

BEYOND BUTTON-PUSHING: A LOOK AT SUASION IN GAMEPLAY THROUGH  
PLAYER, MEMORY, AND THE RHETORIC OF GAMEPLAY

by

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A THESIS

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who has supported me throughout this process. Particularly, I would like to dedicate this to my loving fiancé who has kept me in positive spirits throughout the arduous process of creating this manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the connection between the rhetorical canon of memory and gameplay as a rhetorical activity. Gameplay is discussed as a form of computer-mediated communication, or CMC, that is decidedly ethical. Gameplay is composed of an external memory system, *lectio*, and *meditatio*. This study includes implications for both rhetorical and coercive gameplay structures. This study conceptualizes gameplay through Barry Brummett's post-modern epistemology as an intersubjective rhetorical activity between game designers and players, where players experience an observational looping effect. This study uses Sonja K. Foss' method of Generative Criticism complimented by Giorgio Agamben's method of Archeology in order to study gameplay as a rhetorical construct. Four videogames, Super Mario Brothers 3, World of Warcraft, America's Army 3, and Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City are analyzed using the *memoria* concepts of *lectio* and *meditatio* discussed by Mary Carruthers.

This study finds that gameplay is a form of rhetorical communication between game designers and players that is virtual and humanistic. Gameplay entails a phenomenologically situated player who is embodied in physical technology and a hermeneutically disclosed rule system. Meaning between players and game designers is established intersubjectively through the act of play.

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## CHAPTER 1

### BEYOND BUTTON-PUSHING

Imagine that you are walking along. You see a coin in the distance. The coin sits dangerously close to the edge of a ledge, so you approach it cautiously. You head toward it but then realize that a turtle is coming your way. You instinctively jump to avoid the turtle but find that you miss both it and your coin entirely and have fallen over the ledge. You died because of the choice made to avoid the turtle. I am not describing a dream but rather a well-known videogame, *Super Mario Brothers 3* (SMB3). The nature of videogames such as this is to position players to make snap decisions based on their understanding of game rules and their strategic decision making skills that they have learned from these rules. These skills can be as simple as avoiding a ledge and a turtle to get a coin, as in SMB3, or as complicated as managing the lives and collective strategy for oneself and twenty-four others as in *World of Warcraft* (WoW). But, regardless of the goals and obstacles, understanding the underlying mechanisms of the game, or gameplay, remains a player's most important tool in succeeding.<sup>1</sup>

All videogames are based upon particular systems of processes that symbolically influence their players during the course of the game.<sup>2</sup> Such a relationship suggests that gameplay may be examined as a rhetorical process, with the game designers as the rhetors exerting deliberate suasion upon the players as their audience. Furthermore, moral and ethical

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<sup>1</sup> Gameplay can mean either the structural elements within a videogame as its as controls or the physical and mental act of playing a game itself. See Miguel Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 2009) , 27; McKenzie Wark . *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 2007), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Such influence in videogames is more obvious than other forms of computer-mediated communication. For a more lengthy discussion of symbolic influence in videogames, see Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Persuasive Power of Videogame* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 2008), chapter 1.

choices for players are often embedded within these processes. Videogame players quickly learn what choices are supported by the game designers and are rewarded for their strategic decision-making skills, or gameplay, throughout the course of the game. Accordingly, the general aim of this study is to show how acquiring gameplay skills is a rhetorical process that inculcates the values and worldviews espoused by game designers. A fundamental assumption for this study is that gameplay should be studied by communication scholars for the deliberate influence it exerts upon the cognitive decision making of videogame players. In other words, the rhetoric of gameplay is a form of communication where players and designers negotiate meaning through the internal structures of the videogame.

Granting for the moment, the concept that I am labeling “the rhetoric of gameplay,” we may well ask why this effect needs to be investigated seriously by communication scholars. In part, the answer lies in the extent of popular consumption of videogames. Currently, gameplay is experienced by millions of players in the United States alone (Riley “Video Gaming”; Pew Internet “Adults and Videogames,” and “Teens, Mobile & Games”). As a commodity, videogames continue to increase in popularity among all US citizens. Today, 97 percent of teenagers in the US, ages 12-17, play computer, web, console, or mobile games (Pew Internet “Teens, Mobile & Games”). Furthermore, nearly 53 percent of all American adults play videogames regularly (Pew Internet “Adults and Video Games”). In 2009, the NPD Group reported that 28 percent of all American adult females play videogames, which accounts for nearly 40 percent of the total number of videogame players (Riley “Video Gaming”). Moreover, nearly one-third of American adults aged 65-and-older play videogames everyday (Pew Internet “Adults and Video Games”). This percentage is greater than the nearly 20 percent of younger

adults who play videogames every day (Pew Internet “Adults and video Games”). Playing videogames in the US is a common practice among the majority of children, as well as adults.

So, there are a lot of people who are potentially inculcated with value sets through playing videogames regularly. As communication, gameplay can potentially change players’ moral, ethical, and political positions. More importantly, the moral, ethical, and political positions that players engage can be more or less overt. For instance, the other day, I walked through a retail store and came across an educational videogame by Leap Frog<sup>3</sup> that was labeled as “suited for children as young as five years of age.” With this gaming technology, children could learn how to spell from the dark-natured anti-hero, Batman. What else are young children learning through this spelling game? The values that Batman represents, such as obsession, revenge, violence, vigilante justice, and a Machiavellian approach to eliminating “bad guys,” may not be the most appropriate ones for teaching kindergartners how to spell. On the other hand, Batman's anti-hero persona could teach kindergartners how to spell even more effectively. Basically, we need to start asking these questions seriously.

How we answer these questions resides in the inherently suasive nature of videogame design. Paul Carruthers is a game designer who currently designs mobile phone videogames. In an interview conducted by Iain Simons, Carruthers discusses where gameplay comes into the process of designing videogames (Simons 20). For Carruthers, gameplay is the backbone of videogames and can mean one of two things or both: 1) the act of playing a videogame, navigating through puzzle systems and around obstacles, or 2) the placement of these obstacles and the available means for navigating through them.<sup>4</sup> Carruthers' definition of gameplay refers

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<sup>3</sup> Leap Frog developed an educational system for children ages 4-8, entitled *Leapster2* that was originally released in 2008 in the United States. See Leap Frog’s website for more details concerning *Leapster2: Learning Game System*. LeapFrog Enterprises. October 2009. <<http://www.leapfrog.com/gaming/leapster2/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Iain Simons, *Inside Game Design* (London, England: Laurence King, 2007), 20-2. Throughout this work, I

to the structural elements within the game: how a player can move, where a player can move, and what in-game goal toward which a player is given tools to work. Carruthers also describes gameplay as the “mental buzz” that comes from figuring out how to do things within videogames (Simons 22). Here, Carruthers refers to the act of playing itself. Both of these definitions must be considered.

Gameplay is a concept that is divorced from the look but never the feel of videogames. The “feel” of a videogame is the controls and responsiveness that comes from pressing buttons on an input device. Whether a player encounters fully rendered representations of zombies in-game or only moving blue squares is inconsequential to a player's built-in gameplay defenses against these obstacles. For instance, Mario in SMB3 could have easily been a blue square and the gameplay would not be affected. Nonetheless, these representations do assist players in delineating between actions within a game. Moving squares may not present a particular danger for players, whereas the cultural connotations of zombies will likely conjure up a sense of eminent danger for players. In short, gameplay is a human-to-human exchange between game designers and players, and primarily shapes the perceptions and critical decision making of those who succeed, even in a simple videogame such as SMB3.

Therefore, we need to address the complexities of gameplay and the inadequacies of previous research on videogames to explain these complexities. Gameplay, meaning the system of rules built into a videogame, facilitates communication between players and game designers. Espen Aarseth states that hypertext and adventure videogames constitute a nonlinear, ergodic<sup>5</sup> form, where rules for navigation are embedded within the videogame itself. Videogames are an

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discuss both definitions of gameplay as inherently rhetorical.

<sup>5</sup> “Ergodic” was coined by Espen J. Aarseth to mean highly interactive forms of media, where the audience is an active participant in the progression of the text (*Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U P, 1997]).

interactive<sup>6</sup> form of technology that encapsulate directions for meaning-making as gameplay which makes meaning available to a variety of recipients, regardless of language. Due to the complexity of videogames, Aarseth says, the way players make decisions is “a work of physical construction that the various concepts of 'reading' do not account for” (1).

As a media form, videogames can facilitate learning and understanding of skills as diverse as group dynamics, planning, and critical thinking as well as contextually bound understandings of social identities and military strategies.<sup>7</sup> However, what other values are players learning within these environments? Scholars have begun to consider the ethical ramifications of playing particular videogames.<sup>8</sup> Yet, suasion, or moral influence, is a concept not yet applied to gameplay by the field of rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> Mapping suasion within videogames will

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<sup>6</sup> Interactivity can be considered the exploration of “possibility spaces” which are allowed by gameplay (Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, p. 43; see also Vorderer, *Interactive Entertainment*). An example of a more interactive game would be *Aion* or *World of Warcraft*, where players can fully customize their characters and use the game environment and gameplay to create unique paths within the game. Refer to Peter Vorderer, “Interactive Entertainment and Beyond,” *Media Entertainment: The Psychology of Its Appeal*, ed. Dolf Zillmann and Peter Vorderer (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 21-36; *Aion: The Tower of Eternity* (Aion Team Development Department, NC Soft, September 2009); *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* (Activision Blizzard, Blizzard Entertainment, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Various scholars have discussed videogames as microcosms, so to speak, for a variety of learning experiences. See John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade, *The Kids Are Alright: How the Gamer Generation Is Changing the Workplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School P, 2006); Ian Bogost, “The Rhetoric of Video Games,” *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 2008), 117-39; Derek A. Burrill, *Die Tryin’: Videogames, Masculinity and Culture* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2008); Aaron Delwiche, “From The Green Berets to America’s Army: Video Games As A Vehicle for Political Propaganda,” *The Players’ Realm: Studies on the Culture of Video Games and Gaming*, ed. J. Patrick Williams and Jonas Heide Smith (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 91-109; Anna Everett and S. Craig Watkins, “The Power of Play: The Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games,” *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 2008), 141-64; Geoffrey R. Loftus and Elizabeth F. Loftus, *Mind at Play: The Psychology of Video Games* (New York, NY: Basic, 1983); Rebecca Mileham, *Power Up: Are Computer Games Changing Our Lives?* (West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2008); Marc Prensky, “Don’t Bother Me Mom, I’m Learning!”: *How Computer and Video Games are Preparing Your Kids for Twenty-First Century Success and How You Can Help!* (Saint Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2006); Eugene F. Provenzo, *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> See Burrill, *Die Tryin’*; Delwiche, “From the Green Berets”; Everett and Watkins, “Power of Play”; Sicart, *Ethics of Computer Games*.

<sup>9</sup> “Suasory” or “suasion” refers to moral influence, toward or against, an idea. See Donald C. Bryant, “Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39 (1953): 401.

open up unique avenues for exploring suasion within other highly interactive technologies based upon the common characteristics of computer or technology-based forms of communication.

For instance, is there a “gameplay literacy”? Is there an ethic interwoven in literacy? Essentially, the emerging connection between learning and gameplay suggests that the ability to navigate videogames and other interactive technologies critically could be considered a new form of literacy.<sup>10</sup> In their 2006 study, John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade demonstrated that people who play videogames are shown to exhibit self-educated learning, team work, unique decision-making, and global reasoning, especially within the workplace (Beck and Wade 114).

Mayanne Wolf claims that literacy, learning, and critical thinking are all inextricably connected (Wolf 225). However, literacy is a term more often connected with verbal forms of communication. Only recently have advocates of critical literacy for other forms of communication, such as television or the Internet, surfaced (Warnick 104). Barbara Warnick brings literacy into the digital era, describing literacy as the way those viewing a particular text or message make sense of that message (104). That is, when users or readers navigate information, they need to understand it first before they can begin to make use of it.

Despite developments in critical studies concerning digital interactive media, videogames have historically been a subject of scholarly communication research which indicated a positive but simple relationship between videogame play and players.<sup>11</sup> As videogames have come to be

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<sup>10</sup> See Clark Aldrich, *Simulations and the Future of Learning: An Innovative (and Perhaps Revolutionary) Approach to E-Learning* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2004); James Paul Gee, “Video Games and Embodiment,” *Games and Culture* 3 (2008): 253-63; and *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” *On the Horizon* 9.5 (2001): 1-10; and “Don’t Bother Me Mom, I’m Learning!”: *How Computer and Video Games are Preparing Your Kids for Twenty-first Century Success and How You Can Help!* (Saint Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Joseph R. Dominick, “Videogames, Television Violence, and Aggression in Teenagers,” *Journal of Communication* 34.2 (1984): 136-47; Gary W. Selnow, “Playing Videogames: The Electronic Friend,” *Journal of Videogames* 34.2 (1984): 148-56.

understood as a more complex form of communicating, scholars examining this relationship have begun studying various aspects of the medium which contribute to that complexity.<sup>12</sup>

Videogames are programmed, computer-based, technology-facilitated communication, and are bound not by language, but gameplay. As Peter Vorderer notes, the degree to which players can change the course of videogames, that is, the game's interactivity, separates this media form from its predecessors (29). Interactive gameplay allows players to perform some actions while denying others.<sup>13</sup> Players then use the gameplay permitted by designers to intuit in-game environments and tactics. In this way, the players become inherently susceptible to the potentially suasive structure of a videogame's design.

The purpose of this study is to examine the complexities of gameplay as rhetoric using traditional rhetorical concepts and ideals and specifically considering the role of *memoria*. In the literature review that follows, I review the nature of suasion from classical to contemporary times to justify the place of videogames, rhetoric as memory and memory's preliminary suasive implications specific to videogames. After the review, I explain more fully the purpose of this study and outline the critical method I use. Lastly, I discuss the overall plan for study.

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. Matthew S. Eastin, "Video Game Violence and the Female Game Player: Self- and Opponent Gender Effects on Presence and Aggressive Thoughts." *Human Communication Research* 32.3 (2006): 351-72. Eastin, *Video Game Violence*, Kirkpatrick, Graeme. "Controller, Hand, Screen: Aesthetic Form in the Computer Game." *Games and Culture* 4.2, 2009. 127-43.

<sup>13</sup> See Peter Bayliss, "Notes Toward a Sense of Embodied Gameplay." *Digital Games Research Association*, 2007. <<http://www.digra.org/dl/db/07312.19059.pdf>>; Bogost, *Persuasive Games*; Wark, *Gamer Theory* 2007, Vorderer, *Interactive Entertainment and Beyond*.

## Literature Review

First, it is important to discuss whether videogames are rhetorical in nature. Immediately, questions come to mind about whether videogames can be regarded as rhetoric. For instance, *Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City* (GTA IV) is a controversial videogame that uses representations of urban violence to garnish its gameplay structure. GTA franchise games are highly contested and are assumed to teach those who play them to have a positive association with violence that is race-related.<sup>14</sup> When we consider the public impact of particular games, such as the GTA franchise games, we can assume that influence is occurring at some level. Many theorists have begun to discuss the potential impact that representations within videogames can have upon players, particularly children.<sup>15</sup> However, how do other videogames that do not explicitly contain violence but appear more iconic, such as SMB3, influence players? Furthermore, how does this type of influence relate to classical ideals of rhetorical influence? Do videogames relate to oratorical forms of communication, or do they fall into an entirely separate, unrelated category? Oratory entails a rhetor/orator who communicates a speech to a particular group of audience members. Likewise, videogames include very similar elements as rhetorical “speech,” such as designers and audience members, though they are communicated uniquely. Within videogames, there is a rhetor or team of rhetors who formulates an artifact and several individual audience members who interact with that artifact through gameplay.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Paul Barrett, “White Thumbs, Black Bodies: Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Fantasies in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 28.1 (2005): 95-119; Everett and Watkins, *Power of Play*; David J. Leonard, “‘Live in Your World, Play in Ours’: Race, Video Games, and Consuming the Other,” *SIMILE: Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education* 3.4 (2007): 1-9; and “Not a Hater, Just Keepin’ It Real,” *Games and Culture* 1.1 (2006): 83-8; Nate Garrelts, ed., *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006). See also Ben DeVane and Kurt D. Squire, “The Meaning of Race and Violence in *Grand Theft Auto*,” *Games and Culture* 3.3-4 (2008): 264-85.

<sup>15</sup> Everett and Watkins, *Power of Play*; Burrill *Die Tryin’*; DeVane and Squire “The Meaning of Race and Violence.”

When we look at videogames more closely as a form of computer-mediated communication, or CMC, the interplay of player and game designer becomes more complex. Game designers construct rules that players must interpret and understand in order to navigate in-game environments. When players make these choices, they are invariably relying upon the feedback generated from the game's rules and adjusting the way they play to reflect incoming feedback. Similar to other forms of CMC, the rules and feedback that players respond to through gameplay constitute an external memory system that players navigate.<sup>16</sup> Gameplay, then, is partly how game designers can achieve suasion in players by embedding directions for players to interpret. Unlike the hierarchical forms of communication of the past, CMC places the audience, or user, in a more powerful position to co-produce the meaning of the signs and symbols that they encounter.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, where does the ethical burden lie in the various forms of CMC? Gameplay appears to be a form of CMC with important rhetorical implications.

To place gameplay appropriately under the province of rhetorical study, I review definitions of rhetoric as suasion, from classical to contemporary times to justify the place of videogames. Second, I explore how particular processes can be embedded within videogame systems. Third, I discuss how memory and its preliminary suasive implications specific to gameplay in videogames can inform rhetorical thought about videogames. Lastly, I discuss the

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<sup>16</sup> Several theorists reference other forms of CMC, such as hypertext systems, as representative of external memory systems for users. I discuss this element of CMC and the rhetorical implications of this more specifically later in chapter 2. For now, for examples, see Jay David Bolter, "Hypertext and the Rhetorical Canons," *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery: Classical Concepts for Contemporary Composition and Communication*, ed. John Frederick Reynolds (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993), 97-111; Derek Van-Ittersum, "Distributing Memory: Rhetorical Work in Digital Environments," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 18.3 (2009): 259-80; Richard A. Lanham, "Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Practice, and Property," *Literacy Online: The Promise (and Peril) of Reading and Writing with Computers*, ed. Myron C. Tuman (Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh P, 1992), 221-43; Steward Whittemore, "Metadata and Memory: Lessons from the Canon of Memoria for the Design of Content Management Systems," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 17.1 (2008): 88-109.

<sup>17</sup> Several scholars discuss CMC as a more equalizing form of communication that facilitates community building. See for example Andrejevic "Productive Play"; Baym "Interpreting Soap Operas", "The Talk of Fandom", "I Think of Them"; Brants 1996; Malina and Jankowski, "Community Building in Cyberspace"; Menon "A Participant Analysis"; Rutigliano 2005; Smith "Counting on Community"; Turkle *Life on the Screen*.

purpose of this study, the critical method of understanding videogames, and then discuss the path of this study.

### *Rhetoric as Suasion*

In order to place videogames along a rhetorical tradition of communication using suasory techniques, I begin with the classical definition provided by Plato, in his dialogue *Gorgias*.<sup>18</sup>

Within Plato's *Gorgias*, the main speaker Socrates says that rhetoric "aims at making the souls of citizens as good as possible and is always striving to say what is best, whether it is pleasing or not to the ears of the audience" (503a). From Plato's view, the function of rhetoric, then, is to improve the audience members, not with pleasantries, but with Truth. In his later work, *Phaedrus*, rhetoric is characterized by Socrates, as "a kind of leading of the soul by means of things said (*logoi*), not only in law-courts and other kinds of public gatherings."<sup>19</sup> Thus, for Plato, the role of rhetoric is one of a humanistic, ethical enterprise. Those who practice rhetoric publicly lead the souls of audience members to what is best. Plato's pupil, Aristotle, would explain the role of rhetoric somewhat differently, asserting that rhetoric's "function is *not* persuasion" (1355b). Instead, Aristotle says that "it is rather the *detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter*" which characterizes rhetoric (1355b). Namely, one who practices rhetoric does not seek merely to influence but rather to explore an issue or idea critically.

In the classical period, rhetoric was described through the use of canons, and the importance of memory within rhetoric was not ignored. A Roman orator, described memory as

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<sup>18</sup> "Suasory" refers to material that has the effect of influencing one's morals or ethics. "Suasion" is the influence of morals or ethics.

<sup>19</sup> Refer to Plato, *Phaedrus*, 261a, 8-9. For Plato, "public gatherings" appear to include instances where the identifiable public disputes and makes decisions about meaning, using information. However, now information sharing is also conducted through electronic media and CMC.

the “treasure-house of the ideas supplied by Invention, [and] the guardian of all the parts of rhetoric” (*Ad C. Herennium*, III.16.28).<sup>20</sup> For this orator, rhetorical activity would not be possible without “the firm retention in the mind of matter, words, and arrangement” (*Ad C. Herennium*, I.2.3). Namely, a well-trained memory has the ability to make audience members and rhetors more equipped to navigate suasive material. Classical definitions of rhetoric focus primarily on oratorical forms of rhetorical suasion, which raises questions about how rhetoric and memory apply to digital technologies. Though memory is often referred to as the “lost canon”<sup>21</sup> in the rhetorical tradition, its significance in the rhetorical training of classical and medieval scholars is apparent. In contemporary rhetorical theory, with the focus on communication technologies, the role of memory seems non-existent.

Prior to the appearance of digital technologies and in the midst of the development of mass communication, rhetorical scholars began to expand the idea of rhetoric to encompass how suasion most fundamentally situates ideas, audiences, and rhetors. In the 1950s, Donald C. Bryant, in his seminal work “Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope,” defines rhetoric as the “function of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas” (412). This broadened conception of rhetoric draws on the dialogic movement of ideas between people as well as its counterpart, monologic communication, where audience members have limited input.

At the same time, rhetorical theorists began to advance the scope of rhetoric to include symbolic communication. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke broadened rhetoric specifically to encompass “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (41). Burke also emphasized the rhetor’s efforts at identification,

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<sup>20</sup> For centuries, the *Ad C. Herennium* was mistakenly attributed to Cicero, but scholars have established that the author is unknown.

<sup>21</sup> See Wayne E. Hoogstraet, “Memory: The Lost Canon?” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 46.2 (1960): 141-7.

rather than persuasion, as the means for adjusting audience members to ideas (55). A rhetor can symbolically achieve identification with an audience through deference to individual member's opinions, using the tools of language and other symbolic forms of communication (Burke 56). Burke seems to suggest that the rhetor must begin to speak the same language as the audience, and vice versa. Though Burke's definition of rhetoric also focuses on oratory, the definition adds the dimension of symbolic interactivity between rhetor and audience as an essential element of effective suasion.

In "Some Implications of 'Process' or 'Intersubjectivity,'" Barry Brummett emphasized that the symbolic nature of language and communication is integral to investigating the parameters of rhetoric. The ambiguity of symbolic representations, e.g. language, is an important asset to rhetoric (31). Brummett states that "ambiguity generates conflict and disagreement about meaning" and people face "constant striving to resolve these divisions" (31). These divisions are resolved intersubjectively by both audience and rhetors.

Brummett's conception of intersubjective rhetoric implies an actively involved audience in at least two ways. First, he states "observation cannot be value-free" (26). Finding objectivity in rhetoric is a difficult task because observation is a process between what is being observed and the observer. For example, a speech is heard through each audience member's particular frame of mind, which is necessarily different for every audience member, and which becomes the filter through which the meaning of the speech is absorbed. Thus, as each individual audience member listens to the speech, his or her interpretation of the speech influences the overall meaning of the speech as it is heard. Second, Brummett states, "we must participate in making reality" (28). Therefore, unless an audience member hears a speech, no change in meaning or reality can occur. Through hearing and interpreting messages, individual audience members actively

contribute to how messages *mean*. Through Brummett, the definition of rhetoric is broadened to involve the use of persuasive, symbolic tools in order to create intersubjective understanding between audience and rhetor for the betterment of both.

Thus, rhetoric concerns public, human-to-human communication that uses identification through the manipulation of symbols, including language, in order to create meaning and change the perception of one's reality. These ideas are not in conflict within newer forms of communicative technologies, such as videogames. With videogames, the players as audience members must intuit the content and context of the game designers', or rhetors' message, through *gameplay*. Though videogames are also a part of a verbal, visual, and auditory medium, the tactile and mental element, *gameplay*, is the essential interactive component that can contribute to a rhetorical understanding of videogames.

Within videogame environments, a player simultaneously performs as both a spectator and an actor to ingame realities.<sup>22</sup> Within rhetorical situations, Brummett describes that “the knower and the known reciprocally affect each other, and what the observer observes is the observed affected by the observation, which affects the observer’s act of observing” (157). Videogames are fundamentally driven by these observational loops. The act of playing, and spectating a videogame influences the player's understanding of ingame meaning that is created and continually shaped through playing. However, in order to consider videogames as rhetorical, game designers must make a deliberate choice to promote players’ abilities dialogically to form unique ingame realities. If ingame meaning is monologically established by game designers, then

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<sup>22</sup> Burrill notes the distinctively performative nature of playing videogames in his work on videogames and masculinity. (*Die Tryin'* 55)

coercive suasion is also possible using gameplay. In this postmodern conception of epistemology that Brummett presents, knowledges are situated, and the knower is embodied.<sup>23</sup>

In *Persuasive Games: The Persuasive Power of Videogames*, Ian Bogost expands the idea of rhetoric to include the means used by interactive technologies, but specifically, videogames. While traditional speech uses words symbolically to create meaning, videogames use processes symbolically. Bogost asserts that videogames constitute a procedural medium in that they have the ability “to make claims about *how things work*” (29). For example, war is a popular subject expressed through videogames. In their most basic conception, videogames dealing with war present an active model of conflict, with two or more sides in a state of conflict. Players frequently perform as soldiers, *Call of Duty*, god-like generals, *Command and Conquer*, or in more complicated roles in order to defeat any opposing forces. The wartime simulation expressed through videogames lays out the parameters and guides players through basic wartime strategies where players must often “win” in order to be successful. Thus, videogames can be constructed to reflect the internal characteristics of a process, i.e. war, and a particular outcome of a process, win or loss, living or dying.

The symbolic use of processes drives the observational looping effect in interactive technologies. The feedback that people experience when they interact with interactive technologies needs be explored using classical and contemporary rhetorical memory practices.<sup>24</sup> Concerning of the place memory in the rhetorical canon, Virginia Allen stated:

A rhetorical theory that dismisses problems of the nature of mind as uninteresting or that presupposes the workings of memory to be unproblematic is a truncated theory.

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<sup>23</sup> I pursue this idea further in terms of players’ relationship to videogames as technologies in Chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> As previous scholars have intimated, other interactive media make use of memory practices. For example, see Allen, *Faculty of Memory*; Bolter, *Hypertext and Rhetorical Canons*; Lanham, “Digital Rhetoric,” *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*; Van-Ittersum, *Distributing Memory*; Welch, *Electrifying Classical Rhetoric*; Whittemore, *Metadata and Memory*.

It is memory that mediates between our perception of the flow of disconnected sense.  
(46)

Though currently we have many theoretical tools to explain portions of videogame play, none has thought how the rhetorical canon of memory factors into the digital rhetorical situation. How do people utilize memory practices to navigate more immersive systems of CMC, where language is not the primary mode of communicating?

In order to answer this question, I accept Brummett's concept of postmodern epistemology, classical definitions of rhetoric, as well as the concept of procedural rhetoric. Essentially, videogames function based upon the “knower” and “known” looping effect explored by Brummett, or the observational looping effect. Game designers manipulate this looping effect in order to inform players' ingame realities through gameplay. As such, videogames are more than a source of entertainment; they become a source for learning cultural values and ideologies.<sup>25</sup> The way in which game designers, or the rhetors in this case, manipulate feedback that players get from gaming systems through gameplay practices influences how players form ingame realities. This remains a theoretical concern. Therefore, a thorough understanding of gameplay practices will undoubtedly contribute to a meaningful understanding of videogame rhetoric. I turn now to examine the inner-workings of procedurality and feedback within videogames and how memory as players' “treasure-house”<sup>26</sup> informs gameplay more closely.

### *Procedurality and Propositional Feedback*

Brummett described rhetoric as a process, while Bogost claimed that processes could be used rhetorically. What is rhetorically significant about the use of processes? Our minds interact

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Beck and Wade, *The Kids Are Alright*; Bogost, *Persuasive Games, Rhetoric of Video Games*; Gee, *Learning and Games, Video Games and Embodiment*.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ad C. Herennium*, III.16.28.

with the world and represent it meaningfully through simulations. Lawrence W. Barsalou argues, “comprehension is grounded in perceptual simulations that prepare agents for situated action” (*Language Comprehension* 77). For example, when we imagine the functions of a restaurant, we place ourselves in either the position to serve or be served as patrons. In our own personal example of what happens at a restaurant, we can understand what restaurants are by simulating actions that are most familiar to us, such as being the patron, waiting to be seated, and ordering from the menu.

Similarly, James Paul Gee argues that people commonly create “value-laden, perspective-taking 'games in the mind'” to give meaning to everyday experiences (*Video Games*, 256-7). Remember, for a moment, the example of a restaurant. In order to understand who plays which role, we create a comprehension scenario that functions as a game in our mind. The players, i.e. patrons, servers, so to speak, are given roles, means, and ends that help us provide context to the restaurant experience. Thus, processes and process models are fundamental to forming ideologies and assessing personal values through experiences. Moreover, using conceptual process models is an integral part of understanding the rhetorical exchange inherent in gameplay within videogames.

Players can construct a variety of comprehension systems or other “mind games” to navigate videogames. Essentially, videogames present players with constructed environments that they interpret in order to navigate by using comprehensive models that presuppose values. Also, videogame environments are marked by feedback and propositional cues that inform how players form ingame realities. In doing so, players experience an observational looping effect, where they play, interpret, and act simultaneously, relying upon the system’s relaying of feedback. For example, we can apply the observational looping effect to other technologies.

When a person has his/her blood pressure checked at a physician's office, the physician uses an arm cuff to register the patient's pulse. As the physician manipulates the blood pressure cuff, the cuff displays meaningful information to the physician. Yet, it is the physician's manipulation of the blood pressure cuff that produces the feedback that he/she interprets in order to reveal the patient's blood pressure.

In a similar fashion, players interact with videogame systems and interpret the feedback from them. Thus, examining the looping effect and how this supports players' inculcation of knowledge is integral to examining videogames as a media form. Inevitably, this will illuminate the rhetorical effectiveness of videogames. Let us consider briefly Bogost's concept of procedurality,<sup>27</sup> then of propositional feedback, and then discuss specific memory practices which undoubtedly contribute to rhetorical conceptions of gameplay.

Procedurality is the key component of procedural rhetoric. As Bogost states, "Procedural rhetoric is a subdomain of procedural authorship; its arguments are made not through construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models" (*Persuasive Games* 29). Basically, "procedural authorship" refers to the series of "if-then" statements or propositions that frame the ingame actions which are the driving force of videogames' dynamic nature. Similar to the use of words in a speech, videogames use processes as the chunks of meaning-making material, rather than language. Bogost elaborates: "procedural representations often do allow the user to mount procedural objections through configurations of the system itself" (37). The crux of Bogost's theory is symbolic procedurality, a valuable rhetorical concept that ought to be employed by contemporary rhetoricians to understand videogames as well as other CMC rhetorically because it alludes to the element of

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<sup>27</sup> For Bogost, procedurality refers to using rule sequencing symbolically in computer systems to construct meaning. See Bogost, *Persuasive Games* 20-29, for an extended explanation of procedurality.

interactivity or the degree to which players/users can shape in-game meaning. Essentially, symbolic procedurality, as explained above, uses processes, such as gameplay within videogames, persuasively to impart an expressive, often rhetorical message.

Ultimately, players are acting within a model that has been meaningfully designed to express a certain world-view. While players experience these models, they also experience game designer's "speech"<sup>28</sup> or meaning through meaningful interpretation and action. For example, *Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City* (GTA IV) includes certain changes in design that collectively impart a different stance of the game designers toward players. Notably, previous games within the GTA franchise included the gameplay allowance to maim female sex worker Non-Player Characters (NPCs), but GTA IV does not allow players to perform this action in certain areas of the videogame. Eliminating these previously allowed actions imparts a message, through gameplay, that the treatment of these representations of sex workers is unacceptable. In this example, we can see that playing videogames potentially is a rhetorical process that is heavily based on the communication between game designers as rhetors and players as audience.

