2009, Accessed June 2, 2009, http://www.pcgamingalliance.org/imwp/download.asp?ContentID=15911.

Simms, R., Sunderman, H., Hinley, R. & Young, D., 'Making School Fun Again'. *Theory into Practice*. Vol. 12(4), Oct. 1973, pp. 238-241.

Smith, V.L., *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1989, pp. 22-23.

Acknowledgements
This research was made possible by funding from the St. Mary's College Faculty Technology Group and the Office for Faculty Development. Data collection regarding Hungarian gamers was facilitated by http://www.frostshock.eu.

Dana R. Herrera, Department of Anthropology, St. Mary's College of California, USA.

András Margitay-Becht, Department of Economics, St. Mary's College of California, USA.

The Role of the Quest in Serious Gaming

Daniel Riha

Abstract
Killing, exploring and questing, play major roles in the performed activities in 3-D computer games. From the serious applications design point of view, the questing activity has the highest potential to add 'serious' value to the gameplay. Quests are described by many game theorists as the essential building elements of computer game design. The author tries to clarify why the quest has become the founding element of serious games design alike. This paper investigates the specifics of the quest implementation in the serious interactive 3-D settings with focus on interactive documentary. In the first part, the author presents a summary of recent research on computer game questing based on the outputs from the game studies and with respect to serious gaming. The second part will consider computer game questing activities and examples of its implementation in selected serious interactive 3-D productions.

Key Words: Serious computer games, quests, interactive documentary, virtual heritage.

*****

1. Introduction

Let's begin with a short review of the recent research on questing in computer games.

Ludologist Espen Aarseth attempts to reveal the grammar of quests. He proposes that by understanding how the quest functions and its importance for game design, quest analysts can contribute to many of the current debates in game studies, such as: '[…] the question of narrativity in games and cross media productions, and the crucial issue of playability and replayability.'[1] He defines a quest game as follows:

> a game with a concrete and attainable goal, which supercedes performance or the accumulation of points. Such goals can be nested (hierarchic), concurrent, or serial, or a combination of the above.[2]

According to Aarseth, there are three basic quest types: 1) place-oriented, 2) time-oriented and 3) objective-oriented, each of which might be combined in a variety of ways. For place-oriented quests, it is typical to apply puzzles and labyrinths, for time-oriented 'beat the clock' or 'stay alive' models and, in the case of the

objective-oriented quest, fulfilling the task leads to a given result. Aarseth sets the four modes of combinations of mentioned quest types as follows:

a) Time&Place ('get there before…');
b) Time&Objective ('Get it before…)

a) Place & Objective ('Get there and…');
b) Time&Place&Objective ('Get there before … and …')[3]

Wikipedia lists following typical categories of game quests: kill quests, gather quests, delivery quests and escort quests.[4] Videogame producer Steve Ince recognizes some of the game quests as critical objectives: 'The objectives the player must complete if they are to reach the end of the game' and side quests as 'non-critical objectives are optional for the player.'[5]

The quest combinations shall result 'in rich and highly complex quest worlds, where the player feels free to decide what to do next, and can solve the quests in many orders.'[6] This type of quest seems to be clearly useful when developing the serious interactive 3-D titles.

For Thomas and Brown, a quest grants 'a description of a task to be performed, basic information about what resources are needed, and a reward to be received when the task is completed.'[7] Following these, one of the key issues in questing is 'the willingness to find, analyze, and evaluate resources needed to complete a task. […] a quest disposition is one that is tied to resources and that focuses on the contingency and possibility, but also that demands a high level of situational awareness.'[8]

Tosca defines quests as 'a way of structuring events in games, and explained that they incarnate causality at two levels: a semantic one (how/why actions are connected); and a structural one (plan of actions, interaction of objects and events).'[9] Tosca further emphasizes the differentiation between the player and the designer's perspective in considering quests: 'For the player, they are a set of instructions for action, as they give her a goal that needs to be solved. For the designer, they provide a structure to plan for events and describe object interaction within a comprehensible framework.'[10] Tosca ends her contribution on game questing with the statement that a game analyst identified 'a fairly fixed and small number of typical quests that many games repeat (the exchange, the breach of contract, the discovery of the traitor, save the kingdom, etc.)'[11] and opens the question if its ever needed to invent a new and diverse versions of the quests in the future. But specially, the production of serious 3-D interactive titles might become the area where these new quest forms shall be needed and designed.

2. Why Implement a Quest into Serious Gaming?

The quests are described by many game theorists as the essential building elements of computer game design. Killing, exploring and questing play the major roles in the performed activities of 3-D computer games. From the serious applications design point of view, the questing activity has the highest potential to add 'serious' value to the gameplay. If properly designed, the user shall ideally gain a meaningful experience of the serious contents through the questing activities that at the same time shall become a sponsor to the fun.

According Tosca the game quests involve causality at two levels:

> a semantic one, where we understand how/why actions are connected (the character has to do X because of Y, and then Z will happen); and a structural one (the designer can plan for the events and objects involved in the quest, and also for the order in which some or all events must take place).[12]

Tosca identifies that on the user's side difficulties appear at 'the semantic (information, choice) level when the instructions are not clear (the player doesn't know what to do), or when they are too specific (the player has no choice whatsoever); and at the structural (interaction) level when the obstacles are not challenging enough (too easy) or impossible to overcome (too hard).'[13] According to Tosca, the optimization of the semantic and the structural functions of game quests will ease a combination of objects and actions that lead to interesting and meaningful gameplay:

> The two levels can be perceived by both the player and the designer, and if the quests are well built, they will contribute to create some kind of emotional engagement as part of the player's experience, as they can be the glue where world, rules and themes come together in a meaningful way.[14]

A user's emotional involvement increases in the virtual environment and so functions as a prerequisite for the true adoption of informative and narrative contents made available.

Aarseth points out the fact that 'the quest is the game designer's main control of the players' agenda, forcing them to perform certain actions that might otherwise not have been chosen, thus reducing the possibility space offered by the game rules and the landscape.'[15] The quests offer a promise of having a certain level of control over the user's action, a feature valued highly in serious gaming development.

The perfected semantic and structural levels of the game quests have been identified as a substantial condition of the meaningful gameplay. But how complex

might these quests need to be to compel the gaming generation to employ the serious gaming applications?

It's clear that serious games can't always offer fabulous secrets to be discovered by the players. But fortunately the players of serious gaming applications are usually recruited from specialist groups (experts, teachers, students, enthusiasts), and these users have higher motivation when engaging with the interactive gaming environment. So, for serious gaming design we may overcome the assumption that a more challenging game of quests/quest chains than, for example, those of a World of Worldcraft (WoW) type game, may be implemented in the interactive environment. The ingame quests might be accompanied with activities such as looking for external explanatory discourse on the web sites, or even having its parts designed as alternate reality game (ARG) side quests.

3. Quests and Select Serious Games

Although the serious game market grows continuously, it remains small compared to the more commercial computer game market. We may find hundreds of such games, while only a small number of the serious games could be described as full featured computer games. In what follows I would like to summarize six serious game titles that vary by game type (adventure game, multi-user virtual environment, modification, first-person shooter (FPS), flash game and multi-platform project) to document the range of serious game implementation environments and innovations in serious game design with respect to the questing.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, head-developer of one of the first full feature 3-D serious computer games series: *Global Conflict Palestine*[16] by Serious Games Initiative, depicted this game as offering the users the opportunity to explore a variety of different perspectives, stories and experiences of daily life in the Middle East. Egenfeldt-Nielsen explains:

> This is structured in quests that the player has to solve and close by filling out a report. In addition to the quests students have access to an encyclopaedia, primary sources and links. We also provide a manual describing how the game is best integrated with other teaching forms.[17]

Although its gameplay has been criticised[18], this title forces the users to include external resources, but does so without breaking the gaming experience.

Different approach offers *The Quest Atlantis* (QA) developed at the Center for Research on Learning and Technology at Indiana University. QA is virtual world in the multi-user virtual environment Active Worlds.[19] Active Worlds technology doesn't offer features of a game engine, but its users in Quest Atlantis explore

multi-user virtual world with avatars and solve the quests, which result in the meeting of prescribed standards.[20]

RePlay: Finding Zoe[21] is another example of online web game, its Adobe flash-based game designed to bring 'awareness to gender stereotyping and sexism, promoting healthy, equal relationships.'[22] In the gameplay, a group of kids is looking for a friend Zoe who apparently suffers from an abusive relationship. Players find their way to different locations in town to find 'clues on her whereabouts encountering other kids who present gossip and rumors. ou are faced with numerous choices in response to these rumors, and depending on what you say, you'll be able to gather more friends to come along with you in your quest.'[23]

Escape from Woomera[24] represents a 3-D documentary action adventure game where the players experience the extreme situation of the today's refugee. The player tries to escape from the former detention centre at Woomera, Australia. The designers expect players to be forced to learn 'about their character's situation and environment, in order to solve the game's puzzles, thereby allowing further progress. Rewards will be based on unlocking new sections of the game, and a variety of outcomes will become available to the player.'[25]

Similarly, the game project '*In The Balance*'[26] described by the authors as a multi-platform project that 'seeks to create a learning space that effectively responds to the 'school-to-prison pipeline''.[27] The audience engagement campaign and multiplayer game is a co-extension of a documentary project that explores a case wherein a Tennessee family was murdered and six Kentuckians were sentenced to life in prison when they were teenagers. Designers describe their goal as providing tools 'by which users and players may become actively involved in developing formal and informal learning networks oriented toward social action.'[28]

Eyewitness[29] is an FPS game. It is similar to some more famous FPS games such as Wolfenstein. However, besides using only weapons, you also control a camera with which you accomplish the goals of the game by taking photos of atrocities and horrific crimes, while avoiding being detected by Japanese soldiers.

All the above mentioned videogames have proven that the quests as a feature of the videogames might have the role beyond entertainment.

4. Questing in the Interactive 3-D Documentary

Many theorists of game studies including Tronstad, Aarseth, Tosca and Juul propose the concept of quest as a solution for bridging the open structure of games and the closed structure of stories.

For Tosca the game quests have become one of the easiest techniques for implementing storytelling elements into computer games, because the gameplay is 'entwined' with a story:

> Whatever their variety or the name we give them (quests, missions, adventures, exchanges, errands, tasks), quests are the

> chance for the game designer to bring the storytelling elements into play. And if there should be any general recommendation for designers, it would be that they try to entwine structure and story as much as they can in their quests.[30]

According to Howard, the transformation of narratives into quests 'bridges the gap between the process of searching represented through the constative speech act of narrative and the program of invention and interaction enacted through performative speech acts as quests.'[31] Howard calls for quest design implementations to offer 'multiple allegorical and symbolic connotations.'[32] He argues that these 'might be enjoyably enacted multiple times by different players, as they deepen their understanding of this meaning or seek a different interpretation.'[33]

For Howard designing computer games based on literary production leads to active performance of meaning rather than passive absorbance. He calls this search to enact meaning an interpretative quest:

> Rather than asking players to interpret concepts without a concrete referent, games require players to act out the meaning of an object or landscape within the context of a situation whose outcome matters to them.[34]

Active performance of meaning might be supported by role of estrangement, emphasized by Løvlie. The experience of estrangement in videogames will lead to the creation of distance for reflection:

> When the tools provided by the game are not appropriate for solving the problems presented, this experience breaks down, and the potential for meaningful gameplay is denied. This is a kind of mock agency; a broken promise of agency. If this situation is appropriately contextualized, it might create the distance that is necessary for contemplation and reflection on serious themes.[35]

The author's own concept for an interactive 3-D documentary on Bosnian artists in Prague during the 1990´s might adopt the model of a quest as a method for incorporating narrative information into the 3-D interactive documentary, but design constraints must decrease the possibility of fictionalizing lecture. Daily life situations described by Bosnian authors are often obscure in nature. Thus, the estrangement effect might be fruitfully exploited to express such obscurity, but its applicability must to be proven through playtesting.

In terms of traditional documentary theory, the design approach of this 3-D interactive documentary relates to the reflexive mode[36] of reality representation during the production process.

Dankert & Wille propose an interesting model of reflexive content exploration in interactive 3-D documentaries, where a user has to act in a foreign environment as if he or she belonged there, but without the necessary knowledge and experience. The interface would then provide the tools for overcoming a user's lack of knowledge and experience. They propose encyclopaedias, explanatory discourse, tutorial guides or similar constructs for breaking the illusion of total immersion. Here again, the quest system might be usefully employed to help motivate players to search for additional information.

For example, in a delivery quest, the player may be asked to deliver an object from another location or to get needed information outside the gamespace. According Karsen, these quests often take the character to a new zone or a new area and thereby serve as vehicles for further exploration of the game.[37]

5. Conclusion

Tosca, in her above mentioned research paper, called for a detailed examination of different types of quests towards uncovering a typology that could be used both for analysis and design. For the empowering of the development process of serious game designs, we might make a similar request for a detailed examination of the specific types of quests in serious interactive 3-D designs.

Notes

[1] E Aarseth, 'From Hunt the Wumpus to EverQuest: Introduction to Quest Theory', *Entertainment Computing*, ICEC 2005, Proceedings of 4th International Conference, Sanda, Japan, September 19-21, 2005. F Kishino (ed), International Federation for Information Processing, 2005, p. 496.

[2] Ibid., p. 497.

[3] ibid, p. 499.

[4] Wikipedia, web source accessed, 26 June, 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quest_(gaming)#Gather_Quests.

[5] S Ince, *Writing for Videogames*, A & C Black Publishers Limited, London, 2006, p. 166.

[6] Aarseth, op. cit., p. 499.

[7] D Thomas & J Seely Brown, 'The Play of Imagination: Extending the Literary Mind', *Games and Culture*, 2: 2007, p. 149.

[8] D Thomas & J Seely Brown, p. 149.

[9] S Tosca, 'The Quest Problem in Computer Games', *The Proceedings of the Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment Conference*,

Fraunhofer IRB Verlag, Darmstadt, 2003, online version available at: http://www.itu.dk/people/tosca/quest.htm.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Aarseth, op. cit., p. 504.
[16] Game available at: http://www.globalconflicts.eu.
[17] Interview with Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, available online at: http://www.sig-glue.net/a_data/docs/963054interview_seriousgames.pdf.
[18] Reviews from PC Gamer UK, PC Format and Eurogamer, http://www.metacritic.com/games/platforms/pc/globalconflictspalestine.
[19] Active Worlds is one of the first software technologies that anticipated the success of the multi-user online worlds of Second Life.
[20] S Barab, M Thomas, T Dodge, T Goodrich, B Carteaux & H Tuzun, 'Empowerment Design Work: Building Participant Structures that Transform', *Keeping Learning Complex: The Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of the Learning Sciences (ICLS)*, P Bell, R Stevens, & T Satwicz (eds), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2002, pp. 132-138.
[21] Available at: http://www.metrac.org/replay/en/index.html.
[22] Available at: http://rez2cool.blogspot.com/2007/11/replay-finding-zoe-serious-gaming-for.html.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Available at: http://www.selectparks.net/archive/escapefromwoomera/.
[25] Escape from Woomera, http://aminima.net/wp/?p=412&language=en.
[26] http://www.takeactiongames.com/TAG/CRIMINAL_JUSTICE.html.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Available at: http://www.mic.polyu.edu.hk/nanjing/design.asp.
[30] Tosca, loc. cit.
[31] J Howard, 'Designing Interpretative Quests in the Literature Classroom', *Proceedings of the 2006 ACM SIGGRAPH Symposium on Videogames*, Boston, Massachusetts, 2006, p. 137.
[32] Ibid., p. 134.
[33] Ibid, p. 134.
[34] Ibid. p. 136.
[35] AS Løvlie, 'End of Story? Quest, Narrative and Enactment in Computer Games', *Proceedings of DiGRA '05 Conference: Changing Views - Worlds in Play*, 2005, p. 5. http://www.digra.org/dl/db/06276.38324.pdf.

