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THE ENTHYMEMATIC MODEL OF MEANING-MAKING IN VIDEO GAMES: TOWARDS NARRATIVELY DESIGNED TRANSMEDIA TEXTS

Kevin Human
Clemson University, k.w.human@gmail.com

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THE ENTHYMEMATIC MODEL OF MEANING-MAKING IN VIDEO GAMES: TOWARDS NARRATIVELY DESIGNED TRANSMEDIA TEXTS

A Thesis
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the Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Digital Production Arts

by
Kevin Human
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Accepted by:
Tony Penna, Committee Chair
Mark Charney
Don House
Tim Davis
ABSTRACT

After introducing the ludological and narratological sides of modern video game theory, we explain Ian Bogost’s concept of procedural rhetoric. We go on to argue that procedural rhetoric in practice is a form of what Stephen Dinehart and others have called narrative design. Furthermore, we argue that narrative design principles fall into the Aristotelian, enthymematic form of knowledge creation. We then cite examples of effective narrative design in video games and show how they fit the enthymematic model. We conclude with a discussion of how the epistemic principles of narrative design are applicable to a transmedia design context and how they empower the user/player to become creator and author of their own transmedia texts.

We argue that as video games continue to evolve as an art form, so too must our understanding and scholarship thereof. By understanding the processes that games use to communicate, we can make better games. By making better games, we can not only grow the medium as an art form, but as we will see, we can engage players on levels outside of the played experience and enable them to become more thoughtful and creative people.
DEDICATION

For my parents, who have helped me out in more ways than I could mention.
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I would like to thank the exceptional and generous members of my committee for influencing my work in their own unique way. Tony Penna for his interdisciplinary understanding of art and media production and for agreeing to serve as chair; Dr. Mark Charney for his unrelenting guidance and friendship through which I have gained a much richer understanding of storytelling than I ever could have hoped; Dr. Don House for his support, kind heart, and sarcastic quips, each more timely than the last, who has helped reinforce the idea in me that there are multiple ways to solve any problem and that computer scientists can be cool; Dr. Tim Davis who believed in my potential and opened the doors of DPA for me when I was looking for a path and taught me the importance of detail and fine tuning that last five percent of any endeavor.

Thanks to my fellow classmates whose skills and talents—along with many, many late nights together in the lab, dinner conversations over beers, Mexican lunch breaks, late nights of Rock Band, more late nights in the lab, and trips to various conferences—have helped shaped the person and the artist that I am today. Zach Inks and Celu Ramasamy, who have motivated me to not settle for anything less than my dreams and inspired the best in me; Micah Guy, who has been a great friend and idea generator for many of the more bizarre concepts I’ve created; Shirley Yu, who has been fighting the good fight for a more interdisciplinary DPA and truly embraces all forms of art and how they speak to each other; Ashley Triplett, the intrepid social organizer and the glue that held our
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Gaming has come a long way as an art form since the 1970s and the days of the Atari 2600. It has grown from the innocence of pixilated graphics and weathered the critical backlash of the early to mid 1990s, when graphics became realistic enough to render violent acts. During that time, video games leapfrogged from being a cute diversion of cartoon-like characters stomping turtle shells to what many concerned critics wrote off as a degenerate form of entertainment (Moulthrop 61, Barry 327-332). Graphics power didn’t stop in the mid 90s, and the current generation of video games is more photorealistic than ever. However, video gaming as we know it is still in its infancy as an art form. It has only been around a relatively short forty years, compared to the one hundred and fifty or so years of television and the centuries of theatre. Yet, as video games continue to grow and evolve, they are increasingly becoming a defining element of our culture.

According to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), US computer and video game sales grew 22.9 percent in 2008 to $11.7 billion. Even more impressive, these figures are for software only, and do not account for sales of hardware such as gaming systems and controllers. Part of the cause for this increase in sales is due to the growth of the gaming community from the stereotypical, socially isolated, clammy-skinned asocialite, to diverse ages and
demographics. The ESA estimates that 68 percent of American households play computer or video games and that 40 percent of all game players are women, accounting for a significantly larger portion of the game-playing community (34 percent) than boys age 17 and younger (18 percent). Furthermore, in 2009, 25 percent of Americans over the age of 50 were playing video games, up from nine percent in 1999 (“Industry Facts”).

People are starting to take note, and the study of video games is starting to rear its head in the academic world, where a hodgepodge of disciplines is struggling to come to terms with it. Professor of Simulation and Digital Entertainment at the University of Baltimore, Stuart Moulthrop, points out that by defining games in a particular context, we are deciding who gets tenure, meaning that in the untheorized frontier of video game scholarship, academic departments are fighting for who gets to claim the video game space (62). However, trying to fit video games exclusively into a film, art, or computer science department is not unlike the conundrum of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. The parts may look and function similarly, but they just do not fit. We need a more interdisciplinary approach to the study and production of games so that the discipline will have the room it needs to truly grow into its own specialized field.
Defining Video Games

Until recently, one problem impeding growth of video games as an art form has been the insistence by scholars and even some designers to define video games incorrectly. Historically, the two main voices in the debate on video game theory have been the ludologists and the narratologists. Ludologists, in the strictest sense, are proponents of studying games based on gameplay, that is, the rules that govern play, the mechanics of the game, the terms of winning and losing, etc. They are less concerned with the storytelling properties of video games and more concerned with the gameplay parts and how they function.

Conversely, narratologists emphasize the storytelling aspect of video games and use theories of theatre and film to describe and define them. Depending on whether you ask a strict narratologist or ludologist, soccer will either be a set of rules to govern play or a narrative of two conflicting teams or tribes (Pearce 145).

Ludologists such as Gonzalo Frasca and Espen Aarseth see gaming as a simulation or a system of rules in which the player is given freedom of choice and can do what they wish, provided their choices meet the constraints of the game world. Narrative devices can exist, but are used as ‘filler’ material; the story is irrelevant to the success and enjoyment of the game. Ludologist Markku Eskelinen writes, “if I throw a ball at you, I don’t expect for you to drop it and wait for it to start telling stories” (36). Despite Eskelinen’s impassioned claim, much like modern movies, books, and theatre, games too can tell a good story. Saying
games do not tell stories is like showing a movie and saying, “that wasn’t a sequence of images.” Narratologists such as Janet Murray and Brenda Laurel would agree—Laurel is responsible for the computer as theatre metaphor—saying that narration is a key element to a good game. However, Murray rightly notes that we do not need to think of games as story-games. To her, that would be like using the term “photoplay” to describe early films (4). Yes, when we are watching a film, we are looking at a series of sequential images, but it is not a literal one-to-one representation of what we would be seeing if we photographed every frame of a stageplay and watched it in a flipbook. To describe the phenomenon of the motion picture, we created the term film. Murray says we must do the same in the game space. Her proposed term for these new narrative gaming experiences is “cyberdrama.”

Murray is correct in her assertion that we do not need to think of video games as story-games, yet she invents the new term, cyberdrama, to imply that they are exactly that. We must be careful with our terms here and not let our definitions of new forms of “games” exceed our scope. Early articles on narratology and cyberdrama (Laurel, Murray, Pearce) continually reference chess and soccer. Some even cite playing the stock markets on Wall Street or a man playing with his dog as games (Murray 3). The problem with these comparisons is that we are trying to define a very wide and diverse space with large all-inclusive terms. Aarseth asserts that these types of categorizations are part of what he calls “narrative colonialism” and represent the attempt to reform games into a more
acceptable form of art, literature, or film (49). Aarseth is correct in his assertion that this insistence of reformation—or as Marie-Laure Ryan calls it, the Holodeck Myth, with reference to Janet Murray’s book, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*—is an overgeneralization of the importance and function of narrative within games (48). However, he is misguided in his claim that games are self-contained and free from any type of intertextuality. As we will see as we explore narrative design and transmedia storytelling, the relationship of games to other forms of media is paramount to our understanding of what makes a video game a video game. Stuart Moulthrop agrees, noting that if the unrealistically proportioned and attractive protagonist of the *Tomb Raider* games, Laura Croft, were replaced with a different, less attractive avatar, the game would still function the same, but could not be treated the same for critical purposes (48). Furthermore, the intertextual nature of games is evident based on their content, as many games are based on films or other media. The understanding of the content of such games is certainly not internal. For example, a fan would enjoy and appreciate Easter eggs a novice would ignore in a *Star Wars* game; however, the discovery of such Easter eggs are not integral to enjoy the ludological components of the game. Yet Aarseth’s ultimate point is relevant. There is a critical distinction we must make to separate video games from other forms of interactive media.

Video games can informally be divided into several categories such as core games, interactive drama/cyberdrama, casual games, social games, and serious games. The goals of this paper are not concerned with interactive drama
(Façade), casual games (Tetris), social games (Farmville), or serious games (Darfur is Dying). Let us be clear: our concern is with core video games. We will define core video games as games developed by a professional or independent studio, meant as entertainment, intended to be distributed on a large scale, and usually played on a console system or personal computer. Within the spectrum of core games, there is a vast array of styles and genres; however, they share the designation core video games, not new media, cyberdrama, and the like. It is very true and very exciting that the core video game is evolving and branching off into these other forms; these types of experiences are extremely noteworthy and represent unimagined possibilities of what we can do with interactive media, but they are not “video games” in the sense we have defined them. They represent a completely different breed of media and thus demand a completely different hermeneutic.

The problem that arises in much academic scholarship is that oftentimes we tend to focus on these new forms of media and neglect the video game, assuming that our theories will suffice as a large enough blanket to cover them, or worse yet, arrogantly assuming that video games are a lesser art form than their newer offspring. Video games are sometimes likened to throwaway entertainment necessary before something of “quality” is produced; the junk before the good stuff. Moulthrop notes that the quantity of what he considers poor games must be waded through before finding that diamond in the rough, comparing the process to drama and film: “We can have no serious drama like
Copenhagen without a dozen recycled Producers…no Summer of Sam without a handful of Lethal Weapons” (Moulthrop 61). Yet despite Moulthrop’s claims, there are many who consider Lethal Weapon a seminal film. Similarly, some of the lowbrow games Moulthrop dismisses have been well received by video game critics and players alike, particularly Half-life, which is often touted for its advanced integration of story and gameplay. In fact, a seemingly harmless game such as Microsoft’s Flight Simulator—which terrorists used to learn how to pilot planes before the 9/11 attacks (Moulthrop 62)—could cause more harm than a violent game such as Half-Life.

