Game-Street: Rhetoric and Critical Play for Business Ethics Instruction

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GAME-STREET: RHETORIC AND CRITICAL PLAY FOR BUSINESS ETHICS INSTRUCTION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Professional Communication

by
Glen T. Southergill
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Accepted by:
Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik, Committee Chair
Dr. Steven Katz
Dr. Cynthia Haynes
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores business ethics instruction as a rhetorical problem and discusses critical play as a means of learning. Aristotle’s concept of phronesis, or practical wisdom, is used as a way of demonstrating the problematic nature of business ethics pedagogy theory and practice when viewed through a lens of social epistemic rhetorical theory. Rather than attempting to quantify business ethics, this work argues for a subversive paradigm achievable through critical play.

Game space is observed in two domains of ethical learning. I argue that the business ethics classroom space of Clemson University is a form of remediated non-space constrained by game-esque mechanics and social conventions. A Massively Multi-Player Online Role-Playing game (in this case, World of Warcraft) offers illustration of aligning business ethics learning with play. Critical play permits subversion and/or unlearning (replacement of existing paradigms with new ones), and is observed in classroom (non-space) and World of Warcraft (virtual mixed-ecology space).

For educators and theorists interested in business ethics instruction, this thesis suggests both a mechanism of “viewing” and “teaching” that responds to the rhetorical problem of business ethics and concludes with a call for interactive ethics across the curricula.
DEDICATION

This work is presented with respectful admiration for the dedication of all those who live(d) the creed *non ministrari sed ministrare*. I also dedicate this work to my dedicated, patient, and loving family (most especially my wife Trisha). This thesis is lastly dedicated to Dr. Jeicha. My work is possible because you saw in me a potential that others did not. Thank you, sir, for exhibiting the teacher ethos I seek to develop.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My Clemson University experience was enriched by a number of people. In particular, I acknowledge the many contributions of my committee readers, Drs. Cynthia Haynes and Steven Katz. To Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik, I offer a special thanks for his guidance. Drs. Tharon Howard and Martin Jacobi, perhaps not in agreement regarding the works of Plato, can be placed together as wonderful teachers under whose skillful wings I began to fly. I thank Rev. John Nieman for recently reminding me to trust myself. Lastly, I thank the students and staff of Clemson University’s Department of English and Master of Arts in Professional Communication program for two wonderful years.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

“This economic crisis began as a financial crisis, when banks and financial institutions took huge, reckless risks in pursuit of quick profits and massive bonuses. When the dust settled, and this binge of irresponsibility was over, several of the world's oldest and largest financial institutions had collapsed, or were on the verge of doing so. Markets plummeted, credit dried up, and jobs were vanishing by the hundreds of thousands each month. We were on the precipice of a second Great Depression” (President Barack Obama).

“The point is, ladies and gentlemen, that greed – for lack of a better word – is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms – greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge – has marked the upward surge of mankind” (From the film Wall Street).

“But at the same time, each party must take care not to say or do anything tending to impose upon the other” (Chief Justice John Marshall, Laidlaw v. Organ, 15 U. S. 178 (1817)).

“Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty” (Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI)

When I began mulling this thesis in 2009, the American economy was in the midst of a crippling recession. Consumer confidence and unemployment were headed in opposite (and decidedly unfavorable) directions. Barack Obama, before a crowd widely reported in excess of one million attendees, took the Presidential Oath of Office in January. During his inauguration speech, Obama declared “That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood... Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some…” (para. 3). The crises struck perilously close to home when my wife and brother, employees of Clemson and Arizona State University respectively, were placed on mandatory furloughs to combat budgetary shortfalls. It was
a year of optimism and hardship. And it was during this time I elected to study how educators could contribute to the process of dismembering the unsavory business practices that had so contributed to our collective woes using the technology I so revere.

The relationship of ethics to business practice is a rich area for conversation. Popular culture has not hesitated to share a perspective. For example, American film has long explored this culture of greed. Iconically, the character Kane in the acclaimed film *Citizen Kane* uses his power as owner of the fictional newspaper *Inquirer* to instigate the Spanish-American War.

More recent films, such as *Capitalism: A Love Story* and *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* each challenge the viewer to take a direct interest in ethical business practice. In *Enron*, the viewer is prompted to “ask why.” The idea behind which is that a population skeptical of business motives and willing to question those motives is likely to prevent abuse. *Capitalism* directly admonishes the audience to intervene and demand reforms quickly. The film’s director, documentary film maker Michael Moore, suggests that he is eager for change but cannot do it alone.

In both *Enron* and *Capitalism*, workers are encouraged to influence the practices of their organizations. *Avatar*, a Golden Globe winning film that grossed in excess of $75 million dollars its opening weekend, invokes a fictional corporation behaving quite badly. The protagonists of *Avatar* are those who fight the “evil corporation.” American film has a history of calling for reform of business practice such that it is more socially responsible. Perhaps it is time for games to follow suit.
It would be comforting to believe that unethical business practice is confined to the Hollywood back lot. Such a belief fails to account for recent events. Shoddy business ethics appeared with disconcerting regularity during the first years of the new millennium. The first decade of which began with the now infamous Enron scandal; then assorted shenanigans including questionable sub-prime consumer lending practices, allegations of gasoline price fixation and fraud perpetrated by Bernie Madoff followed. The global financial system struggled in 2009, perhaps triggered by failures to behave prudently. Society’s fortunes can mimic those of some businesses (such as Lehman Brothers). Indeed, a global corporation’s failure can endanger economic security on an international scale. That the stakes have grown this large adds urgency to this discussion.

Yet, efforts to produce “ethics” have not resolved the problem. Business writer Stevenson Jacobs notes that $100 million dollars in bonus payments were being paid to American International Group employees following a year during which $120.7 billion dollars of government assistance was needed to stay solvent. Even some students of business have shown remarkable nonchalance on the subject of ethics. Journalists Geoff Gloeckler and Jennifer Meritt report that several hundred applicants to graduate business study were denied admission after “hacking into software to check on the status of their applications” (1). Sadly, no movie-making magic is needed to create a representation of unethical business practice. One needs only to consult a local newspaper. The stories seemingly confirm unethical business practices occur regularly with far reaching consequences. It is not just a “good idea” to question the methods for business ethics instruction, but a necessity.
Nearly two hundred years have passed since the landmark United States Supreme Court *Laidlaw* case in which Chief Justice Marshall explained that parties in a business contract bear a responsibility to “take care” to avoid imposing on the other party (see quotation on page 1). Ethical theorist Robert Kolodinsky comments that, a century later, Henry Ford (in response to stockholder criticism) suggested businesses provide a service to society. Some shareholders criticized Ford’s reinvestment of financial capital on expansion instead of dividends. Kolodinsky notes an increasing focus on corporate social responsibility during the 20th century whereby businesses and educators involved “ethical” thinking as desirable characteristics. Despite this accounting of history, we face in the 21st centuries well publicized failures. One wonders whether the year 2017, both a centennial and bi-centennial anniversary of infamous business ethics events, will stay true to form.

It is logical to conclude that educators have a responsibility to respond. Their students will one day enter the business community and shape standard professional practices. As University of Northern Iowa Professor Donna Wood tells the Associated Press, “students need to be inspired of the possibilities of not doing harm” (1). Because the results of business practice are felt widely and educators can influence (even if indirectly) those practices, the need for reconsideration is great. However, how does one inspire? How does one express possibility? No weapon in regards to these questions is as potent as the imagination. Old paradigms yield begrudgingly; the gears of “intellectual progress” rhetorically construct themselves in metaphorical grinding fashion. As Thomas Kuhn notes, tacitly accepted knowledge defends itself. For the business community and
its notion of ethics, education would benefit from unleashing and directing disruptive creativity to build new from old.

It is for those reasons that I invoke rhetoric to problematize concrete notions of ethical instructions. Inevitably, as supported both by my review of business ethics pedagogy theory and classroom observations, attempts to quantify this concept into a mathematical model fail. I argue not for a new model or definition, but a way of seeing the problem. In aspiring for a subversive paradigm, I ultimately agree that changing times and the rhetorical nature of self will not permit absolute clarification of “how” or “what” ethics to teach.

Game theory, particularly as applied to (un)learning, is promising to this perspective. I select (un)learning as a reference to the duality of task facing business educators. Existing paradigms of ethics need fundamental reconsideration. Ideas based on agency theory are insufficient and pervade the current system. Instead, I suggest a need to frame this conversation rhetorically. Professor Steven Katz, in The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric, describes a view of rhetoric held by Isocrates and the sophists where oratory has the strength to “shape” perception, thought and civilization (97). In Katz’ argument, virtue according to Isocrates is a practical aesthetic instead of rigid system of rules (101). In many respects, I both embrace this model and position gaming as a tool aligned with it. Exploring business ethics literature rhetorically is thus integral to the placement of game theory, given that sensory experience can lead to creative acts of definition and deliberation.
As but one example, consider the mis/understanding of the ethical issue as an internal conflict between one’s sense of “right” and the perceived needs of the organization. To place the conflict in wording likely familiar to those having read arguments commonly associated with Milton Friedman, does the member of a business have a responsibility beyond legal compliance in such a case? One agreeing with Friedman’s often recognized position may say that ethical training simply consists of regulatory compliance and fiduciary responsibility. Any concern beyond profitability and legality has no place in the business field, to paraphrase the landmark argument. Business training concerns itself with profitability and legality in this school of thought. Fingerprints of Friedman’s argument remain in business literatures which limit the definition and scope of ethics training. Such a position where ethics is a concrete, absolute reality illustrates precisely why new approaches are needed. Neither “legality,” “social good” (*phronesis*), or “personal virtue” sufficiently address the rhetorical problem that such constructs are inherently flawed.

A position aligned with Friedman’s, as I later suggest, insufficiently addresses the ethical problem (when viewed rhetorically) and diminishes the impact of game theory. I consider ethics a rhetorical construct approachable through critical game play. The capacity of games to inspire disruption through intervention, promote enjoyable engagement through interactivity, and construct relationships through gamer/game interactions illustrate that they are an asset. As a central consequence of this inquiry, I discuss how gaming could intersect with business ethics education using the concept of critical play. With the divorce of game play from triviality comes the potential for
addressing pressing societal needs through interactive mediums. One such pressing need, the question of how future business management practitioners learn ethics, is considered in this thesis.

This possible intersection between technology and social need is an exciting space into which games can charge; I hope to theorize the possible implementation of learning games to teaching business ethics. Game theorist Espen Aarseth observes “after forty years of fairly quiet evolution, the cultural genre of computer games is finally recognized as a large-scale social and aesthetic phenomenon to be taken seriously” (45). With the development of this new medium comes the recognition of new avenues for research. Gaming is an immersive medium that can potentially be a tool for teaching, learning and collaboration. The creative and subversive abilities of critical play are promising.

In this work I address a number of concerns. When business ethics instruction is explored rhetorically, what consideration(s) result? In what ways is critical play aligned with the teaching and learning of business ethics? How is this learning/teaching style available through technologically remediated environments?

**Methodology**

Note that, to comply with policy on Human Subject Research, I received validation for protocol #IRB2010-026 from Clemson University’s Institutional Review Board. My study relies extensively on a method of participatory observation in conjunction with theoretical review. I hesitate to label this approach “ethnography” given the relatively short duration of study (in the case of classroom observation, less than two observations). Triangulation, used commonly in ethnographic study, is a useful
descriptive tool that can reduce the likelihood of observer bias. I use it here to provide additional perspective(s) in support of my claim. In a sense, I perform what could be called a restricted ethnographic approach.

I begin my analysis by illustrating through rhetorical theory how current trends in the business ethics literature support a subversive perspective. This approach, a rhetorical analysis, consists of criticism towards available business literature using social epistemic theory. I assert that phronesis is a lens by which the current business teachings are shown as inadequate. As a consequence, shortfalls in current ethical paradigms are recognizable. Instead of teaching ethics as a form of mathematical model, I argue for a subversive educational paradigm dubbed “unlearning.” This theoretical discussion of rhetoric is found in chapter two.

Following my analysis of business ethics through rhetoric and resulting call for subversion, I attempt to describe a learning process for unlearning through critical play. Such play is described in business ethics and game theory literature. I afford a case study to demonstrate critical play. To describe the style of play, I outline my experience as player, describe the game rules/conventions, and discuss the findings of an interview conducted by email with the game designer(s). Chapter three presents this unified theory of play with the relevant case study. Further, it suggests critical play is a tool by which subversion is achievable.

I note in this third chapter that the spaces available to play are not exclusively virtual. It becomes problematic to view just one space as appropriate to observe game learning conduct. I therefore select two spaces, both subject to ecologies of remediated
critical play. Both are spaces of play and learning. Each is used to teach business ethics. Neither is constrained from “new media” involvement. In one, the “self” is present primarily in virtually remediated form. In the second, virtual media is used in a physical space. My final objective to observe critical play as a means of learning/teaching business ethics in two virtually remediated environments.

One such remediated environment in which I observe the teaching/learning associated with critical play is the popular game *World of Warcraft*. *World of Warcraft* is a popular and rapidly growing Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing (“MMORPG”) game. It, as a platform, has grown significantly in size as a result of its ability to update content continuously and appeal to a range of game player. *World of Warcraft* can never truly be “won,” merely played. Successful play relies on such business appreciated skills as collaboration and problem-solving. Further, this game has by virtue of add-ons and socially created media expanded its ecology of play. *Warcraft* is an immersive game-world which creates highly engaging play.

However, in developing the necessary in-game relationships, a set of ethics is developed by players. These ethics do not jeopardize the economical objectives of avatar development, acquisition of wealth or stockpiling of material goods. Instead, the game is built such that economic benefit is greatly enhanced through development of a communal ethic. Because the context calls for and requires it, players develop conventions as an accompaniment to rules required through mechanics. How such a communal ethic was formed through subversion in critical play for the Venture Guild is considered through several sources, including participatory interview, direct involvement as a researcher-
player in the guild, and classroom discussion with fellow members of the guild. This second environment serves as the focal point of analysis in chapter five.

The next environment of remediated game play space considered is a classroom. I conduct an observational study of a Clemson University class. Clemson ("CU") is a regionally accredited institution of higher learning and houses the Robert J. Rutland Institute for Ethics. CU maintains business program accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. The AACSB is the only business program accreditation agency recognized by both the Council on Higher Education and United States Department of Education. CU is therefore a rich environment for study of business ethics instruction.

A section of undergraduate strategic management serves as the setting for this study. This is a course in common to all disciplines in the business college. Students are likely soon to graduate after completing this course. It is a CU requirement that all students complete a business ethics e-portfolio entry in this class. The students in this course are therefore at a unique point in their academic careers and entering a final stage of CU’s ethics quality control.

Clemson’s case study is triangulated through analysis of course materials, instructor interviews and classroom observations. Formal instruction is limited to two workshops during a one week portion of the class. Because this is the only section of class dedicated to ethics, additional observation would not yield additional information. I conducted a series of interviews with the course’s primary instructor, a tenure-track professor at Clemson University, over a three month period. The course learning
outcomes, syllabus, readings and ethics assignment were reviewed textually. Finally, I observed the in-class discussions themselves to see the learning environment and interactions personally. This triangulation produced a description of the environment, theory and interactions present. In particular, I look for evidence of the rhetorical problems of business ethics and whether critical play is noticeable.

Chapter six concludes with discussion of key findings. More specifically, I identify and discuss several theorists, designers and educators who work towards creating engaging spaces of socially relevant game play. Their work affords a (cautiously) optimistic forecast (although much work remains to be done). I outline some future lines of conversation and research in this final chapter, including a call for interactive ethics across the curriculum.
CHAPTER TWO
BUSINESS ETHICS PEDAGOGY

“If there is a theme to Rye Barcott's career to date, it has been his willingness to confront painful situations many of us would prefer to ignore. 'I've always been interested in understanding ethnic violence and intervention,' Rye says. With the blessings of the U.S. Marine Corps, who provided the scholarship for his education, Rye studied Swahili and, in his junior year at the University of North Carolina, took his new language skills to Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, one of the largest slums in the world” (Profiles para. 1)

“Modern leaders must be aware that businesses are not only economic institutions but social institutions with responsibilities that extend beyond financial considerations” (Key Areas We Teach para. 5).

“Today, the most significant and important managerial problems are not defined by a single function or industry. Financial markets, globalization, climate change, corporate governance, healthcare, education, development, entrepreneurial activity, to name a few — all of these critical concerns in today's world economy require a broader perspective and a deeper sensitivity to the ways in which market forces can be brought to bear not just to create and sustain wealth, but also to address and alleviate some of the most vexing societal problems” (Who We Are para. 2).

Much can be learned about an organization by the face it shows the world. Any institution, educational or otherwise, can choose to represent itself publically with the values it feels important. For instance, the above quotes are directly from the homepages of Yale University’s School of Management, Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business and Harvard University’s Business School. If any indication, these comments imply that the university system is heeding the call to produce ethical business thinkers. However, I suggest from this review that the existing theories for doing so are insufficient.
The public face, however, is just what is readily visible. A well written page, artfully presented through .html on space maintained by well respected academic institutions, does not illustrate how ethics are taught in an academic setting. This chapter endeavors to pierce the veil of public persona; it explores the philosophy of academic governance and mechanics of instruction. Educators face a challenge consisting of both what to teach and how to teach it. The focus for this chapter, “what,” is complemented by and is groundwork to chapter three, four and five’s exploration of “how.”

Increasingly, game learning is seen as applicable to business practice by voices both in the gaming and business communities. Game theorist Miguel Sicart comments that games include implicit rules of etiquette and sportsperson-ship, such as player repertoire and community, which augment the actual game mechanics (28-29). Those mechanics can also reinforce behavior. Players, as discussed by Sicart, engage in a form of critical thinking definable by design firm IDEO founder’s David Kelley as “understand[ing] a system or statement” (qtd in New York Times 8). Businessweek writers John Hagel and John Seely Brown note that games can include rich metrics for performance evaluation, promote experience-based advancement, and require intrinsic motivation. These factors are Hagel and Brown’s answer to the title of their piece, “How World of Warcraft Promotes Innovation.” Both business and gaming communities see gaming as playgrounds for the mind; this connection receives attention in chapter three.

