COMPARATIVE VIDEOGAME CRITICISM
by Trung Nguyen

Citation

Keywords:
Mythical and scientific modes of thought (bricoleur vs. engineer), bricolage, cyber texts, ergodic literature, Unit operations.
Games: Zork

I. Argument & Perspective
Ian Bogost’s “unit operations” that he mentions in the title is a method of analyzing and explaining not only video games, but work of any medium where works should be seen “as a configurative system, an arrangement of discrete, interlocking units of expressive meaning.” (Bogost x) Similarly, in this chapter, he more specifically argues that as opposed to seeing video games as hard pieces of technology to be poked and prodded within criticism, they should be seen in a more abstract manner. He states that “instead of focusing on how games work, I suggest that we turn to what they do—how they inform, change, or otherwise participate in human activity…” (Bogost 53) This comparative video game criticism is not about invalidating more concrete observances of video games, such as how they work, but weaving them into a more intuitive discussion that explores the true nature of video games.

II. Ideas
Unit Operations: Like I mentioned in the first section, this is a different way of approaching mediums such as poetry, literature, or videogames where works are a system of many parts rather than an overarching, singular, structured piece.

Engineer vs. Bricoleur metaphor: Bogost uses this metaphor to compare the fundamentalist view of video game critique to his proposed view, saying that the “bricoleur is a skillful handy-man, a jack-of-all-trades who uses convenient implements and ad hoc strategies to achieve his ends.” Whereas the engineer is a “scientific thinker who strives to construct holistic, totalizing systems from the top down…” (Bogost 49) One being more abstract and the other set and defined.

III. Commentary
I thought that Ian Bogost’s commentary on these ways that we observe and critique video games is very interesting, especially since we are in a class about video games. Coming into this class, I expected the typical things that come up when the topic of gaming is discussed in an educational setting. “What makes a video game?” “Are video games a valid way of learning?” “Are video games art?” “Are video games more beneficial or more harmful to society?” “What makes a ‘fun’ video game?” That kind of discussion that has been milked for all that it is worth. Very quickly though, I learned that the class would be a lot more than that just as Bogost wants video game criticism to be more than just those fundamentalist ideas. I also heavily connected to our discussions of concepts such as diegetic vs. non-diegetic and how part of the class always instinctively categorizes them into concrete parts that can’t overlap within a game. Overall, I very much agree with his views and argument. We need to go beyond technical discussion of video games and move to a more human approach.
FINISHING THE FIGHT, ONE STEP AT A TIME: SERIALITY IN HALO
by Stephen Calkins

Citation

Keywords: intra-, inter-, para-ludic, seriality, hermeneutic interaction, aesthetics of control, narrative

I. Argument & Perspective
Jens Bonk seeks to demonstrate his idea about seriality in games (intra-ludic elements) and how this seriality is essential to seriality outside the game itself (between games in a series, inter-ludic elements, and in the franchise, para-ludic elements). The Halo series is a flagship for this idea of a singular seriality of events that drive the story forward while incorporating elements outside the current narrative being told. Interestingly, he uses Halo 3 as his prime example for this and breaks down the first sub chapter of the first chapter, a structure serial in nature. Lastly, he seeks to point out that Halo 3 contains intra-ludic elements that allow it to stand alone in the series on its own narrative. These elements are “intertwined” and “interrupt” each other to constantly force new challenges on a player and advance the story.

II. Ideas
Seriality is defined by the context in which you are analyzing a game, but in general describe elements a game or series of games employ to advance a story and connect points from previous stories to the current situations a player faces. This involves employment of intra-, inter-, and para-ludic elements by game designers such as an enemy encounter, a character from a previous game joining the battle, or a battle influencing events in games unrelated to the main series. At the heart of this is the idea of a “serial hermeneutic progression” in which a player is always trying to make sense of a given situation. Situations are presented to players to keep them engaged as they attempt to gain control of the situation or “understand” it. Jens brings up a term, “outbidding” which is a system Halo 3 exemplified where a situation encountered by the player was very quickly followed up by a much more enticing event, keeping the player engaged and progressing. Even momentary pauses in the game hinted to exciting future moments of gameplay. These ludic moments he describes cannot exist without the relation to another ludic moment that it either builds upon or has been built on. This gives way to a linear seriality in Halo 3 that is kept exciting by the continuous “outbidding” of intra-ludic elements.

III. Commentary
The most interesting point I think is that from the start of the franchise, Halo was “conceived as a transmedia series”. The seriality all serve to cater to players who have experienced the story of Halo at any different point. A figure provided by the author demonstrates this point well, where books and spin-offs fill in various gaps in stories, but that are not necessary for enjoyment of the main storyline. This gives immense freedom to developers to use expressive elements in the games. The components-of-self and components-of-system serve as inter- and intra-ludic elements in the games and the story. An example is the Warthog vehicle first encountered in Halo: Combat Evolved. This vehicle is teased early in the game and given to the player later, but is also a continuing element of the game and can become integral to the storyline (the final driving chapter). What also is incredibly interesting is that the intra-ludic elements of Halo games, drive the para-ludic elements that surround the games. Although this is true of almost all games, Halo provides an environment where a strictly controlled advancement of the narrative is experienced by the player as seemingly in control of the advancement and triggers for these narrative elements are derived from inter-ludic elements.
PLAYING WITH SOUND: A THEORY OF INTERACTING WITH SOUND AND MUSIC IN VIDEO GAMES

by Dylan Johnson

Citation

Keywords: schizophrenia, kinesonic synchresis, self-produced sound

I. Argument & Perspective
Collins' main argument states that interacting with sound is fundamentally different than listening to sound. Collins begins by introducing the reader to a number of sound interactivity concepts that aide the reader in analyzing the sound experienced by players. She discusses how sound interaction in games is able to create new associations through its haptic context. In addition, Collins emphasizes that game sound plays a critical role in character attachment, mise-en-space development, and immersion. Lastly, Collins ties her argument to real world interactions such as role-playing, sound customization, and cocreativity. Throughout the work she references hundreds of games to emphasize that sound is critical to every genre.

II. Ideas
Collins refutes the existence of "schizophrenia", or disembodied sounds, to show that interactive sound is multimodal (involves many different sensory modalities). She continues by defining kinesonic synchresis as the merging of image and sound and argues that it is critical to game studies because of its ability to "create new associations through its haptic recontextualizations" (39). In addition, she introduces the reader to the sonic game space, which expands on the previous notion of a "magic circle" game space that consists of strictly visual phenomena. In this space, she argues, sound has an "advantage over visuals because of its ability to extend beyond the screen into the player's space" (45). Collins also introduces the idea that game sound "becomes both a tool for and a site of performance and spectatorship" (91) in the context of social interactions. In this way, game sound can become the catalyst for creative activity outside of the game.

III. Commentary
We can connect Collins' comments on sound interactivity with Eric Zimmermans' multivalent model of interactivity. Collins discusses sound interaction within the context of each of the four modes presented in class. For example, Collins is within the context of cognitive interactivity (mode 1) when she discusses the emotional reaction of a player who is experiencing the sounds of a horror game. When Collins discusses the rules of Dance Dance Revolution, she is describing the explicit interaction (mode 3) where the player must push the correct buttons to the beat.
UNCERTAINTY IN GAMES
by Joshua Munsell

Citation

Keywords: uncertainty
Games: Super Mario Bros., Curse of Monkey Island, Chess, Rock/Paper/Scissors, and so many more

I. Argument & Perspective
Costikyan, with a refreshing perspective, believes that delving too far into academic terms ultimately obscures the message of the idea, and so he attempts to use relatively basic terms. He starts the paper with a quick summary on how he believes that games are products of culture, created as a way to safely interact with uncertainty since there is no such safety in the real world. While he refuses to wax over the definition of a "game," he does believe that all games, in some capacity, have these qualities - uncertainty and interactivity. The primary differences between games are what type uncertainty they are relying on (which he expands on throughout one chapter as he analyzes a variety of games, and summarizes in a later chapter) and how they leverage it. The majority of the book is him looking at artifacts he considers to be important games and analyzing them so that he can parse out what forms of uncertainty make them interesting.

II. Ideas
- Interactivity - one of the key factors of the game, as it is the key way that we have a player; without interactivity, we have no player, and without a player, we have no game. However, not all interactive things are games (light switches, productivity software).
- Uncertainty - the other key game factor, as he asserts that predictability does not lead to fun (and no good games are predictable). There are eleven types of uncertainty/unpredictability that work across platforms: performative (Mario platforming), solver's (puzzle games), player (what are the other players going to do?), hidden information (what do I deliberately not know?), narrative anticipation (what's going to happen next?), development anticipation (what new content will appear in the game later?), schedule uncertainty (when can I next play?), perceptive (can I find the information i actually need?), semiotic (what will playing this game mean?) and randomness.

III. Commentary
As I attempt to further my studies in game design, it's incredibly interesting to use it as another lens both to analyze games and steer my own game design. What's interesting about this is how it relates to another lens I have encountered, how less utilitarian it is. Instead of examining how the game works and what patterns can fit into the infrastructure to the game you want to make, Costikyan's perspective is deeper and more theoretical, examining what actually makes the game tick. It's a refreshing change from the much more scientific methods that I've otherwise encountered.

While all of the forms of uncertainty are interesting, the most intriguing to me is semiotic uncertainty as an attractant to players of games. As no designer exists in a vacuum, their cultural and personal biases always reflect in a game, but using that as the primary motivator in a game seems incredibly strange at first. However, when you look at the games in this class and others, that is arguably one of the driving forces behind all of them - what is the Stanley Parable, Dear Esther, Save the Date trying to say? Upon retrospection, that is arguably much more the leverage than the narrative uncertainty - in the case of Stanley Parable, it is most definitely using narrative anticipation as a prop for its semiotic uncertainty. As I am interested in socioemotional and aesthetic learning with games, being able to utilize this new framework which specifically includes semiotic uncertainty as a motivating factor within game design.
**Why Do We Care Whether Link Saves the Princess?**

by Anthony Pascual

**Citation**


**Keywords:** Paradox of fiction, illusion theory, thought theory, pretend theory, multi-level mind, global appraisal, local appraisal

**Games:** Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker

**I. Argument & Perspective**

Frome’s aim is to discuss why we are able to emotionally invest in a video game. The approach is through a cognitive lens. Particularly speaking, there is a given assumption that we emotionally respond to things in which we believe yet we still respond emotionally to video games. Frome offers varying solutions to this problem, but deems them unsatisfactory in accurately assessing what the mind is doing, i.e., inputting an object as not real, and how the person responds, i.e., reacting to the object as if it is real. Frome offers a multi-level theory of the mind. The mind has higher level functions that can evaluate the reality of an object as well as lower-level functions that can evaluate more trivial elements of an object. The mind can process low-level evaluations without higher level feedback. In fiction, on a higher level the mind recognizes the work is not real, but on some level still reacts to the local appraisals that are also made.

**II. Ideas**

- The paradox of fiction is a notion that is assumed throughout the argument, that is, the mind responds to objects deemed as fictional as if they were real.
- The illusion theory states the mind suspends disbelief. Likewise, the thought theory states that the mind is responding to real thoughts and ideas, not the fictional object itself. The pretend theory is a third solution that suggests the mind pretends the fiction is real.
- The idea of a monolithic mind, that is, the mind working in a unified standard, contrasts with Frome’s idea of a multi-level mind that the mind inputs a spectrum of varying levels of appraisals from local to global extrema.

**III. Commentary**

Gamic action is an attempt to model the video game experience between player and game interaction. The notion of what is going on in video games has an added layer of why it is going on, and this commentary by Frome explores a philosophical issue of cognition relevant to player behavior in video games. While Frome’s theory may be contentious for his scientifically cognitive approach, he is exploring a relevant issue to more comprehensively satisfy of what is actually going on in video gaming.
Gamic Action, Four Movements
by David Larimer

Citation

Keywords: Action-Based, Dromenon, Machine, Operator, Diegetic, Non-Diegetic, Ambiance Act, Acts of configuration, Movement act, Disabling Act, Enabling Act


I. Argument & Perspective
Galloway takes an action-based perspective, implying the actions are the most important part of games. He writes that games are actions in the same way photos are images and films are moving images. The participation and actions which occur as a result of the game are what make them unique. Galloway creates a system to classify these actions into four categories as a way to discuss these games and their significance. Galloway also claims games are “algorithmic cultural objects” and thus looking at games from the software perspective is valuable.

