At Home Everywhere:
Empowerment Fantasies in the Domestication of Videogames

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation engages conversations about the meaning and function of videogames within domestic spaces in 1990s and 2000s convergence culture. The introductory chapter discusses fantasy as a constituent of domesticity, and makes a case for how fantasy can be thought of as a bridge for videogame formalism and research into the context of play. It begins by discussing the "rhetorics of play" in game studies along with videogame medium specificity, introducing the notion of empowerment fantasy in relation to a rhetoric of frivolity, and providing a historical sketch of the arcade spaces where games were played before they were a primarily domestic phenomenon. It argues that the videogame precursor, arcade pinball, was understood and validated through a rhetoric of power, skill, and control, and a corresponding "sports masculinity." This is consequential for how we think of what gaming, as a business and cultural phenomenon, inherited from discourses on the threat and function of arcade spaces. In turn, this is an important context for gaming's transition into domestic spaces.

By identifying textual activity in games outside the auspices of narrative, Chapter 1 expands prevailing models of media-content convergence, which tend to assume games are inherently cinematic for their storytelling potential (and movies game-like when made with branching narratives). I argue that a far more meaningful site of convergence between videogames and movies is a shared body fantasy about collision and movement through space— a kinetic expression that is mapped to body schema through repeated practice in videogame play, and that takes on broader narrative significance in action-hero cinema. Building on feminist film theory's use of fantasy for textual interpretation of repetitious home viewing (Walkerdine, 1986), this chapter lays the groundwork for thinking about empowerment fantasy in popular entertainment.

The second chapter introduces and tracks a "body-transcendence" fantasy in action videogames of the 1990s and 2000s. In defining the fantasy of having a transcendent body, it considers new applications in entertainment media for Niedzviecki's (2006) "I'm specialism," in which a longed-for specialness (extreme individuality) represents a new kind of (American)

consumer conformity. It explores the wish for mastery expressed at the level of body memory in action videogames in terms of what Carlson (1981) calls a "politics of powerlessness," an overtly ineffectual exercising of traditional mechanisms of power that blends protest with a kind of withdrawal from political reality (George Wallace, Donald Trump). This chapter's central fantasy connects games with a melodramatic action cinema, which is addressed here, but discussed extensively in the following chapter.

The third chapter discusses the "body-transcendence" fantasy in melodramatic action-hero television and cinema, a super-genre that Shaun Treat (2009) called the "superhero zeitgeist" of the late-1990s, and 2000s. In these films (e.g., *The Matrix, The Iron Giant, Kung Fu Hustle*) and television shows (e.g., *Naruto, Daredevil*) the transposition of narrative conflict into bodily terms (a phenomenon remarked upon by Lisa Purse, 2007) reflects a wish for mastery expressed at the level of body memory shared with action videogames in the early 1990s. The chapter uses games and cinema to inform one another, developing new approaches for thinking about convergence in entertainment media.

Chapter 4 identifies and describes a core empowerment fantasy shared by videogames and narrative media. The "tether fantasy," which is defined through careful videogame textual analysis as the pleasure of leaving a safe point and venturing into unknown, dangerous spaces, as well as the pleasure of returning to safety. The chapter draws from a variety of academic sources that discuss a tether (or equivalent) phenomenon. "Tether fantasy" is a literal psychoanalytic term to describe a kind of residual separation anxiety, and this corresponds to the behavioral-psychological framework of attachment theory. But rather than grounding its claims in these disciplines, this chapter focuses on demonstrating how a "tether fantasy" can be described in other domains, such as architectural design, narrative media, and (increasingly) as an empowerment fantasy in videogames. This fantasy, more than any other in the dissertation, describes gaming's relationship to the home, since the tether is part of the design of many games, but is also descriptive of how games fit into what Barbara Klinger calls the "home-entertainment fortress." This chapter explores the implications of reading games in relation to other media through a shared "tether" fantasy, an analytical lens which influences how we think about empowerment in games, videogame genre, historical precursors to games, and gaming's relationship with broader cultural and historical patterns.

The fifth and final chapter identifies and describes a core empowerment fantasy driving growth in videogame genres, but which does not exist as coherently in narrative media or contexts outside of videogame and tabletop play. The "accretions fantasy" is defined through careful videogame textual analysis as the pleasure of correcting weakness by gathering and accruing objects, items, and power from a game's spaces and characters. In a game, the accretion represents increasing stability in the face of threat, and I tie this pattern to Freud's "nirvana principle," but through the disguise of an endless array of busy activity (the seeming opposite of quiescence). This chapter tracks the accretion fantasy as it intersects with other empowerment fantasies in games—especially the tether fantasy (but also the fantasy of bodily transcendence)—extending analysis into videogame genre begun earlier in the dissertation. The chapter intervenes directly into research into videogame motivation predicated on "Skinner box" theories (stimulus-response and reward schedules) of psychology in order to argue that videogames *cannot* be reduced to reward schedules alone (cannot be conflated with slot machine play). The notion of fantasy here—and how this fantasy intersects with other, more readily "narrative" fantasies like the tether—helps articulate how games are both structured by but not reducible to their systems, their core loops or hooks.

The dissertation's conclusion briefly discusses nostalgia as an effect of a particular kind of relationship between daily life and videogame fantasy in domestic space.

To Eldrus, my partner in games

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Acknowledgments

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The research that follows was largely written from the comfort of the new CITRIS building on campus, where I was allotted an adjustable desk, and seemingly limitless bookshelf space. This is just one of the many ways being a DE student with the Berkeley Center for New Media (BCNM) made this work possible. The BCNM also supported my doctoral research through the New Media Summer Research Fellowship Award, as well as by providing many opportunities for feedback from a wonderful interdisciplinary group of scholars at student research presentations. Special acknowledgment should go to Greg Niemeyer who offered invaluable advice on the contents of my dissertation, and whose grad seminar on the rhetoric of games helped solidify my academic interest in the topic.

Introduction: Empowerment Fantasy, Rhetoric of Power, and Videogame "Domestication"

Nearly thirty years ago, David Sudnow first encountered the Atari 2600 port of *Missile Command* (1980) at a professor's home in the Berkeley hills. While a novelty for most of the drunken Berkeley intellectuals gathered around the screen, *Missile Command* would be Sudnow's gateway game—the game that "hooked" him (made him "stoned on button pushing"[1]) and compelled him the very next day to buy his own 2600. Since *Missile Command* was not in stock, he instead purchased *Breakout* (1976), a game with which Sudnow would soon become obsessed, and about which he would subsequently author a book (*Pilgrim in the Microworld*) that stands, even thirty years later, as one of the most detailed personal accounts of videogame infatuation. In *Breakout*, players must clear lines of blocks by bouncing a virtual ball back and forth between blocks and paddle. The challenge is not just in hitting the ball with the paddle, but in predicting and controlling the trajectory of the bounce, and being prepared for moments when the velocity of the ball suddenly increases (the "breakaway slam"). Sudnow's granular description of his struggle to develop the requisite motor control analogizes gameplay to athleticism and virtuoso piano performance. He even discusses the (subsequently dubbed) "Tetris effect" of hallucinating a game following prolonged and intense engagement—"I'd woken up in the morning with the silhouette of that psychedelectric landscape still etched on my retina" (1983: 31). His prose is suffused with praise of skill, mastery, flow, and self-improvement through training:

> I served again. The ball's coming down over there and my paddle's here. How fast to go? A smooth gesture knows from the outset when it'll get where it's headed, as a little pulse is established that lays out the upcoming arrival time, a compressed "ready, set, go" built into the start of the movement. The gesture then feels when to speed up and slow down to attain the target. I swing the bat back and forth to acquire its weight, establish a usable rhythm then held in reserve as I await the ball, preparing for a well timed movement anywhere within the arc of the swing. (Sudnow, 1983: 38-9)

Thirty-four years later, a UC Berkeley graduate student plays *Dark Souls III* (2016) in a Berkeley apartment. Neither piano nor sports player, he nevertheless enjoys a fluid "eye-hand partnership" that was developed in the videogames he played growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. He is stuck at a difficult boss fight—trying to slowly "level" his character by helping other players through networked cooperative play (as a summoned "phantom")—when he notices a different player using a sorcery he lacks. Checking the *Dark Souls III* wiki online, he discovers that an alternate path leads to a scroll and the option of purchasing more powerful spells. Using the new spell (the powerful "soul spear"), the player defeats a boss that he has died at dozens of times. Success is a satisfying combination of the player's developed motor skills and his character's newfound sorcery abilities.

In some ways, little that Sudnow wrote about videogame engagement needs updating in the thirty-year interim. *Dark Souls* is a merciless videogame series requiring finely tuned skills, which players train gradually over many repeat encounters with difficult enemies, bosses, and player-controlled characters. Players will replay difficult portions of the game many dozens of times until—having fully memorized a boss' behaviors, and perfectly trained the complex ways one must respond (operating coolly within a high-stress, no-room-for-error situation)—they finally prevail, heart pounding and eyes bleary from not blinking. One is transformed through

this kind of play. And, in turn, transformation is registered on the screen in the moment of victory—what game designer and advocate Jane McGonigal refers to as the *Fiero* (meaning the sense of triumph) of an "epic win." In these moments, *Dark Souls III* shares something with *Breakout* akin to the pleasure Sudnow described in feeling like a cause to the game's action:

> I'm no painter and don't dance in mirrors. But here I could watch a mysterious transformation of my movements taking place on the other side of the room, my own participation in the animated interface unfolding in an extraordinary spectacle of lights, colors, and sounds. (Sudnow, 1983: 23)

Of course, a shared sense of skill and kinetic action can only go so far in an attempt to link high-tech objects at opposite sides of forty years of rapid technological development. It goes without saying that *Breakout'*s visuals are almost as rudimentary as game visuals have ever been; *Dark Souls III* is nearly photorealistic. The former is a physics- and geometry-based single-player game—in fact it was conceived of as single-player *Pong* (1972); the latter is a lore-filled, deeply atmospheric and orchestrally scored game played on a network where other players can leave tips for one another or opt to be "summoned" to another player's game as a beneficent "phantom" (players share spoils of victory), or else as a "dark spirit" who benefits from killing the "host of embers" and halting their progress in the game. The game reflects a kind of paranoid network aesthetics where the space of play feels anxiously open to the presence of *others* whose spirits (as if locked in a kind of parallel purgatory) are perpetually immanent.

But advances in processing power as well as graphical and network technologies cannot completely explain the significant differences between early arcade games and the games played in present-day home-entertainment spaces. *Dark Souls* reflects three decades of intermingling between the agonistic pleasures of early arcade play and the pleasures of domestic leisure, a situation of merger that has changed both games and the home spaces that "host" them. *Dark Souls III* is shrouded in a richly detailed gothic fictional universe, with speaking characters, monsters, music, and cinematic cut-scenes—inheritances of the gothic novel (as well as gothic stage plays, films or television shows). But as a game, the structure of play renders it distinct from this thematic influence. In addition to the literal skills a player builds from play, the player-character also becomes more powerful by leveling up, collecting equipment and new abilities that, once acquired, cannot be lost. The game permits the repeated experience of starting in a safe place, venturing somewhere dangerous, and seeking out the next point of safety. The game's most stressful moments—when a maleficent player ("dark spirit") has invaded the player's game (at which point there is no longer such thing as a safe place)—only occur when the player is summoning helpers ("phantoms"), so that one rarely has to fend off this invader alone, and so that it is a *social* bond that, in addition to trust in one's own abilities, provides a secure connection. These key elements of *Dark Souls III* gameplay actually represent core play fantasies shared across a range of console and PC videogames, as well as across the "intermedial" divide with other home entertainment media like books, television, and movies.

This dissertation tracks empowerment fantasies in commercial videogames and other entertainment media often enjoyed in the home during the four decades that intervene between *Breakout* (1976) and *Dark Souls III* (2016). While film and television studies have tracked the shift from large, public, cinema screens to small screens at home, they have not done so with an extended discussion of the videogames that shared those smaller screens. Even less have media scholars provided a flexible theoretical framework for thinking about the pleasure of extended videogame play in relation to other media at home—frameworks assuming all games are interactive stories notwithstanding. Moreover, there is also no widely acknowledged paradigm

for distinguishing in a meaningful way between early arcade games and games played decades later in the home. These two categories of games are often either entirely conflated, or else placed on a teleological continuum where the "roots" of home-entertainment are traced to graphically simplistic arcade precursors.

In his discussion of the dilemma facing curators of videogame museum space, Raiford Guins emphasizes the point that "delineating a thing's situation is a prerequisite to writing its history" (2014: 12), meaning that the way we define games influences how we situate them historically. For the keepers of emerging videogame archives, the question looms of what to preserve—where is the game, exactly? Is it just the code, just the software, or does it include the original hardware, the cabinet art, instruction pamphlets, and other paraphernalia? "Delineating a thing's situation" would, in this case, also influence how we relate games to other media in convergence culture, as well as how conscientious we feel towards games' content. One criticism of "games formalism," or the attitude that their rules and formal structures matter most, is that it stems from a place of white privilege and skirts issues related to the medium's often highly problematic representational contents. However, the attitude that games can be taken entirely as representational systems—that games are essentially just narratives—contorts the very meaning of "story"[2] in order to diminish any specificity to which games might lay claim. This serves the rhetorical end of rendering games susceptible to the same kinds of important past critical interventions in film studies on the topics of race, gender, class, sexual identity and physical ability. But it simultaneously troubles the theoretical or historical elucidation of games, and sometimes turns away those seeking to learn about games as a medium.