Perhaps in part due to the negative connotations of the term “video game,” scholars have tried to redefine the term. Categories like interactive narrative, interactive drama, game-story, story-game, user experience, and cyberdrama have all been proposed (Laurel, Murray, Perlin, Mateas). To compound the problem, most of the terms used to redefine video games are skewed toward the narratological side of the equation, with the possible exception of game-story, which at least semantically puts gameplay first. The ideas carried by many of these terms imply a branching yet linear choose-your-own-adventure style of predefined experience. While there is certainly room for these types of experiences in the interactive media space, an interactive drama is not a game, and until we realize that, we are going to be continually handicapped by our own misconceptions. Second Life and World of Warcraft are not the same thing. The former is a virtual world that has games within it; the latter is a video game that
looks like a virtual world. Different types of interactive media require different storytelling techniques. Some don’t require any at all. And within the video game sub-type, core video games themselves require contextually specific storytelling devices.

In video games, storytelling and gameplay should not be in opposition. Story should function in support of the gameplay and drama advanced because of it. Video games simultaneously communicate both narrative-based and play-based experiences within a controlled environment. By understanding the processes that games use to communicate, we can make better games. By making better games, we can not only grow the art form, but as we will see, we can engage players on levels outside of the played experience and enable them to become more thoughtful and creative people.
CHAPTER TWO
NARRATIVE DESIGN

Storytelling is a core human activity (Murray 3). We construct narratives out of meaningless events all the time and use what we know about the world to fill in the gaps. (Mateas 24, Lidwell 20). For example, in a recent television ad, we are presented with a series of objects that contain two dots and a curve. From that geometry, we construct smiling and frowning faces. We do the same thing with games like chess. We see the pieces, we know the rules, and while we play the game, we add our own story specific to our played experience. If a certain knight captures many pieces, a player might say, “Oh, that knight is very powerful.” In reality, the knight is no more or less powerful than any other, but because it has been used skillfully, a meta-narrative about the strength of the piece is constructed. Video game and transmedia scholar Henry Jenkins notes Monopoly as a similar example of players intrinsically constructing meaning from context. He notes that the game, the pieces, and the cards provide a pretext for the game, but what we remember about the game—and what we construct our own narratives from—is the act of moving around the board (120-121). For example, if your opponent has a hotel on an obscure property, but you land on it several times, that hotel might develop a reputation similar to the knight in the chess example. In this example, a player-constructed narrative of the dominance of a specific property is constructed. The perceived value of the property is
contextual. For example, in a separate game of *Monopoly*, it is possible that no players land on that same property and the property is perceived as worthless. These kinds of meta-narratives are formed similarly in video games.

*Shining Force* is a turn-based strategy game developed in the 1990s. The player travels a fictional world and recruits Non Player Characters (NPCs) to join their battle party. Once an NPC joins the player’s party, that NPC becomes playable. Battles in *Shining Force* are similar to chess. There are two sides, the player and the computer. Each side starts in specific locations on the map, moving party members one at a time in round robin fashion. Like the pieces in chess, each character in the party has certain movements and abilities that make them preferable to others.

Figure 1.1: *Shining Force 2* Battle Map.

In *Shining Force*, the characters have more of a biography than the pieces in chess or *Monopoly*, though the stories are usually simple (see Figures 1.2 and
1.3). In addition to the character backstories, there is a larger plot that the player experiences, wherein they are forced to save the world from the ever-present forces of evil. There is also a third type of narrative, a meta-narrative like the one created in chess or Monopoly, that is created when the characters are used in gameplay and a player develops non-prescribed associations with them. It is not uncommon for players to use characters that they perceive as more fun or more aesthetically pleasing over the characters who are ludologically “better.” For example, a newly acquired character who has high attack and defense values may be left out of the battle party in favor of a lesser character with whom the player has already spent hours developing a relationship.

Figures 1.2 and 1.3: Character Development in Shining Force, Elliot and Bleu, respectively.
Procedural Rhetoric

In chess, the narrative only exists on the meta level. In Shining Force, the player is allowed to construct a similar meta-narrative and participate in a larger predefined story. This is the basis of what Ian Bogost of Georgia Tech calls procedural rhetoric.

The term “rhetoric” often evokes the classic images of Socrates or Aristotle and the use of oratory, but as our media has evolved, our rhetorical tools have gone beyond mere oratory to other forms such as art, sculpture, literature, etc. Bogost notes that, “procedural rhetoric is the practice of using processes persuasively, just as verbal rhetoric is the practice of using oratory persuasively and visual rhetoric is the practice of using images persuasively” (28).

As game developers, we walk a fine line between being artists and being salesmen. The most beautiful graphics or the most intriguing story is worthless if no one is playing our game. We must convince players to play, without convincing them. In that respect, we are similar to authors and painters, who more often than not, have expressive goals, not persuasive ones. Yet, as Bogost suggests, “the expressive aesthetics of a painting could be argued as a persuasive argument to view it” (19). Or, as singer/songwriter James McMurtry once said while observing that the illusion of writing songs for the sake of human expression is confounded by the reality that a given local venue will only book him if people come and spend money on drinks, “I used to think I was an artist.
Come to find out, I'm a beer salesman.” This sentiment applies to other art forms as well, including video games.

The postmodern early twentieth century rhetorician Kenneth Burke understood human communication as a tradition of symbolic systems (1340-1347). In fact, his rhetorical model is very much applicable to the video game space. According to Bogost, Burke’s understanding of humans as creators and consumers of symbolic systems helped expand rhetoric to include nonverbal domains, in particular, photographic and cinematic expression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (21). Here in the early twenty-first century, we are expanding our rhetorical understanding yet again to encompass new media, including video games. Just as “visual communication cannot simply adopt the figures and forms of oral and written expression…a new form of rhetoric must be created to accommodate these media forms” (Bogost 21). The danger with these new media forms, as Charles Hill points out, is that images are more “vivid” than text or speech, and therefore, “they are more easily manipulated toward visceral responses” (qtd. in Bogost 21). Visceral, non-cognitive reactions to games are exactly what critics like Anne Marie Barry were reacting against when they protested video game violence during the graphics boon of the 1990s. Indeed, notes Hill:

Advertisers don’t want to persuade people to buy their products, because persuasion implies that the audience has given the issue some thought and come to a conscious decision. Instead, advertisers want to...compel people to buy a product without even knowing why they’re buying it—as a visceral response to a stimulus, not as a conscious decision. (qtd. in Bogost 21)
This type of response is a very powerful one. As video game writer and designer Stephen Dinehart says, “It allows us [game designers] a wider cognitive palette from which they [players] can self-author more emotive and visceral interactive fiction experiences” (“Defining”). The term “self-author” is a bit deceptive, as it implies a conscious effort by the user to create their fiction; a true rhetorical narrative design functions, at least in part, on a subconscious level, as Hill has already noted.

**Enthymemes**

Many players and critics tout sandbox games, such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series as games that allow the player to go anywhere, do anything, and truly self-author their own experiences. However, ultimate freedom for the player should not be a goal of game design and total freedom will actually impede the play experience. Even the most free-roaming sandbox game has rules. Game designer and professor, Eric Zimmerman, offers an excellent definition for games in this context. Zimmerman notes that rules are essentially restrictive and limit what a player can do. He calls this the paradox of rules and games: “Rules are rigid, fixed, closed, and unambiguous. Play, on the other hand, is uncertain, creative, improvisational, and open-ended. The strange coupling of rules and play is one of the fascinating paradoxes of games” (161).

To try and develop an interactive experience without rules is to try and develop an interactive experience that is not a game. Game writer Micah Wright
notes, *Grand Theft Auto IV* actually has fewer gameplay options than its predecessor, *Grand Theft Auto III*, though *GTA IV* is widely considered the better game. He claims that despite the sandbox gameplay losses, *GTA IV* was the better game because of “better story and better writing.” That is, story on both the literal and the meta level. Furthermore, as Bogost notes, fewer gameplay options “is not a limitation of the game, but rather the very way it becomes procedurally expressive” (43). Bogost adds, “the interactivity afforded by the game’s coupling of player manipulations and gameplay effects is much narrower than the expressive space the game and the player subsequently create. The player performs a great deal of mental synthesis, filling the gap between subjectivity and game processes” (43). Here we see one of the fundamental tenants of procedural rhetoric, for this “mental synthesis” resembles how a person makes inferences from enthymemes in classical rhetoric and is Aristotelian in nature. Understanding how the enthymeme works in a procedural environment—like a video game—is the key to understanding the synthesis of story and gameplay and advancing the art form.

An enthymeme is a syllogism with one of the statements removed so that the reader/listener must infer the meaning. A syllogism is a set of statements that includes a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. A syllogism would be:

*All cows eat grass.*

*Bessie is a cow.*
Bessie eats grass.

Figure 2.1: The Syllogism. The information of two overlapping premises combines to support the given conclusion.

Compared to the enthymeme:

All cows eat grass.

Bessie eats grass.

In the enthymeme example above, one of the premises is omitted, leaving it to be inferred by the reader. According its logic, if all cows eat grass, Bessie must be a cow, since she too eats grass. The conclusion that Bessie is a cow is a valid one, though it may or may not be true. Bessie could be any type of herbivore, or possibly an eight-month-old child. Thus, though our enthymeme is valid, it may not be true.

A famous enthymeme from an old drug prevention commercial showed a person crack and fry an egg with the following voice over:

This is your brain.

This is your brain on drugs.
In this example, the viewer of the commercial is likely to infer their own conclusion that “drugs scramble your brain.” This type of viewer-created conclusion is a powerful persuasive device and is the reason why enthymematic arguments are used in advertising and political discourse.

**Fig 2.2: The Enthymeme.** In an enthymeme, either one of the premises or the conclusion is left out so that new information may be inferred.

Enthymeme = Premise I + Premise II + Inferred Conclusion

Bogost remarks that a “procedural model like a videogame could be seen as a system of nested enthymemes, individual procedural claims that the player literally completes through interaction” (43). He offers the game, *Freaky Flakes*, as an example that represents a procedural enthymeme: “The player literally fills in the missing portion of the syllogism by interacting with the application, but that action is constrained by the rules” (32-33). Again, we see behavior-constraining rules as an integral part of video games.

Dinehart agrees: “If the game allows the player to interject their own story without heavy handed authoritarian dictation, a much more rich [sic] experience will be had. The system relies on a player’s own cognitive ability to create
meaning and purpose within moments” (“Real-Time”). Bogost concludes, “Sophisticated interactivity can produce an effective procedural enthymeme, resulting in more sophisticated procedural rhetoric. (43).