II. Ideas
Galloway characterizes players as “operators” and the games themselves as “machines.” This characterization divides actions in half, either being done by the operator or the machine. Another division occurs to classify the action as “diegetic” (part of the narrative of the game), or “nondiegetic” (not related to the narrative of the game). These divisions create four unique quadrants for gamic action to be classified. Geertz’s concept of “deep play” implies culture is an “acted document.” This means culture can be interpreted just as any other text. Geertz applies this interpretation to Balinese Cockfights, interpreting them as “a means of expression.” Galloway uses these concepts to relate the non-diegetic operator acts as a symbol of the algorithmic culture.

Huizinga and Caillois describe “play” as actions taken during free time, separate from reality, with structure but no productive reason for those actions. Galloway references Huizinga’s use of “dromenon” meaning “something acted” to connect this concept of “play” to his action based look at games. Derrida describes play as a joyful action without bringing up a loss or absence of something else. Play is described as a purely positive concept. He also includes the idea of disruption and agitation as a part of play. Galloway relates this disruption and agitation to non-diegetic machine acts.

III. Commentary
Although Galloway’s classifications for actions in games creates the opportunity to analyze each piece of a game and its respective effect on that game, the deconstruction of those games should be done with the knowledge of the game as a whole in mind. While I find the classifications handy tools to describe certain actions within a game, the way a game incorporates these actions to produce an experience for the player shouldn’t be overlooked. Many individual pieces of games can be interesting but what makes a great game is how these pieces mold together to captivate the player, keep them interested while playing and often after they’re done playing. Salen and Zimmerman’s fourth mode of interactivity, beyond-the-object-interactivity, is an important reaction to games that only come about when a game uses all these actions in a way that inspires players to seek out more information and continue thinking about the game outside of playing it.
Starting with Revolution: The Wii as a Platform
by Eduardo Ayala

Citation

Keywords: “Gaming Redefined”, “Social Interaction”, “Player’s Engaged Imagination”, “Social Platform”, “Physical Living Space is most Important”, “Hardware and Software Limitations Shape Games”


I. Argument & Perspective
The authors are commenting about how influential the Nintendo Wii has been on the wide culture. Going as far as ‘redefining’ certain games such as bowling from Nintendo’s game Wii Sports. As well as reinventing the image of what a “gamer” look like. Certain games require players to stand up to play and using their whole body by swinging the Wii Remote rather than sitting down with a controller like past home consoles were. The authors comment on Nintendo always being an entertainment company and bringing a little taste of the past into their writing, from when they started to the present with tight constraints, they have made something engaging, entertaining, and fun. They also mention that more children in the United States recognize Mario than they do Mickey Mouse, in which Mickey is a lot older than Mario. The authors argue that the appearances of games are shaped by the limitations of the hardware and software available at the time. The very first Mario was designed based on the tools available and is the case for every Mario incarnation since. The Nintendo Wii highlights the intermediate space between a player and system as the center of the action. The Physical living room space is the place where what is most important to games really happens, and plenty of games exemplify that. Red Steel 1 failed due to ‘hardware’ limitations but also because the company pushed for “graphics and processing.” Red Steel 2 pushed away from the more realistic looking graphics to the actual realistic feel of using the Wii Remote’s ability and that’s what the authors argue made the sequel a success. The main point that the authors are saying is that the Nintendo Wii is a social platform by design, because the player’s space is used a physical space, to watch other’s play and enjoy playing for the social interaction.

II. Ideas
Mode 2: Functional Interactivity from Zimmerman’s Rules of Play. The Nintendo Wii has games that make you stand up and play using the “Wii Mote”, the player is interacting with the system’s controller by standing up and swinging it around and of course clicking the buttons on the “Wii Mote”.

Lucid Hermeneutic Circle: the Player Subject can be that the Nintendo Wii is introducing a new way of playing games that require you to move around in order to play, to do ergodic work. One that plays bowling may be able to pick up the bowling in Wii Sports bowling a lot easier as an Individual Player. WarioWare D.I.Y is a game whose purpose is to have the player make and design games within the game and be able to share it with others, understanding how to make games and being able to express it falls under Community Player. Mario games have been rated for everyone from the start.

III. Commentary
While reading this chapter of this book I was drawn in pretty quickly. I personally enjoyed playing the Nintendo Wii when it first came out and put in many hours of Wii Sports along with my siblings. I was probably a little bias as I read, but that doesn’t take away the fact that the Nintendo Wii did bring some innovative to gaming when it was introduced in 2006. Eventually Sony revealed the “Move” and Microsoft revealed “Kinect” as a way of trying to compete with Nintendo’s Wii, so you can see that Nintendo influenced the industry in many ways. The only downside I think of the Nintendo Wii was that it did not have many 3rd party support as the other two consoles did.
Call of Duty, which was getting really popular, was terrible to play on the Nintendo Wii, many sport games like FIFA were pretty bad as well, obviously the Nintendo Wii had technological constraints, but that’s what limited it. The Authors nailed it though and compared to Sony’s Playstation 3 and Microsoft’s Xbox 360 it was seen as inferior in terms of the power inside the console, but Nintendo’s goal was not to have the “strongest” console on the market. Their goal was to use the “intermediate space between a player and system as the center of action, where the player’s body encounters the materiality of the platform”, and it was a huge success and outsold the other two because, one of the many reasons, it indeed did that.
DEFINING THE VIDEOGAME

by Matt France

Citation

Keywords: artifact, definition, evaluation, gamification, ludification, play, rhetoric, performance, Socratic dialogue

Games: Football (as in NFL, not just Madden and NFL Blitz, etc...)

I. Argument & Perspective
Karhulahti acknowledges the difficulty of and the long pursuit of defining a game, and believes that this question requires a new approach. His colleague states, "Let me get this straight. Instead of defining the game, you're going to define the videogame, which you think will show how things we call videogames can be identified better in relation to other cultural phenomena [of playing games]". To which he replies that, "I was thinking about a definition that would identify videogames only in relation to other ludic phenomena, especially those we call games." The article accounts the discussion these two have concerning this interest. Their account breaks defining "videogames" into several categories.

- First: Visual. Here, the two discuss the merits and flaws with the word video in video game. They do this by discussing the differences of "videogames" compared to "Digital Games", "Electronic Games" and "Computer Games." Here they decided the necessary differential is the word visual, and agree that videogames must be necessarily visual.

- Second: Performance evaluation. Here its concluded that "Quite the contrary. Confirming that the demands of videogames are not unique only supports our premise that the distinctiveness of the videogame cannot be explained by its properties alone. What is decisive is the way in which fulfilling those demands gets evaluated." Here, it's explained that because videogames can be supported and utilized by multiple modes of operation, it is not the execution, but the evaluation method that makes them unique. From here, they move on to discuss that a "videogames" requires the game itself to evaluate the player, not another person or themselves; The difference between game systems and game components.

- Third: Artifacts. Videogames are artifacts.

Interesting note, the article is written completely as a transcribed dialogue. The method here forces an interaction, as well as an immediate counter-narrative that places an different value on the reliability and the credibility of the author.

II. Ideas
Videogames imply video. One major idea that Karhulahti discusses is games as artifacts. Unfortunately, they do not discuss the definition of artifact that they are using here. So I can assume as a cultural artifact, which gives insight into that culture. Beyond this, I am uncertain on what this means, and they do not discuss the definition further, even though they refer to games as artifacts for the whole of their dialogue. They discuss Videogames as evaluative platforms. Not that someone is evaluating the game play, but the game itself is evaluating the game play. A videogames requires an internal evaluative process of the players performance.

III. Commentary
I found this piece exceptional for its strangeness. I thought it unconventional, as it follows a dialogue, rather than a report format. However, interviews are not that strange, the interesting part here was that the dialogue was presented as unplanned, as though two people sat down and this conversation happened normally. This helped create a sense of credibility, however, at the same time decreases credibility, as, even though some works were directly stated and sited in conversation they felt less authentic this way and gave questions to the
credibility of outside, cited works.

Even though one of their major points, when asked to summarize concisely the definition of "videogames" they said videogames are artifacts, I do not believe I understand what artifact means in this context. For a paper which relies heavily on this concept and key concept, I felt disconnect here and need to do more digging into the application of artifact within this context.

The one thing I did greatly appreciate from this article, is the emphasis on "videogame" and not "game" while still noting that the categorize of games are frequently blurred and often are used synonymously, even though they may or may not be, given the context in which they are being used. This was not only refreshing, but offered an interesting look into what a "game" is or is not.
I. Argument & Perspective
Raph argues that games are teachers, and a game has done its job well when it is able to teach a player everything it has to teach before the player stops playing. He views games as education in the form of entertainment, and believes that all games inherently have something that can be grokked.

II. Ideas
The author’s main argument revolves around the idea that boredom causes a player to quit a game. Another main idea is that games are teachers, and that fun is a byproduct of learning. Finally, he shares the idea that all games are fun because learning is fun, and games all have something the player can learn. He consistently uses the term “grok”, which means to learn or understand intuitively, and the chapter is lacking in technical vocabulary. Finally, an organizing metaphor he uses is within his argument is that games are teachers.

III. Commentary
I feel the Raph's of linking games and teachers is a valid argument. Games are already being incorporated into education, where the goal of the teacher is not to teach, but rather to help their students become comfortable with the game, where the student can then begin a learning process. Similarly, a more recent example is Minecraft, which has the advantage of essentially tricking students into learning because they believe they are playing a game. Minecraft can help teach students important skills like reading and being able to work in teams.

Back to the author's idea about boredom being the cause of a player quitting a game, he believes boredom can stem from a couple different causes. The first is when a player beats a game so thoroughly and extensively the game no longer presents an intellectually stimulating challenge. The second is the opposite, when a game is too challenging so that the player cannot discern a pattern to help progress farther through it. So either when you have already learned everything you can, or you are incapable of learning something. However, just because a game does not have something for you, does not mean it will not have something for someone else; every game has something for someone.

I agree with the author's statement that every game has an idea that can be grokked. Even incredibly simple games like Flappy Bird have something to offer, maybe not to a grown adult, but perhaps for very young children, teaching them something as simple as interacting with the devices the game is played on, it is still something the player learned that will stick with them. Meanwhile Dear Esther would mean nothing more than fancy talking and walking around a pretty island to a child, but adults may be able to see some of the deeper meanings being discussed.
IMMERSION: HOW MUSIC DEEPENS THE PLAY EXPERIENCE
by Toby Dunkelberg

Citation

Keywords: immersion, flow, gameplay experience, music
Games: Amnesia: The Dark Descent

I. Argument & Perspective
Video Games, unlike other forms of media offer an active immersive experience that closely mirrors flow. This state is very difficult to reach because it relies gamers losing track of themselves and the fact that they’re playing a game. Game designers use every tool they have to try and reliably achieve immersion, but they struggle because many of their methods to preserve that state rely on conscious cues which remind the player that they’re playing a game. One subconscious cue that is overlooked is music. By playing louder music the nearer you get to a destination you replace an inherently non-immersive direction arrow with an immersive friendly subconscious cue. There are many other ways to utilize music. It’s well documented ability to impact listeners’ emotions opens up a whole host of possibilities are seldom looked at. Emotions impact nearly every aspect of the human condition, from how we see to how we perceive time. By paying special attention to how music is used in their games composers and game designers can channel those abilities to design games that are more immersive and thus have better game experiences for players.

It’s important to note that the author, Winfred Phillips, is the “superstar of video game music,” and she’s writing the book for her fellow composers. As such a large part of this chapter is a series of tips for other video game composers as to exactly how they can contribute to immersion. All of these tips form the basis of an argument towards the game industry for music to be included more heavily in the game design process.

II. Ideas
Immersion – the feeling of fully sinking into something, i.e. instinctively pressing buttons instead of thinking “press x to jump.” There are three levels to get to immersion: engagement, engrossment, and finally full immersion
Flow – a state of total immersion where individuals are so involved in what they’re doing “they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing” thus losing track of time and themselves.