World of Warcraft, or WoW, is a game rich in ethical arguments, experienced through game mechanics and etiquette. As a tool for learning ethics, it receives further discussion in chapter four’s case study. Pat Galgan, editor for the American Society for
Training and Development’s *T&D* journal, sees the game *World of Warcraft (WoW)* as an invaluable aid to learning such core business topics as teamwork and problem solving. Industry writer Douglas Thomas subsequently wrote with John Seeley Brown that *WoW* “guidemasters” are immersed in a form of leadership training directly relevant to the business community. I accept that *WoW* teaches pertinent business skills. I wonder, and explore in chapter four, whether one particular skill (ethical reasoning) is learnable through the game.

However, before reaching the discussions of “how” business ethics can be taught using games in theory (chapter three) or actuality (chapters four and five), I must first explore the question of “what is” business ethics instruction. Using an approach derived from rhetorical theory, I argue that business educators are simply on a wrong track. Their efforts, although noble, cannot address the rhetorical shortcomings of dogmatic definition and modeling. I suggest instead that the desirable key skill to construct in learners is not an absolute ethical definition. Instead, I see a need for a subversive skill set. As but one illustration, I showcase *phronesis* to illuminate how existing models for ethical instruction fail under social epistemic rhetorical theory. A move to *phronesis*, which is visible in some business literature, is fundamentally incomplete and in many respects dangerous ground. The theoretical underpinnings of this failure are broad and equally applicable to “stakeholder,” “virtuous person” or “agency” theories of business ethics instruction. Ultimately, I endorse an approach where the inevitable insufficiencies of dogmatic models (such as those just referenced) are attenuated through subversion.
Further, I later assert that subversive paradigms are experienced through critical play (in chapter three).

**The Call to Arms**

Professor Sumantra Ghoshal of London Business School’s Advanced Institute of Management Research memorably comments “business schools do not need to do a great deal more to help prevent future Enrons; they need only to stop doing a lot they currently do” (75). Flying in the face of conventional wisdom, Ghoshal argues business ethics education must reinvent what it “says” and “does.” A minor “tweak” is insufficient to address the need.

At present, as argued in this chapter, the adjustment called for is in progress but fundamentally incomplete. A rhetorical lens illustrates the value of a subversive paradigm to continue the process. I argue that the subversive paradigm, rooted in social epistemic theories of rhetoric, is a useful tool to address the ethical problem confronting educators.

Ghoshal notes that contemporary management practices are shaped by theories of agency and competition. According to agency theory, companies must align the interests of the company with the interests of the individual managers. Managers, if not so motivated, can place their personal interests first at the expense of the organization. In the context of scarcity, agency theory predicts an ethical lapse. Scarcity, a bedrock principle in economic theory, holds that resources are limited. Competition for those resources (including customers) is fierce. Companies not only combat peers for those benefits, but face pressure from four additional forces according to the “porter model” as
discussed by Ghoshal (suppliers, customers, regulators and employees). Existing paradigms of management theory, therefore, preach that personal interests must be aligned with corporate interests through compensation practices; corporate practice occurs in a context of intense competition for scarce resources. As Ghoshal laments “thousands—indeed, hundreds of thousands—of executives who attended business courses have learned the same lessons…by propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility” (75-76).

Ghoshal sees the need but, trained in economics, does not necessarily know the tools available through rhetoric. I agree with Ghoshal’s assertion that a major substantive shift is needed. However, I disagree that a model derived from existing business theory will sufficiently ‘do the trick.’ Michel Foucault suggests “the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers…” (216). In the case of business ethics, much of what can and cannot be said is dictated by the rules of business practice. This is particularly observable in the results of my Clemson University observational study. By basing my argument on rhetoric, I depart from business theory. In so doing, I suggest that the power of the community to limit what can and cannot be said is minimized. I apply a rhetorical view to the problem as a means of reaching a new way of addressing it. This alternative method, subversion, provides a paradigm of viewing ethics from a vantage that opens new (and needed) possibilities.
Ghoshal continues his attacks on the theoretical underbelly of management by noting that organizational governance itself must be rethought. Agency theory, as he notes, lacks predictive empirical and philosophic support. Agency theory heavily influences both how the academy and many businesses define management. The myriad of studies cited by Ghosal indicate that those companies most aligned with agency theory do not perform better. In this arrangement, manager compensation is heavily influenced by organizational performance. Directors, those tasked with management oversight on behalf of the stockholder, are independent of management. However, they do not do better in the marketplace in Ghoshal’s argument. Further, as Ghoshal notes, it is easier for a stockholder to sell their stake than an employee to find a new job or community to recover from corporate misdeed, so

“why do we not fundamentally rethink the corporate governance issue? Why don’t we actually acknowledge in our theories that companies survive and prosper when they simultaneously pay attention to the interests of customers, employees, shareholders, and perhaps even the communities in which they operate?” (81).

Ghoshal’s position radically challenges the business academy to rethink its tacit knowledge concerning management in theory and practice.

I suggest (and will further explore in this chapter) that Ghoshal’s argument represents a social turn in business ethics theory. Such a move is evident in some of the literature later reviewed in this chapter. Patricia Bizzell noticed a similar move in composition theory at the 1985 Conference on College Composition and Communication. And like Bizzell’s observation in the college composition field, a track is available to
business ethics where attempts to (re)produce an ethical definition will only create further mistaken definition. Bizzell refers to this phenomenon as a fall back to foundationalism, whereby foundationalism is defined as “the belief that an absolute standard for the judgement of truth can be found” (39). Business ethics theorists could continue, without a view inspired by social epistemic theory, to errantly find the correct “absolute” standard then continue to find that view fails the test.

Social epistemic rhetorical theory, as I use it in this context, is an important concept to define. Steven Katz comments in *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric* that rationality, science, and technology are “parts of what it means to be human” (102). Bizzell comments that the “individual mind can never transcend personal emotions, social circumstances, and historical conventions” (40). Further, she comments that “rhetoric is the study of the personal, social and historical elements in human discourse – how to recognize them, interpret them, and act on them…” (52). Essentially the broad theory I invoke here can be succinctly stated as follows: the nature of knowing is the process of human experience. The cultural training and immersion we receive from birth inspires and intertwines with our notion of rationality such that one is inseparable from the other. And, as will be further described in this analysis, such a recognition offers an opening for a new way to learn (and teach) business ethics.

As further evidence of the social turn in business ethics, consider that Ghoshal is certainly not the only management academic to attack agency theory. This is manifested in concern over the relationship between “individual” and “organizational” interests. More specifically, business ethicists are suggesting that a manager’s ethical obligation is
no longer to maximize organizational profitability. N. Craig Smith, INSED Chair in Ethics and Social Responsibility, asserts that there is no mutual exclusivity between profitability and ethical self interest. To act ethically is to promote profitability and vice versa. Evidence “suggests that good corporate citizenship can pay handsome dividends both in terms of profitability and global reputation.” (Smith 28). What I find interesting in Smith’s comments is the turn to allowing good corporate citizenship as a profitable end. However, who or what is it that defines “good corporate citizenship?” The answer to this question, in the social turn, is inevitably driven to social epistemology.

I now turn my attention to further illustrations of the social turn in business ethics. Jacob Rose argues that corporate greed and corruption are driven by perceptions of corporate law which create “ethical deafness and lack of social responsibility” (319). Regulators have attempted to combat this issue with legislation such as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and Sarbanes-Oxley Acts. However, what Rose (and law-makers) neglect to accept or recognize is that their products (“ethical hearing,” “social responsibility,” “effective laws”) are ultimately constructs of the human experience created through social epistemology. The gravitational pull of foundationalism seems inescapable to the patterns of thought brought to bear on the problem thus far in my review.

The social turn in business ethics is an opening door. What is needed is a new way of viewing the problem. As Robert Kolodinsky et al. comments,
“Unlike most other core business school content, the teaching of ethics and social responsibility necessarily requires an emphasis and understanding of the impact of decisions and behaviors on others” (167).

Kolodinsky et al.’s comment implies space exists for the possibilities presented through social epistemic theory. Within this space, a way of “understanding” impact different than other business school content is needed. It is precisely this understanding, subversion, I suggest in the section which follows.

The good, the bad, and the stakeholder

My treatment of business literature has served to illustrate a relationship to social epistemic rhetorical theory. Curtis Vershoor comments that the recession of 2009 “demonstrates that markets aren’t effective in controlling unethical practices driven by greed, which is only an extension of the concept of enlightened market self-interest” (14).

The goal, development of business professionals versed in ethical theory and prepared to operate within the domain of corporate social responsibility as professionals, is clear. What is needed is a discussion of how social epistemic theory opens a door, subversion, as a means of addressing the problem. However, before offering this approach, I must discuss those who will ultimately “do” the business when released into the working world. Metaphorically, “stakeholder” is a way of adjusting the role of the business practitioner. It is a concept important to subversion, as ultimately it represents the agent schooled and practicing the method I incorporate in my analysis.

Charles W. Powers and David Vogel suggest the “new” concern for ethics is a result of social transformations (7). As large corporations continued to grow both in
economic and political might, they carried with it a desire to uphold “human dignity” and the value of “human life” (8-10). The surrounding community, not just the employees and managers, became seen as “stakeholders” directly influenced by corporate action. As organization “Z” or “X” acts, the surrounding community reacts. If Z or X hires, unemployment in the community drops. Z or X can reduce the workforce, operate plants in (ir)responsible ways, or otherwise influence the construct of “stakeholder.” Loosely defined, a stakeholder is an interested party (who may not be an employee or owner of the company). Applying the stakeholder concept simply means thinking both as a member of the organization and society at large simultaneously.

There is, however, a red herring associated with the stakeholder concept. Powers and Vogel state,

“the way in which issues affecting businesses are being articulated is almost entirely in the moral terms of justice, fairness, human rights, and human dignity. These are basic ethical concepts, but they are also too general either to explicate or guide behavior. They are little more than evocative concepts whose meaning must be tied to particular roles, contexts, communities, or institutional relationships, in order to have any meaning” (14).

Even the simplest of philosophical mandates, such as the notion of not doing harm, can become immediately problematic. Doing no harm, for instance, cannot offer guidance should harm be undefined or in the eyes of the beholder. Social epistemology clearly remains present.
Some have attempted to address the stakeholder concept through foundationalistic approaches. Their need for specific definition led to creation of specific codes of ethics. This approach, as outlined by Christopher Cowton, consists of creating a professional body. Professional bod(ies) consider specific elements including code of practice with protocols for enforcement, continuing education and specialized body of knowledge (178). Interestingly, Cowton comments that high standards of ethics are a “price” paid for self regulation. Harkening back to the treatment of rhetoric by Steven Katz in The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric, a sophistic position (such as one held by Isocrates) would find codes no less troublesome as those codes are also socially constructed (100-101). Codes are no less a construction of human experience than individual intuition. A re/turn to foundationalist safe harbors cannot provide saving grace.

It should not come as a shock that the considerable literature on the subject of ethical codes provides illustration. Cynthia Stohl et al. define codes as a guide to behavior and overview of values. They are “tangible evidence” of a commitment to ethical behavior (Stohl et al. 609). As reported by Stohl et al., one such code from the United Nations includes such considerations as human rights, labor relations, environment and anti-corruption. Peter Kensicki adds focus on “…the ideal of altruistic attitude and behavior” (1). Kensicki notes that such codes must include both personal commitment, the support of organizational or professional leadership, and mechanisms of enforcement. A dogmatic thinking is present.

In response to the absolutist certainty of Kensicki and Stohl et al., consider this parable. A hamster or ferret gets on a wheel and begins to run. The creature exerts
energy, causes the device to spin, and essentially moves nowhere. All effort is dedicated to a lost cause. The wheel spins. Little is accomplished. Nothing is shown for the effort. The poor creature, if it were to think about it, may wonder if whether a changed footing would impact the result. Applied to educational contexts, in a quote attributed to John Ruskin, “education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know; it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave” (“About Education”). Understanding a code is moot if said understanding does not promote knowing which code to use at which points. The human agent remains central even to the strongest of code (which, again, concurs with Katz’ treatment of Isocrates and sophism). Both the code itself and the process of interpreting or applying code are social actions subject to human frailty.

Educators in the domain of business ethics have good reason to fret about this problem. Are efforts to prepare students for ethical professional practice akin to preparing a lamb for slaughter? As but one example of why these are good reasons to fear the answer to these questions, consider the Code of Ethics circulated by the Enron Corporation. Page one, a memorandum signed by Kenneth Lay himself, comments that all officers and employees are “responsible for conducting the business affairs of the Company in accordance with all applicable laws in an honest and ethical manner.” Further, in this same introductory memorandum, all employees are required to sign a certificate of compliance as a statement of “personal agreement” to conform to the company’s principles. Enron’s Code of Ethics continues for six pages and explicitly defines a commitment to such lofty prose as human rights, integrity and respect (4).
It is a flowery element of prose which, had it not ultimately been associated with Enron, may have served as a wonderful example of ethical codes. However, in the “capable” hands of some Enron stakeholders, a well written code became mere smoke and mirror. Even the best written code can be thwarted by human implementation.

I raise these points not to play the “all is lost” card. There is reason to hope. Existing approaches to ethical instruction can at least raise attention in the student body.

A study by May, Luth and Schwoerer identifies using a quasi-experimental study affords correlations between education on ethics and moral efficacy, meaningfulness and courage. To summarize, those exposed to the test condition were significantly more likely to be confident in their confidence to positively address ethics, see the value of ethics and have their courage to act on their concerns. It is, as the authors note, imperfect and not prescriptive. At the least, education can raise some eyebrows in the classroom. Also, a business case exists for “paying attention” to the problem. This can also promote student engagement. Cowton states,

“One of the crucial aspects that many people have remarked upon is how an ethical approach leads to a good reputation, which in turn leads to trust on the part of various stakeholders, and this can bring about things like improved sales, lower employee turnover or better terms from suppliers…a good reputation can be thought of as an intangible asset…”(182).

When quantified fiscally using Cowton’s observation, the essential math becomes something like “ethics = reputation = profitability.” Ethics is not a distraction from operation, but integral to it. Those versed in business ethics can engage in the process of
learning using this business case. This can engage those already immersed as stakeholders to embrace a new view. The proverbial “gas” is “in the car.” Now comes the question of where to drive it.

**Phronesis: A Metaphorical (and Incomplete) Screen**

Whether conducted in a classroom or virtual setting, the approaches to discussing business ethics thus far are evidence of a social turn. Whether discussing the problem from the vantage point of moral sensitivity (a stakeholder approach), the process of responding (the problem solving method), or code (professional ethics method), business ethicists stay true to Bizzell’s form and return to foundationist thinking. Inevitably, the “new” constructs which result fail when they met the human nature through which they are intended to work.

This social trend and its limitations have received considerable attention already. Indeed, clean mathematical approaches cannot account for the problem of teaching ethics. Social epistemic theory holds that human construction is present in all areas. The emerging trend of business literature represents a call for fundamental reconsideration of teaching ethics (a call for anti-foundationism). What may result, lest a new perspective is brought to bear, is the creation of a new and equally inevitably insufficient paradigm. I now develop the case for subversion as a way of escaping the meteoric (and predictably unsuccessful) illusion of safe harbor.

Before I do so, I illustrate one way in which social epistemic theories of rhetoric can beneficially problematize the business ethics literature (*phronesis*). *Phronesis* has support within current trends in business ethics pedagogy theory. However, it is a
rhetorically troubled concept. In evoking it, I provide a way to understand limitations. I am, as an illustration of a concept defined after this illustration, conducting a subversive inquiry. Phronesis may sound agreeable to business ethicists but it can neglect fundamental issues and facilitate ideological perversion. Business ethics pedagogy would be wise to heed this recognition and warning.

Rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke comments that we must see things through a process of filtration. Seeing, in this case, can be applied to any form of understanding or interpretation. Burke asserts “we must use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another” (1344).

I am, in essence, intentionally using this theory to my advantage. In willfully selecting a screen (phronesis) I have picked a tool to understand (and unmask) the dangers and possibilities of current ethical instruction in business. As Burke observes, this lens will dictate both what I can and can’t see. As the nature of phronesis has received much scrutiny, I am confident that the rhetorician’s gaze can offer words of guidance and warning.

The link to phronesis in business ethics literature is readily apparent in discussions by Mary Hartog and Philip Frame. To understand this link, let us accept the definition of phronesis as “the reasoning appropriate to performance, or conduct” asserted by Carolyn Miller (22). Phronesis becomes social prudence. Hartog and Frame argue
openly for the need to link ethics theory with practice through “real world” experience. Such learning demonstrates “a knowledge and understanding of the ethical canon as it applies to the world of business…” (400). They do so expressly through the “process of reflective judgment informed by attitudes, values and emotional integrity that in turn clarify and shape both thinking and action” (403). As defined by Hartog and Frame in the context of business ethics instruction, phronesis is a form of critical thinking for the betterment of society. They state:

“We can trace the idea of practical relevance back to the Aristotelian notion of phronesis and contrast it to a platonic conception of the good, where a case study or lecture may be thought sufficient to convey the ‘ideal,’ that is, what may be considered as established wisdom. In contrast, the concept of phronesis involves an amalgam of knowledge, virtue and reason, (roughly translated as judgment) enabling us to decide what to do, in other words, practical wisdom lived out” (403).

Harto
g and Frame thus posit the concept of practical wisdom as relating theory to situational judgment. Such ability requires, in their treatment of the subject from the vantage point of business educators, not only a theoretical approach (such as through lecture, reading, case study, or other device in sheltered academic environment) but a practiced in professional context (or simulated professional context) approach as well.