[36] B Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 1991 calls them 'Modes of Representation' and proposes four types: 'expository', 'observational', 'interactive' and 'reflexive', (cited in Dankert and Wille).
[37] F Karsen, 'Quests in Context', *Game Studies*, Vol. 8, Iss. 1, September 2008.

Bibliography

Aarseth, E., 'From Hunt the Wumpus to EverQuest: Introduction to Quest Theory'. *Entertainment Computing - ICEC 2005: Proceedings of 4th International Conference*, Kishino, F. (ed), Sanda, Japan, September 19-21, 2005. International Federation for Information Processing, 2005, pp. 496-505.

Barab, S., Thomas, M., Dodge, T., Goodrich, T., Carteaux, B. & Tuzun, H., 'Empowerment Design Work: Building Participant Structures that Transform'. *Keeping Learning Complex: The Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of the Learning Sciences* (ICLS). Bell, P., Stevens, R. & Satwicz, T. (eds), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2002, pp.132-138.

Dankert, H. & Wille, N.E., 'Constructing the Concept of the 'Interactive 3D Documentary': Film, Drama, Narrative or Simulation'. *Virtual Interaction: Interaction in Virtual Inhabited 3D Worlds*. Quortrup, L. (ed), Springer, London, 2000.

Howard, J., 'Designing Interpretative Quests in the Literature Classroom'. *Proceedings of the 2006 ACM SIGGRAPH Symposium on Videogames*. Boston, Massachusetts, 2006, pp. 133 – 138. ISBN: 1-59593-386-7.

Ince, S., *Writing for Videogames*. A & C Black Publishers Limited, London, 2006.

Karsen, F., 'Quests in Context'. *Game Studies*. Vol. 8, Iss. 1, September 2008.

Løvlie, A.S., 'End of Story? Quest, Narrative and Enactment in Computer Games'. *Proceedings of DiGRA '05 Conference: Changing Views - Worlds in Play*, 2005.

Thomas, D. & Seely Brown, J., 'The Play of Imagination: Extending the Literary Mind'. *Games and Culture*, 2: 2007.

Tosca, S., 'The Quest Problem in Computer Games'. *The Proceedings of the Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment Conference*. Fraunhofer IRB Verlag, Darmstadt, 2003, Online Version available at: http://www.itu.dk/people/tosca/quest.htm.

Daniel Riha, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. His research includes issues on Serious Games and Multi-user Virtual Environments Design.

On the Virtual Frontlines: Video Games and the War on Terror

Thomas Riegler

Abstract
This contribution explores the continuing 'virtualization' of the War on Terror by concentrating on the political subtext and aesthetics of relevant games. The main thesis is that these cultural products teach a simple lesson: violence is the preferred, usually the only, answer to human conflict. Furthermore the games reinforce cultural stereotypes and 'myths' about the ongoing conflict - mainly by depoliticising the War on Terror into a purely military confrontation that can be won by eliminating 'targets' and by 'blowing stuff up'. In doing so, these games exert profound influence on how today's conflict is perceived by the public.

Key Words: Terrorism, war on terror, computer games, popular culture.

*****

1. Introduction: The Military-Entertainment Complex

In a 2002 online article for 'Salon' James Wagner Au welcomed very special 'weapons of mass distraction', by which he meant a new breed of computer games that would teach today's teenagers 'how to wage, and win, the war against terror'. Au clearly envisioned the digital recruits, grown up with computer games, as real-life soldiers destined to end the 'unfinished business of 1945.'[1] The columnist did not exaggerate: In the years since George W. Bush's declaration the War on Terror has become increasingly digitalised and virtual. Computer games are at the forefront when it comes to the depiction of terrorism/counterterrorism in popular culture: One can re-play the campaigns of Iraq and Afghanistan (*Kuma War*), destroy terrorist networks (*War on Terror*, *Black*), or morph into a futuristic commando (*Ghost Recon*). As a SWAT team member (*Counter-Strike, Rainbow Six*), or a soldier of fortune (*Mercenaries*), the player is immersed into a culture of 'militainment'.

The video game industry is uniquely suited to disseminate this warlike culture. It is the fastest growing market in the entertainment sector. Furthermore video games are truly unique in their modes of representation: Players are immersed physically, intellectually, and emotionally into game, resulting in the participants reacting to virtual experiences as if they were real. It is this interactivity that makes playing a game much more involving than watching a movie, where the spectator is passive and not part of the action. Thus David Leonard has argued that video games are one of the most influential conveyors of discourse and ideology in contemporary American society: 'video games - more so than schools, religion, or other forms of popular culture - are teaching Americans about race, gender,

sexuality, class, and national identity.' Because of this electronic games are 'sophisticated vehicles inhabiting and disseminating ideologies of hegemonies.'[2]

Meaning in video games is conveyed visually, textually, and sonically through narrative. Therefore this contribution aims to explore the virtual representation of the War on Terror by focusing on the political and ideological subtext of the games, while neglecting their aesthetic, formal, and technical aspects. The following section provides an overview over key narratives expressed in the games and how this relates to the current discourse on terrorism/counterterrorism as well as to larger questions regarding the role of the US in international relations.

2. The 'War on Terror' in Game Space - Key Narratives:

2.1 'The Games dramatise the War on Terror as defined by George W. Bush after 9/11.'

The virtual scenarios are quite eager to answer critical questions like 'Who is the enemy?' or 'Why do we fight?' The bad guy is depicted mostly as shadowy, determined, ruthless, and above all worthy to be eliminated. He acts out of hatred for the West and its values, targets civilians and critical infrastructure, and is perceived as a threat to global stability and security. Often terrorists, guerrillas, etc. are simply pawns used by a third party: A rogue state that aims for domination and uses surrogates to advance its goals. North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela are especially singled out. Therefore preemptive strikes against these rogues and regime change in Middle Eastern nations are the only options for keeping America safe.

This interpretation implies that terrorism does not stem from political or social causes. It is either an evil ideology with no basis in reality or surrogate warfare used by dictators, warlords, and guerrillas against the West. The ideology behind the Bush administrations' War on Terror - preventing the acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) by terrorists, preemptive strikes against 'sponsors' and 'transformation' of the Middle East - is affirmed and propagandised with support from the US defence apparatus, who also conducts its own virtual mobilisation.

The games adapted very quickly to the official lineage: Even before the start of the Iraq war, gamers were able to topple Saddam Hussein: In *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002) the player operates as a member of a SAS team behind enemy lines. The tagline reads: 'No Diplomats. No Negotiation. No Surrender!' Set in the 1991 Desert Storm campaign, the mission is to sabotage Scud missiles with C4 and snipe at a certain General 'Aziz' (who looks very much like the Iraqi dictator). The sequel *Conflict: Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad* (2003) was promoted with lines referring to Saddam Hussein's 'chemical arms, secret weapons and hidden arsenals, which continue to threaten the gulf.' Thus the mission was clear: 'Lock and load, and get ready to GO LOUD.'[3]

Starting in February 2004 the New Yorker firm Kuma Reality Games came up with a novel idea: Under the motto 'play the News' subscribers to their online *Kuma War*-series can replay 'highlights' of the War on Terror: The killing of Saddam Hussein's sons, the capture of the Iraqi dictator, the assault on the insurgent stronghold Fallujah, and battles for the control of Iraqi towns like Mosul, Najaf, and Ramadi. Kuma's publicity kept its promise: „Wherever the war takes our forces, we will put you there.'[4]

Full Spectrum Warrior, which was designed by a Pentagon owned institute, tells of a wave of terrorist attacks in Europe and Southeast Asia, particularly targeting US and UK interests. The source of the attacks leads to the tiny fictional Middle Eastern nation of Zekistan, where dictator Mohammad Al-Afad provides safe haven for Al Qaeda terrorists and their training centers. After several failed diplomatic initiatives NATO invades Zekistan to dispose of Al-Afad. A game like that is a perfect simulation of a working Bush doctrine: The US pre-emptively deposes of a tyrant with connections to terrorists and transforms Zekistan into a Western style democracy.[5]

2.2 'In order to defeat Terrorism, one has to fight 'dirty''

Since the evolution of asymmetric warfare and unconventional strategies like terrorism, there exists an argument, which calls for the imitation of the enemy as the best way to defeat him - and it is up to specially equipped and highly trained forces to employ 'unconventional' warfare to finish the job. Such 'Men in Black', SWAT-Teams, Delta Force operators, and Army Commandos are populating countless scenarios: It is all about dramatising their heroic actions - they have to free hostages, disarm bombs, and engage terrorist, drug gangsters and mercenaries on a worldwide scale.

Problematic aspects like accountability, lacking civilian oversight, and illegal activities are blended out in this process. Instead media and popular culture often celebrate a morbid cult. There is an obvious fascination with 'black' warfare, which seems to derive from a pre-modern emphasis on annihilation of a demonised enemy.

Counterterrorism forces were at the forefront of public interest since the early days of the action games related to Terrorism/Counterterrorism. It started with the online action game *Counter-Strike* (1999), which pits counterterrorist team against a group of terrorists in a series of rounds. Each is won by either completing a mission or eliminating the opposing force.

While the enemy remains just a faceless target in *Counter-Strike*, he gets contextualised in Ubisoft's *Rainbow* series, based on the bestselling Tom Clancy novels: It begins with Eco-terrorists, who want to protect 'mother nature' by wiping out humankind with a stolen virus (*Rainbow Six*, 1999). Then Neo-Fascists attack Southern American oil interests and European financial institutions (*Raven Shield*, 2003). The following threat comes from 'Global Liberation Front', which unites

various leftist anarchist, and third world liberation forces against the West (*Rainbow Six: Lockdown*, 2005). Finally international terrorist Irena Morales leads a mercenary army into the gambling capital of the US (*Vegas*, 2006).

But terrorism not only has to be fought overseas, but also in major American cities that are threatened by catastrophic super terrorism. At this point the hero of the highly popular FOX-TV series *24*, Jack Bauer, enters the virtual world. *24: The Game* (2006). While making use of actor's voice and likeness, the game features more than just one 'ticking bomb' scenario in the span of just one day: It starts with a terrorist plot to release ricin into Los Angeles' water supply. Shortly afterwards a LA metro station is attacked with Sarin gas -a diversion, which allows the perpetrators to overtake the CTU main building and steal confidential data. Next a major earthquake is caused by the detonation of explosives at focal points, where fault lines intersect. And finally weapons grade plutonium is stolen from Fort Lesker, a US military base at the epicentre of the earthquake. Ultimately Bauer can foil the attempt to smuggle out the uranium to the Middle East, and he kills the terrorist leader.[6]

Confronted with apocalyptical dangers and monstrous conspiracies Jack Bauer is victorious because of his utter ruthlessness and disregard for laws and civil rights. To safeguard an ever endangered and fragile order, Bauer is prepared to use all means necessary, especially when it comes to interrogating uncooperative suspects withholding precious information.

At one point in *24: The Game* the player has to interrogate the terrorist Robert Daniels, who has information about a planned attempt on the Vice President's life. Bauer shoots Daniels in the stomach and ties the bleeding man to a chair. While a graphic on the sideline shows the person's stress level in form of a sinus wave and the clock ticks, the player has to choose between acting aggressively, calmingly or neutrally towards the suspect. Since Daniels is obviously in pain and promised medical aid only if he cooperates the whole procedure in fact constitutes an act of torture.[7] Like in the TV series Jack Bauer's ethical position is consolidated: In a „time ticking'-bomb case opting for the 'lesser evil' like torture is not only permissible but morally commendable.

2.3 'Stealth, Technology, and Firepower will rid us from Evil.'

Since the early 1990s the US military was 'transformed' from its Cold War outfit into a slimmed down 21st century fighting force relying on smart weapons and highly trained Special Forces to fight the 'new', asymmetric threats of the post Cold War era: terrorist networks, drug cartels, guerrillas, warlords, pirates, etc.

The game industry is on the forefront depicting this 'transformed' military in action, its awesome high-tech capabilities combined with the professionalism of elite soldiers. Even more than average Hollywood blockbusters the games celebrate the military power of the United States in a way that amounts to war

propaganda. This should not come as a surprise since almost all of the games in question received input or cooperation from the military itself.

Close Combat: First to Fight (2005) for example was designed with input from active-duty and retired Marines, who had taken part in the second battle of Fallujah in Iraq. Similarly Zipper Interactive's *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals*-series, which started in 2002, was produced with the consultation of the US Navy Special Warfare Command, and this connection was marketed offensively.

Although Activision's *Call of Duty* franchise is dedicated mostly to recreate epic battles of the Second World War, at least part four addressed current conflicts. The action in *Modern Warfare* (2007) spans from Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan to the Middle East. Commandos of the legendary British Special Air Service (SAS) and a US Marines detachment are called in to counter a plot between Khaled Al-Asad, commander of revolutionary forces in an unnamed Middle Eastern country, and a Russian ultra-nationalist, who threaten the US with ballistic missiles. Both sides use violence ruthlessly in an undeclared war without rules: Adopting the perspective of the viewer the games' trailer depicts the execution of an Arab ruler by Al-Asad's forces. Later on the insurgent is first interrogated by the SAS men and then killed in cold blood. Besides this celebration of 'black' operations, *Modern Warfare* also praises the capacities of a 'transformed' global strike force, especially when it comes to executing lightning strikes around the globe.[8]

While games like *First To Fight* and *Modern Warfare* market their claim of offering realistic entertainment, the myth of the omnipotent Special Forces is further embellished in games that cross the line into fantasy - producing the ultimate warriors of the 21st century. In Red Storm Entertainment's *Ghost Recon* series the player is in charge of a fictional, newly created squad, known as 'the Ghosts'. This highly classified and high tech equipped force has to operate in trouble spots worldwide: Foiling an ultra-nationalist plot to rebuild the Soviet Union (*Ghost Recon*, 2001), freeing a post-Castro Cuba from a drug cartel's puppet regime (*Island Thunder*, 2003), defeating a renegade North Korean general (*Ghost Recon* 2, 2004), capturing a Pakistani warlord and arms dealer (*Summit Strike*, 2005).

2.4'Global Stability, Security, and Prosperity depend on Western Interventionism.'

The subtext of games is clear: Since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the world has changed profoundly to the worst. In many regions state power is failing, warlordism is on the rise and organised crime is global player. This 'jungle' is in need of order: The military, super-spies or paramilitary forces have to be deployed and used to safeguard geopolitical interests and destroy enemy weapon capabilities that threaten Western superiority. Overt political undertones are most obvious in the case of Pandemic's *Mercenaries*-series. Part 1 features a search and destroy mission for the leader of a North Korean military coup. The enemy in *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* is yet another 'evil

state', whose leader messes with America: 'A power hungry tyrant messes with Venezuela's oil supply, sparking an invasion that turns the country into a warzone.'[9]

The fictional Caribbean island 'San Esperito' in *Just Cause* is easily recognisable as communist Cuba: Although revolutionary slogans are branded everywhere, society seems static and oppressed into submission. Impersonating the CIA black ops agent Rico Rodriguez the player has to dispose of a dictator, who is 'dreaming' of weapons of mass destruction: 'Nobody knows what San Esperito's military ambitions are but it doesn't matter: regime change is the only option.'[10]

In the wake of a related major blockbuster Novalogic's *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* (2003) took on an episode from the US intervention in Somalia (1993): An ill-fated firelight in the capital Mogadishu, which began as an arrest operation and ended in the shoot down of two US helicopters and heavy casualties at the hands of Somali militiamen. The developers worked closely with former Rangers and Delta Force operators to recreate the missions more authentically. A share of the revenue was donated to a fund aiding relatives of killed US Special Forces.

In the end the game's fictitious interpretation of the events was classic revisionism: A humbling defeat was transformed into a 'glorious defeat' against all odds. 'As we've said, it wasn't a failure. To a certain degree, it's about setting the record straight', Black Hawk Down's publicist remarked in an interview.[11] The last mission of the game 'Aidid Takedown' - the killing of the prime architect of the US defeat - even offered satisfaction, which never took place since the warlord died in inter-clan fighting in 1996.