III. Commentary
Phillips’s ultimate goal in the piece is to argue music’s importance to an immersive experience in order to stress music as a central aspect of game designing. She structures her argument well but her support is too often a published research study, which is simultaneously overkill and not enough. These papers give results in a controlled lab setting and Phillips never once links them back to video games. That failure to provide proof that tendencies observed in a lab setting cross over to a video game experience makes her scientific argument unconvincing. In addition, many of those medical studies rely on fMRI results. In recent years fMRI studies have come under scrutiny because the correlation between increased hydrogen (what the machine actually measures but used as an analog for bloodflow) and an increase in brain activity has come under fire. These studies have also shown a repeated tendency in publishing results based on statistics that are shaky at best. Phillips’s failure to address those two points makes her scientific argument fall short.

The weirder thing is that Phillips provides enough surrounding support and anecdotal evidence to support her claim many times over. So her addition of research studies was a overkill. If you take out all the studies her paper is just as, if not even more convincing. Her argument isn’t that hard to believe it’s just something that people don’t think about and need to be shown with examples. If she had focused more on that aspect her paper would be much more convincing, not to mention much easier to read.
QUESTS IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT: DEFERRAL AND REPETITION
by Emerson Jordan

Citation

Keywords: Quest, Repetition, Deferral of Ends, Linerality, Duration, Single/Multiplayer Games: World of Warcraft

I. Argument & Perspective
Jill Rettberg analyzes the World of Warcraft quest system from a literary perspective to explain how the repetitively structured, end-deferring design retains players through an endless journey. Rettberg's commentary consists almost entirely of defining game terms and literary techniques, describing game content, and citing the typologies and observations of others. She builds the framework for understanding what consequents when a utilitarian mindset immerses in a carefully crafted conclusive-less experience.

II. Ideas
- **Utilitarianist Gaming:** WoW players perceive quests as ends to a mean: upon entering a new zone, one tends to acquire all quests at once, ignore quest narratives, and consult online guides that brief quest starting locations, objective locations, and strategic tips for maximum efficiency.
- **Repetition:** WoW quests maintain consistent syntax, objectives, and structural quality: “background story, objective, reward,” and involve “traveling, killing, and collecting.” The repetitive, highly quantifiable atmosphere structurally supports the “always wanting more” mentality.
- **[Susan Tosca Typology]** WoW quests are fixed regarding linerality (the path to complete is singular and specific), vary in duration, and vary in regards to their single/multiplayer structure.
- **Deferral of Goals:** The Quest Log constitutes an endless to-do list; the desire for more never ceases, and only gets deferred from one quest to another upon completion; Rettberg ironically notes “we have finally succeeded in creating something that we can desire endlessly, have entirely, and never consume.” This is maintained through situational elements that encourage patience, and associate quest completion with status and achievement. Onyxia, the daughter of Deathwing, is alluded to in low level quests, the entrance to her cave is dramatized, and her head is mounted in the town square upon her slaying where all can witness. The “we want more” mentality and the adventurer's patience are simultaneously amplified with the anticipation of this end-game raid boss: “Onyxia is here, these quests say, look right here, but you can't touch her—yet.”

III. Commentary
Rettberg's sets the foundation for how WoW and other mainstream titles capture their players through reward and achievement systems and the providing of tangible progress, the likes of which are non-existent in the non-virtual world. It is my understanding that mainstream games carefully and intentionally craft the most tangible, ego-satisfying experience possible, as reflected in the WoW quest system, the CoD killstreak system, the “an enemy has been slain” universal message in LoL, and the ever present scoreboard in Agar.io. Through personal introspection during my own game-play experience I have concluded that the need for this derives from a disconnected mind state that is widespread across our culture: in order to escape having to experience fear, and what are considered “bad” emotions, we disconnect from our emotions, and live under the rule of our amygdala, an entity comforted only by power, progress, and control. To reclaim the medium of video games and shift it towards one that can appreciate narrative and beauty, freaks, normals, amateurs, artists, dreamers, drop-outs, queers, housewives, and people like you mustn’t just participate in creation, they must participate in the shifting of a cultural conscious to one that can contain fear and rediscovers self-hood.
I. Argument and Perspective
This chapter of Ryan’s book essentially addresses the argument as to whether or not video games can be vehicles of narrative. The chapter first posits two ‘camps’ that approach this debate which Ryan refers to as the Ludologists, who say that games are solely play, and the ‘narrativists’ who believe that video games are a source of narrative. The chapter essentially works to reconcile the two opposing camps by countering arguments from both sides, and acknowledging that there is a ‘dual-nature’ in considering games.

II. Ideas
- Ludus & Paidia: Ludus meaning just playing, and paidia meaning mimicking reality.
- Narrative: Drawing from several definitions to attempt to discover where games fit into the concept of narration and storytelling.
- 4 Types of Players: Stating that there are 4 types of game players: killers, achievers, socializers, and explorers.
- Fictional Worlds: The fictional universe that a game creates. Also the idea that players can greatly extend the boundaries of the Fictional World beyond the just the game itself using other mediums such as fan fiction.

III. Commentary
This reading had several useful distinctions and ideas that revolved around reconciling two different approaches to video games as storytelling agents. My first reaction upon reading the piece was to feel a small matter of frustration regarding the nature of the argument. Why did video games have to fall into one of two categories: either being a storytelling agent, or being just play. I was pleased to see that the author strove to find a middle ground between the two arguments. There were certainly compelling arguments to both camps.

One compelling point against games as narratives was that the story in a video game was often a mere 'hook' that brought the player in, but was quickly forgotten as soon as the game action kicked in. Considering several of the more action based FPS games, I can’t help but agree in part with this argument. However, as soon as I agree in part, I quickly think of several counter examples for which this is far from the case.

On the opposite side, I appreciated the argument against all games being a narrative, which stated that some games are narrative in nature and others are not, and that the distinction existed in the ‘concrete surface layer’ as opposed to the ‘abstract deep structure.’ The game used as an example is Tetris, which one narrativist stated was, in an abstract sense, about the social-economic conditions of the 1990’s. While I enjoy the reading of Tetris, I agree that when considering it as a narrative, it is wholly based upon subjective extrapolation of the game's mechanics.

In conclusion, I appreciated the points that Ryan made, and the division of thought that were highlighted. My feelings were that we have to reconcile the concepts of video games as play as well as video games as being a source of narrative. To wholly assume one without the other would be fallacious to say the least. One thing I will say
though is that what may need to be considered, especially as the video game genre develops, is there may need to be
new terminology used to refer to games. I can't help but feel more and more leery in referring to video games as
such. The name itself has become too assumptive in seeing the nature of games. This medium seems to be an
exciting collision of play and story, not the confusing discordant result of the two as games are often viewed as.
Playing with Trauma: Interreactivity, Empathy, and Complicity in The Walking Dead Video Game

by Skye Torrey

Citation

Keywords: trauma, empathy, complicity, interactivity, interreactivity, on-line/off-line, cognitive & emotional empathy, reactivity

Games: The Walking Dead, Dear Esther, Papers, Please, Deus Ex: Human Revolution, Max Payne, Limbo, Braid, Spec Ops: The Line, Lone Survivor, Planescape: Torment, Long Live the Queen, Tomb Raider, That Dragon, Cancer, Dys4ia, Mainichi, Depression Quest

I. Argument & Perspective
This article focused on how trauma is present in video games, closely examining how trauma is integrated through channels of interreactivity, empathy, and complicity, while analyzing these within the framework of The Walking Dead: Season One (2012). Smethurst and Craps argue that the trauma that is used in video games is unlike trauma used in other media forms (271). Not only does The Walking Dead explicitly show traumatic events, the player has an experience with trauma not usually had with books or films, as the game allows for the player to get to know the characters intimately (empathy), as well as gives them the ability to make choices that have the possibility of altering the game (interreactivity), and being held accountable for what happens as a result (complicity). The authors examine and contrast engagement of interactivity as well as empathy in literature with that of video games, which is different in that the individual reading has no control over what happens in the book, and only needs to turn the page to continue further.

II. Ideas
  - Interactivity: This requires work on the players end to complete certain tasks to move the game along (as opposed to just turning a page when reading a book, as they explain).
  - Reactivity: A large factor in what distinguishes games from other media forms; specifically how the game world alters in reaction to what's being done by the player. Importantly, the game not only responds to the user, but the user responds to the game.
  - Interreactivity: joining the first two words above, interreactivity only occurs when the user is in control of the game at hand (this is called “on-line engagement”, contrasted with “off-line engagement,” e.g. “unskippable scripted or prerecorded cutscenes” [273]).
  - Empathy: Cognitive and emotional subcategories of empathy. Cognitive refers to actively looking at someone else’s point of view, and emotional refers to instinctive response. Emotional can be divided further in to parallel (e.g. secondhand embarrassment, as they put it) and reactive empathy (feeling sorry for the embarrassed party).
  - Complicity: merging interreactivity and empathy. Because of how users interact with games, games are able to make the user feel apart of the trauma and a sense of responsibility.

III. Commentary
I found this article to be very interesting, and I’m glad I came across it. I think it builds nicely off of some of the concepts we’ve discussed during class (interactivity, ludic qualities etc.) and has actually helped me understand them better. I enjoyed the fact that they compared trauma and other concepts to something like literature, as it set up a good contrast and their ideas came off more clearly. The article got me thinking a little bit on how would these concepts they’ve identified change (or stay the same) if the user had suffered from specific trauma in their lives. How does actual experienced trauma affect gameplay in general? I have not played The Walking Dead before, but I was able to connect what they were talking about to games that I do have experience with. For example, they talk about how you have to choose to save one or the other character, or you have been burdened with the task of having to kill a character yourself, which I was able to connect to games like Metal Gear Solid V (2015) and Fallout 4 (2015), where you unfortunately have missions that call for such activities.
THE ART OF FAILURE: A TRAGICAL PARADOX
by Kritin Vij

Citation

Keywords: Personal Inadequacy, Meta communication, motivational bias, real vs fictional failure, gamification, balancing, catharsis, paradox of failure, global vs local failure, compensatory solution, reversal theory, self defeating theory, attribution theory, learned helplessness, mood management theory, spectacular failure, skill, chance, labor, completable, transient and improvement goals, complicity, rhetoric of failure, positive/negative emotional valence, rhetoric of failure, fundamental duality


I. Argument & Perspective
Jesper talks about how failure is essential to game playing. And, when we want make improvements, it leads to more satisfaction. He uses real vs fictional failure to explain how we make strides towards playing games that guarantee that we will fail or even see tragic events surpass the protagonist. He with the help of numerous scientifically published papers, through philosophical, psychological, game design and fiction/art, explains the reasons for players to indulge in such games and why this paradox of achieving a negative emotional state may be solved. Arguments for attributing failures to different entities, to drawing a parallel between our need for tragic art, to how differently each game motivates the player from getting further and helps us understand the nature and conscience of the player involved in gaming.

II. Ideas
- Attribution theory explains how for every event, we search a cause and viewing it the wrong way can lead us to learned helplessness where we do not have the motivation to correct the mistake (global failure)
- Self-Defeating: way to avoid being measured by a task. E.g. Procrastination---> “failure not with us, with test”
- Complicity: Players realize that they are working towards an abhorrent goal; game deceives the player
- Fundamental Duality: Games can be without tangible consequences. They still give a license to play even when it has no obvious benefits.
- Positive/Negative Emotional Valence: Games that tend to reflect the interests of the protagonists, vs when it doesn’t
- Skill, Chance or Labor: Differently styled games make players attribute failures in game differently.
- 3 kinds of Goals: Completable: Game won/incomplete. Transient: Won the round. Next round we may fail.
- Improvement: I have to beat my high score. Now we have a new high score. Now, I have to beat that.

III. Commentary
I really loved that Jesper used so many research papers to cite evidence from and to drive home his argument. I personally connect with the idea of “learning happens after failing” and the whole essay stood out to me. He uses counter arguments from authors and proves them wrong. He really connects the dots between failures, trends towards “more failures, small punishments”, attributions towards causality and implications of game-like features in real world. There is a small gap though. He fails to discuss that we live in a world striving for perfection. Games provide us with a sandbox for failing and that leniency is comforting the young and old alike to try new gaming experiences and that that might be the prevailing reason nowadays. Nonetheless, this paper is a very comprehensive insight into the world of gaming and the art of failing!
I really enjoyed this article. It set up a great question—why do we continue to play certain games even when we know we will have failure? With certain games, I know that there are going to be at least a few instances of failure. The draw seems to be that with the more we may fail, the successes will oftentimes feel even greater.