This sounds, at its face, like a wonderful idea. A problem begins to take shape in the work of John Wall. Paradoxically, this problem is recognizable through re-definition of phronesis. Wall asserts the division between poetics and phronesis, creation and
action, is questionable. In suggesting a form of poetic *phronesis*, Wall suggests *phronesis* becomes a means by which the practically wise self “must” be involved with moral creativity (337). *Phronesis*, guided by virtue theories in the way attempted by Wall, becomes a creative act applicable to any human project. Not unlike arguments portrayed by Hartog and Frame, *phronesis* links in particular cases reasoned answers human creativity and logic. However, rather than create a critical distance from the social epistemic, Wall opens a door to it.

Business ethics scholar Stephen Maguire agrees that moral understanding is best acquired in each individual’s learning experience. Also concerned with the divide between theoretical and practical understandings, Maguire also calls for a situated approach by well trained individuals. “Only by understanding what is an appropriate action in a specific situation do we truly come to understand the meaning of the relevant moral principle” (206). *Phronesis* is, in addition to the creative act discussed by Wall, an interpretative behavior to Maguire. In making the shoe fit, Maguire (like Wall) attempts to resize it. However, this in essence again simply exposes the inevitability of human agent (and reversion to foundationalism).

Maguire notes that the proliferation of ethical precepts requires knowing which theory to apply in a given case. The notion of *phronesis* “recognize[s] the inherent interpretive enterprise of moral understanding, this seems to suggest that sense making begins with the situations in which we find ourselves” (1417). Any education which lacks the capacity for situational and self understanding fails to do the proverbial job. Ethicist Charles W. Allen concurs, suggesting a need for *phronesis* to be elastic and
communally nurtured. It is, however, in that notion of community ideology that we find troubled waters awaiting our arrival.

The crux of this emerging issue with *phronesis* is that it is primarily concerned with societal ends, and not the means of those ends. Professor Carolyn Miller, for example, comments that it “applies knowledge of human goods to particular circumstances” (22). Therein lays the problem. To determine the “good” and its appropriateness to the “particular circumstances,” one must rely on the compass provided society. *Phronesis* would argue that reasoning for one’s personal interest as opposed to collective interest is unsound.

However, a capable rhetorician may effectively change the ideology and collective self through his or her rhetoric. The deliberative rhetoric concerned with meeting societal needs can shape those societal needs in the process. Sadly, one such individual did so effectively in the twentieth century to the detriment of humankind. Adolf Hitler, in conjunction with his ministry of propaganda, created a distorted reality in which the deplorable conduct of his Reich was justifiable. Such a reality is clearly both dangerous and contrary to collective good, exemplified by the many who died and suffered as a consequence.

Professor Steven Katz comments, “In conjunction with propaganda, it is well known that Hitler used mass meetings to socially construct, manipulate, and/or reaffirm on a massive scale the reality he rhetorically created” (*Aristotle’s Rhetoric*...49). Hitler,
as a tragic example, illustrated that the rhetoric of *phronesis* can in fact reshape the
“good” on which and against which *phronesis* is judged. The social-epistemic circle by
which good is malleable as an end makes it shaky ground upon which to stand. Katz
comments “The open-ended nature of ethics as a means to an end is, of course, easy to
see in regard to “relative” goods whose definition in each case depends on a social
determination of moral excellence as an end” (*Aristotle’s Rhetoric* ... 51).

In applying a specific lens (*phronesis*) to the social turn in business ethics
literature, I have subverted one frame of reference. Rather than illustrating a “we are
doomed” mentality, I hope to show how this behavior opens new possibilities.

The Optimism of Subversion

Fully aware of the negative connotations of this term, subversion, I would like to
comment on the term in the sense I use it. Rhetoric scholar Victor Vitanza provides a
dramatic mandate for subversion as both a rhetorical enterprise and means of up-ending
the inevitability of ideological confines. Vitanza’s notion of “sub/version” is derived
from a point with which I believe there can be limited debate (harkening back to Burke).
All discourse is informed by ideology. Succinctly stated, no thought can occur without
ideology. Further, facts are accepted as such only by virtue of a socially epistemic
interpretive framework. Vitanza notes, facts are facts “...only by virtue of an interpretive
framework” (69). This standpoint is agreeable to Burke’s notion of terministic screens.
And it is this problem of human-constructed understandings that *phronesis* finds an
Achilles’ heel.
Subversion as outlined by Vitanza assumes a very special connotation. The terminology naturally conjures a form of overthrown ideology. Ideology, in this parable, is ever shifting ground. However, subversion does not view the intellectual coup d’etat as definitive. When one ideology or ideologically defined demon is driven out, another must necessarily take its place. It is in this recognition that subversion is separated from the notion of revisionary. Whereby revolutionary cannot see the fault in its own “hopefully” accepted notion(s), the subversive mindset sees the act of acceptance as necessarily one of fascism. An improvement is not made; a substitution has simply occurred. Subversion is awareness of inevitability flawed dogmatic thinking.

Patricia Bizzell comments that such awareness is the role of the academy. More specifically, she notes a need for acquiring knowledge and then a means of analysis/sorting of “this” knowledge (53). In essence, students in the process of “becoming” a functional practitioner need a mechanism for re/creating that knowledge passed onto them. Rather than embracing a “new” definition of business ethics, I am calling for widespread acceptance of subversive thinking to do just that which Bizzell recommends.

Subversion, in the sense I describe, becomes a realized form of Wayne Booth’s complications to “rhetorical rationality.” Booth comments that rationality (understandably under social epistemic rhetoric) “cannot be pinned down to only one thought system or choice of methods” (381). As an alternative, he provides a taxonomy of assent types and steps to producing assent. It is his fourth “step” of assent that is particularly germane to subversion. In this step, Booth suggests “to think harder about
when you and I should really change our minds” (386). He articulates this through the classroom charge to his students, to “get students to promise, as it were, never to assent to or reject any position they have not fully understood” (386, italics mine). Full understanding, however, entails an acceptance that any such position is temporary until a better one is found. In essence, the assent described by Booth requires a subversion in order to remain open for when a better idea is presented.

Accepting social epistemic theories of rhetoric to understand and problematize the social turn of business ethics literature, as I have done here, means requiring subversive thinking of ourselves and our students. Subversion becomes a necessary condition by which we accept the inevitable influence of human agency in business ethics thinking (or teaching) and provide for our students a way of sorting information.
CHAPTER THREE

SUBVERSION & ETHICS: PLAY, THEORY AND LEARNING

A current mission statement for the objective of business ethics pedagogy could easily be to create a replacement paradigm for the existing professional community through the educational process. Such a mission is consistent with subversion suggested for and the social turn inescapable to business ethics instruction. Contrary to existing notions of agency theory, support for ethics as an imbedded part of the fundamental business paradigm exists. One no longer is both ethical and a successful businessperson; the businessperson is a student of ethics at the conceptual fiber of what he or she does. I see a need for ingraining ethics as an activity to all elements of higher learning. However, as indicated by my conversation in chapter one, I approach this activity rhetorically.

I turn my attention now to describing a method of learning subversion. This model, critical play, is explored in this chapter. A game which engages in critical play questions existing paradigms, engages the learner in a deeply conceptual visual and kinesthetic activity, and relies extensively both on game and rhetorical theory to build its argument. This chapter develops, explains and explores this concept. A sample game, which I had the good fortune to “see” and “play” firsthand, is included to illustrate the principles theorized.

Pedagogy theorists, including researcher Angelina Paladino, see interaction and reflection as integral to learning. “Marketing educators are perceived to be most effective by students when they engage with students and simulate student-to-student interactions”
Interestingly, Paladino endorses a model of problem-based and collaborative learning to teaching a business topic. Learning should be both enjoyable and a cause for curiosity. In use of interactivity, both ends are accomplished. Researchers Eric Zhi Feng Liu and Chun Hung Lin agree, calling upon game designers “to develop educational computer-games that are both entertaining and educational” (177). Liu and Lin, positioning game play as a source of “interesting interaction and challenges,” link game-based learning to any field of study.

However, I am concerned that human factor engineering researchers tend to overvalue one element of the game (usability) at the expense of other considerations (game conventions, mechanics and narrative). While usability is certainly a consideration to any artifact (up to and including games), I believe that Liu and Lin’s assertion “the main principle to be taken into consideration while designing a human-computer interface system is its user-friendliness” illustrates the limitations of such an approach. Similarly, the related cognitive approach favored by researchers such as Mansureh Kebritchi and Atsusi “2C” Hirumi attempt to align game design with theories of learning. The aesthetics and underlining rhetorical principles affiliated with play must be considered as integral to the gaming situation.

To summarize, I accept the argument by game researcher Hans Christian Arnseth that computer gameplay study from the perspective of “contextually situated practice” is “relevant and fruitful.” The alternative, as illustrated by Liu and Lin or Kebritchi and Hirumi, rely on outdated models of communication (as also attacked by by Arnseth). Game theorist Julian Kucklich similarly argues that games must be understood as
interfaces of text and code, narrative and interactivity. Sacrificing one at the favor of another is inherently fallacious.

The idea of a “sound game” in a situated practice sense can serve educational ends. Theorist James Paul Gee notes “...the designers of many good games have hit on profoundly good methods of getting people to learn and to enjoy learning” (5). Gee argues that gaming is viewable through a paradigm of learner empowerment, problem solving, and understanding. Contrary to the notion that a learning game is any game which “skill and drills” adherence to a given convention, gaming is aligned with what Stuart Moulthrop calls “play on a higher level” (212). To Moulthrop, such play is called “intervention” and defined as a “practical contribution to a media system...intended to challenge underlying assumptions or reveal new ways of proceeding” (212).

Interventions employ media to contribute to general scholarship and community in deeply humanistic ways. Researchers Prasarnphanich and Christian Wagner recognize that altruism serves as “prevalent driver” for collaboration in a virtual “wiki” environment. While not traditionally associated with “games,” wikis employ collaborative virtual spaces with a common goal. They lack the situated practice or mechanics of games. However, as Prasarnpanich and Wagner’s work supports, the mechanics of deep reflection (whether “learning” as discussed by Gee or “intervention” as argued by Moulthrop), need not be situated in “skill and drill” and/or non-virtual environments. Wikis serve as an illustration of that conclusion. Games can facilitate deep reflection and consideration, when appropriately designed with knowledge of game theory.
That games can be fun in no way detracts from their intrinsic value. Designer and theorist Raph Koster sees fun not as distracting, but an extension of natural inclination. Designer Richard Bartle expands fun into a taxonomy of player, whereby different players have different common definitions of fun. Naturally, one game will not appeal equally to all players. Bartle and Koster explore fun based on player characteristics and biological extension. For instance, an “explorer” in the Bartle taxonomy are (as Koster would suggest) inclined to gain benefit by discovery. Such players seek to act on the environment in the game world (Bartle 761). They naturally, as Bartle notes, find “real fun” in “discovery, and making the most complete set of maps in existence” (758).

Understanding and resolving curiosity produces natural excitement to the discoverer. Said excitement is accommodate-able in a game.

One may hear the word “fun” and immediately dismiss it as inappropriate for critical reflection. To these purists, fun is for diversion and the business of critical reflection or learning is far too serious for games. Gee again argues in opposition to such a conclusion, stating that “they [video games] are deep technologies for recruiting learning as a form of profound pleasure” (211). The notion by some that games, because they are fun, should not be explored overlooks that fun can become a virtue to the learning game.

This section discussed and described the learning game as an objective to promote critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is later described with the assistance of a game (Sixteen Tons) and then illustrated in World of Warcraft (“WoW”). WoW requires collaboration and problem solving. It contains profound ethical statements in the
procedurality of the game. *WoW* accommodates in its design a wide range of player, so therefore it can appeal to a wide audience. For these reasons, it serves as an environment for illustrating interactive media learning as appropriate to business ethics instruction. Interaction, however, is also later shown in the Clemson classroom (as a means of affording additional space into which critical play can expand).

**Critical Play and Subversive Rhetoric(s)**

Logically, whether and how video games teach are good questions to ask. Gaming is sometimes viewed as trivial activity; a child’s activity unworthy of serious discussion. Or, in some alarmist senses, gaming is conceived as a form of death for other accepted teaching tools. On the contrary, game play offers a powerful learning opportunity.

Game scholar Ian Bogost describes this style of learning as “procedural literacy.” In a particular context, a game “offer(s) meaning and experiences of *particular* worlds and *particular* relationships” (241). Procedural literacy calls for understanding a given representation via gaming then using that created knowledge to “interrogate, critique and use specific representations of specific real or imaged process” (246). The game itself not only offers a representational argument, but an opportunity to understand and apply those relationships through contextual consideration. Evidence of subversion begins to rise to the surface. As Bogost comments,

“procedural literacy means more than writing computer code; it also comes from interacting with procedural systems that make strong ties between the process in a
model and a representative goal – those who strongly argued procedural theoretic.

Otherwise said, we can become procedurally literate through play itself” (255).

To Bogost’s argument, the product of this process is procedurally literate. Such an individual is “one who recognizes the nature of a concept and the abstract rules that underwrite that concept” (257). Players take an early step advocated by Wayne Booth, to “listen” (in other words, engage) through the game, in the process of procedural literacy.

Succinctly stated, Bogost recognizes that games require rules. Those rules are rhetorical artifacts and receive recognition as “procedural rhetoric” as defined by Bogost. Game learning means recognizing the relationships inherent to the gaming situation, then “reading through direct engagement” the perspective on how things “work” (Bogost 260). Logically, as not all reading is subversive, I must now explain which “type” of play is subversive.

For the purposes of this discussion, I accept a definition of play as a form of reading through direct engagement. Although game scholarship by theorists including Janet Murray, Espen Aarseth and Markuu Eskelinnen have historically disagreed on the degree to which play is a form of reading aligned with narrative connotations, I suggest “read” metaphorically speaking describes an inductive process of reconstructing meaning from interaction. To a book, this means using eye scan and standard symbolic convention to review sentences, pages, chapters, etc. Through what rhetorician Kenneth Burke would call a “terministic screen,” the reader creates a meaning through reading
from the symbols on the page and his or her background. The end product is not what was originally written, but what the reader through a form of paradigmatic lens creates.

Similarly, to “read” a game is to experience interactivity in the gaming situation; cognitively processing it through the player’s terministic screen then leads to conclusions both about the abstractions presented in/by gameplay and applicability of those abstractions to the cultural context. To borrow a popular example, the videogame Tetris (a classic puzzle game) can teach either the appropriate way to optimize space on a slave ship or make the most of a classroom or hospital wing. Tetris simply teaches strategy of space use; objects “drop” into the game zone then await rearrangement by the player. What that zone “is” depends on the ‘reading’ by the player.

Espen Aarseth recently described the relationship of classical narrative elements such as plot and character to interactivity before a live (and large) internet audience. His calls for a variable model to understanding the game offer a stark reminder. Few (if any), regardless of abstraction, games are accepted as “is.” Games are instead applied and interpreted to become a process of player meaning creation. However well the game may have been designed from an aesthetic or game mechanics perspective, the player inevitably either is presented with or incorporates meaning into play. In some cases, a simple series of pixels become married with context to create a wholly unintended meaning.

I recently played the game LineUp on my Apple iPod. The game, much like Tetris, is a puzzle game. The objective, to amass points through alignment of colored blocks, is easily pursued. A player need only touch the screen to remove properly placed
blocks. Random number generation makes the game unpredictable. The pace of the game changes rapidly; as each layer of new block is revealed the next layer is revealed slightly faster. Game mechanics, through my screen of interpretation, consists of time pressure and uncertainty.

One strategy does not permit me to win every time. Instead, I must look for patterns based on prior experience. I must, given the limitations on number of “taps” per round, maximize the number of blocks removed per turn. Sometimes, as a large block builds incrementally, I must patiently wait although my instincts call for rapid action as the round moves faster and faster. A quick response to the stimulus is not necessarily the correct move.

From play I abstracted several lessons. First, a good player must learn several common patterns. That player must also move his or her eyes systematically to avoid overlooking combinations. A level of restraint is needed if the available tap count falls too low. Certain “warning signs,” such as siloing of blocks, are to be avoided. Patience is needed. These are but some of the lessons learned.

What problems could this type of game teach? Subjects such as the inevitability of change and need for adaptability can easily been included. I could, for example, see this game serving a role in a lesson plan concerning Spencer Johnson’s *Who Moved My Cheese* on the subject of change management. Many an educator may see the many contexts to which such a lesson can be applied. However, in this case, the game cannot create the meaning without player assistance (as Aarseth reminds).
Education, to Bogost, means “understanding how to disrupt a system with new improvements” (263). Artist and game designer Mary Flanagan views this process not as counter-productive, but essential components of games wishing to address a social agenda. A game which, in Flanagan’s argument, lacks the capacity for production of critical play is unlikely to produce learning. Criticality or critical play is the creation of “environments and activities that represent one or more questions about aspects of human life” (Flanagan 6). The rule based governance of those simulated environments can mimic and undermine some prevailing relationship and possibly serve as a call to “cheat” the status quo. I here argue that the “type” of play which embraces subversion is critical play.

Take, for instance, the often criticized game *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)*. In *GTA*, players are rewarded for breaking the law with impunity. Applying a paradigm of critical play, *GTA* operates less as a call to break the law and more to question the ability of particular laws to address particular social ills. Crime, when reinvented as a beneficial and necessary attribute, becomes not a cause for punishment but a tool for advancement. When applied to a context of, say, justice study or policy, the interactivity and rule-structure of *GTA* compels one to question relationships.

These examples are disruptive according to Flanagan, whereby disruption is “a creative act that shifts the way a particular logic or paradigm is operating” (12). The rules of games themselves, when used to represent or teach a given relationship, become a means of destruction for abstraction. In so doing, conceptual understanding is created. Rather than destroy one’s ability to think critically, intervention becomes a means from
which new paradigms are created. In short, play becomes subversive. Personally, however, I would be equally happy with a less violent game than GTA to do this work.

It is exactly this potential for disruption that causes me to explore gaming as a form of teaching tool. Subversion first and foremost preaches continuous self-reflection. Assuming that an ideology of some sort must be accepted and it is the nature of all ideologies to be exclusive, subversion sees acceptance as temporary acquiescence for good reason temporarily until a new ideology is deemed appropriate. Neither set of accepted values or knowledge excuses the dark underbelly of the beast. Instead, only in accepting the inevitability and attenuating to the fascism as defined by Vitanza does subversion become a playful alternative to intellectual atheism or surrender.