Anyhow, the game's success started a franchise that reflects the popularity of Special Forces in the follow-up of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In *Delta Force: Team Sabre* (2004), *Delta Force: Xtreme* (2005), *Delta Force: Angel Falls* (2009) the settings are no longer connected to a certain historical event: Instead the player has to operate globally in the deserts of Iran, in the drug-producing areas of Colombia and Peru, as well as in guerrilla-infested Indonesia, war-torn Chad, and crumbling Uzbekistan.

While all those exotic locations stand out as prime target areas of real overt and covert US operations, the video games mirrors the official concept of the enemy very clearly: The player has to take out a renegade Iranian general, battle an elusive Colombian drug lord, prevent drug shipments, and eliminate terrorist threats pre-emptively.

3. Conclusion

This contribution has analysed the dominating narratives expressed in video games which centre around the War on Terror. The following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The games discussed present war, terrorism, and global events exclusively from an American or British perspective, while especially the depiction of the Middle East is stereotypical and fits in the orientalistic discourse that encourages and legitimises Western domination of the region. The spatial depiction in the games, which are mapped from above, invokes a sense of American mastery and control: Although war torn and desolate these 'pockets of darkness' are of geopolitical significance and therefore object to US intervention by highly mobile strike forces. The imaginary landscape is another key element that serves and reinforces the narrative: Uncivilised and primitive spaces have to be organized into a unity, whether it is the chaotic urban mazes of the Middle East (*Full Spectrum Warrior*), Caribbean jungles (*Just Cause*), or crumbling Eastern Europe/Russia (*Black*). Invested with ideology but devoid of history, the artificial landscapes form the stage for the classic binary content of the games: the fight between good and evil. To fit in this simple dichotomy the enemy other is represented essential, with a fixed identity that poses a threat to the West and its value system, but reaming outside politics.

   The gender perspective further underlines the notion of American invincibility transported by the games: Apart a few exceptions like Lara Croft-like soldier of fortune Jennifer Mui (*Mercenaries 2*) and the terrorist leader Irena Morales (*Vegas*) it is essentially a male world, dominated by militarised masculinity, competition, and notions of courage, discipline, patriotism, and mental strength.[12]

2. Although the games offer a simulated experience of warlike events, they are in fact escapism from the messy and ambiguous conflicts of the real world. The virtual War on Terror is instead a clear-cut moral endeavour to 'free' and 'liberate' foreign people, to destroy tyranny, and rid the world of truly evil threats. Contrary to the open-ended struggle proclaimed by the Bush administration, the simulations are full of wishful thinking and offer a cathartic experience: Western forces will eventually succeed and reach all objectives, which compensates for the real War of Terror's lack of spectacular results.[13] Although the games may be realistic in the depiction of weapons, violence is sanitized and throughout the player is spared all disturbing aspects of real conflicts.

3. The games affirm the political and cultural status quo from which they originate: They reproduce, charge, and disseminate interpretations, ideologies, and worldviews in contemporary society by constructing an imaginary space, where the hegemonic constants of the public discourse come to life: A fantastical Middle East that seems naturally inhabitated by terrorists; a military that is fit and capable of achieving practically everything; the perception that violence is not only a defining feature of human nature, but also a means to settle political conflicts; that 'black' warfare is likely to defeat terrorism; etc. [14]

4. Video games are increasingly important parts in the formation of a culture of war. The cooperation between the military and the industry has intensified to a certain degree, where training simulation for real soldiers are commercialised for a mass audience and the youth is targeted by digital recruitment. Obviously video games elevate war and security to common sense by making armed conflict imaginable.

In summary, when it comes to the representation of the War on Terror in popular culture, video games can no longer be overlooked: Because of their special nature - immersion, interactivity, and intertextuality - they are especially efficient in transmitting and disseminating hegemonic ideologies on the ongoing conflict.

This contribution has identified some of the key narratives that can be found in games relating to the War on Terror: the stereotypical representation of the enemy, gender, and foreign lands; the sanitisation of violence; the propagandisation of military strength and its high tech capabilities; the affirmation of the Bush administration's definition of the War on Terror; the shaping of a militainment culture, which aims for digital recruitment, makes concern for security part of every day life, and erodes the public's reluctance to use force in international relations.

Notes

[1] J Au, Weapons of Mass Distraction, Salon.Com, 4 October 2002, Viewed on 24 March 2009, http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/feature/2002/10/04/why_we_fight/print.html.

[2] D Leonard, 'Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace', *Media and Information Literacy Education* 4(4), 2004, pp. 1-8.

[3] E Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games*, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York 2006, pp. 246-247.
[4] F Rötzer, Die 'Höhepunkte' des Kriegs noch einmal als Computerspiel, *Telepolis.de*, Viewed on 30 March 2009, http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/16/16909/1.html.
[5] Full Spectrum Warrior: The Front, *Fullspectrumwarrior.de*, Viewed on 25 March 2009, http://www.fullspectrumwarrior.de/fr_front.php.
[6] 24: The Game, *2kgames.com*, Viewed on 2 April 2009, http://www.2kgames.com/24/site.html.
[7] M Sample, 'Virtual Torture: Videogames and the War on Terror', *Games Studies. The International Journal of Computer Studies*, Vol. 8, 2008, http://gamestudies.org/0802/articles/sample.
[8] Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, *Callofduty.com*, Viewed on 17 March 2009, http://www.callofduty.com/CoDMW?lang=en.
[9] Mercenaries 2: World in Flames, *Pandemicstudios.com*, Viewed on 20 March 2009, http://www.pandemicstudios.com/mercenaries/index.php.
[10] Just Cause, *Eidosinteractive.co.uk*, Viewed on 17 March 2009, http://www.eidosinteractive.co.uk/gss/justcause/.
[11] Halter, p. 266
[12] A Kumar, 'America's Army Game and the Production of War', YCISS Working Paper Number 27, March 2004, *Yorku.ca*, Viewed on 5 April 2009, http://www.yorku.ca/yciss/publications/documents/WP27-Kumar.pdf.
[13] S O'Hagan, 'Recruitment Hard Drive', *The Guardian*, 19 June 2004.
[14] C Boggs, 'Pentagon Strategy, Hollywood, and Technowar', *New Politics: A Journal of Socialist Thought*, *Wpunki.edu*, Viewed on 23 April 2007, http://www.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue41/Boggs41.htm.

Bibliography

24: The Game. *2kgames.com*. Viewed on 2 April 2009, http://www.2kgames.com/24/site.html.

Au, J., Weapons of Mass Distraction. *Salon.com*. 4 October 2002, Viewed on 24 March 2009, http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/feature/2002/10/04/why_we_fight/print.html.

Boggs, C., 'Pentagon Strategy, Hollywood, and Technowar'. *New Politics: A Journal of Socialist Thought*. *Wpunki.edu*. Viewed on 23 April 2007, http://www.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue41/Boggs41.htm.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare. *Callofduty.com*. Viewed on 17 March 2009, http://www.callofduty.com/CoDMW?lang=en.

Full Spectrum Warrior: The Front. *Fullspectrumwarrior.de*. Viewed on 25 March 2009, http://www.fullspectrumwarrior.de/fr_front.php.

Just Cause, *Eidosinteractive.co.uk*, Viewed on 17 March 2009, http://www.eidosinteractive.co.uk/gss/justcause/.

Leonard, D., 'Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace'. *Media and Information Literacy Education.* 4(4), 2004, pp. 1-8.

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames, *Panddemicstudios.com*, Viewed on 20 March 2009, http://www.pandemicstudios.com/mercenaries/index.php.

O'Hagan, S., 'Recruitment Hard Drive'. *The Guardian*. 19 June 2004.

Rötzer, F., Die 'Höhepunkte' des Kriegs noch einmal als Computerspiel. *Telepolis.de*. Viewed on 30 March 2009, http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/16/16909/1.html.

Sample, M., 'Virtual Torture: Videogames and the War on Terror'. *Games Studies: The International Journal of Computer Studies*. Vol. 8, 2008, http://gamestudies.org/0802/articles/sample.

Thomas Riegler, Independent Scholar, Vienna, Austria.

Part III:

Videogame Cultures

Pornography of Gaming

Michelle Martinez & Tyler Manolovitz

Abstract
Technological advances have provided the opportunity for the creation of graphically intensive video games that closely mimic reality. As technology improves, video game developers take the opportunity to portray graphic and realistic sexual encounters in games ranging from popular mainstream titles to obscure Japanese *hentai* games. Sex sells, but a notable number of games have taken to depicting scenes of deviant sexual topics. Specifically, incest, sexual violence, and rape in video games have become more prevalent in recent years, and have given rise to some controversy. The purpose of this paper is to explore the prevalence of these deviant sexual topics in video games, including a brief history, overview, and discussion.

Key Words: Incest, sexual violence, rape, video games, sex, pornography.

*****

1. Introduction

There is a dark side to sexual content in the video game market, one where incest, sexual violence, and rape are either the purpose or part of the game play. Technology's evolution has enabled game designers and developers to create and publish more realistic and explicit content evolving from the pixilated and cartoonish rape in *Custer's Revenge* to the more graphic sexual violation in *Sensei 2*. Because technology has allowed graphics to advance to the point of near-realism, explicit games have the potential to be more controversial. It has been suggested that the growth in sexual-content games is due to the age (35) and sex (male) of the gaming population.[1] Regardless, the market for videogames with explicit sexual situations or themes featuring taboo and illegal content continues to grow.

Game creators continue to push the envelope for what is acceptable under the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB)[2] ratings to receive an M (Mature) rating: receiving a rating of AO (Adult Only) can kill a game since most consoles refuse to license an AO game and major public retailers refuse to carry them.[3] Many retailers like Target and Wal-Mart are members of the IEMA (Interactive Electronic Merchants Association), which has said, 'IEMA members generally do not carry AO-rated games any differently than we do not carry X-rated videos or DVDs….'[4] Furthermore, AO games are not the most financially successful platform for the gaming or pornography industries because the games have limited market access, and the cost to the user for limited game play potentially makes it a

poor financial investment as opposed to adult-only websites that provide a variety of updated content.

However, the Internet provides access to the market for deviant gaming content where the ESRB does not have jurisdiction and anonymity is provided, or at least the illusion thereof.[5] Consumers can purchase or download h-games, known as *hentai* games, a Japanese word broadly used to refer to sexually explicit and perverse materials, join a virtual adult only environment like Red Light Center, or play one of many free JavaScript or 'homebrew' games, which are adapted from originals or newly created by fans for a specific platform. Games purchased from overseas are not subject to ESRB ratings unless released in the US. Despite the lack of ratings, consumers continue to review games and provide information on content.

It is the intent of this paper to explore the deviant and often pornographic content in video games, both those rated M or AO by the ESRB and those that remain unrated, by providing a brief history of incest, sexual violence, and rape in console games and virtual worlds, how such games have been received by the public, and where the future for such content lies.

2. Incest

Incest, an almost universal taboo, has been examined throughout history, and in most countries sex between consenting consanguineous adults is penalized if not prohibited; also prohibited is a sexual relationship between adopted siblings, which under many laws is still considered incest.[6] However, there are games for PC and online that offer incest as part of, or the goal of, game play, from *Kana-Little Sister* to the *Fuck Mammy* series. Incest often connotes pedophilia though it denotes both nonconsensual acts (rape, statutory rape, and pedophilia) and consensual acts.

H-games released for the PC and sold online claim 'all characters in this game, as well as all the *hentai*/bishoujo games we sell, are aged 18 or older.'[7] *Kana-Little Sister* is one of the most popular h-games in which the desire between Kana and her brother Takamichi, played by the gamer, is not the main storyline.[8] The occurrence of incest is an option for players. Most reviewers marginalize the potential for incest because of the poignant plot and skillful artistic rendering. However, reviewers online argue Kana's immaturely drawn image eroticizes underage females while others claim if the game distributors say Kana is 18 then perhaps she is simply underdeveloped for her age.[9] *Princess Maker 2* is another game that does not focus on incest though father and daughter do marry in the happy ending.[10]

The Loli culture, which refers to the Japanese Lolita culture in which underage-either in appearance or reality-girls are highly sexualized, has multiple video games that come close to promoting pedophilia. Companies such as Mu-Soft pander to the eroticization of children with flash games like *Hizashi no Naka no Riaru.* The girl in *Hizashi* is clearly underage with a prepubescent body and

innocent features.[11] The purpose of the game is to molest the girl the player is babysitting as she sleeps. The fact the player is babysitting the girl leads to the conclusion she is under the age of consent if she is not old enough to be left home alone. The game includes the ability to have sex with her, which is rape because the girl is sleeping, cannot give consent, and is under age. Because of her prepubescent childlike features, it is also pedophilia.

The *Fuck Mammy* series offer a player multiple scenarios in which he, as the son, may engage in intercourse with his mother. Such games offer consensual incest. Many of these games are unrated by the ESRB and available only online; however, the games warn that a player must be 18 or older in order to access content. H-games like *The Sagara Family* involve incestuous scenarios but none of the characters are coerced or forced by the player, who is the non-related visitor in a houseful of related females.[12]

Meanwhile, *Gibo-Stepmother's Sin* provides incest through violence. The player takes on the character of Yusuke who has a sexual relationship with his cousin, step-mother, and step-sister. The sexual scenarios in *Gibo* are drastically different from those in *Sagara*. The stepmother, Misako, has a scene in which tears stream down her face and her hands are clasped before her in supplication as she tries to plead her way out of her stepson's violent sexual advances: 'This is something that … only degenerates do …' thereby implying her stepson is wrong and a 'degenerate,' while Misako's physical reaction is one of an unwilling participant.[13] In some game play, instances of incest, legal or consanguine, occur through force which leads to sexual abuse and rape.

3. Sexual Violence

As technology continues to evolve, video games are more easily able to provide a more realistic depiction of characters, events, and worlds. Under the guise of true realism, many of these games venture into the darker side of humanity, such as incest and pedophilia, as previously discussed. A more common occurrence in 'real life,' and therefore a more common occurrence in these deviant video games, is the prevalence of sexual violence. Sexual violence is used in video games for myriad reasons, at times taking up only a single scene or event, while other times serving as the focus and driving force behind the narrative. Sexual violence is generally viewed by the public in one of two ways: disgust or sexual excitement. These divergent attitudes are both represented in video games, and inspire the two major purposes of including sexual violence: for tone and plot purposes and to feed sexual fantasies and fetishes. A third occurrence of sexual violence in video games occurs when the realities of sexual violence are ignored, turning such events into sources of humor.

A. Tone and Plot

In some video games, sexual violence does not necessarily play a significant role in the gameplay, but is utilized as a method to set the tone or motivate the plot. As technology has allowed video games to move toward full-immersion into virtual worlds, some developers have grasped the opportunity to utilize sexual violence as a means to enhance the virtual reality of the game. In addition, sexual violence can be used as a fulcrum to initiate, alter, or otherwise move the plot of the story.

In 1995 Sierra Entertainment released one of the first live-action interactive video games called *Phantasmagoria*.[14] *Phantasmagoria* tells the story of Adrienne and her husband, Donald, as they move into an old mansion. Adrienne unwittingly releases a demon, leading to a series of nightmares, bizarre encounters, and abusive behaviour from her husband. The game experienced controversy over a scene in which Donald sexually forces himself on Adrienne. No graphic images are shown, but the scene is clear as to what is happening. Supporters of the game defend the scene by arguing its importance in exemplifying the behavioural changes occurring in Donald.

A much more brutal usage of sexual violence occurs in the Japanese h-game, *A-GA*.[15] The game makes heavy use of sexual violence and is extremely graphic in its presentation, including a scene of soldiers vaginally raping a woman with foreign objects. The game can be quite disturbing and can be pornographic in nature, but some users claim the scenes are necessary to the development of the narrative, leading to a surprising conclusion.[16] [17]

Sexual violence is undoubtedly a controversial subject, especially in video games, but the topic can certainly be used as a means to enhance the game itself.