For example, I play the series Football Manager every year, and every year it sucks me in just as much as the previous. It’s a text based simulator where you take over any soccer team in the world and try to lead them to glory. When my team is in a bad slump, I feel less motivated to continue playing and find myself in a slightly worse mood. However, I literally fist pump the air when an 18-year-old youngster on my team is playing in the first team against a top-notch team like Manchester United, and then they score the game winning goal in the last few minutes. Games, like any form of art, are capable of producing real emotions in us, even if the game worlds themselves aren’t real. One argument that the author made was that in games, the consequences of failure aren’t as vast as when we fail in real life. Because of this, we are more inclined to take risks. To go with my example above, most teams wouldn’t play an unproven 18-year-old against a team like Manchester. But when these risks pay off, they are even more worthwhile.

The article questions whether we truly feel pain when we fail in games, and I definitely think that we do. It’s much like when our favorite sports teams fail. We have no control whatsoever on the outcome, yet I’ve seen grown men cry because their favorite team lost in a heartbreaking overtime. In a sense, the players on the field are comparable to characters in our games. While the players are real, they’re usually not “real” to us because we only see them on TV and in interviews conducted by the media where they’re probably being told how to act. We don’t know them personally, yet we become attached to our heroes just as we become attached to our video game characters. When we see them fail, it brings true pain because through our experiences of watching or playing, we feel as if we’ve personally been a part of their story.

Games can make you feel in control. When you fail, it affects us because we were the ones controlling the actions, and thus the outcome. The author believes that in games there is such thing as the art of failure, something I wholeheartedly agree with.
HOW TO FAIL IN VIDEO GAMES
by Robin Sacks

Citation

Keywords: failure, skill games, chance games, labor games, completable goals, transient goals, improvement goals

Games: Patapon, Uncharted 2, Flywrench, Super Meat Boy, Bejeweled, World of Warcraft, FarmVille, Counter-Strike, Statbuilder, Doom, Mass Effect 2, Super Street Fighter IV, Geometry Wars, Boberman Live, Far Cry 2, Space Invaders

I. Argument & Perspective
In this chapter, Jesper focuses on the different types of failure that can happen in video games. The nature of their argument is that there are different existential and political implications of failing in different types of games. Jesper also argues that failure takes a different form depending on the goal of the game. An interesting quality of Jesper's perspective is that they argue that there are three essential game types and three essential goal types within a game, which makes it easy to map out types of failure on a grid.

II. Ideas
Jesper details what they see as the three essential game types: skill, chance, and labor. A skill game allows you to succeed if you are skilled enough, marks you as inferior if you fail, and upholds the political ideal of meritocracy (i.e. you deserve to succeed if you are better). Chance games allow you to succeed through pure luck, uphold the political ideal of egalitarianism, and in these games failure marks you as unlucky. Labor games, which can be understood as games where your success is based on simply putting in work rather than relying on luck or skill, uphold the Protestant value of hard work as detailed by Max Weber, and existentially imply the player is lazy if they fail.

Jesper goes on to detail what they view as the three essential goals a game can present the player with. The first type is a completable goal, in which the goal is simply making it to the end of the game. With this as the goal, the player is always inherently failing until they complete the game, at which point they are no longer failing. The second type is a transient goal, which can be understood as winning rounds within a game. In this game type the player can never make up for a failure, since a lost match will always be lost. The third type is an improvement goal, meaning the goal is to improve your performance over your last best score. With this type of goal, failure is just part of a continued goal of personal progress.

III. Commentary
I think this is generally a useful context for games, but I think many games defy such categorization, especially sandbox games. For example, in the Sims series, the types of goals players have are as varied as the players themselves. Some may have a completable goal (ex. playing a sim from birth to death) or an improvement goal (ex. getting a sim to the top of their career faster than the last sim), but others may simply have a goal to “explore.” Many players love exploring how many different ways they can kill a sim, for example, which I don’t think fits any of these goal types. In these types of games the game doesn’t decide the goal for the player, the player decides the goal for the game.
How to Fail in Video Games
by Nathan Booco

Citation

Keywords: failure, fairness, skill, chance, labor, completable goals, transient goals, improvement goals
Games: Doom, FarmVille, Flywrench, Geometry Wars, Mass Effect 2, Patapon, Solitaire, Statbuilder, Super Street Fighter IV, Uncharted 2, World of Warcraft

I. Argument & Perspective
This chapter appears in the latter half of Jesper Juul's “Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games”, which orients itself around resolving a central paradox termed the “paradox of failure in games” (p. 2). Juul begins with a brief historical summary of the ways in which games constructed difficulty and identifies historical trends of increasing number of failures and decreased severity of punishment (pp. 69-72). Games offer the promise of a path to success through at least one of three broad, nonexclusive methods, which are used to categorize games as games of skill, games of chance, and games of labor (pp. 73-79). All three offer their own model of fairness, each with its own associated politics. Juul ends by setting these promises of success against three types of goals (completable goals, transient goals, and improvement goals) and offering examples of how each combination creates failure possibilities with different durations and significances for the player (pp. 85-89).

II. Ideas
- paradox of failure - “1. We generally avoid failure, 2. We experience failure when playing games, 3. We seek out games, although we will experience something that we normally avoid.” (p. 2)
- game of skill – Promise of success is predicated on the player's personal ability; promises fairness through meritocracy; failure marks the player as presently inadequate (pp. 74, 81).
- game of chance – Promise of success is predicated on chance; promises fairness through even distribution of odds in the short term and an even distribution of expected success in the long term; failure signifies inherent unluckiness (pp. 75, 81).
- game of labor – Promise of success is predicated on time investment; promises fairness through demand of effort over skill; failure evacuated, leaving relative progress as metric; low achievement marks player as comparatively lacking in dedication or time (pp. 79, 81).
- completable goal – Demands achievement at least once; failure as indefinite state of “have-not-competed-yet;” success as permanent state of “has-completed” (p. 85).
- transient goal – Success condition for a specific session of a game; new possibilities of achievement or failure iterate with each instantiation of the game (p. 85).
- improvement goal – Applies quantification and comparison to transient goals, with a desired result of better performance over time and number of attempts (pp. 85-86).

III. Commentary
Dear Esther's unconventional release of its narrative allows for tremendous leeway for the player to create their own goals in the outlined categories. Going from the beginning of the game to the end constitutes a completable goal, as does accessing all of the exposition through multiple completions. Receiving version of the narrative that grants the player a previously unattained understanding of the narrative or strong support for a particular theory becomes an emergent version of an improvement goal. Through the necessity of multiple attempts and the uncertain nature of each session, Dear Esther can be understood through the lenses of both games of labor and games of chance.
THE ETHICS OF GAME DESIGN
by Seth Pendergrass

Citation

Keywords: ethics, game design, moral choice

I. Argument & Perspective
Sicart argues what is, and is not, ethical gameplay, and thinks about how ethical gameplay can be created.
Sicart does not seek to create tools that directly created ethical gameplay. Additionally, Sicart analyzes games as to whether or not that contain true ethical gameplay.

II. Ideas
- Ethical gameplay – based on the moral choices of the player (i.e. moral choices which change the outcome of the game)
- Ethical game – ethics of experience reflected in game design, experience and community NOT predetermined moral systems
- Open ethical game design – player values and community implemented or reflected dynamically in game world (e.g. MMOs, Civilization)
- Closed ethical game design – player cannot implemented their own values beyond game constraints (e.g. most single player games, Halo 3)
- Ludic experience – gameplay experience (as the player)

III. Commentary
Sicart makes many good points about games often considered “ethical” not really being so, by the definition he provides. A good example that he did not bring up (perhaps due to the age of this work) was the way Bethesda RPG’s (e.g. Skyrim, Fallout 3) attempt ethical interaction with the player. Every action has a predetermined karmic score, making true ethical gameplay impossible with relation to karma system. This in interesting in the context of this chapter, as these games are incredibly popular, in part, because of the moral choices supposedly afforded to the player. I would personally like to see more games provide true ethical gameplay, although I understand just how much more work must be done to provide for this sort of experience in traditional story-based games.

A weakness of this chapter lies in how Sicart is able to point out what is not ethical gameplay, but does not provide any tangible definition of what is. While I know that was not his goal, it would be both incredibly useful for developers and game critics as a whole to have a solid framework for judging how ethical specific gameplay is. By going into more depth on both open and closed ethical games, there is potential to list enough shared traits so as to build at least a working definition.

In the context of our class, I believe it’s important to consider how our gameplay choices are impacted by our morals; every single interaction a player has will be based on their experiences and opinions, even in games where there is not real ethical gameplay. We should discuss future games in this frame of reference, as it provides a much different perspective to typical questions (“is it really a game?”; “is it fun?”).
THE ETHICS OF GAME DESIGN
by Yohan Joseph

Citation: Sicart, Miguel. "The Ethics of Game Design." Ethics of Computer Games. 2009.

Keywords: affordances, closed ethical design, open ethical design, subtracting ethics, mirroring ethics, phronesis and neologisms.


I. Argument & Perspective
The chapter deals with the requirements for implementing ethics in games during the design stage. The chapter also plays on Sicart's various hypotheses about these ethics and about its different types in various different video games.

II. Ideas
The key theme throughout the chapter is about the different types of ethics in video games and the success and failure of different games in correlation to ethical gameplay. The chapter kicks off with two examples, Fable and Knights of the Old Republic. Both according to Sicart were failures in creating a perfectly ethical gameplay for the players. They failed because either they didn't set the players ethical actions in stone thus trivializing the ethical decisions or they quantified ethics into statistics thus undermining the very idea in itself. Both game didn't realize that ethics in video games was much more. According to Sicart, ethics could be divided into two types, open ethical designs and closed ethical designs.

Open Ethical Designs: - This type is when the ethical world of the gameplay is derived by the player itself. All the ethical ideologies are based on what the respective players feel based on different affordances. Games that are designed like this that generally have more leeway. For example many MMORPG's rely on the community of the game to decide many intricate ethical laws and rules that are then implemented by the 'overlord' designers. In most of these games the basic ethical code and rules are written by developers only to be further developed upon by the community of the game making the world itself more open and more inclusive.

Closed Ethical Designs: - This type is when the video game world pushes its own morality and ethics on the player, thus changing the very face of ethics for them. Sicart goes on to further divide this type into two more sub-types, subtracting ethics and mirroring ethics. Mirroring ethics is where the developer realizes that their players are intellectual moral agents in the virtual world. This means that even though the players perform these arbitrary actions commanded by the world of the game in the form of goals, they are still affected as moral agents by their actions. These actions play off this moral understanding combined with a certain helplessness of the illusion of control that leads to the effectiveness of this subtype. Mirroring in all simplicity shows the player his actions as he commits to them, so that they can reflect on their morality. Subtracting ethics on the other hand gives a negative feedback for any unethical action committed even if said action is required for completion of the game. This subtype uses non-diegetic information to negatively reinforce the incorrect actions committed by the player.

III. Commentary
The chapter in particular deals with the issues related to incorporating ethics in videogames with ease, but it becomes questionable when it starts dealing with the different types of ethics in games. Other than one tiny line in the entire chapter the author fails to mention more about the common games that we see today that have a mélange of both open ethical designs and closed ethical designs. This in combination with a more clear distinction between subtracting closed ethics and mirroring closed ethics would have tied up the entire chapter with perfection. The examples of various video games to help with understanding the toolbox ideas Sicart wished to put forth helped understanding the chapter much easier.
UNETHICAL GAME CONTENT AND EFFECT STUDIES: A CRITICAL ETHICAL READING

by Cameron Johnson

Citation

Keywords: Unethical Game Content, Virtue Ethics, Morality, Ludic Maturity
Games: Manhunt, 24: The Game, Soldier of Fortune II, Death Race, Custer's Revenge, Grand Theft Auto, Killer 7, PeaceMaker, America’s Army, Super Columbine Massacre RPG!

I. Argument & Perspective
This chapter focuses on two of what Sicart calls “ethical issues” in computer games, which are “the ethical implications of unethical game content” and “the (moral) effects of computer games on their users.” Sicart tries to reconcile how the public’s “virtue ethics” understanding of how unethical content in games are thought of as real unethical practices instead of being virtual unethical choices a ludic experience. While there are serious instances of taboo unethical game content that can in no way be justified through any moral standard, such as the rape of a Native American woman tied to a pole as a game reward in Custer's Revenge, there is no unethical content that can affect a player’s real morality if he has the ludic maturity to understand that it is a simulation in a ludic experience.