Again, as Hill notes, rhetorical devices can be powerful persuasive tools, eliciting visceral responses from audiences without them even realizing why. As parents and concerned citizens we should be aware of this phenomenon and educate others, but as developers we should exploit the power of procedural rhetoric as much as we can within the confines of our social standards of decency. For example, procedural rhetoric can be used to express how a game makes a political or other statement as in Bogost and Gonzalo Frasca’s *The Howard Dean for Iowa Game*.

We are interested in how procedural rhetoric can be used within a system to create a more engaging user experience, not to persuade a player to act or believe a certain way. That is, we remain focused on procedural rhetoric within video games as a function of both storytelling and gameplay, not as a persuasive tool—at least not beyond the fact that we want to persuade people to play our game. However, confusion may arise from our use of the word rhetoric. Regardless of the semantics, the theory remains the same: developing enthymemes with which the player may construct their own meta-narrative within a predesigned virtual world, all while remaining under the constraints of a ludological rule system. Luckily for us there is another term that means exactly
that and is devoid of rhetorical connotations. We will call the implementation of procedural rhetoric in video games for non-persuasive purposes narrative design.

Models of Narrative Design

Narrative design is the synthesis of story, gameplay, and immersion and represents the union of ludology and narratology. The professional title of Narrative Designer was first fully articulated by Stephen Dinehart in 2006. Similar to E. Gordon Craig’s notion of an all-encompassing theatre artist, Dinehart asserts that narrative designers must understand and participate in multiple levels of production, as they are “managers, writers, game designers, artists, and more. The pillar of their primary tenant must be founded on a transparent blend between narratological and ludological tendencies within interactive experience design.” (“What Is Narrative Design?,” see Figure 3). Game designer and professor Celia Pearce concurs, saying, “Games do not ask the player to construct or interpret what the author is trying to ‘tell’ them. Rather they function as a kit of parts that allows the player to construct their own story of variation thereof” (147). Even critics like Espen Aarseth agree that games create the space for this “water cooler,” or meta-narrative (50).

Dinehart may not have defined narrative design within the context of procedural rhetoric, but if we examine narrative design theory and practice, we will see that it fits our criteria of using the foundations of procedural rhetoric for non-persuasive purposes. Defining video games as interactive entertainment
experiences, Dinehart notes that “the craft of interactive narrative design focuses on creating meaningful participatory story experiences with interactive systems” so that a player may “craft a story cognitively based on their navigation within said system” (“Defining”). Recalling our explanation of procedural rhetoric, we can see the obvious similarities. Narrative designers employ the enthymematic principles of procedural rhetoric to create their craft. The rhetoric here, however, is not to convince one to vote for a political candidate or buy a hybrid car, but to persuade one to play and keep playing while constructing one’s own unique experiences. Empowering the player to invent their own unique experiences is the first step in advancing video games as an art form.

Figure 3: Narrative Design. Adapted from Stephen Dinehart’s original model.

Regarding the first person shooter *Quake*, Michael Mateas puts forth a series of formal constraints that function much like a syllogism:
Everything that moves will try to kill you.

You should try to kill everything.

You should try to move through as many levels as possible (26).

These constraints are interesting because they articulate the neo-Aristotelian form of storytelling put forward by Mateas and later by Dinehart. This form, derived from the widely accepted classical structure of drama, focuses on formal causes (plot) and material causes (gameplay) acting upon one another. The interaction of the formal/material causes influences the action and feedback of the player. Player/game interaction defines the player’s experience; therefore, player experiences are functions of the forces of gameplay and narrative acting upon one another.

The Figures of classical and interactive drama (4.1 and 4.2), though very different from the Narrative Design diagram of Figure 3, underscore the significance of gameplay/narrative interaction. Whether the terminology is “formal and material” or “narratological and ludological,” both models start with the assumption of an exclusivity between story and gameplay and find ways to bring the two together. The theme across both ideas is to establish a harmony of formal (plot) and material (gameplay) constraints. However, upon closer examination, adherence to the neo-Aristotelian model shows that it is more applicable to interactive drama than to video games and should thus be avoided.
We learn from the title of Mateas’s article, “A Preliminary Poetics for Interactive Drama and Games,” that he is creating a new poetics for games and interactive drama. However, games and interactive drama, as we have argued, are not mutually inclusive. \textit{Quake}, for example is not interactive drama. Furthermore, it should be noted that the classic model is based on Aristotle’s writings of metaphysics and not rhetoric or drama. Though the classic model of Aristotelian drama is widely accepted, we should be aware of its source context to fully understand its implications.

Another issue with the neo-Aristotelian model is that the model seems to be talking about building a dramatic experience in terms of a single-player context. Yet many games function in a large-scale Player versus Player (PvP) setting, with hundreds of players participating in a single experience concurrently. Instead of designing a unique experience for one person, we need to be able to enable multiple players to enjoy unique experiences in the same played space.
Micah Wright notes that *World of WarCraft (WoW)*, for example, does not have much of a standard narrative structure, but “its players seem to fill in those missing pieces for themselves via the story of their character and their guild.” Personalities are created by the people playing the characters. For example, two players can have the exact same face template for their avatars; however, based off of one player’s tone and behavior in and out-of-game (such as on guild forums), one may always be perceived to be angry, while the other character may be perceived as benevolent. Based on identical body types, one character may be seen as strong and fearless, and another slow and oafish, etc. We, the players, are projecting emotional archetypes onto characters who look exactly the same because the game is providing the framework for the players to create their own meanings and characters. Pearce agrees that *WoW* and the Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) genre allow “players to evolve their own narratives within the game’s story framework,” calling it “social storytelling” (148-149). This type of storytelling is not, as Espen Aarseth feared, “narrative colonialism,” but an organically developed narrative that is given rise because of the opportunities presented by the gameplay.

The story framework created by *WoW* and other MMOs extends beyond the experience of the played game, into online forum participation and real life socialization. *WoW* is a game that you cannot “win” in a tradition sense. You can win battles on a small-scale level, but the game is continuously under development so that the end-game today becomes trivial within months. Games
like this depend on these frameworks of social interaction to be successful. In fact, these types of games are beginning to leverage their social nature and are moving toward a more organic model of what they are. For example, in *WoW*, there was a large player-driven event that required large-scale, communal player efforts to accomplish. The players had to collect enough in-game materials before the gates to a new end-game area could be opened and the area accessed. No one player or even one guild could do this on their own in any reasonable amount of time. The players on each server remained in competition with one another, but also shared a common goal. Furthermore, this goal culminated in a world event in which all members of the server could participate. This large scale mobilization of a community is certain to be a major factor in the future of gaming and is a fundamental tenant of what we need to understand in order to advance gaming as an art form.

When designers try to create experiences that presume all possible player interactions, they are actually limiting player experience. Mateas’s interactive drama *Façade* is one such example. In the interactive drama, a user (not player) communicates with a couple by typing text responses. The program examines the user’s text input and the characters respond accordingly. In this manner, the user discovers information about the couple’s lives and their romantic relationship. Unless the user is kicked out before the end of the story for being offensive, the couple either splits up or reconciles.
Figure 5: Façade.

The neo-Aristotelian model as executed in Façade suggests that being offered a small number of obvious choices—for example, collecting enough resources to change the map in WoW—is less desirable to a smoothly mutable plot that is a function of the many small actions performed by the player throughout their experiences (28). The problem with this is that we find ourselves in the dangerous realm of designing for ultimate freedom, letting the player say or do anything. As Bogost has explained, fewer gameplay options is not a limitation of the game, but a way in which it becomes procedurally expressive. Yes, the interactions within video games are becoming more complicated than shooting at monsters, but we still need behavior constricting components. The further we get away from them, the less and less of a video game our art becomes.

The neo-Aristotelian model may not be the best fit for game designers, but contrary to Eskelinen’s claim that Aristotle is outdated, ignoring his work would be like trying to study physics and ignoring Einstein (36). We can help improve the model by looking at Russian formalism. Henry Jenkins notes that a division of
narrative elements can be found in the Russian formalist distinction between plot and story.

Plot is defined as the chronological sequence of events as they are presented to the player. Story is defined as the player’s mental synthesis of the presented events (126; for a player-centric view on story versus narrative and other relevant issues, see Appendix A). We could use a hypothetical zombie shooter as an example. The plot would be the condition of the space where the game takes place and how it came to be in that condition (an abandoned mall after the zombie apocalypse, for example). The story would be the human events within that context and the player’s own meta-understanding thereof (two survivors fighting for their lives inside the mall). Jenkins identifies the theory in literature, citing Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The explorers in the novel keep stumbling across left behind artifacts from a previous expedition. As the reader is traveling the plot arc of the characters of the book, they are also piecing together the puzzles of the past, experiencing both plot and story simultaneously. Dinehart chimes in, having this to say about the formalism of Vladmir Propp:

> His [Vladmir Propp] structuralist approach to classical literary design easily adapts to interactive experiences, and clearly points to the exponential narratological complexity associated with non-linear experiences. In order to maintain narrative integrity throughout an interactive experience a rigid structure must be adhered to. Narrative design was born into the world to bring classical structure back into modern storytelling. (“Defining”)

From this we get what Jenkins calls embedded, emergent, and enacted narratives. The embedded narrative is the formalist “plot.” It is the narratological
story arc that is presented to the player by the designers. Conversely, the emergent narrative is the “story.” It is the constructed narrative within the mind of the player. It is the blanks of the enthymeme being filled in. The enacted narrative exists between the two and represents stories told through what a player literally does, such as grabbing a light saber to fend off a Sith Lord in a Star Wars game (124-129). Jenkins discusses marrying these three types of narrative delivery systems, citing Half-life. As a player in Half-life, you have to move through the overt narrative to get to the next part of the “narratively impregnated mise-en-scene.” This allows for a healthy balance between “the flexibility of interactivity and the coherence of a pre-authored narrative” and is an important step in the evolution of the video game as an art form in which the player becomes author (127).