B. Fantasies

Often a video game's usage of sexual violence goes far beyond setting the tone or motivating the plot, instead seeming to serve as the purpose of the game. Just as the porn industry sells videos catering to virtually any sexual fantasy imaginable, so have video games begun to take advantage of sexual fantasies to drive the market. Video games such as *Biko 2* [18] and *Biko 3* [19] are 3-D stalking simulators in which you follow one of five women and gather items while attempting to remain unseen. After catching the girl, the gamer achieves a different ending depending on choices made throughout the game, one of which includes vivid scenes of sexual violence.

Point-and-click adventure games such as *Tsuki-Possession*, *Sensei 2*, *Hitomi-My Stepsister,* and *Gibo-Stepmother's Sin* seemingly attempt to portray as many types of sexually violent acts as possible. Such acts include ball gags, anal rape, forced public urination, urine consumption, psychological abuse, gang rape, and even tying up a naked girl to watch her being raped by a stranger. These games, and others of the same ilk, attempt to tell an elaborate story in which sexual

violence acts as a plot device, but the excessiveness reveals their purpose as depictions of fetish and fantasy.

To the general public, these video games can be revolting, but the targeted niche population must find them enjoyable in some capacity. Just as porn movies began to cater to the deviant sexual fantasies of society, so have video games attempted to claim a toe-hold in the market. It is no coincidence, then, that just as mainstream society often ignores the more deviant aspects of pornography, so does society ignore these extreme and deviant video games. Games such as *Phantasmagoria* have stirred public controversy with only a relatively mild instance of sexual violence, but other incomparably violent depictions of sexual actions are largely ignored. One could argue that the more extreme video games are developed and sold in Japan. Geographic boundaries, though, have become much less important because of the Internet. In fact, many of these games are still available for purchase via online merchants such as Amazon.com.[20]

C. Humour

Some video games have actually utilized sexual violence in a humourous manner. The popular *Grant Theft Auto* series falls into this category, although the open-ended style of gameplay allows plenty of responsibility to fall on the shoulders of the gamers themselves. One characteristic of the series allows the main character to pick up a prostitute and pay her for sex, which in turn enhances his health. The game also allows the main character to beat up and/or kill any pedestrian or character and steal his/her money. Gamers have discovered that beating up a prostitute after sex allows them to reclaim their money while still reaping the benefits of enhanced health. Although one cannot prove the developer intended for such a thing to happen, this ability has been a source of humour and entertainment for gamers.

Jewel Knights Crusaders also utilizes sexual violence, although with much more graphical representation.[21] The game itself attempts to serve as a comedic parody of 'battle team' anime and television shows such as *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. In the game, the female fighting team agrees to let the main (male) character join the team after agreeing to let him do whatever he wants to them. The game repeatedly depicts graphic scenes of sexual violence, but again, the comedic and unrealistic tone of the game removes any real sense of violation.

Sexual violence is used in dramatically different ways by different games: tone and plot purposes, to feed fantasies, and even to serve as a source of humour. Despite the varying usage, though, almost all instances of sexual violence in video games share one commonality: devolution into rape.

4. Rape

Just as most instances of sexual violence in 'real life' lead directly to rape, video games, too, tend to follow such a course. Although technological advances

have allowed rape to be depicted much more graphically and realistically, rape in video games goes back for decades. In 1982, *Custer's Revenge* was released for the Atari 2600, portraying a naked General Custer avoiding swarms of arrows on his way to raping a naked Indian woman tied to a post.[22] The graphics were rudimentary and highly pixelated, but the game left no doubt as to its goal.

In 1990, before MMORPGs and online virtual worlds became prevalent and graphic intensive, Pavel Curtis developed an online text-only virtual community called LambdaMOO. Although not a video game in the traditional sense, LambdaMOO does set the foundation for modern virtual realities such as *Second Life*. There are no graphics or goals, but players do control avatars in order to interact with one another. In 1994, a character named Mr. Bungle entered the game and utilized a voodoo doll subprogram that allowed him to take control of other characters. Mr. Bungle forced the characters into different sexual acts with him and with each other, at one point forcing one character to eat his/her own pubic hair and another character to 'violate herself with a piece of kitchen cutlery.'[23]

Rape has continued to exist in different video games throughout the years, but became a very hot topic in early 2009 due to the controversy surrounding the Japanese h-game game, *RapeLay*.[24] The game, often described as a 'rape simulator,' follows Kimura Masaya as he stalks and rapes a mother and her two teenage daughters.[25] Although the game was released in 2006, it did not come under fire until years later when a listing for the game was discovered on Amazon.com. The discovery ignited a firestorm of controversy in the United States, leading to organizations such as the National Organization for Women-New York City and Equality Now to speak out against rape simulator video games. British Labour MP Keith Vaz, too, joined the protest by calling the game 'appalling' and requesting its ban.[26] Amazon.com and eBay.com have since disallowed the sale of *RapeLay*, and the game developer has also removed any mention of *RapeLay* from its official web site.

Interestingly, according to some sources, '*RapeLay* can actually be called tame compared with its more extreme peers.'[27] Despite *RapeLay*'s shocking concept, the actual presentation of the game contains little blatant violence. This varies from games such as *Tsuki-Possession* and *Hitomi-My Stepsister* that depict numerous scenes of shocking and violent rape. The fact that the game was noticed to have crossed the Japanese border may have initiated such reaction. *RapeLay* was in publication for three years and listed on Amazon.com for an unknown length of time before any controversy arose. Some of *RapeLay*'s more extreme peers have been in publication for nearly a decade and are still available from online merchants such as Amazon.com.

Despite the graphic and deviant sexual content, these games serve a sizeable market. Just as the porn industry has found methods to extract millions of dollars from small niche markets, so have these video games found success. Most people perceive rape as a grotesque crime against humanity, but a large portion of society

enjoy rape fantasies and demand that companies like Illusion and G-Collections continue to publish these games.

5. Conclusion

Research in the area of deviant video games is limited. *Sex in Video Games* by Brenda Braithwaite takes a general approach to sex in games and covers a great deal of material regarding the topic, but does not go into detail about deviant games that feature rape, sexual violence, or incest. Perhaps as more games like *RapeLay* come into the public sphere of knowledge a greater interest will be taken in examining what sorts of video games dealing with deviant material exist and what characteristics make up the market.

As technology advances, so do games in their complexity from plots to graphics; meanwhile game players ask for more sexual content, arguing for a more realistic approach to fantasy worlds by suggesting the micro should mirror the macro. Online environments are beginning to provide the content and space to play out unhindered fantasies, but for players who want a game or plot to go along with sexual content they may have a while to wait for this market to meet their demands. AO games are harder to come by because of their lack of marketing or because they have not been yet released in the US, which can be a problem for some who want their games translated. However, deviant games do exist. Currently the deviant games market is cornered by Japan with their list of h-games sold through English-language distributors.

Ultimately, pornography is not illegal nor are pornographic video games in the US, though video games, or other drawings or animations, in which children are depicted in sexual situations are illegal under the PROTECT Act of 2003 passed by Congress. There is a widespread condemnation against videogames that promote incest, sexual violence, and in particular rape, from feminist, religious, and political groups. Regardless of public reception, these exploitative and violent games exist and are available for purchase, continuing the growth and sustenance of a niche market that provides deviant situations, plots, and images in video games.

Notes

[1] D Brown, *Porn & Pong: How Grand Theft Auto, Tomb Raider and Other Sexy Games Changed Our Culture*, Feral House, Port Townsend, WA, 2008. The flooding of the Internet by game players creating mods (modifications) that can be downloaded to give an in-game character genitalia when clothing is removed implies that more sexually explicit games, or ones that offer more adult themes, in general are desired.

[2] The ESRB, created in the United States in 1994, is a self-regulatory and non-profit entity that assigns ratings to entertainment software released in the US to inform consumers about game content and age-appropriateness of the material.
[3] The difference between M and AO ratings comes down to the length of time showing explicit content, either violence or sex/nudity.
[4] C Morris, 'Wal-Mart, Target Pull *Grand Theft Auto*', CNNMoney, 20 July 2005, viewed 5 June 2009, http://money.cnn.com/2005/07/20/technology/personaltech/gta/.
[5] It is the not the purpose of the paper to explore the psychological reasons behind a player's desire for anonymity. Games offer anonymity in various degrees depending on the format, platform, and Internet connectivity.
[6] 'Indbred Obscurity: Improving Incest Laws in the Shadow of the 'Sexual Family'', *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 119, June 2006, Viewed 5 June 2009, http://www.harvardlawreview.org/issues/119/june06/note/inbred_obscurity.pdf.
[7] J-List, 2008, Viewed 5 June 2009, http://www.jlist.com/HENTAI/.
[8] *Kana, Little Sister,* G-Collections, 2002.
[9] JC, 'Kana, Little Sister', ForeverGeek, 3 October 2004, Viewed 5 June 2009, http://www.forevergeek.com/2004/10/kana_little_sister/.
[10] *Princess Maker 2*, Gainax, 1996.
[11] *Hizashi no Naka no Riaru*, Mu-Soft, 2006.
[12] *The Sagara Family*, G-Collections, 2004.
[13] *Gibo-Stepmother's Sin*, Peach Princess, 2004.
[14] *Roberta Williams' Phantasmagoria*, Sierra Entertainment, 1995.
[15] *A-GA*, Illusion, 2004.
[16] Sizhi, Review of *A-GA*, Moby Games, 14 July 2007, Viewed 4 June 2009, http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/a-ga-gekidou-no-akusei/reviews/reviewerId6226/.
[17] Lasttoblame, Review of *A-GA*, Moby Games, 15 July 2007, viewed 4 June 2009, http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/a-ga-gekidou-no-wakusei/reviews/reviewerId97350/.
[18] *Biko 2*, Illusion, 2000.
[19] *Biko 3*, Illusion, 2004.
[20] These games include *A-GA*, *Tokimeki Checkin!*, *Tsuki-Possession*, *Virgin Roster*, *Jewel Knights Crusaders*, *Hitomi-My Stepsister*, *Kana-Little Sister*, *Sensei 2*, and *Slave Pageant*.
[21] *Jewel Knights Crusaders*, G-Collections, 2004.
[22] *Custer's Revenge*, Mystique, 1982.
[23] J Dibbell, 'A Rape in Cyberspace', *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1998, p. 13.
[24] *RapeLay*, Illusion, 2006.

[25] Some actual game elements include a freeform mode that allows the raping of any female character, the ability to incite additional males to join in the rape, abortion, tracking the number of vaginal ejaculations, and 'breaking' each girl to make them sex slaves. The game 'ends' in one of two ways: being stabbed to death while raping one of the victims or being thrown in front of a train by an impregnated victim.

[26] B Moore-Bridger, 'MP Calls for Rape Game to be Banned', *London Evening Standard*, 25 February 2009, viewed 4 June 2009, http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23652279-details/MP+calls+for+rape+game+to+be+banned/article.do.

[27] L Alexander, 'And You Thought Grand Theft Auto Was Bad: Should the United States Ban a Japanese 'Rape Simulator' Game?', Slate, 9 March 2009, Viewed 4 June 2009, http://www.slate.com/id/2213073/pagenum/2.

Bibliography

A-GA. Illusion, 2004.

Alexander, L., 'And You Thought Grand Theft Auto Was Bad: Should the United States Ban a Japanese 'Rape Simulator' Game?'. Slate. 9 March 2009, Retrieved 4 June 2009, http://www.slate.com/id/2213073/pagenum/2.

Biko 2. Illusion, 2000.

Biko 3. Illusion, 2004.

Brown, D., *Porn & Pong: How Grand Theft Auto, Tomb Raider and Other Sexy Games Changed Our Culture*. Feral House, Port Townsend, WA, 2008.

Custer's Revenge, Mystique, 1982.

Dibbell, J., 'A Rape in Cyberspace'. *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*. Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1998, p. 13.

Gibo-Stepmother's Sin, Peach Princess, 2004.

Hizashi no Naka no Riaru. Mu-Soft, 2006.

'Indbred Obscurity: Improving Incest Laws in the Shadow of the 'Sexual Family''. *Harvard Law Review*. Vol. 119, June 2006, Retrieved 5 June 2009, http://www.harvardlawreview.org/issues/119/june06/note/inbred_obscurity.pdf.

J-List, 2008, Retrieved 5 June 2009, http://www.jlist.com/HENTAI/.

J.C, 'Kana, Little Sister'. ForeverGeek, 3 October 2004, retrieved 5 June 2009, http://www.forevergeek.com/2004/10/kana_little_sister/.

Jewel Knights Crusaders. G-Collections, 2004.

Kana-Little Sister. G-Collections, 2002.

Lasttoblame, Review of *A-GA*. Moby Games, 15 July 2007, retrieved 4 June 2009, http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/a-ga-gekidou-no-wakusei/reviews/reviewerId,97350/.

Moore-Bridger, B., 'MP Calls for Rape Game to be Banned'. *London Evening Standard*, 25 February 2009, Retrieved 4 June 2009, http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23652279-MP+calls+for+rape+game+to+be+banned/article.do.

Morris, C., 'Wal-Mart, Target Pull *Grand Theft Auto*'. CNNMoney, 20 July 2005, Retrieved 5 June 2009, http://money.cnn.com/2005/07/20/technology/personaltech/gta/.

Princess Maker 2. Gainax, 1996.

RapeLay. Illusion, 2006.

Roberta Williams' Phantasmagoria. Sierra Entertainment, 1995.

The Sagara Family. G-Collections, 2004.

Sizhi, Review of *A-GA*. Moby Games, 14 July 2007, Retrieved 4 June 2009, http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/a-ga-gekidou-no-wakusei/reviews/reviewerId6226/.

Michelle Martinez and **Tyler Manolovitz**, Newton Gresham Library, Sam Houston State University, USA.

Maternal Engulfment in Horror Videogames

Ewan Kirkland

Abstract
This paper uses Freudian psychoanalysis to explore horror videogames. It combines theories of cyberspace, videogames, and psychoanalysis to investigate space, narrative and the avatars in games such as *Clock Tower 3*, *Silent Hill 3*, *The Suffering*, *Haunting Ground* and *Silent Hill*. Discourses of embodiment, immersion and cyborgism describe videogame play as a merging of subject and object, a pleasurable sense of wholeness and union, the erosion of distinctions between self and other, suggesting regression to a pre-Oedipal state of being and consciousness. The horror genre's preoccupation with womb-like spaces and monstrous mother figures corresponds with the visual and symbolic construction of videogame worlds as 'maternal caves'. Vast gothic structures featuring scenes of bloody dismemberment, patrolled by castrating monsters, reinforces this impression; while horror game narratives involving investigation of the playable protagonist's origins similarly suggest an experience of regression and maternal engulfment.

Key Words: Horror, maternal womb, oedipal conflict, *Silent Hill*, psychoanalysis, videogame.

*****

In her insightful paper exploring the multiple meanings of videogame heroine Lara Croft, Helen Kennedy quotes a 2001 television documentary as claiming:

> Lara's phenomenal success wasn't just about a cracking adventure, other games had that too. Lara had something that hooked the gamers like nothing has before. At the center of Tomb Raider was a fantasy female figure. Each of her provocative curves was as much part of the game as the tombs she raided. She had a secret weapon in the world of gaming, well... actually two of them.[1]

This essay explores the psychoanalytic dimensions of that slippage, between the videogame space ('the tombs she raided') which - implicitly heterosexual male - players navigate, and the female body (Croft's 'provocative curves'). The psychoanalytic dimensions of gamespace are examines, specifically the parallels between the caverns, tunnels and architectural structures which the players navigate, and the female body, primarily the interior of the maternal body. I shall be focussing on horror videogames, a cycle with generic roots in horror film, literature, and gothic fiction, cultural forms which themselves have been subjected

to a degree of productive psychoanalytic enquiry. The Oedipal dimensions of discussions of videogame immersion and disembodiment are first explored. A consideration of horror videogame spaces as analogous to the maternal womb then follows. *Clock Tower 3*, *Haunting Ground* and the *Silent Hill* series are then cited as examples of videogame narratives or architectural organisations which enact a return to maternal spaces.