Critical play is subversive. It places player(s) in a zone through which she must think differently to succeed in the game. Play in this sense is a form of learning. One plays not only to enjoy the game, although that may certainly be possible in a sense, but to “be” altered or affected profoundly. Critical play now “defined,” would benefit from an illustration.

Sixteen Tons

“You load sixteen tons, what do you get…Another day older and deeper in debt…Saint Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go…I owe my soul to the company store.” (“Sixteen Tons,” Tennessee Ernie Ford)

Architect Nathalie Pozzi and game designer Eric Zimmerman named their commissioned game for the 2010 Art History of Games Symposium after Tennessee
Ernie Ford’s 1955 Folk Song. *Sixteen Tons*, the game, offers an example of critical play. This section provides an overview of the game, including rules and space, then a discussion for illustrative purposes of the theory. Though not a digital game, *Sixteen Tons* offers a strong argument of player engagement in critical thought through the act of play. Further, as the space in which play can occur is later in this thesis expanded to the classroom itself, using a non-virtual example is immediately useful.

*Sixteen Tons* (“16”) is designed for four individual players (color coded in Figure 3.1). Each player begins with $3 US Dollars (of his/her own funds). This game does require use of one’s own money to play. Interestingly, the official rules do not dictate whether players keep their respective winnings. Nevertheless, the game begins when each player approaches the game space, a rectangle of sixteen painted squares, from one side (see figures 3.1 and 3.2).

![Figure 3.1: Sixteen Tons by “Rich_Lem”](image-url)
Note that, as evidenced by the large metal cylindrical objects in Figure 3.2, Sixteen Tons initially resembles a large board game with very big (and heavy) pieces. Each color-coded piece is carefully positioned on the play space to ensure an equitable start position for all players.

![Sixteen Tons Start Position Schematic]

Figure 3.2: Sixteen Tons Start Position Schematic

Once all pieces are placed and all players have their start funds, the game can begin. Player number one initiates game play with the comment “put me to work.” Players two, three and four then bid on player one’s services. Under game rules, every player must perform the instructions of the highest bidder. Every piece is eligible for motion by one position per turn in any direction. For example, in the first turn, any piece can move in or sideways, but not out (as they are already positioned on the outer ring). Bidding is optional. If and only if no bids are offered, then player one can move any piece as he/she sees fit.
For exploration, let us assume that player one receives two bids on the first turn. Player two offers one dollar to move his piece one space in and player four offers three dollars to move her piece one space diagonally. Player one must move player four’s piece diagonally one space and then collect three dollars from player four. Player four has exhausted all available funds at her disposal to move the piece, and is ineligible for further bidding until further funds are obtained.

Play continues in this fashion, where every player accepts bids (if offered) and moves pieces (as instructed, unless no bids are offered) until someone wins the game. A player can only win by positioning his or her pieces adjacently on the board, either by doing so him/herself when not in receipt of any bid or paying another player to do so.

Quickly, players recognize a fluid change in rules during the game. Depending on available funds and board position, two players may find themselves in possession of a common nemesis thereby cooperating. American currency, not being the game objective but a necessary commodity, is obtained through simulated manual labor and compensation exchanged for free will. For as the player can only act as they wish when functionally unemployed or in receipt of equal bids, the monetary gain intentionally overrides his or her own judgment. Quite literally, players can (and will) be paid to sabotage their own progress.

Hence, 16 players undergo a deliberate subversion on multiple levels. Their game pieces are both markers of victory and causes of physical discomfort. The player will feel weight and cold steel as they move them. Literally, a player will move another player’s “dead weight” for the “right” price. The pieces incur labor. Yet, only through
labor is the game won. Labor is defined through game play as uncomfortable, necessary and sometimes counterproductive to one’s own interests. This is thus viewable as a form of subversion for work ethic.

Next, each player must amass wealth as an entrepreneur. Only in obtaining that wealth can a player command others. However, in the act of commanding, the buying power for that player is diminished. Players must weigh their options carefully in the bidding process, acutely aware of how other players are situated financially (and physically on the board). Players recognize the scarcity of funds, continuously re-evaluate the game situation, and determine whether (or how much) to bid on labor. The game requires careful bidding strategy; over or under-payment will assuredly compromise the player’s success.

My first game observation included an interesting occurrence. One player was offered three dollars to complete a task. A rival player offered matching funds. The original bidder displayed open frustration, exclaiming “why would you do that?” I noticed that the second player had a larger bank in his hand; the competing bid did not advance his interests directly. To this, the second bidder responded “to give him a choice.” It would appear, even in a game world, players may be uncomfortable with their role as forced follower or leader. Either could become disquieting.

_Sixteen Tons_, in its game mechanics, imbeds subversions and illustrates critical play. Admittedly, those who ignore the game may avoid any dissonance. Those who elect to comply and play, however, must question their definition of labor, capitalism and victory. Of note is the notion of victory in this game. The winner has not amassed the
greatest financial wealth. Their victory may or may not be secured by hard work, collaboration or development of community. Only through the physical relocation of cumbersome objects does one “win” the game. A “winner” in the game may not be the one leaving with the financial winnings! I, for one, was left reminded of the questionable value of material things. Also, through exploitation of labor (whether the player’s own or not), victory may be bought or earned.

I was, however, left curious about an element of the game’s design. Surrounding the field of play was a wall. The space, except for two entrances, was contained with sufficient space just for players and a few spectators. Such close quarters implied to me a degree of intimacy between player and spectator. The spectator, able to enjoy the camaraderie and specter of play, need not move objects or lose money. I felt such costless pleasure voyeuristic, or simply lazy, at first. To address this point, I contacted someone with intimate knowledge of the game’s design rationale for clarification. In personal email correspondence, the response includes:

“It allowed players to be more comfortable taking out their wallets and money. It also created a special place that heightened the spectacle and intensity of the experience.”

Because s/he was not notified of the republication of this quote, I have elected to maintain the confidentiality of the author. In the reply, I see an alignment of space with experience. By performing in a close but public setting, the relationship of power to money becomes uncertain. I mean in saying this that one is left to “play to the crowd” or
“play to the wallet.” Would one rather wow the crowd or perhaps attempt to amass wealth in private?

*16* offers an insight, through space and mechanics of play, of how learning can occur through critical play. Subversion is a means by which the player is left questioning what constitutes “valuable.” Further, the relationship of success to finance and labor is questioned. Despite such a small space, *Sixteen Tons* incorporates powerful elements of critical play.

**Wired/Unwired**

Play, articulated as a mechanism for critical reflection and subversion, does not need the presence of a computer. Indeed one can engage in this deeper varietal of pastime without the presence of electronic remediation. The concepts of “game” or “play” are not products of twentieth century electronic research and development. I do not question whether computer mediation creates play space, mechanics and convention. However, I merely seek to remind that the concept of critical play expands beyond the domain of computing. In the manner defined by this chapter (and explained with the case of *Sixteen Tons*), critical play space can exist outside virtual worlds.

To explore two possible spaces for critical play applied to business ethics learning, I use the distinction between virtual worlds and “non-space” discussed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. In their original conceptualization, those spaces are both remediations. Bolter and Grusin argue “our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation…” (5). Further, immediacy dictates the “medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented…” (6). In
this sense, a dual logic is present. Whether seeking to enhance or remove the recognizable nuances of virtual/new media, “players” (e.g. those in a gaming environment, critical or otherwise) engage in a process of “remediation.”

As “new” media intersects with daily life, it becomes complex to separate the two. Also, a core issue in the concept of remediation is that the creation of new space creates new possibilities (not just those previously explored). Indeed, designers of Alternative Reality Games (“ARGs”) routinely take advantage of the mixed ecology permeating daily life. In a recent trip to the homepage of the Alternative Reality Gaming Network, a game entitled What Happened to Sarah? is described by columnist Jane Doh as a “story…just starting to unfold through video, websites, emails, and social networking sites” (para. 2). Emerging technologies, such as the Apple iPod or iPhone provide new outlets for blurring the boundaries between spaces. Bolter & Grusin refer to those areas which incorporate “complementary and competing media” (such as theme parks, malls, etc.) as “non-spaces” that are subject to the dual logic of remediation (169-171). However, in the thirteen years between the publication of Bolter & Grusin’s treatise and the drafting of this work, fewer spaces are un-remediated (including the classrooms, now well wired with wireless internet service and student laptop computers). While remediation may not fully account for the particulars of each ecology, it provides a contextual link by which one theory (critical play) can be carried over into two domains.

For the purposes of our discussion, this is a particularly important recognition for a number of reasons. I cannot (and indeed make no efforts to) remove the impact of remediation in the learning environments of critical play. Instead, I look to observe the
intersection of critical play with business ethics instruction in space commonly associated with play (the virtual MMORPG of chapter four) and classroom learning (the Clemson University classroom of chapter five). Both are, in the way argued by Bolter & Grusin, applicable as spaces in which play can occur.
CHAPTER FOUR
BOUCHO IN AZEROTH (VIRTUAL SPACE)

In this chapter, I explore the formation of ethics through critical play in a virtual space. My chosen platform, World of Warcraft (WoW), is a massively multi-player online role playing game ("MMORPG") that has amassed greater than 10 million subscribers as of 2008 (Alexander). It is a tremendously popular game, known for its dependence on communication and problem-solving as integral elements of play. This chapter documents and discusses the creation and advancement of my avatar during the first four months of a new guild’s formation. Further, I discuss relevant perspectives on World of Warcraft as a tool for learning.

To experience and explore how this game community becomes a location of critical play for learning ethics, I launched a new avatar in November, 2009. My new alter ego, “Boucho,” became an early initiate of the “Venture Guild.” Venture is an academic guild chartered with the hope of providing collaborative space for students of serious games. Naturally, fun was an intended part of this exercise as well.

Figure 4.1: Boucho
I had previously played *World of Warcraft* ("WoW") briefly. For a game which derives much of its play by "leveling" characters, I had only scratched the proverbial surface. This is an important disclosure because my perspective quite literally was one of a newcomer to the culture at the onset of this study. Much like an anthropologist can explore a foreign grouping as an outsider to understand their perspective, I am able to employ similar means to understand the role of ethics in *WoW*. Through direct play and in-game interviews, I seek to describe the ethical statements of/through play. As discussed by Miguel Sicart, this can be understood both in terms of game mechanics and social player conventions. I therefore divide my comments into discussion of mechanics and player conventions.

Appendix C lists the interview protocol used to contact players in-game. However, in some cases I used follow up questions to seek clarification on player responses. For instance, if a player aligned "ethics" with "right or wrong," I would ask for elaboration on what "right or wrong" meant to him/her. This follow up questioning, which could be called a form of "Socratic method," was open ended in response to player comments.

Six players were subjected to the interview protocol; two of whom continued the discussion over a period of multiple sessions. As *WoW* promotes creation of a "friend" list where avatars can be monitored for offline/online status, it becomes easy to leverage the social nature of the game for research purposes. Perhaps not surprisingly, I found a strong level of skepticism in response to my requests for interview. Nine members of the community refused to participate and/or simply ignored my request for discussion in my
first thirty minutes of trying alone (of the ten contacted). Two of the players interviewed are members of the Venture Guild, the community I joined as a part of this research. I know these players professionally outside the contexts of play. All remaining subjects were found at random.

Between four and six participants is, in studies of usability, considered something of a “magic” number. Usability specialists Tom Tullis and Bill Albert argue that a small sample size precludes recognition of “all” issues. However, a usability specialist with a sample as small as three or four can “identify some of the more significant issues” (17). Tullis and Albert further contend that larger samples can provide insight into a larger number of less significant usability issues and provide representativeness for statistical analysis. However, as statistical analysis and representativeness are not core concerns of this study, the larger sample is not needed. Usability theorists Joseph S. Dumas and Janice C. Redish suggest that “typical” tests of usability include between 6 and 12 participants (128). While the sample size may seem small for discussion, it provides sufficient insight into the “large” ethical concerns in WoW play. This is not a usability study, of course, but the theoretical rationale for sample size is applicable to this research.

The interview method is not intended to encompass a representative sample of the WoW population. Indeed, such an undertaking would exceed the scope of research in this project. Instead, my intention is to promote triangulation by gaining an additional perspective to supplement my own experiences. WoW is a complicated system (as further discussed before). The self report method in an environment of “role-playing” can raise some reliability concerns; hence I use triangulation to offer a description of ethics forged
through critical play. As discussed in my final chapter, a number of additional research lines spring from exploration.

The major “cities” in the game space have an embedded chat feature for communication commonly called the “Trade Forum.” Players regularly use this space for everything ranging from commercial discussion to recruitment for raid parties or to simply to rail against (or for) something. It is not uncommon to see these (and other) types of discourse occurring asynchronously. I listened closely to this channel, looking for an opportunity to contact players for discussion. When I saw discussion of an ethical player action, economic concern (e.g. sale of item or pricing) or call for joining a group, I contacted the player privately using the protocol outlined in Appendix C.

The approval for study offered by the University’s IRB (see “Methodology” in chapter 1) requires protecting player confidentiality. I am unable to remain compliant and discuss the “names” (including avatar names) of the participating players. Therefore, a numbering system (e.g. P1, P2, P3…) is used to discuss the feedback from the players. Players 1 (or “P1”) and 2 (“P2”) are members of the Venture Guild with whom I interacted frequently but did not formally interview. Nevertheless, descriptions of conversations and interactions with these two players are referenced in this chapter. Table 4.1 provides a form of introduction to the players subjected to the interview protocol, including demographic information for their level of WoW experience.

For data analysis, I coded participant comments as related to four categories: *phronesis* (social prudence or communal good), moral sensitivity (a perception of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>WoW Experience</th>
<th>Highest Level Attained</th>
<th>Guild Member?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 Months</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5 Years</td>
<td>80 (three times)</td>
<td>Declined to Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>Declined to Answer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8 Months</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4 Months</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yes (two guilds)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: In-Game Interview Participant Demographics

individual ethics), ethics derived from social aspects of the game with other players, and ethics based in game mechanics. A comment can be cross-listed into multiple categories. Using this four part codification, I found several trends concerning the elements of *phronesis* and moral sensitivity in mechanics and/or social rules. These findings are discussed further in this chapter.

“Boucho” is a dear friend of this research project in several regards. He is a platform for me to experience the process of assimilation into *World of Warcraft* culture from first-hand experience. The Venture Guild, by virtue of both game and classroom interaction, allows me to gain intimate familiarity with how players learn the formal and informal rules of play. “Boucho” became, in a sense, is a continuation of self in the virtual environment.
The object of play in WoW is very similar to the desired outcomes of business. To simplify, a player gains wealth and prestige as a consequence of an enjoyable play experience. Wealth is a fairly simple measure in units of gold, silver and bronze. Prestige, however, is a more complicated measure of formal and informal stature. Social good in WoW, the stuff of which *phronesis* is born, is aligned with those two ends.

At the most fundamental mechanical level, a player completes quests or kills enemy characters to gain prestige (in the form of reputation or experience points) and wealth. These points culminate in the acquisition of a new level (which is to say that after receiving a certain number of experience points, the avatar moves to a new level). At the time of publication, a fully expanded *World of Warcraft* version permits players to reach level 80.

The road to rhetorically “reading” or “playing” WoW has already been established. Political Science researcher Marcus Schtzke discusses that open world games are well tailored to the needs of learning *phronesis*. In his treatment of Aristotle’s moral reasoning, he explains a need for practice in learning virtue. Accepting that morality is a reasoning skill only acquired through “constantly performing virtuous actions,” Schtzke calls for gaming as an immersive media usable for simulating moral decision making.

Harkening back to the social epistemic theory justifying (and necessitating) critical play from chapters 2 and 3, such a dogmatic approach overlooks the role of the human agent. I do, in part, agree with a different element of Schtzek’s argument. Players are presented a complicated choice in which not all needed information is known. The
player must make a value judgment in which two (or more) endings are possible. As Schtzke argues the “ideal” occurs when “the potential for good and bad resolutions” exist and the dilemma presented has significant consequences. While I agree that providing choice is a part of critical play, I disagree insofar as foundationist “right/wrong” thinking is a solution to the problem. *World of Warcraft* is an ideal world for critical play exploration largely because of the social relationships and notion of “self” established through play. Also, there are economic incentives for behavioral choices which can easily reward or deter certain aspects of play. *Wow* thus strikes close to home for businesspeople.

These notions of game-based wealth and prestige are also integrally connected to player conceptions of identity. Psychology researchers Katie Davis, Scott Sneider and Howard Gardner recognize that *Wow* provides an online space whereby identity can be self fabricated (a form of social epistemology, to be sure). These fabrications can, as discussed by Davis et al., be beneficial to the player outside the game world. Role play permits a deeper understanding of one’s self and a way to experiment or explore the idealized sense of self in a low stakes environment. They note “it fe[eels] safer to tell an unseen audience and gauge their response before attempting to speak face to face with their loved ones” (1090). Particularly in regards to reconciling the competing notions of self in different contexts, this practice can prove useful. The cognitive skill of reconciling multiple personalities can begin as an abstract concept in adolescence (1091).

Davis et al. are particularly concerned with how online worlds, including *Wow*, can develop moral courage. For rhetoricians interested in subversion through critical
play, this is an interesting note. As phronesis is an unstable ground on which to place ethics, moral courage and reasoning share the same detriments. Consider what happens when students face stiff competition for top school admission. Employment recruiters may prefer products of those elite institutions. Davis et al. report that 60% of respondents to the 2006 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth agreed or strongly agreed that successful people in the real world “do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating” (15). Students before reaching college must not only wrestle with who they are and forming their notion of self, but face an environment that seems to breed “win at all costs” mentalities. Davis et al. see WoW and similar game environments as a promising response to this problem, as developing student self-appreciation through self-fabrications which “ring true” can be accomplished through play. It is, however, on the style of play needed and rhetorical/subversive nature of that play in WoW we disagree.