Acclaimed game designer Will Wright has frequently defined The Sims as a sandbox game that should be understood as a kind of authoring environment within which players can define their own goals and write their own stories (Jenkins 128). In his game worlds, Wright drops the player into an interesting landscape and the design constraints of the world keep them there. What his games, like The Sims and Spore, do is give the player a framework for a world that they then populate with meaning. Wright touts the benefits of the enthymematic model of meaning-making, noting that it is an “amazingly effective process,” well covered in Scott McCloud’s seminal work Understanding Comics (Perlin 13).
McCloud’s book is written in comic book fashion with a simple cartoon figure serving as narrator. The simplicity of the design of the narrator character allows the reader to project his or her personality onto this blank slate. There is a series of panels when the narrator begins to be drawn as a more and more photorealistic figure in each progressive panel. On the final panel, he asks if the reader would have listened to him if he “looked like this,” a well drawn, detailed reproduction McCloud. By rhetorically asking if the reader would have listened to him if he “looked like this,” McCloud is underscoring the sense of amplification through simplification, pointing out that the sense of connection is broken the more specific the narrator becomes. Jenkins agrees with Wright and McCloud, noting that designers are “less of storytellers and more of narrative architect,” literally building a space that is conducive for the player to populate it with stories (129). This is the delicate balance that video games are able to achieve; they are simultaneously able to create experiences within the limits of the prescribed plot and within the limits of the player’s imagination. When this happens, players take their in-game experiences offline and into the real world, as in our *Wow* example. However, before a player will invest the time and energy to truly engage their fictive universe in this way, they must feel connected to it on some level. That is, they must have a strong sense of agency in the game world.
Agency

Agency is an important quality that distinguishes games from other forms of media. It is the relationship between the player and their impact on the game world and gives the player a reason to become mentally invested and thus more immersed in their experience.

Recall the early days of storytelling in video games in the mid 1980s through the early 1990s. Many games started off with a premise—usually something along the lines of rescuing the kidnapped princess—to give the hero a reason for action. Drama is action. In most successful films, plays, or books, there has to be action driving the plot forward. The protagonist must be motivated to go out and accomplish their goals. In a play for example, the language can be beautifully written, but if there is no action—even if the action is only implied—the audience will tune out. No action translates into no drama. Games are the same way. With no dramatic action, a game is just an interactive “conversation” between the player and the interface. Add in thematic conflict—have the player on a quest to save the princess, for example—and a much richer interactive experience begins to unfold in the minds of the players as the game becomes more than the sum of its ludological parts. This is player agency.

As the storytelling animal, we create meanings where there are none. In fact, in the early years of gaming, when the images on screens were dots, squares and lines, the storytelling was often done in the instruction manual and in the box art. If the box communicated to the player that the dots were stars, the
squares spaceships, and the lines laser fire, it is likely that they were constructing their own epic space adventure each time they played. If the box communicated that the dots were armies, the squares castles, and the lines lightning bolts, it is more likely that the player began to construct their own fantasy adventure. In these cases, the box art was creating the framework for the game as well as the agency for the player. It was giving the player a reason to make their small square shoot a small thin rectangle at a larger square (see Appendix B). Even the world’s most compelling gameplay benefits from creating player agency; even *Tetris* creates reasons for the player to continue to play (high scores, different game modes to master, Russian context, etc.).

In terms of providing agency using narrative design, game writer Evan Skolnick notes that gameplay provides the “what” and the “how,” where game narrative provides the “why.” The question many ludologist critics often ask is, “why even bother with the why?” The truth, according to Skolnick, is that without a contextual “why,” most gameplay can be repetitive, tedious, and virtually pointless. He notes the following possible scenarios for a *Call of Duty*-style game. In both examples, the gameplay is exactly the same, but the latter has all of the narrative bits stripped out and is presented from a purely ludological perspective:

1. One of our tanks is disabled and the crew is taking heavy fire. They need our help! Get to the outskirts of town and defend the crippled tank from the encroaching enemy forces until repairs can be completed.
2. Move to the tank-shaped polygon at coordinates 24,56. Prevent it from taking 300 hit points of damage before 5 minutes have elapsed. (Skolnick)

Clearly, the first scenario is more interesting. It gives us details about the mission that serves as the framework we need to construct our own narrative about how the tank got there and what we can do to save our men from enemy fire. One person might imagine the tank in a war zone in Iraq, under fire from a terrorist attack. Another might imagine a futuristic tank being fired upon by cybernetic robots. There is no right or wrong interpretation; the construct of the scenario enables our imagination to roam free. We can impose whatever meaning we choose, as long as it is situated within the framework provided. Conversely, the second example gives an idea of how you might create the experience programmatically, but offers little in the way of creating an imaginative narrative experience outside of the mention of “a tank-shaped polygon.” We could add one more scenario. It might look something like this:

3. Our Medium M3 Tank is disabled near the Belgium-German border and they need our help! Get to Wallonia and navigate the Ardennes Mountains to defend the tank before we can rescue the crew.

In this third example, we are closer to losing the “sweet spot” balance of gameplay and narration. The narration is becoming overpowering and the scenario is beginning to read like a film or book. We must, as Mateas says, “regard the primacy of agency,” or, our right to make choices or to perform actions with meaningful consequences (14-19). In this third example, we are
losing the “meaningfulness” of our consequences because if everything is scripted, the player will infer that their actions have no bearing on the outcome.

Game writer Richard Dansky contends that there is a “giant, player-shaped hole at the heart of game stories,” and that if you don’t allow the player the freedom to make choices, even simple ones, like “bazooka versus submachine gun, then it’s not a game, it’s an occasionally interactive movie.” Again, we see that understanding player agency and choice is key to designing successful video games.

Actualizing Potentialities

If we accept Zimmerman’s paradox of rules and games, which states that games are, by definition, behavior restricting then there are certain things in a video game that players can and can’t do. In a culture where reading the instruction manual is almost extinct, designers are tasked with somehow showing the player what choices can and can’t be made in the game world. They must do this in a way that is unobtrusive and, ideally, an augmentation of the game experience. The meaning making-mechanism that designers often use is the concept of affordances.

An affordance is “a property in which the physical characteristic of an object or environment influence its function” (Lidwell 20). Examples include how the male and female sides of Legos afford to be plugged in to one another, or how the recessed footplates and handlebar on the Segway human transport
afford the correct riding position (Lidwell 20). Poor affordances hamper the success of a design. For example, a restaurant patron may try to open a door by pulling the door handle, only to find that the door functions by pushing. This is a conflicting affordance. A door that functions by pushing should not have a handle that strongly affords a “pull” action. The design can be improved by replacing the handle with a flat plate, strongly implying a “push” action (Lidwell 20-21). In this way, affordances function as visual enthymemes, making visual statements about form and function, and leaving it for us to decide on the appropriate action. Similarly, a good game should be designed with positive affordances to successfully integrate story, context, and gameplay.

For instance, when the player begins a game for the first time, they may not be familiar with the rules of the game world. They may not know, for example, that certain kinds of walls can be destroyed to create new passageways. It is up to the game designers to teach them the rules of the world. Many games have tutorial levels that instruct the player in the basics, and these can be integrated into part of the game/story through intelligent narrative design.

James Paul Gee notes in his book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, that the gameplay instruction of a good game will be transparent to the player. One example is the training segment in *Gears of War 2*. At the beginning of the game, the player controlling the main character, Marcus, is confronted with a rookie soldier. When asked if the player wants to run him through the training segment, they have a choice. If they are already familiar
with the control scheme, they can skip it. However, if they want to experience the training, they can choose take the rookie on a brief mission that doubles as an introduction to the game world while giving instructions. Note that by giving the player the choice, their agency in the world is also strengthened as they are dictating the path of their own experience.

Another example is the interface development in *World of WarCraft*. Compare the interface of an early game character with that of an end-game character (Figures 9.1 and 9.2) Clearly by end-game, the interface has evolved into something quite complex. In fact, the interface is fully customizable via free third party applications called “add ons” and many advanced players, such as the owner of the pictured interface in Figure 9.2, take full advantage of this customization. The action of players going to third party websites outside of the game creates another type of agency, a meta-agency, outside of the game world, which adds to the impact of the in-game experience. *WoW* starts with something simple, and as the player progresses, it matures into something complex that would overwhelm a first time user. Here, the growth of the interface is tied to the complexity of gameplay. The principle of the seamless integration of functionality is important to design around as we work toward weaving a complex meta-narrative into the tapestry of a game’s structure.
Figure 6.1: Default WoW UI.

Figure 6.2: Customized End Game WoW UI.
This method of actualizing potentialities allows us to create form from chaos. When represented visually, the idea is very similar to Brenda Laurel’s Flying Wedge from her *Computer as Theatre*. True, we should avoid using the computer-as-theatre metaphor as a one-to-one representation, but to ignore the work of Laurel would be as foolish as ignoring the work of Aristotle in our discussion of game narrative earlier.

![Figure 7.1: Brenda Laurel’s Flying Wedge. From Computer as Theatre, page 70, reproduced in Ward, page 81.](image)

Or, more simply put:

![Figure 7.2: Form From Chaos. By actualizing potentialities, the player is self-taught what actions are possible and impossible within their given virtual world.](image)

As Jeffrey Ward notes, “this representation gives us an idea of just how possibility transforms into inevitability in narrative” (80). The notion of possibility and its direct link to causality gives us a fundamental understanding behind the
workings of impossibility in narrative, or at least an audience’s acceptance of actions that would otherwise be considered impossible. As an author, in order to keep an audience convinced that the events in a work are “believable,” it is not necessarily important to stay within the bounds of real life possibility, but within the bounds of narrative possibility. The suspension of disbelief can be a fragile thing, so we must work hard to preserve it.

What all this means, as Laurel explains, is that

We can believe that Peter Pan flies because of the way the potential of his world is revealed through the way his character is established in the action and through dramatic situations that provide him with causes to use his ability to fly. Conversely, it is possible that Peter Pan would try to have a conversation with Captain Hook instead of fighting him… but the improbability of that course of action robs it of credibility. (qtd. in Ward 81)

The key to credibility is consistency. Gee says that games have immediate, negative consequences for "wrong" actions. For example, in Super Mario Bros, if the player makes the "wrong" action of falling into a pit or being bitten by a monster, they die. This behavior is consistent. Mario will never fall into a pit and not die. If the player has one or more extra lives, they are revived at the beginning of the level or a checkpoint and allowed to continue from there. The player will never fail to be revived in such a way as long as they have an extra life. Over time, video games have developed a canon of “givens” that players have come to expect. This canon is the foundation that designers build off of as they continue to push the form forward and add to it. We expect a map to be in the corner; we expect the demon to kill us; we expect barrels to explode. If we
choose to break any one of these constructed givens, we must be extremely careful in what we are doing. When one of the potentialities is broken—when one of the rules fails without explanation—the game fails.