In my work on horror videogames, and the *Silent Hill* series in particular, I have been drawn again and again to psychoanalytic themes: in terms of the narrative and characterisation of the series' central enigma,[2] the repetitive nature of videogame play,[3] or the ways in which videogame components evoke a sense of the uncanny.[4] As Barbara Creed highlights, psychoanalytic theory both influenced and was influenced by cinema,[5] and the same may be said of horror videogames. The titular apartment of *Silent Hill 4: The Room* in which the playable protagonist is inexplicably trapped, is explicitly linked to the maternal body of the mother of a serial killer. In a game which references such Oedipal texts as *Rear Window* and *Psycho*, where an umbilical cord constitutes a crucial object to be found and used, in which midway through the game the walls of the room turn blood red and start to bleed, and where the playable protagonist escapes the womb/room through a series of narrow irregular tunnels, identifying psychoanalytic meaning is somewhat like shooting Freudian fish in a barrel. Nevertheless, investigating horror videogames in this manner allows greater insight into their effectiveness as unsettling texts, the ambiguous compulsion/repulsion nature of horror videogame play, and the transformation of generic horror themes within this new medium.

There is something strangely womb-like about many authors descriptions of the cyberspace experience. Discourses of cybernetic re-embodiment, immersion in virtual spaces, or submission to the rules of alternative digital worlds often describe the blurring of boundaries between the user, the machine, and an enveloping electronic environment. Sherry Turkle writes of 'losing oneself' within virtual environments, the 'altered state' of videogame play producing a sense of oneness with the medium[6] comparable to the early oneness between child and mother. 'Immersion', as described by Janet Murray using a range of water-like metaphors, resembles a uterine experience, 'the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality… that takes over all our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus'.[7] Similarly, Martti Lahti describes a technological apparatus which might 'spread out of the monitor to encompass the space around the player, wrapping itself around her body.'[8] Virtual worlds are described as involving a merging of subject and object, a pleasurable sense of wholeness and union, the erosion of boundaries between self and world, considered by Andrew Darley to be a particularly regressive, adolescent or infantile experience.[9]

If the experience of inhabiting virtual spaces appears to evoke a sensation of inhabiting a womb-like space, this is explicitly explored in Gillian Skirrow's 1986 article 'Hellivision: an analysis of video games'. Involving less a speculation on

the nature of virtual reality, more a consideration of such technologies' application in the digital game marketplace, Skirrow's early analysis of largely text-based adventure games argues: 'Videogames… are about mastering a specifically male anxiety in a specifically male way.'[10] Skirow argues that for young male players videogame spaces represent the mother's body's interior, both a source of fascination and of fear. Drawing on Melanie Klein's suggestion that boys' play displaces anything threatening onto the inside of a woman's body, Skirrow argues that the construction of gamespace - be it catacomb, tomb or spaceship - as ''maternal cave.'' is central to its appeal to male gamers.[11] Such elements certainly resonate within the horror genre, where sinister womb like spaces, monstrous mothers and the threat of maternal engulfment are common. An author who has published much on the gynaecological dimensions of horror cinema, Barbara Creed writes: 'a reconciliation with the maternal body, the body of our origins, is only possible through an encounter with horror, the abject of our culture.'[12] the *Alien* series representing a graphically realized example of this theme. The alien itself embodies the devouring mother, visually evoking the Freudian vagina dentate, while its lair resembles a monstrous womb, the primal fear-inducing cinematic equivalent of Skirrow's gynaecological gamespace.

Discussing the productiveness of drawing theoretical similarities between *Tomb Raider* and the *Alien* series, Dianne Carr makes a significant claim about the visual texture of early videogames when she argues that the absence of tactility, depth, ambiguity, implied odour or dampness to the series' 'sterile and profoundly organised' locations[13], cannot sustain the psychoanalytic interpretations of devouring wombs of *Alien*'s gynaecological set design. While early *Tomb Raider* games informing Carr's paper present fairly regular rectilinear environments, contemporary horror videogames are characterized by elaborate gothic landscapes, rough hewn asymmetrical caverns, dilapidated urban environments, or fleshy corridors dripping with indeterminate fluids. Moreover, many horror games combine such imagery with narratives in which playable characters enact a search for or encounter with a maternal figure, a symbolic return to the family home, or a discovery of their origins involving progression through spaces which frequently assume gynaecological dimensions.

The spatial design of contemporary horror videogames corresponds with Skirrow's description of early game texts, being inhospitable places, filled with bloodied corpses and patrolled by vicious monsters threatening castration. The horrific prison of *The Suffering* is strewn with mutilated prison guards, whose disembodied corpses testify to the horrifying events the player arrived too late to witness. *Resident Evil*'s Racoon City is littered with dead law enforcers and mercenaries whose bodies narrate the failed war against the zombies. Creatures including *The Suffering*'s 'Slayers', scuttling monsters with blades where their hands and feet belong, *Clock Tower 3*'s Scissor Twins, and *Silent Hill 2*'s famous

Pyramid Head, an avenging father figure who drags a huge knife in his wake, evoke threats of castration against the player's avatar.

Such monstrous designs frequently combine with stories involving investigation of parental origins. The narrative of *Clock Tower 3* opens with the protagonist Alyssa returning to her family home in search of her mother. The game's first level involves players penetrating the home's maternal space, unlocking the mother's bedroom, then the door to a secret red walled-room containing a magic portal allowing a time travelling investigation of the family's past. Architectural echoes of the female body are subtly present in *Haunting Ground*, another game which involves uncovering the heroine's origins. The final act features Fiona crossing an umbilical wooden bridge to the House of Truth, its entrance hall containing two twisting outer staircases leading down into symmetrical chambers, like fallopian tubes into the ovaries. *Silent Hill Origins* has a level set in 'Cedar Grove Sanatorium' in which the protagonist, Travis Grady, must use an object titled the 'Jocasta Artefact' to unlock the Female Seclusion ward where a monstrous version of his own mother resides. This figure must be defeated if the player is to continue.

Discussion of engagement in virtual reality and videogame play often suggest a pleasurable womb-like experience of immersion, union, and symbiosis. In contrast, writing on the horror genre explores the use of gynaecological imagery to evoke fear in film spectators. In horror videogames the two combine, resulting in the virtual construction of dangerous womb-like spaces alongside narratives where protagonists travel through bloody chambers to discover the secret of their origin. In many games, this is an explicit component of the experience, suggesting that videogame designers are as aware of these issues as are videogame academics.

Notes

[1] HW Kennedy, 'Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis', *Gamestudies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, December 2002, Viewed on 31 July 2009, http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/.

[2] E Kirkland, 'Alessa Unbound: The Monstrous Daughter of *Silent Hill*', *Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections*, S NiFhlainn (ed) 2006, Viewed on 31 July 2009, http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/publishing/idpress/eBooks.

[3] E Kirkland, 'Repetition in Horror Videogames: A Psychoanalytic Perspective', *Repeat Repeat Conference Proceedings*, Viewed on 31 July 2009, http://www.cpara.co.uk/events/repeatrepeat/technology/kirkland.html.

[4] E Kirkland, 'Horror Videogames and the Uncanny', *Winter Forum on 'The Uncanny'*, Chichester University, 2009.

[5] B Creed, 'Film and Psychoanalysis', *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, J Hill & P Church Gibson (eds), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p.77.

[6] S Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, The MIT Press, London, 2005.
[7] JH Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2000, p. 98.
[8] M Lahti, 'As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasures in Video Games', *The Video Game Theory Reader*, MJP Wolf & B Perron (eds), Routledge, London, 2003, p. 162.
[9] A Darley, *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres*, Routledge, London, 2000.
[10] G Skirrow, 'Hellivision: An Analysis of Video Games', *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*, C MacCabe (ed), Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, p. 138.
[11] ibid, pp. 122-4.
[12] B Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 41.
[13] D Carr, 'Playing with Lara', *ScreenPlay:Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, G King & T Krzywinska (eds), Wallflower, London, 2002, p. 173.

Bibliography

Carr, D., 'Playing with Lara', *ScreenPlay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*. King, G. & Krzywinska, T. (eds), Wallflower, London, 2002, pp. 171-180.

Creed, B., *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, London, 1997.

Creed, B., 'Film and Psychoanalysis'. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Hill, J. & Church-Gibson, P. (eds), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, pp. 77-90.

Darley, A., *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres*. Routledge, London, 2000.

Kennedy, H.W., 'Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis'. *Gamestudies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*. Vol. 2, Issue 2, December 2002, Viewed 31 July 2009, http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/.

Kirkland, E., 'Alessa Unbound: The Monstrous Daughter of *Silent Hill*'. *Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections*. NiFhlainn, S. (ed), 2006, Viewed on 31 July 2009, http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/publishingfiles/i-dpress/eBooks/.

—, 'Repetition in Horror Videogames: A Psychoanalytic Perspective'. *Repeat Repeat Conference Proceedings*. Viewed on 31 July 2009, http://www.cpara.co.uk/events/repeatrepeat/technology/kirkland.html.

—, 'Horror Videogames and the Uncanny'. *Winter Forum on 'The Uncanny*. Chichester University, 2009.

Lahti, M., 'As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasures in Video Games'. *The Video Game Theory Reader*. Wolf, M.J.P. & Perron, B. (eds.), Routledge, London, 2003.

Murray, J.H., *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2000.

Skirrow, G., 'Hellivision: An Analysis of Video Games'. *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*. MacCabe, C. (ed.), Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, pp. 115-142.

Ewan Kirkland has published widely on videogames. Specialising in survival horror and the *Silent Hill* series in particular, he has written on game genre, narrative, self-reflexivity, gender representation, remediation, and artistry.

Murder, Ransom, Theft and Grief: Understanding Digital Ethics in Games

Monica Evans

Abstract
This paper discusses the differences in presenting plausible ethical dilemmas to players of single-player games and the complex digital ethics of multi-player games. Decisions with true ethical weight cannot be made about non-player characters; they must involve human beings. The ramifications of in-game decisions are often undermined by design structures, such as replayability and save states, and the biases of each game's developers. Single-player games rely heavily on narrative devices to inspire ethical or moral questions, but these dilemmas are often superfluous to game mechanics or subverted by technological limitations. In multi- and massively multi-player games, player behavior is directly influenced by two factors: a player's investment in the game, and whether in-game events are considered part of real life or 'just part of the game.' Players with completely different ideals often come into conflict, as with the 2006 massacre of players at an in-game funeral to honor a real person. While massively multi-player games often implement narrative ethical dilemmas, the actual ethical questions raised by these games occur in the ways players interact with each other in individual moments and over time, and are indicative of the shape of gaming cultures and communities.

Key Words: Computer games, massively-multiplayer online games, avatars, digital ethics, interactive narrative, game culture, cyberculture.

*****

1. Ethics and Computer Games

Computer games are emerging as one of our most culturally-relevant artistic media, with an increasing focus on the creation of meaningful experiences for players. As game developers have begun to explore more serious and mature content, many games now present complex moral and ethical dilemmas to players, with varying levels of nuance, plausibility, and depth. There are a wide variety of game types that appeal to an equally wide variety of players and player types; likewise, there are many ways to address ethical issues in computer games, but with some clear distinctions, particularly concerning player behavior. Ethical issues in single-player systems, in which one person is presented with an individual, computer-controlled experience, are quite different than those in multi- or massively multi-player systems, in which players primarily interact with other human beings. Looking at ethics in games, it is helpful to consider ethics as related to player choice, specifically choices between meaningful, not arbitrary, alternatives. To my mind, there is also a clear difference between real ethical

decisions, which must occur between players, and narrative ethical decisions, which encourage players to consider ethical issues even though their decisions have no external, out-of-game consequence. For players to confront and resolve an ethical dilemma, real human consequences must be involved, although narrative can be a powerful tool by which to explore the ethics of human behaviour.

In computer games, player behaviour must be discussed with the following considerations: that strategy often has more weight on the outcome of player decisions than morals; that many game developers are unconcerned about the apparent ethical ramifications of the choices their games offer to players, or in creating in-game consequences that reflect an ethical standard; and that many seemingly unethical acts on the part of a player may be the consequences of that player testing the limits of the game system, rather than a purely ethical choice. It is also worth noting that there is often a clear separation between game mechanics and aesthetic or narrative content. The seemingly shocking action of paying a prostitute for sex and murdering her to get your fee back certainly comes across as morally reprehensible when playing *Grand Theft Auto III*, but this action also represents a loophole in the game system by which a player can gain one resource (health) without expending another (money). Developers that wish to inspire ethical dilemmas in players must consider how blending game mechanics with content affects the potential choices players can make.

2. Choice and Consequence

In single-player computer games, regardless of a player's personal morals, immersion, and narrative investment, the ramifications of in-game decisions are often undermined by three facts. Firstly, a fundamental quality of computer games is that they are replayable. As computer software, games can be installed, deleted, and reinstalled any number of times. These qualities ensure that no decision in a single-player game is irrevocable: all tasks and events can be undone and redone, often with minimal or no repercussions. From both an artistic and a commercial standpoint, preventing players from replaying a game is bad design, the equivalent of prohibiting a person from viewing a particular movie or reading a particular book after their first experience. It is extremely rare to find a game that deliberately prevents the player from playing it again, even rarer to find one that employs this tactic in service of an ethically complex game structure.

Secondly, because of the quality described above, players can accurately predict the outcome of any narrative choice. Difficult or ambiguous choices can be experienced multiple times, during which the player can view the consequences of each decision and then choose the most preferable outcome. While the goal of ethically-complex game systems might be to create gradual changes in a character or a world over time, certainly immediate decisions can be 'gamed' and undermined in this way. Many games with branching morality systems, such as *Fable* or *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, are subject to this sort of out-of-

game strategizing, and moments meant to be dramatically urgent or ethically challenging lose meaning when played twice, potentially undermining the game's core narrative and themes.

Thirdly, the specific in-game consequences for a character's actions are always decided upon by the game's designers. The principles of 'good' and 'evil' in *Fable*, and the respective rewards for following either path, are defined by the specific moral principles of the game's creators. While many of the decisions *Fable* offers players are relatively simple to classify as good or evil, some are more morally ambiguous than others, and a few certainly stand out as questionable - for example, the fact that divorcing one's wife is more evil than killing her, to the tune of six hundred corrupt points.[1] As with all simulations, the complexities of real world systems cannot be perfectly accounted for, and the limitations or omissions of game systems can lead to unique and interesting ethical consequences, some of which may go against the intentions of the game developers.

In addition, many game worlds are defined as physical, strategic, or narrative simulations but not necessarily as ethical or moral simulations, which can mean that the ethics of player actions go largely unnoticed. Scouting dangerous terrain with cheap, easy-to-replace units in *Starcraft* is often a viable strategy; in a game where the specifics of individuals are primarily intended to differentiate between game resources, contemplating the ethics of suicide missions seems out of place. As players, sometimes all we want is to explore the rules of a system, regardless of the content's potential implications. That said, the nature of game systems allows for designers to bring a variety ethical issues to light if so desired. This is the case with *DEFCON*, a fairly traditional strategy game save that points are awarded in millions of civilian lives lost rather than territory won or resources earned. The game is won by the player who has killed the most people, making a clear political point out of an abstract game mechanic.

To reiterate, ethical choices in single-player games often tell us less about the ethics of an individual than about their play-style, as well as illuminate our narrative proclivities as designers and artists. That said, the ways in which single-player games create ethical moments for players can be quite powerful, and can inspire not only ethical introspection but meaningful and lasting experiences.

3. Ethics between Players

Ethics in multiplayer systems raise a completely different set of questions, primarily because the players' choices affect other people. In competitive multiplayer games like *Counterstrike, Unreal Tournament,* and *Battlefield 1942*, ethics are primarily encapsulated in playing fair, and player dynamics are similar to those of team sports. Ethics in persistent-world and massively-multiplayer online games (MMOs) are far more complex. Players adopt not only new playstyles but new personas and interact with a society of players in a variety of ways, including team-based competition but by no means limited to it. The ethical systems we use

to describe our real life actions apply in MMOs, but must be considered through the lens of digital space. A player's ethical beliefs are tempered in-game by two factors: how invested the player is in the game world, and whether the player believes that in-game actions are part of one's real life or just 'part of the game.' A player's ethics are also affected by the specific rules, culture, and limitations of each digital world, which are not necessarily representative of those in real life.