Alexander Galloway asserts that videogames are "not simply a fun toy," and consciously downplays the element of play, instead proposing terms like "operator" and "machine" and likening games to accounting software (Galloway, 2006: 5). What Galloway views as unique and interesting about games is their technological status as "algorithmic machines" which "function through specific, codified rules of operation" (2006: 5). He leaves no room for uncertainty about a videogame's essential status as a "software system":

> Video games are games, yes, but more importantly they are software systems; this must always remain in the forefront of one's analysis. In blunt terms, the video game *Dope Wars* has more in common with the finance software *Quicken* than it does with traditional games like chess, roulette, or billiards. (2006: 6)

Dope Wars is a strategic choice for Galloway, since it is a game of bookkeeping on a Windows 95 interface—*Quicken* is actually the more dynamic and visually interesting of the two. But pushing a comparison between a game like *Dark Souls III* and *Quicken* can seem like the error of confusing a medium with its "delivery technology." This is at least a useful distinction Henry Jenkins (2006) makes, following Lisa Gitelman:

> To define media, let's turn to historian Lisa Gitelman, who offers a model of media that works on two levels: on the first, a medium is a technology that enables communication; on the second, a medium is a set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems. Delivery technologies come and go all the time, but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum. (2006: 13-14)

Although the "medium" of the videogame is indistinguishable from the complex algorithmic operations instantiated in its delivery technology, and although these operations are materially

very similar in both games and accounting software, the cultural practices or associated 'protocol' are clearly distinct. And this distinction is important, even in a highly technological medium, like videogames. As Jenkins argues, delivery technologies change all the time, but the underlying "medium" is what persists: "A medium's content may shift (…), its audience may change (…), and its social status may rise or fall (…), but once a medium establishes itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options" (2006: 14). This leads to a situation of old media "coexisting" with new media, and is a conceptual basis for Jenkins' claim that convergence is "more plausible as a way of understanding the past several decades of media change than the old digital revolution paradigm": "Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies" (2006: 14).

The convergence model doesn't answer the question of what a videogame is; it just reframes the question as a matter of what cultural practices, protocol, or "core human demand" a videogame satisfies "within the larger system of communication options." Answering this question has been a main focus of early videogame scholarship. Noah Wardrip-Fruin's "operational logic" (Wardrip-Fruin, 2009) or Ian Bogost's "procedural rhetoric" (Bogost, 2007) both refer to the idea that a videogame's algorithms (its operations and procedures) make some sort of claim about the world we live in. Mary Flanagan (2009) sees videogames as outlets for children to critically work through issues related to family and the wider social world ("critical play"). McGonigal (2011) suggests games offer experiences of flow and Fiero, but also that they provide the experience of a world where there are jobs (or "quests") for everybody, and we are optimally useful and rewarded for our efforts. Neo-Marxist approaches like that of Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter (2009) see games as meeting the core demand of sustaining modern-day empire through the circulation of immense amounts of elided, immaterial labor. Scholars such as Squire (2011) and Gee (2005) have suggested that games are self-contained autodidactic systems that have the potential to revolutionize education. A popular approach sees games as the new medium for an old wish: fully immersive, virtual reality. Scholars of virtuality in media, such as Friedberg (2006) or Grau (2003), track an impulse for immersion in murals, panoramas, and cinema—Bazin (1967) has referred to this impulse as the founding "myth" of cinema, the myth of "total cinema." Since the 1990s, this myth has been more often directed at videogames, which are regularly construed as virtual cyberspaces, or second realities that supplant corporeal reality, e.g.: Castronova (2008), Turkle (2012). Narratologists such as Murray (1997) and Ryan (2004) approach games as new platforms for storytelling and do not see games as a new medium at all, but as extensions of the cultural function of narrative.

Each definition of the medium here represents what Sutton-Smith (1997) calls a "rhetoric of play," which defines play tendentiously in order to justify (or condemn) it according to the interests of "well-known cultural attitudes" (1997: 15). Sutton-Smith identifies seven rhetorics of play: *progress*, *fate*, *power*, *identity*, *the imaginary*, *the self*, and *frivolous*. When McGonigal argues that videogames can "make us better and… change the world," she is proposing a rhetoric of play as the self (where "play is idealized by attention to the desirable experiences of the players"), and a rhetoric of play as progress. Her work follows a tradition of extolling the positive externalities (side-effects) of computer-game play, such as Kiesler et al. (1985), who argue that videogames expose children to computer technology, thus opening more possibilities for future careers in tech. Due to the ambition of McGonigal's claims, her argument is also very much a rhetoric of play as frivolous, "against which all the other rhetorics exist as rhetorics of rebuttal" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 11). For McGonigal's work, the rhetoric of play as frivolous is

mobilized implicitly in the tremendous gap between play as it is (3-billion collective play hours per week: so much wasted energy), and play as it might be: as an unparalleled creative force for solving neo-liberal collective action problems. All the rhetorics that construe videogames as positive social forces—games can educate, games can change the way art is experienced, games expand the options political expression, etc.—present games as a rebuttal to play as frivolous. These attitudes contribute to broader cultural struggles over the intellectual and scholarly legitimacy of videogames as an object of study, and as an activity in which adults openly engage and take pleasure. The scholars listed here are the most important advocates of videogames in a university setting, and are the reason this dissertation exists.

And yet it is against the rhetorical traditions they uphold that this work intervenes. In the myriad efforts to justify play and cast it as a suitably "adult" occupation, to bring it into the museum, the game itself has been displaced. The field has begun to take on the shape of a donut: an excess of attention around the margins, and at the commercial epicenter a lacuna of theorization and critical historiography. Nearly every one of the serious critical works referenced above performs a careful bait-and-switch, which begins by extolling the commercial and cultural significance of videogames (spoiler: gaming eclipses Hollywood in revenues), and then shifts emphasis to a game which suffers none of the political liabilities of commercial gaming, a game *unlike* the majority of commercial games, and that demonstrates one of the rhetorics of play, making it seem more adult, more suitable for interest at the university level.

The operative tension at the center of this work's intervention is the opposition between fantasy and actuality, which is implied in the preceding discourses as the difference between "empowerment fantasy," and the kind of measurable (or *actual*) empowerment sought through empowerment theory and self-determination research. The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) defines empowerment as

> an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995: 570)

Themes of control and mastery consistently appear in definitions: e.g., "empowerment is a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them" (Zimmerman, 1995: 581). Also emphasized is the notion of empowerment as a process— it is not a "handout" or quick fix, but rather a slowly procured willingness to engage in social change, which depends first on a "fundamental change in a person's consciousness," resulting from "intensive reflection of oneself in relation to society" (Carr, 2003: 8-9).

McGonigal's games are meant to be both empowering on a personal level, as well as at the level of community, exemplifying the image of "individuals working together in an organized fashion to improve their collective lives" (Zimmerman, 1995: 582). They're designed to get us off our couch and out into our local (and global) communities. But, aside from borrowed terminology ("heroic" and "legendary credit" for completing "mission objectives"), they are also nothing like commercial videogames.[3] McGonigal's broad definition of what a game is (anything with goals, rules, feedback, and voluntary participation) allows for a subtle conflation of "empowerment fantasy"—the core motivating structures of the extremely popular titles like *Tetris* (1984) and *World of Warcraft* (2004) she discusses in her definition of games— with individual and community empowerment. Technically, the classroom assignments that McGonigal "gamifies" (structures superficially like a game, offering rewards like level-ups to the most active student-participants) have goals, rules, feedback, and ostensibly voluntary

participation. The problem from a definitional standpoint is that these criteria were inadequate in the first place for the very popular commercial titles used to set up her argument. Simply put, her definition is incomplete. Commercial games like *Tetris* and *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) are not *any rule whatsoever*. The broadness of McGonigal's definition, in a sense, reflects the gulf between empowerment fantasy and empowerment (theory), and how the rhetorical efforts to rebrand the former into the latter cover over the important and very precise ways videogame rules come to establish certain protocol or activities in play.

This is not to assert an essential incompatibility between individual empowerment in play (aka, "fantasy of empowerment") and the goals of empowerment theory (or, similarly, self-determination theory's efforts to make work and education more "intrinsically" rewarding). The distance between the two terms is, again, largely rhetorical and historical, a rebuttal of the implication (deeply culturally internalized) of play's frivolity. Empowerment fantasy is a term evoked frequently in academic discussions of videogames—but it is never carefully expounded upon. For example, the term's appearance at the end of a thoughtful essay about machinima:

> Players must submit to the game algorithm, letting themselves be played by the game, in order to partake in its fantasy of control. Thus player death is a central game mechanism that both threatens mastery and is essential to it. The loss of control inherent to the military video game's empowerment fantasy is an unexamined crack in the wargame's seemingly impervious body armor, the place where it registers killing and being killed as trauma. (Chien, 2009: 250)

While this example does not define the term, empowerment seems suited to describing a nexus of military masculinity, hyperviolent videogame play, and an ideology of control and domination. Here, and elsewhere, empowerment is the foil to some more politically progressive moment (e.g.: "critical play," "machinima," "counter-gaming"). Empowerment is the problematic masculinity, the lazy indulgence, and the self-entitlement that must be overcome. Leigh Alexander, in her unfavorable review of *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013), tied empowerment to the immaturity at the heart of the reflex to lash out at critics: "What, you want to leave me death threats? Go for it! Games are about feeling powerful, and about you getting your way!" (Alexander, 2013). Here, empowerment means entitlement for a particular kind of insecurity mended by the ego-centric male fantasy. Videogame *empowerment* has been the target of scholarly, artistic, and community-based criticisms of commercial games, which seem to only stage and satisfy the fantasies of a narrow player demographic.[4]

The one place where videogame empowerment is discussed outside the logic of this binary is in the earliest serious scholarly writing about videogames, which viewed the phenomenon as the preoccupation of children, not adults. Marsha Kinder (1991), Dan Fleming (1996), and Henry Jenkins (1995, 1998), have all addressed (children's) games openly and descriptively through the terms of fantasy, power, and play. Their approaches are very much in the tradition of child or developmental psychology (and psychoanalysis), such as Winnicott (1971), Mahler (1975), Bowlby (1988), and Akhtar (1999), who view (even "illusory") empowerment through play as necessary for healthy and confident development, as a necessary precondition for learning itself. This notion has been applied to make-believe violence in games and other popular culture in Jones (2002) and, which Dickerman et al, (2008) characterize as a cultivation of imagination:

> Children, [Jones] wrote, are frustrated by their inability to control most of the aspects of their own lives and, thus, will seek empowerment in their fantasy lives: lives where small people are able to overpower things that scare them. He

concluded that fantasy play such as video games will help children achieve self-confidence. (Dickerman et al, 2008: 27)

These ideas do not escape Sutton-Smith's rhetorics of play. They exemplify the *rhetoric of play as progress*, or "the notion that animals and children, but not adults, adapt and develop through their play" (1997: 9). Empowerment is understood as okay—if not necessary—for a time, or up to a certain age. Where empowerment fantasy conflicts with empowerment theory, or just empowerment, is in the case of adults. While the early work on games that talks about them through the lens of child development remains some of the most interesting and insightful (though now sorely dated) writing about games, it does not account for the fact that the average videogame player is 35 years old, according to demographic research by the Entertainment Software Association (2015).

This dissertation applies the empowerment framework to adult videogame play—or, rather, it holds back making a strong claim about the presumed age of a game player. It makes use of developmental psychological research, with special attention to moments within these discourses—often in reference to philosophical and theoretical works somewhat afield of psychology itself—which seem to exceed the "play-as-progress" rhetoric that justifies the research as a whole. In short, fantasy seems to be the term best-suited to answering Jenkins' question about what "core human demand" the medium of the videogame serves. Fantasy is a term capable of engaging both representational and rule- or systems-based structures within a game. It is also a term already suited for thinking about the relationship among distinct but interconnected media—not all of which are primarily about storytelling. Fantasy enjoys a rich body of work devoted to its exegesis, and has been both historicized and theorized from a variety of scholarly perspectives—from psychoanalysis and psychology to philosophy, literature, film and television studies, and the study of fan culture. Many of these works appear in this dissertation, but by no means all of them.

This work is under no illusion that it escapes repeating one of Sutton-Smith's rhetorics. In fact, it openly embraces *play as frivolity*—even while pointing out moments when videogame play, or fantasy more generally, seems to serve important cultural functions. Its main goal is to perform a critical description of games from the perspective of empowerment fantasy—a perspective occluded from scholarly conversations because of recent scholarship's inherent rebuttal of frivolity, our almost inescapable desire to depict games in a more *grown-up* light. Its secondary goal is to sketch a historical framework for how this unexplored terrain changes how we think of videogame precursors, and their relationship to other media in domestic space. Finally, though it is not the central focus of this research, the approach to seeing videogames as fantasy actually opens new conceptual space for critical engagement with the medium's relationship to questions of identity, including race, gender, sexual identity, and physical ability. First of all, by asking these questions about a game's underlying structures (and not just its representational or thematic content), fantasy renders these questions more legible and pertinent to scholars and practitioners more interested in games qua games, including not only "ludologists" and "games formalists," but also designers, artists, and producers.

In the industry, games are discussed as "core loops" or "core hook," a pattern of play activity that recurs throughout play. For example: battle monsters, collect loot, exchange loot for better equipment at a shop, purchase equipment, "equip" (wear) that equipment, and then use it to battle more powerful monsters. Narrative analysis cannot explain the pleasure of the core gameplay loop repeated over hours-long stretches of extended gameplay *between* major narrative events (usually conveyed through cut-scenes). Bogost's and Wardrip-Fruin's treatment of games

like rhetorical statements is perhaps a bit prosaic for thinking about them as core loops. McGonigal starts here, by extolling how games like *WoW* hook players, but the actual core play structures get lost in translation. What is missing in both cases, perhaps, is an account of games' affective dimension, which is relevant to both their representational content as well as the structure of their play. As games scholars—as historians of this medium—we must be able to think and talk about games on both levels at the same time.