One can easily attend a sermon on Sunday and then behave however he or she chooses on Monday. Similarly, why should a player act consistently between situations that exist in and out of the game? Maria Frostling-Henningsson argues for WoW as third order simulacra of simulation. Such a construct is more real than real, having replaced the real and bearing no relationship to reality whatsoever. Frostling-Henningsson acknowledges that the social aspect of gaming is one of the most important drivers for play to many gamers; particularly communication with other gamers. People who are not able to normally socially interact can do so online. She comments “all encounters are possible” without regard to age, gender, professional or physical appearance (558).
One of Frostling-Henningsson’s case studies reports that the subject player had “matured a lot” as a result of WoW play, both in and out of play. “He is cooperative and social and shares his knowledge with the other gamers” (559). Further, to be able to “unite” for common cause was of central importance. A gamer must put the needs to consider the group’s well-being because the game values teamwork and collaboration. A player may, by virtue of violating ethical game precepts, become outcast when shunned by a group. Those feelings are as real in a playground as a workplace. Frostling-Henningsson comments “even though gamers act as avatars in the games, their character often reveals their true personalities by the way they behave” (560). This observation resulted from an encounter in which two girl players bent game rules to cooperate instead of kill one another.

Kevin Moberly sees WoW play as representative of rhetorical meaning-making. His research considers the type of “writing” that takes place in the game. Of particular interest to Moberly’s work is the representation of self through chat logs. To quote him at length,

“Computer games thus have the potential to form the core of a critical, social-constructionist pedagogy that is designed to help students come to terms with the larger process of identity that is enacted through the medium of the composition classroom” (295).

The animated figures are symbolic representations of written code; players find their place through rhetorical meaning-making in the appropriate time. Combat logs and chat features permit written discourse that allows one’s notion of self to emerge through the
act of play. One plays as self exposed to a unique situation, and responds through game mechanics, rules, and writing.

Moberly continues work described by Ian Bogost by probing the relationship of rhetoric to gaming. However, what I find significant about Moberly’s work from the perspective of this inquiry is the relationship of rhetorical identity to play advancement. To Moberly, through virtual choices, one can refrain one’s notion of “self.” It is a bold claim. However, harking back to the *phronetic* discussion of Steven Katz in chapter two, a strong precedent exists for deliberative rhetoric to both shape self and future action. Much like Katz’ example of propaganda during Hitler’s reign created and shaped a reality in which its moral warrant was accepted, the identity created through play can provide a way in which the play-actions are justified. Suddenly, it is not “so bad” to steal a car or hit a bystander (as in the earlier cited example of *Grand Theft Auto*). A realm for subversion is thus identifiable.

Assistant Professor Marlin C. Bates is particularly concerned with notions of the rhetorical self in online worlds including *WoW*. Bates argues that in the rhetorical action of gaming in environments such as *WoW* play is both a process and product of identity. Players not only perform and alter identity through play action, but actually create it.

“The identity is created using guidelines presented by the software itself, web pages, and other users…It is not the *place* that bounds community, but the *identities* that are formed within it” (102-103).

In Bates’ treatment of play, the ecology of the game exists beyond the traditional game space. The game is discussed and shared through web pages, forums and online
databases. One need only use a simple search through Google.Com or Youtube.com to identify continuations of the game space.

With the blurring of game spaces comes a less pronounced wall between play and non-play. As but one illustration, I greeted a fellow member of the Venture Guild (further discussed below) warmly when we passed in the halls of Daniel Hall on Clemson University’s grounds. Bates reminds us that the schemas resulting from game play define how player-characters interact with each other and that game experience exists outside of Blizzard play-space. Players frequently reference and interact through other websites and forums. Bates elaborates on the WoW reality of play in saying:

“That is to say, MMORPGs such as…WoW are very close to a life in that it engages the senses: player-characters who are lost are mourned, people come together and marry, professions obtained, and wealth is gained and lost. It is, in a word, real” (114).

Lee Sherlock takes a similarly broad ecological approach to World of Warcraft study. His notion of play, visually articulated in Figure 4.2, relies on a cross-ecological understanding of WoW play-space.

![Diagram of WoW forums and interfaces]

Message Board Threads

Grouping FAQ

In-game Group Chat

Official Grouping Interface

Friends List

WoWWiki Grouping Articles

Interface AddOns

Looking for Group/Looking for More
larger group, create a localized community. This community is shaped normatively (at the player level) or instrumentally (via mobilization of game mechanics). Sherlock notes that game add-ons, including some devices input through curse.com, and information exchange, such as wowhead.com, contribute to this broad trans-ecology of play. For the purposes of my own play of the game, such a blurring of the lines was an integral part of play.

I argue that WoW play uses rhetoric to produce notions of business ethics in mechanics and play conventions. Further, the play involved is both critical (outlined in chapter three) and aligned with the rhetorical body of business ethics theory (discussed in chapter four) in theory. I now turn my attention to a stronger detailed discussion of WoW as an engine for experiencing ethics ethics pedagogy.

Rhetoric goes to War: Business Ethics Pedagogy in WoW

Thus far, my focus addressed the mechanics of play in WoW. Of particular interest was the relationship of self realized in play and the application of that self outside of gaming contexts. I have argued that the notion of self in play is no less real than the generation of identity outside of the game. Further, I have suggested that the definition
of self or community created in game transcends the game world. One may question the relationship of this to the focus of this work, business ethics pedagogy. That WoW is a game aligned with critical play for learning through subversion should now be clear. At issue is the connection between WoW and business ethics. I now address this point in greater detail. I assert that the connections between WoW and business themes are strong. For illustrations, I discuss the practices of guild formation and gold farming. While both activities are game actions, their connection to “real world” business behavior is apparent (and discussed further).

Within the game, players have the option of creating guilds. Blizzard Entertainment, designer and publisher of WoW, defines the guild as "… a group of players that join together for companionship, adventure, economic gain and more.” (“Guilds” para. 1). Faltin Karlsen notes that the game is designed with quests that reward cooperative play, such as through guilds. Guilds can perform activities such as sharing of knowledge and resources. These guilds can also work together to resolve particularly difficult missions. In fact, as Sal Humphreys observes, the relationship established in a guild can transcend the game as an established guild may simply change MMORPG games en masse. A recent search using the term “World of Warcraft Guild” through google.com revealed greater than 18 million responses, including self-created user sites and organizations dedicated to “ranking” guild performance. Guilds facilitate teamwork and collaborative problem solving.

Guilds are an integral part of the gaming experience in WoW. However, as Castulus Kolo and Timo Baur note, guilds tend to create “additional rules and notions of
honour and and duties governing the interactions among the members and their interactions with outsiders” (Motives and Strategies para. 8). Guilds therefore rely on members to establish both missions (intended results) and norms (rules and notions for behavior). These rules and missions are in essence user-generated game dimensions, as real to game play as any dimension created by the designers themselves. *World of Warcraft*, which both rewards and expects collaboration as a part of game mastery, provides a virtual laboratory for virtually remediated ethical decision making. More so, it does this while stressing a need for collaboration. So guilding is not just a game activity aligned with performance within the game and desirable business skill, but contains a strong ethical component.

*World of Warcraft* gameplay incorporates an ethic of teaming and collectivism. In becoming part of a larger whole, the guild members become stronger as individuals. Guilds facilitate skill specialization, communication and collaboration. Whether serving on a “raid party” or simply sharing ideas on a dedicated communication channel accessible only by fellow members of the guild, individual members realize quickly that they accomplish more as members of a larger organization than as individuals working alone. In modes of play focusing on player versus player combat (commonly called “PvP”), this ability to enlist aid is more necessity than convenience. Members of the game community without friend support will find advancement difficult as other teams will likely target them as easy prey.

*World of Warcraft*, as an example, illustrates how immersive game play can be fun and teach skills attributable to non-gaming situations. Teamwork, communication and
collaboration are skills useful to any professional situation. *WoW*, in a highly entertaining way, builds these skills. Further, the rhetorical rules and conventions that create critical play conditions are present.

However, play within *WoW* contains types of ethical controversy known to the business community. Commonly called “gold farming,” a capitalistic enterprise has developed around the game’s community. Gold farmers engage in sale of items acquired in games for real money. One can, for example, visit the homepage of IGE to buy virtual gold using real money (see Figure 4.3)

![Figure 4.3: Screen Shot of a “Farmed Gold” Buy](image)

To purchase a “farmed” item, a player simply engages in a commercial transaction outside the game. The selling company then supplies the item or items through the game to the player. Because this practice circumvents the normal avenues of acquisition through good faith play with members of the guild or firsthand experience, this practice is frowned upon within the gaming community.
Concerns regarding gold farming are discussed by Simon Carless, Group Publisher at Think Services and Chairman of the Independent Games Festival, and Professor of Communications Research Lisa Nakamura. Carless quotes *PC Gamer’s* position on the practice of gold farming as “dispicable: not only do they brazenly break many MMOs’ End-User License Agreements, but they all-too-often ruin legitimate players’ fun.” Nakamura raises concerns of a different type, seeing gold farming as discrimination and a virtual extension of international labor exploitation. She comments that the practice is a “powerful vector for distributing racializing discourses” wherein the farmer is portrayed with negative connotations long combated by the Asian community. Whether assailed as a violation of game etiquette or opportunity to advance racial discrimination, gold farming is an entrepreneurial activity with many dissenters.

The theoretical and practical connections between rhetoric, play and business ethics in *WoW* now addressed, I explore the consequential (and fun) business of entering *World of Warcraft*. Here I hope to observe and experience critical play applicable to a subversive teaching of business ethics.

**The Birth of Boucho: Relevant Character Background**

Creating an avatar is, in a sense, a form of birthing. The new virtual entity lacks (with the exception of player) form either in the realm of ideas or physicality. This section expresses the formation of my avatar “Boucho.” Using a narrative form, I describe in this section my personal experience of creating my virtual “self.” As this
experience influences my direct play experience and in-game interviews, this narrative is particularly relevant.

My first task was to select a race and class for Boucho. Within World of Warcraft, races are categorized as “Alliance” or “Horde.” The sides are considered mortal enemies. Venture Guild, as a Horde Faction guild, required selection of a Horde race. As I had not yet purchased any expansion packs, I had four choices of race. Each race has beneficial attributes specific to that race. My selection, “Undead,” includes such racial traits as underwater breathing (given that Boucho is technically already dead, there is not much chance of drowning) and cannibalism (morbidly and perhaps grotesquely, the Undead can eat slain Humanoid or Undead corpses to regenerate their own health).

It is important to note that cannibalism is not the only way to regenerate health, a number of foods and potions accomplish the same effect. When not engaged in combat, characters will naturally heal. Therefore the choice to cannibalize the dead is a choice which one may make for the sake of convenience. Undead who cannibalize will heal faster and not deplete the limited stores of supplies carried with them.

These racial attributes are intriguing. However, from an ethical perspective, what attracted me to this selection was the mythology of the race. Zombies are traditionally viewed as evil and destructive. They are associated with popular myths such as vampirism. World of Warcraft has a unique take on this class, stating:

“Having broken free from the tyrannical rule of the Lich King, a renegade group of undead seek to retain their own free will while destroying all those who oppose them. Known as the Forsaken, this group is dedicated to serving their leader, the
banshee queen Sylvanas Windrunner. These dark warriors have established a secret stronghold beneath the ruins of Lordaeron's former capital city. Situated deep beneath the cursed Tirisfal Glades, the labyrinthine Undercity is a sprawling bastion of evil. Within its shadowy confines, Sylvanas' royal apothecaries scramble to develop a devastating new plague - one which will not only eradicate their hated Scourge rivals, but the rest of humanity as well. To further their dark aims, the Forsaken have entered into an alliance of convenience with the primitive, brutish races of the Horde. Holding no real loyalty for their newfound comrades, the Forsaken have duped them into fighting against their common enemy - the Lich King. Only time will tell how these disciples of doom will fare in their mission of vengeance.” (“Undead”).

In this lore, Undead are creatures recently freed from bondage. Their desire to “retain their free will” seems admirable. However, to pursue this end (and their vengeance), they have begun to develop biological weapons and maintain a weak alliance with the other races in the Horde. As suggested by the language “duped them [other horde races],” they are capable of manipulation for their own purposes.

I logically found this ethical dilemma intriguing. Far from innocent, an Undead character may have a logical goal in mind but is capable of very unethical action as a result. I wondered what choices I would make in game play as a result of this situation. In what ways would the rules of play dictate my actions?

With my race in mind, I next needed to select a class of character. Avatars in World of Warcraft satisfy one of three roles in group actions. They may serve as
“healers,” “tanks,” or “damage dealers.” When cooperating, the generic strategy is to maintain a mix of all three roles. Each has a part to play.

A tank will attack a target or targets. In so doing, they attract the attention of the target and receive damage. This attention is commonly called “aggro.” Non-player characters (NPCs) are programmed to respond to the greatest threat. The tank can use that attention (or aggro) to position the target as favorable to the group as a whole. NPCs will follow and face whatever avatar has the greatest aggro. For instance, should the target have the ability to attack an area in front of it, the tank would want to point the target in a safe direction using the attention. The tank is expected to keep the NPCs aggro, position the NPC favorably, and absorb damage without dying. If unsuccessful in any area, the group as a whole can die (“wipe,” in WOW jargon).

Healers and damage dealers have fairly straightforward roles. If all is going well, healers are repairing the tank to ensure s/he lives. Damage dealers, being careful not to distract the NPC or NPCs from the tank, attack and kill the enemy. Usually, one of these two roles also serves as group leader and coordinates activities.

Each class of player is either a specialist or hybrid role. Specialists exceed in one area (e.g. a Mage or spell caster makes for excellent damage dealing while a Priest is the traditional healer class). Generalists can perform different roles, but not to the same degree as a specialist. For example, a Paladin is able to serve in any role, but does not have the same healing or damage dealing ability as one of the previous two roles.

I elected to make Boucho a “Warrior.” This class can serve as either a damage dealing or tanking class. Although I had not yet determined which route to take and
assumed the general group dynamic would dictate my role, I was attracted to the high ability for this class to accept damage. Warriors can wear heavier armor and also have more hit points. A hit point refers to the damage done in combat. Fewer hit points translate to less tolerance for damage. Mages, for instance, can do a lot of harm but are notoriously thin skinned!

During the launching period, avatars can also be customized for appearance. A player can select the gender, name and physical “look” of the character (e.g. features such as hair, eyes, mouth, skin tone, etc.) While these choices can build the ethos and persona of the character, they in no way influence a player’s core characteristics for learning abilities, doing damage, generating aggro or hit points. The plateaus for leveling the character are unrelated to these core choices of race, class, or appearance. I choose to “randomize” my appearance, whereby the computer randomly assigned my appearance. To my chagrin, my character lacked hair and arrived with a dislocated jaw. Perhaps that’s fitting for a Zombie however!

My avatar arrived new to the World of Warcraft not unlike an infant. At level one, I had only the most basic of abilities. I could attack and cannibalize. The armor and supplies to my name were nominal. My ability to inflict and accept damage was very low. Quite literally, I was a babe in the woods.

Ethical Instruction and Argument in WoW Game Mechanics

Luckily, WoW plans for this stage of young avatar development. New avatars are born into a protected area. “Deathknell,” the start point for Undead, is bounded by impassable mountains. The narrow road to the world beyond Deathknell is protected by
powerful guards. Past those guards, more powerful wolves hungrily await the arrival of any young avatar too eager to leave Deathknell’s protected confines.

Deathknell is populated with relatively weak enemies and several quests intended to quickly level any new avatar. It is a learning zone for gaining familiarity with the basic WOW interface and gameplay. Characters move from levels 1-5 quickly. I was able to do so in one three hour session. This continuous reinforcement is helpful to building the player’s confidence in the game. Essentials of game mechanics, ethical and otherwise, are developed during this time while players learn how to navigate and interact in the game space. However, the mechanics of play include additional examples of ethical note.

The first example of which is “questing.” From levels 5 to 13, play consists of largely of either completing missions (aka: quests) for prestige/experience and/or material possession (such as wealth or helpful artifact). In a solo quest, the user is expected to perform tasks in exchange for compensation. Experience points and sometimes money or other items are received in exchange for completing the task. The player is serving as a form of “work for hire.” Should the player participate in a party, the experience and loot can be distributed amongst several players. A party permits completion of more challenging quests or quicker upgrading of player level. The system of distribution and party specialization is, both from experience and player interviews, a rich area of discussion concerning ethics created through social norms and thus receives considerably more attention in the next subsection. For now, suffice it to say that the game rewards and encourages collaboration in questing.
Quests are initiated by computer generated quest-givers; “foremen or women” who provide tasks, permit you to either accept or deny the quest. At the time of quest acceptance, the player is afforded an outcome and rationale for that outcome. The reward is presented at the time of selection.

This, from my immediate observation, represents a type of decision with ethical ramifications. Quests can vary. Common examples include simply talking to another NPC or delivering an item. That seems easy enough. However, in a quest entitled a “New Plague,” the player completes four quests in sequence beginning with collecting five vials of “Darkhound Blood.” The Darkhound are a form of demonic wolf found throughout Deathknell; it is not hard to see past the subtle issues of animal rights when the creature is an inhuman and vicious predator known for attacking any passerby’s without provocation. However, these vials create a toxic poison with additional ingredients similarly obtained, (“Vile Fin Scales” and “Vicious Night Web Spider Venom”). The final stage of the “New Plague” quest consists of feeding the poison to a captured enemy in captivity. Should the player choose to do so, he or she will receive a handsome reward, and the captive dies in spectacular fashion.