An excellent illustrative example of these principles can be found in Julian Dibbell's 1993 essay 'A Rape in Cyberspace,' in which he describes his experiences in a multi-user chat space, the LambdaMOO.[2] Dibbell describes a 'cyberrape' in which one character, Mr. Bungle, used a voodoo doll item to force other players to perform sexually disturbing acts upon themselves for hours. The acts were written in text, as are all actions in the LambdaMOO, but were interpreted as a violation of other users' avatars, and raised a number of questions about how spaces such as the LambdaMOO should be governed. The game community as a whole agonized over whether to 'toad' Mr. Bungle, destroying his avatar and removing him from the game space; in fact, a consensus could not be reached, and Bungle was finally toaded in private by an individual who felt it was right, regardless of the debate. The victims' outrage over Bungle's actions and difficulty with meting out his punishment, not to mention the discussion of additional real life punishment, stems from their clear emotional investment in the LambdaMOO and in their own avatars. On the other hand, when Bungle was asked why he committed these acts, he said only the following:

> I engaged in a bit of a psychological device that is called thought-polarization, the fact that this is not RL [real life] simply added to heighten the affect [sic] of the device. It was purely a sequence of events with no consequence on my RL existence.[3]

Mr. Bungle's investment in the game space is clearly quite different than that of his victims. His description of his actions as a simple psychological experiment, and his dissociation between the events of his real life and his actions as Mr. Bungle, would come across as sociopathic if not for the fact that the LambdaMOO is a digital gamespace. One can argue that Bungle was mistaken about the lack of real life consequences, in that he was removed from the game, although he returned almost immediately as a new avatar named 'Dr. Jest'. Because of Dibbell's article, Mr. Bungle is also one of the most often-cited examples of questionable behavior in games. In any case, Bungle's perception of the gamespace, and of the actions that are appropriate and allowable in it, are clearly not in line with the rest of the players in the LambdaMOO.

Another excellent example can be found in the infamous 'funeral massacre,' an event which occurred in *World of Warcraft* in 2006. The funeral in question was an in-game memorial service held by a guild of players for one of their own, who

sadly had suffered a stroke and died. A forum post announcing the funeral was discovered by the guild Serenity Now, whose members not only crashed the service and massacred the funeral party but posted a video of their accomplishment online as a recruitment tool for their 'hardest-of-the-hard-core' guild.[4] The *World of Warcraft* community reacted with two extreme points of view about the event: that the funeral goers had been deeply wronged and the raiders were truly sick and disturbed people who would probably disrupt their own grandmother's funeral; or that the incident was hilarious, the raiders were well within in their rights to attack players in a contested area, and the members of the funeral party were taking the game far too seriously. Of course, both groups hold an entirely valid way of looking at the gamespace. Both the mourners and the funeral raiders are clearly invested in *World of Warcraft*, but for very different reasons; and the mourners considered the funeral event to be much more 'real' and meaningful than the raiders. The two groups only came into conflict when they came into close proximity with each other. In the end, discussions of ethics in MMOs depend on the fact that their players create societies and communities, and that the structure and design of MMOs encourage constant collaboration, competition, and communication between large groups of players. While anonymity plays a part, it is worth noting that each player character gains an in-game reputation based on the controlling player's actions, and that these actions cannot be reset, re-experienced, or undone, although new characters can often be created at will.

As with single-player games, narrative devices may be used in MMOs to inspire players to consider ethical issues, separate from the ways in which they interact with other players. An example of one such narrative moment is the now-infamous 'torture quest' in the second *World of Warcraft* expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*, in which players are asked to capture and extract information from an enemy character. The quest is offered by a non-player character faction with a strict code of conduct that does not allow for 'extreme measures… You, however, as an outsider, are not bound by such restrictions and could take any steps necessary in the retrieval of information.'[5] Mechanically, the quest is of a standard structure in which players use an item on a non-player character a set number of times. The content of the quest, in which the player tortures the enemy character with a hot poker, has garnered a great deal of attention. Richard Bartle, game developer and author of *Designing Virtual Worlds*, criticized the quest for offering a lack of options in a system designed to let players choose their own narrative path:

> I was expecting for there to be some way to tell the guy who gave you the quest that no, actually I don't want to torture a prisoner, but there didn't seem to be any way to do that. Worse, the quest is part of a chain … So, either you play along and zap the guy, or you don't get to go to the Nexus…. It would seem

> that Blizzard's designers are OK with breaking the Geneva convention.[6]

Of course, as with the countless human enemies already encountered and killed by the player, there is no actual torture or death to speak of. The prisoner in question respawns unhurt and unchanged each time a player finishes the quest, sometimes several times a minute. The issue with the torture quest is not that any entity is harmed, but that the concept of torture is dealt with too casually. Rather than question their own ethical sensibilities, players like Bartle are instead questioning the way in which the developers themselves dealt with the subject, which shows how carefully one must tread when creating moments of narrative ethical meaning.

4. Digital Crime and Punishment

Players of massively multi-player online games must clearly be concerned with the ethics of their behavior, but these concerns rarely extend to questions of in-game justice, perhaps because the vast majority of online worlds do not allowed for a formal player-driven justice system. The development companies that own and maintain these worlds retain the right to ban a player for any number of offenses, usually delineated in each game's end-user license agreement, but these offenses are concerned with players correctly and legally using the game software, not with player behavior within the game itself. Online worlds, however, are constantly evolving, and there are a number of behaviors that inspire questions of justice as well as ethics. Murder, rape, adultery, prostitution, theft, ransom, harassment, and other real world crimes will soon need to be redefined in virtual terms. These issues are indicative not only of the culture of individual online games but perhaps also of online culture as a whole.

Murder, for example, is seen as morally wrong in most ethical systems, and a serious crime in modern legal systems. Murder in a virtual world, on the other hand, is quite difficult to achieve. In many MMOs, particularly those in which players are expected and encouraged to fight each other, death has little permanence and often incurs little to no penalty. In *Everquest*, a character that 'dies' loses some experience points and must race back to their corpse as a ghost to resurrect and retrieve their equipment before it is lost or stolen; in *World of Warcraft*, the penalty for death is even less severe, and amounts to little more than the loss of a few minutes and a small amount of money. The true death of a character has more to do with removing that character from the system than with contextual death by game mechanics. As with the toading of Mr. Bungle, murder might be described as the deliberate and permanent removal of a specific avatar from a gamespace. Alternatively, it might be described as the deletion of a character and all related data. A person that deletes the game account, and therefore all of the saved characters and progression, of another person gets closer to the essence of murder than one who engages in player-vs.-player combat within

the MMO. This definition of murder depends completely on the victim's investment in the character. The act of deleting an account can be seen as both destruction of property and destruction of a specific identity, one which can never be perfectly recreated. Of course, there are instances where one person murdered another in life because of in-game events, but in these cases the murder is clearly subject to real-world laws, though the motive or inciting incident may have occurred in a virtual space.

Theft, as an opposing example, is a bit more complex in virtual space. Unlike murder, theft in MMOs is very clearly real, as virtual property is considered to have real-world value. The intersection of real economies and virtual economies is well-documented, beginning with Edward Castronova's 1997 article that posited Norrath, the world of *Everquest*, as the 77th richest country in the world.[7] Most MMOs encourage players to trade goods and services both in and out of game. Theft of in-world items is a serious business, and one of the fastest ways that players can bring the wrath of a virtual society down upon themselves. The act of ninja-looting is perhaps the clearest example: there is near universal-loathing for a player who, after spending hours working with a group of other players to navigate and fight through a difficult dungeon, steals the rare equipment that appears at the dungeon's end and vanishes, leaving the other players with nothing in a near-perfect storm of betrayal, theft of value, and theft of time. On the other hand, players of *EVE Online*, in which economics are central to the game's core mechanics, understand that market manipulation, corporate takeovers, and acts of piracy are not only expected but encouraged. The largest and most complex heists yet committed in a virtual game space take place in *EVE Online*, and players can lose in-game players assets that are valued at hundreds and thousands of real-world dollars.[8] These sorts of financial dangers are considered an inherent part of *EVE Online's* gameplay and are purposefully allowed to occur by the developers, no matter how hotly they are debated both in and out of game.

As a whole, the inclusion of ethical dilemmas in games of any type make for potentially thoughtful and compelling experiences, and are a sign that the medium of computer games is maturing, whether developers are creating narrative ethical moments or considering the kinds of questions players will face in multiplayer game systems. While ethical issues exist across digital systems as a whole, games provide an advantage to the observer in that players experience ethical dilemmas and their consequences in intense, focused, and observable groups. Studying ethics in massively-multiplayer systems may tell us a great deal about digital ethics as a whole, as well as the shape and nature of virtual communities. It will be interesting to see if people who face ethical issues in digital systems find their real life behavior changing as a result, and if this change is perceived as being for the better or for the worse. For the time being, ethical systems in digital games are more important than they have ever been, as a lens by which we can better understand

the design, structure, and effect of games on their players, and as harbingers of things to come in our increasingly-digital world.

Notes

[1] *Fable*, Lionhead Studios, Microsoft Game Studios, 2004, played on 18 April 2009.
[2] J Dibbell, 'A Rape in CyberSpace: How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society', JulianDibbell.com, viewed 14 May 2009, http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle_vv.html.
[3] Ibid.
[4] 'Serenity Now Bombs a World of Warcraft Funeral', YouTube.com, Viewed 16 May 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHJVolaC8pw.
[5] *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King*, Blizzard Entertainment, Blizzard Entertainment, 2008, Played 27 February 2009.
[6] R Bartle, 'Torture', YouHaventLived.com, Viewed 16 May 2009, http://www.youhaventlived.com/qblog/2008/QBlog191108A.html.
[7] E Castronova, 'Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier', *The Gruter Institute Working Papers on Law, Economics, and Evolutionary Biology*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, December 2001, pp.1-68.
[8] *EVE Online*, CCP Games, CCP Games, 2003, played on 19 May 2009.

Bibliography

Bartle, R., 'Torture.' YouHaventLived.com, Viewed 16 May 2009, http://www.youhaventlived.com/qblog/2008/QBlog191108A.html.

Castronova, E., 'Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier'. *The Gruter Institute Working Papers on Law, Economics, and Evolutionary Biology*. Vol. 2, Issue 1, December 2001, pp.1-68.

Dibbell, J., 'A Rape in CyberSpace: How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society'. JulianDibbell.com, Viewed 14 May 2009, http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle_vv.html.

EVE Online, CCP Games, CCP Games, 2003.

Fable, Lionhead Studios, Microsoft Game Studios, 2004.

'Serenity Now Bombs a World of Warcraft Funeral'. YouTube.com. Viewed 16 May 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHJVolaC8pw.

World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King, Blizzard Entertainment, Blizzard Entertainment, 2008.

Monica Evans is Assistant Professor of Computer Game Design at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her current research focuses on educational game development, digital ethics, and narrative for interactive spaces.

Part IV:

Gender and the Changing Role of the Player

Girl Gamers Rock! The Role of the Female in *Rock Band*'s World of Virtual Musicians

Kristen B. Miller

Abstract
Demographics suggest that approximately 40% of gamers are female, and yet female gamers still seem to be considered an aberration and remain largely missing from amongst the elite players of competitive games. An example of a game in which one would expect to find more elite female players is Rock Band, a music game in which one plays along to guitar, bass, and drums parts in popular rock songs with special controllers or sing along through a microphone. With music as its centre rather than more typically masculine focuses like sports or war, one would think it would attract more female players, and yet most competitive and elite Rock Band players, outside of vocalists, are almost exclusively male. This paper reports the findings of a survey taken by 650 Rock Band players and follow-up, narrative questionnaires sent to 40 male and 40 female of those original survey respondents. The purpose of the survey was to determine what differences, if any, exist between the ways that males and females learn to play the game, interact with other players both online and in real life, and interact with other players in online communities about the game. Overall, this study's findings fit with earlier work in this area by Pamela Takayoshi, who did a case study with four female gamers, and also with the work of Elizabeth Flynn in the field of composition studies. This study suggests that while females do not appear to learn to play this game much differently from males, they are motivated differently and interact with other players differently, and ultimately they have a harder time than males finding a place in the affinity groups that exist for the game.

Key Words: Video games, females, gender, music games, *Rock Band*, online play, learning, motivation, affinity groups.

*****

Much of the recent scholarship in video games has been concerned with the connections between video games and learning, either how video games could be used to teach (DeMaria) or how quality classroom teaching could be modelled after how video games teach (Gee, Selfe and Hawisher). Much of why video games serve as a model of good teaching is because they inspire a lot of motivation, dedication, and willingness to fail on the part of the player. If you can bottle up what it is that inspires a player to work hard and excel at a video game and apply it in the classroom, imagine the improvements to education. Little attention, however, has been given to whether or not males and females learn and play video games differently. Beyond one essay in Selfe and Hawisher's *Gaming Lives in the*

Twenty-First Century, most attention I've found given to gender differences in these type of works has concerned the content of the games - their portrayal of women - rather than how female players might engage with them differently, and the subsequent effect this might have on work that seeks to model classroom teaching after video games. That one essay, 'Gender Matters: Literacy, Learning, and Gaming in One American Family' by Pamela Takayoshi, addresses one primary aspect of women learning video games, that of the role of affinity groups.[1] Takayoshi makes the observation that video games are more of a communal experience for females than for males, and yet at the same time observes that females are much more cut off from the larger gaming community. That the communal experience of it is central for females fits well with the work of Elizabeth Flynn, who argues in 'Composing as a Woman' that, at least in writing, the male wants to set himself apart from others while the female wants to make connections with others. In this study, I set out to see what differences, if any, exists between the way males and females play one particular video game, Rock Band, a music simulation game that allows players to play along as guitar, bass, drums, or vocals to rock songs at difficulties ranging from easy to expert. Overall, the results of this study fit the findings of Takayoshi and Flynn, suggesting that females tend to focus on and be motivated by the connective aspects of this video game, and yet at the same time, do not seem to feel as welcome in the larger Rock Band or general gaming community.

Statistics suggest that about 40% of people who play video games are female, but with females comprising so few of the 'elite' players in the community of a game like Rock Band, questions arise. Is that statistic simply far off the true number of players, at least of console games? Is it harder for females to become known, even if they are as good at the games as the male players? Are they not as motivated to excel as male players? Are they simply not able to play as well? Particularly if it is a motivation issue, is it enough of an issue to damage the attempted transfer by scholars of principles from video game learning to classroom learning? I didn't find that males and females learn to play this game all that differently than one another, but they are certainly motivated differently and behave rather differently in group play.

The main survey used for this study was linked from the discussion boards of three major Rock Band online communities.[2] I also linked it from my YouTube account and passed it along to people I knew played the game through Facebook, desperately seeking less-serious players to fill it out along with the competitive players. In a little under a week, it had received 650 responses, at which point I closed the survey. This survey in no way reflects accurately the numbers of people who play on which difficulty, nor, I would guess, the true proportion of male to female players, since I could not find a good way to get it to more casual players, who would be less likely to frequent online communities related to the game. I also sent a follow-up survey to 40 male and 40 female respondents, asking more

narrative questions about how they learned to play the game, and also trying to match the distribution of competitive players in the two groups as evenly as possible to attempt to give casual players equal representation. While serious players are certainly over-represented in these surveys, some of the results of this survey and the differences between male and female players that they suggest are especially interesting considering that most of the respondents, including most of the female respondents, are serious or competitive players.[3]

One major difference I found between males and females is that males seem to be more focused on numbers than females are. In his article 'Mastering the Game,' Charles Soukup pinpoints the idea of the quantification of action, boiling down one's actions to a score and the consequent drive to improve or achieve a perfect score, as a major contribution to one's motivation to learn and improve at video games. In his article, he is describing how the content of video games reinforces patriarchy through their focus on domination through violence and force, but he also spends time discussing the draw of mathematical mastery. He does not make as strong a claim that this is more of a masculine tendency, but I do see the suggestion through survey responses that males are more drawn to numbers or scores than females. Both male and female respondents were equally likely to restart songs or replay them multiple times to improve their scores on songs, but females seem to be far less likely to 'score track' than males. I saw this echoed in narratives on the follow-up survey in which I asked respondents what their most frustrating and most rewarding experiences with the game had been. Males were more likely to report frustration with trying to achieve a specific score or to get 100% on a song, for instance this story from a top-ranked guitarist on the game:

> Probably my most frustrating times were not when I was going for FCs[4], but on songs like Painkiller. I think I got 94% on the first solo on guitar at least 40 - 45 times before I hit the 95% mark for the bigger score bonus.