Procedurality in gameplay can be understood further by breaking it down into propositional loops, which underpin videogames. Aaron Delwiche argues that, as a medium, videogames provide "a cybernetic feedback loop between the user and the machine" (99). In other words, the cybernetic looping effect is fueled by the gaming system's, be it a personal computer or an Xbox 360, reading of material as it incorporates players' input. Similar to other forms of technology, the material machine, whether it is an iPhone or a personal computer, only reads the material created by game designers. Thus, the variability of response choices is

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<sup>28</sup> Here, I consider "speech" symbolically, not only meaning words used to create meaning, but the meaning itself.

determined by game designers beforehand, making player involvement with the gameplay of videogames an inherently rhetorical, human-to-human, communicative exchange.

Specifically, gameplay choices can meaningfully encourage and discourage particular actions of players as they internalize loops. As a result, the degree to which game designers give contingencies and allow for players to have a unique effect upon ingame actions frames the message that is communicated to players. Delwiche discusses how videogame “loops” are internalized:

Players are rewarded for engaging in certain behaviors (e.g. eating dots, shooting their opponents), and they experience positive feelings when such rewards are given [but] when players make choices discouraged by the game designers (e.g. walking off a cliff or shooting civilians), they are punished. (99)

In short, videogame environments have the ability to train people to act in certain ways through gameplay. For instance, as Mario, the player is rewarded for surmounting the difficulty of crossing over the ledge safely and passing the turtle with a coin and potentially completing the level. However, mistakes in gameplay, such as the inaccurate estimation of jumping abilities, are punished by loss of life and forcing the player to restart the level.

Rosemary Garris, Robert Ahlers, and James E. Driskell in “Games, Motivation, and Learning: A Research and Practice Model” describe how videogame environments serve to influence player choice:

The game cycle focuses attention to a critical chain of dependencies: (a) To elicit desirable behaviors from learners, (b) they first need to experience desirable emotional or cognitive reactions, (c) which result from interaction with and feedback generated from game play. (452)

Essentially, these propositions train players to respond in certain ways when presented with feedback from videogames. A player's success within a game is predicated on the fluid mastery of game controls. Therefore, controls within a game, or gameplay, must become natural

processes for players. Rhetorically, players continually engage an observational loop and the observational looping effect is the foundation of gameplay as CMC. Thus, the structural design of videogames and their symbolic use of processes, as they entail natural learning, may be studied in terms of the rhetorical canon of memory.

### *Memory*

Undoubtedly, a well-developed memory is a player's greatest asset within videogames. Understanding what to do, when, and how to do it at a millisecond's notice will separate the winners from the losers in game. The broad and ever-increasing aggregation of interactive technologies, such as kiosks, mobile devices, and other forms of CMC used in everyday experience, are reason enough to move toward conceptualizing how these rhetorical activities function. Interactions with CMC and interactive technologies such as videogames fundamentally concern observation, internalization, and mental rehearsal of information for use. Thus, the study of the rhetoric of interactive technologies, particularly, gameplay, is the province of the rhetorical canon of memory.

In *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Mary Carruthers looks intensely at memory and its use in the field of rhetoric. Carruthers draws a valuable conceptual connection between rhetorical processes that may otherwise be considered separately. Both viewing visual information and reading are rhetorical activities. Here, Carruthers contextualizes these processes and describes memory as a visual and mental rhetorical activity that involves essentially two phases:

Looking at pictures is an act exactly like reading. And reading, as we have seen, is a complex activity involving both an oral phase, that of *lectio*, and a silent one, of *meditatio*, committing substance of the text to memory, re-presenting it in order to make it one's own. (*Book of Memory* 222)

Carruthers considers the memorization process as auditory and visual, as well as process-based, because one must go through viewing, verbalizing, and internalizing information in order to make meaning useful. *Lectio* and *meditatio* are essentially two sides to the same coin. As I demonstrate subsequently, *lectio* and *meditatio* are valuable concepts for understanding gameplay rhetorically as well. Carruthers further describes *lectio* as “reading” or “study” (162). Namely, *lectio* is an activity “informative about a text” (165). In other words, the focal point in *lectio* is external toward the text, visual representation, or as I demonstrate later, procedural action.

Conversely, *meditatio*, or meditation, consists of the internal operations that support the full rhetorical activity and the inculcation of material (162). *Meditatio* is described further as “the process of memory-training, storage, and retrieval” (163). As *meditatio* involves making material one's own, it has ethical connotations as well (165). When one seeks to comprehend and to domesticate material fully, one understands the material in terms of one's own perspectives and values. One can think of domestication of material similar to the mind games and comprehension scenarios mentioned previously. In other words, to comprehend, understand, and use information fully, we must take a perspective on information.

Also, this perspective-taking activity that goes on in the mind supports the rhetorical activity of both reading and picturing. Indeed, Carruthers contends that both *meditatio* and *lectio* are not confined to the province of verbal material alone (223). Although, Carruthers considers seeing and hearing the “two gates of access” for memory, I demonstrate that this principle must be reconsidered (223). For instance, John Robert Anderson supports the idea that memory actively retains procedural operations as well.<sup>29</sup> This concept is hardly unfamiliar when we

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<sup>29</sup> See chapter 3, 78-118, specifically, for a discussion of ACT theory and procedural knowledge.

consider the adage about riding a bicycle: though we may be unable to explain how to do it, we never forget the physical process of riding a bicycle. Well, that is unless we try to explain verbally how we ride a bicycle verbally while we are physically pedaling.

So, the concepts of *lectio* and *meditatio*, both the study and the decidedly ethical domestication of material, respectively, can be applied to procedural operations. Though gameplay is primarily a procedural operation, it includes the manipulation of a controller or the external aspect, and the interpretation through rule systems, which is primarily internal for players. Again, rather than being purely visual or verbal, videogames are primarily communicative through the rules, processes, and sets of operations embedded in gameplay. Gameplay is a rhetorical activity that takes place within a player's mind yet through the physical interaction with the computing system.

With this in mind, we can think of gameplay in terms of *lectio* and *meditatio*. Gameplay is composed of two parts: one material, the other mental. First, players learn to input a code of operations on a controller, keypad, or keyboard/mouse, which produces certain actions ingame. For instance, think of combinations of pressing buttons on an input device as similar to a verbal syntax. When players in SMB3 initially learn the directional buttons and action buttons, they are equipped to proceed through the entirety of the game, because no other information is needed to navigate the “text” of SMB3. The act of pressing buttons, rearranging them in unique combinations and sequences to progress through the game, forms *meditatio* of gameplay rhetoric. *Lectio* involves the physical controller and abilities, while *meditatio* primarily takes place within the mind of the player, which includes how a player contextualizes, processes, interprets, and responds to feedback from the videogame.

Thus, in a player's mind, the physical act of gameplay follows directly from the mental act of understanding the game's internal processes. Carruthers demonstrates that even internal memory practices are also rhetorical activities and that memory practices are, again, not uniquely verbal: "Picturing is the equivalent of reading and so can stand in for it [...] *because it is also a rhetorical activity*" (222, italics in original). Specifically, picturing, or otherwise familiarizing oneself with the external qualities of a message, is integrally tied to internal memory practices. Regarding external material, Carruthers states that "learning it to familiarize and domesticate it, in that fully internalized, even psychological way" is essential (222). For instance, when people read a comic, they do not simply re-present the comic's material verbatim internally. Each person interprets the comic in his/her own way to gauge whether it is funny. Additionally, Carruthers' notion of internal memory practices is similar to the models of comprehension or "mind games" by Barsalou and James Paul Gee, respectively, see *Procedural and Propositional Feedback* section. In the same fashion, we can relate this characteristic of memory back to videogames. Players play videogames by forming internalized representations of gameplay processes which inevitably take a perspective and assign values. Therefore, gameplay is embedded with the rhetorical characteristics of memory, though it is a predominantly procedural activity.

Likewise, other interactive communication technologies are predicated on people's understandings of their interactive processes in order to receive and to use information. Interactive processes underlie how we interact with kiosks, personal computers, as well as the incoming onslaught of smart phones.<sup>30</sup> Thus, applying principles from the rhetorical canon of memory, scholars may begin to understand interactive technology processes, such as gameplay within videogames, as rhetorical activities as well.

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<sup>30</sup> Smart phones are basically personal computing devices that masquerade as telephones, yet include the ability to access the Internet and to perform such functions as viewing youtube.com videos, playing videogames, and checking email.

Allen asserts that “memory is not perception or conception (which both take place in the present), but a process subsequent to both” (50). In other words, memory relates to using information, rather than simply the gathering and retaining of information. We can safely say that our rhetorical understanding of CMC systems, which function through the meaningful transference of information between people using feedback generated from computing systems, will be enhanced by knowing *how* information is used. From there, we can discover how coercion and suasion function in multiple forms of CMC. For the purposes of this study, let us consider the specific characteristics associated with memory that can support our knowledge of rhetoric in one particular type of CMC, namely videogames.

### Method

To this point, I have attempted to establish the theoretical foundation driving this study and used to analyze four videogames: 1) *Super Mario Brothers 3*, 2) *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King*, 3) *Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City*, 4) *America's Army 3*. Let me reiterate, videogames are rhetorically unique because memory enforced through gameplay underpins their effectiveness. Videogames are essentially a dance in rhetorical space among the game designer's, digitally rendered gamespace, the procedurality of gameplay, and a player's own memory devices and sense of agency. I base the development of this method on my current understanding of research, along with my personal knowledge of videogame technologies and philosophical implications of a technology removed from face-to-face interaction. A rhetorical model of videogames should include the place of gameplay, players' contact with game designers and procedural algorithmic prescriptions. Thus, a careful analysis of gameplay practices and of the act of progressing through a videogame is the primary focus of this study.

However, there is not an established, adequate rhetorical method for examining videogames that focuses on gameplay or considers the implications of memory. Therefore, this study seeks to establish a means for examining videogames by integrating contemporary rhetorical concepts of Bogost, Brummett, and Bryant with current videogame and gaming theory, memory, and play. I discuss gameplay in terms of the intersubjective reality that is created between game designers and players through gameplay. Also, I explore the ingame design choices used to effect players' understandings, namely how Bryant's concept of "adjusting ideas" relates to players, gameplay, and meaning.

Gameplay is important to a unified rhetorical method of videogame analysis. Though the immersive environment that surrounds players, or gamespace, is wrought with meaningful design choices, these do not influence what players can and cannot do. So for example, insofar as videogames include an avatar, they are the vehicles through which game interaction is framed but do not determine what players can do within that environment. Gameplay, on the other hand, serves as the pre-delineated movement capabilities of players within ingame realities and does define where players can move, what they can do, and at which point in the game they can do it ingame.

Fundamentally, gameplay is an exchange between player and designer. Game designers can construct gameplay to illuminate what they seek for players to achieve through playing a videogame. The machine itself only acts as a sort of oracle, divulging the code created by game designers into a meaningful experience for the player. Because game designers delineate the given set of choices of responses beforehand, player involvement with the gameplay of videogames is an inherently human-to-human rhetorical exchange. Similar to reading a book, the technology of the book itself and words do not generate meaning by themselves; essentially, the

writer and reader do. Thus, the degree to which game designers give contingencies and allow for players to have a unique effect upon ingame actions shapes the message that is communicated to players, the result is rhetorical.

Further, in order to navigate ingame environments, players must ultimately memorize these learned dependencies (propositions/algorithms) that determine their success within the game. Propositions and algorithms are the underlying sets of rules support gameplay. Therefore, the notion of *learned* process is particularly of importance to videogame rhetoric. For players to be proficient in the rhetoric of particular videogames and specific genres, they must have a well-developed memory faculty and have the proficiency to navigate a system that basically acts as an external memory for players. This ability or faculty, I believe is one of the most important tools in playing a videogame.

Videogames have previously been approached using a variety of rhetorical analyses, from narrative criticism to identity analysis.<sup>31</sup> As I demonstrate throughout this study, there are other elements integral to all videogame structures that are not addressed by these types of criticism, namely, gameplay and the rhetorical canon of memory. In particular, this analysis seeks to address an issue raised by Mike Schmierbach:

[S]cholars' understanding of games is severely limited. In part, this reflects narrow knowledge of game content. To expand researchers' overall understanding of the use and effects of games, studies need to better describe the *games themselves*. (168, emphasis added)

Gameplay is the foundation of every videogame, yet there is no rhetorical theory that incorporates it as robustly as I see necessary

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<sup>31</sup> For example see George William Boone, "A Burkean Analysis of *World of Warcraft*: Identity Work in a Virtual Environment," Diss. Villanova U, 2008 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2008, 1454169); Burrill, *Die Tryin'*; Everett and Watkins "The Power of Play"; Hess, "*You Don't Play*"; Hefner Klimmt and Peter Vorderer, *The Video Game Experience*; Mikula, *Gender and Videogames*; Turkle *Construction and Reconstruction*; Willams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory *The Virtual Census*.

Both gameplay and memory will inevitably provide a richer analysis of videogame effects.

Essentially, in developing a useful methodology, I perform what Giorgio Agamben calls a method of “archeology”.<sup>32</sup> As he describes it, archeology is a noncanonical approach to inquiry that looks to the uncharted past in theory and philosophy to understand the present and future of research.<sup>33</sup> The missing pieces of gameplay and memory within rhetorical scholarship necessitate the collection of new sources and ideas, thus, a new perspective on how rhetorical scholars understand videogames. As Agamben claims:

[Archeology concerns] the moment of a phenomenon's arising and must therefore engage anew the sources and tradition. It cannot confront tradition without deconstructing the paradigms, techniques, and practices through which tradition regulates the forms of transmission, conditions access to sources, and in the final analysis determines the very status of the knowing subject. (89)

Gameplay began to be used rhetorically with games such as *Battlezone*,<sup>34</sup> in the 1980s, yet it has remained an unrecognized part of the rhetorical tradition. As I have discussed, rhetoric has been a primarily oratorical pursuit. Namely, oral, written, and sometimes visual forms of communication are the primary focus of rhetoric. Though the rhetorical tradition does not specifically exclude interactive symbolic speech, such as gameplay, it does not fully include it. Essentially, a reconfiguring of rhetorical, theoretical, and philosophical tools is necessary to

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<sup>32</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca di Santo and Kevin Atell (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 2009), 89. Agamben includes three essays discussing philosophical questions regarding method. Primarily, he explores the theories of Michael Foucault, Thomas S. Kuhn, and other philosophers for an enlightening discussion on methodological approaches to the human sciences. For further discussion on “archeology” as a method of inquiry, see his chapter 3.

<sup>33</sup> Agamben calls this the “future anterior,” which he further describes as “gaining access to the present for the first time”(106).

<sup>34</sup> *Battlezone* was developed by Atari in 1980. The videogame grew out of a military simulation videogame entitled *Army Battlezone* or *The Bradley Trainer* because it was used by the U.S. Army to teach soldiers how to target enemies within the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. Ed Halter in “Playing First Person Warfare” discusses the evolution of *Battlezone* from its purpose as a training simulator to its popularity as an arcade videogame. Hiro Chang also discusses the U.S. Military's long history of using videogames or simulation gaming technologies to teach and influence people in “Simulations Always Valuable.”

uncover the place of an interactive speech that is also based in memory, namely, gameplay.

In this study, to understand the place of gameplay and memory practices in the current rhetorical tradition, I reexamine rhetorical theorists as well as theorists outside of rhetoric to establish its prehistory and, therefore, its present condition. Agamben further describes the purpose and result of archeology:

It is the *past that will have been* when the archeologist's gesture (or the power of the imaginary) *has cleared away* the ghosts of the unconscious and the tight-knit fabric of tradition which block access to history. (106-7)

Here, I am not suggesting that traditional rhetorical theory has barred access a theoretical construct that recognizes the essential elements of interactive computing systems; rather, it has merely approached it as assumptive or in the manner of other types of texts, which are inherently different. In other words, rather than developing a theory that takes into account the feedback of CMC systems, rhetorical theory merely adapts text-based criticisms or identity analysis to CMC systems.

In addition to Agamben's archeology approach, I use generative criticism. Sonja K. Foss notes that when rhetorical scholars are faced with the dilemma of incorporating new theories into criticism, they often generate units of analysis using existing theoretical concepts (489), a process she refers to as generative criticism. I use this generative analysis and archeology to understand gameplay as rhetoric and to illuminate the place of memory within videogame rule systems through the experience of gameplay as a player.

In order to generate theoretical concepts to perform this analysis, I employ archeology's tenet of noncanonical research. Thus, I look outside of the rhetorical tradition to theories in gaming studies, theories regarding the philosophy of human-technology relations, and memory and comprehension in psychology. Generative criticism and archeology are not mutually

exclusive but complement a search for uncharted research. This generative analysis entails foremost that I understand gameplay as rhetoric and the place of memory within videogame rule systems through experiencing gameplay as a player.

Videogames are active environments and require an active audience member. Therefore, I am guided by phenomenology<sup>35</sup> and approach the rhetorical analysis of videogames experientially by becoming a player. As Don Ihde argues, having a bodily subject position is a “necessary condition of situated knowledges” (69). An actively engaged player fuels videogames, as they are an interactive form of computer-mediated communication. According to Miguel Sicart, “games are the experience of being a player – without this experience, the game is *just* an object designed to provide the means for a subjectivization process” (83). Just as a literary critic must read the book she critiques, I have played the videogames I examine, in order to produce a rich analysis and provide meaningful theoretical conclusions. Equally important are the reflections of other players upon the meanings embedded in videogames. Therefore, I also include the views of players, collected from online forums that discuss each videogame, to contextualize my analysis and findings.

My units of analysis also reflect a player that is actively engaged in gameplay. These units of analysis are my interpretations of the theoretical components of gameplay and the result of theoretical archeology: 1) as an external memory system, 2) as the overt *lectio*, and 3) as the unique *meditatio* that can result. Gameplay is a theoretical concept that is in its infancy. My archeological dig, so to speak, led me to these three interpretations that comprise a rhetoric of gameplay. I employ the theoretical concepts which I previously laid out to understand the place

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<sup>35</sup> Phenomenology asserts that human beings cannot be conceived of apart from their world and that experience is an interrelation of the two. See Peter-Paul Verbeek, “Don Ihde: The Technological Lifeworld,” trans. Robert Crease, *American Philosophy of Technology*, ed. Hans Achterhuis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001), 120-1.

of memory in gameplay as rhetoric: 1) the definition of rhetoric, 2) procedurality and propositional loops, and 3) the rhetorical canon of memory. I detail how the theoretical concept of play may be interwoven with subsequent concepts to support a rhetorical theory of gameplay. I explore the philosophical ideals about videogames as a form of technology, to provide a richer understanding of the analysis.

Through this approach, I attempt to answer several questions that plague me, such as whether videogames constitute a posthuman technology, whether “play” includes a question of ethics, and whether the tripartite rhetorical approach<sup>36</sup> must be reconsidered. Foremost, I explore preliminarily the types of questions that rhetoricians must address when looking at CMC and interactive technologies as rhetorical texts.

There are several implications that interactive communication technologies bring to the study of rhetoric and communicative strategies. As I intimated earlier, interactive gameplay as rhetoric can actually encourage the player to form moral understandings of the messages, making each player not a passive receptacle but an active participant. Within the intersubjective space of videogames, players may essentially become rhetors in some cases, and, as rhetors, players' choices are potentially moral. Through a close examination of gameplay and the ways in which memory practices are used to make gameplay more compelling, the importance of memory studies for the digital era is properly solidified. I want to explore the place of these issues within this study.

### Plan of Study

This study focuses particularly on understanding gameplay as a critical activity within

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<sup>36</sup> Generally, rhetoric is composed of a speaker, audience and speech (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1358b). I question whether this may need to be reconsidered in order to approach interactive informational systems.

videogames and emphasizes the importance of the rhetorical canon of memory and its place within rhetorical videogame analysis, while providing suggestions for approaching CMC and other interactive technologies. I am particularly interested in methods that game designers may use in order to discourage or encourage particular decision-making by players or to "influence" players to act one way over another. Methods for suasion can be embedded within the gameplay by employing difficult techniques, though rhetorical scholars seldom explore gameplay techniques. The study follows the path of, first, introducing important rhetorical and theoretical concepts, discussing important philosophical foundations to gameplay, performing analyses, then drawing some conclusions as well as implications for future studies.

In the present chapter, I have outlined the theoretical foundation for the study and the necessity in understanding videogames rhetorically. As a process-based, rule-based form of communication wherein players function within the preset boundaries of game designers in order to understand game meaning, the faculty of memory is a player's greatest asset. Memory of genre-based rules, controls, elements of levels, and recognition of new material must all be active in order to navigate a videogame. Further, videogames structurally account for digital external memory that players access through gameplay practices. Gameplay, then, is essentially the rhetorical skeleton, or the identifiable language, of videogames.

Chapter 2 of this study explores the theoretical connection between gameplay and memory practices. I begin by legitimating gameplay as form of CMC worthy of rhetorical study. Then, I explore "play" as the central governing concept in videogames, begging the question: to what extent can play be ethical and thus rhetorical? I include a brief exploration of the philosophical dimensions of videogames as a form of technology. Later, I explore some essential

concepts for examining gameplay rhetorically as a memorial activity that stem primarily from rhetorical conceptions of memory.

In the analysis portion of the study, I illustrate examples of how game designers use suatory techniques to construct gameplay. Chapter 3 explores gameplay as a memorial activity using specific videogame texts. I use the rhetorical tools uncovered to examine four videogames as rhetorical texts: 1) *Super Mario Brothers 3* for Nintendo system, 2) *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* 3) *Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City*, and 4) *America's Army 3*. I chose these four games for their diversity of design choices and variety of game goals. Each particular game affords a unique view of rhetorical intent and tools used within videogame structures in order to affect players, in both style and format. Illuminating the commonalities and differences among these games help to illustrate the differing functions of gameplay as a rhetorical and essentially memorial device. Here, I discuss how inculcation is achieved through gameplay within each game and what resulting ethical concerns may arise.

Chapter 4 includes a summary and implications for future research. After analyzing these videogames, I examine the foreseen philosophical and ethical implications of videogames as a technology-based form of human interaction. For one, what can rhetorical scholars expect to see in terms of coercion from interactive media and what form will coercion take? Videogames have previously been implicated in school shootings and other violent behaviors. It is important to discuss how rhetorical scholars can begin to spot coercive material from interactive CMC, and thus, videogames. As we continue onward into a future of interactive digital media for communication purposes, questions of rhetorical versus coercive material within these formats become increasingly important. Lastly, I discuss this study's perceived limitations and future research paths.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONSTRUCTING GAMEPLAY

In the present chapter, I begin by exploring the essential components of a videogame. Furthermore, I look at the philosophical implications of being a player. I look at videogames as external memory systems, wrought with information, and discuss how this information effects gameplay. Then, I explore videogames and gameplay's as potentially rhetorical CMC. Lastly, I examine ethical concerns of interactive CMC and gameplay.

#### What is in a (Video)Game?

Videogames are multifaceted and can range from such styles seen in the early 1980s *Dig Dug* (with limited design and movement variations) to the elaborate virtual world designs of *WoW* or, more recently, *Aion* (both are fully-fledged worlds with intricate interfaces). In the present chapter, I define videogames and discuss the theoretical tools that are useful to understand suatory communication in gameplay and other forms of interactive CMC. Furthermore, I examine the philosophical implications of a player's relationship with gameplay. Also, I discuss the implications that memory has on uncovering how interactive CMC and gameplay function rhetorically.

In 2005, Nicolas Esposito defined a videogame as “a *game* which we *play* thanks to an *audiovisual apparatus* and which can be based on a story” (2, author's emphasis). This is a basic working definition. Videogames are games with end state goals that include a player and use some form of technological apparatus. However, videogames are no tic-tac-toe. Something in

this definition is amiss. Videogames as a technology are more complex, and the elements of “play,” “player,” and “game” cannot be taken lightly.

Alexander Galloway adds that videogames constitute “realism in action” (“Social Realism”). Namely, videogames are a part of an interactive medium that privileges an active audience member who makes choices to change and drive ingame action. Players of videogames interact with processes and models that are represented virtually.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Mia Consalvo contends that scholars must begin to conceptualize meaning-making within a videogame as context-based and player-motivated (411-2). Namely, what a videogame *means* has largely to do with the player and the player's involvement with game processes. Thus, from the time that players purchase videogames to the amount of time that players invest in playing videogames, players are always *active* participants.

As a media form popular with the current generation and probably with future generations as well, we ought to understand how videogames function rhetorically. Whereas previous studies have focused on aspects of identity within videogames,<sup>38</sup> issues of “play” and the nature of the videogames as an interactive technology have not been explored rhetorically. Thus, I explore how “rhetors,” or game designers, achieve suasion in individual players, or collectively, the “audience,” using elements of gameplay. First, I explore videogames as a form of technology.

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Bogost (*Persuasive Games*) explores the concept of videogames as as procedural medium in several of his works, as does Miguel Sicart in *Ethics of Computer Games*.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Boone, “A Burkean Analysis”; Burrill, *Die Tryin'*; Everett and Watkins, “Power of Play”.

### *Players' Experience of Playing Videogames*

In 1968, Lloyd F. Bitzer described the “rhetorical situation” and the integral nature of the audience.<sup>39</sup> Without subscribing to Bitzer’s idea that rhetoric is wholly situational, I contend that the nature of the audience is an important facet to the rhetoric of gameplay. Basically, it is important to understand the place of players, as audience members, within a rhetorical theory of videogames. Remember for a moment that a form of material and virtual technology, i.e. a game console and internal processes, mediates the rhetors’ or designers’ speech. The audience engages this speech only by submitting to the impositions of the material and virtual technology. So, we must question these impositions and prepare for the answer whether it is good or bad. Particularly, the experience of playing videogames as technologies raises questions, such as whether playing videogames constitutes communication and whether this communication can be meaningful. Players are physically separate from the systematic, rule-based world of videogames. Yet they desire to experience these worlds, though not merely visually or verbally. Just as with other forms of CMC, playing videogames ultimately entails players’ full internalization of gameplay to explore videogames’ virtual environments, or gamespace. Thus, the engagement that players seek is symbolically related to gameplay.

This aspect of gameplay is what causes quite a bit of controversy, specifically concerning violence and violent acts. There is an expectation that if one plays an avatar, or game character, determined to eliminate the enemies represented, one will soon translate these actions into real-world experience. Also, if these enemies are, say, representations of females, will players instinctively develop more negative attitudes toward women? Similar questions are asked regarding less interactive forms of media. Say, a young girl watches a late night action movie

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<sup>39</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer wrote about the rhetorical situation in 1968. In his essay, he posits that constraints, exigence, and audience comprise every rhetorical situation and that there are different types of audiences (“The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1.1 [1968]: 1-14).

where the female protagonist brutally annihilates her opponents. Will the young girl then attempt to act out the female protagonist's moves on her friends? Likewise, is shooting representations of people in GTA IV, similar to shooting real humans? I look toward humanistic, phenomenological philosophy and its posthuman counterpart, and try to understand the connection between ingame gameplay activities and physical activities. I am interested in how phenomenology and posthumanism might help inform how we think of memory's application within videogames. Particularly, how do their experiences of such virtual, digital spaces contextualize the rules and systematic actions for players and inform their sense making?

At any rate, videogames are visual, auditory, tactile, and sometimes verbal pursuits. Players interact with the environments represented within videogames through inputting information using a keypad, controller, joystick or other input device that is then read by the computing system. This information is designed to produce specific feedback for individual responses that result in on-screen movement. If the player is more accustomed to manipulating the controls, then movement for that player will become mentally more natural within the digitally represented world. Players must become accustomed to the system of movements and the governing principles of gameplay in order to be successful in a videogame. However, not all players ultimately seek realism. While realism may be the goal of some, we can confidently say that players play videogames to experience the worlds that the videogames divulge.

We cannot understand videogames apart from the players who play them. As Sicart states succinctly, "games are the experience of being a player" (83). Do players experience gameplay in the posthuman sense, as something that impedes upon their humanness or transfers players into a technological abyss? Do players experience gameplay as an extension of human ways of communicating using the technological? Do players feel the controller as a prosthetic part or a

tool for disclosing a particular world? Is players' relationship to videogames as a technology a function of their expertise and experience? The answers to these question will determine whether gameplay is a form of CMC, and thus, potentially rhetorical. If it is, gameplay can be studied using constructs from the rhetorical tradition.

In order to understand whether videogames and gameplay properly constitute CMC, it is important to understand the impact of how bodily subject positions are felt by players. The prevalence of interactive CMC technologies will certainly increase as they become more affordable. Knowing the ins and outs of videogames as a form of interactive CMC will illuminate methods of criticism to use in other media as well as ways to contextualize the experiences of using CMC.

The ingame experiences of players within videogames are what make videogames transcend the characteristics of mere objects (Sicart 83-4). In truth, how interactions with data systems take place is a tricky subject to tackle. On the one hand, the rule-based systems that players encounter while playing videogames may also be considered the player's self, as constituted in virtual space. On the other hand, gameplay may be considered a player's dialogue with game designers through rule-based systems. The relationships of players to gameplay will illustrate the rhetorical quality of gameplay. When we consider the properties of virtuality<sup>40</sup> as a value-laden means of representing the world most commonly divulged through technologies, the place of the player and her experience becomes a question of values as well.

### *Players Engage Gameplay As Fragmented Entities*

People become “players” of videogames only through interacting with videogame technologies. In posthuman and transhuman thought, the combination of human beings with

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<sup>40</sup> Rob Shields gives a brilliant discussion of virtuality and its non-binarist relationship to “the real” in *The Virtual* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

technological systems is an evolutionary step, one that will blur the line between human and machine.<sup>41</sup> Katherine Hayles considers the human body to be “the original prosthesis” that human beings use and “that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born” (*How We Became Posthuman* 3). In this sense, the physical body is seen as being related to the human mind only insofar as it provides a means for humans to interact with their environment. As an inborn tool, the body is replaceable and is not seen as interfering with the mind. Here, the controller, keyboard, keypad or input device used to execute gameplay for videogames can be seen as a prosthetic to the body, something that molds into the player's self experience. Thus, what are the implications of a posthuman player on rhetorical influence?

Posthumanists, such as Hayles, argue that a bodily subject position is a chance of nature.<sup>42</sup> Thus, human beings can operate, or the human mind specifically, is able to operate without a body. In other words, the human mind is similar to a data processing system that is merely housed within the body, as an accident of nature. Human minds, then, can be constituted in purely data forms, regardless of bodily position. A posthuman player can essentially insert himself/herself into the rule-based systems of videogames. The virtual and material technology of videogames would impose no restriction on these players.

Furthermore, Katherine Hayles proclaims that posthumanism “configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (*How We Became Posthuman* 3). The differences between human bodily existence and machine articulation of human existence

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<sup>41</sup> For example, see Bostrom, *What is Transhuman?*, “In Defense of Posthuman,” “A History of Transhumanist”; Cavanagh, “Prosthetic Gods”; Haraway “Manifesto for Cyborgs”; Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, “Refiguring the Posthuman”; Goertzel and Bugaj, *The Path to Posthumanity*.

<sup>42</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*; “Refiguring the Posthuman”; Goertzel and Bugaj, *The Path to Posthumanity*; Bostrom, *What is Transhuman?*, “In Defense of Posthuman,” “A History of Transhumanist”; Cavanagh, “Prosthetic Gods”; Haraway “Manifesto for Cyborgs.”

are unsubstantial in posthumanism. As Hayles explains, “In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (*How We Became Posthuman* 3). Therefore, the presumption is that humans can be materially constituted apart from their bodily existences and placed seamlessly into data systems. In the posthuman, players fuse with their videogames, making impossible any distinction between the selves of the players, and the structural composition of the game designers. So, what of the posthuman selves, identities, and goals of the players?

For Hayles, the answer relates to the posthuman self's quality as a distributed entity. She views the self, as it is considered transcendent from a physical bodily subject position, as a primarily “material-informational entity” (*How We Became Posthuman* 3). Through this lens, the desire and will of the self must be reconfigured. Hayles emphasizes that there no longer exists the “presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the ‘wills of others’” (3-4). Consequently, players and game designers, collectively, would not be considered to have diverging viewpoints or ideas, simply because the posthuman self has no agency. Not only is the posthuman self devoid of individual bodily identity, it is also disconnected. Hayles comments that the “posthuman's collective heterogeneous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another” (3-4). According to Hayles, posthuman philosophy regards the self as a naturally fragmented entity. Thus, a posthuman player, videogame environment, and game designer would be homogenous. They could all simply be the same.