Perhaps in order to be more inclusive, game design textbooks (e.g., Salen and Zimmerman, 2003) usually employ broad and simple definitions of games, beginning with something like Suits' (2005) definition of a game as "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles":

> To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity. (Suits, 2005: 54-55)

This definition evokes images of potato-sack races or bobbing for apples—games where simple tasks are performed in complicated ways for the amusement of onlookers. But commercial videogames like *Dark Souls III* are not made up of *any rules whatsoever*. Even if fully satisfying answers elude us, it is both theoretically and historically important to ask "why these rules in particular, and not some others?" What about the core loops in videogames press specific pleasure buttons in their players, so that these activities can be pleasurably repeated for hours at a time? Rules do not tell a story—at least not a coherent one. And not well. The repetition of granular gameplay "verbs" (Mario jumps, Mario runs, Mario jumps, etc.) does not really aggregate into an interesting story; rather, these repeated actions accrue meaning from the point of view of *fantasy*. The presumption that videogames make coherent claims about the world, that they can be made sense of in so direct and literal a manner as a political speech, situates games as "secondary processes": the rational and systematic half of Freud's "two principles of mental functioning" (1911). The use of psychoanalysis in this research is specifically intended to help identify ways videogames can also be seen as "primary processes," as objects closely related to fantasy and daydream.

Psychoanalysis helps make games familiar by providing a methodology superbly equipped for discussing key elements in videogames that, in their specificity, sometimes make games seem like an outlier to other (narrative) entertainment media. These include extremely repetitious behaviors, self-motivated or intrinsically rewarding play, the experience of spatial navigation, identification without clear character subjectivity, and the (often violent) enacting self-other relationships. Simply put, psychoanalysis provides a framework for connecting fantasy and play through a rich corpus of clinical and theoretical works. But it is not the only framework used in this research to elaborate the psychic dimension of games—both cognitive and behavioral psychology also play a role when they seem most helpful for thinking about an aspect of play or fantasy in games. Moreover, this research looks to the entertainment media itself— games in particular—for its ideas about the pleasures underlying core loops. No pre-existing frameworks, psychoanalytic or otherwise, are merely applied to games. Thinking about games as primary processes can take many forms. I began my UC Berkeley course on videogames by challenging students to interpret games as if they were figurative poetry, a move intended to broaden the scope of a game's meanings beyond what sparsely distributed narrative elements seem to overtly sanction.

In order to define a game as an activity structurally distinct from reading a story, but more intimate than editing a spreadsheet or listening to a policy speech, this dissertation's unit of analysis is the "empowerment fantasy," a dynamic psychological process in which wish-fulfilling goals and the means to achieve them find special correspondence, and which structures prolonged and repetitious interaction with media objects like games. It is important for games scholarship to describe and possibly expand the category of empowerment, complicating the presumed narrowness of such fantasies by considering how they in fact have diverse forms that change over time. This work maps empowerment fantasies in videogames with both historical context and a critical eye for the ways empowerment can also express entitlement. In this framework, determining the politics of videogame is a more complicated process, but this is not necessarily a bad thing.

Videogames may not have a stably monolithic or coherent politics beyond their familiar role in a postmodern consumer economy. Their capitalistic function can sometimes appear like a metanarrative tying all commercial games together, but doesn't in that way go very far in textual analysis; it represents a Marxist reframing of the question of what "core cultural demand" games serve, but it comes no closer to answering that question in a way that is attentive to videogame medium specificity. Videogame rule systems don't actually come packaged with intelligible, univocal rhetorical messages, or at least not in a way that has ever empirically changed peoples' minds about relevant social issues. Moreover, commercial games often beckon a return to a "pre-oedipal" world of dyadic relationships of proximity and distance. Their participation within an oedipal, symbolic world is often minimal, or minimalist—and easily (mis)construed. Yet, games are still played by adults (oedipal subjects), and are traded in adult economies that influence the world in complicated ways—ways of which their publishers must attempt to remain cognizant.

The first chapter tracks this tension in the context of film-game media convergence. It introduces key concepts related to fantasy and the body, and connects them to discourses of power and politics. Though fantasy is not often thought about as something happening in the body, but rather in the imagination, Chapter 1 draws on the concept of "body memory" (like reflex or "muscle memory") to imagine such a thing as a bodily wish or bodily fantasy—more specifically, the deployment of an embedded bodily schema (or a plan of action built from repeated enactment) as a raw material for fantasy. By prioritizing the body as a key site of meaning-making for games, and introducing the notion of embodied fantasy, this chapter offers a theoretical rejoinder to conversations about film-game convergence that tend to prioritize narrative in their account of what is shared within media convergence (e.g., Jenkins' popular notion of "transmedia storytelling").

Chapters 2 and 3 explore a specific body fantasy, the "fantasy of bodily transcendence," as a central point of convergence between especially kinetic videogames and recent, videogame-inflected action cinema. These chapters' analysis of key texts—including genres of action videogames and recent visual-effects-heavy Hollywood blockbusters—demonstrates the usefulness of fantasy as a lens for textual interpretation that neither tendentiously prioritizes, nor completely jettisons, a videogame's narrative-thematic content. The body-transcendence fantasy represents a significant site of (psychic) convergence within home-entertainment media spaces where, increasingly, games and cinema resemble one another.

Continuing in this vein, the fourth chapter introduces a "tether fantasy," which is a key structuring pattern of play that recurs across a variety of videogame genres, as well as in isolated places within popular narrative media (e.g., defensive fortification, space operas, and survivalist and zombie-apocalypse narratives). This fantasy is both about the home, and one commonly

staged within domestic space. This chapter offers a specific way of thinking about how games overtly and repeatedly reflect upon the space of their consumption, and represent their own relationship to other entertainment media there.

Finally, if the first chapter begins with critical analysis of discourses on games that equate them with narrative, the last chapter explores a pervasive gaming fantasy (the "accretions fantasy") that seems anathema to the requirements of dramatic tension and conflict in plot. This fantasy is about gaming's quiescent patterns of play, play's intersection with the horizon of possibility, its flirtation with a kind of permanence or even death, the desire to shore up the body and blot out feelings of weakness. It is about finding treasure, a goal that, in narrative, spurs the quest and, as such, also represents narrative conclusion, destination. In games, this point of destination is both perpetually encountered, and perpetually looming as a *lure of space.*

The dissertation's conclusion combines the methods developed throughout this research to discuss games that—due to their complex hybridity—are often difficult to talk about using the standard terminology for parsing game genres and modes of address. The conclusion extends the dissertation's discussion of fantasy into a post-script on nostalgia, which is perhaps the most perceptible consequence of fantasy's weaving of repetitious play behavior into the rituals of daily life. The conclusion makes a brief case for rethinking the significance of nostalgia for videogame historiography.

The rest of the dissertation's introduction situates the mapping of *domestic* fantasies in videogame play and media convergence in relation to the coin-operated arcade spaces, which were very distinct from the domestic spaces that games would, following the mid-1980s, increasingly call *home*. The "domesticated" games in the chapters that follow exemplify what Marsha Kinder (1991) has called gaming's "extended middle," an analogy she draws from an especially domestic ritual: the child's bedtime story, its deferral of *endings* leading to a perpetually renewed instance of narration, like *1,001 Arabian Nights*. Arcade gameplay was designed to be short, punctuated with the need to feed more quarters (on average, once every two minutes), returning players again and again to an economic exchange based, as Kocurek (2015) has argued, on trust (a quarter buys the chance to improve and to extend the duration of a play session)—a trust generally opposed by the economics of play (Kocurek relays an anecdote about arcade employees unplugging machines to boot skilled players off their marathon play sessions). At home in the 1990s, marathon play sessions increasingly became the populist promise of videogames. Game ads boasted of quests lasting fifty or sixty hours or more. The pleasure (and guilt) related to extended video game play involves an individual, psychic space—a domestic space of withdrawal and relaxation, distinct from the sensory bombardment experienced in arcade spaces. But videogames at home do not represent a total rupture from early arcade games. What follows is a brief discussion of the discursive inheritance of early domestic videogames from the coin-op arcade spaces that preceded them.

Rhetoric of Skill and the Social Functioning of Videogame Play

The historical context of the space of the arcade, and its various electromechanical amusement devices, is indispensable for addressing the question of how videogames changed when they entered the home. This is not just because of shared industrial origins; as Carly Kocurek (2015) suggests, "Video games are now indisputably their own industry, but at the outset they were largely a spin-off of other industries, including the coin-op industry, the

television industry, and the computer software industry" (2015: 17). Perhaps more importantly, arcade spaces were the target of intense and decades-long regulatory efforts, and therefore played a large role in the discursive strategies used to defend coin-operated novelties (including games) and the people who play them. The great videogame market crash of 1983 provides a convenient watershed moment for thinking about the shift from arcade to home videogames. But rather than emphasizing this rupture, Kocurek's historiography of early coin-operated videogames highlights a rhetorical continuity by arguing that in the market turbulence of the 1980s, "video gaming became more rather than less familiar, and … the rhetoric used to defend early gamers has persisted" (2015: *xxiii*). Kocurek conceives of this rhetoric as a "masculinized rhetoric of success" linked to figures of "entrepreneurs, creative thinkers, and … athletes." At several points in her book, Kocurek emphasizes how the pre-1980 arcade discourses "survived and flourished," after the market shifts of the 1980s, and even today "continue to influence contemporary notions of youth, masculinity, and technology" (2015: 3). In short, any effort to construe games as a domestic medium must find a way to relate to the historical claim that the "end of the arcade craze was less the dismantling of video gaming than the integration of video gaming into the practices of daily life" (2015: *xxiii*). This section considers the rhetorical and cultural inheritance of home videogames, with an eye toward how fantasy can be used to help imagine how a "masculinized rhetoric of success" came to be "integrated" with "the practices of daily life."

   Kocurek's book emphasizes the (almost completely ineffectual) regulatory efforts to curtail videogame arcades in the 1980s. By focusing on this period, Kocurek is able to link videogames to the emergence of a postmodern "consumer culture for self-expression and satisfaction," where "consumption becomes protected speech"—the latter idea the culmination of the 1982 Supreme Court decision (*City of Mesquite v. Aladdin's Castle, Inc.*) protecting videogames as free speech (2015: 32). Even gaming's most commented upon lightning rod for moral outcry, Exidy's *Death Race* (1976), is usually also associated with ineffectual censorship that actually boosted the sales of what it sought to repress. While reformers like Ronnie Lamm moved in the early 1980s to limit "the spread of video games through new regulations or through fresh enforcement of existing, often neglected, policies," (Kocurek, 2015: 92) the very fact that existing regulatory laws were "often neglected" reflects the fact that much of the cultural jockeying to make sense of and find a place for coin-operated amusement devices was already over by the time videogames entered the scene.

   The same can certainly not be said for pinball, which Kocurek includes only briefly in her broader historical claim that arcade spaces contributed to the masculinization of early videogames. Kocurek's important history of early commercial videogames could be supplemented by emphasizing the far more intense and prolonged battle that preceded videogame arcades over the legality of pinball. Pinball proponents tended to employ a rhetoric of skill exemplifying an idealized sports masculinity that helped finally convey to conservative reformers a reason for the seemingly wasteful expenditure of time and money with coin-operated electromechanical amusement devices. This rhetoric opposed games of skill to games of chance in order to create distance between pinball (as an active, skill-based game involving practice and careful ball control) and chance-based gambling devices like slot machines. Anti-videogame reformer, Ronnie Lamm, characterized her 1982 crusade as a fight against Las Vegas-styled "one-armed bandits in every store" (Kerr, 1982). This somewhat baffling evocation of a term long used to link pinball to slot machines (and therefore to vice and organized crime) reflects the legacy of the struggle for pinball legality in terms of cultural attitudes towards gaming spaces.

Several of the early videogame "chronicle" histories (as Erkki Huhtamo, 2005, and Raiford Guins, 2014, have described them) map a genealogy for games in which pinball plays a central role. Haddon (1988) suggests that "the institutions which these young males had built up around pinball—the values, rules and rituals—were transferred to the video game," and chief among these values, rules and rituals was "the public display of skill" (1988: 61). Haddon suggests that, "the original *Spacewar* paralleled pinball in terms of a similar mix of strategy, speed and physical co-ordination. It was this genre of the 'action' game that was developed on the arcade machines" (1988: 62). Steven Kent's (2001) *Ultimate History of Video Games* identifies pinball and the coin-operated amusement industry as the most direct antecedent for videogames. He opens his book with the surprising story of pinball's mid-century legal troubles as America debated the merits and risks of coin-operated games. It is important, in this context, to know that the earliest pinball machines, from the 1930s through the late-1940s, had only spring-loaded plungers (a technology from the 1870s) for launching the (usually) steel ball into the playfield, which was fitted with a variety of pins and pockets. A player's score was determined by where the ball came to rest—an outcome seen by many as determined largely by luck. As Kent points out, the plunger pinball machines came under fire as gambling devices in the 1930s, and were banned, confiscated, and destroyed—most famously with Mayor LaGuardia in New York, but actually across the whole country as the nation grappled with the wider issue of regulating the spread of gambling and the rise of organized crime. Toy-like gambling machines—automated, electromechanical, coin-operated devices which paid out tokens, money, or gum or candy ("fruit machines")—came under special regulatory focus, for the presumption (not entirely unfounded) of their connection to mob racketeering, and their deliberate appeal to "vulnerable" populations, i.e., children.