**Gameplay as Story**

To paraphrase from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, all game design components are equal, but some are more equal than others. Evan Skolnick calls gameplay the meal and narrative the spice. Celia Pearce asserts that everything is derived from play and that game designers should be more interested in creating a framework for play rather than telling a story (144). Yet, Dinehart, Bogost, Wright, and others would note that through good narrative design, a framework for play would be a framework for story. That is, storytelling and gameplay can be one in the same. We are designing a played experience of which play and story are equally a part. The game *Mass Effect* is one such example. As the player loads the game, the experience begins. Instead of prompting the player to “create a character,” it requests to “load your profile” as if you were a person in the real world about to go out on assignment. In fact, Adrian Cho, lead technical artist for *Mass Effect’s* sequel, *Mass Effect 2*, has stated:

> So, what *Mass Effect* does is it still delivers all the visceral impact...for people to get that really cool feedback, but...that is only one fraction of what the game offers. All the cutscenes, all the cinematics, all the character development, and most importantly the story—I think those are the things that we want to be able to get to this larger audience. (Nutt).

Note the mention of the visceral type of player response as mentioned by
Bogost, Hill, and Dinehart. Again, the designers are combining the non-cognitive reactions of our reptilian brains with the cognitive process of the neocortex to create experiences that engage the player on multiple levels.

*Mass Effect 2* was marketed to a wider, more mainstream audience than the traditional “hard core” game, with Bioware sponsoring sporting events and producing television spots for *Mass Effect 2* that were cut more like a movie trailer than a game preview. Yet at its core, *Mass Effect 2* retains the “visceral impact” of gameplay responses that make it a game and not an interactive movie. As Cho states, developing games that resonate with players is about finding that delicate balance between gameplay and story, style and substance. He points out that regardless of how beautiful the graphics are, if your gameplay is sub par, it will not find an audience. However, note that he does not mention the reverse, that your game will fail if your story is lacking but the gameplay is stellar. Again we see gameplay as the foundation from which narrative is built.

![Figure 8.1: The Visceral Impact of Mass Effect 2. The “meat” of the game.](image)
It is preferable to give the player control over their experience with story and narrative elements. For example, the third-person action-adventure, role-playing game, *Diablo II*, has very compelling and addictive gameplay that creates what Henry Jenkins and Dominic Arsenault have called a game of emergence. According to Arsenault, a game of emergence is “based on a relatively small number of rules capable of generating a multitude of variants. Most classic games, like chess or sports, would figure on the side of emergence: only the base rules are specified, the challenge arising from their combination” (68). Narrative is built upon the combination of events unique to each game, as in the chess knight and *Monopoly* hotel examples given earlier.

Arsenault points out that in *Diablo* and its successor, *Diablo II*, the dungeons are procedurally generated each time the player enters. That is, the game level is randomized each time it is played, a key ludological component to

Figure 8.2: A Conversation in *Mass Effect*. Choices you make and characters you interact with directly affect gameplay. The “spice” of the game.
the game. However, unlike *Diablo, Diablo II* combines the ludologically-based progression of emergence with a narratologically-based plot, or what Arsenault would call a game of progression. This combination provides an extra level of agency for the player by using what Wilhelm Osterberg describes as pre-rendered videos as rewards for completing each chapter of the game (see Appendix C for detailed information on each of Osterberg’s narremes).

![Diagram of Osterberg’s Plot of Narremes]

Figure 9.1: Osterberg’s Plot of Narremes. This chart is a baseline for different narreme delivery methods. The emergence style of gameplay *Diablo II* offers feeds the player’s desire to create their own meaning. Along with the games pre-rendered videos, both ends of Osterberg’s graph are reached, resulting in a satisfying player experience.
While Osterberg’s original intention was to map out the different methods of delivery in single-player action video games, it is easily adaptable to other genres, as we have done with *Diablo II*, and it fits comfortably within the narrative design model. For example, the pre-rendered videos in *Diablo II* are effective because they are integrated between various ‘stages’ of the game. They don’t interrupt gameplay, and when they are presented to the player the first time, they have the option to skip them. Once a video has been unlocked, the player is given the ability to watch it any time they choose. Again, giving control of the experience to the player is part of what keeps them coming back to the game again and again. In game design, we need to see more a shift towards these seamless types of narrative delivery tools and less of game/experience interrupting mechanics such as traditional cutscenes.

Cutscenes are in-game, scripted movies that lock player input (Osterberg). They are narrative delivery methods that the player watches instead of interacts with and are part of the reason for the video game-as-interactive movie myth. Cutscenes can be fine storytelling tools in their own right, but can easily become gratuitous such as in the game *Lair*. Sean O’Keefe, *Lair*’s writer, says that one reason *Lair* failed was because the story was so intrusive to gameplay. The developers wanted to make a movie; instead they made a game (Interview).

Clearly, writing for games is not the same as writing for films or any other medium. However, movie and game writer Justin Marks laments that many developers still cling to the failing idea that games are interactive movies. In the
manual for the popular game, *Gears of War 2*, there is a note from the developers explicitly stating that they wanted to make a more cinematic experience. Game reviewer Nate Ahearn of ign.com writes that the story is better in the sequel than in the original *Gears*, but it is laughable at times, noting it likely that player will not be able to help cracking a “wry smile” because of some of the “cheesy” voiceovers.

Game writing still has much evolving to do before it can reach the levels of sophistication achievable by the more established art forms. But such levels of sophistication are possible. *Diablo II*, which was released in 2000, was able to combine story with played experience in a era before narrative design, and today we have games like *Mass Effect* giving players both visceral gameplay and cognitive story choices in the same play experience. Furthermore, MMOs like *WoW* are enabling player-created characters and narrative independent of the ludological constraints of the game. All of these examples are evidence of Dinehart assertion that, “when executed with skill, a narrative design strategy innately provides the reader/viewer/user/player with a wider cognitive palette from which they can self-author more emotive and visceral interactive fiction experiences” (“Defining”).

Again, note the use of the word, “visceral.” The player is self-authoring a text, but sometimes this authorship is on a subconscious level. Recall Hill’s point about advertisers not wanting customers to *decide* to buy their product, but rather to be *compelled* to. To strike at the core of narrative design is to create an ebb
and flow between the subconscious level of the visceral responses noted by Bogost, Hill, Cho, Dinehart, and others, and the conscious, metalevel of narrative wherein the player consciously makes meaning out of their experience. The latter is the crux for transmedia storytelling and functions on an intellectual level. The former creates the most impactful emotional experiences that are created in interactive entertainment. Regardless, they are both needed to complete the whole experience, and even more importantly, these effects are not achievable when looking through the video games-as-interactive movie lens.

**Environmental Storytelling**

The environment in which one is located impacts their perception of the world, and this holds true for digital or virtual environments such as game spaces. Jenkins notes, “Before we can talk about game narratives we need to talk about game spaces” (122). Yet we are presenting environmental storytelling last in our discussion because it in many ways it is the synthesis of all of the elements previously discussed: narrative design, agency, actualizing potentialities, gameplay as story, etc. But before we dive into game spaces, let us briefly mention the impact of environmental storytelling in the real world.

A roller coaster experience is roughly the sum of its parts. It is a ride, a diversion, and usually an exhilarating experience, though usually a rather short one. When one factors in the time spent waiting in line versus the duration and impact of the experience, one may second-guess the value of the experience. To
combat this, many theme park designers have begun to integrate the time spent waiting in line with the experience. Take rides at Disney Land, for example, that may be themed with certain characters. These characters often appear in different automated scenarios as guests of the park navigate the labyrinthine line. Time spent idle is now converted to time spent engaging in the experience. The guest is immersed in the fictional world of the ride. Disney Imagineer Don Carson thinks that game designers can learn much from studying these very same principles of environmental storytelling (122). Henry Jenkins cites Carson’s explanation:

The story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks...through. It is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell...Armed only with their own knowledge of the world, and those visions collected from movies and books, the audience is ripe to be dropped into your adventure. The trick is to play on those memories and expectations to heighten the thrill of adventuring into your created universe. (qtd. in Jenkins 123)

Carson would argue that a roller coaster experience can be greater than the sum of its parts. Yet again we see the enthymematic principles of meaning-making at work.

Jenkins wisely notes that the most significant difference between theme park designers and game designers is that in the park, visitors are expected to stay behind the guardrails and remain as passive observers. Game designers, however, have the challenge of creating interactive storytelling environments where players are able to poke, prod, throw, move, and fling things about (123). Freelance interactive producer and game designer, Philip Trippenbach, agrees
with Jenkins’s distinction, illustrating the importance of understanding games as games and not as derivative forms of film, theatre, or some other medium:

When you’re looking at a film or a book, you can explore the artefact [sic] as a text, a complete thing in and of itself. A play or screenplay, on the other hand, isn’t ‘finished’ – in order to appraise the writer’s work, you need to see the work performed. The acting, lighting, cinematography and many other arts and crafts all come into play.

When dealing with video games, you have to consider one more thing – the player. Games are defined in part by their interactivity. The value of the medium springs from the iterative exchange between players and code. Because of this, players in video games take a role similar to actors in improvisational theatre, shaping the narrative as the game goes along. (“Drama, Not Prose”)

An important attribute of environmental storytelling in video games is that it creates the conditions for multiple methods of storytelling to exist in the same interactive space. It sets the stage for the player to act out the plot on their own, to discover the plot as they interact with their environment, or to construct their own plot from their unique environmental experiences; these types of experiences are how we are able to combine the enacted, embedded, and emergent narratives (Jenkins 121-129). The strength of environmental storytelling is that is allows these different types of narratives to be experienced concurrently. Recent examples of environmental storytelling being used to increase both agency and immersion can be found in the games *Bioshock Fable*, *Bioshock*, *Fable*, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

*Bioshock* is a first person shooter. When commenting on Justin Marks’s opinion piece, “Is Gameplay As Narrative The Answer,” game writer Micah Wright firmly notes that the first person shooter genre is terrible for telling a story through
the “thinking protagonist.” *Bioshock*, he says, has a great solution for this that is not a story. Instead, Wright says, *Bioshock* is a game where the player uncovers a history in the course of interacting with the game environment. This includes exploring the subtleties of the world, and the not-so-subtle actions of shooting enemies. Agreeing with Osterberg’s chart, Wright says that players don’t want a cutscene-driven story in their first person shooters because they don’t belong in that space in the same way that not wanting a steak while on a rollercoaster doesn’t mean that one doesn’t like steak, rather having a steak is not suitable for the particular context of a roller coaster (“Opinion”).