At first glance, it would seem that the game encourages unethical action. After all, the action many would consider unethical receives several rewards. The player receives a stipend of experience and cinematic view of the captive’s spectacular death. As indicated by the quest giver, however, “it [the poison] contains a subtle hint of what The Dark Lady [leader of the Undead] has planned for the rest of Azeroth.”
In the context of Undead lore, this quest has a deeper connotation. Would one, in the interests of upholding their national interests, engage in questionable behavior? A reading of the game rules implies a strong preference for supporting nationality over individual ethics. The experience cannot be gained from the final element of the quest sequence unless a player commits murder to serve their race. If the potion is shown to work, the “freedom fighters” of the Undead gain a new weapon against their enemies. However, the player can choose not to participate. S/he faces no penalties beyond lost opportunity cost (e.g. those benefits gained from satisfying the quest-giver’s request). The race will not disown the player or explicitly punish him/her. S/he can continue to gain experience (and level) from killing demonic entities. It would simply take longer.

There is a clearly stated open choice between kill the captive or not. One can choose their direction and suffer the consequences. “Free” will, albeit in a world surrounded by evil demons and assorted enemies, continues. There is, naturally, critical play present in this decision. Will one “invent” their player to do that which they may find questionable in different contexts? Other quests during this phase require similar choices. On a case by case basis, the user must weigh the lore and task requirements with the benefit of completion.

Quests are built into the game and are a component of play. To a certain extent, players can play the game with choice over which quests they complete. It would be interesting, as a social experiment, to see which (if any) quest-types can be subjected to player boycott without compromising on the ability to play the game. That is, however, the subject of a separate study.
In a mechanism similar to quests, players are permitted “achievements” that can result in wealth and “prestige” with other players. Usually, the more difficult the achievement, the more “street credit” comes with it. As P1 noted in discussion, achievements are public information and likely used in evaluating whether to admit someone into a raid party. For example, during a session focused on cooking certain items, Boucho both became an expert cook and earned an achievement. This particular achievement would, of course, not likely produce peer admiration when those peers are looking for a good fight!

As previously discussed, WoW includes an economical component. Gold (the primary currency) comes as a reward for completing quests, can be taken from some corpses, or result from a commercial transaction. At lower levels, the normal realm of play consists of acquiring low level items at little cost from dead enemies or venders. Venders are computer characters charged with commercial or training interests. For example, a weapon merchant can repair damaged equipment or sell inexpensive weapons and a warrior trainer may offer the option of learning new skills. To provide a sense of depth, wowhead.com (a database of WoW information), lists 281 NPC (non-player characters) in Undercity (according to game story, the capital city for Undead). Not all are vendors, however, but this surprising number illustrates the number of possible human-computer interactions possible in but one small zone of the game.

There is an alternative means of raising capital through use of an in-game auction house. An auction house is a form of game-supported free market for higher level items and trade goods. At the suggestion of P1, new players were encouraged to explore
professions. An avatar, regardless of race or class, can acquire skill sets specific to behaviors. One may, for instance, learn to fish and gain the skills needed to find food from water sources in game. Miners or herbalists are skilled gathers of raw materials usable for other professions. As P1 noted, a gatherer skilled in use of the auction house can almost print his or her own money.

With the auction house came a new vocabulary. The auction house interface seems simple enough at first glance. One can “bid” (place an offer) or “buyout” an item (if established by the seller, the item may be purchased outright and immediately for a given cost). However, considerable strategy exists on the subject of pricing. Open source “addons” such as “Auctioneer” permit players to develop databases of economic data on the subject of commodities. Blizzard indirectly influences these values by maintaining a “drop rate” (the frequency by which a given item is released). The general rules of supply and demand are incurred, where the most common items retail at the lowest value (but are subject to fluctuation) and the least common tend to be more “costly.” However, as further discussed in the next subsection, players can interfere with normal market operations (much as unethical traders on the Wall Street Stock Market can influence prices by their behavior alone) through social means.

In these brief examples, several ethical arguments are shown to exist in the mechanics of play. They are, however, interpreted through player experience and choice. Although “mechanical” in that they are “rules” of play, the experience of playing goes through the same process of rhetorical screening as social epistemic theory would suggest. Auctioning, questing and achieving are but some of the ways in which ethical
(and arguably, unethical) behavior can be rewarded, thus suggesting the presence of critical play. These, interestingly, rely on *phronesis* logic as they define ends as relevant; with (some) indications of the same problems (most notably, the “ninja looting” and auction house behaviors further documented in subsequent sections of this chapter). Ultimately, the mechanics of *WoW* are aligned with a business context as well.

**Ethical Instruction and Argument in *WoW* Social Convention(s)**

P5, a self-reported computer studies student at Kansas State University, expressed immediate disappointment in the lack of ethics in *WoW* play. His examples included “undercutting” the auction house and “ninja looting” group raids. The problem of *phronesis* is present: social good is defined by ends rather than means. From both my experience in play and also the feedback I received from fellow players, these are frequent complaints. Additional attention is dedicated to these examples in this subsection. I close this section discussing additional significant ethical arguments derived from critical play in this study.

My personal philosophy and newfound reverence for this game dictates I begin with positive examples of player conduct (and social convention). In fact, I cannot take all the credit for my (initially) rapid ascent. Guilds, once chartered, can only be joined by invitation. The Venture Guild, chartered by P1 and 2, requires hopeful members to contact them in game. My first official act as Boucho was to whisper P2 to introduce my new avatar.

I began the conversation by addressing P2 and in a friendly, polite manner inquiring about her evening. Not knowing who “Boucho” was, she naturally and politely
asked who she was addressing. To my pleasant surprise, within minutes of my introduction, P1 and P2 were on their way to Deathknell to “see me.” Although at a considerably higher level (both characters were in the mid-20 range), they assisted with my first several quests in two ways. With their greater attack power, the enemies I confronted were quickly dispatched. Further, given their knowledge of the game, I was able to navigate to objectives much quicker. The new player must become accustomed to the mapping feature and learn to reach different points. Often in quests (tasks for which players are compensated economically and with experience), players need to “search” for the right enemy or place to be. Thanks to their wisdom, my search time was very short. I was able to follow the more experienced players to the right places.

As a direct consequence of their altruistic actions and welcome, I improved my character quickly. This may not have occurred without their gracious assistance. Further, using an in-game mail system that permits players to share items, messages, or money, I received a gift from P1 at an early stage. At a low level, the gift (of five gold) is a virtual king’s ransom. With these funds, I was able to quickly upgrade my armor, supplies and weaponry. In subsequent play, the altruistic nature of the guild came in quite handy as I frequently needed support (communal guild banking, in-game mailing gifts, support during difficult encounters in the game, etc.).

Thus the first norm was established quickly in my experience. Altruism within the guild was encouraged and demonstrated. More experienced guild members help the newer members learn the game and develop their avatar. In some servers where battle between players is central to play, such cooperation is necessary. Also, they took an
immediate interest in welcoming me to the guild world. The information they shared (including how to navigate the start area of Deathknell) saved time. It was a form of early, game mediated mentorship. The gold gifted me allowed me to obtain helpful materials. This too helps considerably. With stronger weaponry comes greater damage dealing. Better armor permits a longer lifespan in combat. Strong armor and weaponry can offset differences in level. For instance, a level three character well equipped fares a better chance of success against a level five enemy. The level five enemy then produces greater loot (e.g. items or money left on a corpse for the player who killed it to retrieve) and experience (reward for killing the player). It becomes a self-sustaining cycle.

In my case pattern of questing continued until my first raid experience. This experience highlighted the single largest ethical issue reported by in-game surveys. All but one respondant reported “ninja looting” or “raid misconduct” as an issue in play. One player discussed that the “random dungeon generator” (an apparatus that connects players to a group for a raid) in part contributed to it. Players could cross servers, thereby completely excuse themselves from mechanical limitations or social responsibility. Another player reported that some groups intentionally are friends who recruit one or two “schills” (players unwittingly providing loot to a silent consortium, thus monopolizing favorable items). I begin by illustrating these types of issues with a first person accounting.

At approximately level 14, I was invited by P1 to participate in an “instance.” Essentially, “instances” are game-dungeons where only one group can play at a time. A large number of instances, identical in all ways except for the players involved, run
simultaneously. The players are in essence engaged in a form of parallel universe. Raiding an instance requires intensive coordination between party members (or a sufficiently strong Avatar to defeat those enemies present).

Figure 4.4: Wailing Caverns Map (Wowhead.com)

Wailing Caverns is set in a lush, organic, jungle setting. It may seem picturesque (as indicated by figure 4.5’s screen shot), but it is in fact riddled with monsters. Poisonous ooze (“Evolving Ectoplasm”), large venomous serpents (“Deviate Vipers”), and crocodiles (“Deviate Crocolisks”) are but some of the obstacles to overcome. Even some of the plants, “Deviate Lashers,” will attack players. For a player below level 20, it is an area enjoyed only in good company with a well organized raid! As indicated by the
presence of yellow “dots,” in figure 4.4, there are a number of “bosses” of greater strength (and with greater loot).

I entered our instance of Wailing Caverns, and was immediately taken aback by both the quality of graphic and level of enemies. Our group first had to overcome a group of monsters. As “tank,” it became my role to attract (and distract) a target (or targets). I was initially confused by how to do so. I feared a “rush” of the awaiting enemies may be like biting off more than I could chew! An alternative was needed. Warriors possess a variety of special abilities. So I elected to review those abilities to see what options I could find. One particularly seemed promising – a “taunt.” From a
comfortable distance, a “taunt” allows a warrior to catch the attention of a selected enemy. If in close proximity, the “taunt” may cause more than one enemy to attack. So one must choose their fights carefully, selecting their targets with careful attention to the surrounding enemies. One player interviewed expressed frustration with a similar phenomena, where players would simply run past those in trouble during a fight to loot a corpse.

I learned this lesson the “hard way” when an errant taunt inspired a virtual lynch mob of angry enemies to respond. When a tank does this by accident, s/he has few options. Their healer (charged with regenerating their health as the tank is attacked) will hopefully respond proportionally to the damage inflicted. If not, the tank will die and the mob(s) will turn their attention on the remaining members of the party (who lack the tank’s ability to absorb damage). Also, if the tank fails to keep the attention of the mob(s), a mob may become distracted by the activities of the damage dealing or healing elements of the party. An inattentive tank then becomes a very lonely tank, finding corpses instead of healers and damage dealers at his/her back! This came alarmingly close to reality during this same experience when my chat window chirped “Situational awareness, Boucho” and P1 ran through my screen with two angry enemies in tow. I was able to recapture their attention from P1, a healer, before they killed his avatar. However, this was due to the knowledge of P1 (a more experienced player) to run by the tank and call for help. H, a senior player of Venture not interviewed formally reported that he will occasionally let misguided Tanks “die” as a learning tool if this happens more than once.
Clearly, there is an ethical component to this form of grouping. The party requires cooperation. All roles, tank/damage dealer/healer, must work in unison for the group as a whole to succeed. This became an important learning experience for me. The party as a whole counted on my ability to learn the encounter and role. I have to study the configuration of enemies, the territory, and the abilities of our opponents in order to prepare for the encounter. During the instance, the tank has to pay close attention to the positioning of players (keeping friends as far from harm as possible), the attention of the villain(s), and whether any members of my party have attracted undesirable attentions. A failure in any of these regards can not only impact the whole team’s performance, but also perhaps “wipe” the group. In a “wipe,” all members of the team die. It costs time to reorganize the group from the beginning. All progress in the instance is lost, and the enemies will have regenerated (in other words, the group is back at “square one.”). There is an economic cost too, as players have sustained “durability damage” to their equipment (which costs money to fix). Any temporary “buffs” (skills, spells, potions of temporary benefit) are lost. Wiping a party will not win friends.

A player I interviewed discussed an unusual experience. Unable to find the dungeon in which her group was fighting, she continued to receive money and experience while she searched for the location. Finally, unable to do so, she chose to leave the party. She felt, personally, this experience lent itself to unethical conduct (claiming rewards without necessarily having to do work). Easily she could have remained in the party until members of the group kicked her out, at which point she would have received more benefit. As another example of social rule enforcement, members of a party can vote and
remove undesirable elements of a party. It is, in a sense, an attempt to remove ninja looters and raid miscreats from the group. As one player noted, it comes down to respecting that “avatars represent people.”

A short player-produced video entitled “Leeroy Jenkins” offers a wonderful example of the social dynamic in raiding. “Leeroy” begins with a machinematic capture of a group raid. Using a voice over protocol, the video captures the onscreen action and conversation between players. Situated in the midst of an instance, the party is discussing strategy for an upcoming encounter. The group leader reviews the sequence of attack. Some of the players in sequence are to scatter enemies using their special abilities. In scattering the enemies, the damage received to the party is lessened. By doing so in sequence, the effect takes longer to wear off. A healer is more likely to keep up with repairing a tank. The tank will have fewer enemies to keep occupied. It sounds like a sensible play. One avatar, “Leroyjenkins,” apparently grows weary of the discussion. Shouting “Leeeroy Jenkins,” he rushed in and ignores the plan.

His party faces a choice. DO they help or let his avatar die? They choose the former. Leroy will not survive without their assistance. So they follow to save him. The plan is scrapped as a part of the desperate rescue plan. Instead of scattering the enemies to reduce damage in an orderly fashion, the party is wiped out. As evidenced by the voice recording as this happens, the group becomes very frustrated with Leroy. Weakly, he defends “it’s not my fault.” As evidenced by the Leroy example, wiping a team violates social norms.
However, wiping is not the only way to alienate the group. There is the small matter of deciding how loot from corpses is distributed. One player, a “group leader,” can set the distribution rules formally in game. For instance, in my Wailing Caverns experience, the setting was such that players could roll either “need” or “greed” for the highly desirable items. There was only one to go around. In a group of friends, this is certainly not a large issue. Should someone need an item, they can select “need” and receive preferential treatment. If more than one player selects “need,” a random number generator selects the winner. If one player selects need and all others select “greed,” then that player is rewarded the item. If all members select “greed,” that same random number generator decides the winner. Like a trip to Las Vegas or Atlantic City, luck and probability play their parts. These mechanics can be circumvented by unscrupulous players. In short, phronesis here fails; like a Bernie Madoff, the ninja looter views material advancement as ethical end result (whether for guild benefit or other reason) and neglects moral sensitivity to obtain their desired result.

This system of loot distribution is predicated on an understanding of the system and adherence to social conventions. In my first instance, I was unaware of how the system worked. I simply took the distribution windows as annoying pop-ups. Further, the need/greed selection was counter-intuitive to me. Greed seems like such a nasty term, I thought, so why not give it to the player with the greatest need? So I selected “need” on everything quickly (to close the pop-up) and continued playing. After a time, I received a private communication from P1. Suggesting my reputation as a “ninja looter” may otherwise grow, he advised me to stop selecting “need” for items unless it was something
I really needed! Naturally, I asked for elaboration on the “ninja looter” term. Imagine my surprise when I learned the term means “World of Warcraft thief!” Born of concern for Boucho’s good name and a desire to understand how the system worked for future instances, I simply began to select “greed” for all items. I would later learn that greed/need is a reference to motive for wanting an item. Greed is not a bad term in this context, it simply means that the player has no immediate use for the item but would not mind profiting from its’ sale at auction house. “Ninja looting” is a form of social convention where players willfully misstate their intentions to get priority looting for items they intend to sell.

Much of my *World of Warcraft* experience has consisted of learning the language. “Ninja looter,” “tank,” and “wipe” are but some of the terms in common use. Within the discourse community of *WoW* play, these terms have specific meanings. One does not, for instance, want to see “[their Avatar’s name] is a group wiping ninja looter” posted to public forums. It would condemn their integrity and skill, to say the least. The chat window afforded an opportunity to meet good test participants. However, it also permits one to develop an unfavorable reputation in public quickly.

Second to raid misconduct is the matter of auction house behavior. As noted by Player 6, auction houses operate on an open system. The economic influences of supply and demand can dictate the costs of buying an item. Players can, as Player 6 notes, monopolize certain commodities through collaboration and/or undersell items (thus driving down the price). One character referenced, “LL,” successfully found one item needed for an advanced quest and became “rich” in game by controlling the flow of that
idea. Like an illegal monopoly or stock ponzi scheme, the ethic of materialistic game can overwhelm the realm of play adversely. Other player concerns included “rude” chatter over public address systems (an experience I observed frequently), although I am uncertain as to whether I would classify “rudeness” as “unethical” per se. I mention this as all but one player expressed concern about it.

Through the social elements of gaming, ethical instruction and argument occurs in *WoW*. Players experience the “bad” then perhaps learn to avoid it. However, many choose to engage in it at the risk of social capital. Players face a number of subversive choices. Interestingly, I asked my study participants if the lessons learned in play were applicable outside *WoW*. More specifically, can one learn lessons from the game that are applicable to the outside world? All but one said yes. Although their answers varied from “leadership” to “time management,” none felt ethics was amongst the lessons.

Something leads me to believe otherwise. Altruism can occur. Bad choices, such as ninja looting, can cost the player the ability (in some cases) to find a group or guild willing to shelter him/her. The choices presented and conventions established collaboratively imply a subversive perspective business ethics can be made present. I suspect the responding players merely did not recognize it as such.

Having observed critical play in *WoW*, I now turn my attention to a comparable review of critical play in a non-space. At the time of observation, the conversation in this space is explicitly reviewing business ethics. It is, quite literally, time to see if the predictions of social epistemic theory are observable. Also, can this non-space support critical play? These questions receive additional attention in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

TIGERTOWN: A NON-SPACE CASE

What is a learning space? The question may not be as straightforward as once thought. Indeed, in recognizing the close relationship of learning to play (as did Gee) or play as learning (in the case of Flanagan or Bogost), it becomes hard to distinguish one from the other. Both are rewarding. Each can be challenging. Neither requires the presence of a computer although both, arguably, can benefit from one. Ethics, seen not
just as a virtue or reasoning skill, but as the meeting of both, is accessible through critical play as argued in previous chapters.

In this chapter, I explore a classroom environment as a non-space to question whether critical play can occur. I assert that player/student behavior in the non-space of the heavily wired classroom environment of Clemson University can become a place of subversion. I attempt to observe, through limited ethnography the presence of each of these elements. Further, I hypothesize that the shortcomings predicted by social epistemic rhetorical theory will be present.