In the narrative Kent presents, the industry responded to legal challenges by developing in1947 a new mechanism called "flipper bumpers," later shortened to "flippers." As a result, pinball became recast as a game of *skill* and bans were lifted following successful legal challenges. Kent's implicit claim about this history of videogames is considerable—that videogames emerged in and through a regulatory-discursive space that, in a way, determined their basic orientation as games of skill which *center* players in the ongoing activity of play. Scholar and game designer Chris DeLeon argues that

> several major design elements that we often take for granted in early coin-op videogames—including rule automation, real-time button play, and fiction as static theme—originated decades prior as innovations within the pinball industry. These similarities occurred on account of a number of key personnel doing leading work in both industries, and convergent evolution around the business model shared by both game forms. (Deleon, 2012: x)

DeLeon also lists specific core elements in almost all early videogames inherited specifically from the flipper innovation itself, like the idea that "the player has direct influence over on-playfield events as they occurred," the notion that "skillful play could prolong each" game's duration, and the idea that "the primary interaction was a matter of correctly timing button presses" (2012: x). DeLeon's emphasis on active involvement and player skill related to the timing of button presses implies a historical narrative for the medium of the videogame that incorporates the history of pinball in a meaningful way.

Kent's and, by way of extension, DeLeon's arguments imply that these inherited elements of play—the emphasis on skill and player involvement still operative in commercial games today—stem at least in part from regulatory pressures banning pinball. In other words, the

country-wide prohibition, confiscation, and destruction of pinball cabinets in the 1930s and 1940s became productive in the Foucauldian sense, rather than repressive in the Freudian sense, and generated new forms of mechanically mediated play. The pinball game's original mode of play (plunger-only) was "disallowed as being too direct, crude, or coarse"—to borrow Foucault's own phrasing on sexual discourse (1976, 30)—and this closing down of one way of engaging in play, through *chance* like a slot or pachinko machine, was a necessary precondition for the development of other modes of play: namely, the flipper-bumper and the corresponding development of skill and mastery as cornerstones of cultural conceptualizations of the role of the player in relation to the coin-operated, electromechanical play device. What emerged was—like Grieveson (2004) argues of mid-teen silent cinema's designation as "harmless entertainment"— "a *compromise formation* between commercial imperatives and regulatory discourses and practices" (2004: 6).

But this historical narrative must be squared with some contrary evidence. First, with the fact that pinball continued to struggle for legitimacy for *decades* after the flipper had become an industry standard in the late 1940s. In fact, the bans were just picking up pace in the 1940s; they continued into the 1950s, and 60s. There were raids on arcades and warehouses and other legal challenges blunting the pinball's quest for legitimacy well into the 1970s. In the 1960s, pinball was a serious federal concern, thought to be a "major source of gambling revenue" (Bilek & Ganz, 1965: 432)): When Robert F. Kennedy cracked down on organized crime as attorney general, one of his biggest targets was the pinball "racket," which his office argued had "infiltrated… all phases of the [amusement] industry" (King, 1964: 205). Kennedy's office claimed that pinball and slot machines were "one of the mainstays of organized crime" (1964: 205). Steven Kent's central example of pinball legalization, the lifting of the New York City ban, took place in 1976—a full twenty-nine years after the drastic measure of an industry-wide retooling of pinball cabinets (to install flipper-bumpers).

Second, the iconic lifting of the New York City pinball ban is, itself, interesting, because Roger Sharpe's demonstration to the 1976 city council that pinball is a game of skill involved calling a plunger shot like Babe Ruth called home-runs (Sharpe, 1977). While he did eventually use the flippers, he began by demonstrating that the plunger itself involves skill—a fact of which the council was purportedly convinced right away. Similarly, most legal challenges subsequent the adoption of flippers did not actually hinge on the presence or absence of those flippers, but rather on the mechanism that awarded prizes, including (and especially concerning) the awarding of free games.

In case after case, authorities were fixated on whether and how games awarded free replays, which, it was feared, could be (and often were) traded for prize money. In a thorough contemporary legal analysis of the issue, Arthur Bilek and Alan Ganz highlighted a secretive mechanism hidden deep within the pinball machine, a "knock-off button," which recorded free replays awarded to players, so the pinball lessee—bartender or shop owner— could be reimbursed by its owner when its coins were collected and divvied up each week. Bilek and Ganz, lamenting a 1959 federal court case, *Henry v. United States* (which set a standard protecting individuals against unlawful search and seizure) suggested the only sure solution to getting rid of machines with a payout recording mechanism was simply banning all pinball machines. Because of the 1959 federal standard, pinball gambling continued as long as there was no outwardly visible evidence to differentiate a legitimate pinball game—a flipper machine for amusement only— from those concealing a knock-off switch or some other wire or odds-fixing mechanism. Arguments that skill had been demonstrated with pinball play were consistently

undercut by claims that springs could be modified, table legs lengthened or shortened, and cabinets swapped altogether, in order to throw off the most skilled players. Moreover, since any pinball machine could be invisibly converted into a gambling device, how were children to know the difference?

Kent is right that the legal basis for overturning pinball bans did often reference the notion that the games were clearly skill-based. But it is interesting that the cases overturning the bans took place in the 1970s and 1980s, and that flipper-bumpers were not the focus of the most heated legal debates. There were many legal tests in the 30s and 40s concerning the element of chance in games that offered prizes: everything from claw machines to bingo halls, and even school teachers playing Bridge tournaments at church socials eventually came under legal scrutiny. But pinball remained apparatus non grata for decades after these other activities were deemed harmless (and school teachers released from jail), in no small part due to pinball's status as a source of revenue for organized crime, its tendency to be disguised as harmless amusement, and the presumption that it lured children into bars and saloons where they were exposed to alcohol, gambling, adult sexuality and a milieu of mob-related brutality. It was feared that pinball encouraged children to become truant, gambling away their lunch money in sinful places.

But Pinball's liabilities also stemmed in large part from the fact that, decades after the flipper bumper, the slot-machine was still the dominant paradigm in regulatory discourses targeting pinball. Authorities could imagine no other reason, no "intrinsic reward," for playing pinball—only the readily manipulative promise of payout. The more "bumpers, lights, bells or buzzers" (the features which still typify actual machine-gambling design in casinos) the more suspicion there was. Despite the flippers, cultural discourses had still not settled basic questions about the "*social functioning*" of pinball: about how pinball "should function in society, about the uses to which it might be put, and thus, effectively, about what it could or would be" (to, again, borrow language from Grieveson's discussion of regulatory pressures on early cinema) (2004: 5). In short, there was initially no way to even *evaluate* the pinball we recognize today, no way to say what made for a "good" cabinet (aside from how effect it was at 'stealing' money from the vulnerable populations that played it).

Another way to think about this tension is through a social-constructivist lens, which Kirkpatrick (2015) uses to discuss the formation of gamer culture in the 1980s in the United Kingdom. Kirkpatrick references Bijker et al. (1989) to talk about how home computers in the UK in the 1980s were "underdetermined" in their use: "it was not clear what they were for," and they therefore enjoyed an initial "indeterminacy" of possible uses (2015: 11). After this period of ambiguity in new technologies follows a "rhetorical closure," wherein a "determinate semiotic frame (Bijker 1997) has become attached to them" (2015: 11). The electromechanical industry was, in this sense, contending with a sort of (in their view) premature "rhetorical closure" of seeing pinball as a game of chance, and a kind of gambling. It is perhaps a measure of the success of efforts to reframe pinball that videogames were never really beholden to this same frame.

In fact, though today's free-to-play mobile videogame market is very nearly indiscernible from casino gambling, there has been not even a fraction of the moral concern over the detrimental effects of addiction that pinball once faced. It has completely escaped popular notice that Natasha Schüll's (2012) book on casino gambling, *Addiction by Design*, is required reading for all new employees at the major free-to-play game design firm, *Kabaam*. *Kabaam*'s games carefully hook players in a reward schedule and then impede their progress by way of what is called a delay mechanic, or other subtle "gacha" mechanisms designed to manipulate players into

spending actual money on in-game purchases in the exact way electronic gambling machines do in casinos. These games actually behave exactly the way mid-century reformers feared pinball might—on the surface, they seem like normal role-playing or "match-3" puzzle games; underneath lies a series of subtle monetization mechanisms that strongly encourage in-game spending. Why hasn't the mobile gaming industry come under the scrutiny flipper-bumper pinball machines did?

The disparate treatment likely reflects broad cultural shifts in the late 1960s, from flower power and countercultural resistance to the Vietnam War, and what John Burnham (1993) has argued is the rise of a long-running strain of American individualism, namely, "the idea that individual, not community, standards should be the basis for judging conduct" (1993: 22). Burnham is referring to attitudes about the major vices— drinking, smoking, taking drugs, gambling, sexual misbehavior and swearing—whose proponents more or less united in the repeal of prohibition and had steadily advanced through the pursuit of profit and a rhetoric of moderation and individual responsibility. Burnham argues that this rhetoric crested in the 1980s—a trend which would have affected arcade culture as well as "saloon culture".

But a play rhetoric likely contributed more to this change: what Sutton-Smith identifies as the "rhetoric of power" validating "sports, athletics, and contests" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 10). The rhetoric of power is defined as discourse "about the use of play as the representation of conflict and as a way to fortify the status of those who control the play or are its heroes" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 10). In the case of pinball illegality, a rhetoric of play as "frivolous" (A "rhetoric of ancient hue" that has been American since the Puritanical prohibition to any "mispense of time" in the earliest settlements) (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 11; Dulles, 1940: 5) might be said to clash with the rhetoric of play as power. The resulting ambiguity could be seen as a semiotic re-framing of pinball. The industry's earliest efforts to rebrand pinball as a skill game did not initially win favor of the "specific groups of advocates" that seemed most actively to perpetuate this rhetoric—the "male-defined institution of organized sports" (Messner, 1988: 198). But subtle shifts in the way pinball became represented in print and legal proceedings in the 1970s increasingly linked pinball with sports and, in turn, a rhetoric of power (skill, control, and mastery).

Pinball had long contained the fictional trappings of sport. Sports themes were among the most popular of the earliest fictional images adorning pinball cabinets. This isn't to say that the outward appearance of the cabinet meant anything other than subterfuge for what lay within to mid-century authorities. Pinball's proponents in the 1970s successfully used the player's skill as a way to advance a metaphor between pinball and sports play via the virtuosity of the athlete. The star athlete is the benefactor of play par excellence in the rhetoric of power. Roger Sharpe's 1976 demonstration, in which he mimicked Babe Ruth and placed a plunger shot in a specific pocket, was loaded with meaning. Sharpe had recently won a high profile pinball tournament, one of many that were then being organized to further establish pinball as a sports-like game of skill, and to construct the figure of the pinball champion. These efforts were contemporaneous with the pop cultural phenomenon of Tommy, the pinball "wizard" from the Who's rock musical about a young, virtuoso pinball player, produced in 1969 and released as a popular film in 1975, a forerunner to *The Wizard*, the 1989 film about a skilled videogame player. A 1975 Michigan court case reflects an increasingly common attitude at the time: *People v. Palazzolo* found that the 1941 ordinance banning pinball machines did not apply to the modern devices, and dispensed with concerns over the granting of a free play by likening that reward to receiving an extra ball on the 10th frame in bowling. A pinball wind-fall was OK, because pinball was kind of a

mechanically mediated sport, like bowling. This is quite a shift in rhetoric from Robert Kennedy's declaration of pinball illegality a little more than a decade prior. Sports have acknowledged "intrinsic rewards," as well as entrenched rhetorical support through the oft-repeated promise of self-improvement, discipline through training, and the curbing of antisocial behaviors and delinquency in youth.

Significantly, though not surprisingly, the pinball industry's culture of sports masculinity also contains problematic connotations of gendered and sexual violence. Carol Clover (1992) summarizes a 1970s pinball ethos in her discussion of depictions of rape in the film, *The Accused* (1988), a movie in which a woman is raped on top of a pinball machine. Clover says that "[r]ape, in *The Accused*, is male sport." She points out that the "college boys who turn up at the bar that night and end up party to the rape have just come from 'the game,'" that "for her job waitressing at 'The Dugout,' Sarah (the victim) dresses as a baseball playerette," that "the rape takes place on a pinball machine featuring the game 'Slam Dunk,'" and that "during the rape itself, the male spectators cheer and clap and chant in unison… undertak[ing] their tasks [in turn] as if it were the World Series (one spits on his hands as he steps into the batter's box)" (Clover, 1992: 147). Clover's use of the rape-sport analogy implicates pinball at multiple levels: the cultural space around the machine, its play mechanisms, and its fictional associations. Similarly, for Barthes (1970), pinball had come to epitomize western masculinity and male self-assertion, with undertones of dominating and possessing the other. The difference between chance-based and skill-based pinball reflected, for Barthes, global cultural differences: One played the Japanese "pachinko" machine "in a single movement, once and for all" (Barthes, 1970: 28). The "Western," flippered pinball machine, in contrast, "sustains a symbolism of penetration: the point is to possess, by a well-placed thrust, the pinup girl who, all lit up on the panel of the machine, allures and waits" (1970: 28). Second-wave feminism in the 1970s had already identified violence against women in media as constitutive of certain expressions of problematic masculinity. And pinball played its own part in this. Pinball Hall of Fame owner Tim Arnold explains "There's not really a lot of female-friendly images on these [pinball cabinets]. Part of the adolescent male fantasy is guns, women with large breasts, magic spells, any violent misogynist thing you want is there on pinball" (DeLeon, 2012: 25).