In *Bioshock*, environmental storytelling creates a sense of agency and empathy—empathy not necessarily with a specific character, but with the world. One *Bioshock* review by Doug Williams notes that the little details add up to create the overall experience. The game is full of “environmental bits” that are not essential to the plot, but absolutely necessary for creating the organic landscape that makes *Bioshock* seem as real and as immersive as it is. Here we see environmental storytelling as another example of how to create an organic experience within the confines of a ludological rule system. All of the subtle touches work so well because they stand on the backbone of *Bioshock*’s gameplay. Williams argues that it is the combination of story and gameplay, manifested in the environmental ambiance, that makes *Bioshock* stand out as “a monolithic example of the convergence of entertaining gameplay and an irresistibly sinister, engrossing storyline” (Williams).
In *Fable*, environmental storytelling is used to strengthen player agency. Osterberg notes that there is a moment during the game when the player returns to what was formerly a picturesque village only to find it engulfed in flames. This is important because it shows that things are actually happening in the world. The player understands that they are not just an amusement park observer, held in check by the restraining gates, but an active agent in a changeable world, influencing the environment on large and small scales based on their actions (53). Osterberg concludes that manipulating the environment is thus a powerful way of conveying story without inhibiting gameplay…” He underscores the importance of understanding the influence of gameplay on narrative and vice-versa, stating,

> If you [the designer] have a strong sense of what the player is going to want to do – because that’s what’s fun to do – you can craft the narrative to take advantage of that player desire. Story and gameplay end up reinforcing each other, the player feels like they’re driving the action and doing cool things, and everyone wins. (Osterberg 53)

Similarly, in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, the player can find audio recordings from villains that create an embedded narrative as part of the environment all while Batman follows an enacted narrative to his goal. The player, as Batman, is able to piece together the stories of their enemies’ pasts while advancing the agency of their present. Here, as in *BioShock* and *Fable*, the player is experiencing both plot and story.
Arkham does an excellent job of maintaining agency, even during moments primarily designed to advance the enacted and embedded plots. Game writer and designer Emily Short praises the narrative designers of Arkham:

When Batman falls into Scarecrow's clutches and is forced to live through his nightmares...there are scenes that aren't exactly cut-scenes, but in which the player's interaction is narrowed so that he can only walk forward, experiencing the environment that Scarecrow has created for him. (Alexander)

Short cites the significance of the cutscenes being *playable*. Instead of yanking the player out of the ludological experience and forcing them into a narrative one, these playable cutscenes are simultaneously engaging the player on both ludological and narratological levels. With this new type of narreme, the playable cutscene, we could modify Osterberg's original graph:
Figure 9.2: Osterberg’s Plot of Narremes (modified). The playable cutscene occupies two spaces on the graph. It is a narreme that at once engages the player in both the gameplay and narrative.

In this updated graph, we see our first hard evidence of how to integrate gameplay and story. Whether it be through environmental subtleties, dynamic environments, or playable cutscenes, environmental storytelling can be used to encapsulate the principles of narrative design, namely, setting the stage for the player to explore, immerse themselves, and create their own interpretation of the played experience, all while participating in an enacted narrative. As designers and scholars, we need to continue to scrutinize Osterberg and others’ descriptions of narrative delivery in video games. The more red ovals we can add
to the graph, the more tools we will have to design better games and take the video game art form to the next level of sophistication.
CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS

As we have shown, narrative delivery in the video game space is a complicated system. We are challenged with the goal of creating unique, organic experiences within the confines of a given rule system, but we have shown that these goals are achievable through the proper execution of narrative design. This is a delicate art, because in the game space, we have access to many ways of telling stories, and we must be aware of which methods are appropriate for our given context. If we were to design a game with every single delivery system we have discussed, our game would become filled with white noise—distractions between the player and the experience.

As Lidwell et. al. point out, over-taxation causes people stress and frustration. When people are cognitively under-taxed, they become apathetic and bored. They note that, “Immersion occurs when perceptual and cognitive systems are challenged at near capacity without being exceeded. Under these conditions, a person loses a sense of the ‘real’ world and typically experiences intense feelings of joy or satisfaction” (112). This is the delicate art that we as game designers must master. Storytelling becomes a tool that we use within gameplay to achieve higher levels of immersion.

Critics such as Espen Aarseth claim that game rules and narration are not easily mixed and agency is irrelevant, citing for example, that the story of Star Wars is unextractable from a game of the same name (51). It is unclear to which
version of the *Star Wars* game he was referring, but Celia Pearce would agree that to say that the story is unextractable from film to game is a mistake; “*Star Wars* is a great example of a story world tailor-made for gaming” (153).

*SUPER STAR WARS*, a game for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System from the 1990s told the story of the film, and it did this without interrupting gameplay. The story was told through cutscenes between missions and gave a general outline of the plot of the movie, but not the details. As a player who at the time had never seen the film, I filled in those details with my imagination. When I finally did see the film, it allowed me to make meaning out of the experience in a whole different way.

![Image of Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back](image)

**Figure 10:** *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. The game successfully told a non-detailed version of the story without interrupting gameplay.

In another refutation of the notion that the story of *Star Wars* cannot be deduced from a *Star Wars* game, Jenkins notes that a direct one-to-one understanding doesn’t matter. As we have already noted, even in early *Star Wars* games, the player is able to infer their own meaning from the story world. Jenkins

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53
would add that a game version of *Star Wars* needn’t retell the story in order to enrich our experience in the *Star Wars* universe. We live in a world of transmedia storytelling, he notes, a world that he says

…depends less on each individual work being self sufficient than on each work contributing to a larger narrative economy…*Star Wars* games exists in the dialogue with the films, conveying new narrative experiences through its creative manipulation of environmental details. One can imagine games taking their place within a larger narrative system with story information communicated through books, film, television, comic, and other media, each doing what it does best, each a relatively autonomous experience, but the richest understanding of the story world coming to those who follow the narrative across the various channels. (Jenkins 124)

Jenkins is clear in his refutation of Aarseth’s argument that games are self-contained experiences. Video games, he notes, should not be functions of the aspirations of the storyteller, but the process of narrative comprehension (121). Understanding video games in a transmedia context is the final crucial component of evolving the art form.

**Transmedia Storytelling**

We can understand storytelling in a transmedia context by looking in an unexpected place: the museum. A piece of boxing headgear worn by Muhammad Ali, who at the time was still known as Cassius Clay, is set to be on display at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, scheduled to be opened in 2015. The headgear was worn during the time when Ali was training for his first title fight with Sonny Liston. Dr. Lonnie Bunch, the director of the museum, was asked in an interview if he planned on putting the headgear in the
sports exhibition section. He replied saying, no, because according to Bunch, all of the personal struggles of Ali were represented in that headgear, and the struggles of Ali encompassed many of the struggles of African Americans during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. All of the rallies, the inspirational speeches, the segregated diners and shops, the race-related violence, were encapsulated in that one piece, which Bunch believes transcends sport. Indeed, Bunch recalls that as a museum, “part of our obligation is to tell stories that are unvarnished truth, tell stories that are going to be complicated and difficult and tell stories that are going to be controversial” (“Museum’s Latest Treasure”), because as a culture and as individuals, we are in many ways the stories we tell.

In Bunch’s example, Ali’s headgear serves as an entry point into the larger story of African Americans in the 1960s, and even into more contemporary issues that have arisen in Ali’s life, such as his battle with Parkinson’s disease. The headgear serves as a springboard to launch the museum visitor down a path of discovery as they relate separate topics that share a connection through the headgear. In the context of the museum universe, the headgear serves as the entry point into other historical spaces.
Figure 11.1: Ali’s Multi-topic Web. Using Ali’s headgear as a centerpiece, various disparate topics are linked together. This linkage increases understanding and meaning of both the individual topics and the sum of the parts. Thus, the complexity of the web is increased by connecting each of the secondary topics to one another and we improve our understanding of the world.

The understanding one obtains from exploring the offshoots of the entry point is enthymematic in nature. Recall that in the enthymematic model, information is purposefully omitted for the user or player to infer their own conclusions (see Figure 2.2 on page 18). The same can be said of the museum universe in the preceding Ali example. For example, one might combine their knowledge of civil rights with their knowledge of the Vietnam War in such a way to draw a new conclusion never considered before. The museum context gives the framework for this to happen by giving its visitors many different windows through which to view the same object—the world. But it is up to the museum
visitors to infer the significance of the connections they make. This type of meaning making is a fundamental component of transmedia storytelling.

![Diagram](image)

Civil Rights + Vietnam War = New Understanding

Figure 11.2: The Enthymematic Method of Meaning Making: Museum. In this model, Ali’s headgear is used as the springboard.

A transmedia storytelling context in video games functions similarly to the museum storytelling context referenced above. Instead of using an exhibit piece as a springboard, we use a media entry in the transmedia universe. A media entry can be a game, a film, a web site, a graphic novel, a novel, a play, or any other media form that exists in the universe of a given intellectual property. This springboard serves as the channel through which the player or user, depending on which type of media is being used, can access other parts of the intellectual property in the transmedia web. Regarding the relationships to each entry in the transmedia web, Henry Jenkins notes:

Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa...Reading across the media
sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. Redundancy between media burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail. Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty. ("Transmedia Storytelling")

As each entry in the intellectual property (IP) is related to the next, any of them can serve as the springboard, provided they are designed with a transmedia context in mind. In this manner, audience members have multiple entry points into which they can enter and explore the fictional universe.

Figure 11.3: A Transmedia Web. This web uses video games as the entry point into other entries in the universe. Any of the transmedia entries can serve as the springboard. In this case, gaming was arbitrarily chosen.

Jenkins points out that transmedia storytelling isn’t anything new. People tell stories, “enshrined in stain glass windows or tapestries, told through printed words or sung by bards and poets, or enacted by traveling performers”
He notes that sequels are not a bad thing either, asking us to remember that *Huckleberry Finn* was a sequel to *Tom Sawyer*. According to Jenkins, Mark Twain “understood what modern storytellers seem to have forgotten—a compelling sequel offers consumers a new perspective on the characters, rather than just more of the same” (“Transmedia Storytelling”). The same can be said for entries in a transmedia universe. Transmedia developer Jeff Gomez points out that transmedia storytelling is not branded entertainment that simply tacks a brand onto something else in the way the TV show *The Apprentice* builds its jobs around Burger King or other brand name products. Instead, transmedia properties are about empowering the audience not only to make their own conclusions about the fictional universe, but to become authors of their own related texts themselves. Stephen Dinehart concludes:

> In a transmedial work the viewer/user/player (VUP) transforms the story via his or her own natural cognitive psychological abilities, and enables the Artwork to surpass medium…Thus the VUP becomes the true producer of the Artwork. The Artist authored transmedia elements act a story guide for the inherently narratological nature of the human mind…to become thought, both conscious and subconscious, in the imagination of the VUP. (“Transmedial Play”)

We can gather through Dinehart’s description that the functional methods of transmedia storytelling share commonalities with the theories of narrative design—that is, the building of a framework within which an audience can create their own meaning.