In regards to critical play, there is an important observation to share at the onset. Case studies are used in the CU business classroom routinely. Students are encouraged to explore a scenario using a different perspective or apply and defend their ideas. It is, harkening back to the theory exposed in chapter three, an interaction of play already.

Unlike critical play, which subverts to attenuate to the imperfections of (most) any position, the case study method can simply return to foundationalism in a manner like described by Patricia Bizzell. Clemson, as observed, relies heavily on a case study method. As such, it is important to distinguish between the case studies that invoke critical play and those that do not.

As often taught, and observed in this chapter, ethics is treated in the case study as a matter of rational decision making (ala phronesis). Case study advocates suggest well structured decision making steps can reduce the figurative guess work and, in this sense, exemplify the fallacious thinking of dogmatic foundationalism. The warnings of social
epistemic rhetorical theory are overlooked. Play is integrally involved in this process, as is now discussed, although those engaged in it may not be aware.

To illustrate the holes in the logic of a case study method (such as what was observed at Clemson), I employ a sequential critique. The first step in the case study method is the recognition of problem. As illustrated by the classroom assignment listed in Appendix B, the required assignment in the classroom empathizes this skill. One can either be “told” of an issue or “recognize the issue” through one’s own sense(s), of course. Pederson defines this idea of recognition as moral sensitivity. Moral sensitivity is “closely related to the concepts of moral reasoning and moral judgment…In seeing moral practice as ethical problem solving, moral sensitivity is linked to the first step of the problem-solving process - - problem formulation” (Pederson 335). How one defines and, indeed whether he or she does recognize, a problem is a product of individualism. Social epistemic theory is already present. And it remains in step two.

However, merely “seeing” is not responding. If and when an issue is observed, can the human agent respond (and respond appropriately)? Pederson notes,

“The path from moral sensitivity to ethical behavior is usually conceptualized as a decision making process, but a problem-solving perspective is used here in order to draw the line from moral sensitivity to problem formulation” (340).

In this first step of many, a problem is made visible. Once a problem or dissonance is seen, a choice must be made. How does one see, define, and plan to respond to the culprit? Recalling that games are definable as a “series of interesting choices,” the jump from moral reasoning to critical play is indeed not a long one. As game theorist Miguel
Sicart recognizes, the layers of gaming associated with play including convention and rules can permit facilitation of ethical guidelines. Moreso, in deciding “how” to act (the “problem formulation” in business-speak), the terministic screen discussed by Burke is heavily involved. The agent is in the process of defining, from an individual perspective, what constitutes an appropriate resolution.

This process, steps one and two, are complicated further by student attitudes. The player, as is the case of any game, engages in an act of interpretation. This is particularly true when considering student attitudes in regards to ethics. Kolodinsky et al., in studying student attitudes concerning ethics, found variance in levels of idealism, spirituality, and views on materiality. Predictably, no consensus was reached in their sample population. These individual indicators are sometimes accepted as suggestive of a “moral compass.” Social epistemology is intricately linked throughout the process, Pederson agrees. He comments “deliberation” results and “…he [the problem solver] may or may not conceive of an ethical problem in the situation” (341). At issue, however, is whether individuals will “see” and “respond appropriately” when the creation and definition of “appropriately” are human constructions.

McGraw et al. comments on the third step of the case study method. In this step, the previously created “problem resolution” plan is enacted. They comment that “ethical behavior often originates from values such as honesty, integrity, and respect” (2). One can almost feel the slide continue to foundationalism! Unlike some theorists, who continue to think down repetitious lines, I maintain that a subversive paradigm is more helpful to educational context than the case study method. Giacalone, recognizing the
difficulty of either teaching values or a process requiring the possession of those values, instead endorses simply screening candidates for ethical abilities not unlike screening for writing skills. I, however, fear that this simply avoids the issue. As defining ethics concretely in my argument cannot be conceptualized concretely, such an approach is both misleading and ill-informed. A pre-requisite level of skill is needed to perform in a gaming situation and only certain players in the play of ethics instruction may be capable of developing the necessary sensitivities. However, valuing ethics instruction in a subversive way changes what skills to value.

Such a skill can be practiced. According to Von Welzien Hoivik, “…it takes several more years of hands-on experience before they [students] have – if ever – the personal and professional maturity and courage necessary to become responsible business leaders” (5). Play can serve as a dress rehearsal, critical or otherwise, can embrace and illustrate consequences. As an illustration of the “non-critical play” variety of case studies, a meta-analysis by Waples et al. provides a less than glowing picture. Their review indicated instructional programs built upon decision-based criteria were generally unsuccessful. Challenging the idea that teaching a method of ethical analysis for all cases would suffice, Waples et. al. call for discipline-specific approaches. It is not far removed from the practice needed to master games such as World of Warcraft, where skill is gained through experience. I, however, have a different interpretation. Students were presented with choice, but not subversion. They were not empowered to engage in critical play. Such an activity, where an answer concretely became the “right” or “wrong” answer, I can see how the study provided negative results.
The case study method is not one to disregard. However, the method and philosophy of the case study needs careful consideration. A case study can become critical play. Subversion can take place. However, when used in the context of a rigid system of formulaic choice in the context of “right” or “wrong” (after all, are such notions not in social epistemic theory a human creation?), the potential of gaming and subversion is neglected. Quite literally, a different result is expected from the same action.

Clemson University Background

My current home, Clemson University, is an ideal setting for exploration. I begin my analysis with background on business accreditation. Said accreditation represents the standards against which a school is evaluated. Then I move into departmental and school background, with specific attention to those elements of the program aligned with ethics instruction. These are the rules of the play space. Finally, I report on an observational study conducted in a management class focusing on the topic of ethics instruction. One could call this a game in progress.

The educational process conducted by any college or university is completed under the watchful eye of accrediting agencies. According to the Council for Higher Education (CHEA), accreditation “is review of the quality of higher education institutions and programs” (“Informing the Public About Accreditation”). Accreditors are private, non-governmental organizations whose sole purpose is to review higher education for quality. Accreditation boards establish standards and policies against which institutions are evaluated, and those standards are evaluated by either CHEA or the United States
Department of Education (“Fact Sheet #5: Accrediting Organizations in the United States”). These standards and policies of accreditation bodies therefore represent the position against which all accredited members are judged.

Not unlike game mechanics, accreditation rules provide the framework around which institutional policies and individual courses are designed. A simple review of accreditation can offer insight into how a given principle is translated into policy or evaluated. However, it cannot speak to the social conventions established in the actual space of learning. Reviewing both the classroom interactions and rules of accreditation therefore affords a holistic view of how ethics moves from concept to procedure. This first section considers the “rules” of this non-space play: the accreditation standards and university policy.

Only one accrediting body specific to business education is currently recognized both by CHEA and the DOE (“Recognized Accrediting Organizations (as of April 2009)”). It should be noted that this accreditation body is not institutional. This accreditation is specific to programs and is therefore referred to as “programmatic accreditation.” It is common for programs that possess programmatic accreditation to also be a part of institutions possessing “regional” accreditation. To simplify, the program may be housed by an institution subject to accreditation and the program itself may be accredited. Therefore, the program may be accredited compound; it must comply both with the rules of the host institution and programmatic accreditation board. Institutional accreditation is not considered in this discussion as the direct position of business educators is of greatest interest.
The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business ("AACSB") is recognized both by the Council on Higher Education and United States Department of Education as a Programmatic Accreditation Organization ("Recognized Accrediting Organizations (as of April 2009)"). At time of writing, 579 schools maintain AACSB accreditation (AACSB International). After receiving initial accreditation, an institution must then "embark on a continuous process of accreditation maintenance" consisting of three steps ("Eligibility Procedures" 4). The institution must undergo initial and on-going review for quality or accreditation may be denied or lost entirely.

The initial process consists of a self-evaluation report and Peer Review Team visit ("Eligibility Procedures" 5). One requirement of this initial process is that "either the institution or the business program must establish ethical behavior by administrators, faculty and students." (13). Within this position statement is an interpretive language that reads "AACSB believes that ethical behavior is paramount to the delivery of quality business education." (13). However, the AACSB is unwilling to participate in the implementation or enforcement of that code and provides no relief beyond actions within the institution itself to uphold that code (14). The mere presence of a satisfactory code of ethics to the AACSB satisfies the initial review process.

The AACSB recognizes two forms of learning goals: "general" and "management specific." General goals include those that are not management-specific and "relate to knowledge and abilities that graduates will carry with them into their careers" (62). These "might" include ethical reasoning skills (62). The faculty’s role within this system is defined as deciding where these goals are contained within the curriculum and how
progress towards those goals is monitored. The monitoring activity “does not require elaborate processes, but it must be regular, systematic, and sustained.” (62).

Any school is expected to generate an articulated mission statement with which the AACSB’s accreditation evaluation process is linked (14).

For decision makers, the mission statement captures the essence of their institutions. It is a brief statement that focuses on their thoughts when they make decisions so that they can decide whether proposals are central to the mission. The AACSB considers accreditation an exercise in strategic management; the duality of the mission statement itself and effectiveness of “marshal[ing] its resources and efforts towards its mission statement” is considered (15).

Schools are afforded considerable latitude in establishing mission statements. “Schools should assume great flexibility in fashioning curricula to meet their missions and to fit with the specific circumstances of particular programs” (70). Rather than dictate elements of the mission statement required for accreditation, the AACSB affords a more accommodating approach. Rather, topics “typically found” are listed for guidance. Eleven such topics are listed, including both “individual ethical behavior and community responsibilities in organizations and societies” and “other management-specific knowledge and skills as identified in the school” (70). While ethical reasoning is listed prominently, which may suggest a degree of importance, it is not a component “required” for accreditation. Instead, if embedded in the mission statement, the method of progress evaluation is considered. Further, as articulated by Standard 15, the school curriculum management process includes “learning experience” in seven “general knowledge and
skill areas as…ethical understanding and reasoning abilities” but does not require any specific courses in the curricula (71).

Employers are in no way required to hire graduates of AACSB accredited schools. Those schools may or may not articulate ethical reasoning as an element of their mission statement or curriculum. If such an articulation is made, the AACSB will then consider the learning mechanism(s) for teaching that standard on a case by case basis.

Accreditors may matter heavily to and inspire educational conduct. It is curious, however, how those policies are transferred into daily practice. For answers, I turned to Clemson University’s educational approach for guidance.

Clemson University offers a rich case study opportunity for considering how business ethics is taught. In keeping with the AACSB methodology, a two part evaluative process is considered (the mission statement and learning management system). Clemson University’s College of Business and Behavioral Science is accredited by the AACSB. As such, it is safe to assume that the standards and policies of Clemson have met with the AACSB’s approval. Business programs are offered through the college in Accountancy and Finance, Economics, Management, Marketing and Business Administration (“Departments and Schools”).

Ambiguously, the mission of the college is “developing leaders through education and research focused on human behavior and business practices in organizations, economies and societies.” (“About CBBS”). With the exception of passing reference to society, consideration of ethics is loosely affiliated with the formal mission statement of the college. If one were to accept a web-based welcome message as an extension of that
mission statement, then the inclusion of ethics as an element of college teaching strategy becomes more prominent.

In CBBS, we are serious about students’ educational experiences and offer a wealth of opportunities for applying knowledge gleaned in the classroom to situations that positively affect the world around us…CBBS infuses our classrooms and beyond with a focus on individual and social responsibility in hopes of instilling in students a greater understanding of global citizenship. We not only want to develop leaders, but leaders steeped in responsible thought and action so they can inspire and transpire society for generations to come.

(“Message From the Dean” paragraphs 2 and 3).

It is unclear whether an accreditation visit would accept such an extension. However, given the prominence of speaker as leader within the college (Dean Claude C. Lilly), it is reasonable to accept this statement as an informal declaration of intent for that college. Noted are the mentions of social responsibility, positive affect and global citizenry. These terms in this context imply a desire to instill in students a strong grasp of business ethic as a part of the educational process.

AACSB standards, as previously discussed, do explicitly allow for inclusion of university mission as an element of review for programmatic accreditation. It is therefore appropriate to consider university-wide standards as a part of this discussion.

Clemson University identifies seven areas of competency for all undergraduates in the general education curricula (“Proof of Competencies”). These include two categories of general interest to business ethics. One, entitled “reasoning, critical
thinking and problem solving,” includes the objective “analyze disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and abilities gained during the undergraduate experience” (“Reasoning, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving”). Also required is a competency in “Ethical Judgment.” This competency includes outcomes in “what ethics is and is not” in both personal and professional contexts as well as an “understanding of common ethical issues and construct[ion] of personal framework [for systematic ethical decisions]” (“Ethical Judgment”).

Clemson University also nourishes the Robert J. Rutland Institute for Ethics. The Rutland Center directs its programs and activities to campus groups including student, staff and faculty and also aims to reach people within community. Amongst the institute’s goals is to “teach students how to incorporate ethical values in rewarding careers and personal development” and “teach faculty how to integrate ethical and value-based analysis and discussion into their teaching” (Ethics Across the Campus & Community). The institute affords educational outreach and institutional support for the College of Business and Behavioral Sciences.

A search of the 2009-2010 Clemson University Graduate Announcements identifies ethics as covered by MBA foundation and core courses along with “basic business functions” and “communications and leadership” (32). No other graduate programs mention “ethic,” or “ethical” in their program description. Within the Course of Instruction for this MBA program is listed a one credit “Seminar on Ethics and Leadership” that endeavors to “expose MBA students to various ethical, leadership and personal development venues…” (66).
A similar search of the 2009-2010 Clemson University Graduate Announcements degree programs identifies two courses required of all undergraduate students which may require consideration of business ethics. The first, numbered BUS 101: Business Foundations, is a one credit hour course seeking to provide an “introduction” to a variety of topics “critical” to student success, including business ethics (139). A second, entitled MGT 415: Business Strategy, is a capstone course for seniors intended to analyze complex business problems that requires “students to integrate their knowledge of all areas of business.” (192). Some programs such as Economics also require PHIL 344 Business Ethics in their course of study.

Having considered the rules governing the space at an institutional level, I now turn my attention to study in one context of non-space play. At all levels, I see an important intersection with rhetorical theory. The process of definition, whether what is “accredited” or “necessary” for business degree credentialing (aka the curriculum), governs what “can” be said (recalling comments by Michel Foucault). A business instructor, such as the one I observed, cannot change the rules of play alone. My comments therefore are directed at a higher level than a single class experience. The instructor in question, during one conversation, expressed uncertainty as to how best to teach ethics. It is clear that the class is intended with good ideas in mind but constrained by the rules of the space in a number of respects.

In The Non-Space

Recalling the definition of non-space Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin provide, I suggest the Clemson classroom is a form of remediated area. Between the
classroom “smart board” (an integrated computer/projector solution), wireless internet and student laptop computing machines, such a claim is not hard to defend. Like *WoW*, communication is synchronous. However, this communication may or may not be supplemented by the virtual.

My study consists of participatory observation for one class. As a subject for consideration, MGT 415 was selected due to a variety of factors. All business students must experience it. It comes after exposure to both introductory ethics training and exposure to ethics within each discipline. Because it is a capstone course, it serves as the last quality assurance step in the credentialing process. Students in this course are nearly finished with their degree and are close to entering the workforce. It is, as an object of consideration, one used with a variety of benefits.

Also noteworthy is that this course requires an ethics entry into each student’s e-portfolio. It is “a place to show what you [the student] know.” (“About E-Portfolio”). Clemson’s e-portfolio is intended to collect sharable evidence of general education competency, including ethical reasoning. As mandated by the department, every syllabus for MGT 415 includes the following language:

“One assignment in MGT415 is to choose one of your exercises in which you identified an ethical issue and to upload the MS Word document to your e-portfolio under EJ2 (Ethical Judgment 2). The ethical issue could be related to outsourcing, poison pills and other hostile takeover defense tactics, downsizing, corporate governance duality, product development or recall decisions, and various decisions involving stakeholder management. Your write-up should
discuss various stakeholders and articulate a systematic, responsible and reflective argument for arriving at an ethical resolution to the problem.” [Personal Correspondence]

MGT/415 (Business Strategy) therefore provides an appropriate setting for study and offers a chance to observe rich contextual information.

The observational study was completed using a variety of qualitative measures. I interviewed the course instructor both in-person and via electronic mail over multiple sessions. Next, I reviewed all class documentation (including readings and syllabus) on the subject of business ethics. I lastly observed the workshops in which ethics was a source of conversation (two sessions totaling just about two and a half hours of classroom time). My observations were coded for interaction type (suggestive of critical play or not) and whether phronesis was present for each comment (from student, course materials, or instructor using a three part system of “strongly,” “somewhat” and “not”). The resulting raw data is presented in Appendix “A.” In Appendix “B” I report on the instructor’s assessment methodology on the one assignment. The purpose is both to illustrate the presence of the social turn and to illustrate the need for a new approach (such as the subversion I suggest).

To my very pleasant surprise, I found evidence of a balanced approach (the “convergence” model) to teaching ethics which strongly supported the presence of the social turn. I also observed one activity on each day that could easily be made to involve critical play with slight revision. The balanced approach, when viewed from a standpoint
of social epistemological rhetoric, is further illustration of a place for the subversive paradigm.

However, I faced a very daunting coding challenge. The instructor of record used the “Socratic method” of instruction frequently. Learners were presented questions to answer. Those questions were open ended, but leading. This interaction was used in conjunction with white board work (e.g. drawing/writing on the class board), video and PowerPoint presentation. From my observation, students frequently remained silent in response to questioning. They may have been presented with an “interesting choice” of how to respond; yet they frequently did not. Hence, I did not classify Socratic interactions in this case as critical play. However, I can see this method becoming play-esque in some circumstances. The instructor earns praise for he/r use of multiple interactive modalities. In many respects, he/r efforts to do so provides a precedent for gaming’s classroom inclusion.