Pinball's overt sports masculinity remained the way the industry postured itself long after it had been eclipsed by arcade videogames in sales and, gradually, floor space. Haddon (1988) suggests that pinball was "appropriated" and in many ways displaced by videogames: "within a few years of the introduction of video games, pinball sales had declined by two-thirds" (1988: 61). In one of the pinball industry's many efforts to rekindle excitement in the 1990s (which include flashier, more complex cabinets with real audio recordings, movie tie-ins), industry spokesmen like Lyman Sheats, Lou Perfidio, and Roger Sharpe would appear on news stations as both pinball employees and "pinball champions." In a 1990 episode of the Today Show, a then middle-aged Sharpe promoted pinball as a fun game for "those people who are not intimidated by round objects and batting a ball around," as a game that is "much more physically interactive than video, in terms of being able to control your own destiny." Perfidio, when asked in the same interview to defend pinball's "lousy reputation" responded: "It's a game of skill. It's as all-American as baseball"—walking away (on the family-friendly morning show) from a question raised about a comment he had reputedly made comparing pinball to sex. Similarly, in a 1993 Today Show appearance ("Man-Machine Battle"), Lyman Sheats engaged in a carefully planned back-and-forth about whether pinball was a sport with host Bryant Gumbel, who stumbled a bit playing devil's advocate, ("This isn't a sport, right?") setting up Sheats' talking point: "Yeah,

actually it is a sport. There is a select group of people who take it very seriously and consider it a sport." Echoing then decades-old regulatory concerns, the host rejoins: "Really? I mean, how does one train to play pinball where the game is basically decided by the random flowing of the ball once it hits the side?" Sheats reiterates the centrality of control, using techniques like "trapping the ball," and adding that "pinball is about 20% that [random]. People with a decent set of skills can actually conquer a game." These appearances reveal the general lack of subtlety used to brand pinball as masculine sport. In so doing, they tied pinball to cultural and discursive traditions that tend to excluded women.

Kocurek argues that the earliest videogames were not as stratified along lines of gender as the games of the later 1980s and early 1990s, at least in part because the earliest coin-operated games were not placed in *arcades*. Kirkpatrick makes a similar claim about the "underdetermination" of early computer games in the UK: it was the formation of a gamer culture in the mid-1980s (largely gaming magazines' construction of a shared player "habitus"—Bourdieu's term) that re-framed games as male sport. In America, Kocurek notes that Atari founder Nolan Bushnell himself claims that women accounted for at least 40% of coins dropped for *Pong*. *Pong*—originally installed in Andy Capp's Tavern (a California bar)—was like other early games, placed in business spaces where it was not the primary source of revenue. Kocurek details the strong masculine leanings of spaces where games *were* the primary source of revenue (namely, arcades). The UK situation doesn't seem to have the same public/domestic divide as the American context, but the "masculinization of games" (which were "domesticated" in the UK during the US market crash of the mid-1980s) happened nevertheless.

Home computers in the UK initially occupied a highly ambiguous position somewhere between instruments of education and machines equipped for gaming. Kirkpatrick argued that computer manufacturers had to tout educational benefits in order to "appeal to parents while," at the same time, "maintaining the functions essential to playing games: graphics capabilities and speed of visual action" (Kirkpatrick, 2015: 9-10). This initial ambiguity or "underdetermination" was worked out in a subsequent schism between "serious" or "grown-up" computer magazines and those focusing on "games about aliens and dragons" (2015: 14). The very terms, "game" and "gameplay" "are themselves products of the historical process" Kirkpatrick tracks in the formation of a cultural field around videogames—games which were originally overwhelmingly diverse in content[5] and with respect to gender. Yet even in the home, where the magazines that came to be devoted to games as such were consumed, games came to be "defined as a masculine activity," a framing which ultimately shaped audience expectations and self-perceptions, and the games themselves (118). This too is related to a kind of sports-masculinity. Kirkpatrick asserts that "it is true that even in early issues of the magazines technical skill was often appraised in rhetoric that connected it to masculinity and that this sometimes extended to gaming achievements" (118). But by the end of the 1980s, the tone in the magazines becomes more combative, both "reflect[ing] and contribut[ing] to a change in the ethos of gaming, which is now adversarial, challenging and defiantly unconcerned with parental approval" (119). Like with pinball advocates' embrace of sports masculinity,

> Gaming discourse insulates the new community against attacks from outside but it does so not by presenting games as a universal force for good, open to all, but rather through strategies of inclusion/exclusion and the use of rhetorical techniques that 're-position' (Bourdieu 1993) games in the culture. (Kirkpatrick, 2015: 37)

In this new community, "gameplay" became the preeminent criterion on which to evaluate videogames, and "gaming acquired an idea of itself as avowedly masculine" (122). As Kirkpatrick, following T.L. Taylor (2006), suggests, "There is nothing inherently masculine about being good at computer games," and even "masculine" game genres ("shooting aliens or beating up foes") "are not obviously more appealing to boys than to girls" (122). Kirkpatrick concludes, "What proved really decisive, however, was the formation of a community around the appraisal of those activities in terms that identified them with masculinity" (122).

Raiford Guins (2004) has identified a tendency *within* academic commentary on the relation between gender and games that, similarly, contributes to the construction of gamer community and gamer identity along narrow gender-stratified lines. Most of what academia has said about the gendered makeup of the public spaces where early American arcade games were played can represents what Guins calls an "imago," or "snapshots of evidence predicated upon selective memory" (2004: 202). Guins provides a number of notable examples:

> In the crowds around game machines, boys far outnumber girls. (Greenfield, 1984: 98)

> Go into your local arcade, preferably one that is in a venue with a mix of entertainment such as an amusement park, pier, or entertainment mall. If you look closely, you may notice that there are actually girls and young women in the arcade. Now look again and see how many of them are playing games. Chances are that hardly any of them are feeding quarters into those beautiful profit centers. (Pearce, 1997: 205)

> The 1980s video arcade was one of the few truly diverse hangouts in teendom. It catered equally to preppies and high school dropouts, geeks and jocks, Chicano kids and rednecks-in-training. (Herz, 1997: 47)

> Hundreds of times I had stepped into the palpable darkness that stretched Peacock's three rooms to the limits of possibility, stumbling through football players and freaks and blacks and gearheads and dropouts and nobody specials and Mexicans and no-good trust-fund rebels, half of them higher than hell judging from my future experience ... (Weiss, 2003: 13) (Guins, 2004: 202).

One could add to these snapshots or "imagoes" dozens of others, like Kiesler et al.'s (1985) empirical study describing videogame arcades as "the pool halls of yesterday": "places where young males hang out with their buddies. Occasionally they bring their girlfriends, but the girlfriend's role is to admire the performance of her boyfriend, not to perform in her own right" (1985: 455). Even highly critically engaged analyses have relied on such imagoes of arcade spaces. Peter Buse (1996) claims (following Kinder, 1991) that, "video games have always courted and supported a masculinist culture; and it is safe to say that mastery has traditionally been a masculine preoccupation" (1996: 173). Haddon (1988) argues that videogames are "male preserve, from their prehistory in the all-male MIT computer labs of the 1960s to the arcade culture of the 1970s and early 1980s" (Buse, 1996: 173):

> the location of video games within arcades incorporated the new machines into the existing social activities of these milieux. Amusement parks, as well as many of the other public sites where coin-op machines were found, were part of street culture. They were mainly male, particularly young male, preserves. Some girls

were present in these contexts and there were some girl players - after all, the arcade and other public locations were meeting places. Yet observational studies found that the proportion of boys varied between 70-90%. So, while the new technology may have been brought in to mark changes, it was itself slotted into an existing nexus of social relations. Very traditional fears about 'deviancy' and working class male youth seemed to underlie much of the apparently new alarm about video games playing. (Haddon, 1988: 61)

Kocurek's critical historiographical analysis of Enrico Ferorelli's 1982 *Life* magazine ("Year in Pictures") photograph from Ottumwa, Iowa, offers up a literal snapshot, though one carefully contextualized and available for corroboration. In the picture, a row of young, male videogame wizards pose like athletes above a row of videogame arcade cabinets in the middle of an empty street lined with shops and a movie theater, while female cheerleaders sit in the foreground, under the machines. The arcade hosting the shoot in Ottumwa promotes itself as *the* venue for competitive record setting (arcade owner, Walter Day, wears a white and black striped referee uniform to work). Kocurek reads the image within the context of *Time* magazine's tendency to represent youth culture to older readers by mixing the new (and potentially threatening) and the old:

> To glamorize the top gamers was, inherently, to glamorize a competitive posture highlighted again and again in representations of the boys and men selected as the ambassadors of this new technological vanguard. Again, however, the new is shown tied to the old. The arrangement of the players and their games in neat rows is much like group portraits of sports teams—an impression driven home by the presence of cheerleaders. In the individual shots that accompany the group photograph, most of the gamers stand with their arms crossed, a posture that visually references the poses struck by athletes in numerous portraits taken over the preceding century and reflects gendered standards of portraiture. This tie to sports was a cultural connection that many made in the ensuing decades. It is also a connection that anchors competitive gaming to a culture of sex-segregated organized sport in which, as Michael A. Messner argues, "'gendered cultures' come to seem natural." (Kocurek, 2015: 41)

The notion of the arcade as a masculine "street culture" distinct from a more feminine domestic culture corresponds to a division of space that stretches back to the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres and the division of labor along gendered lines at the beginnings of industrial modernity. Cunningham (2000) and Guins (2004) frame the shift from arcade to domestic spaces during gaming's "second wave" as a shift from street to bedroom:

> The second wave, according to Cunningham, occurred in the early 1990s when dedicated game consoles (Sega and Nintendo) relocated game play from public spaces like arcades to the home: 'the move of computer games from "street culture" in the arcades to "bedroom culture" in the home ... has transformed the experience of games-playing for young girls' (p. 217). (Guins, 2004: 202).

Guins fears that recent commercial messaging represents efforts to "re-present" the home "as a homosocial space dedicated to 'the guys,'" who would "own the media room" and "drink Coke or Pepsi, eat McDonald's burgers, and spread out across the now standard overstuffed black leather couch and accompanying armchair" (2004: 204). Women, if they enter this image at all, "signal interference to the social space of game play. They threaten to end it through marriage, parenthood, or going out on a date" (2004: 204).

But Guins and Cunningham both move at light speed in their treatment of "second-wave gaming." This meaning of videogame "domestication," as Michael Newman argues in his forthcoming book, is twofold:

> Domestication of media is, first of all, like the taming of wild animals. Video games had to be made safe, familiar, and predictable. This kind of domestication is the process of new technologies becoming integrated into everyday life and passing from novelty to regular usage. Domestication also refers to the literal integration of games into domestic space, the space of the home, and in particular the idealized single-family home of white suburban America during the Cold War. The taming and familiarizing of games and the incorporation of games into routines of middle-class family life were part of the same process of video games coming into an identity as a medium with widely shared and stable meanings and purposes. (Newman, forthcoming).

Newman points out, echoing an observation made by Sheila Murphy (2011), that videogames, "like television and radio before them… were often represented as the focal point of a family circle, a new electronic hearth" (Newman). But he highlights a contradiction in the fact that early videogames "drew almost exclusively in their forms and representations on traditions of masculine play and boy culture, and offered a form of recreation and leisure quite at odds with the ideal of the family circle in feminized domestic space" (Newman). Murphy argues that "home gaming systems and the literal and figurative connections between television sets and computers require an analysis of television as a device caught up in the construction of a newly masculinized home entertainment zone" (Murphy, 2011: 47). Murphy points to advertising campaigns by Atari and other companies that depict home videogames as multi-generational, family activities, as evidence that (one might imply) they had to soften their hyper-masculine associations when making the transition into home spaces. But even in the examples Murphy has chosen, the emphasis is on sports, and the advertisement's address targets only male members of the family. In question is a 1978 series of TV ads pairing major athletes of the day with an Atari sports game, the tag line was "don't watch television tonight, play it!" Newman suggests that this situation offered young boys an "escape" within the home: virtual space and "a form of play deriving from a history of boy culture that resists the middle-class propriety and companionate leisure of suburban American ideology" (Newman). The early fictional content of home games ("sport, space adventure, or combat") (Newman) mirrored the thematic colorings of masculine arcade culture, and the gameplay also remained embedded within this world. The high-score ranking, skill-based play, and short play sessions were still intact in the earliest home games.

Any history of early home videogames would note that the first home games were often direct arcade ports—but on hardware that lacked the power to provide adequate replicas of the much larger and dedicated arcade consoles (a well-known example is the Pac-Man port for the Atari 2600). The Neo Geo was intended to finally deliver authentic arcade-quality games into the home—but it failed for exactly this reason: for bringing arcade games into a space that had, in short, outgrown them. In his study of the promotional campaign and critical reception of the failed videogame platform, SNK's Neo Geo (launched in 1990), Benjamin Nicoll (2015) suggests that the Neo Geo's "main appeal was its promise to satisfy long-standing fantasies of bringing arcade games into the home" (2015: 10). However, Nicoll suggests, Neo Geo's "games adhered to conservative arcade genres and conventions: action, sport, shooting, 'beat 'em up' and, most prominently, the two-dimensional fighter" (2015: 13). This led to problems with the critical reception of the Neo Geo's *gameplay*—a term that, Nicoll demonstrates, had risen in the

early 1990s to become the "dominant concept" for evaluating software, "frequently framed in opposition to graphics, music, and so on" (2015: 14). Nicoll concludes Neo Geo's software was viewed as "too repetitive and derivative" compared with games on the competing home systems, Sega and Nintendo, adding that "There is also a noticeable decline in interest in the kinds of arcade genres and conventions that the Neo Geo had built its reputation on, as people began to sharpen their tastes and preferences in the direction of games that provided more sedate, thoughtful, and narrative-oriented gameplay experiences" (2015: 15).