II. Ideas
To list and explain every concept and idea that Sicart introduces in this chapter would be a lengthy non-trivial exercise, so I'll try my best to summarize the most important parts. Of course, the main theme is “unethical game content” which is any simulated action in a game that would, in the real world, be considered unethical by social convention. Later in the chapter, Sicart also compares games that can be very difficult resulting in extreme frustration as being unethically designed. He introduces the concept of “virtue ethics” which when applied to games implies that from playing games with unethical content a player will develop the values that the simulated unvirtuous actions could foster as if the actions were real; in order for a person to be virtuous he must not participate in unethical actions. This concept is commonly applied to games as though they themselves, and not their content, are ethical or unethical. This philosophy applied to games does not take into account the player’s “ludic maturity” which is his/her ability to separate a ludic experience from reality.

III. Commentary
I wanted to do my GSOS on this subject because it is something in games that I have become more sensitive to. Take for instance the campaign in Call of Duty: Black Ops, during one of the cut-scenes you are in a room with a “terrorist” who is tied to a chair and it gives you a prompt to “press left bumper to punch.” This wouldn't be so bad but after some dialog that goes nowhere and a few more prompts you have to press a button to pull his tooth! I don't think this type of linear cinematic interaction is going influence someone to torture someone else, but it reinforces a growing trend of an unjustified devaluation of human life just by applying catchwords like “terrorist” or “Arab.” This is probably not the game designer's intent and I would not for any reason support a ban or boycott of this kind of game. I enjoy the game for the most part but that part makes me sick to my stomach. I think others ought to feel the same way as well, but it's not going to affect someone's virtuousness. Given the example of Black Ops and similar games I agree with Sicart that it takes certain degree of ludic maturity to separate simulated unethical content in games from reality. I think it is also important to note that this is not an issue that is mutually exclusive to digital games. Movies, plays, novels and any sort of entertainment medium has possibility to contain unethical content that does not make the entire work unethical.

Sicart’s answers to the questions he proposes at the beginning of the chapter are subjective, but it is not a black and white subject. It’s hard, if not impossible, to quantify feelings, morality and ethical capacities. Saying that only
players with the ludic maturity should be able to play games with unethical content is not really an answer. I don’t think that there is any way to disagree with that statement. The question is, with what metric do we quantify ludic maturity? Similarly, Sicart posits that design of unethical content should be dictated by a creative and reflective drive, but recognizes the paradox of completely distasteful unethical game content that is designed to be “creative and reflective.” He gives the example of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, which the creator insists is designed for mature players and is meant to foster the discussion of a taboo subject.

I’m not unhappy with Sicart’s answers; I think they are as explicit as they can be. Any expressive medium that has unethical content requires some imaginative maturity to understand it. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is praised by some and scoffed at by others but the thought of banning it seems outrageous because the novel is almost universally accepted as an artistic expression of the author, regardless of the content. Perhaps the questions asked by Sicart will never have a good answer. We may just have to wait until games are appreciated by their worth as an artistic medium, rendering the questions not worth asking.
ETHICAL GAMEPLAY
by Keane Correa

Citation

Keywords: Homo ludens, instrumental play, instrumental rationality,
Games: Limbo (Playdead 2010), StarCraft II (Blizzard Entertainment 2010), Halor Reach (Bungie), Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Bethesda Game Studios 2011), FIFA 12 (EA 2011), Every Day the Same Dream (Pedercini 2009), Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (Naughty Dog 2009)

I. Argument & Perspective
The author seeks to advocate for games that are open for interpretation – games that does not just reward the player for points but for putting their own morality and recognizing the way they play.

II. Ideas
- Murray's concept of "cyberdrama" is addressed in this book because Sicart wishes for games that allow him and other players to be able to place themselves in the game and take part in the fictional story of the game world.
  - “Play is appropriation, creation, expression, and submission to the rules of a game. Play is more about the player who is engaged in a game and less about the rules of such game.” (68)
- Galloway's characterization of players as "operators" also comes into mind because he addresses the operators and their gamic actions. The ethical player allows is able to process the diegetic actions of the machine and play along with the machinma of the games.
  - “Morality is a way of navigating and engaging with the world, and by externalizing the results, we are deprived of our own faculty of moral reasoning…externalizing morality makes it a target to reach rather than a practice to follow” (69)
- Actionism is an idea that Sicart also opposes. He wishes the operator to be more engaged in a phaneroscopical way. He believes that the player can move about the game world using cognitive interactivity and beyond-the-object interactivity.
  - “Slow Technologies give players time to reflect.” (73)
  - “Constructionist here refers to the capacity and duty of a gent to constitute themselves as ethical agents” (78)

III. Commentary
Sicart provides the argument that the design ideology of slow technologies allow the players to reflect in the game. He even believes that a game like Uncharted 2 delivers an experience that the designers deliberately placed in the game for the players to create an ethical discomfort and a moral connection. However, I argue that Drake's actions in the game and most shooter adventure games like Uncharted creates a ludonarrative dissonance. Dissonance in a way that the actions of the player conflict with the narrative of the game. Giving the players this time to reflect using slow technology should be more focused in assessing the question: “Why did I just so any human beings? Should I even feel bad that this village is going to be invaded even though I am committing murder as well?”

While I do believe that games with morality choices should not be based on points and rewards but rather recognizing the way the player moves and behaves about the world, I highly advocate that the narrative should also compliment gameplay. Games like Bioshock, while giving the players a moral choice, the effectiveness is completely discarded when the player is forced to perform mass homicide against so many other people. Sicart fails to address that for an ethic focused game to make sense, the game space, gameplay, and narrative must be woven together in such a way so as to recognize the player.
PLAYING WITH NAMES: GAMING AND NAMING IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT  
by Zike Deng (Zico)

Citation  

Keywords: naming, names in games, naming for structure, creating names, bad taste of names, naming culture in games, names with a history, names as identities.

Games: World of Warcraft

I. Argument & Perspective
The chapter discusses naming in World of Warcraft and explores means and motives of players’ choice of names. Through observing and analyzing more than 1000 characters’ names in World of Warcraft, collecting comments from websites and forums, as well as interviewing with several informants, the author finally comes to a conclusion that names are more than just appearances that distinguish characters, or players, from each other, but they are tightly linked to players’ personalities as who they are.

II. Ideas
- Naming for structure: similar to how names function in real world, names in virtual world enable players to recognize each other and distinguish from each other, thus facilitating communications and interactions. Naming in games also follows normative system and sometimes is under restriction.
- Creating names: players in World of Warcraft use a variety of methods to generate good names. Some players get inspirations from gods’ names in various cultures. Some use their own real names for characters but with different spellings in other languages. Some choose to use names from their favorite books. Some browse the internet and seek for inspirations. Some even use random name generators.
- Names as personal identities: names are not only names of characters in games, but also names through which other players recognize you. Names might also indicate players’ creativity, gender, race, class, and how seriously a player engages in a game.

III. Commentary
I strongly agree with the author’s idea that names in games are equally important to names in really life, because they are essential to create social order and structure our conception of the world. Although characters only exist in virtual space, their names are reflections of players in real world. They represent real identities. Furthermore, the methodologies in this research are worth noting. In order to obtain accurate data, the author let his own characters do fieldwork though which he collected more than 1000 names, and he also created an online forum where he asked players to participate in his study. Interviews are included as well in order to have more explicit perspectives. However, one limitation of this study is that all data are collected from only one specific game: World of Warcraft. If there were more different games analyzed in the study, the conclusion could have been more reliable.
PLAYING WITH NAMES: GAMING AND NAMING IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT
by Josh Bartley

Citation

Keywords: Culture, Reflection, Identity, Association, Appropriate,
Games: World of Warcraft, Dungeons and Dragons, Warhammer 4000, EverQuest

I. Argument & Perspective
The topic of this chapter and research was on the discussion of naming. Hagstrom discusses what goes into a name, the purpose of having one, and what that names means or represents. By using interviews, online studies, and in game observations, Hagstrom discusses the multitude of names she saw, the backstories behind some of those names, and what these names mean not only to the player themselves but to the community as a whole. The nature of this chapter is to look into the reasons why players pick the names that they do and to give us an idea of the culture that surrounds this particular gaming community. The research showed that naming is much more than a beginner's task, it is an identity that you will carry with you throughout the whole game and to some people it means everything to them. An interesting quality of the authors perspective was that they didn't take any name as being lacking purpose or not meaningful. The author shows that even “dumb” names like “bank” have a purpose in that they are named specifically for a task. Names like that are just as meaningful to someone like “Tarir” because the gamer chooses that name for a specific reason and these reasons vary.

II. Ideas
The first idea Hagstrom brings up is that naming can provide structure and organization based off of Levi-Strauss’ theory for order. The idea here being that names are different based on where a person comes from in the real world and this takes place in the game as well. The different races in Azeroth provide different identities for players to attach themselves too and by doing so the naming of their characters becomes categorized by their race. A second idea is that character inspiration comes from a multitude of places. Whether it be from literature, favorite movies, personal preferences, or linking characters together, naming a character is meaningful and says a lot about a player and their connection to their culture. A third idea is that of naming through history. The idea here being that naming can draw from a person's past and through this past can build and shape their future. Anthony Giddens says this is done because “identity is in constant transformation…a person's identity is to keep the narrative going.” This essentially meaning that one's identity is never complete and that we will constantly be evolving and adding to our identity as time goes on.

A key concept of the chapter is that naming is serious. To some people losing a name is everything to them because it is how they are identified not only as gamers but to the community they immerse themselves in like the case of CmdrTaco. A fourth idea being Kjollerstrom's “Bad Taste” is that naming will always be a hard concept because you will always have people that like your name and don’t like it. Also that trying to conserve or push a certain style of name will never last and that culture is rapidly evolving.

III. Commentary
Naming is a concept that seems so unworthy of one's time and so minimal to ones enjoyment of a game, but in reality it is a major part of the game and the gamers themselves. Naming is not only a way to make a
gamers game more meaningful and unique, it allows the gamers to establish an identity in both their own households but in the community as well. Gamers can choose to name their characters based on whatever they see fit as long as it fits into the guidelines. This definitely comes into the big picture of the effect of games outside of games. A name you use in game can be used to identify the person behind the controller as well as their character. For example, my Xbox gamer tag is Jabbawocky10. One of my friends who I play Xbox with calls me Jabbawocky every time I see him and is his go to name for me. Now not only does something that I liked 4-5 years ago (Jabbawockeez dance crew) define what I was a fan of, it also describes me as a person.

Naming can also be used to show the community what you are interested in or are a fan of. For example, in Borderlands 2, I have a character that wears a hooded jacket that resembles one of the characters in the Flash TV series which I am a massive fan of. While at the beginning of the game I didn’t know what to name my character, but when I saw the similarities in outfits between my character and the Rouges Gallery (DC Comics) I knew that I was going to name my character “Rouges”. This type of naming can also be seen in many Fantasy sports team names through the use of player puns, favorite team jokes or other things.

The article completely connected with me and I thought the article connected on a lot of points especially with organization. The fact is that in my experience in gaming, no name comes about without some forethought or purpose for being there. This article greatly expanded on the avenues that I thought naming should be about and connected it to history, culture and the reason behind it all. Gamers want to get the best experience out of a game that they can. If you start off your game by naming a character “First Name Last Name” and have to live with that, chances are you aren't going to have fun. Gaming is all about immersing yourself into the experience and fully interacting with the environment and other players. Naming is a massive part of the immersion process and by naming a character appropriately you can make allies, increase your enjoy ability of the game, and completely become the character you set out to be. A bad name can hinder a characters outcome and sometimes even cause a gamer to start their journey over. Naming is about much more than just something to get out of the way, it is a meaningful process that can carry a person's history or identity and you can't get that from grinding hours into mechanical gameplay.
THINKING INSIDE THE BOX
by Daniel Enoch Tobin

Citation

Keywords: Rules of play, interactivity, games of emergence, games of progression, sense of intention, perceivable consequences, narrative immersion, internal versus external events, glory, artificial scarcity, state machine, main quests versus side quests, story, ritual, sacrifice, time waste, and sense of mastery


I. Argument & Perspective
In this chapter Leibovitz attempts to get us all on the same page in regards to the history of video games and how they relate to spiritual and religious pursuits. He starts by asking us to question the criterion by which we place value on games. He follows this by examining the concept of interactivity and looking at the ways in which game design can fail or succeed. A major point he makes is that video games have gone through an evolution that has satisfied very different human needs in a quite short span of time. Where he asks us to end up at is place where we see video game play, which is non-essential in our modern information age, as serving a deeper purpose.