Hayles takes a closer look at posthuman subjectivity and what implications subjectivity has on the relationship of humans to technology and finds that posthuman subjectivities are multifaceted, not territorialized, similar to the dialogic or performed self.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the posthuman self transcends the materiality of technology and is thus performed through technology. Hayles posits that the posthuman self necessarily complicates the binary of subject/object. For example, a posthuman subject interacting with a technological artifact that displays a virtual world “becomes absorbed in deterritorialized flows surging across the screen to mobilize affective and perceptual capacities” (Hayles, “Refiguring the Posthuman” 314). The posthuman subject is thus liberated from a unified subject position to a fragmented, disembodied position that can easily navigate across material technology. Consequently, a posthuman player's identity would be the result of the technology's limitations. Namely, posthuman player identity would be viewed as subtly transferable between technologies and shaped and changed by this mutual transference. Thus, the player does not have a unique stance but is merely absorbed by the technology used to play videogames.

Specifically, the result of a posthuman player identity and self can be seen through Thomas Cavanagh's work with self-serve technologies and Heidegger's *bestand*.<sup>44</sup> Self-serve, cybernetic,<sup>45</sup> or self-steering system technologies include things such as Automated Teller Machines, ATMs, self-check-out lines at most modern grocery stores, and even certain

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<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of dialogically performed self, see Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating* and Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Heidegger uses “*bestand*” to describe the result of technology. The idea that technology functions as a *bestand* means that it is devalued, misused by humans, and easily disposable. *Bestand* also defined as “standing reserve.” See Rojcewicz, *The Gods and Technology*, 83-107 for an extensive discussion of this term. Moreover, Peter-Paul Verbeek (“Don Ihde”) characterizes *bestand* “as a storehouse of goods that lie ready for human manipulation” (129). Heidegger, Verbeek states, “thought that technology consists of a specific, and reduced, interpretation of the world” (129).

<sup>45</sup> Here, “cybernetic” refers to systems that are self-steering and continual, such as the Internet.

videogames which thrive because of the continuous nature of their virtual world designs, i.e. WoW or *Runescape*. Cavanagh posits that a human-technology relationship results in Heidegger's "standing reserve." To enumerate, Cavanagh characterizes this relationship as a limiting and pervasive one: "whenever we use a piece of self service-oriented performance support technology to help us complete a task, remember something, or speed us unnaturally along to premature proficiency, we are using a technological prosthetic to extend human capability (473). In other words, using these technologies functionally makes the user a cyborg.<sup>46</sup> A posthuman player becomes a cyborg by using a controller. Therefore, even when players play self-steering, online videogames to interact with other players over large geographical areas, the players are limiting their humanity, and player, videogame, and gameplay constitute a *bestand*.

In brief, using a Heideggerian analysis of human-technology relations, Cavanagh argues that self-serve, cyborg technology limits human interaction and privileges machine and capitalistic gains over humanity and interpersonal interaction (460-1). Of course, we can apply the characteristics of a limited relationship between humans and technology to videogames. Self-serve technology, Cavanagh argues, thrusts humanity into the "standing reserve" where people are devalued and their humanity is constricted. Thus, the implications of a posthuman player have a startling effect on conceptions of rhetoric and on how we can begin to understand videogames as a technology.

Posthuman ideals have a monumental effect on how we can understand videogames, gameplay, and rhetoric in this context. For instance, according to Cavanagh's conception of cyborg systems, videogames that are self-steering, such as *Aion* or WoW, constitute a *bestand* because players initially use material technology to play them. The player, as he or she executes

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<sup>46</sup> A "cyborg" is a fictional character that is both human and machine, such as the character Jaime Sommers in ABC's and NBC's *Bionic Woman* or the popular character known as Robocop.

commands using a material controller, constitutes a cyborg. Posthumanism conforms to the idea that technology generally replaces humanity, rather than enhances it. Interestingly, the use of earlier forms of technologies, such as eyeglasses, pens, or calculators, are not identified as limiting. Still, some researchers readily argue that these technologies do constitute a posthuman age and that humans' relationship to technology is a constrictive one. When we consider that the role of rhetoric is public, human-to-human communication that uses identification through the manipulation of symbols in order to create meaning and change the perception of one's reality, either the construct of the posthuman player or the practice of rhetoric itself seems ill-fitting. In other words, if human-technology relationships are posthuman in nature, then rhetoric is not an appropriate lens for studying them.

In any case, Hayles and other posthumanists/transhumanists reinstitute the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy in order to privilege an accidental consciousness located in fragmented, disparate parts.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, there would be no use of rhetoric or persuasion for the posthuman users of technology and players. The self would be so fragmented that neither dialogically exchanging ideas nor seeking to persuade would be necessary as the self would have no will or desire. Indeed, the self as housed within a bodily subject position is also an unnecessary condition for posthuman intersubjectivity. Player and videogame, or user and technology, become one. Once in a while, one hears about romantic partners who use WoW to communicate across vast geographical distances and keep in touch, or about an older sibling who uses email to edit a younger sibling's term paper. Vis-a-vis these and similar stories, posthuman conceptions of technology seem a projection for the future, at best. Unquestionably, today,

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<sup>47</sup> For more discussion on posthumanism or transhumanism and the resurgence of the Cartesian binary, see for example, Haraway "Manifesto for Cyborgs"; Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, and "Refiguring the Posthuman"; Bostrom "In Defense of Posthuman," "A History of Transhuman Thought", and *What is Transhumanism?*; Goertzel and Bugaj, *The Path to Posthumanity*.

people use technologies primarily to communicate with other people or to gain access to information produced by other people.<sup>48</sup>

Most research suggests that CMC technologies do not absorb the human self and disperse its fragments within undefined data systems. To the contrary, people use these CMC technologies to get meanings and information from other people. For instance, when people read a book to be pulled into a world of fantasy or horror, they are reading the words of a human author; the book neither writes nor reads itself. In the same vein, videogames, nor their systems, program themselves. The Internet, accessed through cellular phones, computing devices, and kiosks, and videogames are used so that people can experience meanings and gain access to information ultimately generated by others without geographic restrictions. The systems used to play videogames are human designed and programmed as well. Again, I use the analogy between videogames and books. Essentially, the player must “read,” or play, them, and the “words,” or gameplay mechanics, are initially authored by game designers. Both players and designers act independently. It follows that a rhetorical theory of videogames as a form of interactive technology predicated on the use of gameplay for communication does not include a posthuman player.

### *How Human Audience (Players) Relate to Technology*

Rhetorical communication and thus suasion are primarily humanistic, where the audience members jointly enter into a dialogue with the rhetor(s) to negotiate meaning. Similar to the

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<sup>48</sup> See Nancy K. Baym, “Interpreting Soap Operas and Creating Community: Inside an Electronic Fan Culture,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 30.2/3 (1993): 143-77, “The Talk of Fandom: The Importance of the Social Practices of Soap Opera Fans in a Computer-Mediated Discussion Group.” *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subcultures and Identity*. Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, ed. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 1998, “I Think of Them as Friends’ Interpersonal Relationships in the Online Community. *Gender, Race, & Class in Media*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, G. Dines and J.M. Humez, ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003, 488-496.

rhetorical exchanges between orators, or rhetors, and their audience members, players use the mechanisms of gameplay to perform a latent dialogue and negotiate meaning with predetermined frame of the game designers. Thus, a fundamental separation between the individual audience members or players, the rhetors, and the meaning in question exists. Still, the question remains: theoretically, how do players “read” videogames?

The theoretical precepts of phenomenology as described by Don Ihde prove indispensable to understanding players' relationships to videogames.<sup>49</sup> Phenomenology privileges a view of the self as being both a part of the physical body and the rhetorically constituted body, that is viewed and upon which is written cultural ideals. Ihde, a philosopher of technologies, defines phenomenology: “phenomenology takes the subject out of the box and places him or her *in the world* -- but as embodied and in a perspective” (*Bodies in Technology* 74). A phenomenological perspective applied to videogames implies that players exist as players by the experience of playing a videogame which occurs through gameplay. Therefore, the player has a self that is positioned in a world, rather than one fragmented through data systems, and thus has a will, perspective, and desire separate from the virtual and material videogame technology.

According to phenomenology, Verbeek notes, people “cannot be conceived apart from their relations to the world, and the world cannot be conceived apart from people’s relations to it” (“Don Ihde” 120). People, then, are related to the world by virtue of being in the world that exists, be it virtually constituted in within videogames or the physical world around people. It is through interactions with the world that people get meanings, perspectives, and ideas.

Specifically, players derive meanings through playing videogames. For this reason, I regard the

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<sup>49</sup> See *Technology and the Lifeworld* where Ihde discusses how a phenomenological relationship between humans and technologies potentially present the world in *new* ways. Humans and technology have a relationship contextualized by continual interaction, and places people in an embodied perspective.

exploration of the relationship between player and videogame technology as a rhetorical pursuit, that cannot be downplayed, because rhetoric inherently entails an audience, rhetors, and symbols.

Furthermore, Verbeek states that “for a phenomenologist, the interrelation between subject and object always precedes the subject and the object themselves; the subject and the object are constituted in their interrelation” (“Don Ihde” 130). Likewise, we can understand how players, as the rhetorical audience, are constituted through examining the process of interaction between the bodily subject positions of the players and the technological artifacts, or more specifically, what these technological artifacts disclose.

As I have explored, videogames entail more than the technology that they are played on. A single videogame title may be played on multiple platforms, using essentially different technologies.<sup>50</sup> Videogames, as technological artifacts, are essentially used to unveil the rule-based worlds to players. Thus, videogames constitute what phenomenologists call world disclosing technologies, through embodiment and hermeneutic relationships. In order to understand how players experience these worlds as disclosed through videogames and how this experience relates to rhetoric, I turn now to Ihde's conception of the self.

Ihde describes the phenomenological self as being composed of body one and body two. Body one, Ihde describes, is learned “reflexively” by “actively being in a world” (*Bodies in Technology* 69). We know body one by virtue of experiencing interaction with the things around us. In other words, body one may be considered what players know by virtue of physically playing videogames. Namely, the subject, or the player in this case, ascertains a bodily subject

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<sup>50</sup> Many videogame titles are released for different platforms simultaneously, which does not necessarily mean that each system used to play the single title does not impact gameplay. To the contrary, the lack of gameplay continuity among physical systems demonstrates that videogames and the systems used to play them are primarily used to gain access to the world within or their virtual environments which do remain static. One can experience the same gameplay and thus experience essentially the same world using different videogame technologies, though this is certainly not always the case (i.e. see the case of the release of *Dragon Age: Origins*).

position only through interacting with the world around her. Having a bodily subject position, Ihde argues, is the “necessary condition of situated knowledges” but not the only thing needed (*Bodies in Technology* 69). On the other hand, body two, is “the body of the condemned in Foucault, the body upon which is written or signified” cultural, political, and social meanings, such as the experience of being a woman (*Bodies in Technology* 70). Contrary to posthumanism, body two, or the culturally marked body, necessarily follows from body one. Namely, body one and body two are constituted “in the interactions, in the mutual questioning and interacting of the world and us, in the changing patterns of the life world” (*Bodies in Technology* 86). These two body positions interact to constitute one's self and thus one's unique conception of reality.

Yet, the question of how players become embodied within videogame worlds remains. As players experience the world divulged through videogame technologies, they sit before a television/monitor, manipulating gameplay controls and experience the results of their input into the computing system simultaneously as both actors and spectators to ingame actions.<sup>51</sup> The material technologies, i.e. the controller, do not in and of themselves produce the embodied perspective. Controllers and monitors merely allow players to gain access to a world that is constructed around gameplay rules. Concerning embodied relationships to technology, Ihde's philosophy assumes that “the most important characteristic of embodied technologies is that they possess a certain transparency. They call attention not to themselves, but to (aspects of) the world given through them” (Verbeek, “Don Ihde” 127). Similarly, players use controllers or other input devices to interact with videogame rule-based systems. The controller is not the focus of the players. The players must move past the controller or input device to begin to internalize

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<sup>51</sup> Burrill discuss the simultaneously reflexive and performative nature of playing videogames further (*Die Tryin'* 55).

the gameplay mechanisms fully, or “read” the game. Namely, the controller is simply the means to do so.

Therefore, a phenomenological player is not disembodied and disparately located among videogame data but is embodied, within a unique perspective, yet also experiences videogame data. A phenomonological player retains her bodily subject position while experiencing the videogame world and can therefore bring something of her experience to that world. Whereas a posthuman player's experience belies suasion, a phenomenological player's experience is amenable to and potentially guided by suasion. Here, I look to Ihde to explicate the task ahead when considering people's relationship to potentially suasory interactive technologies:

But whatever these new realities are, they will emerge from the dance, the interrogation, the “foldings of flesh” that Merleau-Ponty talked about in his late works, and they may be located by looking at the practices and giving account of our bodily engagements and embodiments in that world. (86)

The experiences of playing videogames are the focal point, along with the tools, that players use to engage videogame worlds. Hence the potential for rhetorical suasion lies in the hands of those who produce these tools for engagement within videogame worlds, that is gameplay, rather than in the static videogame technology, that is the controller or computing device. As the driving force of videogames, how, then, does gameplay constitute a phenomenological engagement?

Although the visual elements of a videogame and the physical characteristics of the videogame systems may provide players with an embodied perspective, interacting with the rule systems that underpin videogames is what makes a person become a player of a particular game.<sup>52</sup> In other words, gameplay is the means by which players interact with meaning within videogames. In brief, gameplay mechanics form the unseen skeleton of the world which then players experience, and the rhetorical exchange between designers and players is virtual. In this

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<sup>52</sup> Sicart explains that a player is essentially the experience of playing videogames; the two, player and playing, are inseparable, 90.

respect, gameplay is not something that players can touch, but exists virtually. Virtuality is intangible, but it is not in conflict with what is “real” – most often considered what is physical (Shields 22). To the contrary, the virtual is “an essentialized, self-evident way of the world” (Shields 24). Values and perspectives are integrally tied to the virtual. Virtual spaces presuppose values and perspectives, as they are considered “ideally real” (Shields 22). For example, an artist or sculptor cannot truly recreate the Statue of Liberty in New York City. Essentially, what the artist or sculptor attempts to produce is a product that retains its essence. Of course, what is regarded as the essence of the Statue of Liberty is ultimately up to the artist or sculptor’s impression of it. Similarly, gameplay is a virtual system. Suffice to say that, as a virtual system, gameplay is what represents designers’ reality, including the values, perspectives, and meanings players encounter ingame. Thus, gameplay as a virtual system of rules constitutes a technological artifact that exposes an intangible world to players.

Here, Ihde's philosophy is indispensable. Ihde seeks to explore what technologies disclose to us. According to Ihde’s philosophy, technologies that represent a world are hermeneutically related to those who experience them. A hermeneutic relationship to technology is one where the technology “provides a representation of reality, which implies that the design of such a technology predetermines which aspects of reality is to be made perceptible” (Verbeek, “Don Ihde” 128). In other words, hermeneutic technologies are constructed to show a world, not necessarily *the* world, through a specific lens which automatically entails a perspective. Constructing gameplay worlds requires mounting knowledge on the part of the player to navigate them. The way in which world-disclosing technologies are constructed determines how the world is disclosed to people. For example, television has evolved from its initial design to using light-emitting diodes, or LED to display moving images. What results is an alarmingly crystal clear

display to audience members. Whereas other television technologies gave a black-and-white, often pixilated picture, LED television technology allows audience members to pinpoint each discrete wrinkle revealed on the face of their favorite actor or actress. In the case of videogame technologies, their internal, virtual structure ultimately creates the world, as the controllers and monitors merely provide the embodied perspective for players.

Additionally, Verbeek tells us, in hermeneutic relationships, “we are involved with the world via an artifact, but the artifact is not transparent. The artifact does not withdraw from our relation to the world but provides a representation of the world, which requires interpretation in order to impart something to us about it” (“Don Ihde” 127). Similarly, players experience gameplay and recognize it as such: a virtual system of rules of behavior by which they choose to abide. Gameplay is not a jumbled web that absorbs players as data but requires that players sit, operate a controller to generate feedback, interpret that feedback, and act accordingly. Essentially, players experience gameplay transparently and meaningfully. When players experience observational loops within gameplay, they do so with the internal processes. Through hermeneutic relationships, humans can access a virtual space, but the world that is accessed, as human beings produce it, takes a perspective.

In short, Ihde’s humanistic approach to human-technology relations does not regard these relationships as fixed, but rather dependent upon individual human-technology experiences. Body one/body two are constituted in interactions with technologies through a necessarily embodied subject position (69-71). As a phenomenologist, Ihde advocates that technologies are constitutive of identities and realities, depending upon how we choose to create them. In the same vein, game designers can use gameplay mechanics to construct differing player

experiences, such as the experiences associated with an FPP<sup>53</sup> or an MMO,<sup>54</sup> regardless of the physical technology used.

The notion of choice, as well as an embodied perspective, is essential to a rhetorical conception of interactive technologies and CMC. Through a phenomenological lens, a situated, embodied subject position is privileged. Yet, an embodied perspective does not detract from human identity or humans' abilities to interact with technologies. Ihde remarks, that "in this interconnection of embodied being and environing world, what happens in the interface is what is important" (Ihde, *Bodies in Technology* 87). Namely, the nature of humans' relationships to technologies emerges from the moments of interaction with specific technologies. Ihde argues, "the fantasy that says we can simultaneously have the powers and capacities of the technologizing medium without its ambiguous limitations, so thoroughly incorporated into ourselves that it becomes living body, is a fantasy of desire" (Ihde, *Bodies in Technology* 15). Our selves and perspectives are embodied apart from technologies, but the technologies that we use, such as CMC, can be constructed to reveal different aspects of the world to us.

According to Verbeek, Ihde's philosophy is thus based on people's "dealings with the concrete technological artifacts, and the praxes and interpretations that are made possible by them" ("Don Ihde" 144). Likewise, players' material experiences within videogames are based upon the possibilities that are created as they respond and interpret virtual gameplay structures. Gameplay, then, is used to communicate the worlds or perspectives of the game designers to the players. Essentially, interactive technologies, such as videogames, have a highly rhetorical

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<sup>53</sup> "FPP" refers to first-person perspective videogames, where players are unable to view any aspect of their avatars that would not be similarly viewable by existing in their own bodies. For example, players could not position their own avatars to see in their avatars' eyes.

<sup>54</sup> "MMO" refers to Massively Multiplayer Online videogames, that frequently have a role-play component (i.e. MMORPG). These are games in which players interact with a variety of other players in a cybernetic world. An example of one such videogame is WoW.

implication, because when we use these technologies, we respond and interact directly with worldviews of others. Through interaction with videogame input devices, players gain access to gameplay, and then can see the world the gameplay's design reveals to them. Verbeek further explicates: “on an experiential level, as something that mediates our experience, technology no longer appears to entail necessarily a reduction of the ways in which the world is revealed to us” (“Don Ihde” 144). Here, the fear of the Heideggerian *bestand* of humanity is unseated in that technologies are created and sustained by and through human interactions.<sup>55</sup>

Most importantly, knowledge of the systems of interactive CMC technologies, such as videogames, provides new perspectives from which to view how rhetoric functions in virtual contexts. Namely, we can begin to discuss where the ethical burden lies in interactive CMC technologies. In videogames, players, or the audience members, use the material technology of videogames to gain an embodied perspective. An embodied perspective merely accounts for the reflexive position from which players can view the world in videogames. Therefore, using material videogame technologies does not impart meaning rhetorically to players. In fact, gameplay functions rhetorically in many ways. Videogame designers construct what they want players to do and know, such as their perspectives and worldviews, in gameplay. Players hermeneutically engage videogames' internal, virtual structure, or gameplay, to experience meaning. As syntax, gameplay rules and principles supply the storehouse of meaning making material to players. Thus, the rules and principles can offer varying amount of freedom to players. Also as syntax, gameplay requires that players understand, interpret, and use its rules in order to create meaning.

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<sup>55</sup> I intentionally exaggerate the plurality of technologies in order to emphasize that a humanistic conception of human technology relationships neither homogenizes “technology” nor “human.” Essentially, the plethora of both types of technologies and their uses by humans is antipodal to the Heideggerian *bestand*.

### *Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)*

If we relate videogames to existing understandings of how people communicate using computer systems, we can unravel their complexities further. Videogames and other emerging forms of communication, such as those facilitated by the Internet and other computer-mediated forms of communication (CMC), are highly complex. The presentation of information is vastly different from the oratorical or visual forms of communication used throughout most of human history, as information exchange entails an active audience. Information in interactive systems presents a plethora of new questions about the nature of influence, rhetoric, and ethics.

Primarily, interactive information systems and CMC present new obstacles to understanding how people think. Similarly, videogames represent a unique, audience-driven form of communication that relies fundamentally on conditioning actions. Warnick posits that we need to understand how users make sense of the information encountered in computer systems to begin to understand the range of rhetorical influence that is possible through these systems (104). Thus, we must start at the beginning. First, we must understand how users make sense of the information that they encounter through CMC, and particularly, how videogames function as CMC, before we can discuss particular implications of the rhetoric of gameplay as a form of CMC.

Let us first discuss the emerging issues surrounding CMC in a broader sense. We can consider CMC to mean any type of communication between persons where a computer or computing device is used, rather than face-to-face speaking, to relay information (Warnick 69). For instance, CMC can range from the use of a kiosk at the movie theater to purchase a ticket or the use of a personal computing device to access the Internet. In each case, people use the

material computing device to access information that has been provided and programmed by another person or team of people.

*Memorial Implications of CMC.* From CMC's unique properties, researchers are beginning to hone in on the possibility that computing systems of information may revive collective interest in the rhetorical canon of memory. Previous scholars have hinted at the importance of memory when interacting with computer systems.<sup>56</sup> In 1991, Richard Lanham suggested that the way in which computer systems function rhetorically calls for a re-examination of mnemonic devices (*Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* 179). Thus, there is an implication that external computing systems demonstrate either the need for more established mnemonic skills on the part of the user or the computing systems. Specifically, the designs of computing systems constitute external memory for users, but these systems can either perform as external memory systems more or less effectively and to multiple ends.

When Jay David Bolter examined hypertext, he found a unique relationship between users and hypertext. Bolter asserts that the goal of hypertextual spaces is to act as external memory systems that visually map verbal information for users (107-10). For example, rather than retaining the search results for “dog” in one’s head, a user can simply “google” it. Google, as a meta-database, then itemizes all that “dog” represents for a user’s benefit. Thus, hypertext links on websites essentially are the storehouses of information that users access by simply clicking the links.

Similarly, Stewart Whittemore found that understanding memory was important to navigating content management systems, or CMS (98-103). Whittemore posits that CMS

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<sup>56</sup> See for example Allen, “The Faculty of Memory”; Bolter, “Hypertext and the Rhetorical Canons”; Lanham, *A Handlist*; Loftus and Loftus, *Mind At Play*; Welch, “Electrifying Classical Rhetoric”; Whittemore, “Metadata and Memory”; Van-Ittersum, “Distributing Memory.”

interfaces have the capacity to overburden users' long-term and short-term memory through their interface design and features (94). For instance, an application used for writing notes that only allows the user to view one word at a time, versus the entire message, will require the user to retain the entirety of the message in memory while constructing it, which may burden the user. Later, Whittemore concludes that CMS offers the potential to store tracks of information for users but does not provide a unique way of assembling the stored material (107). Namely, CMS can hold large amounts of information but has not yet improved the interface design and level of interactivity so that users may use it most effectively.

Hypertext and CMS may primarily be used for holding information for users to manage. Thus, computing systems can take on information and help users manage it through CMC, but there is a question of whether CMC and CMS allow for unique construction of information. Namely, if a form of CMC were to be considered rhetorical, it would allow for audience members, or users, to form unique realities.

Suffice to say, CMC and CMS afford rhetoricians a new reason to look at memory as a relevant canon. In CMC systems, the machine can act as the device upon which memory, as a type of imprinting, exists.<sup>57</sup> However issues of interface design and the level of interactivity may limit how CMC can contribute to innovation. The principles surrounding memory offer tools that, while fundamental to reasoning and comprehension, appear to be essential to navigating computer systems. Likewise, in terms of videogames, to what extent can the internal structure of videogames be said to represent external memory for the players? Again, videogames are themselves virtual computing systems, as they are constructed and accessed through material computing devices. Thus, gameplay, the fundamental aspect of videogames, must be considered

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<sup>57</sup> Cicero describes the canon of memory in this fashion in Book II, 354-360. *On the Ideal Orator*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse. (New York, NY: Oxford U P, 2001).

in regards to these new insights. But first, I distinguish between common notions of memory as merely the storehouses or remembering and memory's more rhetorical functions.

*Rhetorical Characteristics of Memory Applicable to CMC.* Memory relates uniquely to CMC as more than an aid to remembering. Therefore, I explore several other characteristics of the rhetorical canon memory that are important to a discussion of gameplay as essentially suasive CMC. As I describe memory theoretically, I enumerate the characteristics that are indispensable to rhetorical CMC. Memory does not merely concern the reproduction of information. When discussing nonrepresentational religious imagery, Peter Parshall demonstrates that memory is more than re-creation.<sup>58</sup> To the contrary, he explains that memory is a kind of self-constructed imprinting of an image that we generate for ourselves (469). Though the material of memory is externally supplied, memory exists for us as a self-propelled rhetorical activity. Here, Parshall discusses the nonrepresentational nature of memory:

So regarded, the idea of a memory image offers us an alternative point of view on the problem of representation and what we inadequately term *realism* in picture making. Rather than bringing something to life by representing it, mnemonic images seem to arise from a strategy or a premise that is in essence antirepresentational: a resistance to describing the object itself in favor of offering a kind of blank, a configured but unadorned space we must fill in for ourselves. It is for us to lend the image certain qualities and attributes in order to give it a distinct and private meaning. (469)

Similar to how Mary Carruthers describes memory as the personalization of internalized information, Parshall demonstrates that memory is antirepresentational using nonrepresentational religious imagery. Just as when a cartoonist draws a caricature of someone, the cartoonist does not try to copy the person realistically, but rather to supply viewers with the person's essence. The work of memory is one of taking a perspective and representing the essential aspects of an idea. Thus, rhetorical memory activities do not entail making a copy of external material but domesticating material in a way that makes it personal for an individual.

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Parshall, "The Art of Memory and Passion," *The Art Bulletin* 81.3 (1999): 456-72.

It is equally important to note memory's characteristic as a mental activity. The rhetorical canon of memory, as Carruthers discusses it, is a phantasmal process, meaning that it takes place in the mind (*Medieval Craft of Memory* 163). Referencing Aristotle's conception of memory, Carruthers describes memory as concerning "intellectual objects," such as ideas and meaning (163). Essentially, an individual manages ideas and meaning mentally which they cannot otherwise be detected by the five senses. For instance, while playing a videogame, as the propositional loops and processes are internalized, they become "intellectual objects" to each individual player. An "intellectual object" in a videogame includes actions such as how a player can move, whether a player can "jump," and particular obstacles. If unable to internalize "intellectual objects" in videogames, a player's progress will suffer, such as in the earlier example of SMB3 when the player was unable to jump the appropriate distance. Indeed, without the full, phantasmal domestication of propositions during gameplay, a player's progress will suffer.

Moreover, Carruthers concludes that "memory relates essentially to the appearance of phantasms, incidentally to the intellect's ability to judge" (163). In addition to the movement of mental material, such as ideas and meaning, intellectual judgment entails the movement of mental material toward a physical end. The physical end is not always explicit. As in the case of riding a bicycle, if we consider the steps of riding too explicitly while actually riding, we may surely fall off. Memory, then, is not a wholly intellectual process but can also relate to actions.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, environments that are based on mounting experience could not be understood apart from the constructs of rhetorical memory.

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson discusses this in *Language, Memory, and Thought*.

Again, verbal, visual, and procedural memory entail the movement of ideas and meaning within the mind in order to personalize information and make it one's own. Furthermore, domesticating information results in the formation of values. Essentially, memory inherently supports moral reasoning. Noel Packard and Christopher Chen trace memory from medieval times to current sociological theories and found that memory in medieval times was used to support moral knowledge. In later sociological theorists, memory was found to be a social and individual activity (1315-6). Suffice to say, memory practices are inextricably linked to the formation of moral knowledge.

Furthermore, Liz Rohan describes material technologies such as texts and other material media, which serve as external preservers of memories.<sup>60</sup> Memory itself can be a resource and has a “rhetorical end” (373). As Rohan explains:

Memory as craft, as practiced in the domestic sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, posits memory as a veritable rhetorical canon in its own right, a means of persuasion, and also its end, a process that requires the development of complex rhetorical devices—both material and cognitive. (370-1)

Rohan points out another valuable rhetorical function of memory. Once again, memory is *not simply remembering* but a rhetorical activity used to assign values externally as well as internally. Though Rohan primarily looks at memory as a rhetorical means of preserving in the domestic sphere, the author demonstrates that this function of preserving in itself is rhetorical.

Additionally, as a rhetorical activity, memory is a process. Dave Tell explores Augustine's conception of memory within *De Trinitate*. Beyond the notion that memory exists as the storehouses of mental objects, Tell demonstrates the formation of these storehouses (238). Using concepts from Augustine's work, Tell demonstrates that it is more than attention that

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<sup>60</sup> Rohan, “I Remember Mamma: Material Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and One Woman’s Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Quilt,” *Rhetoric Review* 23.4 (2004): 376. Here, I mean texts which transcend a mere verbal form.

brings objects of the mind into view from within the storehouse; it is human will (239). Specifically, he says, “the act of retrieval shapes the past as it recalls the past; the past resides, in a very real sense, in the act of retrieval itself, rather than in the storehouse” (243). In other words, memory is a rhetorical process whereby people focus their will upon information in order to internalize it, then take a perspective on it in order to make it useful. Tell describes that the retrieval of information from mental storehouses is by use of *verbum mentis*—a “mental word” which is intrinsically meaningful and provides access to the “storehouse” associated with memory (244). Tell then discusses Augustine's use of the faculty of understanding and states that understanding “treats images *as* words” (244). Likewise, these mental words can be used to recall sets of processes and scenarios in the mind as well as images. Specifically, mental words are constructed as intrinsically meaningful devices which we use to bring access to our treasure-houses of memory (244). Thus, Tell conceptualizes *how* information is domesticated and internalized.

Memory is a process of using mental words to gain access to storehouses but does not end there. Tell explains: “In a very real sense, then, the work of memory is accomplished not in the disclosure of images hidden away in Memory, but in the confessional expression that strives endlessly after such disclosure. Memory is displaced” (248). Thus, as a process, memory is continual. Similarly, James Young intuitively stated that “the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution” (*Texture of Memory* 21). According to Tell, memory is thus “work that succeeds on the condition that it is never finished” (249). When you use objects from the storehouse of memory, those objects are again reconfigured as they are used, rather than be removed from the storehouses and treasure-houses of the mind unscathed. Therefore, memorial

activities, such as gameplay, are processural and continuous, meaning that a player must continually re-evaluate gameplay information.

Thus memory is an inherently rhetorical process which can be conceived in myriad ways. Memory is both internal and external. Specifically, memory concerns morals, ethics, ideas, and meaning. For example, how we place value in scenarios such as war involves internal memory practices. However, these concepts can also be applied to actions, procedural memory, and thus interactive CMC systems. As I have also noted, memory can serve as the treasure-house or storehouse from which intentional material is removed for use. For instance, hypertext is used to organize information externally for users. Furthermore, memory, as a rhetorical activity, can serve as the means to substantiate identity upon material objects and texts. Likewise, CMC systems are constructed this way. Similarly, domestication and ethical judgment are necessary to navigate propositions and algorithms embedded in interactive technologies.

As I have noted, videogames as CMC use gameplay to build experiences between players and designers, and players use their knowledge of gameplay to navigate these systems. Gameplay, as a type of syntax, requires the accumulation of experiential information. In terms of gameplay, Geoffrey R. Loftus and Elizabeth F. Loftus describe in *Mind at Play* that how fast players can shift their attention and process new information is essential to gameplay (50-1). For instance, in SMB3, players immediately are forced to become accustomed to the existence of turtles, ledges, and other obstacles. Throughout the game, enemies become more prevalent and have increasingly varied movement patterns to which players must adjust in order to progress further. As the range of programming for videogames becomes more complex, this 1983 idea from Loftus and Loftus becomes all too real, particularly the increased demands made on short-term memory. Namely, players' adjustments in gameplay are based on their mounting holistic

knowledge of gameplay mechanics and rules (Loftus and Loftus 64-6). Thus, gameplay requires constant recognition and readjustment on the part of players to compensate for increasingly difficult rules.

Let me reiterate, gameplay constitutes both the tools allowed players and the system structure through which players navigate. Players must use these tools of gameplay to navigate these systems more effectively or lose. Particularly, Loftus and Loftus note that “in playing video games, speed is of the essence – particularly the speed with which you can *retrieve* information from long-term memory” (Loftus and Loftus 52-3). In other words, gameplay is an active engagement and relies on a well-developed memory. Particularly, videogames are active, virtual environments. Players must familiarize themselves with the internal consequences, responses, virtual directions, as well as practical gameplay elements in order to navigate the rhetorical environment of videogame space effectively.