      Nicoll views this as evidence of "a shift in attitude toward the gaming arcade and its once elevated position in gaming culture"—but also links it to an argument Kirpatrick (2015) has made about the formation of "gamer culture": "What began in the mid-1980s as a desire to fuse the narrative content of text-based adventure games (such as those developed for microcomputers) with the visuals and sounds of arcade-style action games had, by the early to mid-1990s, become a fully articulated game design practice" (Nicoll, 2015: 15-16). By 1990, home videogames had changed in substantial ways from their arcade roots:

> Rather than focusing on the blunt thrills and excessive spectacles of arcade gaming, home video games now aspired to provide long-term appeal with their engrossing stories and intellectually stimulating—but not punishing or overly challenging—gameplay. Magazine review criteria were even adjusted to factor in the longevity of a game, often quantified under a 'value' or 'replay-value' rubric. (Nicoll, 2015: 16).

Neo Geo's arcade ports did not fare well in unfettered replay, especially in direct competition with (much cheaper—though also less graphically rich) games that were designed for precisely this kind of play. Domestic videogames had indeed begun to experiment in a new and growing (post-crash) home market, incorporating not just narrative play from "text-based adventure games," but role-playing games based on tabletop board games, Tolkien-inspired adventure games, city-building simulation games, games about spatial navigation and exploration, and arcade-style action games built around the idea of extended play and progression. The idea that a videogame could allow players sustained access to a virtual world was firmly established by the 1990s, at the same time when cyberspace and virtual reality took hold in the popular imaginary as concepts linking computer technology with the promise of a kind of "total cinema" or immersion in a second reality[6]. Fan gaming magazines, players' guides, and even televisual media accompanied popular games, always gesturing toward a diegetic horizon that exceeds the boundaries of the game as such. This era's iconic "cheat code" and sprawling printed game maps identifying the location of secret doors and hidden items, both of which were disseminated through fan and games-journalistic sources, reflect the growing sense that videogames offer vast diegetic spaces for one to explore over extended (ideally, uninterrupted) play sessions. And this was important for thinking about gaming as a repeated and extended activity intersecting a wide range of activities in day-to-day life. Guins' (2004, 2014) historical interest in videogame ephemera (players' guides, instruction pamphlets, etc.) calls for "expanding the permeable boundaries according to which televisual space can be delimited," an act which "exchanges the screen space of video games (game design, games as spatial art, screenic immersive worlds, game play, the graphical user interface) for the materiality of the video game, relations to the screen in space, and the ephemerality of spaces within which video game play presided/s" (Guins, 2004: 198). Guins here is intuitively seizing on the significance of paratextual materials to the diegetic coherence of early videogames. The fact that the efforts at world-building these

games presented exceeded their own "screen space" is itself testament to the changes facing gaming in domestic spaces in this period.

One can see these changes reflected within the pinball outreach efforts described above— e.g., Roger Sharpe's repeated reference on the Today Show in 1990 to pinball as a "three-dimensional world under glass" and Lyman Sheats' insistence that a pinball game "changes every time," suggesting a kind of encounter with unlimited potential through the game's physical complexity. But the shift in the reason for playing a "domesticated" videogame can be perhaps more acutely felt in corresponding shifts in the regulatory discourses used to counter games. Haddon (1988) points out that videogames differed from pinball on the basis of narrative content:

> Although it is possible to subject pinball to some form of textual analysis, the storyline of the [video]games allowed commentators to see the new form as a medium, and thus comparable to other media texts. Indeed, it was this feature which enabled the transfer of concerns about 'violence' from areas like TV and film to the new entertainment machines. (Haddon, 1988: 62)

Truly, violence was never really pinball's charge as a medium—despite mid-century concern about the effects of violent media on children, and despite no shortage of violent imagery on pinball cabinet art. Brian McKernan's (2013) analysis of videogame coverage in the *New York Times* demonstrates, empirically, that violence was not even close to the chief moral concern for the earliest waves of videogames either. Earliest concerns over videogames had to do instead with the "Dumbing of United States" (2013: 314) and other health-related fears (e.g., lack of exercise, hand and eye strain). Violence was the concern of only 16% of negative stories—and this is tied with the number of news stories extolling the social benefits of playing. It is only beginning in the 1990s that violence becomes the predominant concern for videogames in popular press—perhaps just soon enough for videogaming's agonistic sports masculinity to become identified as a *textual* manifestation. In other words, just soon enough for games to be viewed, as Haddon suggests, as visual texts capable of relaying violent imagery—much like television, comics, or cinema.

Pinball's "violence" is geometrically abstracted—like shooting at pins or bashing a ball with a bat in other sports. But its manifestation in videogaming's increasingly photorealistic world has come to represent problematic "male empowerment fantasy" in gaming's misogynist, homophobic and racist online culture, and the endlessly reproduced and hyper-violent first-person shooters and fighting games. Masculine empowerment in videogames is related to a core rhetoric of play begun long ago in a different technology's fight for cultural legitimacy, but which continues to operate almost anxiously in an uncertain market. In other words, this aspect of gaming is historical, contingent, and subject to change. In fact, this inherited strain of competitive sports masculinity, what Kocurek calls a "rhetoric of skill" or what Sutton-Smith would group under a "rhetoric of power," has already blossomed into new forms stemming from its interaction with other rhetorics, and other play fantasies. Games' original cultural purpose (skill, control, mastery, competition) has given way to diegetic immersion, virtual transport, exploration, and day-to-day familiarity and intimacy within domestic entertainment spaces—but not, it might be said, without a deeply embedded and lasting effect on videogame genres and cultural attitudes. As DeLeon argues (above), the pinball flipper introduced the idea (now, one might say, foundational to nearly every single videogame) that "the player has direct influence over on-playfield events as they occur" (2012: *x*).

Updating pinball masculinity for videogames means describing a mode of domestic masculinity, one either reconciled or at odds with the (perhaps *formerly*) feminine domestic sphere. Derek Burrill (2008) situates videogames within broader "techno-masculine sites, such as violence, pain, sports, play, gambling, and competition" (Castañeda-Peña, 2009: 384). Kocurek (2015) describes similarly describes videogaming's "technomasculinity," or a blending of older strains of competitive male sport with the image of the technologically adept boy genius, a formulation Kocurek traces back to "amateur radio culture of the Victorian era" (Kocurek, 2015: xix). This notion echoes an argument that Susan Douglas (1999) has made about tinkering with radio technology as a masculine pastime (like fishing for a signal) within domestic confines:

> Tinkering with radio (like tinkering with cars) was one way for some boys and men to manage, and even master, the emerging contradictions about masculinity in America, especially as some of them found themselves spending their increased leisure time at home. For a growing subgroup of American boys, these vivid yet often conflicting definitions of manhood and success were resolved in mechanical and electrical tinkering. Trapped between the legacy of genteel culture and the pull of the primitivism so popularized in the new mass culture, and certainly trapped between the need to conform and the desire to break out, many boys and men reclaimed a sense of mastery, indeed of masculinity itself, through the control of technology. (Douglas, 1999: 68)

It is important to keep in mind that a term like masculinity is contested. Connell's (2005) *Masculinities* is so titled in order to emphasize that "masculinity" is not monolithic, but rather made up of different, competing definitions and cultural attitudes toward gender and its performance. The masculinity on display in the recent "Gamergate" controversy is highly problematic, a kind of excess that corresponds with the excessive violence in so-called male-empowerment genres of games. In Gamergate, cultural commentators pointing out problematic gender binaries in the representational content of commercial videogames were targeted with over-the-top vitriol, death and rape threats, and the actual doxing (malicious publishing) of personal information (email, home address, phone number, etc.). Within gaming as a mass medium, there is no doubt an excess of violence, and one could say an excess of masculinity, which must be addressed openly as a shared cultural concern—even if this rhetoric once helped distinguish pinball (and thus early videogames) from association with slot machines and other gambling devices. Similarly, at one time in the past, organized sport met a national interest in the physical fitness of American youth and shifting definitions of idealized or heroic masculinity. But, more recently, amidst broader social change, gender-stratified institutions have come under fire for the treatment of women they seem to encourage: for example, the male athlete's repeated connection to rape—from the Kobe Bryant case to the recent controversy over the 6-month sentence given to convicted white swimming star, Brock Turner, who was caught in the act raping an unconscious woman behind a dumpster on the Stanford campus, and whose father thought six months was steep for "twenty minutes of action."

But what gets lost, perhaps, in our collective rush to condemn the most overt and problematic expressions of masculinity on display in the world of videogames is how empowerment has changed since the arcade days. Kirkpatrick (2015) asserts that videogames, as Gaudreault and Marion (2006) said of cinema, were "born twice": "first as relatively indeterminate technology then as the focus of a specific milieu which elevated them to a kind of prominence" (2015: 7). It might, however, be more precise to say that videogames were born thrice, or that the culture of the arcade is *not* reducible to the culture of the home—and, even if it

were, that games have not undergone complete "rhetorical closure" (an image which makes games seem particularly ossified, even dead).[7] It is true, as Kirkpatrick demonstrates, that the formation of gamer culture seemed to coincide with efforts to *gender* games as masculine. But compared with the action games that typified this period in the late-1980s and early-1990s, modern-day games are no longer as clearly or easily connected to narrowly defined categories of gender and identity. If at one time, pinball and slot machines, were (in the eyes of the law) impossible to distinguish from one another—then it might be said that as a result of regulatory intervention and commercial imperatives, there was a fork in the road. Gambling devices in casinos now remediate videogames in their use of computer graphics, but in their basic format and design—in their *play*—they have developed very little over the past century. Play is still enacted by a single button press (or lever pull), and after several (carefully timed) seconds, the machine generates a randomized outcome. Videogames, on the other hand, represent a kind of discursive explosion stemming in part from a point of cultural stricture on chance-based outcome.

Unlike slot machines, videogame systems simply cannot be reduced to Skinner-box reward schedules—the reason for playing is not to acquire some monetary wind-fall; the reward is *in the act of play itself*. Systems designers may not need to occupy themselves with "gameplay"—but gameplay is central to the experience of engaging the game, and somehow contains the reason for playing, the terms through which the notion of "reward" can even be made sense of. Videogames are precisely that which is rewarding through coin of another realm, they "pay out" something that in almost all cases (virtuoso performers in competitive gaming circles notwithstanding) cannot be cashed in. What the flipper bumpers represented was the emergence of a new kind of intrinsic reward—one that was ultimately made sense of with the help of an analogy with competitive athletics, and a discursive alignment with an idealized form of masculinity. The tension in reward schedule between system and gameplay is discussed more in Chapter 4.

Research into pinball's efforts to win cultural legitimacy in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s reveals pinball's repeated failed attempts to cast itself as a domestic leisure—the machines were prohibitively expensive, too large to fit in most homes, difficult to service when they broke, and were always noisy and flashy, invoking the space of the arcade wherever they were played—a space that always disrupted and intruded upon domestic space. Domestic pinball was relegated to the recreation room, the basement, or to an existence as novelty items in the living rooms of the wealthy. When advertised, home pinball cabinets usually appeared in newspapers along with other outdoor sporting goods. Home videogames, on the other hand, were initially sold on the same page as consumer electronic devices, reflecting the ease of access to home spaces they enjoyed in the way that Sheila Murphy (2011) describes, by retrofitting and repurposing television technology and the spaces where TV viewing took place.[8] These domestic spaces and their television technology became the nexus of more than an inherited sports masculinity—a cultural function related to skill, mastery and control. As scholars of television such as Lynn Spigel (1992) have already pointed out, these were already complexly negotiated spaces within the middle-class home in terms of changing dynamics of gender, notions of childhood, and definitions of home: home as a space of respite, a space of unpaid labor, a space of education and edification, and a space of leisure.

Home and Fantasy as Magic Circle

> It is one of the powers of art or of invention more generally to cross the planned relations of dimensionality—the modes or dynamics that *properly* form or make sensible an object or a process. As it does so, other worlds gently slip into, swell across, or mutate those we are apparently content that we live in.
>
> Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 2

In her work on domestic geographies, Maria Kaika writes that

> For Heidegger, the house is understood 'as the most primitive drawing of a line that produces an inside opposed to an outside.' The debate as to whether this line is (or should be) rigid and unsurpassable, or indeed, as to whether it should exist at all, also goes back to antiquity. (Kaika, 2004: 265)

It seems silly to debate the definition of a home. Yet what home means is a historically and culturally specific question. And it is one that, in Western philosophy, has metaphysical stakes. Gaston Bachelard (1964) argues that before we are a *being in the universe*, we are a being in the cradle, born into the home. Ontology is, Bachelard suggests, tied to our place in the home, our little "corner of the world… our first universe" (1964: 4). For Bachelard, the house "shelters daydreaming" and "protects the dreamer" who, in turn, "experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams" (1964: 5, 6). In Bachelard's account, the emotional boundaries of home fluctuate in imagination: "through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days": "we comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection" (1964: 5, 6).

In these (admittedly white, male, western and bourgeois) perspectives, the home becomes like a "magic circle." Huizinga (1950) introduced this concept to refer to the quality of play's separateness from everyday life. Caillois (1958) references Huizinga's term to establish what he views as play's quality of being "circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance" (1958:9). Consalvo (2008), who applies this term to videogames, describes it as a "bounded" space "set apart from normal life" (2008: 409). Consalvo does acknowledge that the concept is useful in "uphold[ing] structuralist definitions or conceptualizations of games," but ultimately rejects the magic circle because "It emphasizes form at the cost of function, without attention to the context of actual gameplay" (2008: 411). This is, of course, a false binary. There is nothing about being attentive to form that precludes sensitivity to context—quite the contrary. But there is important context to Consalvo's argument itself, which is largely a reaction to the way the magic circle as a concept had been taken up by "ludology" to evacuate all concerns extraneous to the game as a formal system (e.g., social interactions and community bonding that happened in and through networked games like *World of Warcraft*).