II. Ideas
Video games have evolved too a point where they allow players to play for “glory” and not just resolution. An understanding of game design, code, algorithms, and internal events can ruin the world of the game for the player. The change from arcade to home based play has changed what players place value on in gameplay. We have moved from a purely linear main quest style of game experience to one in which we desire mastery of the game world though the pursuit of the glory of the side quest, exploration, and digital mementos. Our play at this point in time has become akin to ritual from an anthropological and societal viewpoint.

III. Commentary
A major concept that was pushed forward at the very beginning of this chapter was that we cannot be examining video games through the same lens with which we examine art, movies, or other types of games. For me this was summed up beautifully when he said, referring to non-interactive screen recording that MoMa had in an exhibit on videogames, “The question, then, is not whether video games are art, but whether whatever is currently gracing MoMA’s walls could even be called video games”. For me this cut to the heart of many of the issues we have been examining in class. His later examination of some basic concepts regarding religion and spirituality and the life experience of archaic man and how these related to the experiences some modern players have was strung together in a way I could really connect to. In addition the ways he covered inside and outside events relating to gameplay and the state machines that we experience games via was both challenging enough to expand my thoughts yet still graspable for someone new to the topic like me.
THINKING INSIDE THE BOX: GAME DESIGN, GLORY, AND THE SEARCH FOR GOD
by Cristal Ramos

Citation

Keywords: Fixation, Exchange-value, Algorithm, Medium of superabundance, Godhood, Non-essential items
Games: Pac-Man, Puckman, Crush the Castle, Angry Birds, Legend of Zelda, Eragon, Iwo Jima, Assassin's Creed III, Space Invaders, Asteroids, Wario World 4, Final Fantasy VIII, Metroid Prime

I. Argument & Perspective
Leibovitz begins his chapter by stating that video games are not art but much rather code than anything else. Instead we should be asking ourselves, what makes up a well designed video game? The author says that the divide between code and image are what makes games so complicated to understand. The chapter then goes on talking about whether games as an interactive medium in which the author disapproves the theory by using Ervin Goffman's concept of interplay. He backs up his argument by using Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's example of space of possibility in their book Rules of Play. Leibovitz states that video games redefine interaction by placing players in a carefully designed environment that permits them the freedom to do little more than negotiate the limited number of alternatives on offer (11). He says the only things that can happen are those that are prescribed by the designer and etched in the game's code. According to the author, a poorly designed game is one that leaves no room for chance or deviation and that doesn't have defined rules. He also goes on to disapprove the notion that video games are similar to movies or TV shows by conducting an experiment asking gamers to recall the plot of a video game (in which most didn't remember), proving that the traditional narratives are largely inconsequential to a player's experience. He believes that we should see video games as a system that can be in different states (anatomy of choice). In order for games to be compelling, they must unfold in a way that allows players to continue and believe that the decisions they make are their own, and that the game's world allows for expression of their free will (19). Straying away from game design, the author goes on to talk about how players are on a search for glory. By adding a high score board on early arcade games (the ones you add a coin to), players were more interested in exchange-value (glory) than use-value (functional reward). Then Leibovitz uses the search for the existence of God as a metaphor of game play, and implies that players will always exist in a system in whose true nature—its algorithmic plan—they'll never fully know, and may as well focus on attempts to beat the game. To sustain the inherent logic of the game as a hermetically sealed universe, designers needed to add non essential items/tasks that allow players to assert their sense of mastery over the world. The author describes video games as a "beautifully unproductive waste of time" for a sense of emotional catharsis. To finish off his chapter, he mentions that glory is more important to humans than resolution. We can live without the precise knowledge of the architecture of our circumstances, but not without a sense of agency to affect them and that is what designers should be focusing on (29).

II. Ideas
- Johan Huizinga’s Homo Ludens concept of the magic circle.
- Ervin Goffman's concept of interplay.
- Jester Juul's view on video games as games of progression and games as a state machine.
- Doug Church’s 3 principles that games must allow players to have and are intended to safeguard the purity of the game experience; sense of intention, present perceivable consequences, and immerse themselves in the narrative.
- Salen and Zimmerman's Rules of Play interactivity and anatomy of choice (internal events e.g. the game's hidden architecture VS the external events e.g. visible to the player) models.
- Steven Poole's incoherencies of causality, function, and space.
III. Commentary
This chapter was packed with examples of concepts from other authors. I liked how he said that video games are a complicated medium to comprehend, and that we should not expect to ever fully understand it. We are players, as he puts it, in the search for God’s existence. We know nothing about the designer and his intent, but we keep playing anyways. Like believers who don’t necessarily have evidence of God’s existence, but still live religiously. This chapter left me wanting to learn more about coding, and how it affects the gaming experience.
PROCEDURAL REALISM: THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF REALITY IN VIDEOGAMES
by Victor S. Lee

Citation: Wilcox, Steve. “Procedural Realism- The Political Representation of Reality in Videogames” First Person Scholar. 2014.

Keywords: Procedural Realism, politics of procedural realism, complexity of closure, gaming violence

I. Argument and Perspective
Steve Wilcox argues that the politics of procedural realism in mainstream games “perpetuates the fetishization of violence” by pursuing one form of realism over the other. For example, he argues that the game developers of Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare and the Far Cry series selectively pursues realism on topics such as behaviors of weapons and natural details like fur and fire physics, but not on the reality pertaining to grief and sadness as a result of violence. To emphasize his concern, he compares the Far Cry 4’s main plot to that of ISIS propaganda and ISIL beheadings to game’s throat-stabbing mechanic - “first-person shooter games can be so easily appropriated to serve the rhetorical needs of an organization like ISIL.” As such, he calls for holding game designers accountable for what their games choose to represent and critiqued for their politics of procedural realism.

II. Ideas
- **Procedural realism**: details of the game that strives to “represent real-world systems in a manner deemed accurate or realistic” to the player.
- **Politics of procedural realism**: developer’s decision to choose what to represent realistically and unrealistically.
- **Complexity of closure in games**: unlike literature where a reader reads about a car crash and closure reveals the event in a way that it conforms to the reader’s understanding of car crashes in reality, games “need to be much more explicit”. Ex: In a car race, they need to consider physics, its weight, handling, damages from collisions
- **Procedural realism as a ratio**: Mainstream games commit trade-offs where some parts of the game strives for procedural realism while others are “truncated or omitted”. Could be due to the complexity of closure in games.
- **Developers and their politics of procedural realism needs to be accountable and criticized**

III. Commentary
While Steve Wilcox presents an interesting topic, I find his arguments to be shallow and at times fatuous. Should we criticize a ‘run-and-gun’ game for not having a certain aspect of realism on topics akin to PTSD as he suggests? Depends, but I need more context. Call of Duty series heavily relies on the fast interplay of the brain, the muscle, and the controller (Swink’s cybernetic model), and emphasizes the operator and diegetic game action for competitiveness. It was never meant to be a realistic model for the horrors of war. Call of Duty focuses on the “community player” and the K-D ratio determines the player’s value in the online community. Even its advertisements focus mainly on the average people spraying lead like Rambo to other players. Another way to think about it is through the ludic hermeneutic circle. The developers’ focus is on the cultural human being becoming a player through a community of players, not by being an individual player in a solo op.

Want a game that pursues realism of death and blurring lines of morality in war? Play This War of Mine. The game was created with that in mind. Steve Wilcox’s argument of politics of procedural realism is akin to criticizing a survival horror game for its lack of having a moment of romantic comedy. Far Cry 4 developers focused on fur and fire physics as a standard for their level of realism, not as a conspiracy to corrupt our youth. Why criticize them of that? Instead, we should applaud their ability to extend our current technology of graphics, which raises the bar on visual realism, serving as a stepping stone for future games.
For *Far Cry 4*, author focuses on the design constraints and the player subject, where the player is set in one behavior, committed to violence of action which in turn will affect the player’s morality. What he does not include is the game’s secret ending. If the player listens to the main villain and does what he says, the game ends with a peaceful ending where the main character does not inflict violence to anyone - something un-ISIL like. As an afterthought, his fatuous comparison between ISIL and the game reminded me of Jack Thompson.
PROCEDURAL REALISM
by Alex Schnell

Citation: Wilcox, Steve. First Person Scholar. 2014.

Keywords: Procedural Realism
Games: Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, Far Cry 4

I. Argument & Perspective
The author's commentary is about a topic he identifies as procedural realism, he covers his opinions and perspectives on how game creators use procedural realism to represent a realistic or unrealistic similarity to the physical world. His commentary is elegantly worded and convincing about how games creators use realism to form a message. Yet his writing seems to become partially a ranty about issues he sees in the video game industry or the media charged at analyzing it because the message is shrugged off. (I find this quality of his writing more engaging and entertaining to read, because they are passionate. Similar to your rants.)

II. Ideas
The basis of his argument stems from the idea that game creators will accurately create certain aspect of the game while intentionally or coincidentally leaving other aspects underdeveloped and part of the status quo. An example of this that the author mentions early in the commentary is the comparison between gun models and handling versus the implications of killing another human in first person shooters. By this the author builds on the idea, that action aided by partial realism detract from the need to flesh out the aftermath and repercussions of actions of the character. The author also compares realism through violence and the associated accountability, a game producer has in the message to the player through character actions. The example used in the commentary being throat stabbing of FC4 in comparison to the brutal crimes that Isis perpetrates.

III. Commentary
Mr. Wilcox makes some arguments I agree with and some I do not. I believe personally that his comparison of procedural realism in relation to violent acts being in some way symbolic to the heinous crimes of Isis, to be a bit of a stretch. A response to his argument could be that the "unsavory comparisons", are the game producer adding in real world themes to add tension to the game. This draws similarities to how game producers used to use World War 1 and World War 2 as the main sources of conflict in order to create a game with some grounds in reality. His argument that in FC4 the player character goes to a foreign nation aids a hard line military religious faction to overthrow repressive government is likely the results of the game producer trying to make the game have modern themes. Not make a huge political message as Wilcox suggest they are. Most triple games these days attempt to appeal to the largest percentage of the market possible this means that having more connection to world conflict will increase the game’s relevance. In addition his argument that some triple A games notably Call Of Duty water down themes such as the horrors of war seems to be a case of him wanting the horror genre mixed in with his military fantasy. I believe is not unreasonable to think the creation team for the recent Call of Duty game did not at these themes in intentionally. Because, it might have side tracked the very simplistic and straightforward plot that appealed to the lowest common denominator. One segment of the text that I did agree with on most levels was the one concerning the current landscape of games media. Film and literary critiques are able to express misrepresentations the art has to the subject while not necessarily giving it a worse rating; a Tarantino film is one such example. In the current games landscape with the triple-a producers being very close or outright owning the media critiquing their games, these types of criticism, or in some cases any criticism at all, are completely silenced at the expense of the consumer.
I. Argument & Perspective
This excerpt gives multiple examples of how e-sports can be considered sports just as football and baseball are. The author makes sure to give the argument from the viewpoint of people involved in the e-sports community, often quoting players, audience, and other witnesses. The author explains the competitive aspects of e-sports in multiple sections.

II. Ideas
As mentioned, multiple sections explain the e-sports community. Instead of saying, “this is similar to athletic sports because…” the author simply reveals the information, which strikingly resembles the “real” sports. First, the players achieve incredible feats of the human body such as advanced brain processing and keen dexterity of fingers. The peripherals (technology) gives these skills uses, and they must allow the player to play at his/her greatest limits. Thus many players prefer bringing their own equipment (mouse, keyboard, etc.) that most match their preferences.

A very important part of e-sports is the rules and regulations. Salen and Zimmerman’s Rule of Play outlines three kinds of rules in games, but the article mainly focuses on the third kind: implicit rules: the “unwritten rules”. For instance, “duck jumping” is a technique in Counter-Strike that is banned from tournaments, despite technically existing within the game. In a tournament in Seattle, one team beat the other, but the losing team accused the winning team of duck jumping. This resulted in a huge commotion in which referees could not agree what to do, resulting in distrust in referees.