In contrast to this focus on numbers, females tended toward reporting more big-picture frustrations like physical limitations with drums and guitar, or with passing a certain difficulty. Responses regarding rewarding moments were largely similar across the genders except males were more likely to mention achieving specific ranks on leaderboards, which females did not mention. Males were significantly more likely to check their rankings on the online leaderboards than females were.

As I mentioned before, Takayoshi observed that video games are more a connective medium for females, as opposed to the competitive medium they seem to be to males. This also fits with Flynn's work in composition studies regarding females' focus on building connections and males' focus on setting themselves apart. The results of my survey echo this: females reported being more 'self-competitive' while males report being much more competitive with others.

Interestingly, the few times that female respondents mentioned feeling competitive with others in their narrative responses, it was almost always with other females. For instance, one woman talks about how, when she was learning to play Guitar Hero (a precursor to the game Rock Band), she describes it as being 'all about the fun' and 'being better than the girls I played with.' At the time, she was quite content to play on medium, but when Guitar Hero III was released, she was motivated by the ability to play online against others and by the progress of a friend who also played the game:

> I was previously content to play on Medium, one of the girls was already playing on Hard. Such a thing was not to be. I was not to be outshone be a stay-at-home wife, even if she DID play 4 to 5 hours a day. It was pure outrage that got me serious about becoming a better player.

Another female respondent in her narrative remarked about noticing how female players either tend to form bonds with one another because of being in the minority, or they become more viciously competitive, trying to establish themselves as the best female player. So overall, it seems that males are more competitive with others than females, but both are competitive with themselves, and females may be sparked into being competitive through an urge to be the best of their minority group.

Respondents' narratives of learning to play the game were fairly similar across genders. The biggest difference seemed to be that males were more likely to recount specific ways they found to solve a problem or get past an obstacle, while females were more likely to mention getting help or encouragement from others along the way. Females were more likely to mention working on a different instrument instead or leaving the game itself alone for a while when becoming stuck. On the other hand, one of the places where the biggest differences between male and female players emerged was in mostly self-reported behaviour in group play. Overall, you see females being more motivated to improve when it's for a group rather than themselves, being more likely to give up the more popular instruments to others, showing more concern for how others will feel in multiplayer settings, and overall more support of other people.

First, though it wasn't an option on my follow-up survey, several female respondents wrote in to explain that at least part of their motivation to improve comes from wanting to play well for their bands or for their clan mates, in the case of PMS Clan members. Along with the suggestion that wanting to improve for the sake of others is a consideration for the female players, descriptions of band atmospheres from both male and female players suggests that female presence in bands tends to create a more supportive group. As females describe playing in mixed-gender bands, they tend to talk about becoming friends outside of the game

and also discuss feeling responsible for lightening the mood and being supportive. As one respondent describes,

> I'm usually the only female in a band, and when the guys get competitive and act like jerks, I tend to over-compensate by praising parts where they did well, and giving out advice for where they could improve. I just can't stand to see someone put down because they messed up. We all had to start somewhere. If the jeering gets too bad, I'll leave, or if I'm the leader, I'll kick the offending player. I don't care if you're the best player in the world, I don't want to hear that crap. If there is another female in the band, it seems most of the time, she and I will collaborate to keep things light. Makes it more fun.

Another female describes taking on a similar role in the top-ranked band for which she is the vocalist:

> Being the vocalist, my job was the 'easiest' of the other instruments, so more often than not I was the voice of reassurance for the others. 'It's okay, we'll get it next time.' 'Lets quit that song and try it another day.' Etc.

As males discuss being in mixed-gender bands, they either say that they don't find it much different from playing in an all-male band (stressing that if you are good at your instrument, you are good at your instrument - gender doesn't matter), while others seconded the female description of a supportive atmosphere and being friends outside of the game. In male descriptions of participating in all-male bands, there are descriptions of both supportive atmospheres and of serious, business-like atmospheres. As one respondent described it, he and his band mates 'weren't really supportive, more like understanding' of 'off' days and mistakes. However, there were no descriptions of mixed-gender bands being extremely businesslike, while numerous all-male bands were described this way.

Likewise, males and females report substantially different responses to certain scenarios in group play. In cases of other players failing out of songs in group play, females are slightly more likely to be supportive and understanding and to protect the struggling players by conserving 'overdrive' so save them if they fail out. Males report being more likely to kick players who are struggling in between songs, quit themselves, suggest the struggling players drop a difficulty level, or refuse to save them if they fail out. In cases of the respondents themselves failing out, females are more likely to drop a difficulty for the next song. Males are more likely to quit during or after the song and to keep the same difficulty if they stay.

Females also report being less frustrated with players who pick lower difficulties than they do.

Overall, most of the females in the Rock Band community who are well-known are well-known for being vocalists, but most female respondents to this survey do still play other instruments on expert, though primarily guitar and bass. However, these same females seem to either feel obligated to give up the more prestigious or challenging instruments (guitar and drums), or at the very least, are more willing than males to take the less-desired parts of vocals and especially bass. A common problem one runs into in group play with Rock Band is that few people want to play bass; almost everyone prefers lead guitar. This is backed up by responses to my survey; few people choose to play bass when playing alone. It makes sense that more people would play bass in groups simply because when four people are playing, someone is going to have to take it. What is interesting is how much more often females report playing bass in group settings than males.[55] Females seem far more willing (or feel more obligated) to give up guitar to other people.

I also asked respondents on the follow-up survey how it makes them feel if they pick a higher or lower difficulty than the people they are playing with (which, in the case of these respondents, almost always meant playing at a higher difficulty than the people around them). Both males and females reported feeling unwanted or undeserved attention for playing on expert, and both genders report still playing their best regardless. About even numbers also reported enjoying excelling or feeling good about playing on the higher difficulties. The biggest difference was that two separate females specifically mentioned either playing their worst instrument, playing badly on purpose, or dropping a difficulty to more closely match what other people are doing. One male respondent, while not playing worse than he is capable of, did say that he prefers to sit back and let others play for a while before he joins in so he doesn't scare them off. These responses, though from a small pool, suggest that females are a little more worried about others feeling like they aren't good enough and that they are more willing to feign a lack of ability for the sake of other people, again supporting this notion of their seeking video games to be a connective medium.

However, while females more than males seem to be looking for connections with others as they play the game, there remain many ways that females feel unwelcome in this gaming community. Narratives from females and from males who are mistaken for females in online play illustrate how females are treated quite differently from males in online gaming. The major themes in this seem to be females (and males thought to be females) getting hit on, receiving more friend requests, and being sent more messages, but in addition to this extra attention, also being singled out, particularly in first person shooter games, for being harassed and/or killed (or in the case of Rock Band, harassed or kicked from multiplayer sessions). Several females report trying to give the impression that they are male by using male avatars and not speaking through the microphone so they don't get

treated any differently. The situation seems the same regarding online communities for Rock Band. The three biggest ones are the official Rock Band forums, which cater more to the casual players; Scorehero, which tends to attract the most competitive players; and the PMS/H2O clan site, a site for multiple games which is competitive but aims at creating a place where females are encouraged to play and where males can play with those females as equals. Males generally favoured the official site and Scorehero, while females in this survey favoured Scorehero and the PMS clan site. Scorehero, because of being comprised of serious players but not specifically aimed at including females, provides the best illustration of the troubles females encounter when trying to join these affinity groups. Multiple females described joining Scorehero and becoming involved but feeling conflicted about whether or not to reveal their gender. They felt like they would be taken more seriously as players if they did not reveal their gender, but felt like they were lying to people by not revealing it. At the same time, they didn't want to reveal that they were female because they didn't want to get attention just for being female, as they saw less skilled players get attention simply based on gender. It seems a shame that this is the choice so many female players feel like they must make, but this comes from them being received as outsiders by so much of the gaming community; there doesn't seem to be a way to keep gender from being an issue. Overall, females report either getting very positive or very negative reactions from male players, but also, on the whole, report feeling that male players are supportive of them, or, as one respondent described it, 'I would generally say 'more supportive' but in a mildly condescending, 'women are supposed to suck' kind of way.'

My examination of Rock Band players and the differences between male and female players of the game supports the prior work of Pamela Takayoshi regarding video games and of Elizabeth Flynn regarding the differences in males and females that manifest in their writing. Females more than males in this study showed more interest in making connections with others than standing out from others, whether through their direct answers or through the types of stories and details they would focus on in their narrative answers. They also tended to show more awareness of others and their feelings when describing their own behaviour in multiplayer situations. And yet in contradiction to their focus on connecting with others through the game, female players seem to have a hard time finding a place within the community without making an issue of their gender, tending to receive either overly positive or negative attention because of their gender when it is known, or feeling deceitful if they do not make their gender known. This demonstrates how gaming is still largely a male-dominated place, despite what statistics may say about how many females are playing games. I am interested in looking at how these same issues may manifest themselves in learning situations in the school and workplace, because it feels like if you see it in studies of video games and studies of writing, it probably shows up in other areas, as well.

Notes

[1] Takayoshi is discussing affinity groups as defined by James Gee: J Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, p. 27.

[2] Those three communities are the official Rock Band website http://www.rockband.com, a score-tracking site called Scorehero http://rockband.scorehero.com, and a female gaming clan site called PMS/H2O Clan http://www.pmsclan.com.

[3] 596 survey respondents (91.7%) were male and 54 (8.3%) were female. A majority of respondents were between the ages of 15 and 29, with 35.8% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 23. 10% of respondents were 30 or older. The female respondents skewed slightly older than the male respondents. Those who responded to this survey play Rock Band a lot; nearly all reported playing the game somewhere between several hours a day and several hours a week.

[4] An 'FC' is an abbreviation for 'full combo,' which is hitting 100% of the notes in a song without any extra strums on guitar or bass or extra hits on drums.

[5] Males and females did not report very different habits with playing bass in solo play - 4.7% of males list it as the one they play most, compared to 6.3% of females. However, in group play, the number of males who report playing bass most rises to just 12.5%, while this number for females jumps to 27.1%.

Bibliography

DeMaria, R., *Reset: Changing the Way We Look At Video Games*. Berret-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2007.

Flynn, E.A., 'Composing as a Woman'. *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*. Villanueva, V. (ed), National Council of Teachers of English, Illinois, 1997.

Gee, J.P., *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003.

Selfe, C.L. & Hawisher, G.E. (eds), *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007.

Soukup, C., 'Mastering the Game: Gender and the Entelechial Motivational System of Video Games'. *Women's Studies in Communication*. Vol. 30, June 2007, pp. 157-179.

Takayoshi, P., 'Gender Matters: Literacy, Learning, and Gaming in One American Family'. *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*. Selfe, C.L. & Hawisher, G.E. (eds), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, pp. 229-249.

Kristen B. Miller, Ph.D. student at Auburn University with research focus in rhetoric and composition, Alabama, USA.

Man to Man: Sports (Games) and Female Characters

Riikka Turtiainen

Abstract
The new FIFA 09 videogame is - according to game reviews - the ultimate football simulation. They claim it's the most realistic depiction of football yet. Over 200 improvements have been made since last year's game. 'The third generation football engine' guarantees more realistic ball control with credibly dribblings and slide tackles. As a videogame player you are allowed to adjust many tactical settings. In Be A Pro: Seasons you can pick a single real-world player or create your own professional player and develop his skills. Yes, his. You can customize things like size of your characters nostrils or grade of his baldness but you can't choose the gender. How realistic is that? Very, if we consider the game as a simulation of media sports. It represents the actual position of female team sports in media. In this paper I discuss the absence of female team players when the case is videogame culture - and at the same time the whole world of media sport. I approach the topic throughout questions of female heroism and stereotypical gender roles in popular culture.

Key Words: Videogame culture, media sports, female, football, realism, FIFA 09.

*****

In the console world, the battle for the title of best football game has been constant between Konami's Pro Evolution Soccer and FIFA-series. At this moment, the latter series has the upper hand, due to the release of the improved *FIFA 09* game. The most noticeable aspect in the new football simulation is the aspiration for extreme *realism*, which of course affects playability and the gaming experience as a whole. This fictional game review has been written through the eyes of a presumed female player; subject of the critique will not only be the actual game but also digital sports games in general, and the 'obvious' bisection of media's sport scene.

1. 'Let's get physical'

Realism in general is a popular catchword in digital games (for example in war games), but particularly in sport games the simulation aspect forms the core of the game experience. In fact, the realism of *FIFA 09*, as in many digital sport games, is based on the simulation of the representation. Usually in sport games, the object of the mimicry is the professionally produced television broadcast. This same phenomenon can be seen in war games, where they usually simulate war movies and not the actual war.[1] Aki Järvinen has identified the audiovisual styles of digital games and he calls this kind of aspire for realism as televisualism, which is a

subcategory for photorealism.[2] Realism in *FIFA 09* includes, in addition to the audiovisual elements, the 'plausible' control mechanics and AI, which in cooperation creates a vivid gaming experience.

Compared to the predecessor of *FIFA 09*, the game has over 200 different types of improvements. Biggest modifications have been made to the physics engine, controls and tactics editor. Consequences of contact situations are more realistic than before. A player who has less muscle will come second in head-to-head struggles, and Michael Owen loses all the headers to Sami Hyypiä. Realism of these situations, and the consequences of them, has been made possible by using motion capture in the animations. The movements have been captured by using real professional football players. A perfectly aimed slide tackle, and its results, obey the laws of physics, and in general the movement of the players is much more natural. In addition to the players' movements, the physics of the ball have been improved. Controlling the ball becomes almost as difficult as it is in real life. As you could imagine a game character resembling its creator, weighing 120 pounds and 160 centimetres tall, does not have the upper hand against bigger characters. Understandably a game character that size is very small in the football field - especially when all the other players are men.

FIFA 09 has 'vast customisation options', which do not include the possibility to choose gender. In the settings you can customize the size of a character's nostrils, earflap and the advancement of baldness, but still the qualities of the characters remain very masculine. Overall the visual quality of the graphics is very impressive. In-game realism extends from game characters to the settings of game events. Even the differences between stadium sizes and their lighting have been taken into account - support chants including, of course. The tactics editor offers the possibility to modify your in-game strategies. For example you can change the position of your press line, but you cannot 'manoeuvre' the cup size, which I would not exactly call as deficiency in the game play. Still, many players desire for the possibility to choose your player who performs the free kicks and corner kicks. In this context, is a female character behind the ball a 'special situation'?

2. Be a Pro (not a Woman)

Be a Pro is a game mode where you can customize the appearance of your player. Optionally you can choose from the list of real life licensed players which are from real professional or national leagues. Broadcasting rights and fan paraphernalia are based on pure business and are an analogue to the realistic purpose of the game.[3] Aim of the *B a Pro* season mode is to become an international football star during the time period of four football seasons -or you can optionally develop the career of a known football star. I can understand the lack of female football teams (especially when the Finnish Football League is not included in vast selection of licensed football leagues), but wouldn't it be possible to toy with the idea of a female player among the male players, in the *Be a Pro*-

game mode. This kind of fantasy setting in no more ambitious than the reproduction of a common sports fan in Real Madrid's opening combination.