But the concept of the magic circle is useful. Just as the boundary of a home establishes an opposition between inside and outside—one which, debatably, constitutes the home—so, too, does the magic circle circumscribe and constitute the game as such. In its original use, Huizinga would never have imagined that the magic circle meant play was detached from lived experience. This reading flies in the face of the whole spirit of his work, which views play as a *source* of civilization. It also doesn't seem plausible that the videogame formalists meant that something like cheating (Consalvo's example: using a mod to cut out tedious "grinding" in

World of Warcraft) was unimportant or unworthy of study. But if ludology had a vision in the early 2000s, it was to try and build knowledge about a new and special object of study. And established sociological methods applied to chatroom conversations within an online videogame—though important field work for studying online communities—doesn't say much about what is special about games. Like the play theorists who introduced the concept of the magic circle in the first place, videogame formalists wanted to know what a game was. There was something seemingly significant about a game's being divided from lived experience, on one hand, by *rules* ("conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts") and, on the other hand, by *make-believe* ("a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life") (Caillois, 1958: 10). And this concern is actually related to the question of how games fit into their social, economic, and historical contexts. Winnicott's (1971) notion of play as a "third space" or "potential space" between external and internal reality or fantasy (and between the me and the not-me) posits play as separate and protected—like a magic circle saved from "reality testing," from ever having to determine if what is happening belongs to the real world, or is imagined. And Winnicott sees this transitional zone as the basis of creativity and a zest for social interaction with others.

  This notion of separateness from reality, and from reality testing, echoes what Freud (1920) said about fantasy (here "phantasy" to denote the psychoanalytic nomenclature, and not the popular or literary uses of the term):

> The creation of the mental realm of phantasy finds a perfect parallel in the establishment of 'reservations' or 'nature reserves' in places where the requirements of agriculture, communications and industry threaten to bring about changes in the original face of the earth which will quickly make it unrecognizable. A nature reserve preserves its original state which everywhere else has to our regret been sacrificed to necessity. Everything, including what is useless and even what is noxious, can grow and proliferate there as it pleases. The mental realm of phantasy is just such a reservation withdrawn from the reality principle. (Freud, 1920: 463)

Fantasy itself can be seen as a third "magic circle," but this is no surprise given how closely related the two terms are in the frameworks of behavioral psychology and psychoanalysis. Freud (1908) described fantasy as play that had withdrawn to an interior, psychic, space in order to escape the judgment of observers. The notion of "magic circle" is as much about the closure, the completed circuit, as it is about the "magic" (which Winnicott says underlies play, and is originally provided by a supportive parent). But, as Klapp (1978) says of information theory (and of the ebbs and flows of organic life), too much closure means isolation, stagnation, and death; too much openness means chaos, and also death. This dissertation argues that all three "magic circles" here overlap one another in the patterns of daily life, and are actually employed to facilitate a series of interwoven openings and closings.

  The two different forms of separation in Caillois' account of play (his dictum: games are either "ruled *or* make-believe," pg. 9), are instructive for thinking about the role fantasy plays in videogame textual analysis. Juul (2005: 13) argues that videogames violate Caillois' dictum, since nearly all videogames are both ruled *and* make-believe (fictional). But this isn't really an overly compelling interpretation of Caillois' likely intended meaning. Caillois' example is Chess—playing Chess by the rules means playing chess "for real". There is no "pretense" (Caillois, 1958: 8). Alternatively, a young child could play *at* playing Chess, moving the pieces around the board without knowing any of the rules, pretending to play Chess (the condescension

in Caillois' example is obvious). And Chess is already a game with a fictional theme (medieval in reference). Caillois' dictum was intended to differentiate two competing motivations for playing, different *kinds* of pleasure attached to play (he later identifies "ludus" for focused, rule-based play, in opposition to the unrestrained and more kinetic "paidia") (1958: 27). Videogames pose no challenge to Caillois' dictum, at least not one already posed by his own example of Chess. But videogames are complex, highly technical, and hybrid objects, and things can get confusing, quickly. One plays *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) for real—but one can play this game for real while, within the game, performing some other action, like pretending Mario is a pacifist who wants to avoid killing any enemies. Players are then playing *at* being a pacifist within a videogame that they also play "for real." But for Caillois, these two types of play tend to exclude one another, as they stem from very different places, and serve different emotional and cultural roles.

The first thing to note here is that there can be fantasy play that is primarily make-believe, and fantasy play that is rule-bound. Or, put differently, fantasy, as a process, can take either sort of play as its basis. The notion of "core loop" seems to apply to ludus and rule-based play—what is expressed through algorithmic functions and rules—rather than what is asserted by linguistic statement or fictional image. This dissertation argues that a core loop implies the presence of an especially resonant play fantasy. In Caillois' taxonomy, paidia and make-believe play (opposed to ludus and rules) are construed as unstructured, fleeting, dynamic and capable of dovetailing off from (but remaining somewhat independent of) the suggestion of a sentence of descriptive text, a representational image, or, we might add, a pattern of action structured by rules. These two modes of play imply a different relationship to fantasy, even if in any one game containing an admixture of both they are difficult to distinguish.

For videogame analysis, it is helpful to note that there are two different magnitudes of make-believe play. The first, and most common, is essentially like a shorthand—players see sky and mountain where they know only polygonal representations of such things to exist in the game. Players may even refer to these things as if they were their referents, while knowing they are not. This does constitute a kind of make-believe, what some might call a "suspension of disbelief" (others an "inherent credulity"). But looking at textured polygons and seeing their real-world referents in this first mimetic category is not the *point* of play. Here, make-believe is subordinated to the core loop; we accept the fictional or thematic state of things as part of a game's premise. Juul (2005) has expressed this idea in a severe form that I term the "mimetic teleology," where he observes (following Retaux and Rouchier, 2002) that while graphical detail (and, by implication, make-believe elements of play) serve a large role for those who are new to a game, "The more experienced a player was, the less the graphics mattered" (Juul, 2005: 139). In Juul's example, players (of *Quake III Arena*, 1999) turn off textures and graphics details in order to prioritize speed over verisimilitude and immersion. In the mimetic teleology, visual and ornamental elements welcome new players and ease them into a game's core loop, which then takes over, sustaining prolonged play. But, most likely, make-believe play never fully disappears; a game's images, even for advanced players, draw on existing perceptual schemata and representational categories, even if the focus of play is skill and competition requiring immersion within a rule-bound space (like in Caillois' play category of agôn).

The second kind of make-believe is itself the point and purpose of play in a wide array of popular games. These games —e.g.: *Sim City* (1989) or *The Sims* (2000)—offer virtual reality spaces, or simulation systems which the player is asked to imagine as more cohesive and coherent than they really are. In the extreme, the coherence is so far-reaching that players are

cued to make-believe the existence of entire microcosmic worlds or galaxies, as in *Spore* (2008) or *No Man's Sky* (2016). Often there is little else to do in these games than to make-believe play. For example, the social network game, *Second Life* (2003), tasks players with constructing a boundless universe by collective role-playing. Players build actual content and give shape to the three-dimensional world. But the idea that this second (virtual/cyberspace) world is a cohesive, thriving substitute for lived experience is sustained through a shared mimetic fantasy (and make-believe play).

In many other games—games with recognizable core loops and rule-directed play—there are key moments when make-believe takes over as the dominant mode, such as when players are tasked with navigating dialog trees and branching narratives (as in BioWare's *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, 2003, or *Mass Effect*, 2007), when players must press the button they are cued to press in a "quick time event" or interactive cut-scene (as in *Resident Evil 4*, 2005), when attacking a friendly non-player character (NPC) marks the player as an outlaw and the whole town shuns them (in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, 2011), or when death is permanent (known as "permadeath") in games like *Fire Emblem* (1990) and *The Castle Doctrine* (2014). In these examples, make-believe play momentarily predominates, and rule-bound play cedes ground—either pausing or falling into the background, providing a structural support to a game of make-believe.

Strictly speaking, one does not need a videogame for make-believe play. In fact, if videogames can lay claim to anything special whatsoever, it is their capacity to hold images steady under the light of external reality (controlled by algorithmic functions capable of frustrating or challenging simple wish-fulfillment, a player's omnipotence of thoughts). In other words, what is distinct about videogames is not their capacity for make-believe, but their capacity for rules. And yet, games are the banner for make-believe play, the bearer of a promised future where one can step into a second reality and become or do anything one imagines. This future—the image of cyberspace itself—represents a time when rules catch up to an imagination that, by definition, exceeds our grasp of reality as it is.

The analogy that has been most helpful for my own thinking about fantasy and videogame play is that of *a trellis and a vine*. The game's rule system, its structural support, predicts and provides a patterned set of activities and objectives for play. But this structure is punctuated by gaps, both literal and figurative: gaps in time, gaps in space, hiccups in the motivational structure, pauses in forward progression, moments requiring player intervention, moments of exploration and uncertainty. Games, being a mass-produced object, provide the same structural support to every player—though, being "ergodic" or "hyper"-texts, each player may experience different aspects of this structure on each play session. The structure itself sometimes shifts in response to player action (games that send more enemies if players do well, and less if players struggle), but the system is reliable, learnable, capable of being learned, intuited, and, for skilled players, *mastered*. Fantasy, on the other hand, is idiosyncratic and changes in every play session. At some points along the trellis (structural support, rules system), the vine (play fantasy) is woven tightly, so that it is difficult to distinguish the fantasy from the structural support. In these moments, player activity is motivated by the game's own algorithmic systems—and the first kind of mimesis is operative, subordinated to facilitating the player's engagement with rules.

When a game wants the second kind of mimesis to take over—by suggesting a cohesiveness to the world that is not (or not *yet*) written in the rules—it might be said that the vine has outgrown the structural support of the trellis. This does not signal a stopping point for

fantasy. Wish-fulfillment is, in the first place, predicated on frustration, on something not quite satisfying. At the outer bounds of the trellis, the role and magnitude of make-believe shifts (and the shape of the vine changes). The notion of a fringe to the trellis implies that rules assist make-believe by shouldering a kind of imaginative burden, and that make-believe play tends to precede structured or rule-bound play in the elaboration of new videogame genres by exceeding existing support structures and suggesting directions for future development. Videogames extend the reach of make-believe play; in return, make-believe play imagines new play fantasies before they become codified in rules as trellis. Chapter 4 of the dissertation offers a range of concrete examples of this process.

One could say that at the point where the vine outgrows the trellis, and coils in search of new support and a way to continue its own growth, that the vine acts independently of the trellis. But, of course, the vine only arrived at that specific spot as a result of the built support with which it allied itself—one might say that the "core loop" becomes reflected in the coil of the vine, even though these are distinct concepts. This is a way of saying that fantasy can become closely related to an object like a videogame, but that it exceeds the game, and persists *after* we are finished playing (and hails us back into the game, or a different game, *before* we play again). The work of make-believe at the fringe of ruled or algorithmic structures persists and suffuses the spaces where we play these games, influencing daily patterns as well as how and when we engage with other, related entertainment media. As Galloway (2006) suggests, players are not persistently "in" play at every moment when they are engaging with a videogame. Sometimes they're configuring options or reviewing scores or save files, waiting at load screens, or in the next room doing something else while the game remains suspended in a state of pause. But even if, as players, we are not within the literal structure of a videogame's "core loop" at every moment of interaction, it is important to note that anticipation can be more powerful than play itself. The core loop is a reason for playing, a desire to return that stitches play sessions together, a (perhaps) self-soothing, affect-regulating, balancing or unifying experience that we look forward to and reach out toward.

In this sense, fantasy is not simply a second reality we escape into, a view embodied in virtual reality systems that ask us to remove all our furniture from the room where we plan to play the game so we don't trip and injure ourselves. The domestic spaces where we play videogames here become a burden or a threat. Fantasy in videogame play is something intimately wound up with the spaces where we spend these extended periods of time with games, and with which daily rituals necessarily become caught up. This conceptualization of fantasy is meant as a kind of "media ecology," as in Matthew Fuller's (2005) use of the term for describing "the massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter" (2005: 2). Fantasy itself becomes a "medium" insofar it facilitates the overlap and transference of seemingly disparate objects and patterns of behavior—both material and immaterial. In this dissertation, I discuss fantasy as being like the "wonderful, leaping fish" Linda Williams (2001) described in relation to melodrama's ability to transcend discrete media formats. This analogy is meant to emphasize fantasy's capacity to stitch together unexpected things, to expand the range of cultural objects and experiences typically discussed in relation to games, and offer new ways to talk about the role of entertainment media in everyday life. It is for this reason that I view the *other* side of fantasy as nostalgia. Nostalgic relations with games stem from their having become deeply embedded as structures of pleasurable repetition within our experience of daily life over extended periods of time. In the dissertation's conclusion, I discuss nostalgia further in this context.

CHAPTER 1. FILM-GAME CONVERGENCE AND BODY FANTASY

> It seems, though, that we seldom want the sense of movement and excitement, the speed, by itself. How many times does one want to visit the Imax or, probably, a Showscan Dynamic Motion Simulator? We generally want the exhilaration and rush embedded in a fiction. Such fictions situate the thrills. They refer us to the world.
>
> Richard Dyer, 1994: 7-8

> A core of meaning may travel across media, but its narrative potential will be filled out, actualized differently when it reaches a new medium. When it comes to narrative abilities, media are not equally gifted; some are born storytellers, others suffer from serious handicaps.
>
> Marie-Laure Ryan, 2005: 1

In the past fifteen years, it has become an almost commonplace observation that videogames are increasingly "cinematic," and that cinema, in turn, is increasingly game-like. Sheila Murphy's historical consideration of media convergence (*How Television Invented New Media*, 2011) highlights how games have long been overlooked as early computing systems enmeshed with other media (like television) in domestic spaces. But scholarly inquiry into the content and form of convergence media has tended to hinge on vague, shifting definitions of what a videogame actually is. The muddy or—at times—diminutive role games play within prevailing conceptions of convergence culture limits scholarly understanding of this culture more generally.