Examples of audience created content are abundant. Will Wright pointed out in his 2009 SIGGRAPH keynote that fans of the TV show, *Lost* have been busy creating their own transmedia content. As of the summer of 2009, on the
Lostpedia, the show’s own wiki, a mid-level character on the show had more words in their entry than Barack Obama had in his own Wikipedia entry.

Furthermore, fans of the show were able to reverse engineer a map of the island based on descriptions, locations, and images from the show.

In the 2009 film, Avatar, a fictional language was produced for the Na’vi, the alien race portrayed in the film. Enough of the language was developed to communicate the lines needed for the film, but nothing beyond that. Since then, fans of the film have taken up developing the language further and have set up websites for grammar and vocabulary, and are also enterprising by selling shirts with phrases printed on them in the Na’vi language. A similar process occurred with the Klingon language from Stark Trek.

A transmedia approach can also be applied to activism and social change, as groups such as the HP Alliance (Harry Potter) have been established and use a transmedia approach to galvanize support for social causes. These are just a few of the numerous examples of how audiences are using today’s technology and media intellectual properties to become creators in their own right.

Forms of expression will always exist as their own autonomous units, such as the Cormac McCarthy novel, The Road, or Alan Moore’s graphic novel, Watchmen. Though each has been made into a film, in both cases (as in many) the films were retellings of the original story, not an expansion thereof. Along those lines, not all video games will fit into a transmedia context; some games
will solely function as games. However, a game to film adaptation is not, as Celia Pearce contends, a synthesis of elements that are diametrically opposed.

To Pearce, the function of character in film is to be fully developed, versus in games, where if the character is too developed there is nothing compelling to which the player can contribute—no agency (152). She argues that part of the reason the game to movie adaptation has resulted in such poor quality films—the highest rated film based on a game IP at the film review site rottentomatoes.com is a paltry 44 percent for the 2001 film, Final Fantasy, The Spirits Within—is because the games off of which the films are based were not designed with the leap to the big screen in mind (“Best Video Game Adaptations”). This barrier can be overcome, however, if we remember that in a transmedia context, games and film are each part of a universe, not the universe entire. Only then can we design each entry accordingly.

Pearce’s reasoning about the opposition of character may be true in literal adaptations, but in a carefully crafted transmedia IP where each entry is an extension of the universe, this ceases to be a problem and becomes more of an asset. The conclusion space of the enthymematic model is greatly enriched by different viewpoints. As in the museum example, overlapping perceptions allow for new understandings in the conclusion space (see Appendix D for more details on the conclusion space).
Figure 11.4: The Enthymematic Method of Meaning-making: Transmedia. As more entries are added to the transmedia web, the conclusion space (the area of the overlapping circles) becomes more and more complex, allowing for an enriched understanding of the intellectual property in which the audience is immersed.

In this context, games are free to be games. They don’t have to be movies—or anything else—because they have those media elements in their transmedia web, supporting the game as part of the whole and as its own autonomous entity. So, story as we defined it—in terms of the formalist, story-as-player-constructed-meaning—really isn’t important to a video game that is part of a transmedia IP. While storytelling is very much a part of video games today, it is not what games are about. As transmedia Steve Danuser concludes, “We just have to get better at telling stories within the experience of play instead of falling back on traditional narrative.” Video games are not interactive films. They are not cyberdramas. They are not game-stories or story-games. Video games are video games, and as we have argued, a more interdisciplinary approach to the study
and production of them is needed so that the discipline will have the room it needs to truly grow and advance as an art form. At the same time, we must hold on to the core tenets of what makes a video game a video game and not get swept away in the tide of emergent interactive media.

Video games tell stories, but they do much more than that. The methods of narrative design allow designers to adapt the content and structure of games to meet specific design goals. They can be experiential, telling an interactive story like a movie that is played. They can be immersive, engaging players both emotionally and cognitively. They can be epistemic, allowing players to construct their own experiences and meaning from context. Video games can be all of these things. They are not, fundamentally any of them, and we must understand how, when, and why to best use the various processes they offer as a medium.

In an effort to reach this understanding, we have shown how the current state of the art empowers players to invent their own unique experiences through the processes of enthymematic meaning-making. We have shown that the large-scale mobilization of a community is possible in video game environments—study of the upcoming Blizzard release, StarCraft II, which is scheduled to be integrated with the social networking site, Facebook, should yield an insightful representation into our understanding of how mainstream video games fit into our real and digital lives. Finally, we have shown that video games employ the tools to engage players on emotional, intellectual and meta levels, all at the same time. By understanding these processes that games use to communicate, we can
make better games. By making better games, we can not only grow the medium as an art form, but we can engage players on levels outside of the played experience and enable them to become more thoughtful and creative people.
Appendix A:

Results of Informal Qualitative Survey of a Target User Group: *World of Warcraft* players

**How important is story in a game?**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bloodninja</td>
<td>Most games I play now I play with a basic lack of care or understanding of the story line unless it is superb. Basically, I've seen it all in my old age, so the average &quot;save the princess&quot; storyline does jack shit for me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>Gameplay makes good games. You can have a game with a great story, but if the game play is crap more than likely the game will be bad. You can have a bad story, but great gameplay and the game will be good. If you have a great story and great gameplay then it's more than likely to be great game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torvald</td>
<td>The way I view story is that it's not important to creating a single good action/adventure game, but today it has become very important if you have ambitions of creating a good single-player gaming franchise. In the old days, it didn't take much to make a franchise out of one successful side-scroller with minimal story, and the (sometimes still minimal) stories that have grown around those franchises got added later. But today, people have access to so many gaming options, even if you come up with some really cool way to design a game, it doesn't seem like it will take too long before other developers use a similar design or improve on your design and make something better. The thing a game designer can count on controlling the most is the story of their game world. In the context of the first game made, a good story won't be worth anything if the gameplay is terrible, because no one will want to play it. If you have the good gameplay however, the story can pay off later quite a bit. If you created a strong enough story, people will want to know what happens next. If you can get the gamer invested in the characters of your story, they'll be a lot more likely to follow those characters in other games. How many people thought that Final Fantasy X-2 looked really gay? The singing, girl-power, the renaming of the old style &quot;job system&quot; to &quot;dress spheres.&quot; But the game didn't do badly, and I guarantee you most of the people who bought it did it solely out of wanting a satisfying ending to Final Fantasy X. A lot of good games never rise to the level of success that they deserve. There are surely tons of good games with good gameplay and good stories that I'll never hear about. But if you manage to gain recognition with one game, a good story can keep your follow-up games in the spotlight.</td>
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Drksdeotmnn | If a game's storyline doesn't draw me in by the time I'm say 2 hours into it I'm not going to play it (unless its an FPS in which case I likely bough it because I just wanted to see blood or boobs (or both). Final Fantasy is what got me into video games (the main games, not these stupid spinoffs) and to this day FFVII and FFX are my favorite games. |

**Is the importance of story genre dependent?**

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<tr>
<td>Antipathe</td>
<td>I think the importance of story is very much genre dependent. Borderlands and...</td>
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</table>
MW2 are both very good games with little or no story that I can remember. Most role playing games rely very heavily on a story. So what does the difference come from? I think its based entirely on the way the game is meant to be played.

An FPS, fighting game, etc., does not need a solid story because human-to-human interactions are not a relevant part of the game. It's like adding a romantic twist to an action movie - no one gives a shit, its irrelevant. Gameplay here is based on skill or hand eye coordination - glorified pong.

In an RPG, adventure game, etc., storyline becomes more important because the gameplay is based at least in part on social interactions. If you're going up to people and engaging in conversations to further gameplay, the story is integral to those conversations making sense and fit into the game and story as a bigger picture. In essence, the game IS the story, and these genres can be a powerful storytelling medium.

Obviously there's some blurring of lines in here, and story never really HURTS a game - but I think as games move along the spectrum from mindless finger-twitching to immersing yourself in a world and society, the importance of a story increases.

In my opinion it is fairly important both what genre the game is, and the type of gameplay the game is trying to focus on whether or not the story is important.

In general, RPGs need a very strong story in order to be enjoyable, especially single player focused RPGs. Elders Scrolls series of games, any of Bioware's games, Final Fantasy etc, all are games that are generally very well received and have extremely deep stories and that's what draws people to play the games. In terms of MMOs and other RPGs designed more for multiplayer or at least not necessarily immersion, (dungeon siege comes to mind) hack and slash type basically need only a fundamental story to supplement the gameplay.

FPS's generally don't need much in the way of story to be good. The greatest single player fps's (Half Life Series etc) all have great stories though. While the ones that do not generally are good because of their multiplayer capabilities.

In general, RPGs need a very strong story in order to be enjoyable, especially single player focused RPGs. Elders Scrolls series of games, any of Bioware's games, Final Fantasy etc, all are games that are generally very well received and have extremely deep stories and that's what draws people to play the games. In terms of MMOs and other RPGs designed more for multiplayer or at least not necessarily immersion, (dungeon siege comes to mind) hack and slash type basically need only a fundamental story to supplement the gameplay.

Story: Anything I have to say about the importance of story is limited to action / adventure. For RPG's, story is a massively important aspect for creating a single good game. If a game is based on mimicking a sport (Madden games) or an art (like music with Guitar Hero), story has almost no impact.

Is there a difference between narrative and story?

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<tr>
<th>Player</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloodninja</td>
<td>A narrative is definitely different, as it keeps you updated to the pace and place of what is happening. I think games with a great story require a great narrative, but a great narrative doesn't require a great story.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volarun</td>
<td>I personally prefer when games seem more story driven and less narrative. Its just more fun and easier to get immersed when it feels like your decisions matter rather than you are running through the baseline script of what is going to happen and if you don't do it right you have to start over or at least do it the 'correct' way. FPS's get away with simple narratives better and can at least provide</td>
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entertainment in the first playthrough but they have little to no single player replay value in my opinion, and as such better have at least enjoyable multiplayer.