It is interesting to notice how naturally realism and fantasy coexist in sports games. As noted earlier this is possible only to a certain extent. *FIFA 09* is not the only game which does not offer the possibility for a female character. Invariably in team sports games female characters are absent - this is true if you do not take into account beach volley and tennis (or baseball in Wii Sports). On the other hand, sport games can be seen as very liberal. David J. Leonard has mapped the proportion of black male game characters and he has found that they are very well represented in the sports games genre. Eight out of ten black male game characters are sports heroes. He has also noticed the lack of women in those virtual arenas. Leonard says that the hegemony of white men is still evident in game worlds, which preserves the stereotypical addressing of black men.[4]

Susanna Paasonen has studied media culture, she has contemplated how heroines are depicted in fictional television. She has allocated female action heroines into three categories. First example is Buffy the vampire slayer, where the female representations consist of characters with magical and supernatural powers. Secondly, in the series Dark Angel, the female protagonist is a figurehead for all characters who have been technically and scientifically modified. Last category consist of female characters like Xena or Lara Croft, these mythical characters have superior martial art skills and overwhelming physical strength. All of these famous television characters have appeared as a digital game character. (Lara Croft's first appearance was in a digital game, and then she was ported in to a movie.) These identifiable female characters have something in common; they are crafted into something very exceptional. According to Paasonen, heroines possess a body which represent traditional femininity (thin curvaceous woman), but at the same time they have extraordinary physical abilities (= an impossible equation). Inhuman strength is generally explained with genetical manipulations and supernatural features. Paasonen states that the role of an action hero depicts traits, which are usually designated for male protagonists. She also discusses about gender standardised media cultural genres, such as action, war fiction and sports, all of which are generally thought as male roles. Romances, melodrama and comedy are usually considered to be female genres.[5]

Unfortunately, stereotypical gender roles are transmitted from the conventions of popular culture to game worlds.[6] In the 80's and the 90's, female game characters were passive 'damsels in distress', Sonja Kangas says that they were the victims of the scenery. Even though some progress has been made, female characters are still more objects of desire than active characters. In game genres, cute platformers are usually designed for female players.[7] Feministic media study approaches the concept of a female game character, when pondering how the world is gendered in different media productions, presentations and how it is conceived. This field of study has focused on representations of female heroism.[8] What if

female representations in sports games are completely absent? Without a detailed specific analysis, it is possible to indicate than in this context womanhood transforms into an invisible gender.

3. Truthful Simulation of Media Sports

FIFA 09 is not the only sports game simulation to blame for the exclusion of female characters - neither is the digital game industry. Critical gaze should be shifted towards media sports as a whole. *FIFA 09* -reviews usually state that 'the game hast the most realistic gameplay ever seen', and the game has been said to be 'a successful simulation of realistic football', and even 'this is the most realistic football simulation to date'. I think that the reviews are quite accurate, when describing simulation as a reflection of broadcasted football, which in real life does not include female players.

Exercise and sport studies have examined discourses how gender roles are constructed in sports. Riitta Pirinen has examined feministic interests of sports studies in her dissertation and she has touched upon the idea of a media created subject that is called a 'sporting woman'. Using her material, which consists of newspapers and women's magazines, she examines how the subsidiary of women in sports is produced, maintained and reinforced.[9] Sanna Valtonen and Sanna Ojajärvi interpret how gender roles are described in sport cultures, and they have selected examples from media created visual representations. It seems that media offers very few subjects for women to identify with, because competitive sports are biased towards to the male audience. For women the focus is usually only on exercise. Communication researchers end up asking that what kind of ideological consequences do the representations of female athletes have, and what kind of opportunities do they possess for reworking identities and forming the active subject.[10] In sports media studies female star athletes can be located in individual sports, figure skating, golf and tennis. In these sports it is possible to highlight the feminine qualities of the athletes. Female team sport athletes are typically considered to be large, sweaty and aggressive - which means that these qualities are not thought as media sexy or feminine.[11] Beauties of individual sports, who are usually posing in different contexts than sports, can be counted among Lara Croft and all the other accepted heroines. According to Sami Kolamo, sports represent the forerunner in popular culture's definition of heterosexual masculinity. In media culture, physically strong and mentally tough athletes have typically been male; women have typically been the ones who award the medal for these victorious male athletes.[12]

Female team sports players are usually heroines of their own lives. In team sports, women's performance and overall quality of the game is often compared to men.[13] In all of its virility, a female football player is inevitably slower and weaker than a male player. This can sometimes seem comical to the untrained eye. Riitta Pirinen calls the textual customs where female sports is labelled comical, low

grade and of no value as trivialization.[14] Sport belongs to categories which are measured through polarity. Pirkko Markula and Richard Pringle have studied mechanisms, which are used when producing gender identities, in the vigorous sport rugby that is usually thought as a masculine sport. In their interview data, it is apparent that the idea of mixing femininity and rough physical sports was considered to be peculiar and confusing. The reason for this, among other things, was that women were said to be physically weaker than men.[15] In media, the discourse concerning female sports usually has humoristic and sexual connotations.[16] If the option to choose a female character would be introduced in to digital sports games, would gameplay transform into a burlesque?

4. 'I just dropped her stats all down to 50, then shipped her off to Russia'

In 2007, FIFA's webpage had a poll where people could vote what new features they were hoping for to the future FIFA releases. New leagues, futsal, women's football, among other things were desired new features. My internet search engine found a game review, which predicted better sales in North America if women's football would be included; this is because women's football is widely popular in North America.[17] In the United States 'soccer' is considered more as a sport meant for women. USA has won many world championships and Olympic gold medals and the success has brought vast amounts of young girls to start playing football. Former star player Mia Hamm even had an own Soccer Barbie doll in the 90's, the doll was very flexible because it had joints that were created to achieve maximum ball control. This is one of the reasons why it is odd that we live in beginning of the 21st century and women are still absent in digital sport games. (even Ms. Pacman was introduced in the 1980's).

Surprisingly, an anomaly can be found in an ice hockey game, which is not even an in-game joke (reminds one of the female sports discourses) from the programmers. FIFA series is published by EA Sports; in their ice hockey game *NHL 09* there is a certain character which clearly has the features of a woman. Sabrina Ladha is the name of this ice hockey goaltender and she can be found from the free agents list. Reason for Ladha's inclusion is the *Make-A-Wish Foundation*, which fulfils the wishes of terminally ill children. Ladha's character has been an issue among the players of the game, some have thought that it is a sympathetic gesture, but some are quite dissatisfied. Her character is very large and her abilities are phenomenal. In *NHL 09* message boards, there are many comments from outraged players. 'A supernatural woman' in a game which pursues maximum realism is instantly disapproved, and harsh comments have been made about the game (WTF?!). Some of the players advise to trade 'the Indian chick' to a non-NHL team, which you would never use in the actual game. Players who are in favour of this gesture are a minority at the message boards. An easily provoked person could ask that does a person have to be terminally ill, in order to have a female player in team sports games.

From all accounts it seems evident that a female character would be a step back in the pursuit for (media sports type) realism. But how realistic is the *FIFA 09* gaming experience for female football players? In-game subject positions and identifying with the game character are complicated processes. Game designer Mary Flanagan has described the hard to define relationship between the physical player and the in-game player as *double embodiment*. The gamer sees the game character on screen but at the same time he 'sees' through the eyes of the character - these experiences are not completely formed without the physical player with a controller in his/her hands. The player has the possibility to be the character in the game, but also it is possible to be the player on screen and at the same time off screen.[18] It is not unusual to state that 'I scored a goal as Litmanen'. The 'I' in a digital game can manifest itself in many different ways, but wouldn't it be nice for a girl/woman to play as one of the best female football players Marta, instead of always playing as Ronaldinho. It seems that at the moment the only way to experience *FIFA 09* with a female character is to play the Wii version of the game. In this version there is a game mode called Footi and you can play it with your Mii-avatar. With modern hardware it would be possible to create a first person team sports game, where you could see the action through the eyes of a football player - but then the televisualism of the game would be lost.

Game journalist Bonnie Ruberg writes in her article *The Truth about Little Girls* that when she was venturing in game worlds she was a boy, man, luscious female fox with pistols on her hips, zombie, Pokemon, a ninja with no pants and a pink ball with a big mouth - but never a little girl. She asks that where have all the little girls disappeared in videogames: 'Perhaps the girls are too busy to be noticed because they have to arrange tea parties for their teddy bears?' Ruberg analyses female game characters and their constant sexualisation. Even games targeted for little girls include surgically enhanced characters, such as Barbie and Bratz dolls.[19] Sonja Kangas regards games meant for little girls as mere screen savers; this is because the playability of these games is usually nonexistent. The design of these games is defined by narrow minded concepts what girls like and the minimization of economical risks.[20] Once again, one has to note that the digital game industry is not the only one to blame in maintaining female stereotypes. In December (2008) a newspaper, which has a large circulation, reported about alternative Christmas gifts that would replace traditional Legos and Bratz-dolls: 'A boy might be pleased to receive a hockey stick or a microscope and a girl might like to receive a hula hoop or miniature farm animals'.[21]

Girls who play digital games, have been studied in academic fields, since the 90's studies results have led to different kinds of approaches in game design.[22] It is true that not every girl/woman desires to play *FIFA 09*, but neither does every boy/man. Team sports games and the characters seem to hold many evaluative and open questions when they receive the prefix 'female' or 'women's'. Football transforms into women's football etc. I think that digital games are the perfect tool

and an opportunity to redress stereotypical attitudes. If digital games are not perfect for this task, then what is? For now I cannot imagine what it would feel like if the 'dude' who reviews games would turn into a 'broad', as long as it doesn't turn into 'crumpet leaguer'.

Notes

[1] J Campbell, 'Just Less than Total War Simulating: World War II as Ludic Nostalgia', *Playing the Past. History and Nostalgia in Video Games*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2008, p. 186.
[2] A Järvinen, 'Kolmiulotteisuuden aika: Audiovisuaalinen kulttuurimuoto vuosina 1992-2002'', *Mariosofia: Elektronisten pelien kulttuuri*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2002, pp. 70-91; A Järvinen 'Urheilun ja tähteyden simulaatiot', *Lähikuva* 16:1, 2003, pp. 44-57.
[3] Järvinen 2003.
[4] L David, 'Performing Blackness: Virtual Sports and Becoming the Other in an Era of White Supremacy', R*e: Skin*, MIT Press, Cambridege, 2005, pp. 321-338.
[5] S Paasonen, 'Naisen malleja ja naismalleja: television uudet toimintasankarit', *Kulttuurinen sisältötuotanto?*, Edita, Helsinki, 2004, pp. 121-134.
[6] Järvinen 2002.
[7] S Kangas, 'Mitä sinunlaisesi tyttö tekee tällaisessa paikassa? Tytöt ja elektroniset pelit', *Mariosofia: Elektronisten pelien kulttuuri*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2002, pp. 131-152.
[8] See A Mäkelä, L Puustinen & I Ruoho, 'Feministisen mediatutkimuksen näkökulmat' and 'Esipuhe', *Sukupuolishow: Johdatus feministiseen mediatutkimukseen*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2006, pp. 7-44.
[9] R Pirinen, *Urheileva nainen lehtiteksteissä:* Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 512, 2006. http://acta.uta.fi/pdf/951-44-6574-1.pdf.
[10] S Valtonen & S Ojajärvi, 'Kauniit ja kunnolliset. Naiset ja miehet liikuntakulttuurin kuvastoissa'. *Lähikuva*, vol 16, issue 1, 2003, pp. 30-43.
[11] For example see D Baroffio-Bota & S Banet-Weiser, 'Women, Team Sports, and the WNBA: Playing Like a Girl', *Handbook of Sports and Media*, LEA, New Jersey, 2006, 485-500; Pirinen 2006, p.14.
[12] S Kolamo, Sami, 'Urheilu, tähdet ja fanius mediaspektaakkelin aikakaudella', *Kulttuurintutkimus,* Vol 21, Issue 4, 2004, p. 41.
[13] R Pirinen, 'Catching Up with Men? Finnish Newspaper Coverage of Women's Entry into Traditionally Male Sports', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* Vol 32, Issue 3, 1997, p. 240.
[14] Pirinen 2006, p. 41
[15] P Markula & R Pringle, '*Foucault, Sport and Exercise. Power, Knowledge and Transforming the Self*', Routledge, London and New York, 2006. (See also Pirinen 2006, p.13.)

[16] M Carlisle Duncan, 'Gender Warriors in Sport: Women and the Media', *Handbook of Sports and Media*, A. Raney & J. Bryant (eds), LEA, New Jersey, 2006, pp. 231-252.
[17] FIFA 09: Introducing Womens Football? Games On Net. (11.12. 2007) http://wwwgameson.net/article/2344/FIFA_09_-_Introducing_Womens_Foot ball.
[18] M Flanagan, 'Hyperbodies, Hyperknowledge: Women in Games, Women in Cyberpunk, and Strategies of Resistance', *Reload: Rethinking Women and Cyperculture*, M. Teoksessa Flanagan & A. Booth (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 425-452.
[19] B Ruberg, 'The Truth about Little Girls', *The Escapist*, Issue 50.
[20] Kangas 2002.
[21] 'Kun äreät Legot ja viehättävät Bratzit tympivät'. *Satakunnan Kansa* 10.12.2008.
[22] For example J Cassel & H Jenkins (eds), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Gams,* MA: MIT Press, Cambridge, 1998.

Bibliography

Campbell, J., 'Just Less Than Total War: Simulating World War II as Ludic Nostalgia'. *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games*. Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2008.

FIFA 09-Introducing Womens Football? Games.on.Net. (11.12. 2007) http://www. games.on. net/article/2344/FIFA_09_-Introducing_Womens_Football/.

Flanagan, M., 'Hyperbodies, Hyperknowledge: Women in Games, Women in Cyberpunk, and Strategies of Resistance'. *Reload: Rethinking Women and Cyperculture*. MIT Press, Cambridege, 2002, pp. 425-452.

Huhtamo E. & Kangas, S. (eds), *Mariosofia: Elektronisten pelien kulttuuri*. Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2002.

Järvinen, A., 'Urheilun ja tähteyden simulaatiot'. *Lähikuva.* Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2003, pp. 44-57.

Kolamo, S., 'Urheilu, tähdet ja fanius mediaspektaakkelin aikakaudella'. *Kulttuurintutkimus.* Vol. 21, Issue 4, 2004, pp. 37-48.

'Kun äreät Legot ja viehättävät Bratzit tympivät'. *Satakunnan Kansa.* 10.12.2008.

Leonard, D., 'Performing Blackness: Virtual Sports and Becoming the Other in an Era of White Supremacy'. R*e: Skin*. Flanagan, M. & Booth, A. (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005.

Markula, P. & Pringle, R., '*Foucault, Sport and Exercise. Power, Knowledge and Transforming the Self*'. Routledge., London and New York, 2006.

Mäkelä, A., Puustinen, L. & Ruoho, I., 'Feministisen mediatutkimuksen näkökulmat' and 'Esipuhe'. *Sukupuolishow: Johdatus feministiseen mediatutkimukseen*. Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2006.

Paasonen, S., 'Naisen malleja ja naismalleja: television uudet toimintasankarit'. *Kulttuurinen sisältötuotanto?* Edita, Helsinki, 2004.

Pirinen, R., 'Catching Up with Men? Finnish Newspaper Coverage of Women's Entry into Traditionally Male Sports'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport.* Vol. 32, Issue 3, 1997, pp. 239-249.

Pirinen, R., *Urheileva nainen lehtiteksteissä*. Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 512, 2006. http://acta.uta.fi/pdf/951-44-6574-1.pdf.

Raney, A. & Bryant, J. (eds), *Handbook of Sports and Media*. LEA, New Jersey, 2006.

Ruberg, B., 'The Truth about Little Girls'. *The Escapist*, Issue 50, 2006. http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_50/299-The-Truth-about-Little-Girls.3.

Valtonen, S. & Ojajärvi, S., 'Kauniit ja kunnolliset. Naiset ja miehet liikuntakulttuurin kuvastoissa'. *Lähikuva.* Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2003, pp. 30-43.

Riikka Turtiainen, Digital Culture, University of Turku, she writes her doctoral dissertation on the digitalised consumption of media sports. Her research is a part of the research project called *Creation of Game Cultures: The Case of Finland* (CG-Cult) funded by an Academy of Finland.