Players actively engage the external memory system of the game, though play itself is nonrepresentational but rhetorical. Engagement with external memory systems essentially relates to the observational looping effect outlined in Brummett’s postmodern epistemology (“Some Implications”). Essentially, memory is a continuous practice, where meaning is constituted in the interrelation of person and domesticated material, i.e. the “knower” and the “known,” the observer and the observed. Videogames and CMC technologies involve the interaction between people’s perceptions and the computing systems themselves. The observational looping effect is thus fundamentally applicable to CMC and interactive technology through the theoretical concepts that underpin rhetorical memory. Gameplay is thus fueled by this observational looping effect and is fundamentally a rhetorical memory practice.

## Gameplay as a Memorial Activity: Rules and Reasoning in Virtual Space

Existence in the world of videogames can be a unique sensory experience. While mostly physically immobile, the mind is carried to a place of utmost mobility.<sup>61</sup> Depending upon the game, a player can fly, run, and swim in the matter of seconds. I have previously discussed gameplay but only briefly. As argued above, gameplay is essentially a rhetorical memory activity. Here, I explore how players' visceral experiences within videogame spaces are facilitated by gameplay.

Although, the governing rules of gameplay are framed by the physical feel and look of videogames, gameplay is the guiding principle, or the law of the land. Gameplay at once constitutes the external system with which players interact as well as their means to do so. Within videogames, players domesticate and internalize gameplay rules and principles as they make choices ingame. The choices that players make can be moral or ethical. Furthermore, individual videogames are not created in a vacuum, so particular styles and classes of games follow a system of gameplay that is recognizable. For example, the skills developed through playing an FPP may be carried over to multiple games that use that same viewing style and gameplay format. Now, I explore the meaning of gameplay further, its potential as a rhetorical activity, and how its suatory structure relates to players as audience members.

## Gameplay as an Ethical Pursuit

While we look toward understanding gameplay through a rhetorical lens, let us explore gameplay as 1) how players actively engage videogames and 2) how the system of propositions constitutes an external memory system which allows for players to create ingame realities. In

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<sup>61</sup> Here, I am not referring to new gaming technologies such as the *Wii* or Microsoft's new *Project Natal*, which are untraditionally physical.

doing so, I seek to answer several questions. First, how do the chain of interdependent propositions shape the way players navigate ingame? Furthermore, where does the ethical burden lie in gameplay rhetoric?

First, I begin with the structural design of the games. McKenzie Wark discusses gameplay as the very structure of videogames, the law of the land, and the rules espoused by god-like game designers. The algorithms and propositional rule systems are what frame videogames. Algorithms are “a finite set of instructions for accomplishing some task, which transforms an initial starting condition into a recognizable end condition” (Wark 031). The world in videogames is framed by rules. Ultimately, whether a player is given a representation of a gun or a banana as a weapon does not change the overall actions that the player undertakes through gameplay. Likewise, the character Mario may have just as easily been a flower pot as a plumber, and there would be no effect on the game's rules.

Much of the negative press surrounding videogames is based on the look of videogames. In actuality, the algorithms of a game are the key to unlocking the secrets of gamespace. Shooting and scantily clad female avatars are considered the worst component of videogames. However, the backbone of videogames, algorithms and rules, is what guides player movement through gamespace.<sup>62</sup> Wark comments, “In a game, any character, any object, any relationship can be given a value, and that value can be discovered” (030). The truth and value of videogames do not lie within how they look or the skin tone of the avatars represented but with a player's relationship to the rule system. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the player is not to bask in the representations of gamespace. Rather than gamespace being the arbiter of meaning for a player, these systems of rules and values surrounding gameplay shape how players form meaning.

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<sup>62</sup> Gamespace is the digitally rendered environment through which players navigate or the area surrounding their avatar.

There has to be a sense of mystery within an algorithm for a game to be a game and thus impart meaning rhetorically. For instance, many regard the virtual world design of *Second Life* as a videogame. However, the algorithmic structure of *Second Life* lends itself more toward a free-range, virtual playground. “Players,” or more accurately users, of *Second Life* may regard the virtual space provided as a place to enact activities within the real world through the frame of the virtual world. Users of *Second Life* are given a plethora of tools to customize their visual spheres. The multitude of tools in *Second Life* are not focused on a designed endpoint. The imparted meaning of designers of *Second Life* is more similar to that of interactive CMC, rather than rhetorical gameplay, that always entails a rhetorical end.

Players of *Second Life* are not given a goal to negotiate their beliefs or values toward but make their own. Virtual worlds, interactive technologies and interface designs must include “enough unknowns to make a game of [them]” (Wark 009). Rhetorical gameplay, or players' experience, is based on some form of intersubjective discovery of goals that is ultimately governed by rules. In other words, the look of a game does not designate how meaning is created between those who designed it and those who experience it. When we consider play more discretely, we find that it fundamentally has a political and thus rhetorical dimension. The overt content may belie a videogame's political dimensions which are embedded in the constructed rule systems. Gameplay as a type of “play” has rules which govern it that facilitate rhetorical meaning negotiation between designers and players. In other words, gameplay's “play” quality is how values, morals, and ethics are communicated to players.

Johan Huizanga spear-headed the philosophy of play in human experience, which is the foundation for ludology,<sup>63</sup> as an activity separate from “real” life. Play is an essentially human

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<sup>63</sup> Ludology is one of the burgeoning theoretical understandings of videogames. For discussion, see Gonzalo Frasca, “Simulation Versus Narrative,” *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron

activity which helps humans to enact and to exercise morals, rules and norms (210). Therefore, activities of play are safely sectioned off from those of the real world. Huizanga explains: “A closed space is marked out for it, either materially or ideally, hedged off from the everyday surroundings. Inside this space the play proceeds, inside it the rules obtain” (19). Essentially, the enclosed space allows for the rules of the real world to be momentarily suspended while the rules of play abound. Huizanga then says that the sense of order within play is more strict than in the real world: “Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it [the rules] 'spoils the game,' robs it of its character and makes it worthless” (10). Just as rhetoric entails the inculcation of values and ideals by rhetors, play does so by rules.

In the case of gameplay, its virtual rules are authored by game designers. Again, virtual world platforms such as *Second Life* skirt this fundamental understanding of play by making their world so malleable and the goals of those who function within the world so subjective and varied, as to leave the message up to the users' construction. The design does not provide users with identifiable end goals.

Thus, partitioned off from the real world, play constitutes a world unto itself. Huizanga says of play: “While it [play] is in progress all is movement, change, alternation, succession, association, separation,” (9). Play becomes the product of memory and a cultural phenomenon once completed (10). However, it is sheer repetition that is one of play's most enduring qualities. One cannot assume that nothing is retained from repetitive and interactive play. Play is not, however, considered a serious activity by Huizanga. Huizanga uses warfare as an activity similar to play but lacking in play quality: “It is the *moral* content of an action that makes it serious. When the combat has an ethical value it ceases to be play” (210). On the contrary, I maintain, the existence of rules in play itself, be it those rules within an act of warfare, or not,

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(New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 221-35.

imposes a set of values on those who participate in play. Although Huizanga denies that play encapsulates cultural values, morals, and ethics, other scholars disagree.<sup>64</sup>

James Paul Gee uses play as a metaphor for how people create and organize value systems and models for understanding the real world. He comments:

It turns out that we all play games in our heads to prepare us for action and decision in the real world, games we make out of images, actions, feelings, and dialogue that come from our experiences in the world. (“Video Games and Embodiment” 257)

In other words, Gee considers games as the conceptual processes that people use on a daily basis to make decisions. During games and play, values and judgments are “tried-on” and practiced. Wherever there is an identifiable goal or end-state, one can presuppose that particular values are necessary to achieve the goal. Play, then, is not an amoral activity but a value-laden one that helps us to enact our own judgments and values in a “safe” partitioned, virtual space. How separate are virtual play, or gameplay activities, from “real” world meaning?

The rules of play are not decided arbitrarily. For example, the board game *Monopoly* is enacted on a board that is partitioned from the “real” world. The money is fake and rainbow-colored, and the world is structured by 12x12 vibrant, real estate squares. Rules within the game, such as those where players can be arbitrarily sent to jail or taxed an exorbitant amount of property taxes by the flip of a card, are enacted within the game world of *Monopoly*. However, these rules of the game symbolically represent the arbitrariness felt by Depression-era economics. Preserved in this rule-bound system, the moral and ethical ideals that come from *Monopoly* play can be passed down through generations because its rules are static. The gameplay of *Monopoly* is merely one example how rules of play carry the symbolic mark of ethics, values, and morals.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, see Beck and Wade, *The Kids Are Alright*; Consalvo, “There Is No Magic Circle”; Gee, “Video Games and Embodiment”; Prensky, *Don’t Bother Me Mom*.

Play is symbolic and thus polysemic.<sup>65</sup> Though the rules of the game are not immediately applicable to the world beyond the board, they are symbolically applicable. The expectation is that, in the “real” world, one would not be sent directly to jail by something as arbitrary as a “Chance” card or be charged with an exorbitant “Luxury Tax” by the roll of die. The irony is, however, that justice and debt can appear arbitrary, especially during an economic depression. Therefore, the rules of play are not all arbitrary, and their values can be embedded within games that we play and transferred from person to person within a culture. For example, when played in other cultures, *Monopoly* will likely result in similar connotations that are interpreted through players' respective cultural lenses because the rules are the same.

Miguel Sicart claims that these forced rules of behavior, or gameplay, are the ethical and moral foundations within computer games: “Games force behaviors by rules: the meaning of those behaviors, as communicated through the game world to the player, constitutes the ethics of computer games as designed objects” (Sicart 22-3). In other words, it is the rules and game-like qualities that are fundamentally rhetorical. Players continually intuit the rules of the virtual land or world that they traverse to find rewards and fulfillment.

Sicart believes that digital games subsume the ethical quality of their rule systems beneath the physical consoles or computers themselves (26). Truly, that the ethical quality of videogames lies within their internal code rather than the physical consoles used to play them can be seen in the fact that people can play the same videogame title on multiple consoles and experience the same ethical quality from the game's rules. The physical input does change. Indeed, we can relate the disconnect between rules and physical technology back to Ihde's

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<sup>65</sup> I suspect that gameplay is uniquely polysemic thus far. However, the degree to which videogames are a polysemic media form has not yet been critically studied from a rhetorical perspective. Some implications of audience decoding and polysemy may be found in Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 6.2 (1989): 103-22.

conception of phenomenological human-technology relations and say that players form an embodied relationship with the physical consoles of games. Players then become more enchanted by these hidden rules and are forced to follow commands to engage the rules. Sicart notes: “Gameplay, the actions taken by players, is forced to be ethical by the game rules” (25). Sicart's notion of gameplay conflicts with Huizanga's idea of play. The rules that underlie play, and specifically, videogames, are the carrier of ethical action, from game designer(s) to players. Consalvo also disagrees with the notion that play is devoid of ethical and moral concerns (412). Within any videogame genre, such as FPP, MMO, platformer, players are bound by the hidden system of rules and must create their own realities within those parameters.

Thus, gameplay is an ethical engagement for players, where players learn to master the values embedded within videogames. The world of videogames is much more complex than what one might guess from the media representations of pale-faced teenagers perched in front of televisions or computer screens for hours. Though they physically remain relatively still, their minds are adventuring through rule-governed worlds garnished with colors and framed by ethical perspectives. Gamers sit fully and hermeneutically engaged in these environments to overcome the obstacles embedded within a game's design. The structural peculiarities of videogames' internal codes themselves may never be known, but players' desires to overcome these obstacles do not wane.

As Wark describes it: “gamers confront one another in contests of skill that reveal who has been *chosen* – chosen by the game as the one who has most fully internalized its algorithm (013). Navigating around lava and fireballs at breakneck speed within SMB3 will only be possible once a player has learned to pinpoint when each obstacle will arise and how to overcome each obstacle. Specifically, videogames such as SMB3 represent a unique opportunity

for players most interested in structural gameplay practices to experience these fully.

Particularly, SMB3 is bound by specific timing of ingame events and limited range of motion.

Likewise, in *Mind at Play*, Loftus and Loftus discuss memory within gaming:

When you learn a new video game, you have to remember many things about how to play the game and what the consequences are of various actions. Under what circumstances is it useful to turn tail and run instead of taking an offensive stance? How long will your armored shield last before becoming useless? How many points does it cost you for each shot?

(52)

Players are forced to train memory of operations within the game and speed as their most important assets.

Still, knowledge of the propositions within videogames will underscore player success. However, memory for gameplay propositions and the mechanics of play differ among videogames. Other games, such as GTA IV, offer a more veiled system of rules because of its 3D, open-world design, and NPC movement variability. To internalize knowledge of gameplay, players have to play particular genres or titles of videogames repeatedly. Each new game's structure provides a uniquely disclosable world. For example, a person playing Checkers will not encounter the same ethical meaning as a person playing Chess. The game's individual structures impart different ethical scenarios.

However, players can also experience interference from playing a videogame that uses one particular type of gameplay that differs from another. Loftus and Loftus describe how interference works: "*Interference* more generally is an important characteristic of long-term memory; it refers to the problem you have remembering one thing as a result of learning some other, related thing" (53). To avoid this type of interference experienced by playing multiple genres of videogames, players must uniquely organize gameplay practices as they are associated with different genre. The purpose of gaining tracks of long-term memory information is to make

the stored information easily accessible. As Mary Carruthers said of rhetorical memory, people must organize mental material to make it most useful. Similarly, gameplay principles and structural elements must be organized with “flexibility, security, and ease of recombining matters into new patterns and forms” (*The Medieval Craft* 4).

When navigating the structural elements of videogames, players must be in a position to engage *memoria* actively in their sense-making process. Gameplay itself functions similarly to the construct of rhetorical memory. Namely, players must engage the external memory system of videogames, understand *lectio*, and engage in nonrepresentational *meditatio* in order to play videogames. Gameplay is a continuous, willful experience by players set in motion by game designers and as a result constitutes a unique form of CMC with many unexplored rhetorical implications.

#### *Concerns of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)*

Do videogames present the same *memoria* qualities as other forms of CMC? Let us consider gameplay as the literal playing of the game as well as the feedback and rules that guide players' actions ingame. When people play videogames, they use a controller, keyboard, or keypad to input commands into a system that they generally did not create themselves. Players make sense by interpreting the feedback that they receive from the system into which they input information. Here, the sense-making process is centered around how players interpret the feedback that they receive and respond to it through play. Players receive different feedback depending upon how different videogames are internally structured or designed.

Additionally, for kiosks, computing devices, and videogame systems, the computing device of its own accord does not generate the feedback that users, or players, receive. The

feedback is generated by the programmer who designed the program to give particular responses to specific actions. The machine itself merely acts as the external memory device, within which designers' hermeneutically-disclosed worlds are imprinted. Players input what they want to happen, and the machine responds based upon game designers' set protocols, barring the instance of crashing. In other words, the meaning lies in designers of CMC's symbolic speech, such as gameplay, and in users'/players' interpretations.

Whereas kiosks might use verbally guided touch-screen technology to allow people to interact and retrieve information through this technology, videogames employ gameplay. Players use the pressing of buttons on a keypad, keyboard, or console controller to input pre-recognized commands that are read by a computing device, such as an Xbox 360 or cellular telephone to produce actions. Videogames are a form of CMC that use gameplay to facilitate understanding between persons, where the player is given a set of rules by game designer(s) to follow while attempting to reach a set goal. For example, videogames resemble sandboxes for players filled with toys and digging tools created by game designers. The toys and digging tools are the gameplay, given to players sparingly and at choice times to convey meaning within their environment.

In sum, people may now communicate, either immediately or latently, through using computer systems. The problem is that CMC remains a difficult type of communication to understand philosophically, rhetorically, and ethically. CMC changes the way humans comprehend and function.

I have discussed philosophical, ethical and rhetorical dimensions of CMC technologies. Gameplay as CMC uses physical technology to enable the embodiment of players. The underlying code is then hermeneutically divulged to players through play itself. Many

researchers worry how the addition of CMC to other types of communication will influence the way humans act, think, and problem-solve.<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, there is the assumption that CMC compromises other ways of communicating. On the other hand, CMC replaces other forms of communicating. Potentially, the way that humans begin to interact with technology may ultimately restructure society.<sup>67</sup>

What does this have to do with a *game*? Well, the popularity of videogames continues to grow, as I explained in chapter 1. Whether these are internet flash videogames, mobile phone videogames, or more in-depth virtual world videogames, they have the potential to become more influential to those who play them. Within the workplace and at home, the “gamer” generation is equipped with much different tools than their non-“digital native” counterparts.<sup>68</sup> Thus, videogames are believed to shape a new type of thinking.<sup>69</sup> CMC as a whole is uniquely interactive as well, because it entails the mediation of communication by a computing system. Consequently, researchers have to develop tools for understanding how influence occurs within CMC media. Inevitably, the rhetorical canon of memory is indispensable to gaining insight into CMC. Videogames are a further unique form of CMC which may help researchers gain insights into constructing and decoding messages from interactive systems. Videogames use gameplay to impart ethical and moral meaning to players. Particularly, memory may help rhetorical scholars

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<sup>66</sup> See Loftus and Loftus, *Mind At Play*; Provenzo, *Video Kids*; Sicart, *Ethics of Computer Games*; Wolf, *Proust and the Squid* for discussions of how computing effects thinking and problem-solving.

<sup>67</sup> Whether technology is ushering humans into become “post” or “trans” is a philosophical concern. Further, technology’s ongoing impact on society is questionable. For further discussion, see Goertzel and Bugaj, *The Path to Post Humanity*; Hayles, “Refiguring the Posthuman”, *Electronic Literature*; Ihde, *Bodies In Technology*; Laura, Merchant, and Smith, *The New Social Disease*; Slack and Wise, *Culture + Technology*.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of how the decision-making skills of “gamers” are changing the workplace and home, see Beck and Wade, *The Kids Are Alright*; Mileham, *Power Up*; Prensky *Don’t Bother Me Mom*. For a discussion of “digital natives,” see Prensky, “Digital Natives/Digital Immigrants,” *On the Horizon*.

<sup>69</sup> See Beck and Wade, *The Kids Are Alright*; Loftus and Loftus, *Mind At Play*; Mileham, *Power Up*, for a discussion how “gamers” are unique.

understand how gameplay functions rhetorically. Furthermore, the application of memory to CMC systems raises a fundamental question of how CMC effects rhetorical scholars' conception of rhetoric. Specifically, we can begin to ask how coercion takes place within CMC and where the ethical responsibility lies for of messages generated through CMC.

In the present chapter, I have explored the theoretical and philosophical foundations that may help rhetorical scholars analyze interactive CMC using videogames as the example. After discussing the definition of videogames, I examined the place of players as audience members to interactive texts. I then explained how gameplay can be conceived as a form of rhetorical communication between designers and players. I then discussed the rhetorical implications of CMC as they relate to memory. Afterward, I looked at how gameplay can be used to communicate ethics by its “play” quality and rule systems. And, lastly, I looked at some of the ethical ramifications of interactive CMC.

I begin chapter 3 by addressing these and other questions using specific videogames. I use the rhetorical and theoretical tools outlined in chapter 1 and chapter 2 first to conceptualize each game as a rhetorical text. I look to the observational looping effect, the concept of external memory systems, *lectio* and *meditatio* second to define specific suatory characteristics of each game. But foremost, I measure each game against the backdrop of the definition of rhetoric discussed in chapter one as symbolic human-to-human communication that has suasion as its goal. Lastly, I discuss what rhetorically we can learn from the four different genres that I have analyzed.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYZING GAMEPLAY DESIGNS IN VIDEOGAMES AS INTERACTIVE CMC

Up until this point, I have discussed the theoretical tools to analyze the rule-based systems of videogames. In Chapter 1, I covered the concept of postmodern epistemology as rhetoric or the observational loops about which Brummett talks (“Some Implications”). The observational looping effect is a helpful way to conceptualize how knowledge is created in interactive computing systems. As the user interacts with the computing system, the computing system provides feedback, determined by how the system was programmed, which the user then interprets as a guide for continual interaction with the computing system. In Chapter 1, I discussed how *lectio* and *meditatio* can be used to analyze rhetorical memory and to distinguish between information gained directly from a text and that which is interpreted from the text as individuals domesticate it for their own use. *Meditatio* is the point in rhetorical memory where inculcation, or suasion, takes place.

Though I briefly touched on how CMC can be external memory for users/players and designers in Chapter 1, I explored this more so in Chapter 2, when I discussed CMS and hypertext. I also considered how audience members relate to CMC technology and the messages it relays. Audience members can become embodied through the physical element and structures within the external memory systems of interactive CMC in order to experience the meaning hermeneutically through its processes. Then I discussed how ethics can be interpreted from game rule systems by examining the ingame use of rules. For the present chapter, I apply these

theoretical tools and concepts to understand the rhetoric of gameplay in *Super Mario Brothers 3* (SMB3), *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* (WoW), *America's Army 3* (AA3), and *Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City* (GTA IV).

To analyze these four videogames, I begin by discussing what types of observational loops are designed into their external memory system for players to navigate. Then, I examine the *lectio* and *meditatio* that follow from their external memory systems. Lastly, I explain how these pieces form the suatory message through the observational looping effect that results. After analyzing all four separately, I examine them collectively, for any emerging similarities or differences and consider the implications on the use of memory for analyzing interactive CMC.

My voice as a player and researcher is important for establishing the experiential context of each game, as well as context about each game. I include players' views from online forums related to each videogame to further contextualize an experiential analysis of the four videogames. I have chosen a slightly more conversational tone for the analysis of these games primarily so that readers may imagine more fully how these games are experienced by players. Of course, each videogame has different intentions, whether from the genre or the context surrounding each, which is why the individual analysis of each is important to constructing a general theory of the rhetoric of gameplay. Even so, the results of each analysis may not be substantially political in nature though they give insight into how gameplay can be suatory. In other words, in the same manner as other media, the topics of videogames vary widely.

Gameplay and rhetorical memory are intertwined. As with other CMC systems, SMB3, for example, is an information system in its own right. Before players are able to begin to interact with it, the external memory system of SMB3 displays cataloged information and designed feedback from the game's designers. Videogames incorporate a variety of

informational material that is not procedural. Music, visual elements, story elements, and the look of one's avatar comprise the external memory system. Of course, these elements do not affect the underlying rules of gameplay; on the contrary, they accommodate gameplay, so to speak.

For players, gameplay entails an external memory structure, where players continually interpret information and feedback from designers by physically using the controls. Gameplay can be conceptualized as a rhetorical activity that includes identifiable *lectio* and *meditatio*. *Lectio* entails one's engagement with the overt material of a text, that is, the material which does not need interpretation. Such elements of the game as its layout, the levels within the game, game controls, and progression rules are material that anyone can discern when interacting with a videogame. We can also think of *lectio* as the unique building blocks that designers provide to enable players to create their own individual ingame realities. *Meditatio* is how a player arranges these building blocks to make a uniquely meaningful picture of a text. In other words, every player engages the videogame as an external memory system and is given *lectio* tools, but the successful completion of a videogame level generally does not require that players perform exactly the same way. In *meditatio*, players use the *lectio* tools to make unique choices within the external memory system. Therefore, *meditatio* is more subjective. However, because it takes place in a rule-based environment, the options are programmed into the game and thus are identifiable. For example, in SMB3 players can choose to go through entire levels without getting any coins<sup>70</sup> or use the rule system to make it their own game of acquiring every single coin available within a level. Nevertheless, players cannot insert their own form of currency into the game.

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<sup>70</sup> In SMB3, players can collect coins throughout every level (barring some castles and Hammer Brothers). After players collect 100 coins within SMB3, they are rewarded ingame with an extra life.

Ultimately, the ability to arrange unique material within the external memory system of each game using given controls, layout, and other static elements illustrates the rhetorical value of videogames. More choices that are meaningful throughout a videogame allow players a variety of paths to *meditatio*, whereas, a lack of choices is decidedly limiting. As I examine each videogame, I look at the types and range of choices that are allowed by the designers of each game.

I divide each analysis into six parts. First, I briefly examine external information about each videogame, such as when it was developed and by whom. Second, in the About the Text sections, I detail the surrounding elements of the videogames as texts, including information such as the intention of designers, the history of the videogame, and genre format. Third, I detail the internal elements of the external memory system of each videogame applicable to gameplay experience, such as verbal and visual information, otherwise known as gamespace. Fourth, I examine the *lectio* of gameplay, including input devices and what type of control players have ingame. Then, I discuss how *meditatio* may emerge from gameplay rules and procedures, such how unique choices can be made by players to construct meaning. And lastly, I briefly summarize the culmination of the information about each videogame, external memory system, *lectio*, and *meditatio*.

## A Trip Down Memory Lane with Mario and Luigi

Super Mario Brothers 3 (SMB3) was popular when it was released, in 1989, in the U.S. and is a substantially recognized game by the current generation.<sup>71</sup> Though Nintendo released previous titles including the Jumping Man and still releases Mario-themed videogames to this day, SMB3 remains culturally iconic. More than Mario and Luigi's adorable visual presentation drives its popularity. Its iconic nature stems from the design of the videogame and its flexible gameplay. Primarily, players confront the virtual world of SMB3 in a test of speed and memorization. Players who internalize and domesticate game operations are in effect “chosen” by the game and surmount its obstacles more effectively. In this case, players learn to navigate obstacles within a specified time span. The rhetoric of SMB3's gameplay is mainly one of mastery over the procedural layout of the game's external memory system.

Featured on *The Wizard*,<sup>72</sup> a children's movie, SMB3 is highly dynamic for the limited commands that the game entails. The primary goal for a player is to come to know the external memory system provided by the game intricately, to know where and when each obstacle appears, and to master the tools provided by the game strategically, such as knowing when a high jump may be more useful than a basic jump.

### *About the Text*

Mario and Luigi are both plumbers on an epic quest to save the damsel in distress, Princess Peach<sup>73</sup>, from the villain, Bowser, and his various minions. SMB3 evolved from an arcade game and is most known for its pixilated form. At the time of its release, SMB3's graphics

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<sup>71</sup> In light of the game's popularity, Nintendo released SMB3 for the *Wii*, in 2007.

<sup>72</sup> In the movie, a presumably autistic child and his older brother travel to California for nostalgic reasons. Along the way, the autistic child becomes proficient in mastering gameplay within videogames and wins a videogame tournament with his talents. The movie was directed by Todd Holland in 1989.

<sup>73</sup> This character is also called “Princess Toadstool.”

and music were extraordinary. SMB3 was originally designed for a Japanese audience, in 1988. As a result, the story, a lot of the ingame items, and levels may have Japanese cultural connotations, such as the role of the Raccoon as an inhabitable yet powerful guise for Mario/Luigi. For the version released in the United States, some changes were made to make the gameplay slightly less difficult, such as ingame items granting greater defense against enemies. Herein, I refer to the United States version of SMB3 that was originally released for the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1989.

### *External Memory System*

SMB3 is a 2-dimensional platformer, where players can only move the screen left and right, up and down, and occasionally, what appears to be diagonally. The onscreen characters and world appear as cartoon characters, they are highly iconic, pixilated, and colorful. Players see their avatar, either Mario or Luigi, in third-person perspective (TPP) throughout the game. The game includes nine worlds; the ninth world is the Warp Zone world, essentially a bonus world where players can skip worlds without completing them.<sup>74</sup> Each of the worlds, one through nine, includes a visual map of all the levels, similar to a physical game board. Mario sits on “Start” and moves throughout the virtual board toward the end, which is represented as a large white castle. Players must defeat each level in succession. So, in order to reach level 1-2, players must first complete 1-1.<sup>75</sup> Of course, ascending through levels is not always the case because certain items within the game, such as Clouds and Music Boxes, allow players to skip levels. Players encounter a variety of other items that grant unique abilities throughout the game.

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<sup>74</sup> I do not include the Beta level that is leftover from designers because players must use additional cheat codes to access it.

<sup>75</sup> For reference, I use the following system to identify different levels in SMB3: World 1, Level 1 is listed 1-1 or World 5, Level 3 is listed as 5-3.

SMB3 has several levels, items, and worlds that comprise the game. Each level and world, together with the predictable appearance of items, constitute the external memory system that players continually engage. The external memory system includes elements that will be relatively the same for every player, and that players cannot individually change.<sup>76</sup> The external memory system also includes the elements in SMB3 that players cannot use to effect change in the game but are a part of the maze quality of the game. For instance, the placement of levels on the world boards, so to speak, is a part of the external memory system as well as the structural elements of each level. Players can uniquely navigate around the structural elements of each level, but they cannot use them to generate feedback from the game.

In each world, players see a game board-like view of the game's levels. When players move onto a level square, they select it and navigate through it. Once in a level, Mario can run along the ground, jump, or walk. Each level in SMB3 includes a definite beginning as well as an end. In the beginning of each level, players start on the left side of the screen and progress right, down or up, depending on the level. The end of levels is generally punctuated by a black screen with a card that cycles through three displays with differing point values.

As players progress through the game, their actions are recorded by the external memory system, including how many points they have acquired, what levels have been completed, which castles have been completed, and which bonus levels are completed.<sup>77</sup> Players also have an item bar which shows the accumulation of items as well as the number of lives a player has accrued.

In each world there are roughly six to fifteen levels per world through which players move. Each world has its own theme, with a unique layout, design, musical composition, and

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<sup>76</sup> Again, this is without the help of hacking or cheat codes used through emulators or other technologies.

<sup>77</sup> I consider bonus levels within SMB3 to be elements such as the Mushroom House and Spade. Both are not integral to the unveiling of the plot or to “beating” the game.

unique technical obstacles whose difficulty builds upon previous levels. For each world, a different technical obstacle is introduced. For instance, World 2 is Desert Land, and players must learn to avoid sinking in quicksand. Another example is World 6, Ice Land, which includes lots of icy blocks that cause players to slide. Players must learn how to use *lectio* creatively as they face the challenges that are particular to each world, as they culminate in World 8.

The most important element of SMB3 is the game's timing. SMB3 is a game that is based on a variety of timed in-game events. In every level throughout every world, obstacles occur at the same time every time a player engages the level. When and where a player ought to jump is the same every time. A player accumulates tools to master each level each time he or she experiences it. The unique yet predictable nature of SMB3 is one of its most rhetorically intriguing elements. Essentially, playing SMB3 is similar to riding a bike after many subsequent plays. After learning how these intricately woven building blocks form SMB3's timed system, players can derive unique ways to surmount each level. Essentially, with enough practice, a player is able to internalize the external memory system of SMB3 and to beat a level with his/her eyes closed or while paying attention to something else.

The tools that designers give players to navigate external memory systems of videogames are essentially the flashlight in the dark for players. Now, that I have described the external memory system that houses SMB3's gameplay, let us look at the *lectio* and *meditatio* that enable players to engage the gameplay uniquely. The term *lectio* refers to how players make sense of the external memory system.

### *Lectio*

This term includes the static elements in the game used by players to create change, or feedback, within a videogame, such as controls, items, and progression, as well as visual

elements that players can change. Players can input a few commands into SMB3's external memory system that result in unique feedback. The controls are relatively simple. There is a directional pad, better known as D pad, which allows players to move right, left, duck down, or jump higher. Also, there are an A and a B button. When players hold down B and press right or left on the D-Pad, Mario/Luigi will run in either direction respectively. When players press A, Mario/Luigi will jump. Players also have a Start button and a Select button, neither of which primarily effects progression through the levels but does allow players to freeze their progress momentarily. These six commands are how players engage the virtual gameplay of SMB3 and allow them to act uniquely within the levels. When combined with other ingame tools and items, such as the Tanooki Suit, players to do other actions as well, for instance, turn to stone.

SMB3 allows both one and two player campaigns. In two player mode, the first player controls Mario, while the second player controls Luigi. While in two player mode, players can engage in PVP, or player versus player, by settling on the level box to which the opposite player is attached. Though players are never involved in the same level for progression through the game, PVP offers a break from sheer progression and way for players to outwit each other in a one-screen level test of gameplay skill.

There are several recurring elements in the appearance of each level that players can use to generate unique feedback. Essentially, the levels are composed of blocks, pipes, clouds, ground, lava, moving structures, water, ice, and bouncing blocks with varying functions. Each element has a pretty basic rule. Players can jump on top of blocks, get coins or items out of them, and break them. Players can go in pipes in some cases, and players can swim in water, but of course not in lava. These rules are consistent throughout the game. Mostly, every other element is a platform that players can stand atop, stemming from the game's genre as a platformer.

SMB3 is overwhelmingly inhabited by unfriendly characters or enemies, that travel in the water, on land, and in the air. At any point in time, players have to avoid or eliminate these. The majority of enemies are mobile and strategically placed to make navigation potentially difficult.