III. Commentary
I chose to read this article because I follow some competitive gaming. It was an interesting read. E-sports could be part of the blame for the monoculture of game design. Gaming at the professional level requires honing many skills as mentioned in the article. Ludic phronesis is very important in mastering games, and thus developers are inclined to release games with highly similar mechanics, making it easier for the professional gamers to get into the game using their ludic phronesis acquired through playing similar games. For instance, first person shooter (FPS) games on PC almost all use the same control scheme of mouse to aim and shoot, WASD to move. Ludic phronesis is not as important in physical sports as it is to e-sports; rugby skill does not necessarily translate to American football skill, while League of Legends (a MOBA game) skill transfers very well to Defense of the Ancients, another MOBA game, because the games were made to be highly similar to avoid players giving up ludic phronesis if transferring games. This could be an important point in comparing e-sports to traditional sports that was not mentioned in the excerpt.

The Counter-Strike tournament controversy reminded me of the infamous “Holy-Roller” play in American football, in which the Oakland Raiders scored a game-winning touchdown with intentional forward fumbling, which was against the rules. The referees did not notice that the fumbles were intentional, and thus the Raiders walked away with the win. It was after the game when the controversy arose, and referee distrust rose. In both the Counter-Strike and NFL case, referees overlooked intentional rule-breaking, and when the people found out the controversy rose. This parallel links e-sports to their more mainstream counterparts.
Playing for Keeps
by Matthew Xu

Citation

Keywords: FPS-first-person shooter, LAN-local area network, DWANGO-Dial-up Wide-area Network Games Operation, F2F-face-to-face, CPL-Cyberathlete Professional League, WCG-World Cyber Games, RTS-real-time strategy, KeSPA-Korean e-Sports Association, PC bangs—internet and gaming café, Internet Protocol pricing-business model where internet cafés have licenses for a set number of computers


I. Argument & Perspective
The earliest days of competition between players goes back to the seventies where computer scientists in college laboratories would compete with each other in games such as Spacewar. When games moved to the arcade, the invention of the high score list was essential to the culture of video game competition. The next big revolution in competitive computer gaming came with the release of FPS games such as Doom and Quake as this was the first time people were able to play each other online. In fact Quake was the first computer game tournament to have a very significant prize in the form of a Ferrari. Later on, the CPL was formed and was one of the first organizations to host regular tournaments to support the e-sports scene. The e-sports scene in Korea is much more developed than it is in the rest of the world. Professional gamers are held to the same regard as movie stars, pro athletes, and celebrities. They have sponsorships from big name corporations such as Samsung and AMD. One reason for the much more mature scene in Korea is because of an entity called KeSPA that regulates all things e-sports. Another reason why gaming is so mainstream is because of PC bangs where many young people hangout. Media coverage on mainstream television also shows the maturity of the scene.

II. Ideas
Sponsorships are a major driving force in the e-sports scene. The money that comes from sponsors both grows and sustains the scene by providing the funds necessary to run tournaments, equipment for the players, money to support professional clubs and teams, and salaries for the players of the teams. In return for the money, the players, teams, and tournament organizers act as living advertisements for the products that the sponsors want them to promote. In the end it is sort of a win-win situation that benefits everyone. Mainstream acceptance is something that the rest of the world needs to work on in order for e-sports to grow. The effect of things such as PC bangs is very evident in how professional gaming found its place in Korean culture. While the development of PC bangs is unlikely in the west due to the prevalence of personal computers, perhaps all that is needed for mainstream acceptance is a more open mind towards new things.

III. Commentary
In my opinion, perhaps one of the main reasons why the western scene is not as developed as the Korean scene is because of the lack of easily accessible media coverage. As an avid follower of various e-sports scenes over the last few years I can say with confidence that there has been explosive and exponential growth in the last few years after the author's book was written in 2011. One of the reasons is because of a site called twitch.tv that allows users to livestream themselves playing video games. This was the site that personally got me hooked on e-sports as it was an interactive medium where pro players can teach a live audience with commentary in response to the audience's remarks. In addition, just watching something being done at the highest level is something of awe. This is the same reason why people watch the Olympics. Twitch was also a way where professional players can earn a stable income through advertising revenue that comes with streaming. Just from looking at the prize pool available at tournaments you can tell how much growth has happened as a tournament last year had a prize pool of 18.5 million compared to just a few thousand as described by the author. Even big name investors such as Mark Cuban are interested in e-sports now. The growth of e-sports is very closely tied to the growth of twitch as at the end of the day, the spectators make everything possible just like in physical sports.
Playing for Keeps
by Kevin Wong

Citation

Keywords: e-sports, professional gaming, power gamer, high score list, Korean scene
Games: StarCraft, WarCraft, Counter-Strike, EverQuest, Half-Life, Quake, Doom, Wolfenstein 3D, Pac-Man, Asteroids, Star Fire

I. Argument & Perspective
In his book Raising the Stakes, T.L. Taylor uses his first chapter, “Playing for Keeps,” to outline the history and evolution of competitive gaming, and provide anecdotes from his own experiences with the e-sports industry. Taylor divides the history of competitive gaming into two distinct periods: the first characterized by “high score list” games where players indirectly compete in a leaderboard system, and the second where players directly compete with each other. Taylor goes on to discuss the Korean professional gaming scene and how it serves as a basis for the development of e-sports.

II. Ideas
The Korean model that Taylor presents is characterized by an ultra-prevalent game culture (compared to western societies), governmental and infrastructure support, corporate involvement, and support from a variety of media outlets.

III. Commentary
Taking stock of the western e-sports industry several years after the publication of Taylor’s book, it’s clear that certain aspects of the Korean model have developed faster than others. In terms of governmental support, professionals across many games are now eligible for P-1A visas to compete in the United States as “athletes.” Additionally, corporate involvement is definitely on the rise. Taylor mentions telecommunications giants such as Samsung, KTF, SK Telecom, and Pantech that all hold major stakes in Korean e-sports. These names are now rivaled by the likes of Nissan, Red Bull, Geico, Intel, and many others. And finally, there’s no denying that e-sports is receiving more exposure from a wide range of media outlets than ever before. Games such as League of Legends, Dota 2, and Hearthstone all have a mainstay on ESPN.com; some games, such as Heroes of the Storm, have even received on-air features. Despite all this, gaming and e-sports still remains a fairly isolated activity compared to the model Taylor describes. A key component of infrastructure support is the ability to publically play, discuss, and live games and e-sports; the example he gives is the PC Bang culture of Korea. While attempts have been made to progress this facet of e-sports and game culture, it has yet to become mainstream in western society.

An organic conversation that arises when talking about e-sports and competitive gaming is whether these games should be considered sports. The United States government has hinted their answer, allowing gamers to receive visas reserved for athletes. However, many would consider the classification of gamers as athletes absurd. Others might attempt to differentiate athletes and sports, and make arguments based on various definitions, none absolute.

At the end of the day, this discussion is rather pedantic. Over the past several years, we’ve witnessed immense growth in western e-sports culture and its influence on major aspects of common culture is undeniable. Athletes, sports, gamers, nerds, whichever label you prefer, e-sports is here to stay.
WHERE THE WOMEN ARE
by Mariah MacKenzie

Citation

Keywords: women gamers, identity exploration, virtual environment exploration, the pink games movement, differential social power, gender-blindness, gendered marketing campaigns, the “ideal player”

Games: Hearts, Bingo, Asheron’s Call, Ultima Online, EverQuest, Yohoho! Puzzle Pirates, Tomb Raider, Barbie Fashion Designer, Rockett series, Let’s Talk about Me, The Sims, EverQuest II

I. Argument & Perspective
Taylor argues that contrary to popular belief, women gamers are a growing demographic within the online video gaming community, as evidenced by PC Data Online’s 2001 market-research study. Although playing games like Hearts and Bingo contributed to the data, women are beginning to play more MMOGs – massively multiplayer online games – and comprise 20-30% of three major MMOGs’ subscriber bases (Asheron’s Call, Ultima Online, and EverQuest). Taylor proceeds to explore various aspects of these video games through the perspective of women gamers – in particular, those from the EverQuest subscriber base – to ascertain why they are participating in these online communities, despite the designers largely catering to their male audiences. Efforts made in the past to include women into the gaming community, such as the pink games movement, were insufficient considering the games were tailored around traditionally “feminine” sensibilities and pastimes. The chapter closes with a call for more video games to be created allowing women to play freely alongside men regardless of stereotypic gendered preferences, thereby providing all of their players with an opportunity to explore their varying interests.

II. Ideas
Women gamers do, in fact, exist, and can find enjoyment in androcentric online video game environments in multiple ways. One such way is through identity exploration; they like emphasizing certain personality traits through their choice of MMOG character types, and being able to switch between different characters depending upon their moods. Women gamers also enjoy the freedom inherent in virtual environment exploration. Although the environment or characters within it may threaten them, women gamers will not be targeted based upon their gender, which is not always guaranteed in real life. The pink games movement was an attempt to include women into the video gaming community in the 1990s, however it only did so through the creation of games like Barbie Fashion Designer that capitalized upon stereotypical “feminine” interests. Due to the nature of the video games targeted to them, male gamers accrue more social power or legitimacy through playing “their” games than do women gamers, contributing to women gamers’ invisibility. Some game designers try to lessen their tendencies to cater toward male gamers by utilizing gender-blindness, or the failure to view things from a gendered perspective. Marketing campaigns are gender-focused by targeting video games’ “ideal players” – straight, adolescent white males – and demonstrate this by either utilizing sexualized women within their advertisements, or only showing men playing their games.

III. Commentary
This chapter tied in quite nicely with the views expressed in the Anna Anthropy reading for class by discussing who the “ideal player” is, how mainstream games are particularly catered toward a single demographic, and how there is a need for more diverse games that can be enjoyed by a wide variety of individuals. The truth of women gamers’ preferences within online video game environments cited really strengthened the author’s authority for me, considering I was able to identify with all of them as a female gamer. I particularly enjoyed the author’s articulation of why virtual environment exploration is so enjoyable, because that explanation – although resonating with me strongly – had never occurred to me before.
BECOMING PRO
by Dylan Jeffery

Citation

Keywords: E-Sports
Games: Starcraft, Counter Strike

I. Argument & Perspective
E-Sports lack of established avenues for players “professionalization” leaves developing players in a sort of Wild West, where there are no rules or metrics. Their best hope is to find a reliable team and stick with them, because there’s no guarantee they’ll find another. Not to mention that women are few and far between and largely face exclusion without formal methods for entering the scene.

II. Ideas
Professionalization is established as the transition amateur players make when they break into the professional scene.

III. Commentary
I’ve been following the professional Dota 2 scene for 3-4 years, so this idea of the professionalization process and how it might be improved is very interesting. On multiple occasions there have been talks of player unions but nothing has ever come of it. The rampant instability in Dota 2 teams leaves many players teamless when a big tournament comes around, and some type of player organization could help them through that.
Finding New Worlds
by Zoe Escalona

Citation

Keywords: MMO, playspace, bashes
Games: EverQuest

I. Argument & Perspective
Taylor argues that massively multiplayer online games blur the boundary between “game” and “non-game” spaces. They extend the “playspace” to outside of the game. Taylor also touches upon the community formed with MMOs and how a player navigates between the real world and the virtual one. One of Taylor's methods was to immerse herself in gaming culture. She played EverQuest online for four years with several different characters and also went to in person meet ups, or “bashes,” for the game. She wanted to concentrate her efforts on deciphering the relationship between MMOG players and the multiple worlds they reside in.

II. Ideas
Taylor believes that online multiplayer games are “fundamentally social spaces” and that they can create powerful shared experiences. Users navigate between online and non-online spaces in nuanced and complex ways. Specifically, Taylor brings up the idea of the real imitating the virtual. This was seen in the way that people at real life gatherings would be called by and act like their in-game avatars. Taylor also expands upon the idea that permeable boundary between in-game and out-of-game also extends to online and offline life in general.

III. Commentary
The boundaries between in game worlds and reality are being broken with the rise of online gameplay. I think that it is integral to remember that online environments are affecting the real world.