**How important is the community of people you play with? Do you enjoy single player or multiplayer games more?**

**Bloodninja**

The people you play with make the game in multiplayer games. Most games nowadays have a multiplayer aspect, because humanity as a whole is a social creature. We like to compare and contrast ourselves with our fellow gamers. We like to have someone to talk to about things... The age of the single player game is over, and while they will still be produced, if you look at hours player for video games, there are very few single player games that hold a candle nowadays. Modern Warfare, WoW, DOTA, Half-life, all these games are so popular because of their multiplayer aspect.

**Antipathe**

Once again, this is genre dependent. If it's a storyline-based game, the community is less important as the simulated social interaction is already present in the game. I'm immersed in a story and there are other "people" around me, even if they're just cartoon voices. For FPS, action games, etc., the community is very important as otherwise I'm just playing fancy Pong by myself and it gets boring fast.

**Volarun**

How important is the community of people you play with? Do you enjoy single player or multiplayer games more?

Generally I find multiplayer to be more fun than single player. But there are exceptions because of the great storytelling involved in the single player aspect. Dragon Age, Oblivion, Half Life, Baldur's Gate, all have very good stories and I can play them over and over. But you can only do that so much whereas multiplayer capabilities add more replay to the game and the community becomes a huge and drawing aspect to continue playing the game even after you have at least mastered the basics.

Whether the community is the friends you with, or the people you compete against I feel like the quality of the community determines how long you continue playing the games more than anything else.

**Torvald**

Community: In single player games, community is almost irrelevant. It can still serve the useful role of giving feedback to designers about what players would like to see in sequels of games (or patches), but aside from that it barely registers.

In multiplayer games, it's integral. There's two real community types. There's just having a large enough player base to set matches up against, and then there's having friends who play the game with you. The first is needed in order to have an operative environment for multiplayer, so it's always necessary, but the second is important because it's creating an auxiliary source of enjoyment for the game.

With the MMO world, I think there's an insidious relationship that's developed between community and character advancement. Character advancement in a continuing game creates a sense of investment in the character, and no one likes to walk away from an investment. Similarly, no one likes to walk away from a community of friends either. It buttresses the ties the player has to the game, and probably drastically hurts the competition. The top guys in other gaming companies must realize that even if someone creates a better MMO than Blizzard, it's unlikely they'd ever take Blizzard's top spot. Not only will people feel
invested in their WoW characters, but they'll invested with their WoW friends. The people who might have the will to leave the character may not have the will to leave the guild in WoW.

With non-character advancement MMO's, community has a much easier time switching. A group of people who love RTS games will eventually switch to a newer, better RTS than the current one they're playing. A community switching their game doesn't happen fast, but it still happens at a decent pace. That's not really the case when character advancement gets involved. It can happen, but it's a lot more rare and a lot slower.

Not to say I want to leave WoW. I'm loving ICC. But there is a bad side to the connection of community with character advancement in a single MMO.

**What makes a good game?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloodninja</td>
<td>A good game offers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advancement and Escapism. That is what all those games have in common. You will never see a game called &quot;Accountant Adventures&quot; or &quot;Scientist Sundays&quot; or &quot;Cubicle Rearranger II.&quot; People want to feel gains and to feel powerful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neaves</td>
<td>A &quot;game&quot; is unique in that it can provide factors in a way real life isn't able to. The only difference between &quot;Doing the dishes&quot; and &quot;doing my daily quest&quot; is in the actions, and the reward; ask yourself which you'd rather engage in, and why.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B:

Figurative versus Literal Gameplay in the Atari 2600

The cover of *Space Invaders*, *Adventure*, and *Star Trek* insinuated that the action was more intense than it actually was. The gap between concept and gameplay allowed—or forced—player imagination to fill in the gaps.
Appendix C:

Wilhelm Osterberg’s Eleven Storytelling Tools in Single-player Action Games

1. **Pre-rendered video:** (Often called FMVs, Full Motion Videos) Pre-rendered cinematic scenes, pausing the game and locking user input. Example: In Just Cause, the player is treated to a pre-rendered video clip at the beginning and end of every main mission.

2. **In-game cutscenes:** Cinematic scenes that are played out within the game engine, (i.e. using the same models and environments that are used for the actual game) pausing gameplay and locking user input. Example: In-game cutscenes with high cinematic quality are used extensively in Gun, often including quite a bit of violence to induce dislike for the game’s villains.

3. **Scripted sequences:** The same as cutscenes, but without locking user input: the player retains full control of his character during the scripted sequence and the gameplay is not halted. Many missions and tasks are implemented as scripted sequences without them conveying any story. The distinction here is that the sequence must mediate some kind of narrative content to be considered a storytelling tool. Example: As mentioned above, Call of Duty uses scripted sequences in a great way, never taking away control of the main character and allowing the player to lose the feeling of agency.

4. **Voice-over:** Voice over during play – a narrator’s, the main character’s or another character’s voice conveying story. The distinction here being that this does not pause or inhibit gameplay in any way. Technically this is a scripted sequence, but to the player there is a difference in that the voice-over doesn’t intrude in the gameplay. Although voice-over could be considered a subset of scripted sequences, this distinction is important: the voice-over is a more subtle tool with its own areas of use. Example: Voice-over is used cleverly in GTA: San Andreas when the main character and supporting NPCs are traveling by car to (or from) mission hotspots. These lulls in gameplay are thus used to convey story in an unintrusive manner.

5. **Ambient actions:** NPC reactions to the player not directed directly at the player and/or not directly affecting gameplay, for example cheers and rants as well as visible NPC-NPC interaction. This too could be interpreted as scripted sequences, but is quite different in its implementation. Ambient actions are rather implemented as an AI system governing NPC actions and reactions. Example: In Just Cause, firefights erupt between the guerilla and the army when troops from these warring factions come too close to each other.

6. **Character development:** The aging, growth, changed looks and improved skills of the main character, preferably dependent on player choices. Admittedly, the distinction of what is character development in this sense is blurred somewhat; picking up a weapon could be seen as improving a skill (killing), but has very limited narrative potential. An interesting implementation of character
development is to let narrative sequences carry over into the gameplay by showing consequences of the sequence on the main character (e.g. letting an FMV showing the main character suffer a head injury result in him carrying an eye patch for the rest of the game). Example: Eating too much fast food in GTA: San Andreas makes the main character gain weight, eventually becoming obese.

7. **Location evolution**: The changing and evolution of visited locations and environments returned to, meaning a changing of the looks (and possibly also the gameplay possibilities) of parts of the game arena. Example: The idyllic village that Fable starts in. A little further into the game the player returns to the same village, but it now looks completely different as it is burning and under attack by bandits.

8. **Interactive dialogue**: Text and/or voice dialogue, traditionally where the player chooses from a set number of different text lines to interact vocally with NPCs. This makes an interesting combination of narrative text from the NPC and player choice in what to reply. Example: A simple type of interactive dialogue is present in Fable, where the player can answer “yes” or “no” to NPC questions by pressing a button.

9. **Storytelling items**: Journals, notes, books, TVs and other items bearing narrative content that can be found in the game world (and often picked up) by the main character and read, viewed or listened to by the player, at the player’s own discretion. Example: In Fable, there are a number of books that can be found and read (or sold) by the player. These contain much information that helps in bringing the game world to life and providing backstory.

10. **Player journal**: An automatic player journal that is recording the events as they happen in the game. The journal often includes notes on the main character’s feelings and thoughts as well, making it unique. The journal also takes a unique position on the edge between game and real world, being an item carried by the main character in the game world as well as an interface aid for the player. Example: In Fable, there is an in-game menu mainly featuring gameplay tips and information about how the game world works. Under the headline “story” there is an integrated journal telling the story so far in short segments in first person, as if told by the main character.

11. **Plain text**: Storytelling through the displaying of pure narrative text, often displayed in a text-box overlaying the gameplay area on screen. Since a few years ago, plain narrative text is seldomly displayed without being read aloud.
Appendix D: Conclusion Space

The conclusion space is defined by the area where the circles overlap. It represents the possibility of understanding that audience members can create. The audience can be defined by the players of the game, readers of the book, viewers of the film, etc.

A game by itself is limited in meaning. A player can interpret the various narremes used in the game by bringing their own personal context to the table. However, in a transmedia context, the understanding of the game or book experience is enriched by an understanding of the other.

As more entries are added to the transmedia web, the conclusion space becomes more and more complex, allowing for an enriched understanding of the intellectual property in which the audience is immersed.
More entries can be added to the web, further adding to the possibilities of the conclusion space.


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Image Credits

Figure 1.1: Shining Force Battle Map.

retrogamer.net. np. nd. Web. 8 July 2010.
< http://www.retrogamer.net/users/495/thm1024/shiningforce2.jpg >

Figures 1.2: Character Development in Shining Force: Elliot.


Figure 1.3: Character Development in Shining Force: Bleu.


Figure 2.1: The Syllogism

Original.

Figure 2.2: The Enthymeme

Original.

Figure 3: Narrative Design, adapted from:


Figure 4.1: The Neo-Aristotelian Model of Classic Drama, adapted from:


Figure 4.2: The Neo-Aristotelian Model of Interactive Drama, adapted from:


Figure 5: Façade.

< http://interactivestory.net/ >
Figure 6.1: Default WoW UI.


Figure 6.2: Customized End Game WoW UI.


Figure 7.1: Brenda Laurel’s Flying Wedge, originally from:


adapted from:


Figure 7.2: Form From Chaos.

Original.

Figure 8.1: The Visceral Impact of Mass Effect 2.


Figure 8.2: A Conversation in Mass Effect.

np. nd. Web. 6 July 8, 2010 < http://idg.bg/test/pcw/2008/7/31/7003-masseffect_75_1280x760.jpg >

Figure 9.1: Osterberg’s Plot of Narremes, adapted from:


Figure 9.2: Osterberg’s Plot of Narremes (modified), adapted from:

Figure 10: Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.


Figure 11.1: Ali’s Multi-topic Web

Original.

Figure 11.2: The Enthymematic Method of Meaning Making: Museum.

Original.

Figure 11.3: A Transmedia Web.

Original.

Figure 11.4: The Enthymematic Method of Meaning Making: Transmedia.

Original.

Appendix B: Space Invaders Cover.


Appendix B: Space Invaders Gameplay.


Appendix B: Adventure Cover.


Appendix B: Adventure Gameplay.

Appendix B: *Star Trek Cover*.

< http://www.gamersace.com/images/Atari-StarTrek.jpg >

Appendix B: *Star Trek* Gameplay.

< http://www.videogamecritic.net/images/2600/star_trek.png >

Appendix C: Conclusion Space.

*Original.*