These stable portions of SMB3 can be manipulated by players to generate feedback. Here, I have identified the elements which are essential to understanding the game but certainly not provided an exhaustive account of all game elements. SMB3 includes several “secrets” that players can discover as they play. The secrets in the game can range from secret passageways to the discovery of additional items. Secrets within SMB3 are also static elements of the external memory system of the game which every player can potentially encounter, but they are not essential to progress through the game. Secrets are static elements embedded in SMB3’s external memory system. They are often accessed using creative *lectio*, such as the Whistle hidden in the door behind the level completion area in 1-3.

Throughout the game, there are numerous other additional tools and items that players can acquire. Much of these items grant special abilities. For example, Mario starts out small in the world of SMB3. By small, I mean that if Mario comes into contact with an enemy toon,<sup>78</sup> the player immediately dies. However, with the help of Mushrooms, littered throughout the SMB3 levels, players have at least one defense against contact with enemies. The second tool is the Leaf, which turns Mario into a raccoon, with a tail that allows him to fly above the world, which is one of Mario's only chances for steady upward mobility.

Oftentimes, there are items and secret, or not so secret, locations that Mario can reach by defying gravity with his flapping tail. The Leaf also provides Mario with an additional defense against coming into contact with an enemy. Yet another item is the Flower which allows Mario

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<sup>78</sup> “Toon” refers to any representational virtual character. It is similar to an avatar, though the player does not control these. Thus, a toon can be used to characterize enemy or friendly NPCs or other players' avatars in MMOs.

to shoot fire balls at enemies, though not all enemies are not susceptible to fire balls. Each of these tools has its own benefits. Both the Leaf and the Flower can only be acquired subsequently to the Mushroom. One of the most valued items is a tool that allows travel. The Whistle allows Mario access to World 9, or the Warp Zone, and a path to several other worlds. The Whistle only appears three times in the game and is regarded as a “secret” item.

### *Meditatio*

There is no single way to beat SMB3. In fact, progress through the game can take anywhere between eleven minutes and several hours, depending upon the goals and skill levels of the players. Players can uniquely navigate SMB3's external memory system using the tools of *lectio* with flexibility. Though each player will inevitably encounter the same external memory system and the same *lectio* or rules for navigation, each player has the ability to form his or her own ingame realities. Essentially, how each player takes advantage of the external memory system and uses the unique building blocks of *lectio* drives the ingame realities for individual players.

Players make personal decisions as to whether they value speed, point accumulation, unveiling of secrets, or the collection of items. Basically, the players can use the rules of the game in such a way as to form their own rules for play. Players have the choice of completing every level within SMB3 or just completing the requisite amount in order to win. Players can make it a contest to accrue the most lives in the least amount of time or other such competition. The external memory system is stable yet the *lectio* flexible enough to allow players to drive observational loops uniquely when engaging SMB3. Players can choose which way to progress,

whether it is more extensive or quick. A player who posted on an online forum, describes his/her goal of beating SMB3, without ingame powerups other than 1UPs and Stars:<sup>79</sup>

took forever . . . only 3 game overs though and i did not abuse the one fortress in world 7. which reminds me, i had to get a tanooki suit for the fortress in world 7 and a mushroom for the final world 8 fortress, so i used them to complete the level but died immediately in the subsequent level to make it fair. main point: i beat the game with no world map power ups or in level power ups. i still used stars and 1-ups. It wasnt as hard as i thought it'd be, but still incredibly challenging.<sup>80</sup>

The player formed his/her own rules out to navigate the external memory system of the game and chose elements of *lectio* to make it his/her own. By not allowing the perks of ingame tools such as the Leaf or Flower, one essentially ups the ante and creates a game within a game.

A recurring test of skill within SMB3 tests the extent to which players can internalize, domesticate, and quickly use SMB3's external memory system. For instance, other players turn SMB3 into a test of timed skill. The quicker a player can effectively reach the end of the eighth world and defeat Bowser determines his or her overall skill. Another player commented:

I tried again the other day and cut it down to 25 minutes. I warped right after the World 1 fortress but still died a few times, so there's more room for improvement yet. I think 21 or 22 minutes is well within reach. The thing I was really concerned with was having enough lives, but if you're on your game I suppose it's not much of an issue.<sup>81</sup>

Another poster said of timed play: "I say around the 15 minute mark is legit. Those 12 minute records are usually tool-assisted which is cheating, and someone got caught slowing the game down to make things easier to avoid."<sup>82</sup> Playing SMB3 in this fashion is less about unique *lectio* and more about sheer speed and necessity, as well as full domestication of external memory

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<sup>79</sup> 1UPs are green mushrooms with in the game that grant players additional lives. Stars are items that players can get in the game that grant them essentially a cloak of defense. No enemy can kill Mario while he has a star. However, certain world elements, such as lava and falling off the world, will still kill Mario.

<sup>80</sup> This comment was posted by TOSYuan3195, on *Gamespot.com*. In order to retain the unique voices of forum posters, I do not correct or change their own words. But, when necessary, I provide further explanation.

<sup>81</sup> Posted by LSUfella, on *Gamespot.com*.

<sup>82</sup> Posted by CorruptedRPG, on *Gamespot.com*.

system. So, players take the external memory system and the *lectio* of SMB3 and arrange unique games with special rules without those allotted boundaries. Utmost respect is given to those who can operate within the grounds of gameplay *lectio* and effectively internalize the external memory system's mechanics to get through the game quickly.

Throughout SMB3, *meditatio* is highly flexible as there are multiple means and multiple ends to almost every level. For example, 1-3 can be ended in two ways. On the one hand, players can go through the level and get their “card” at the end. On the other hand, players can go toward the end of the level and get on top of the white block. If players press down on the D-pad and A, they gain the ability to go behind objects for a short period of time. When the skill is active, players can go behind the black screen at the end to a “secret” Mushroom House, or special item house. There are multiple means to end a level as well. Players can choose to use the Music block to get more coins or simply run through the level to the end.

The game board-like area of the game offers unique strategic choices for players as well. In World 2, after obtaining the Hammer item, which allows players to break certain obstructions on the game board, players can use it in multiple ways. For instance, a player can choose to save the Hammer until the completion of World 2 and use it to access a shorter path immediately in World 3. Or, players can use the Hammer in World 2 to break a side passageway that leads to another enemy level who holds another Whistle. With every level in SMB3, players are able to manipulate feedback uniquely and to use multiple means to reach the end of each level, as well as the game in its entirety.

### *Concluding Remarks*

SMB3 substantially relies on the consistently recurring elements of its external memory system and the static nature of *lectio*. It tests players' ability to domesticate material, memory,

and skill. Players are given a limited number of tools, *lectio*, but their range of possibilities is enormous. Inevitably, the game includes visual cues which are culturally bound to the Japanese culture, and others that are recognizable by U.S. cultural lens. Though I do not discuss the cultural connotations of SMB3 in depth, several of the elements within the external memory, for instance the Raccoon, are Japanese cultural symbols.

The amount of choices that players have in SMB3 makes this game highly re-playable. In other words, players can find a variety of ways to end the game and progress through, making each play experience potentially unique. By having such a strong and timing-based series of obstacles, players can easily chart their own paths around these obstacles.

#### An Economy of War: World of Warcraft

The largest Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) is created around an iconic environment of Orcs, Elves, gold, war, and competition. The name of the game is *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* (WoW), an incredible microcosm of structured human activity, frequently studied.<sup>83</sup> People across vast geographic distances get together in a virtual world called Azeroth to undertake difficult tasks either together or in competition, and they pay monthly fees to play.<sup>84</sup> Primarily, this is a game that requires intense social engagement that often results in competition between players, both allies and foes. WoW is a virtual capitalistic society, with tendencies of barbarism, which is constantly at war. Only the strongest, most well-equipped members of Azeroth survive; the rest eventually stop playing. WoW is

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<sup>83</sup> See for example, Sherlock, “Genre, Activity, and Collaborative Work”; Gunkel and Gunkel “Terra Nova 2.0”; Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player”; Bates, “Persistent Rhetoric”; Suzor, “On the (Partially) Inalienable Rights.”

<sup>84</sup> According to *Worldofwarcraft.com*, in 2010, players pay a monthly access fee of \$14.99 for one month down to \$12.99 per month for six months, which allows players to control one account on which players can create numerous avatars within various realms, servers, and of either faction.

highly hierarchical in that players in the highest ranks make the most influential decisions that drive ingame action. Wow has an additional component not seen in many other game formats; built into the code of the game is the implication that players will organize together and collaborate up in order to surmount obstacles. I find this to be so because there are numerous raids, instances, and group quests that require players to collaborate. Furthermore, communication tools are interwoven into gameplay. Also, this game encourages a uniquely intimate relationship between a player and his/her avatar(s).

#### *About the Text*

WoW was created by Blizzard in November 2004. WoW is currently the most popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) with 11.5 million subscribers worldwide.<sup>85</sup> Because of the sheer number of subscribers, WoW is divided into several realms and servers with identical worlds that players inhabit. WoW's lore is derived from the Warcraft PC videogame series that Blizzard created. In a similar fashion, WoW is essentially a resource-management, real-time strategy videogame situated at the micro-level or individual players and groups of players. In other words, each individual player collects and manages resources and combat skills for his or her avatars. WoW's virtual environment is a 3-dimensional either TPP or FPP videogame; namely, players can adjust their viewing style to their liking. Azeroth, the world in which players act, is a cybernetic virtual world that is nearly always open and runs continuously, regardless of whether a player is playing or not.

Azeroth is composed of two warring factions, the Alliance and the Horde. The avatars of the Alliance and the underlying story indicate that the Alliance regards themselves as good and just. While the Horde is brutal and forthright. When players play WoW, they can choose to play

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<sup>85</sup> Blizzard Entertainment, Inc December 23, 2008 Press Release. To put this in perspective, this is more than half the population of Australia.

on the side of either the Alliance or the Horde. Players choose from seven races, for either side, to create their individual avatars. For example, the Alliance offers Night Elves, Dwarves, and Humans, while the Horde offers Trolls, Blood Elves, and Orcs. The Alliance toons are decidedly more aesthetically pleasing than the Horde avatars.

In total, there are eight combat classes.<sup>86</sup> Players can then choose to be a member of one or many of these eight classes but only one class can be played at a time. Each class serves in one of three roles in group situations. One class that players can choose from is the Mage, who serve as the low-armored, damage-dealers in WoW, but who also can procure food supplies, granting health points, or Mana, magic power, for other players. The Rogue class uses medium armor and primarily deals quick damage. The Warrior uses the heaviest armor allowed and primarily distracts enemies from other group members. Each class serves in the capacity as healer, damage-dealer, or tank, or damage-absorber.<sup>87</sup> These three roles are essential to the progression of ingame group activities. Some classes, such as Paladins or Druids, can move easily between either of these roles. In any case, all three roles are needed to complete the majority of group tasks within the game and are equally powerful, though not equally valued.

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<sup>86</sup> To be more specific, players can choose from a Rogue, Deathknight, Paladin, Warrior, Druid, Shaman, Priest, or Warlock class. Blizzard, the creator of WoW, continual work to balance the abilities of each class with providing combat uniqueness. Consequently, the gameplay techniques within each class may fluctuate over time. Players, then, are constantly adapting to the changing demands and uses of their combat classes.

<sup>87</sup> In any ingame group situation, such as instances or raids, players face enemies that have an exponentially larger amount of health, or hit points (HP), than the combined group members. Consequently, players must stratify roles to keep all members of the group alive and complete goals. There are three roles to perform. For example, in a group of five players, gameplay duties are split as such: 1) one player absorbs damage or tanks, 2) one player heals the tank as well as the other players, and 3) three players deal damage to enemies, or DPS. The rationale for these three roles is as such. One player's solely absorbs damage from enemies and attracts the attention of enemies from other group members, or tanks. While the tank absorbs damage, one player focuses on replenishing HP for primarily the tank, and other three members. Lastly, three players are given the role of dealing damage, also known as DPS, to enemies. Though performing multiple roles is highly unlikely and oftentimes causing delay for the group, some players may choose to perform two of these roles. For further information on role mechanics, duties, and class abilities, visit *Worldofwarcraft.com*.

Players can choose to enter two major types of realms. First, there are PVP worlds, where players can attack real members of the opposing faction at any time, regardless of the skill level of one's avatar, which is currently from level one to level 80. Second, there are PVE worlds, where players face environmental opponents, such as NPCs and monsters. Each realm provides a very different playing experience. In PVE or PVP realms players can engage in both fighting other players, PVP, or focusing on environmental opponents, PVE. The rules of PVP encourage players to engage real players of the opposing faction, while the rules of PVE encourage engagement of NPCs and environmental enemies.

### *External Memory System*

The external memory system of WoW is composed of a vast geography of plants, animals, resources, cities, and settlements. These elements of WoW, while relatively static for players, can be changed by Blizzard designers, such as during ingame holidays or special events. The world of Azeroth is constantly in flux, covers a large virtual geographical area, and has many different creatures. Each geographic zone is a unique ecosystem, from the flat plains of the Barrens, to the snowy mountains of Dragonblight. Geographic zones also include particular resources that allow players to craft ingame items, such as plants or creatures that players can obtain and are unique to those areas. Knowing where particular plants grow becomes increasingly important throughout the game, as it is essential for acquiring resources. In order to play effectively, players develop a good sense of direction within the geographic zones in order to gain items, complete tasks, and reach ingame destinations.

WoW provides a map showing where players have been and labeling the geographic regions and cities of Azeroth. As players travel through Azeroth, areas on their maps come into focus. The game also records their completion of certain missions. For instance, after players

complete the mission in Outlands, where they go to defend Undercity, a major Horde city in the game, their screens reflect a burning Undercity; those who have not completed the mission do not see it. Apart from instances such as this, the geography of the virtual game is relatively constant. Moreover, each geographic zone throughout Azeroth is specifically tailored toward the skill level of avatars and includes items for that skill level. For example, one geographic zone, Duratar, caters to lower-level Horde avatars, such as levels one to ten, and also includes resources that players are able to collect within that level bracket.

The game includes a wealth of items that players can use, including armor, weapons, and other material items which allow players to create new, marketable items. Material that is used to make new items, or crafting items, are incredibly important to the game's economy and social structures. As players progress, the level of items that they need to play steadily increases with them. Each item can be found in specified geographic zones throughout Azeroth and some within particular group scenarios.

The virtual plant life in WoW corresponds with the geographic zones that are divided by avatar skill level. Lower-level plants, such as Peacebloom, are found in generally lower-level geographic zones, such as Duratar. Similarly, a lower-level mineral, copper, is found predominantly in areas that are generally for players with lower-level avatars levels. Another item, such as the mined item known as Saronite, is located in geographic zones with higher-level avatars, such as the Sholazar Basin. As players ascend in avatar skill, they move to geographic zones which accommodate the avatar's skill level and need for ingame resources or items.

As players run their avatars through the hills of Hillsbrad, they sense the effect of moving across a vast world. Azeroth covers four continents in total. Ultimately, the virtual geography is as vast as the game's social, economic, strategic, and political dimensions.

WoW also has an economic system and several Auction Houses. Auction Houses are located in major cities in WoW. Players can place personally crafted items or gathered resources in the Auction House databases to sell them. The series of Auction Houses resemble the Wall Street of each realm for each faction. Players with enough ingame monetary resources can drive prices up or down at will. The Auction House runs continuously, as do other elements in WoW, regardless of whether players are signed into the game. There are poor players, and there are rich players, and all players have equal chances to be either. Essentially, WoW is a highly competitive capitalistic system, where only the fittest will survive. In order to get to the top, players often use the help of other players.

WoW has an intricate interface with a variety of tools that allows players to keep track of their assets and ingame communications. The interface includes access to current quests or ingame predetermined goals, maps, access to the contents of players' bags that include items and resources, players' achievements, and details about players' avatars, such as the avatars statistical information, characteristics, attacks, and equipped items. The interface also includes an “action bar” to which players can attach specific, frequently used skills, such as combat moves or Cooking.

### *Lectio*

In totality, the *lectio* of WoW is best contextualized by playing the game. WoW has a considerable amount of personalizability options that make the game appear as seamless as if in real life, or IRL. Generally, players engage the game system itself through using a variety of inputs on a keyboard and mouse. The mouse is used to click particular items in the game, with some hotkeys, or player-chosen shortcuts, on the keyboard, and directional keyboard buttons. There are two levels to WoW's *lectio*: the general game rules and those which apply specifically

to particular classes. Players go through WoW and complete quests in order to progress through the game. These quests give players experience points, or XP, which allow the avatars of players to ascend in level, or “level up.” Experience points can also be gained from killing monsters in the game that are proportionate to players' levels, but more points are gained when players defeat monsters above their level.

A player's goal in WoW, as with other videogames, is to ascend from the lowest rank to the game's highest, in order to gain access to ingame content. However, the leveling process in WoW can take years. Each player begins with an avatar at level one. Level one avatars have few combat abilities or resource management skills. Thus, the activities of level one avatars are confined to developing adequate rote navigation of the game's interface and virtual geography. Players have to get from level one to the highest level, 80, in order to participate in the endgame activities, such as raids, where large groups of players face environmental obstacles, or PVP arena battles, where players face each other. When avatars ascend one level, they gain more attack abilities and points to use toward specializing their skills. Eventually, at level twelve, avatars are allowed further specialization of skills and abilities through the allotment of Talent Points.<sup>88</sup>

Generally, players engage enemies with one of three kinds of attacks: ranged, melee, or magic. Which of these attacks players can use depends on the class that players choose to play. With each class, players are given a choice of weapons and attacks that are specific to that class. Each avatar has a list of special skill sets that are represented numerically. For instance, a higher amount of points accumulated in Stamina, one numeric value, will result in greater health or HP,

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<sup>88</sup> Talent Points are basically skill points awarded to players for ascending levels. One per level is allotted to player and when players apply each point toward a skill, they are making a decision about the gameplay style of their avatar. Talent Points can be used to specialize in a variety of skills, which results in variety of gameplay styles even within particular classes in WoW. For further information, see *Worldofwarcraft.com*.

and a quick rate of Energy, Mana, and HP regeneration. In any case, whether a player is a damage-dealer, healer, or tank, he or she strives to increase these numeric values through assigning Talent Points strategically and acquiring equipment for the avatar in order to be the best of that class.

There are other elements of the game that do not relate exclusively to combat. A large component of the game is the accumulation of monetary and resource wealth. Players are given ingame currency, in gold, silver, and copper pieces. Also, players are given the ability to hold and sell possessions they acquire. Players are allowed to have two professions, such as skinning or jewelcrafting, which enable them to support themselves monetarily. When players complete quests, they are rewarded with items, experience points, but almost always coinage. As they increase in level, players gain a higher amount of coinage from quests. Similarly, when players defeat certain enemies, even enemies that one would not assume carry coinage, players receive money.

The Auction House is essentially the economic hub for WoW, a virtual market place, or Wall Street, where players go to market their accrued items. Prices can be driven exceedingly high or low, depending upon who holds the greatest amount of gold on the server and what groups need. Players can “buy out” items, and then price them all for a higher price. Players who have more ingame monetary wealth can be seen huddled around Auction Houses as brokers on Wall Street. Two of the Auction Houses allow players to buy and sell with members of the opposing faction as well, which is one of the only means for cross-faction communication. Players engage in relatively constant buying and selling, primarily to make profits and afford highly expensive but flashy endgame items and resources; eventually, this increases one's avatar's place in the hierarchy of WoW through visual cues.

Another component of the game derived from the game's focus on monetary and material property is the notion of “gear.” In WoW, players can literally “see“ each other’s gear level. “Gear” or an avatar's armor type, weaponry, or transportation creatures, otherwise known as mounts, are all valued commodities. Weapons and armor include, as well as other items, include numeric points, such as Stamina, that increases the gameplay viability of one's avatar. Players can then “inspect” gear, achievements and other aspects of players’ avatars to gauge the value of other players' avatars. Players can test their avatars’ skills against other players’ avatars in Duels, or ingame feats of strength between allies or foes. Gear ultimately translates into an avatar's perceived value and gameplay ability on a server but, in actuality, is used to augment one's ability to play.

WoW includes a variety of socializing tools and provides various ingame means for communicating with other players that pantomimes IRL communication. The game offers emotes, or specialized emotional displays, for avatars, which let players make their avatars dance, tell jokes, sing, laugh, and mimic anger simply by typing “/dance.” The General Chat system displays the immediate musings of all denizens within a city. Players can type “/w” for private chat, or Whisper, which allows players to contact other players individually. Players can also send mail to each other, with items, a message, or coinage. Also, players can join in groups of two or more in order to complete ingame tasks or simply socialize. Specifically, WoW includes sectioned off mazes, called instances or raids, which include enemies that have an exorbitant amount of health, or HP, compared to individual players. Therefore, players must complete with at least four members, though often five. As the game progresses, players join in groups, from 10 up to 40 at a time, to complete more difficult sectioned off mazes, otherwise known as raids.

Players can form permanent groups as well, called guilds. Guilds are groups of two or more people, some numbering well into the two hundreds, who stick together in order to communicate and progress through the game. Unlike other forms of ingame communication, Guild formation persists after players exit the game. In other words, Guild members are generally long-term gameplay companions. Guilds allow players to stay in contact with a stable social group, so that when the time comes to collectivize for larger ingame mazes, players know other people to go with them.

### *Meditatio*

Players play a single avatar at a time, one with certain skills which they have developed over a long period of time, sometimes up to two years. An avatar is monetary, intellectual, and emotional investment. Players can make unique choices about how they structure their avatars' skills, how they advance their avatars' levels, how they equip their avatars with gear, and how they choose to play the game. At its root, WoW is a game of competition. Players seek to be bigger, better and more effective than their counterparts, by means of monetary gain, resource management, avatar specialization, and playstyle.

The possibilities are endless once a player enters the world of Azeroth on a given server. First, a player picks a faction: Horde or Alliance. Then, the player designs his/her avatar, making aesthetic choices such as the avatar's gender, hairstyle, or skin hue, as well as gameplay choices such as its basic skill set or Class. For instance, a player may choose a male, Undead Priest as an avatar. For Priests, the player can choose to heal comrades or deliver damage, but uses Mana, or magic power, to do so. The player's avatar can only wear cloth armor material, making it highly vulnerable to enemy damage. From this point, a player must put in several hours to level his/her avatar the game's maximum level, 80. From levels one to ten, it may take a few days to a week.

Playing can essentially amount to a full-time job.<sup>89</sup> From there, it may take months until a player reaches level 80, the highest level. There are a few things that players can do along the way.

For one, a player becomes acquainted with Azeroth, including the culture and lingua franca that players have developed over time. At first, a player may be struck by the sheer vastness of the game, especially if the player is not familiar with MMOs. Upon the first quest, players learn that their world is in turmoil. Merely traveling from one location to the next takes several minutes. Then, players may notice the variable weather, terrain, and enemies whom they encounter while running to complete quests. While the weather does not influence gameplay, it contributes to aesthetic enhancement and engagement in gameplay. Each geographic zone is designed with a general climate in mind. While roaming through one geographic zone, Stranglethorn Vale, the sporadic virtual rain only helps to engage players in the fantasy of hunting wildlife in a jungle.

As players complete the introductory quests and begin to travel, they ultimately begin to learn WoW's culture and meet other players. While looking for a quest item, players discern that they can speak to other players ingame. For instance, a player may ask other players, "where is this item? I'm new." To this, players may get a response of, "lol, look it up, noob<sup>90</sup>" or maybe something more helpful. "Noob" is a term a part of WoW's general elitist culture and stems from gameplay dynamics that players inculcate among themselves over time, where upper-level players tend to contemptuously communicate with those just beginning in Azeroth.

It can take months until players intimately know the world of Azeroth. As the game is highly immersive, it requires dedication. Only at level twelve do players discover their avatars'

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<sup>89</sup> On Worldofwarcraft.com forum post "How Many Hours Do You Play?" some posters noted playing 1-2 hours per day, while other noted playing 6-8 hours per day.

<sup>90</sup> "Noob" is a derogatory term for someone who is "new" or does not know his/her avatar, its specializations, or how to play well. It can also be spelled, in a variety of ways, including "nub."

Talent Trees, where they can make meaningful decisions about how their avatars fight. Training for new abilities cost ingame money and becomes increasingly expensive as players' avatars ascend skill levels. Allotting points which ultimately determine one's gameplay experience can be a daunting task for beginners who have not sought outside help, from Internet forums or other friendly players. Players often begin to fill in what looks best for his/her avatar as they are allotted points, without knowledge of endgame dynamics. Strategic Talent Point allotment is crucial to the development of players' *meditatio* but may initially be split between crucial roles. Players often regroup their specialization points after reaching higher levels and assessing how their avatar performs alongside other classes in group situations.

Around level 20, players most likely have chosen their professions and begin to learn what their avatars' class can offer in a group setting. Each avatar is allowed to have two ingame professions for acquiring resources or building items. Initial training for professions cost ingame money, as well as successive training to "level up" professions. For instance, a player can choose both Engineer and Jewelcrafting. The player is still classified as a beginner because until a player learns the monetary and resource systems that govern WoW, his or her ability to prepare for group activities is hindered. Generally, the unique requirements of endgame events fuel the market.

At level 20, a player can choose to join a group with up to four other players to complete quests within instances. A player must perform in one of three capacities: 1) damage-absorber or tank, 2) group healer, and 3) damage-dealer or DPS. For instance, a Priest has the ability to heal damage and deal damage but should not attempt both. Each spell cast by a Priest uses Mana, whether it is a damage or healing spell. If both duties are attempted, the player's avatar will lose Mana at an alarming rate and will be unable to perform either duty effectively. Here, the player

may fail repeatedly before readjusting his/her group playstyle to keep the main damage taker, the tank, alive. Prior to this level of gameplay, most classes are not very dynamic. Still, many players do not fully domesticate or internalize their own unique set of skills, which separates them from other classes, until level 40 or until players familiarize themselves with the many skill constructions that are possible using Talent Points. Primarily, the delay in gameplay familiarity is due to the changing nature of avatar *lectio* throughout the game and the lack of full abilities and Talent Points until level 80.

When players reach the higher levels, such as 60 and above, they begin to see how the upper echelon of Azeroth functions. Players begin acquiring items with greater value and look “cooler.” Items generally range from the lower items that are white in designation to the highest valued items that are purple or orange, the highest value, in designation. Displaying items that are purple or “purps,” and items that are a part of a set or Tier becomes a symbol of status in WoW. For example, a player with an avatar that is level 80 with purps as both weapons and armor may find that he or she is accosted by lower-level players for gold, resources, or help with ingame activities. In other words, status is quite visible in WoW. While items with a gray designation are often brown, gray, or other muted hues, “purps” include spikes, bright colors, or animations, such as a Mace weapon with a rotating head.

At level 80, equipment becomes an important indicator of a player's ability to gain respect and influence in group settings and to play effectively. A player must endure hours of quests and group activities before he/she reaches that point. Players who reach this point generally know their avatars' individual skills and group roles intimately as well as WoW's culture. Essentially, the time spent in Azeroth is necessary for full domestication of gameplay and the cultural aspects that surround it. Level 80 is where essential roles and hierarchies

solidify. For a non-beginner, the game is structured around playing three roles, but they are not equally valued for gameplay. In fact, a caste system for the three types of playable roles is embedded in playstyle ideology.

First, there is the damage-dealer or DPS role. This role's primary job is to use avatar resources strategically to eliminate enemies and bosses as quickly as possible. The class is treated as if they are in abundance. One poster says: "If there were tons of healers and tanks for every pug<sup>91</sup> that started, you could say dps<sup>92</sup> has too much value. However, this will never happen."<sup>93</sup> Second, is the role that provides healing to other group members. Healing is a valuable role, and those who play this role often get perks from players ingame. Third, is the role that primarily takes damage, the tank. Tanking is often considered a daunting task because the life of the damage-dealers and healers depend upon this role. In truth, all three roles are dependent upon each other and have the potential to be equally valuable. Each of these three roles can be similarly difficult, but once a player reaches the height of leveling, in this case, level 80, the perceived value of each role becomes apparent. On servers where there is an abundance of any of these classes, fierce competition ensues for group spots, weapons, and other valuable commodities in group situations.

The importance of each role is equivalent. Still, players fall into a caste system based upon their basic duties. WoW players debate this regularly, and each has an argument as to the importance of each type of player:

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<sup>91</sup> "PUG" stands for Pick-Up Group and refers to groups that are assembled ad hoc with members who do not have ingame social affiliations, such as guild membership.

<sup>92</sup> "DPS" refers to Damage-Per Second and is a name for classes that deal damage or the amount of damage that can be dealt by an avatar.

<sup>93</sup> Posted by Allora. From a forum thread entitled "Tanks and healers have too much value" on worldofwarcraft.com <http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/thread.html?topicId=19717353370&sid=1&pageNo=3>.

DPS are usually scrutinized the most while joining a group, making it much harder to actually get in to raids and what not if you aren't at 110% gear level, skill, spec, etc. because theres dozens more that could replace you if you don't meet standards. However, they do have the actual ability to faceroll through things, and can blend in easily unless they're DPS is low, at which point they get yelled at. Lots.<sup>94</sup>

While the damage dealing roles, or DPS, are thought of as the more stressful types to play, they are also considered easier to play and more widely available. By expectation and pressure, DPS are easier to procure and easier to play, and therefore, expendable.

In actuality, the game revolves around the cooperation of the three types of roles in unison. In larger battles, where twenty-five players are required to kill one boss, it is generally necessary to have multiple members of each role. Some players do approach the game as a teamwork exercise rather than a hierarchical competition:

Team is the keyword here. That's what it's supposed to be; a team effort with each person doing their part. But, when you say things like “a dime a dozen” and “easily replaceable”, you've already insulted 2/3 of that team./Showing a little respect for each part of the group, no matter their role, doesn't seem too much to ask.<sup>95</sup>

WoW's gameplay is the source of strife and teamwork. However, the structure of the game which values advancement, knowledge, and monetary wealth is highly hierarchical.

Whether the hierarchical organization of WoW was the intention of Blizzard designers is unknown. The gameplay rules do indicate a resource and wealth based economy, equipment value is a symbol of status among players. WoW creates such a large world that differing viewpoints of all types are possible. The system set up around WoW's economy and item value

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<sup>94</sup> “Faceroll” is a derogatory term in WoW that is used to describe the physical act of rolling one's face across the keyboard in order to control one's avatar during combat. In other words, faceroll is used to describe players who play a class whose gameplay is viewed as effortless, uncomplicated, or simple. Therefore, faceroll is not only used to insult individual players but avatar classes as well. This comment was posted by Kashind. Taken from a forum post entitled “Who has the Harder Role? DPS-HEAL-TANK” on worldofwarcraft.com. <http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/thread.html?topicId=18031082038&sid=1&pageNo=3>.

<sup>95</sup> Posted by Zyonyx on previously cited forum thread.

makes clear an almost barbaric virtual society. Particularly, ideologies about gameplay and roles within the game are clearly demarcated, ingame and on forums.

### *Concluding Remarks*

WoW taps into a fundamental Darwinian-like characteristic of human beings. Player interaction within WoW exemplifies humans' tendency to engage in hierarchical communication. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke states: “The hierarchic principle itself is inevitable in systematic thought. It is embodied in the mere process of growth” (140). In other words, hierarchy is an integral part of human communication. Constantly, players strive to be better than others and themselves. WoW owes the success of its continual monthly fees to gameplay's encouragement of competition. The rhetoric of gameplay in WoW is competitive, hierarchical, and capitalistic. Players begin in opposition to a faction, and ascend as heroes to compete with those within their faction.<sup>96</sup> Players have equal chances to succeed, but knowledge of gameplay becomes a commodity within the game, and unfamiliarity with the game earns a player the label “noob.” Players call those who seek knowledge of WoW's economic and social system “noob” as an insult. Once players master gameplay and WoW's social and economic system, they use their individual gameplay style to express their ideology toward gameplay.

Ideologies form around the three types of ways that classes can function and overall playstyle. In a study of information use and social structures in WoW, Nathan Hulsey notes, “[T]he act of playing can be political, in that players often align themselves with specific ideologies which affect their choices in play and social interactions” (60-1). Hulsey explains this idea more fully:

On the one hand, there is the social aspect of the MM[O]RPG, were [sic] one requires others to get things done, and on the other there is the

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<sup>96</sup> For an analysis of ingame player identity in WoW, see Boone, “A Burkean Analysis of “World of Warcraft.”

individual act of making decisions about how to play and equip your avatar. Gear and rank garner respect from players; however, there is a price to pay for obtaining them, namely time and the often elitist culture that surrounds hardcore play style. (41)

These ideologies begin in the social structures within the games, the Guilds, but ultimately emerge from gameplay mechanics. While some guilds value a more casual approach to gameplay, others have a more serious approach which may result in cultural elitism. Where more serious guilds are concerned, the competitive endgame atmosphere is integral. Also, the competition between roles within the game are more pronounced and the role caste system emerges. WoW's ingame tools do not force this behavior, but the MMORPG atmosphere, at least this one, certainly encourages endgame competition between individuals.