Taylor’s argument is interesting because of its implications for the internet world in general, especially when we consider the rise of social media. More and more we see people finding friends and communities online and not just in games, but also online video (like Youtube) and fan culture. Taylor talks about the instant sense of belonging that materialized when she found other people that played on the same game server as her. These connections are made on almost arbitrary details of in-game life, but are forging tangible relationships in the real world.

Taylor’s argument connects to the Multivalent Model, specifically relating to the Mode Four: Beyond-the-Object Interactivity. In EverQuest, players were taking their dedication to the game outside of the actual game. By holding events and meeting people in real life, they were ascending the boundaries of what the game was suppose to be. This was seen especially in the live-action LiveQuest version of the game. We also see this happening in other parts of the internet world, like the creation of VidCon, a convention/conference for online video.

It would be interesting to pursue what difference her immersion into the virtual game world had on her perception of it and her research in general. I wonder if her investment in the game created any favorable biases towards the online gaming community that could have swayed her research.
Playing for Keeps
by Shane Bowers

Taylor, T.L. "Playing For Keeps" Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming, 2012

Keywords: Power gamer, Esports, F2F (face to face), cyberathlete
Games: way too many... some of the important ones include: Counterstrike, StarCraft II, Quake, Doom, Half-Life, Asteroids

I. Argument & Perspective
The chapter was about exploring the history/ rise of competition in relations to gaming and the struggles / milestones all of the effected parties went through to contribute to the common of goal of mixing competition with gaming in a successful and wholesome manner. The most important stance that the author took was addressing videogames in an optimistic way and not writing them off as childish or irrelevant.

II. Ideas
The ideas put forth in esports definitely do diverge from a large category of thinking when it comes to gaming but also highlight some of the skipped over portions that are defiantly important and shouldn't be ignored. Instead of arguing about the purpose of gaming being leisure vs. art or leisure vs. education, the debate takes a turn becomes the question of whether playing the game can become an actual profession. The Whitmanian perspective is also very relevant in this book due to the fact that "playing is not a half-sleep, but, in highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle". Competitive gaming adopts the most rigorous version of this exercise and puts videogames on a completely different level from just brainless button pushing. It's also worth noting that to achieve the worthy skillset necessary to be able to compete at such high levels in gaming, a player or operator must master all of the Diegetic aspects of a game.

III. Commentary
For me, a one sheet is not nearly enough space to express all of my thoughts, praises, facts, experiences, and sheer excitements that I have had with esports of the years. Ever since I stumbled across the broadcast IPL 4, a League of Legends tournament in 2012, I have been following esports and have seen how it has evolved and become a very prominent industry worldwide. The concept of leisure vs. profession is almost quite trivial now since paying videogames has become a large number of people's careers especially in the past year. There are still people who don't give credit where credit is due and continue to trivialize this industry but seeing that League of Legends has become a billion dollar industry; those who oppose esports are realistically just in denial. I think it's important to understand where I'm coming from when I say how real esports have become. Players practice ten to twelve hours a day in a multitude of ways including theory crafting, physical fitness to boost mental functionality, and honing mechanics and team play in the game itself. Teams have a coaching staff which usually consists of 2-3 analysts, a head coach, a team manager, and a life coach. Teams are being sponsored by major companies and have contracts that are signed by players that are legally binding. Players are actually imported from around the world to different regions to play for teams and work visas are issued to them as if they had the same status as professional athletes. Players can make millions of dollars a year, gathering incomes from things like: tournaments, sponsorship deals, streaming the game online, and as salary from the teams they are on. It's also noteworthy that commentating, analyzing, and speculating the game is also a means of careers for people through the companies that run the tournaments. Comparing this to things mentioned in the chapter about battling on arcade games to get high score or the difficulty of traveling to competitions just shows how much esports has grown over the years and how much it should be looked at as a profession for the controller in addition to things like art, education, or literature.
Slave Morality and Master Swords: Ludus and Paidia in Zelda
by Serena Wisner

Citation

Keywords: Ludus, Paidia, Slave Morality, Master Morality, “good,” “evil,” Modes of Play
Games: The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, Majora’s Mask, Wind Waker, Twilight Princess, The Sims

I. Argument & Perspective
Link, the protagonist from The Legend of Zelda, is an inherently good and moral protagonist, who has no other choice when following the narrative of the game. When the player guides Link in this way, they are engaging in ludus play. When the player “goes off the path” from the narrative, they are engaging in paidia play, and are neither moral nor immoral. The ludus and paidia player also relate to Friedrich Nietzsche’s two types of morality: master morality and slave morality, which can be loosely defined as “good” and “evil.” The author ties all aspects of play and morality back to Link and Ganon, and how the terms relate to the two in the game world.

II. Ideas
There are three different ways of interacting with Link, leading, becoming, and observing him, based on the different levels of engagement. When the player switches to paidia play, the player is leading Link. Engaging in the narrative, and ludus play is when the player becomes Link. Finally, the player observes Link when watching cut scenes. In the game, Link is a moral person who cannot lie and worse sin is breaking clay pots.

Ludus play, in the Zelda world, refers to following the story, and saving Zelda and Hyrule from Ganon’s evil, where paidia play is breaking that narrative, be it side quests, or glitching the game. This existence of ludus and paidia in Zelda can also parallel morality in the real world: master morality and slave morality.

The “masters” creates the rules, and decides what is “good” and “evil,” according to their standards. The “slave” then is forced to follow them, but is skeptical and suspicious of the “masters.” The “master” in this case, also seeks to inspire fear in the “slaves” and becomes the “evil” to the slaves, hence, the description of Ganon as the “master” and Link as the “slave.”

III. Commentary
I’ve been playing Zelda for many years, and I’ve never really thought about the real-world philosophy behind it, so this was a neat article to grasp the philosophy perspective of the games. I get the concept of Link trying to destroy the Master’s “evil,” as it goes against his own principles, but I wouldn’t necessarily say that Link is an inherently moral character, or a “blank slate” as the author states. For example, in Link’s Awakening, Link can steal from the shop in the village. Although he is labeled as “THEIF” for the remainder of the game, he is no longer that good character that he is described to be. As for the three aspects of Link, leading, observing, and being Link, I don’t think that those three aspects were what the designers had in mind when creating and naming the protagonist. Miyamoto, the creator of The Legend of Zelda, once stated that Link was intended to be a literal link between the player and the protagonist. That is to say, the player was intended to actually be Link, there’s even the option at the beginning of every Zelda game to name Link whatever you choose. Thus, your actions in the game are Link’s actions. Every “deviation” from the narrative is still Link’s actions, without the player “leading” him. One of the arguments that I do agree with is the slave and master morality that is presented towards the end. The authors argue that the “master” (Ganon), creates the rules and society and the “slave” (Link), is forced to live by those rules, and eventually, the slave seeks to break those rules, and “restore equilibrium.”
I. Argument & Perspective
The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy explores a variety of topics surrounding the way we play the Zelda series and the philosophy behind his hero journey.

II. Ideas
- “Thought theory” is the idea that we attach emotions and imagine it happening to us. Or apply those emotions in general, even if they aren’t happening directly to us. For example, we feel happy as Arielle, Link’s sister gives him a telescope for his birthday, the same way we would if our own sister did that. Or we feel scared as a monster breathes fire at us, as if it were there in real life (but not to the same degree).
- “Environmental presence” is the idea that a virtual object or world is actually there, in your mind and you interact with it the same way. Also, to go one step farther, that you perceive the hero to actually be you.
- Existentialism in The Legend of Zelda. Link is the lonely hero, and though he gets help from many along the way, it is his journey alone that can save everyone. Also, it is his journey and fate to again and again save the world from Ganon. However, every journey is still as fun and interesting for him and the player. Does link have a will, or do we project ours onto him? Where does the freedom lie? Is Link our slave or are we a slave to Link and the boundaries in the game?

III. Commentary
I have had the feeling of environmental presence while playing Zelda before, leaning in to make Link move faster and putting more force into pressing the A button for a ‘stronger’ attack during boss battles. I understand thought theory because every time I play I get emotional and invested because the characters, sages, and places all mean things to me. I connect Link with myself, and the other characters with friends, his hometown of the Kokiri Forest becomes my Arlington, and I react as if Link’s major story events happened in my real life. The Hero’s Journey theme comes with a lot of existentialism, that Link is destined to again and again save Hyrule and the princess is destined to forever be captured and held in peril by Ganondorf, the eternal villain of the series. However, this makes the journey no less fulfilling and I am doomed to play Zelda again and again, with every new addition and replaying old versions. However, the journey is no less gratifying, interesting and fun for me.
SETTING UP THE GAME
by Brian Amoeni

Citation

Keywords: Popular & Pervasive, Franchise, Prolific, Passive Observer
Games: Legend of Zelda 1986 (NES); Adventures of Link 1987 (NES); A Link to the Past 1991 (NES); Links Awakening 1993 (GB); Ocarina of Time 1998 (N64); Majora's Mask 2000 (N64); Oracle of Seasons 2001 (GBC); Oracle of Age 2001 (GBC); Four Swords 2002 (GBA); Wind Waker (2002) (GameCube); The Minnish Cap 2004 (GBA); Twilight Princess 2006 (Wii); Phantom Hourglass (DS)

I. Argument & Perspective
Zelda and philosophy! Luke Cuddy proclaims that Zelda is quite possibly one of the most notable franchises of all time. Cuddy heralds at how exuberant the notoriety of the digital elf is, and claims that to even brand yourself as a gamer, you are required to have an adequate amount of knowledge regarding Link and his Princess. As we continue into the novel, Cuddy begins to question the meaning of Zelda, Link, and The Triforce. What does this mean? This means that Zelda is big, huge even, so big that the size of this franchise broaches the connection of the game, to reality. Delving into this connection we ask, what is the nature of the gamer’s connection to link? Does Link have his own will, or do we, as active controllers, project our will onto Link? This also brings up questions about the Triforce, such as how courage, wisdom, and power connect the franchise to reality. As the author generates all these inquiries, our cognitive processes are provoked, provoked and channeled into philosophical thoughts.

II. Ideas
Cuddy states the belief that the Legend of Zelda Franchise is “one of the most popular and pervasive” titles to have “leaked through and corroded pop culture like a divine solvent”, and by all respects I can’t help but to agree with him. Zelda is insidious within the gaming culture, more prolific than Sunshine in Hawaii. The franchise has comics, music, encyclopedias, and games mimicking the game itself frolicking throughout gaming society. Cuddy then illuminates the connection of this huge franchise as a proponent of philosophy, stating that “Zelda does not itself state a philosophical position. Zelda does not do philosophy. But it does bring some very interesting philosophical questions to the table, inciting the thinkers to adopt their own positions”. So, how does Zelda generate philosophical thoughts? One of the most easily recognizable connections to philosophy is Plato’s “Aha!” moment, or a moment often referred to as “Eureka!” Place yourself into the position of a gamer operating Link, traversing through a difficult dungeon, decoding challenging puzzles, and toppling resilient enemies. At the end of the dungeon, Link’s journey culminates to a secret room with a treasure chest. He then proceeds to opens it, and to his delight, a ladder, a weapon, or a crucial item is lifted over his head. Now imagine yourself thinking, hard pressed and exerting your cognitive boundaries, when voila, the answer you’ve been seeking pops into the floating abyss you call a head. That is Plato’s “AHA!”, that is the feeling of gratification, that is philosophy.

III. Commentary
When it comes to finer workings of Zelda and philosophy, I personally think it is very intriguing, for not often do you deconstruct a childhood pastime with the lens of a philosopher. I think this novel keys into our natural curious tendencies as humans, and illuminates the deep prodding questions we have at the far recesses of our minds. I personally love Zelda, and during my playthroughs I am generally far too preoccupied by the marvels within the game to ponder the meaning of the Triforce, and the meaning of courage, wisdom, and power. However, after my entrancing session of player inputting, I was able to step back and speculate. Why does Zelda make us feel like we do? Why am I delighted when Ganondorf has been vanquished? Why am I heartbroken when the Princess is abducted? I mean, these characters aren’t real, so should I really feel a connection? I believe I should. This art form really allows human emotion and empathy to bridge into the digital dimension. It is astonishing that our ties to these animated pixels are more tangible than we give credit. I believe that this relation of Zelda and philosophy is only grazing the surface of the countless analyses which will validate this art medium moving forward.