The critical play activity, for both days, was “role-playing.” Learners were asked to “play a part” in response to a case presented. During my first observation the students worked in teams to respond to one perspective for the case at hand. In the second, a video documentary was interrupted at several strategic points to permit learners to respond to “what if” type questions where they were asked to be in the place of the speaker. Interestingly, that video (as a digital artifact) was an example of virtual elements included in the space. Would inclusion of other virtual, gaming media be such a jump? This question will receive further attention in the final chapter.
Phronesis played a small part in the class comments and texts. A total of 189 comments were logged during the two class observations. 8 were assigned to the phronesis category (4%). The model presented to class ("convergence," see figure 5.1) balanced several perspectives. Consequences, the camp to which phronesis is assigned in the convergence model, was defined as the “value of consequences” from a standpoint of egalitarianism and utility. While the utility concept (defined in class as “the tendancy [the action in question] has to augment or diminish the happiness of the parties whose interests are at stake”) is phronesis; said consideration represented a relatively small part of the larger whole.

Convergence

- Convergence among the three perspectives leads to confidence in your ethical decisions

Consequences  Rights  Character

Decision/Moral Judgment

Figure 5.1: MGT/415 Model for Business Ethics “Convergence”
That *phronesis* is both present and checked by other perspectives is a heartening thing, given research contributed by Carolyn Miller and Steven Katz. Sadly, not all the news is good. I noticed that, in the second class observation, the discussion of ethics radically shifted from discussion of social and human concerns to organizational well-being. Frequently, students were prompted to consider the good of the company. Good of themselves, society and/or other humans seemed to hold a less central focus.

Ironically, all of the terms reflected in Figure 5.1 are subject to the same rhetorical shortcoming as *phronesis*.

That which was discussed on the first observation was not necessarily reviewed in the context of the second’s case study discussion (a discussion of child labor called the “Ikea case”). Further, as evidenced by Appendix B, the instructor’s position on moral reasoning seemed to shift from the syllabus. Citing attendance for class sessions (which was not required and the week before Spring Break), the instructor’s goal for student response became:

“So, I'll be evaluating more generally how well they identify and describe the ethical dilemmas faced by the organizations -- in other words, can they even pick out the ethical problem and identify the choices the company was faced with?” (Personal Correspondence).

It would appear in these observations that the remnants of agency theory remain elements of the business ethics discussion for MGT/415. Also present (and problematic) is a steadfast maintenance of foundationalist thinking. This, however, adds credence to my argument for application of a new paradigm (subversion) and mechanism (critical play).
Overall, the results of study are promising and indicate much work remains. 

*Phronesis* is present but tempered with additional concerns. Virtual artifacts are accepted elements of discussion, suggesting the inclusion of game technology is not too far removed. Two activity could, if modified using the guidance previously supplied, use critical play. Not one perspective was used (but the convergence model provided encounters similar issues). As a part of the instructor’s evaluation methodology, students were expected to consider the ethical elements of two business cases (which, at least, will make ethics a point of some reflection).

Sadly, the ethics assignment counts for 19 out of 500 points available according to the syllabus. Attendance for the week of discussion was, respectively, 27 and 29 students present (out of 46 on the class roll). Elements of agency theory remain imbedded in the conversation. The expedience of organizational performance, a concept so well explored by Steven Katz, remained a desirable state as evidenced in the final day of discussion (where good of company became a heavy focus). The instructor, to be commended for her commitment to teaching and inclusion of ethics in conversation, personally expressed a desire to better understand “what” and “how” to teach business ethics (personal interview). There was, in my observation, space for application of a subversive paradigm expressed through critical play.
CHAPTER SIX

GAME (NOT) OVER

This work has attempted to connect several proverbial dots. To borrow an expression kindly offered in development of this work, there are a lot of “moving parts” present. These elements include critical play as a form of learning appropriate to subversion and a case for subversion in business ethics instruction derived from social epistemic rhetorical review of business ethics literature. Much territory has been covered in (relatively) short order. In this final focus, I summarize key findings then discuss cause for optimism. My future direction, interactive ethics across the curriculum, is addressed as a final closing thought. This is an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned in response to my original research questions and then describe future direction and hopes.

Research Questions 2.0: A Review and Discussion

Shortly before writing this draft, I received word that the Clemson University Library had to carefully review its asset allocation model in response to projected budgetary concerns. Several periodical databases were in question as costs needed to be carefully controlled. This is, if not ethical, illustrates a need for considering ethical instruction given the influence of business on general economy. As consumption and production are intertwined with quality of life, those in the “business” of production and distribution are in the very real business of meeting human needs. The success and failure of a Lehman Brothers or AIG are connected, if only indirectly, to a Clemson Library’s ability to supply information access to students.
Harkening back to chapter one, I asked several questions to guide my study. When business ethics instruction is considered rhetorically, what consideration(s) result? In what ways is critical play aligned with the teaching and learning of business ethics? How is this learning/teaching style available through technologically remediated environments? In this first subsection, I describe the results of my core conclusions.

My review of business ethics literature suggests a parallel to the social turn experienced by composition studies in the perspective offered by Patricia Bizzell. This concept, appealing as it may sound to simply request businesses consider the needs of society, is not without a dark underbelly. Social-epistemic deliberative rhetoric theory holds that the very notion of collective good can be swayed, recreated and adjusted. A capable rhetorician, perhaps dangerously so, can change the benchmark by which “good” is measured. A dangerous expediency, such as one studied by Steven Katz, is a real possibility. The same risks are present to business ethics as explored in rhetorical theory.

In fact, I argue that rhetorical theory (particularly the social epistemic lens I used in chapter two) can identify a skill set for ethical instruction that is subversive in nature. Ethicists of this paradigm accept positions not because they are the “best” or “ideal,” but because the “shifting of knowledge” discussed by Bizzell left that position as best available, subject to change. Wayne Booth may, in fact, affirm this process results in assent derived from the “best doubting.” Our goal becomes not to teach what ethics “is,” as such an approach inevitably underestimates the role of human agency, but to empower doubt. In attenuating the fascism, we are engaging in what Michel Foucault would call a “reversal” and Victor Vitanza calls “sub/version.”
Critical play is, in many respects, a system that uses game/learning or learning/games to subvert. As outlined in chapter three, the choices facing game players can produce learning outcomes. However, that learning can transcend simple memorization or information regurgitation (a skill sometimes called “skill and drill”). To rise to the subversion associated with critical play, users must face difficult choices and question the system in which they are a part.

Two remediated environments (to borrow terminology from Jay David Bolter and David Grusin) were observed for evidence of critical play. I found, both in the virtual space of World of Warcraft and non-space of the Clemson strategic management classroom, contained ethical arguments. Each was an area in which critical play was not far removed. WoW, I suggest, already has elements of critical play in it. CU could, with revision, include activities (like the case study method, adjusted) conducive to critical play. It is not a far leap to more directly connect the styles of play and learning from both environments to business ethics instruction.

Classroom study, however, found a loyalty to foundationalist thinking about the problem. The model taught was one of convergence between several theories (of which phronesis was a part). However, the risks associated with phronesis are still present in those other elements. Again, if “good” or “moral” or socially constructible terms, how can a “rights” or “character” theory prove any more reliable that phronesis? I fear they may not be. I am also troubled by other warning signs (low student attendance, limited certainty on what to look for in student reasoning in grading, and but 19 out of 500 points assigned to the ethical reasoning assignment). It is not that the business community fails
to see a need for change; they simply do not have a consensus on how (or what) that change entails. This confusion carried over into the Clemson classroom. And as evidenced by the “game” rules of accreditation and university catalog, the change needs to happen at a more institutional level.

The games *Sixteen Tons* and *World of Warcraft* offer several illustrations of how the mechanics and social conventions of gaming can result in critical play. In *Sixteen Tons*, players may find the capitalist tendencies of monetary acquisition through labor may run contrary to their individual interests. They, literally, may be paid and forced to move their piece into a losing position. In *World of Warcraft*, social norms (e.g. raid coordination, the stigmata of “ninja looting”) contribute to ethical expectations. Violating those socially constructed conventions can produce a number of undesirable consequences. Play becomes deeper learning, a form of subversion and critical analysis which may be applicable to the study of business ethics.

Considerable insight was obtained on my core research questions in this work. Much work remains to be done. The future work, motivated by a sense of profound (but cautious) optimism is discussed in the next (and final) subsection of my thesis.

**A Brief and Cautious Case for Optimism**

Optimistically, I note that a number of supporters for gaming in education are exploring the possibilities for critical play in learning environment. Educators (Catherine Parsons and the Cognitive Dissonance guild), Game designers (for example, Jane McGonigal), and researchers (like Richard Blunt) all seek to find ways to bridge the play/learn divide in practice.
Writer Jennifer Demski reports that a group of secondary educators interested in the relationship of play to learning founded the Cognitive Dissonance guild in 2007. One founder, Catherine Parsons, is assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and pupil personnel services for Pine Plains Central School District in New York. They are both players interested in education and educators interested in play (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: CogDis Homepage Screen Shot

Like my study, “CogDis-ers” immerse themselves in the WoW environment. The guild, as articulated in its homepage, explores and experiences the implications and applications of MMORPG play to education. They have noticed a type of engagement in their play perhaps applicable to their classrooms.

Educators are not the only ones with raised eyebrows at the possibilities. Game designer Jane McGonigal seeks to make it “as easy to save the world in real life as it is to save the world in online games.” Arguing that, in games, “we” can “become the best versions of ourselves,” McGonigal has attempted to create games that immerse players in
“making” the future. She argues that gamers are urgently optimistic, intensely motivated and willing to collaborate for problem solving.

Her games, such as *World Without Oil* and *Evoke*, are alternative reality games intended to influence “real world” behavior. For instance, in *Evoke*, new missions are uploaded/“evoked” weekly. Players must accomplish three objectives:

“LEARN - Investigate our great challenges and share what you discover.

ACT - Get out in the world. Do something small to help solve a real problem.

IMAGINE - Unleash your creativity. Tell a story about the future you want to make.” (“How to Play,” para. 5)

Missions are reportedly on subjects such as poverty and human rights. Other games, such as *World Without Oil* include teacher resources to translate the element of play back into the classroom (see figure 6.2).

McGonigal’s efforts to blur the experiential distinction between societal contribution and gameplay offers great promise for proponents of critical play in the classroom. Work done by researcher Richard Blunt supports such efforts through quantitative arguments. As reproduced in part in Appendix F, his report on the introduction of serious videogames to three college business courses “found that, at least in some circumstances, the application of serious games significantly increases learning” (“Conclusion,” para. 5). Games have support as mechanisms for critical play in the context of education and socially relevant causes is under consideration by educators,
and game designers.

Logically, the jump to a game specifically for the purposes of studying and teaching business ethics is not far removed. Should the work of this group of educators, researchers, and designers prove any indication, there is a role for critical play in these questions not too far distant from existing projects. It is my hope that this space explored in this thesis serves as but the beginning of this discussion (and not the end).

And Not the End

The Robert J. Rutland Institute for Ethics at Clemson University, per its mandate, endeavors to “teach [all] students how to incorporate ethical values in rewarding careers and professional development (“Ethics Across the Campus & Community” para. 1). I support this mission as, in every career, ethics is (or at least “should” be) a consideration.
This work has focused on a rhetorical lens in one context (business ethics). A social turn was found whereby space was made for subversion as an applicable paradigm. Critical play, a model of which subversion is a part, is applicable both to the paradigm and space available.

I wonder, now, how best to expand the notion of “rhetoric and ethics” with consideration of interactive approaches. Subversion, argued as pertinent following my “filtered” study of business ethics literature, is achievable with or without full virtual immersion. Interactivity is a means of interventionist paradigm described by Stuart Moulthrop that engages learners to develop what Ian Bogost calls procedural literacy. However, I see no need to limit such an approach to one context. In future research, I would like to pursue a wider cross-curricula agenda. It is to this work I foresee my future explorations. How, starting at an early point than continuing throughout the academic career, can an institution such as Clemson employ interactive media to promote rhetorical ethical musings? This is, admittedly, the subject of more than one project. It would be best to start soon.
APPENDICES
## Appendix A

### Management 415 Observational Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th># of Students</th>
<th># <em>Phronesis</em> Ethical Comments</th>
<th># <em>Non-Phronesis</em> Ethical Comments</th>
<th># Critical Play Interaction Elements</th>
<th># Non-Critical Play Interaction Elements</th>
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<td>1</td>
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Appendix B

Student Ethics Assignment (E-Portfolio) and Instructor Assessment Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus Instructions*</th>
<th>Instructor of Record Expectations**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “This assignment requires an assessment of ethical issues in two of the cases discussed this semester. Use IKEA as one of your cases. Choose between the Skeleton in the Corporate Closet Case and the Glock Article for your second case. The completed paper should not exceed 2 single spaced pages. Structure your paper as an essay that addresses the following questions:

1) Summarize one of the principle issues in the IKEA case. Which individual(s) are involved in this issue? Are these individuals creating the ethical issue or are they responding to it? Which of the company’s stakeholders are most likely to be affected by this ethical issue? What course of action would you recommend to resolve the ethical issue and why?

2) Summarize one of the principle ethical issues in the second case of your choice (either Skeleton or Glock). Which individual(s) are involved in this issue? Are these individuals creating the ethical issue or are they responding to it? Which of the company’s stakeholders are most likely to be affected by this ethical issue? What course of action would you recommend to resolve the ethical issue and why?

3) Compare and contrast the ethical issue you identified in the IKEA case with the issue you identified in the second case. Assess how well the managers of each company...” |
| “One of the evaluation criteria for the ethics case paper will be how well they evaluate and explain the ethical dilemmas faced by the organizations in the cases. One great way to accomplish that is to use the convergence method discussed in class today. However, as you could see, many students were absent today -- there are 46 students on roll (I didn't count the number who attended today, but 46 would have meant every chair full -- and we had several empty chairs). Therefore, many will not use the convergence method in their papers. So, I'll be evaluating more generally how well they identify and describe the ethical dilemmas faced by the organizations -- in other words, can they even pick out the ethical problem and identify the choices the company was faced with? I don't explicitly direct them to use the convergence method because, in part, I like to see who tries to use it -- who recognizes when a tool they've been given will be useful. Students who use tools discussed in class might find it easier to make the arguments (and to make them clearly) that are required in the paper.” |
addressed the issues.

4) Choose one of the ethical issue you’ve mentioned in the preceding answers. Describe the decision you would make in that situation. Explain your thought process using the convergence approach (combing the consequences perspective, rights perspective, and character perspective) for making decisions about ethical question that was discussed in class.”

*Original syllabus language.

**Direct quotation from instructor, provided via email on 3/9/10 in response to question “The theoretical approach presented was one of convergence between virtue, consequences and rights theories in a business context. I'd assume the upcoming student case studies will be evaluated for use of this model (aka: decision/moral judgment)? Am I correct in this assumption; if so, how do you plan to evaluate the student's work?”
Appendix C

Warcraft In-Game Interview Questions

Boucho: Hi, I'm conducting research on how interactive media can be used to teach ethics. I saw your trade forum post regarding [insert subject]. Would you be willing to take a few minutes to chat about your in-game experiences?

1. How long have you played World of Warcraft?

2. What is the highest level you have obtained?

3. Are you in a guild? If so, in what capacity and are there any ethical rules governing guild membership?

4. Have you encountered any unethical play? If so, would you describe the experience?

5. What is it to play “ethically”?

6. What makes a player “unethical”?

7. Do you feel the game includes any ethical dilemmas? Explain…

8. How do you define ethics?

9. Does the game teach you anything you can apply outside of the game? Please explain…

10. Do you have any questions for me or general comments?

Thank you so much for your time. Have a great game!!
Information Concerning Participation in a Research Study
Clemson University (sent via email attachment and verbally reviewed)

Game-Street: Business Ethics Pedagogy and Interactive Media

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik and Mr. Glen Southergill. The purpose of this research is explore how interactive game media can be used in teaching business ethics.

Your participation involves interview(s) and observation in the classroom environment.

The amount of time required for your participation will be approximately two hours in addition to your regular class time.

Risks and discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this research.

Potential benefits

As a result of this study, user (business student and faculty) needs may be better understood by learning game designers.

Protection of confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication that might result from this study. However, it may be possible for a reader to induce your identity from the general demographic and background information supplied.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.
Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik at Clemson University at 864-656-3151. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance at 864.656.6460.
Appendix E

Private Correspondence Regarding *Sixteen Tons*

from  
To    Glen Southergill <…>
Cc     
date  Mon, Feb 8, 2010 at 10:34 PM
subject Re: Sixteen Tons

Glen,

Thanks for your email and the kind words about […]. To answer your questions, […] chose $3 because that is what works with the game mechanics. […] would have loved using $4 per player because that would add up to 16 (a la 16 Tons) but no luck.

The enclosure served many purposes as a literalization of the magic circle. It allowed players to be more comfortable taking out their wallets and money. It also created a special place that heightened the spectacle and intensity of the experience. As a gallery project, the wall helped give the overall piece a sense of presence in the white box of the gallery.

-[…]

On Mon, Feb 8, 2010 at 2:45 PM, Glen Southergill <gsouthe@g.clemson.edu> wrote:

Dear […],

Please accept my compliments on a wonderful showing at the Art History of Games Symposium. As a student of game design and rhetoric, I've read (and played) several of your works. I regret I was unable to introduce myself while I was in town for Friday's discussion.

The game you co-designed with […] was fantastic. […] left me curious on a few points. First, why was the entry fee set at $3 per player? Naturally, agreeable players could subvert the rules to satisfy their own agendas...yet, is there a significance to $3 per player? Second, what was the intended relationship between the enclosed game space and the intended game experience?

Again, thank you for a wonderful experience. […]

Glen Southergill
Appendix F

Select Findings from Richard Blunt’s *Do Serious Games Work? Results from Three Studies*

**Figure 9.** Test scores with and without game use for MGMT 303 students by age, with and without game play.

**Figure 10.** Distribution of letter grades for MGMT 303 students by ethnicity, with and without game play.
REFERENCES


_Citizen Kane._ Dir. Orson Wells. Mercury Productions, 1941.


Vorderer, Peter, Tilo Hartmann, and Christoph Klimmt. "Explaining the Enjoyment of Playing Video Games: The Role of Competition."