### Be All You Can Be As A Soldier In America's Army (3)!

What happens when one mixes videogame technology and the virtual backdrop of guns and weaponry? An army. Well, a virtual one. AA3 is a videogame that includes various, US Army-themed training scenarios for players. While parents and consumers of videogame technology may simultaneously condemn and value the fantasized nature of soldiering within other videogames, such as *Metal Gear Solid* or *Call of Duty* franchise games, AA3 avoids fantasy and instead aims for realism. The game uses realistic elements to absorb players into a position to play a newly recruited US Army Soldier. While playing a US Army recruit, players are exposed to characteristics of US Army creed embedded in gameplay.

#### *About the Text*

AA3 was created in 2001 as a recruitment tool and is the third videogame in a series made specifically for this purpose.<sup>97</sup> The game is free to download and free to play, so it attracts

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<sup>97</sup> See Wardynski, *America's ArmyPC Game*, 7.

many players, including veterans of the US Army.<sup>98</sup> In 2006, the game reportedly had “7.5 million registered users, making it one of the Top 5 online PC games” (“Enjoy the Game?” Christian Science Monitor). AA3 has cost US tax payers 32.8 million dollars over the last ten years (Sinclair, “America’s Army Bill”).<sup>99</sup> The game designers do not claim that it has suasive value. Casey Wardynski of the US Army described AA franchise games as intending “not persuasion, but education” (*America’s Army PC Game*, 9). Unlike many of the other games mentioned, AA3 is explicitly targeted toward a unique demographic. Wardynski, who is among the originators of the AA project, describes that “the game [has] engendered positive awareness of Soldiering among twenty-nine percent of young Americans age 16 to 24” (*America’s Army PC Game*, 7). AA3’s gameplay and external memory system seem designed to promote holistic inculcation of US Army values and principles.<sup>100</sup>

AA3 is a FPP videogame; so, players can only see of their avatars what they could logically see of their own bodies without the assistance of a mirror. FPP videogames provide unique embodied perspectives for players. In this case, players see their weapon, usually a gun, and what is directly in front of their avatars. AA3 is rendered in three-dimensional graphics, with real world color schemes, NPC design, and environment design. The physical characteristics in AA3 are explicitly imitative of IRL bodily movements. Players’ avatars can become fatigued, have trouble concentrating, have elevated heart rates, and experience tremendous physical damage. Though blood and gore are not rendered, for the sake of the videogame’s rating and target demographic, all other elements, including sounds that denote bones breaking, are

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<sup>98</sup> See Li, Zhan, *America’s Army PC Game*, 25-7.

<sup>99</sup> See Sinclair, “America’s Army Bill” for an annual summary of cost.

<sup>100</sup> Recently, in May 2009, the game spawned graphic novels. See chapter one by Sherman, Penick, and Brown, entitled *Knowledge is Power* at <<http://www.americasarmy.com/graphicnovel/reader/>>.

rendered. Players also are instructed by ingame virtual sergeants who verbally goad players into completing tasks within specific time frames. Virtual instructors are also used to deliver lectures, which include only a miniscule portion of gameplay instruction, on first aid or medic training that players can use while in PVP battles.

The game is both PVE and PVP, with numerous side elements that provide additional information about US Army careers. Players can complete solo missions that help them learn how to operate an ingame firearm and learn new skills. Also, players can engage in large battles against each other in PVP. The game includes a variety of ingame weaponry designed realistically to mimic gun firing rate and style.

#### *External Memory System*

The game is meant to mimic IRL visually. The grass, the wind, the screaming sergeants that order players to complete tasks are used to create a realistic backdrop of US Army recruitment. More of importance are the series of lectures and training scenarios. The videogame allows players to get different types of training to raise their ranks and achieve new skills, including various types of firearm training and medic training. The game also provides a constant reminder to players of US Army rules through the loading screens. The has several non-game-like qualities that are also a part of feedback generation and the videogame, such as the Real Heroes Program and US Army careers and lifestyle information.

AA3 records a player's progress in the game as rank. As players complete certain missions and specialize in target practice scenarios, they increase in rank. As players progress, they can refer back to their progress through the ranking system. If they are unsatisfied with their score in a certain event, such as Advanced Rifle Marksmanship, players can go back and repeat it until their score is satisfying. As players complete missions, more become available in other

phases of the game. Players gain access to more weapons and medals for their online viewable “Jacket” as well.<sup>101</sup>

In order to rise in rank, players must accumulate Honor points. In the form of the acronym LDRSHIP, players can see their avatar’s statistics as they complete PVP and PVE missions. Each letter symbolizes a part of the US Army’s IRL creed and essential attributes which players must improve through play. For instance, “S” is Selfless Service, and “P” is Personal Courage.<sup>102</sup> To improve Selfless Service attribute, players must “Put the welfare of the Nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own.” Ingame, improving one's “S” attribute translates to “Treat injured soldiers! Leave no man behind!” In other words, by being a medic in PVP, players can increase this attribute. To improve the Personal Courage attribute, players must “Face fear, danger or adversity (physical or moral).” In terms of gameplay, improving one's “P” attribute translates to “Engage the enemy, take calculated risks!” In other words, the “P” attribute is essentially awarded to players when they complete a PVP mission while their avatar's life, or health, gauge is low. The LDRSHIP attributes encourage both taking risks with the life of one's own avatar and providing team support to other friendly players' avatars.

In a similar fashion, the other attributes are used to emphasize team membership and refusal to disobey US Army values in other capacities. The verbal and visual backdrop of gameplay, or the external memory system, are often designed to influence the meaning players derive from gameplay. Though the verbal content of videogames is not a part of gameplay, it is

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<sup>101</sup> The “Jacket” is a virtual representation that mimics US Army issued jackets. As players increase in rank and receive medals, they become a part of players' jackets. In this way, players are able to visually track their progress through the game as become more decorated Soldiers.

<sup>102</sup> Description of attributes and honor points and their functions are taken directly from ingame play of AA3.

explicitly used in AA3 to communicate the intended rules and morals attached to gameplay and is the backdrop of gameplay.

PVE training has three phases designed to teach players a variety of skills, ranging from basic training to advanced obstacle training. After players complete certain PVE missions in the game, they sit through their graduations. In AA3's PVP, players join up with other players to complete objectives, such as taking and holding positions.<sup>103</sup>

AA3 includes a variety of elements that are non-game-like and merely informational. Players can browse through US Army careers, and salary brackets while in the game. Details about family life and other aspects of working in the US Army are included. Players can also look at “Real Heroes in the US Army.” “Real Heroes” profile soldiers of the US Army and include a narration of their lives. The narrations are often arranged to show how each person was destined for the US Army from birth. For example, Real Hero Sergeant Jason Mike’s childhood years are described under the heading “It Was the Life I Was Raised For.”<sup>104</sup> Another Real Hero, Second Lieutenant Gerald Wolford is described as saying “I always wanted to jump out of airplanes.” Other ingame elements also weave US Army information into gameplay. For instance, the training scenarios for medics or combat healers are oftentimes long and include videos that are saturated with US Army creed and ideology. Within the virtual lecture rooms, US Army advertisement posters are on the walls, and the language used by the instructors refers to IRL combat medic training which reinforces US Army creed but only tangentially relates to gameplay. At the end of these video/lecture scenarios, players then learn to execute commands simple gameplay commands on a keyboard in order to perform gameplay acts.

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<sup>103</sup> A “take and hold” mission objective essentially means that players collaborate with their group members in order to travel toward a specific ingame location, then defend that location against opposition.

<sup>104</sup> Herein, examples and quotes come from ingame AA3 videogame, version 3.0.7.

Including the material in the loading screens, AA3 details an experience of being a US Army Soldier that excludes rendering of blood, discussing rationale of fighting, or the value of human life. Of course, AA3's purpose is to teach young males about the US Army. For instance, when players go to complete basic training, the loading screen displays still images of male soldiers being sworn into the US Army, getting in a bus, and driving to boot camp. Though females do join the US Army, the avatars that AA3 provides are also male.<sup>105</sup> These scenes use audio dubbed over still images of young males saluting. The backdrop of the visual and verbal material places players in a situation to learn about US Army values, culture, and the ideology of being a US Army Soldier while playing the videogame. Suasion is intentionally built into the external memory system and *lectio* of AA3.

### *Lectio*

On the PC version of AA3, players input controls using a keyboard and mouse. The game's controls primarily have to do with bodily movement of an avatar and navigation through ingame US Army information. Players can navigate the main menu screen which includes US Army information, their avatars' statistics, PVE training, and PVP scenarios with other players. Within PVE training scenarios, players learn to use weaponry, use first aid, and run through timed enemy scenarios. In PVP, players join with other players to complete missions such as "Take and Hold." PVP missions primarily require that players secure areas, weapons, or intelligence material with their teammates against opposing players.

Players can choose from among only male faces to represent their avatars. The male faces have a variety of skin hues from which players can choose. The avatars can walk, run, look around, switch weapons, use firearms and incendiary weapons, and perform rudimentary first aid

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<sup>105</sup> In a pamphlet about AA franchise videogames published in 2006, AA's game designers claim that female avatars will be added to the game as roles for women are added (*America's Army PC Game*, 11-2).

on comrades. Each firearm has a unique firing scheme that reflects its IRL use. For instance, the M320 firearm can easily be operated while an avatar is in a standing position, whereas the M249 is best controlled while an avatar is kneeling or lying down. Players participate in a variety of target practice scenarios, from aiming while still, to aiming while navigating a timed scenario. Additionally, players learn that their aim is affected by the breathing of their avatars, so they have the option to have their avatars hold their breath to improve aim. Reloading weapons is unique to each gun as well. Essentially, AA3's *lectio* can teach players different types of US military grade weaponry, how they fire and reload, and the simulated weight and body position needed to operate them effectively.

While engaging in PVP, players can communicate with their comrades through voice or typed chat and play variety of roles, such as Grenadier or Rifleman.<sup>106</sup> Players can make their avatars say a variety of predetermined commands that are audible to other players or use voice chatting to communicate with allies. For instance, by using pressing commands on the keyboard players can alert their allies of incoming enemies, incendiaries, or the need for a medic. Players can add other players as buddies as well as join larger groups, called Clans, as well.

Many changes were made in AA3 that differentiate it from other games of its franchise and give players the impression of customization. For instance, players of previous AA versions were unable to choose a skin hue and face for their avatar. Also in the previous version, players could enter a virtual recruitment office, called the Virtual Recruitment Station or VRS. Within the VRS, players could move their among virtual NPC recruits, listening to their excitement and awe as well as speak to virtual NPC recruitment officers. Though information concerning US

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<sup>106</sup> There are four roles from which players can choose: Rifleman, Squad Designated Marksman, Grenadier, and Automatic Rifleman. Riflemen are the basic infantry members. Squad Designated Marksmen are long-range shooters. Grenadiers are can damage larger targets from medium to long distances. The Automatic Riflemen generally are used to overwhelm enemies with rapid fire.

Army life and recruitment information are still an integral part of AA3, the US Army designers of the game chose to present such information in a different format that makes it appear less a part of the gameplay.

### *Meditatio*

Players have few customization opportunities. At any point in time, a player controls his or her avatar. Players can choose from a limited design of avatars. In the first America's Army videogame (AA), players did not get to choose an avatar at all. Beyond choosing from among variously hued male faces, a player gets little customizing options for their gameplay experience in AA3. To play, a player signs up online, gets a username, then download the full, always free, videogame. To make the videogame more accessible, AA3 partnered with the popular videogame distribution company, Steam. When a player first begins the game, they can choose between Basic Training or PVE play, browsing Real Heroes, or participate in online PVP play with other players.

Training is an important element in the game. As players complete training scenarios, they get access to more weapons and incendiaries, as well as essential first aid abilities that come in handy in online group play. Training is split into three zones. Each zone is labeled red, white, and blue and increase in difficulty. The red, white, and blue color system is analogous to a two week training period in IRL bootcamp. Each zone details the IRL steps of being introduced into the US Army and receiving training. First, a player must complete Basic Training successfully. For a player, this means the successful completion of an obstacle training course only. In this Basic Training scenario, a players become acquainted with moving their avatar. Through a series of crawling, climbing, and narrow balancing obstacles a player is evaluated for time and accuracy.

After completing the Basic Training, a player must go through a simulated graduation ceremony. The player cannot skip this cut-scene using controls. Here, the audience members and announcer are rendered in two-dimensional cartoonish style, and an emcee speaks at the US Army ceremony.

Each training scenario begins with a lecture. A player must explicitly follow the guidelines given by the ingame NPC superiors. There is no free-roaming in AA3 PVE missions. Players must follow the strict commands of their ingame captain or face consequences. If a player shoots a friendly NPC target or real players within training scenarios or PVP, the player loses Honor points and is whisked off into a cell with somber harmonica music playing. Oftentimes, the training scenarios are timed, and the virtual sergeants prod players with very strong verbal comments such as “I don't have all day, soldier!”

In PVP, conditions are slightly different. Players themselves can reinforce teamwork and group strategy. Players can choose among a variety of roles, such as Rifleman. While players engage in PVP, the avatars of their opposition appear as “terrorists.” Likewise, the opposition sees its own team members as the “good guys,” or US Army. In other words, both teams in PVP view allies as US Army soldiers and enemies as “terrorists.” Furthermore, both the weaponry and the design of the avatars reflect that a player is viewed as a “terrorist” by foes and a US Army Soldier by allies. One player posted on the official AA forums to discuss this element:

I started playing AA3 yesterday and i loved it, but it seems like i always join the American Army as team. it would be nice if you added some more weapons and did like we can be the terrorists and the Americans.<sup>107</sup>

Other players who posted on the forum thread responded saying that playing as “terrorists” would not be appropriate for a US Army videogame.

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<sup>107</sup> Posted by Sgt.Rasmussen on the official America's Army forum on a thread “The Future of AA3” <<http://forum.americasarmy.com/viewtopic.php?t=309796>>.

AA3 uses a fictitious backdrop of allies, eastern European enemies, and weaponry. One of the developers describes this decision:

For the first time we have chosen to fictionalize the weapons and the equipment of the enemy soldiers in America's [sic] Army. We came to this decision because we wanted to build a more realistic fighting force to match the strength of the United States Army. In America's [sic] Army 3.0, players will be engaging a fictional country's [sic] Armed Forces. This fictional army will more closely rival the U.S. Army in their training, equipment, and the preparedness of their soldiers. Being able to take this liberty will give us much more flexibility in the design and the gameplay of AA 3.0 and in many ways allow us to build a more realistic game.<sup>108</sup>

By “a more realistic game,” they seem to mean they are making AA franchise videogames more game-like by fictionalizing the aesthetic information. The changes that AA3 has made are crucial to how players conceive of gameplay. Now, a player becomes a member of the virtual US Army to fight fictitious enemies and has the ability to have a virtual identity through the array of avatar faces. Yet, the game still has suasory material that is quite similar in function. The yelling drill sergeants, use of cut-scenes, realistic firearms, and Real Heroes keep AA3 firmly grounded in what gamers call IRL. On an forum thread, one poster describes the effect that playing AA3 has made on him or her:

this game has made me realise that i wanna be a soldier i like order and i've always dreamt of it. risk your life each day for what you believe in, im not afraid of death and hate terrorism and i'm good at sneaking up behind my enemies and take them out without making too muh sound.<sup>109</sup>

The gameplay and material within AA3 have meaningfully shaped the previous forum poster's view of the US Army and choices outside of the game. To this player, AA3 gameplay frames the US Army by belief, rules, order, lack of fear to risk one's life, and hatred for terrorism. Thus,

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<sup>108</sup> Posted by Developer SnoopDoug on AA3 US Army forum thread entitled “the new wallpapers (HK416?)”. <<http://forum.americasarmy.com/viewtopic.php?highlight=&p=2560848>>.

<sup>109</sup> Posted by Sgt.Rasmussen on a forum thread entitled “The Future of AA3” <<http://forum.americasarmy.com/viewtopic.php?t=309796&page=1>>.

even the fictionalized enemies within AA3 do not disrupt the suasory nature of the gameplay. Players essentially generate the same type of feedback as with earlier franchise videogames.

### *Concluding Remarks*

AA3 is relatively slow-paced and not dynamic in that players are generally not responsible for unique gameplay choices, beyond those that relate to team PVP. Players are unable to chart unique paths aesthetically or through gameplay choices for their avatars. Much of the gameplay surrounds teamwork, listening, concentrating, aiming, and shooting. Players must listen to the lecturing about US Army rules, creed, and regulations that give way to the gameplay *lectio* itself. None of these scenes that include lectures can be skipped, so it is essentially a mandatory portion of the game. In terms of technique within the game, players must learn the differing firing schemes of each weapon. Each weapon is incredibly unique and requires that players use their avatars' body position to operate it successfully. Beyond this technical aspect of the game, players simply complete missions and watch themselves ascend in the virtual US Army. Checking on their virtual jackets allows players to see their medals as they progress.

Bill Howard, within the AA3 Developers' Blog, describes the game.

Teamwork is necessary to succeed and survive in the Army and in AA3. The game is the Army's office game, and it brings unparalleled realism and authenticity to military gaming. The Army cannot accomplish its missions without adhering to the Army Values and employing teamwork at every level, and the same is true for AA3.<sup>110</sup>

AA3 is less of a virtual world, and more of a series of training scenarios strewn together by US Army core values. Problem solving may come in the form of mastering controls so that one's avatar moves quickly and succinctly through gunfire and obstacles. Rather than designing AA3 as a unique perspective on US Army soldiering, designers seek to mirror IRL soldiering so what players "try on" is virtually real soldiering.

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<sup>110</sup> Posted on AA3 official game site. <<http://www.americasarmy.com/about/blogs.php?blogid=12>>.

## An Urban Morality Tale: Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City

Work or steal? Kill or save? Most of us do not feel the need to ask these questions on our day to day rounds at work or at home. From what we encounter in real life (IRL) rules are seemingly set in stone. But, when the time came, do we know which path we would take? In the virtual world of GTA IV, players get the chance to experience difficult decisions of morality with ingame simulated outcomes and circumstances. Of course, players experience repercussions within the confines of the digital landscape of Liberty City. So, whether these decisions translate into the “real world” is subjective for each player. Still, when one pools the external memory system, or the information surrounding gameplay, as well as the *lectio*, and *meditatio* of GTA IV's gameplay, the message is clear. Players are able to step into Liberty City and experience life as an immigrant in a virtual, highly Americanized metropolis. Players choose how they react in their avatar's skin, and begin to understand the ramifications of actions.

### *About the Text*

GTA IV can be played on a variety of consoles, including PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 as well as PC. Past games within this franchise have included stories of urban dwellers in many other contexts. The theme of GTA IV revolves around an immigrant's experience in the fictional Liberty City. The popular commercial Rockstar Games videogame, GTA IV is at once respected by gamers and hated by those not privy to the gaming world. For many, the game is understood as a catalyst for violent actions perpetrated by youths and as a voice of debauchery.

At the surface, the game seems to promote violent actions, as well as endorse stereotypes and immoral behaviors because of its use of weaponry, violence, prostitution. If read critically as a text, the digitally rendered world of GTA IV provides a perspective on what it means to live in an American urban environment as an immigrant. Within it, players may choose to uphold the

rule of virtual law enforcement ingame through the use of choice-based user operations, *lectio*, that are facilitated within the contexts, or external memory system, constructed by game designers. In order to function within the confines of the external memory system and use *lectio* to generate unique gameplay feedback, or *meditatio*, GTA IV players must make choices in response to the rhetorical situation created by designers.

### *External Memory System*

Named explicitly for the Statue of Liberty, GTA IV represents a hypothetical city that has the undeniable essence of New York City and the surrounding neighborhoods. This is evidenced in the map layouts and characteristics of the storyline. Living up to its name, Liberty City is understood as the place where one can “make it” and a place where the stereotyped American ideals of freedom, the pursuit of happiness, and prosperity can be realized. It is important to note this choice of city for GTA IV. New York City represents a dichotomy. It is traditionally the place where many non-residential people first sight America’s greatest known symbol for liberty, and also the place where many immigrants have their first taste of American-style marginalization and are refused access to the American Dream based upon their status.

Liberty City is a fancifully rendered environment that simulates real spatial and temporal interactions. It includes fully mobile and independently acting traffic situations, with realistically sequenced traffic lights, and NPC pedestrians that frame events, making the city nearly come to life.

Players of GTA IV embody the avatar Niko Bellic, an Eastern European immigrant who arrives at the Liberty City in order to escape what is considered a difficult, war-ridden living situation. As Bellic, the player seeks prosperity in the land of opportunity with his cousin, Roman, who is already a Liberty City resident. When arriving, a player finds that Roman has

incurred numerous debts through his effort to live the richly materialistic life that he understood all Americans to live. As embodied within the avatar, players vicariously experience life as the newly immigrated Bellic and how videogame designers view Liberty City (New York City) life's effect on immigrants.

The rightwing and leftwing radio stations that are in loop within GTA IV exemplify the satirical nature of the Liberty City. While players temporarily inhabit Liberty City as Bellic, they are subjected to multiple views as represented by game designers that frame players' choices within gamespace. Players can look at ads, go to bars, and listen to the radio vehicles. Rockstar Games, the maker of GTA IV, label these as "ways to keep yourself amused in Liberty City" (*Grand Theft*). In jest, Rockstar Games game designers, use the radio within GTA IV as a framing device for players that presents a satirical look at Liberty City, New York City, through both an exaggerated stereotypically liberal and conservative viewpoint, as well as various music genre stations.

Public Liberty Radio, or PLR, station presents the satirized version of leftwing ideologies. The show is structured as an actual talk-radio station, equipped with commercials and hyperbolic takes on controversial issues that are pertinent to real-world environments. PLR advertises itself as "lulling you to sleep with liberal soft peddling" (Rockstar Games, *Grand Theft*). Ironically, PLR personalities criticize the very actions of players. "I blame videogames, they're teaching our kids to solve hunger by slaughtering the weak. We should only slaughter the weak to win wars and sell guns to unjust governments we keep in power" (Rockstar Games, *Grand Theft*). Also, this station frames itself as wanting to save the environment. "We're gonna kill global warming once and for all! We're gonna have a concert, yeah, you'll wanna buy the T-shirt and global warming will end, man. It's barbaric!" (Rockstar Games, *Grand Theft*). The

rightwing station exhibits a similarly polarized viewpoint, but includes satirized views of "the foreigner."

WTCC is conservatives' "real voice" in Liberty City (Rockstar Games, *Grand Theft*). The station is often rampant with satirized misogynous ideals. "You know who's made the most money throughout history? The Man. Who were the great leaders? Man. Who fought the best wars? Men. Who make the best murderers? Men. Who invented the plague? Men! We got it all, bitch! We run this show!" (Rockstar Games, *Grand Theft*). More importantly, the station includes the stereotyped belittling of immigrants and foreigners that is associated with rightwing views. It says its liberal rival, PLR, "wants to give your country to an illegal immigrant" (Rockstar Games, *Grand Theft*). But WTCC does not think this is permissible.

WTCC is noticeably against foreigners. As one personality says, "Public education is another lie. Okay, you see it in the book they're teaching us science. Now, science is good when it teaches you how to turn a , uh, you know, a million ungrateful foreigners into glass" (Rockstar Games, 2008b). The radio stations show that players are not in the land of opportunity. There is no Dream in Liberty City and, as Rockstar Games show, no "gateway to the land of opportunity" that is not riddled with bigotry and violence (Rockstar Games, 2008b).

### *Lectio*

Players control the avatar Niko Bellic as they traverse the virtual landscape of Liberty City. Customization is a valued element of GTA IV. For instance, players can dress their avatar however they please in slacks, jeans, hats, or other items. Players can also customize their vehicles and weaponry.

Players have basic bodily control of their avatar, Bellic. So, they are able to make him walk, run, jump, and swim. These abilities are a part of GTA IV regardless of the console that it

is played on. The difference is the ease of controls, i.e. whether players use a mouse/keyboard or a PS3 controller. Players using the PC videogames scrutinize the customizability of their controls. One poster states: “And that is exactly why the PC version will always be awesome. No matter what crap Rockstar / Microsoft limits you to, you can sooner or later get rid of it.”<sup>111</sup> An essential part of gameplay is the embodiment of *lectio* and a transparency of physical controls. As one forum poster puts it: “can’t wait to give this a shot tonight, my driving skills on the keyboard a crappy at best”.<sup>112</sup> Another poster sees the situation a bit differently:

Yeah, in the end I’ve noticed the game is easily most enjoyable using keyboard and mouse. It makes shooting from vehicles perhaps even too easy, but nevertheless, you get the best possible sense of your surroundings using the free mouselook especially since GTAIV’s camera follows you car’s movements a bit too lazily compared to older GTAs.<sup>113</sup>

For each player, the PC version is a chance of specialize *lectio*. Though this does not influence abilities, it does help players to be able to domesticate these abilities and by increasing the physical transparency of controls.

One of the more controversial abilities in the game is the ability enter in and out of vehicles ingame. Though stealing vehicles results in a variety of ingame consequences, many missions require players to use vehicle transportation. Simply by standing near the driver or passenger side of vehicles in GTA IV, players can freely enter any vehicle. If the vehicle is locked, players' avatar will automatically break the window of the vehicle. Players can use this ability to steal vehicles ingame. Stealing vehicles results in disciplinary feedback from NPCs.

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<sup>111</sup> Posted by Medfreak. Taken from previously cited forum thread.

<sup>112</sup> Posted by phishinNYC. Taken from GTAforums.com post entitled “All Controllers WORKING!” <<http://www.gtaforums.com/index.php?showtopic=37947&st=0>>.

<sup>113</sup> Posted by Zat. Post take from previously cited forum thread.

A player may choose to steal a car ingame but may be met with either violent action on the part of the NPC or passive cowardice, depending on the NPC's designed disposition. Certain types of vehicles within the game are associated with specific socioeconomic classes. If a player wishes to steal certain types of vehicles within the game, the player is forced to make the decision whether to steal a nicer vehicle and be met with greater resistance from NPC drivers and police or steal a vehicle associated with lower class value and be met with passivity or incessant gunfire. The implications of this class demarcation within the game is evidence of ideological slant on the part of game designers in that they connect higher levels of material wealth with law enforcement reactions and lower levels of material wealth with gang-related violence.

Each vehicle provides a different "feel" when driving it. Thus, vehicular control ingame requires the use of a variety of *lectio* techniques. Players spend a majority of their time in using vehicles in GTA IV. While in vehicles, players can listen to radio stations as well. Radio stations include a leftwing and rightwing version of public/talk radio and music stations with a variety of musical genres, from country to classical.

Players can also buy a variety of incendiaries and weapons, from Molotov cocktails to shotguns. As players come in contact with new weapons, they do not receive training with each individual weapon through the game. Players must simply practice usage by themselves. However, weapons and incendiaries do not use varying *lectio* techniques to control them. So, more importantly, players must develop driving skills.

Completing missions, though not required by any means, helps to advance the plot, and thus, allow players to "beat" the game. The series of missions use non-player controlled cut-scenes to advance the plot in the game. Between gameplay sequences, the game includes cinematic narratives that further describe Niko and his interpersonal connections with NPCs.

Cinematic narratives also provide the context for missions that players can complete after forming interpersonal relationships with NPCs.

Players are given ingame communication devices and the means for interpersonal relationships as a part of the game. Players get a cellular phone, where they can call ingame NPC dates and friends to complete missions and hangout ingame. For instance, players can use the cellular phone to ask Roman to go to a pool hall. Players can also go to ingame cyber cafes where they access the “Internet,” view ingame news reels, or browse personal advertisements. Essentially, players can “socialize” ingame, though with NPCs. The foundation of GTA IV gameplay is interpersonal relationships that Niko forms with NPCs.

### *Meditatio*

When one first begins GTA IV, they are told the story of Niko's move to Liberty City from Eastern Europe. Within the first few hours of playing GTA IV, a player can experience the let down that Niko feels once he arrives in Liberty City. His cousin Roman, who he moved to Liberty City to meet, does not live the lavish lifestyle of luxury that he promised. Instead, he works as a taxi cab worker, frequently uses illegal drugs, has gambling debts, and works for a crime boss within the city. So, to make a living, a player must choose between “good” and “bad” professions: taxi driving, more illegal acts, or both.

The tension between the “good” and the “bad” is evident throughout the game. For the missions players must negotiate committing illegal acts to advance the plot while avoiding ingame law enforcement. For instance, one NPC, Brucie, offers missions where players commit grand theft auto by stealing valuable cars for Brucie.

The responsiveness of law enforcement seems to “spoil the game” for some players. On a forum discussing the police in GTA IV, one forum poster states:

I'm glad my friends and I aren't alone in this belief. To those that think this lends more to realism, you're mistaken. First and foremost this is a Grand Theft Auto game. It's not about exacting realism. I didn't buy a crime & punishment simulator, that's not what made this franchise popular. If I wanna mess around the 'hood and knuckle down pimps for script, I don't want the pigs chasing me over it every 10 seconds in a friggin' VIDEOGAME that PROMOTES criminal behavior to successfully complete it! Just a bit contradictory don't you think?<sup>114</sup>

May GTA IV be considered something more akin to a “crime and punishment simulator”? The way in which the rules of the game reprimand players from performing allowable acts in the game seems contradictory. Between the game's external memory system, the allowed actions that players are given, or the *lectio* of the game, it seems that the limbo between “good” and “bad” acts is the line that a player has to learn how to balance in order to be successful in the game.

The rules are used strategically to impart ethical values. Players can drink copious amounts and operate vehicles through their embodiment in Niko. However, written into this operation is police vehicles' immediate notice of Niko's intoxication, even from extant distances. Whether the player operates the vehicle any more or less recklessly than while Niko is sober, police vehicles take immediate notice and stop and arrest players which makes it difficult for players to function effectively in a vehicle while intoxicated. Drinking and driving, though allowed, are constructed ingame around the proposition “if I drink, then I'll get arrested.” Game designers can encourage ingame actions with particular representations and feedback in order to cause players to conceive of the moral rules of the external memory system a little differently. As with this example, drinking produces the feedback of law enforcements' increase in sensitivity to Niko. Players are, however, given the option to hail a taxi cab ingame after Niko becomes intoxicated or call Roman for a ride.

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<sup>114</sup> Posted by Apexmoto. Posted on GTAforums.com on a forum thread entitled “Cops...”.  
<http://www.gtaforums.com/index.php?showtopic=437672>.

Players do not have to “beat” GTA IV in order to enjoy it. Roaming around in Liberty City is a surreal experience. One can do anything, within the confines of the controls and ingame elements. One posters states:

I quite enjoyed going out with friends or on dates and the minigames were quite challenging, minus darts and the “Gobble Gobble” achievement taking me absolutely ages. It gives a good change of pace from blowing people's brains out – infact, IV was less like playing a game and more like reading a book – you can go at your own pace but you'll always end up with the same plot.<sup>115</sup>

Meandering through the game is a valued experience. Whether players socialize with NPCs and play mini-games or roam around in their vehicles listening to ingame radio, all is possible. Still, the only way to “beat” GTA IV is through the completion of all ingame missions. Because of the highly open-ended nature of the GTA IV, players have room to create their own Bellic as they play.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

GTA IV includes violence and forces players to negotiate both “good” and “bad” acts. The game has uses the external memory system to create a symbolic background of discipline via NPC cops, political polarization using the radio stations, and “the foreigner” using satirized American values. Players may role-play in a variety of ways. Role-playing refers to players creation of their own story as Niko within GTA IV, that is not solely related to the completion of ingame missions. Role-playing is a enacted through gameplay as well as aesthetic enhancements, such as clothing customization.

As Niko, players can choose their actions. One forum poster role-plays by “cruising the city in hot cars!”<sup>116</sup> Another poster enjoys “buying glocks and killing a couple of cops.”<sup>117</sup> While

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<sup>115</sup> Posted by LordDastardly. Taken from forum post on GTAforums.com entitled “The Good, the Bad, and the Future: GTA IV, IGN article.”

<http://www.gtaforums.com/index.php?s=a579ff3c658b87499a9c8e2f45242548&showtopic=441069>.

<sup>116</sup> Posted by Marutzu. Taken from forum thread entitled “Role-play, what do you do it your bored” from

still another says “I like to drive around obeying traffic laws. That’s about it.”<sup>118</sup> Generally, the game sets the stage for the player to create a Niko Bellic that suits him/her through gameplay and offers story and plot elements for context. Players who buy the PC version of the game can reform the physical controls to meet their individual preferences as well. While the game is overall customizable, it is constructed as a morally saturated gamespace and uses gameplay to contextualize rules and responsibilities ingame.

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GTAforums.com <<http://www.gtaforums.com/index.php?showtopic=440040>>.

<sup>117</sup> Posted by felipefrasson. Taken from previously cited forum thread.

<sup>118</sup> Posted by ThePhenom92. Taken from previously cited forum thread.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION – SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS

In chapter three, I analyzed four popular videogames, SMB3, WoW, AA3, and GTA IV using gameplay as the unit of analysis. I conceptualized gameplay as a memory-based activity and based my analysis on three constructs: an external memory system, *lectio*, and *meditatio*. First, I described the external memory system as the informational component of the each videogame. Included within the external memory system of videogames are non-procedural elements such as music, back story, and narrative. Second, I reconceived *lectio* as a procedural memory term and applied it to the procedural information in each videogame, which included what operations a player can perform. Third, I reconceived *meditatio* as the inculcation process whereby players domesticate procedural information through their individual perspectives as they play a videogame. Whereas *lectio* concerns rote information of videogame controls and abilities, *meditatio* is essentially the mental process of arranging *lectio* uniquely.

*Meditatio* relates to how players conceive of playing videogames, where cultural or ideological value judgments are incorporated, and how players navigate gameplay systems. Players assume an active posture and experience an observational looping effect during gameplay that culminates through *meditatio*. Concurrently, players act, make decisions, and form judgments that translate into gameplay actions which effect the trajectory of their play experience. Procedural information in videogames must be understood within the context of the

structure of a videogame, rather than isolating one act, such as the ability to “shoot” ingame. To play, players not only engage videogames as computing systems but also engage the propositional feedback that is generated through play. The structure of videogames provides richness of comprehension for players, making them a part of a highly suatory medium.<sup>119</sup> Choices made ingame are based on values and propositions created by game designers, and in this respect, the choices that players make are based on values and judgment as well.

Let me now assess the findings of the analysis, including the similarities and differences between each game. In the following sections, I assess the suatory nature of videogames and the implications of players' choices ingame and how the structure of videogames can encourage or discourage choices by players. Then, I summarize what has been established by this study, its overall conclusions, and its limitations.

### Assessment of Suatory Implications

To address the suatory nature of videogames from a functional analysis of these four games, SMB3, WoW, AA3, and GTA IV, we must consider the similarities they share as well as their differences. Each game belongs to a different videogame genre and has a different play style. Nonetheless, to develop a rhetoric of gameplay grounded in the theoretical perspectives of both traditional rhetoric and *memoria*, these different types of videogames have been evaluated, as suasion, using the same criteria.<sup>120</sup> Throughout this section, I pose the same question for each game: does its gameplay seem rhetorical or coercive? Specifically, in terms of suatory impact, I ask what types of choices are allowed players, how are those choices valued or rewarded, and

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<sup>119</sup> See Chapter One, *Procedural and Propositional Feedback* page #s. Also, see Barsalou, “Language Comprehension” and Gee “Video Games and Embodiment”.

<sup>120</sup> The rhetorical canon of *memoria* is an essential theoretical component because of how players are given choices and prepared to use them ingame through gameplay rules.

what about the design of the game seems to inculcate cultural or ideological norms through gameplay?

To begin, I examine several questions relating to how choices are structured within the videogames that I analyzed. Particularly of interest is how certain choices are encouraged or discouraged by each videogame. Then, I consider examine the question is the structure of the gameplay rhetorical or coercive?

### *The Importance of Ingame Choices*

Not only does a rhetoric of gameplay have to include the place of game designers' speech but also it should include the place of each player's response to game designer's speech. Game designer's speech primarily comes in the form of the rules allowed the players, or *lectio*, in combination with the external memory system built within videogames. Basically, game designers generate a story and projected path through that story based on procedures and learning with ethical underpinnings. Similar to an obstacle course, each player encounters the same rule-based obstacles but can choose which way to navigate around them according to his or her own preference.

When game designers build a way to insure that players themselves are actively generating the meaning within videogames, gameplay resembles a rhetorical communicative exchange, whereas when players are not given specific options to participate in making their own ingame realities, gameplay resembles a more coercive communicative exchange. In order to facilitate this rhetorical exchange within gamespace, game designers have to allow players to personalize their paths through the videogame by using choosing among gameplay and occasionally aesthetic choices. Being able to contribute to the gameplay experience is essentially a way for players to dialogue with designers, but the range of choices that designers allow for

players determines to what degree videogames are rhetorical. The meanings about which players make decisions illuminate the suasive message embedded within gameplay and which values and ideologies designers wish to illuminate.

For example, WoW gameplay concerns a player's ascension in a war-stricken environment. In order to ascend, players must acquire resources and master gameplay for their class's role as DPS, healer, and tank. WoW allows a nearly infinite amount of leeway for players to choose create their own unique experiences which leads to a very personal investment in an individual's gameplay experience. With multiple classes, roles, and abilities ingame, players can create their own stories down to the very aesthetic qualities of their avatars. In the case of the aesthetic qualities of one's avatar, these choices illuminate the relationships between ingame races and factions as well as encourage players to form a kinship to their particular faction. Players are persuaded to become the best fighters of their own faction, class, and role within WoW and compete with allied players of all levels as well as players from the opposing faction for resources and status in order to ascend. Even though a tremendous amount of flexibility is allowed in WoW, trajectory toward a given end state is consistently supported by ingame rules.

Players are prompted to level to the highest level in the game by the acquisition of Experience Points. When players defeat a monster or complete an instance, they gain Experience Points. If players want more ingame skills, they must gain Experience Points. Not many ingame activities do not grant experience points. For instance, players can dual both ally and opposition players or PVP in large battles with other players against players of the opposing faction without gaining Experience Points; rather, PVP battles can grant players access to additional resources and gear. All videogames include some choices while retaining a relatively stable end goal, one to which both the game designer and players adhere. Thus, gameplay experience based on these

choices would seem to be rhetorical rather than coercive. Players can choose to which degree they engage in hierarchical associations with fellow players of either faction but ultimately the game rewards ascension; ascension through the game is best achieved by becoming regarded with high social status among players, exceptional knowledge of one's avatar's role and gameplay style, as well as effective acquisition of resources and gear. Coercive gameplay would exclude opportunities for collaboration, such as Guild creation, free-trade of resources among players, and numerous group gameplay activities that require all three gameplay roles, i.e. DPS, tank, and healer, from which all players may potentially benefit.

#### *Using the External Memory System and Lectio*

What types of choices do players have? The choices that players have within a videogame are dependent upon what game designers write into videogames' informational systems. Essentially, players' choices are an interaction between the external memory system and *lectio*. For instance, players have the ability to jump in SMB3. Jumping is hampered by the location of the game in which the players are moving, such as the board game-like layout of SMB3 or within a level.<sup>121</sup> The type of terrain in SMB3 levels, desert quicksand versus underground maze for instance, and the structures, such as hills versus moving structures in the sky, also influence a player's gameplay choices. To navigate around small moving sky structures without falling off and being forced to repeat the level, players may choose to modify Mario or Luigi by using a Leaf and navigate carefully through the obstacles or speedily navigate the obstacles with a "small"<sup>122</sup> Mario or Luigi by memorizing the spatial placement of obstacles.

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<sup>121</sup> Here I am referring to the two one of two visual modes that SMB3 offers to players. Players first choose a level by moving Mario or Luigi around on a board-game like representation of the level layout of each world, then players can navigate around obstacles within levels, controlling Mario or Luigi by making them run, jump, and otherwise navigate around enemies.

<sup>122</sup> By "small," I refer to a Mario or Luigi not modified by a Mushroom or any other *lectio* tools offered in the game.

As an essentially memory-based activity, how are the external memory system and *lectio* committed to memory? As players experience information from a videogame's external memory system, they contextualize their use of the videogame's *lectio* through the choices a game offers which in turn influences their formation of values and ethics within the game, or *meditatio*. Players must experience the external memory system in combination with *lectio* to experience persuasion through *meditatio*. For instance, in WoW players respond to *lectio* as well as the external memory system over time. In fact, much of *lectio*, such as their avatars' skills, the external memory system, such as terrain, resource value, and the story within the game, are not revealed until a player reaches level 80. So, as players make more and more choices about their gameplay style, their use of resources, and their social relationships through their avatars, they potentially become inculcated. WoW in particular is constructed to have players for several years because the external memory system and *lectio* continually reveal themselves to players.

As players progress through the game, more elements of *lectio* are revealed to them which inform their *meditatio*, however, at any time, players may choose to disengage the "text" of WoW or quit playing. Gameplay itself does not coerce players into continued play but can potentially persuade players into learning certain values while playing. As these elements of *lectio*, such as the Talent Tree, the Auction House, and instances and raids are revealed to players, they recontextualize how to use the elements of the external memory system, such as resources and items. As players play WoW and ascend through levels, they find that certain roles of gameplay, such as healer or tank, certain items, and particular resources are valued more than others; thus, players are persuaded to achieve the roles of gameplay and attain the items that are associated with higher status among players. Playing inculcates players into the hierarchy of WoW. Though the resources and items commonly exist throughout the entirety of WoW, it is

only through consistent feedback and reinterpretation that players form play style ideologies and learn the lingua franca of WoW's community. WoW ultimately values ascension, capitalism, and competition between players for resources. As players ascend, items become less plentiful, more valuable, and more desirable.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, players regard specific roles in greater esteem than others which forms a caste system among allied players.

### *Imposing Elements in Videogames*

Videogames are built on a foundation of learned processes, as is evident in each videogame that I analyzed. Because learning is inevitable in videogame experiences, how are other elements of the games imposed upon players? Remember for a moment that rhetorical communication relies on the audience member's ability to make choices about meaning with the speaker. In a similar manner, in order for a videogame to be more rhetorical than coercive, certain elements within the videogame ought to be amenable to players' influence.

Elements within the external memory system and *lectio* can be somewhat imposing if they do not allow players' input. In other words, *meditatio* associated with games that do not allow players to contribute to their gameplay experience is limited to the content that the videogame includes. For instance, AA3 does not allow players to change their interface, create a

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<sup>123</sup> For instance, in a traditional 25-person instance, players vie for resources that can only be obtained by acquiring a position in a large group capable of completing the strenuous task of defeating bosses in an instance. Each monster, or boss, "drops" or releases an item once players defeat it. The items that are dropped by bosses are random and difficult to come by. Oftentimes, the item that is dropped is useful for all members of a particular class, gameplay role, or all 25 players for its ingame monetary value, aesthetic value, or gameplay value. Players can acquire items and either equip their avatars with the items to make that avatar's gameplay more effective or sell the item to acquire gold ingame.

Having items before other players is oftentimes a motivation for players because it allows them to achieve a particularly envied status among fellow players. Furthermore, equipping one's avatar with gear that comes uniquely from particular instances contributes to status. In addition to status positions, acquiring items to make a player's avatar more effective in gameplay also results in popularity or status. This is essential to gameplay because status and popularity ultimately translate into more invitations to large group activities, which then leads to the ability to acquire more resources. In order to be awarded a group position, competition among players who perform the same gameplay role ensues because of the rarity and necessity of ingame resources and items that are available through group play.

unique avatar, or perform acts differently than they are required. *Meditatio* then is not a result of players' negotiation of ingame choices but players' compliance with gameplay.

Some games, such as WoW and GTA IV, allow players to change interface elements. In WoW, players can change their interface, their avatars, or their realms, and choose different activities or languish at their discretion. WoW players can also explicitly choose their abilities and play style of their avatars. In effect, the lack of gameplay choices results in mere compliance by players to the game's code. In GTA IV, players are given several choices built into missions, and in the PC version players can modify their controls, though not their abilities. Also, SMB3 gives players multiple options within levels concerning the tools that players use and what items players pick up in a level. Players in SMB3 cannot change *lectio* but may use it uniquely to emphasize speed for instance.

Conversely, in AA3 players are given strict parameters to complete missions. Each training scenario begins with a screaming NPC sergeant and is followed by verbal prompts throughout to keep the player on track. For instance, willingness to follow orders is a part of the US Army's value system so gameplay is framed by NPCs who continually prod players to follow specific gameplay orders better known as goals. The game explicitly encourages players to complete very specific and limited tasks while being in direct compliance with Army core values. In PVP scenarios, the Honor Points system is constructed to keep players in line as well. For instance, PVP play awards Honor Points based upon specific acts that reflect the US Army's idea of how teams ought to perform, such as the Selfless Service or "S" attribute points.<sup>124</sup>

Players are not given free rein in movement either; in other words, AA3 does not use an open

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<sup>124</sup> "S" Honor Points are awarded to a player who heals another allied player but is constructed to emphasize the player's consideration of his or her allies above himself or herself. See the "External Memory System" section under AA3 gameplay analysis.

virtual environment or gamespace design. Players see the limited environment of a US Army training facility. Unlike many other videogames, AA3 plays in the same fashion as a training program.

### *Encouraging Ingame Choices through Gameplay*

Throughout each videogame, gameplay is the means by which communication takes place between players and game designers and is evident through the what players can and cannot do ingame. As a rhetorical construct central to videogames, how are acts overtly encouraged? Each videogame in the analysis is a part of a different genre and encourages acts in a variety of ways. For instance, WoW encourages social interactions among players through its integration of communication tools. Also, the ability to form guilds and participate in raids and instances is dependent upon other players. Resource acquisition, because each player can only have two professions, also benefits from group interaction. Throughout WoW, players become more reliant upon social ties, especially for end game activities, such as raids.<sup>125</sup>

Conversely, AA3 strongly encourages strict adherence to rules. Players are not given the ability to exercise unique gameplay within the training missions and are given strict instructions at the beginning of each one. On the one hand, WoW encourages ingame actions in an open-ended fashion. Namely, players, if they so choose, can participate in PVP activities and avoid resource management by buying items from ingame NPCs. On the other hand, AA3 players do not have the choice to modify their gameplay. Adherence to the rules is necessary for ascension through ingame ranks and necessary to continue playing the videogame.

### *Discouraging Ingame Choices through Gameplay*

Gameplay processes can be used to discourage players from executing ingame actions as well. AA3 discourages a lack of team cohesion in PVE and PVP play. Friendly fire is not

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<sup>125</sup> For a discussion of social ties and structures in WoW, see Hulsey, *Hey, Guys*.

tolerated. Whether players shoot friendly NPCs or friendly ingame players, they are whisked away to a virtual cell where they stay until they exit to the ingame main menu. During PVP activities, players are discouraged from participating in non-team based activities as well. Players gain honor points based upon how close they are to their teammates in PVP battles. If players want to ascend in rank ingame, they have to abide by this rule and earn Honor Points. Not all play is rewarded by designers. In other words, players can be penalized by game designers for actions not in accordance with the rhetorical message advocated through gameplay. Such as within AA3, players lose Honor Points for friendly fire and are unable to complete their training scenario.

A variety of videogames either restrict players from receiving particular ingame points or restrict players from completing certain actions as a means to discourage gameplay decisions. GTA IV uses unique methods. For example, GTA IV discourages players not by eliminating players' ability to complete certain actions but by making certain actions result in inconvenient consequences that players can use *lectio* to surmount. Players who maim ingame NPCs are reprimanded by police ingame which can potentially lead to the arrest of Niko if players do not defeat or evade ingame police. The difference between AA3 and GTA IV is that GTA IV discourages actions by presenting a surmountable problem to players, whereas AA3 denies points and discontinues players progress, forcing players to repeat material. In GTA IV, players can use the vehicles to escape police, so the penalties for maiming NPCs are easily met by players. Essentially, players can maim NPCs in GTA IV if they want to but the act is considered illegal by the game.

#### *“Missing” Elements in Videogames*

Gameplay as a rhetorical construct is saturated with the initial choices on the part of game designers. Scholars ought to begin to ask how elements such as the ability to modify one's avatar

are explicitly left out of the videogames. Which types of abilities are left out is also indicative of gameplay's rhetorical quality. Specifically, I find the incorporation of players' subject position within the game as a highly important factor in how players formulate *meditatio*. For instance, both SMB3 and AA did not provide the means for players to customize their avatars. However, SMB3 contextualized this by characterizing Mario and Luigi as avatars who existed before players entered the scenario. Mario and Luigi were suddenly caught in the position to save Princess Peach from Bowser and his minions. Essentially, each character has a personality and back story that exist for every player. In the late 1980s, character customization was not popular among videogames so this is not a surprising characteristic. In AA, players were unable to customize an avatar so players subsumed the role of soldiers themselves. Essentially, AA players stepped into the virtual vehicle of the avatar as themselves, whereas SMB3 provided a role-play experience. Being able to create a unique visual representation of one's self rather than subsuming a pre-delineated role allows players to take a self-reflexive stance toward gameplay. The actions that players execute through play are essentially their own, rather than those of their avatar when this action is not present. Without this self-made representation or context provided by a back story, players essentially act as themselves rather than from a position of self-reflexivity. In my opinion, AA3 added the ability to choose a face and a name for avatars because it was necessary to create distant between players and their gameplay actions for this reason.

Essentially, gameplay is perspective-taking, and value-laden. What actions players can do is just as important as the position from which players complete those acts. In designing the context for game avatars, designers create a rationale for players own actions and a perspective from which players make ingame decisions. For instance, in GTA IV, players control Niko

Bellic who is a foreigner attempting to build monetary resources. The character, during cut-scenes, habitually remarks upon the ways in which American Values appear hypocritical and American standards unattainable by comparing Liberty City to what he tried to escape by leaving his home country. This perspective as well as the advertisements and public radio stations ingame, provide a satirized view of American Values which frames ingame decisions, such as participating in organized crime or not, within the context of the game. In AA3, the context is much less open to interpretation. Players themselves are the recruits who must learn how to follow the tenets of the US Army creed as established through gameplay. Therefore, what is designed is just as important as what is not designed. In order to create certain worldviews, game designers may leave certain elements, like a position for self-reflexivity, out of videogames.

### *Situating Play and Player*

Gameplay is inherently a rhetorical activity, in that players respond to and make choices within the predetermined boundaries of game designers. Rather than assuming that the inculcation process functions in the same fashion as other symbolic activities, such as reading, I ask the question, what are players doing within these games? Players do press buttons and invest hundreds of hours into gameplay. Conceptually speaking, playing videogames is more than simply pressing buttons. Essentially, players have to use elements effectively in the observational looping effect. Players must know what those buttons do, the consequences of their actions, what actions are penalized, where their actions will lead to, and how to maximize their avatar's value and their gameplay abilities. Players invest an incredible amount of time into making their avatars' ranks or scores higher. The vast majority of videogames are structured in a manner of win versus lose. Primarily, lower level, less abilities, less accuracy, and less assets leads to loss, whereas higher levels, more abilities, greater accuracy, and more assets leads to winning. The

goals that players are situated to attain, such as having well-decorated “Jackets” in AA3, contextualize the underlying structure of ascension or win versus loss.

### *Feedback and Observational Looping*

The observational looping effect, where players simultaneously observe, exert influence, and act, is in constant motion during gameplay. What players do is dependent upon how they conceptualize the external memory system, *lectio*, and *meditatio* of gameplay. Though the aesthetic qualities of the external memory system can be vexing because of representational violence and gore, players must learn to surpass this and use it to inform gameplay. In other words, the aesthetic qualities are merely used to garnish gameplay; thus gameplay is the focal point of videogames. Initially players seem to find the physical element of gameplay restrictive and seek transparency of *lectio*. Once how to use controls is fully domesticated, players seem to seek perfection and full understanding of rule systems and also exchange knowledge of these systems with other players. Later, players may begin to optimize the observational looping that they experience by changing the physical *lectio* and reassigning buttons in the interface.

Changing the appearance of the external memory system or creating games within the gameplay structure of videogames help players to form new associations with gameplay systems. In other words, most videogames give players the ability to uniquely respond to gameplay through multiple means which creates a more dialogic relationship between game designers and players.

To one extent or another, I find this elements apparent within each videogame that I analyzed. From the way that videogames are structured, I can draw several conclusions about agency, choices, and influence. As I discussed initially, each game is structured a bit differently. In SMB3, players have predetermined avatars, predetermined rules systems, unchangeable controls, a slightly modifiable projection though not including formal elements, and an array of

helpful tools. Whereas the height of changeability comes within WoW, where players can change their avatars, their professions, their Talent Trees, modify their economic strategies, and use ingame communication tools to create a different experience.

In the majority of videogames, including these four, players engage a rule system that becomes increasingly varied and difficult as well as promotes ascension by players. Learning gameplay processes and techniques or *lectio* is paramount to ascension. As players progress through videogames, their choices and assessments are based more on how they inculcate videogame controls and processes or *meditatio*. Whether within a fundamentally closed-ended system, i.e. AA3, or open-ended system, i.e. WoW, players are encouraged to progress in various ways. In each of the four games that I analyzed, players function within a point system. As players complete more levels or quests, they are awarded more points or ingame monetary compensation. The points or ingame monetary compensation that players receive are more than a mark of ascension through gameplay, but they also indicate mastery. Mastery of gameplay material may tangentially support sustained play, but more directly shows that players have understood game designers' perspectives and successfully become inculcated with the important material in gameplay. For instance, if a player completes a training scenario in AA3 within the least amount of time and with perfect aiming accuracy, that player has demonstrated that he or she not only mastered *lectio* by using weapons effectively but also performed with instinct and speed that is favored by AA3. Yet another example can be found in WoW. WoW is structured so that other players also reinforce players' mastery of gameplay. Players in WoW who have accrued more resources and ingame coinage are lauded as "leet" or elite players and gain respect from other players on their server. It follows that "leet" players have also mastered gameplay in

the sense that they manipulated the monetary and resource system of the videogame to their benefit.

### *Gameplay as Rhetorical or Coercive CMC*

Communication in videogames occurs between players and the game designers. Communication takes place in a virtual context, with players continually shaping meaning by playing. In this context, communication can be more rhetorical or coercive. Let us revisit the definition of rhetoric discussed in chapter 1. Rhetoric is an intersubjective human to human exchange regarded the negotiation of symbols between a rhetor and audience members. In a rhetorical exchange, both the audience members and the rhetor must be mutually and dialogically engaged in the negotiation of meaning. In the same fashion, players must be give the means by game designers to influence ingame meaning in order for a videogame to be considered rhetoric. Based on the amount and types of gameplay choices players are given ingame, I would place the videogames that I analyzed on a continuum from more rhetorical gameplay to more coercive gameplay: WoW, GTA IV, SMB3, and then AA3. I derive this continuum from the amount of gameplay choices players are given ingame.

First, WoW is fundamentally open-ended. Though static elements in the videogame, such as the existence of XP and Talent Points, cannot be changed by players, game designers are constantly issuing Patches which update and amend abilities and points around how players experience gameplay. Game designers in this case pointedly respond to players' input and regard players' choices as highly important. WoW gives players a lot of options. Players come in contact with thousands of other real players in a day, so, to distinguish themselves, players can make unique aesthetic choices which allow them to display their successes uniquely with gear. Combat and interface choices are also possible. Communication is foundational to gameplay in

WoW. As players progress, the culture and lingua franca in WoW become more apparent. Again, WoW is essentially a community of people who communicate through gameplay, so in order to be successful, players must become familiar with the style and format of communication preferred by the members of their server.<sup>126</sup> The game never “ends” though. Once players reach the final level, they can make amendments to their gear, avatar combat style, and other elements which does not mean that players start over. Players make continual choices in WoW in order to respond to the variety of play contexts, such as with PVP gameplay versus PVE, or the release of new gear or items. Choice throughout the videogame is of utmost importance for players to maintain mastery of gameplay.

The least rhetorical of each videogame was AA3. In AA3, players do not drive ingame actions. Training scenarios and missions are delineated to each player in the same fashion and players must complete them in that fashion under the strict rules that are built into the game. Previously, AA did not allow players to have the most customizable portion of AA3, the choice of variously hued avatar faces. When compared to SMB3, AA3 has surprisingly fewer avenues for players’ to form their own realities based upon gameplay rules. In SMB3, players are given several choices throughout each level of items, coinage, and several ways to engage enemies. Though enemies are present, SMB3 players are not required to eliminate them all. Likewise, though resources, in the form of items and coinage are present, players are not required to obtain or use them all. Though each level is timed, players can use as and much or as little of that allotted time. Progression through SMB3’s rule system is dependent upon how players choose to use items ingame. For instance, in my analysis, I found that some players choose to make

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<sup>126</sup> In WoW, players are split between a variety of servers. Each server seems to use communication tools differently. For instance, some servers may use Trade Chat to discuss Guild recruitment details while others may regard that as disrespectful to fellow players. In order to “fit in” and function within groups properly, players must learn what their fellow players prefer.

ascension a test of timing, while others choose to make it a test of endurance by not using ingame items to enhance gameplay.

Ultimately, communication between players and the designers of videogames can be both rhetorical and coercive. Though videogames are considered apart of an interactive medium, interactivity does not lead to rhetorical, dialogic communication. AA3 is still considered interactive. Players engage in an observational loop while they play. However, the avenues of play are severely limited. On the other hand, SMB3 is also interactive and is a part of an older brand of videogames that did not value customization. However, it still includes enough gameplay choices for each player to have a unique ingame experience.

Game designers set the observational loop into play for players, deciding initially what information and which actions are included in gameplay. Therefore, there is an ethical responsibility that game designers have toward players. In AA3, players are given the opportunity to point, shoot, kill repeatedly without contextualizing those actions beyond “Army core values.” However, in GTA IV, which is more violent and includes representations of blood and gore, players are provided with a multi-faceted context. Not only are players given the backdrop of Bellic’s immigrant status, but they are given satirical elements that frame a continuously enforced “good” and “bad” system. When players shoot an NPC ingame, they are not rewarded but punished. Whereas, shooting in AA3 is wrought with rewards, and players are not given space to negotiate the underlying meaning of AA3 actions.

Players are ultimately responsible for how they choose to play videogames. In GTA IV, game designers built repercussions for certain actions, i.e. killing NPC civilians, into the game. In WoW, even the open-ended character of the game has its limits. Players cannot use the communication tools within a videogame to harass players and are able to petition GMs or game

masters for assistance with those types of matters. Players who break ingame rules or use them with ill intent can be banned from WoW. Though the ethical contexts are created by those who design videogames, the ethical burden partially lies with individual players.

### Determining Gameplay as Dialogic or Monologic

From the previous analysis, I have constructed a preliminary rubric that lists the of criteria and characteristics that may be used to determine suasory value in videogames.<sup>127</sup> What I highlight in this rubric is the opposing communicative functions that elements within videogames can serve. The following table includes eight criteria that emerged from the analysis in Chapter 3: 1) Backstory/Context, 2) Avatar/Players' Gameplay Perspective, 3) Gamesapce/Virtual Environment, 4) Controls (*Lectio*), 5) Rewards/Points, 6) Interface Design/Layout, 7) Means/Inculcation (*Meditatio*), and 8) End State/Goal. Each criteria is described by its suasory impact as either dialogic or monologic on a scale from one to four, where one is most dialogic and four is most monologic. Dialogic communication is associated with rhetorical suasion, whereas monologic communication is associated with coercion or propaganda. As I discuss each criteria, I list the rating number in parentheses followed by a brief rationale for the assigned rating.

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<sup>127</sup> □ The purpose of the rubric in this study is to provide a preliminary tool useful for the rhetorical analysis of videogames as “texts” using gameplay as the central rhetorical construct. The structure and intent of the rubric in this study were inspired by Table 2.2 “Propaganda in a ‘Spectrum of Influence’,” page 65 of Beth S. Bennett and Sean Patrick O’Rourke, “A Prolegomenon to the Future Study of Rhetoric and Propaganda: Critical Foundations.” *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: News and Classic Essays*. Eds. Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 51-72.

*Back Story/Context*

I find this to be a highly important element in videogames, as it forms the rationale for the gameplay acts of the central role. The back story/context within a videogame is created through cut scenes, visual representations/art, music, and verbal communication in videogames. A videogame with a rhetorical focus emphasizes contingencies within the context and back story to which players respond by using gameplay. The issues can be moral or ethical, but, essentially, rhetorical videogames pose a question which players in turn answer through gameplay. A dialogic back story/context allows for players' interpretation of content, therefore content is polysemic. In other words, a dialogic context may include fictionalized situations, elements of fantasy, or parodied situations.

**Table 4.1** Dialogic/Monologic Criteria Rubric

Dialogic/Monologic Criteria Rubric		
<b>Dialogic</b>	Criteria Scale (1-4)	<b>Monologic</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Describes purpose for ingame actions performed by the central role</li> <li>✘ Includes moral or ethical contingencies which players must negotiate using gameplay</li> <li>✘ Based on fiction, fantasy, or parodied situations.</li> </ul>	<b>Back Story/Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Provides a more instructional or pedantic stance</li> <li>✘ Does not include a rationale or motivation for the central role in the game.</li> <li>✘ May use IRL situations rather than fantasy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Allows player to create distance between himself or herself and the actions of the central role.</li> <li>✘ Central role/avatar has its own personality characteristics or aesthetic characteristics</li> <li>✘ Promotes self-reflexivity</li> <li>✘ May include a variety of gameplay perspectives.</li> </ul>	<b>Avatar/Players' Gameplay Perspective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Players subsume the central role as themselves.</li> <li>✘ Avatars/players' perspectives are sterile,</li> <li>✘ Role is described but the motivation is limited.</li> <li>✘ Questioning and self-reflexivity are discouraged in favor of adherence to the rule system</li> <li>✘ Single gameplay perspective.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Open-world design</li> <li>✘ Players can freely explore and discover “new” or “secret” areas</li> <li>✘ Interaction with gamespace encouraged</li> <li>✘ May include the ability to visually modify or create distinctive characteristics for one’s avatar or elements of gamespace.</li> </ul>	<b>Gamespace/Virtual Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Closed-world design. Players are unable to explore gamespace and are limited to particular areas.</li> <li>✘ Modification and interaction with virtual environment is limited</li> <li>✘ Very limited visual customization is offered for an avatar or gamespace.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Includes opportunities for players to problem-solve and optimize their playstyle.</li> <li>✘ Playstyle modifications allowed and the use items often result in unique gameplay.</li> <li>✘ Mastery of gameplay can be achieved through a variety of means.</li> </ul>	<b>Controls (Lectio)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Controls are limited to a predesigned arrangement.</li> <li>✘ Players are unable to modify gameplay.</li> <li>✘ Abilities relatively static throughout videogame progression.</li> <li>✘ Mastery of gameplay is narrowly focused on the specialization of very few actions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Players are rewarded for exploration and innovation.</li> <li>✘ Players can decide from among several activities to obtain points or rewards.</li> </ul>	<b>Rewards/Points/Penalties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Players are rewarded for adherence to the rules.</li> <li>✘ Penalties are strict.</li> <li>✘ Points given are not contingent upon playstyle</li> <li>✘ Rewarded activities somewhat repetitive.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Contributes to gameplay</li> <li>✘ Makes evaluative criteria transparent</li> <li>✘ Includes the ability to assign particular abilities or tools gained ingame to specific buttons.</li> </ul>	<b>Interface Design/Layout</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Interface is static.</li> <li>✘ Includes information unrelated to gameplay</li> <li>✘ Abilities and tools are assigned to predetermined locations.</li> <li>✘ Players are not given the opportunity to change tools, abilities, or their tactilely accessed locations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Multiple decisions</li> <li>✘ Decisions can change the eventual end state</li> <li>✘ Progression uncovers richer contexts for ingame actions</li> <li>✘ Continually encourage players to reconceptualize how they play.</li> </ul>	<b>Means/Inculcation (Meditatio)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Decisions limited.</li> <li>✘ The way that players progress is determined beforehand making</li> <li>✘ Players’ involvement rote</li> <li>✘ Understanding of the goal remains static and unquestioned.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Contingent upon player choices</li> <li>✘ Multiple ends/polysemic end</li> <li>✘ Flexible means.</li> </ul>	<b>End State/Goal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Clearly defined at the outset, generally as completion.</li> <li>✘ Gameplay choices, if they are present, do not affect the game’s outcome.</li> <li>One end</li> </ul>

Monologic back story or context does not appear to invite unique interpretation from players of the content or gameplay. A back story/context that exemplifies monologic communication emphasizes the stability of the central role. Namely, that the actions of the

central role are non-negotiable or open to player interpretation through gameplay. Players merely enact the responsibilities of a static central role without questioning or attempting to change the central role. The back story/context reads more as a instruction manual from which players learn gameplay controls and abilities.

GTA IV (1), WoW (1), and SMB3 (2) fall within the dialogic category. GTA IV satirizes American values and offers ample participation by players as to how a foreigner may function within the context of American culture. WoW invites players to perform as warriors to defend either side of opposing factions within Azeroth, where each faction fights for particular ingame resources. As WoW players engage in the creation of their avatars, they become co-producers of inhabitants of the Azeroth. In SMB3, players must discover their own gameplay route to saving a damsel, Princess Peach, from an evil villain, Bowser, and his various minions but players' actions do not influence that back story/context. AA3 (4), however, falls within the monologic category. Players are invited only to perform as US Army recruits then Soldiers. Players do not individually contribute to the context, but merely inhabit the sterilized role of US Army Recruit/Soldier without interpretation.

#### *Avatar/Players' Gameplay Perspective*

The central role is generally the subject position from which players make decisions and problem-solve. Also known the avatar, the central role can be most generally considered the perspective from which players enact gameplay decisions. Though within particular videogame genres, most notably real-time strategy or RTS videogames, rarely include a "body" from which players make gameplay decisions but a generalized perspective. However, every videogame has a position that players are expected to literally, play. Thus, the avatar or more generally, players' gameplay perspective is the position from which players perform gameplay actions that can also

be considered the central role in videogames. Dialogically constructed avatar/gameplay perspective allows players to choose how to perform the actions associated with their role through self-reflexive engagement. Playing an avatar or functioning with a role is a self-reflexive engagement during which players are given the choice to decide which actions are most associated with their role. Generally, players can define their role through a variety of actions and design the visual representation of their ingame role when applicable.

I see the distinction between dialogic and monologic to lie within constructions of the central role. Monologic central roles limit players' responsibilities as decision-makers as well as players' ability to be self-reflexive. Players are limited to a role which offers no contingencies. The responsibilities of the role are predetermined and enforced by gameplay. Players perspective emphasizes following the rules rather than innovative problem-solving through gameplay. A monologic gameplay perspective serves as a receptacle with which players passively engage, offering little to no customization or means for decisive gameplay performance.

WoW (1) offers a highly self-reflexive engagement between players and their avatars. Players must construct the aesthetic qualities of their avatars as well as the specific class and role, which encourages players to constantly reconsider their role as players of their avatars. GTA IV (1) also encourages self-reflexive involvement between players and Niko Bellic. Not only can players create their very own Niko through dress, vehicle choice, and weapon choice, players are confronted with the ethics of law and order. In GTA IV, players must negotiate their role as an inhabitant of Liberty City as either "good" or "bad."

SMB3 (2) includes less options for customization but multiple means for players to decide their own method of playing as Mario or Luigi over a fictionalized context. Players engage the role of plumbers Mario or Luigi, pseudo-warriors in a land where kings' thrones were

compromised by Bowser's regime. Still, players can only choose between playing Mario or Luigi, but also decide their tools, movement, and styles of play actively. AA3 (4) presents players with fewer customization options and gameplay options than SMB3. Players can choose a predetermined face but the role is static. Moral and ethical limitations are built into the role so that players are unable to decide which type of US Army Recruit or Soldier they play.

### *Gamespace/Virtual Environment*

From my perspective, each videogame is enacted within a place though not in the conventional sense. Gamespace is the visually or, in the case of MUDs or Multi-User Dungeons, virtually defined spatial arena within which players enact gameplay decisions through the central role. At its core the gamespace or virtual environment is a spatially defined area where gameplay activities take place. A dialogic gamespace or virtual environment encourages the exploration and unveiling of "secrets" by players. Dialogic gamespaces are primarily open-world design where players are encouraged to explore. Dialogic gamespace designs offer "secrets" ingame which reward players through points or items for exploring outside of the necessary trajectory of the videogame.

Whereas I find that closed-world designs emphasize the trajectory of the game. The gamespace area is small and only includes gameplay obstacles that are related to the advancement of the game. "Secret areas" and unique exploration are discouraged in place of a players' adherence to the rules of the game world. In this type of environment, every player who plays a particular videogame will have acted within the same static environment. In essence, gamespace is impersonal. Interaction between a players' central role and the environment, i.e. changes to the environment, are not permitted.

I rate the videogames that I analyzed thusly: WoW (1), GTA IV (1), SMB3 (2), and AA3 (4). WoW and GTA IV encourage players to roam freely. WoW, which has a fully-fledged virtual world, has numerous geographic regions that are associated with particular resources that benefit players. WoW also provides unique aesthetic engagement in that players can experience rain forests, deserts, and snowy mountains at their leisure. GTA IV similarly encourages exploration. Players can use vehicles to travel along highways and alleyways, go into shops or a pool hall. These particular activities do not influence a player's progression directly. Each GTA IV player depending on how they choose to explore Liberty City, can form unique relationships with the various locations.

SMB3 is more spatially limited in that each level has a smaller general area from which players cannot leave until they complete the level. The level layouts of each world are static as well. However, SMB3 also has numerous "secret" areas throughout its worlds that give players incentives to explore. Though levels are timed, players are penalized for where they go within that timed period. SMB3 overall encourages players to use their control of Mario or Luigi or specific items to explore level layouts as well as the spaces within levels. AA3, however, uses timed and un-timed scenarios in sterilely-designed spatial areas. The photorealistic design is merely aesthetic garnishment that is used to transport players to Basic Training, for instance. The training scenarios copy those used in the US Army in order to transport players into IRL training. Exploration is strictly discouraged through the voice acting of NPC sergeants and gamespace is focused upon the development gameplay techniques, such as distinguishing between a "terrorist" and "non-terrorist" force at a second's notice.

### *Controls (Lectio)*

I find that the controls of each game were used to provide more or less interpretation from players. It appears that *lectio* is used to exemplify the values and ethics of the central role, controlled by players. Thus, a restriction of actions appears monologic, whereas *lectio* which includes multiple options for players to exercise their values through the central role is dialogic. *Lectio* encompasses what players can do and the types of playstyles that are allowed within the game. Specifically, a dialogic use of gameplay *lectio* may allow players to adjust their playstyle and make particular choices. Mastery of dialogic *lectio* was continuous throughout videogames, so that players are continually introduced to new actions and abilities from which to choose. What I consider dialogic *lectio* provides flexibility as well, so that players have choices as to what actions to do versus not to do. Dialogic *lectio* may also include the option for players to assign certain abilities to buttons at their discretion. Ultimately, I see a dialogic *lectio* to include multiple tools that involve players in deciding their own actions.

Monologic *lectio* is based around the perfection of a limited number of acts or a single act that cannot be reconfigured by players. *Lectio* may be most notably used to emphasize certain values, and have players repeatedly enact these values procedurally. In any case, *lectio* may be limited to few actions, and the actions may not be used by players to drastically change gameplay experience. Monologic *lectio* may appear as having relatively no innovations throughout a videogame. Players may be unable to choose which actions to focus.

WoW (1) places the responsibility for class specializations upon the player. Players have the choice of choosing among multiple classes, which lead to three generalized roles. Players can specialize the combat abilities and resource management abilities of their avatar. GTA IV (1) gives players multiple choices in how they play Niko Bellic. Players need not focus on driving,

walking, or shooting NPCs, but can act at their own discretion. Stealing a vehicle in GTA IV depends upon how a player chooses to act, but players are not forced into this role. Though players are not given drastically new abilities, the ingame vehicles provide players with a chance to exercise *lectio* uniquely. Also, the choices that players are able to make reflect a player's choice, not forced upon the player. Multiple tools, including a cell phone from which players select access their interpersonal relationship, exist as a part of *lectio*. SMB3 (2) gives players numerous tools and ample flexibilities with which to use those tools. Players can use the Leaf to fly, break blocks, or eliminate or incapacitate enemies. AA3 is more focused on bodily movement of a player's avatar and the use of firearms, incendiaries, and occasionally, first aid supplies. In AA3 is used to frame a value in team work and the US Army Creed. Insofar as choice is concerned, players may choose to receive first aid training or not; however, first aid training directly influences players' advancement through Honor Points. Whereas in SMB3, for instance, whether players choose to do particular acts does not influence whether a player can advance through the game.

### *Rewards/Points/Penalties*

In nearly all videogames, players are given rewards, points, or incentives that not only inform players of the actions that are preferred by those who designed the game but contribute to players' advancement through a game. For instance, after a player receives X amount of points, they advance to a more advanced level. Points, rewards, and penalties were used essentially by game designers to guide players' performance, in a strict or loose way. In the four videogames that I analyze, I found that rewards and points were used in ways that seemed to limit players' actions as well as ways that encouraged innovation. Ultimately, rewards and points may be used to signal advancement. Dialogically, rewards and points may be used to encourage players to

explore, find new items or areas, experience particular moral/ethical contentions, or use *lectio* creatively. Penalties may be used dialogically to signal which acts are reprehensible to game designers.

Rewards and points may be used monologically to limit players' responses to gameplay. In this respect, the arrays of actions that players can perform to be rewarded with points are limited. Furthermore, the actions that result in points and rewards may be structured around specific values or ethics. In other words, rewards, points, and penalties may be used to police players' uses of *lectio* and limit *meditatio*.

Out of each of the four games that I analyzed, WoW (1) and GTA IV (1) used points, rewards, and penalties most dialogically because the receipt of points is generally dependent upon individual players' decisions. Barring the genre distinctions, WoW and GTA IV used points, rewards, and penalties in relatively the same fashion: to signal monetary acquisition and progression. WoW rewarded players for various types of resource acquisition, and penalized players for being harmful to other players or tampering with the game itself. As players explore and complete instances, they receive numerous item rewards. Therefore, social activities, such as instances, are highly rewarded whereas being disrespectful or crude to players through the chat systems is penalized, if the players are reported. Several of WoW's rewards are given to players through the discretion of other players as well. For instance, positions in raids or groups, or the assistance in gameplay.

GTA IV (1) uses rewards and penalties to encourage players to be innovative players and confront ethical choices in gameplay. Players are penalized for killing NPCs by the arrival of ingame police. However, players have the chance to surmount this penalty by escaping, which often entails specific uses of vehicles or hiding. Though the message that killing NPCs is "bad"

is communicated to players, players can still obtain monetary resources from the dead NPCs and avoid being arrested by ingame police through innovative *lectio*.

In SMB3 (2), players receive rewards in the form of points for performing multiple acts that range from breaking blocks to acquiring ingame tools, such as Mushrooms or 1UPs. Players are penalized if they take too long to complete a level, run out of lives or chances to complete levels, or miss ingame obstacles. Players do not lose points or items, but their character dies, or is ejected from a level, and forced to complete previously completed obstacles at “Game Over.” In other words, SMB3 values completion, avoidance of obstacles, thoroughness, and general collection of 1UPs and Coins that eventually accumulate and result in extra lives or chances.

AA3 (4) uses points specifically to communicate particular values from game designers. Particular values include adherence to the US Army Core Values, following orders, lack of innovation, and commitment to PVP team members. The acronym that is used to represent the array of Honor Points is “LDRSHIP.” Failure to hit appropriate enemies, i.e. terrorists, in a training scenario results in failure. Training scenarios are more than opportunities for target practice but a way to encourage players to see “terrorists” as bad at a moment’s notice. Other actions, such as exploration in training scenarios, also results in informal discipline through yelling NPC sergeants. Friendly fire is severely punished to teach players that kinship to their group is of the greatest value. Even within PVP situations, players can only receive Honor Points by doing particular acts, such as completing a mission with severely low health or remaining close to team members. In other words, AA3 strictly regulates the behaviors and activities of its players to reflect US Army Core values, teamwork, following orders, and an unwillingness to question orders.

### *Interface Design/Layout*

One part of videogames that is highly important to gameplay is the interface design and layout through which players access information necessary to gameplay. The interface and how it is designed forms the skeleton of the external memory system and is used to organize ingame information for players. What players see and are able to access while playing a videogame is determined by game designers and makes up a player's field of vision and thus contributes to how players play. Also, the interface designs and layouts of videogames can be used to determine which type of abilities game designers want players to cultivate ingame or what types of information game designers believe is pertinent to gameplay.

The distinction that I make between dialogic and monologic interface and design layouts is based on whether players can choose which abilities to make accessible, whether information accessed in the interface is useful to gameplay, and how interface information is used to frame gameplay. I consider a dialogic interface and design layout one in which players can individually arrange the information that they wish to make accessible, whether it involves gameplay statistics or the placement of a map ingame. Dialogic interface design helps players navigate gamespace and use gameplay, acting as a toolbox from which players get what they need to succeed ingame. Basically, an interface that is designed for dialogic communication between game designers and players may seek to enforce transparency of ingame evaluation criteria, tools, and spatial layout of gamespace.

On the other hand, monologic interface design and layout may not allow players to choose where items are arranged and which abilities are made tactilely and visually accessible. Most importantly, monologic interface and design layout may also be used to privilege particular information unrelated to gameplay yet important to inculcation. An interface may also seem

cluttered or unrelated gameplay, possibly used to distract players from useful elements in the game. Namely, a monologic interface design may thwart players' attention. Therefore, monologic interface designs may not contribute to the ease with which players perform gameplay activities, and thus, remain relatively useless to players.

WoW (1) is by the far the most dialogically constructed in terms of its interface. Not only does WoW include several options to customize and arrange visual information, but allows other players to create their own interface designs. WoW is unique in that players with experience in programming can create their own interfaces to reflect their ingame roles as DPS, tanks, or healers. Essentially, players can create an interface which specifically charts one's DPS. Also, players can create interface tools which chart WoW's ingame economy via the Auction House and the placement of resources in Azeroth. Most importantly, the information represented in WoW's interface relates solely to gameplay practices and modifications yet emphasizes a player's choice. Ultimately, the players themselves can choose whether they need the interface tools provided in WoW.

I rate SMB3 (1) as highly dialogic as well. The information provided within the interface solely relates to gameplay activities and prove to pertinent to ingame success. The world maps in SMB3 are used efficiently to track players' progress by indicating completed and uncompleted levels. The map layout allows players to choose their paths through particular worlds where choices are given of which levels to complete. SMB3 includes one multi-purpose toolbar that helps players track their progress, items, Power, or "P" level, in-level time, and monetary acquisition located at the bottom of a player's screen. Though SMB3 does not include the wide range of actions that WoW or GTA IV have, the game designers used the interface design to adequately reflect necessary information for players to assist their ingame decisions. Ultimately,

the succinct design of SMB3's interface makes playing SMB3 very straight-forward; no information is hidden from players.

GTA IV (2) and AA3 (3) similarly include the means for evaluating one's progress as a players through statistics. GTA IV also includes a full-fledged open-world map and a GPS, or global positioning system that players can use to navigate the intricate design of Liberty City. Additionally, GTA IV offers numerous ways to track how players have performed, including the number of vehicles that a player steals, the number of NPCs a player kills, and the percentage of game content completed by a player. The map in GTA IV can be used to determine in which zones players have been.

AA3 allows players to track their progress via their Jackets and includes an itemization of their Honor Point accumulation by the acronym LDRSHIP. Many of the PVP tools are highly useful as well in that they help players locate comrades near to them. However, AA3 also includes the "Go Army" tab directly on its main interface page that includes noticeably positive-biased representations of US Army Careers and US Army Life through the Real Heroes section. The "Go Army" tab is unrelated to any form of assistance that may help players play AA3. To the contrary, the "Go Army" tab's purpose appears to be to encourage a realistic between AA3 and US Army life. The "Go Army" tab may be considered an inculcation device that creates the necessary positive connection between being a US Army soldier IRL and playing the role of a US Army soldier ingame.

#### *Means/Inculcation (Meditatio)*

When players enter the rule-based system of videogames, they cease to be the sole controllers of their fates. Videogames are somewhat constrictive environments because they limit far more actions than they privilege. However, videogames can use the multiple characteristics

within the external memory system and *lectio* to construct a gameplay environment in which players are given the means to decide how their ingame experience progresses. While some videogames emphasize the contingencies in the values and ethics that their gameplay supports, others do not create the options for contingencies. Based upon the use of ingame tools to either allow or deny players' decision-making ingame, I establish a distinction between dialogic and monologic *meditatio*. The distinction is partly based on whether the overall structure of the game encourages contingency and partly on the amount of influence players are given in determining the progress of a videogame.

Dialogic means toward inculcation may allow the player to choose his or her path through the game. Players may be able to use *lectio* uniquely and innovatively. Namely, several paths and uses of *lectio* exist which are not defined within the game. The context surrounding *lectio* may be used to raise questions or present a changing goal to which players must respond using *lectio*. By encouraging multiple uses of ingame *lectio*, players are essentially encouraged to explore myriad ways of mastering gameplay. Dialogic *meditatio* may include the subtle introduction of new context information and gameplay elements, so that players must continually engage and respond to gameplay and adjust their playstyle accordingly. Namely, dialogic *meditatio* is subjectively based on how players use ingame tools.

Conversely, monologic gameplay is focused outwardly to the game's rules, and allows for fewer chances for players' input. Monologic means are limited. A static goal exist at the outset of gameplay to which players respond by using limited *lectio*. New elements that are introduced into the game are imposed upon players, rather than offered to players as a means to adjust their gameplay. *Lectio* in monologic gameplay structures would appear rote, in that very few actions are needed to master gameplay.

WoW (1) and GTA IV (1) are highly dialogic in that they seem to encourage players to respond in various ways to gameplay. WoW in particular is a continuous videogame, in that new content is released regularly. Players in WoW can choose which elements they make their priorities, i.e. leveling or resource management. Though WoW's gameplay supports an emphasis on resource management, players can become successful in other ways. PVP and a focus on leveling through PVE play are additional ways in which players can conceive of gameplay. The social elements in WoW lend yet another dimension to gameplay. Players can choose to engage the social world of Azeroth, or focus on gameplay aspects. In any respect, whether players regard reaching level 80 as the most important aspect of play or becoming successful in PVP situations, players have various means to reach these goals. The values that emerge from WoW's gameplay are hierarchy, resource acquisition, and the role caste system. Ultimately, players are responsible for negotiating these values.

GTA IV provides players with a trajectory which they can choose to control themselves. At any point in time throughout the game, players can choose to focus on several ingame activities then resume the trajectory of the game at any point. GTA IV is highly critical of how foreigners are treated in the US and whether the American Dream, of excess and prejudice, is really a guise for ignorance and greed. Players must negotiate how they perform as foreigners within the highly satirical context.

SMB3 (2) gives players several choices in how to complete the game. New gameplay tools, landscapes, and enemies are introduced at nearly every turn, so players must constantly remain alert. The trajectory of SMB3 can also be changed through the use of the Whistle, which allows players to travel forward through levels. However, in the end, SMB3 is centered around Mario and Luigi's need to rescue Princess Peach. Players, though the means are highly flexible,

do not explicitly change the outcome of SMB3. However, players can choose how they use and acquire items and whether they privilege timing or thoroughness which allows for unique gameplay experiences. SMB3 players are warriors ingame. SMB3 emphasizes innovation in gameplay, forcing players to consider the most effective way to make it World 8 and save Princess Peach. In this respect, both GTA IV and SMB3 allow for a more subjective use of ingame tools.

AA3 (4) is highly monologic. The choices that players are given are few. Players may choose a male face to represent their avatars and at which point to receive ingame training. However, the decisions that players can make ingame to do result in unique gameplay. Essentially, every player who plays AA3 is treated to the same procedural structure. Playing AA3 is more akin to following orders than engaging in communication with its game designers. AA3 players have virtually enlisted in the US Army. Their only goals are to graduate from Basic Training and work as a US Army Soldier in PVP battles. The content of AA3 is used not to encourage questions from players, but to provide an answer the question of “How do I become a US Army Soldier?” The issues of taking lives, being transported overseas away from family and friends, as well as the risks that US Army Soldering places upon one’s life are purposefully made imperceptible through gameplay in favor of a positive yet sterile instructional means of demonstrating soldiering.

#### *End State/Goal*

Goals are what make videogames games. However, some videogames allow the player to determine a game’s end state. The end state of a videogame is reached only through a player’s continual interpretation of feedback from a videogame. Game designers may construct feedback to instruct players toward a specific end state or invite the player to make meaningful choices

which determine the outcome of a game. Thus, I find that dialogic and monologic end points differ in that dialogic end points are structured to incorporate a player's choice, whereas monologic endpoints are structured around the choice of the game designers.

Game designers do not force players into a specific end point in dialogic gameplay but may rely upon the overall suasive structure of the game to provide the foundation for a player's choice. Where moral and ethical gameplay is concerned, game designers may construct the end state as a final question of values to which players respond through gameplay. Dialogic gameplay engages the player and game designer in a moral/ethical conversation and leaves ample room for a player's interpretation.

Conversely, monologic end point may appear unsurprising to the player. Mere completion of the final level may be the only overtly identifiable goal that players are encouraged to have. Through the videogame, players may find that the choices that they make do not affect where gameplay takes them. Ingame, the game designers do not invite a player's interpretation. Furthermore, videogames that have a monologic end point may leave no room for interpretation as to what particular means a player must take to reach an end.

WoW (1) and GTA IV (1) have the most dialogically constructed goals. WoW players have the experience of reaching level 80 only to be confronted with continuing quests, instances, and raids. WoW's end state must be individually defined. Players themselves function within a cybernetic system of real players, so the players themselves provide continuity to Azeroth. An end state in WoW is based upon the decisions of individual players. GTA IV players are inculcated into a world of making "good" and "bad" decisions throughout the game. In the end, players are given a similar option: take revenge or strike a deal. The latter seems heinous yet it is potentially less dangerous for players than striking a deal. The means to win GTA IV are highly

flexible, and the ending retains the need for players to consider contingencies within ethical situations.

SMB3 (4) has one particular end where a player can defeat Bowser. The way in which a player reaches Bowser is up to the player's discretion. However, the means that players use to beat Bowser are limited. In the end, SMB3 clearly defines players' goals, to rescue Princess Peach, and players are unable to influence the outcome. AA3 also has a monologic end state. A player's goal is to graduate from Basic Training and become a soldier. Though a player may choose to participate in PVP after "becoming a soldier," ultimately this goal is unchangeable. Players' decisions as they go through training do not influence a player's ultimate goal. Consequently, I find AA3 to be very monologic as well, as it does not invite players to interpret and influence a unique end state.

### Summary of Study

When I set out at the beginning of this project, I hoped to find a suitable rhetorical method for analyzing videogames as rhetorical texts. However, no method is exact. As a form of interactive media, videogames are dependent upon players' choices in managing their intersubjective rhetorical experience. A method that includes the place of players'/users' responses and conceptualizations of a computing system's feedback, i.e. *meditatio*, proves initially helpful. Throughout this process, I found that the principles surrounding gameplay may also be applied to other forms of interactive media analysis, such as memory's application to interactive media.

In the beginning of the study, I examined rhetoric and the place of memory in rhetoric. Rhetoric is essentially dialogic and entails choice on the part of the rhetor and audience

members. During the classical era, rhetoricians included the rhetorical canon of *memoria* as integral to rhetorical training and study. The contemporary period of rhetorical scholarship no longer includes the study of *memoria* which has been dubbed the “lost canon” in rhetoric.

Until now, the applicability of *memoria* to interactive media processes has only been a suggestion.<sup>128</sup> *Memoria* can be integrated into a rhetorical theory of gameplay based upon how memory functions as a rhetorical activity for players. In chapter one, I discussed how gameplay is based upon procedurality and learning. Each videogame situates players to learn the physical skills for a series of processes and put them into play both physically and mentally for hours, or in the case of WoW, years. Over time, players learn the cultural expectations and that follow from gameplay exceptions. As illustrated fully in WoW, the underlying mechanisms of memory make gameplay a rhetorical activity. As a construct, *memoria* includes both *lectio* and *meditatio*, where people gaze upon a visual or verbal text, then domesticate the text within their own perspective.<sup>129</sup> Rhetorical memory can function within the context of procedural memory as well, where people learn the gist of a process then domesticate it within their own perspective.

Learning principles and values within procedural systems is how comprehension functions for humans. As I mentioned in my discussion of Barsalou and Gee, people create scenarios and comprehend more richly through simulations. For instance, knowing that a play is enacted by actors and actresses and takes place traditionally in a theater where an audience watches does not provide ample understanding of *how* a play works. However, when one places these elements in a scenario or simulation, where one pictures audience members paying to view

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<sup>128</sup> See for instance Allen, *Faculty of Memory*; Bolter, *Hypertext and Rhetorical Canons*; Lanham, *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*; Van-Ittersum, *Distributing Memory*; Welch, “Electrifying Classical Rhetoric”; Whitemore, *Metadata and Memor*.

<sup>129</sup> Carruthers *The Book of Memory, Medieval Craft*.

a performance in a theater, getting their seats, then gazing at the actresses and actors as they perform their parts, one has a richer idea of how a play works. In chapter one, I cited Bogost's position that processes similar to the sequence of a play can be embedded in computing systems to show how things work.<sup>130</sup>

In chapter 2, I examined the place of the player in videogames and whether videogames are CMC or just, well, games. Videogames do entail communication between people using computing technology. For a more complete picture of the rhetorical activity in CMC, we must consider the choices players and users face. Players make the choice to engage the computing system but operate within the boundaries delineated by game designers. The exchange between game designers and players is a humanistic exchange, in that game designers' speech is encapsulated in the external memory system of videogames and the allowed actions, or *lectio*. This is the rhetoric of gameplay. On the other hand, systems that game designers provide players, or the external memory systems, are cybernetic systems which are existent regardless of players' interaction. Though players must operate within the boundaries set by game designers, they are often given choices which make their experience unique. At the same time, ingame choices can be created by game designers to reflect world views and perspectives.

In chapter 3, I analyzed four videogames on the basis of their external memory systems, *lectio*, *meditatio*, and people's opinions from selected forums. Though each videogame's external memory system provided a vastly different experience and varying types of information, gameplay was structured in a similar way among the videogames. Some videogames gave players less choice, while others gave players a tremendous amount of choice. But, each game had certain elements that remained constant throughout while providing other elements that are interactive. The four videogames share three main structural features. First, none of the four

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<sup>130</sup> See Bogost *Persuasive Games* 29.

games allowed players to change the abilities of their avatars.<sup>131</sup> Ingame abilities are static, in that players cannot make changes to these as they predetermined by game designers. Another relatively static element is the world layout. Second, in each videogame, players are not allowed to change their virtual environment, though in some cases they are able to interact with it.<sup>132</sup> Third, the end results, not the path that players could take to get there, were primarily the same. For example, in WoW, all players are able to level their avatars to 80. Similarly, in SMB3, all players are able to defeat Bowser.

In chapter 3, I found that each videogame provided a unique experience through the actions that were allowed for players. Changeable elements were included in the external memory system of each videogame. For instance, players in WoW can change their avatar or gear, with enough ingame resources. In SMB3, players can use the ingame tools, such as the Leaf or Mushroom, to modify their avatar and use new abilities. In both cases, the modifications also result in a difference in *lectio*. In WoW, for instance, changing one's gear can change the numeric attributes of an avatar's combat performance, resulting in changes in stamina or attack power. In SMB3, changing from a Leaf to a Mushroom lessens players' abilities ingame, from being able to fly to being able to walk.

Also, players could use *lectio* of many of the videogames in a unique way to make their own games within the videogame's structure. Though each player is given the same external memory system and *lectio* in SMB3, players are given ample choice in how they choose to progress. In my analysis, I found that some players choose to use a timed method, where they attempt to finish the entire game in the shortest amount of time. To play in this manner, players

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<sup>131</sup> I am not referring to the physical *lectio* of the videogames, such as which buttons players press on their input devices. I am referring to the resulting actions.

<sup>132</sup> WoW players are able to harvest resources.

must have a clear understanding of the external memory system of the game and fully internalize *lectio* so that the physical element is transparent and they can respond immediately to ingame obstacles. In GTA IV, players choose different types of games within GTA IV's structure. Some players try to hold off ingame police for as long as possible, while other players choose to obey as many traffic laws as they can. On the other hand, AA3 does not have an open space for choice-making. Each of the other three videogames provided the foundation for unique player experiences while still imparted structured values.

### Limitations and Possible Uses for Future Research

Based on this study, the rhetorical observational looping effect seems to be integral to playing videogames and other forms of interactive CMC. Therefore, examining interactivity within interactive CMC by looking at the external memory system, or the informational makeup, the *lectio* or the allowed actions, and the resulting *meditatio* of users/players appears to be a useful rubric. In the future, rather than regarding interactive technologies and humans relationships with informational systems as restrictive of humanity, researchers should examine technologies as broadening the scope of our communication abilities. Players and users of interactive technology have unique input into their interactive experiences. The posthuman fear that people become cyborgs as they use technology and the fear of the *bestand* may be unfounded.<sup>133</sup> People use computing technologies to get information from and to other people. Videogames, as these are also a form of CMC, are no exception. More than likely, the chance to engage videogame worlds to experience the difficulty of designers' gameplay and master it enjoyably attracts players.

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<sup>133</sup> See discussion on *Players' Experience of Playing Videogames*, chapter 2, 33-37.

However, there are a few limitations to this study. First, only four videogames were chosen to conduct this study. Though I have knowledge of other types of gameplay, such as simulation videogames such as *Populous*,<sup>134</sup> it would be useful to apply this rubric thoroughly to one videogame and catalogue *lectio* more exclusively so genre styles could be incorporated. For instance, in simulation videogames, players often control and manage the collective abilities and attributes of whole armies rather than single, personal avatars. Thus, simulation videogames have more elaborate *lectio*. The crux of the rhetoric of gameplay lies within the choices that are given and how those choices can be used. Therefore, this study could benefit from both a wider variety of videogames and a more thorough analysis of single videogames.

A second limitation is that I did not include cheating and how that can effect the external memory system, *lectio*, and *meditatio*.<sup>135</sup> Players can cheat through a variety of means. Cheating involves both changes in the external memory system or an exaggeration of abilities already within a videogame. For instance, players in GTA IV may use a “cheat code” in order to supply their avatar, Niko, with unlimited ammunition or health. Ultimately, these decisions change a player's gameplay experience tremendously.

Nor did I take into account how *meditatio* is related to the production of media that transcends ingame contexts. Players use gameplay to create new material. For instance, youtube.com includes an array of player produced videos that not only provide guides for other players but often tell a story using recording scenes of gameplay with dubbed audio.

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<sup>134</sup> *Populous* was designed by Peter Molyneux, developed by Bullfrog Productions and published by Electronic Arts in 1989. *Populous* is a real-time strategy, or RTS, videogame that was released to a variety of platforms, including PC and SNES.

<sup>135</sup> Mia Consalvo has produced numerous studies on cheating in videogames. See for example, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology P, 2007 and “Rule Sets, Cheating, and Magic Circles: Studying Games and Ethics.” *International Review of Information Ethics* 004.4 (2005): <<http://www.i-r-i-e.net/inhalt/004/Consalvo.pdf>>.

A fourth limitation is one upon the interactive medium that was analyzed. I focused on videogames and strictly gameplay as the unit of analysis, though the usability of this method may be illustrated better by analyzing Smart Phones or other interactive technologies. With any form of interactive technology, there are a number of programmer supplied choices that users can use to navigate interfaces. These choices may or may not adequately suit users' needs. This method may be useful to improving upon interface designs and pinpointing where more meaningful interactive design choices are necessary for users.

This method primarily situates the designers' choices and players/users' choices in a manner that will make its application to Smart Phones, kiosks, even computing programs such as Microsoft Word very simple. As it is based on memory and the acquisition of skills, researchers can use an analysis of external memory systems, *lectio*, and *meditatio* to measure interactivity in a variety of media. Even technologies dealing with television may be analyzed by looking at what information is presented, what actions are permitted, and what users can do within that context.<sup>136</sup>

Examining gameplay in this fashion may also contribute to cultural/critical understandings of videogames as texts. The external memory systems are virtual and laden with values and perspectives. People who play videogames are participating in cross-cultural communication through gameplay. Videogame sales constitute a multimillion dollar global market. Though the videogame industry overall had lower sales in 2009, the NPD Group reports that four of the five videogames that sold the most units in 2009 were developed by Japanese companies.<sup>137</sup> In other words, avid players of videogames are quickly becoming global

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<sup>136</sup> For instance, OnDemand from Comcast or other television interface technologies.

<sup>137</sup> Wii Sports Resort, New Super Mario Brothers Wii, Wii Fit Plus, and Wii Fit were among the highest selling videogames by units in 2009. See David M. Riley, "2009 Video Game Software Sales Across Top Global

communicators with gameplay as their syntax. Even those videogames which do not appear political by American cultural standards, such as SMB3, could be political in a Japanese cultural context. Mario and Luigi are essentially nontraditional warriors, who take on traditional Japanese figures, such as the raccoon, to save Princess Peach. With cultural knowledge, videogames from other cultures will become less iconic and cute and more political.

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