Much of what has been written about film-game convergence looks at literal examples of "intermediality," such as film-to-game or game-to-film adaptations, or games that are tied to movies in merchandising efforts. Though important, and especially useful for thinking about industry overlap, these approaches skirt issues of medium specificity and deal only with the most literal examples of film-game connections (e.g. Mack, 2016). And most work that imagines something beyond the most literal points of convergence between films and games tends to over-emphasize narrative.[9] The few exceptions (e.g., Brooker, 2009) often rely on even more tenuous notions of overlap ("videogame style" versus "cinematic style").[10] Often, whether or not a media scholar will even tout cinema-videogame convergence in the first place depends on where that scholar stands on matters of videogame medium specificity (e.g., narratology-ludology debates).[11] The scholar who views games as a platform for storytelling (narratology) may be more inclined to note the narrative affinities between games and cinema; the scholar who sees games as unique, rule-based structures requiring a non-narrative hermeneutic (ludology) may never feel the need to incorporate cinematic analysis into games-specific research. A convergence approach tracing the connective path of narrative alone will tend to misrepresent what is unique about games, and for this reason not advance the conversation about convergence as far as may be possible. This is one potential limitation to the highly influential notion of convergence culture as "transmedia storytelling" (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins' more general

definition of convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms" seems broad enough to accommodate new definitions for new media, but it is used primarily to describe the transmedia narrative strategy adopted by media franchises like *The Matrix* for simply telling a massive story across a variety of platforms, so that the videogame (*Enter the Matrix,* 2003, and *The Matrix Online*, 2004), the live-action films (*The Matrix, The Matrix Reloaded, The Matrix Revolutions*, 1999-2003), the animated film anthology (*Animatrix*, 2003), and the comic book (*The Matrix Comics, Vol. 1*, 2003) all convey unique aspects of a broader "transmedial" story (Jenkins, 2006: 2). Jenkins, along with some narratologists (e.g., Marie-Laure Ryan, 2005), at least concedes that different media may tell that transmedial story differently, a gesture toward specificity he neglects to follow up in detail, but that is often unfortunately entirely left out of many accounts of film-game convergence.

This chapter conceives of games as structured and repetitious interaction for the expression of empowerment fantasies—an approach it also applies to popular cinema in order to map new space for convergence and to do so in a way that retains medium specificity (rather than couching its analysis within a narrative framework which privileges the principally narrative medium of the two). It returns to discussions of fantasy from psychoanalytically inflected film and media studies from the 1980s and 90s—as well as rarely incorporated discussions in the empirical and clinical world of psychological research—in order to demonstrate the important role fantasy can play in conversations about film-game convergence, especially for articulating an approach outside the auspices of narratology.

The two main goals of the following brief review of literature are, first, to demonstrate how extensively convergence scholarship tends to reduce games to narrative and, second, to show that even in thoughtful accounts (which afford games a distinct—though, again, often "handicapped"—capacity for storytelling, to borrow Ryan's language) opportunities are missed for seeing games as unique cultural objects, and for, in turn, thinking about the place and function of games in convergence. The implications for this reconsideration of the place of games within media convergence are potentially far-ranging, including how we think of the relations between entertainment media, and their historical relationship to the home and the people who consume them.

The context for this intervention begins with noting that there is, in even the most nuanced narratology, a subtle hierarchy of storytelling that diminishes games precisely by extolling their potential to tell stories. Any instance of viewing games as a narrative, Espen Aarseth argues, minimizes what is truly unique about the medium—that player-driven, repetitious and structured activity, that stuff *in-between* the narrative-cinematic cutscenes— therefore positioning games as an automatically "inferior narrative art" (2004: 362). But it is perhaps even more important to note how, in the less-nuanced narratology of content-convergence, scholars and commentators advocate for a resolution of all distinction between these two media. In such arguments, games are reimagined as narratives with sustained first-person optics (e.g., Aldred, 2006), or simply as narratives with branching paths (build-your-own-adventure novels), where time is mutable and different permutations are considered in turn. This definition of games makes them indistinguishable from films like (to use a frequently cited example) *Run, Lola, Run* (1998) (see, for example, Jim Bizzochi's "*Run, Lola, Run*—Film as Narrative Database," 2005). Entire edited volumes like *ScreenPlay: Cinema / Videogames / Interfaces*, (2002), and the *Visual-Narrative Matrix* (2000) along with numerous DiGRA papers (Digital Games Research Association) have imaginatively resolved the "language" of cinema and the "language" of videogames (dissolving and blending their specific formal "grammars").

It is worth pausing on one important example of this broader tendency, specifically the way a videogame's fluid, virtual camera tends to be un-cinematic, clashing with cinema's analytic construction of space. Narrative filmmaking's long-established formal system involves dividing up space for greater emotional impact and narrative economy, manipulating attention by exercising tight control over scale, frame, point of view, and pacing—creating a scene, creating an image. A videogame's virtual camera, on the other hand, tends to be fixed above and behind the player's character, at a distance from the field of play, fluid and continuously relaying the state of the game, without edits or other discontinuities, even when nothing in particular is happening. One might say that the attentional needs of the player determine the role of the camera system, rather than the other way around (an exception being "immersive," VR cinema).[12] A cinematic camera freely occludes vital plot information. Exercising narrative ellipsis means controlling the spectator's access to knowledge, which has become an important part of building tension and allowing imagination to take hold. By contrast, a virtual camera in a videogame that does not properly frame the videogame's action at any moment is invariably and simply considered "broken." Attempts to resolve these different camera (or image-making) expectations comprise a key strand in academic discourse on film-game convergence. Taking a moment to track this thread does not present an exhaustive review of the relevant literature, but it does touch on many of the most common points and examples in film-game convergence scholarship, and will, at the same time, lay some of the groundwork for this chapter's claims about embodied fantasy in media.

In an example of convergence scholarship seeking to resolve the camera tension, Clarke and Mitchell (2001) decide in favor of cinematic montage, arguing that the "continuity of time, space and action" that most games adhere to is actually an arbitrary convention that could (and *should*) be changed in favor of a more dynamic, "cinematic" camera in games (2001: 7-8). For evidence, the authors identify early games like *Pac-Man* (1982) that precede the continuity tradition. These early arcade games lacked a "sustained continuity of time, space and action" because gameplay was brief and "consisted of separate, distinct levels of stylized play within a game area typically no larger than the screen" (8). Reading early videogames as spatially discontinuous allows the authors to identify continuity as a historical convention (starting with "first-person 'shootem-ups' such as *Doom*" around 1992) rather than as an absolute requisite of form (8). And they are right about this—the game camera's continuity *is* a historical convention, and it *is* beginning to change in a number of high profile games (discussed more below in relation to the Quick Time Event). But the issue is that theirs is not a compelling reading of a game like *Pac-Man*, which is highly continuous in its "play"—in fact, when player characters leave one boundary of the screen they emerge from the opposite side because play takes place in a universe so entirely defined by the continuity of action on screen that there is no outside (nothing to cut away to).[13] And there is no analytical division of space *within* the arena (no zooming in or framing just portions of the field of play). In this game—like almost all action games regardless of the length or complexity of a round of gameplay in *Pac-Man*—play unfolds in an absolute and uninterrupted "continuity of time, space and action." While visual continuity is a convention that game experimenters have been testing recently, it is not a convention in any arbitrary or purely *external* (historical) way—and Clarke and Mitchell's misrecognition of *Pac-Man* is an example of a common eagerness to "cinematize" videogames, to fragment and make sense of them through a cinematic lens.

Some convergence scholars adopt the reverse framework. Alexander Galloway (2006) suggests, in "The Origins of the First-Person Shooter," that gaming's *aesthetic of continuity* is

not just a historical convention, but rather a core part of the experience of playing a game, and something that has begun to influence cinema as well. He argues that the videogame camera's fluid continuity reflects human perception:

> The lack of montage is necessary for the first-person way of seeing, even if the game itself is a side-scroller, or a top-view shooter, or otherwise not rendered in first person. Where film montage is fractured and discontinuous, gameplay is fluid and continuous. Hence the gamic way of seeing is similar to human vision in ways that film, and television and video, for that matter, never were. (2006: 65)

The fluid continuity Galloway posits as central to gaming's formal logic (and Clark and Mitchell lament as a tired convention) is in fact widely shared in the world of videogames.[14] But it is curious that Galloway describes human *vision* as "fluid and continuous," when it would perhaps more accurately be described as discontinuous and fleeting, given to lapses in attention and the pitches and rolls of eyes in the head, blinking, motion-blur, and rapid (montage-like) re-focusing, eyes "darting around the room." All of these discontinuities, psychologists have learned, are compensated for (by pre-existing "schema" or "cognitive maps") before we are consciously presented with perception, a process which David Bordwell long ago linked to cinematic spectatorship.[15] Moreover, the process by which something inherently discontinuous becomes *experienced as a fluid and continuous impression* doesn't seem hugely dissimilar from the processes by which cinema spectators "perceive" a discontinuous camera system as fluid and continuous in its depiction of space and time. I don't just mean the phi phenomenon and the persistence of vision—I also mean that cinematic editing practices are already about *perceived* continuity ("invisible" cuts).[16]

And yet, despite this shared perception of continuity, cinema's aesthetic system clashes with the requirements of the videogame camera—the latter of which requires, one might say, more than *perceived* continuity. There are of course notable exceptions in the world of gaming that deliberately frustrate our continuous visual access to the space of play (exceptions, I suggest, proving the rule).[17] But, more importantly, Galloway's perhaps too-easy analogy between "gamic" and human "way of seeing" might allow for a perhaps too-easy formulation of game-film convergence—a formula predicated (like many other accounts of film-game convergence) on shared formal features alone. In both of Galloway's analogies, there is (too) much emphasis on what is *literally* seen, rather than the unique ways in which the body might make use of this visual information when engaging each medium. Galloway defines "gamic cinema" by its fluid camera movements and eschewal of montage—features which may not mean quite the same thing in games, or even in each cinematic case.

Perhaps a more productive way of saying that games generally obey a "first-person way of seeing" (since, by Galloway's own admission, they don't always adopt a first-person optical point of view) is by reference to James Newman's (2002) argument that all games are played "first *hand*," i.e., that players are asked to directly act in games—to intervene in game events. Roger Caillois (1958) characterizes the player's direct involvement as the "latitude of the player," the "free[dom] within the limits set by the rules" to respond to the "constant and unpredictable definitions of the situation [of play]… such as are produced by each attack or counterattack" (1958: 7-8). In spite of the complexity contributing to a game's "unpredictability," the player must somehow generate "*constant* … definitions of the situation" of play (even if the definitions are false or incomplete) in order to act *as a player* in the game, to experience it "first hand." A videogame's depiction of continuous action actually challenges human vision to be more continuous than it is comfortably capable of being.

Intense agonistic games dry out contact lenses—they challenge players not to blink. Competitive games such as *GoldenEye* (1997) task players with constantly keeping track of continuous and fast-paced action, as well as focusing on multiple points at once (up to four distinct viewpoints carved into the screen's four-player multiplayer quadrants). The game's depiction of space is fluid because its images are an instrument to aid the player in overcoming a series of discontinuities, limitations or perceptual bottlenecks that inhibit our grasp of the game's complicated and unpredictable action. Human perceptual capacity for conscious attention is very small compared with the complex spaces of most agonistic videogames. Participating in an agonistic game—navigating space, overcoming obstacles, tracking targets, and being aware of and actively frustrating another player's tracking efforts—requires a variety of means for overcoming human perception's fundamental discontinuities and limitations in focal capacity.

In videogames, the virtual camera is an agent of legibility in a space of complexity; it is largely through spatial and temporal information contained within the game's (virtual camera-mediated) images that the *situation of play* in an action videogame can be articulated (or intuited), though these virtual (three-dimensional, perspective-based) images are only one among several important tools recruited in the player's endeavor. Others include in-game sound, the sound of competing players hammering controller buttons, scores (kill count, remaining ammo, etc.), topographical maps, radar systems, and of course implicit knowledge of the rules of play, map layouts, spawning points, and the tendencies and behaviors of one's opponents (this is often referred to as the "meta-game").

Put succinctly for the present discussion of the videogame camera: videogame images are more a fluid articulation of the space of play than a duplication of human physiological vision. As players, our schematic understanding of the game, our internalization of rules and the exact way a game's many elements interrelate in play, join with the game's fluid and continuous portrayal of space (in the face of often frenzied action) in the shared mission of facilitating the elaboration of definitions of the situation of play. Skilled players do this more quickly and effectively than novices—this fact is often referred to via the psychological principle of "chunking" [18] (the forming of bigger chunks of information in long-term memory as a result of repeated engagement and learning). The role a game's images play in this process is an important part of the explanation for the aesthetic of continuity in videogames. And conceiving of the aesthetic this way alters our understanding of film-game convergence more broadly, with ramifications for how we make sense of videogame-inflected cinema as well.

In games based on finely tuned motor skills where small, controlled movements with precise timing are an absolute requirement for competitive play, such as *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (2001), skilled players track movement not just in seconds or fractions of a second—they actually count the frames in the move's animation. When *Smash* players press an attack button, they trigger a short, pre-determined character animation, which is in turn only a small unit in a fast-paced and ongoing fluid relay of attacks (and counterattacks) so that *literally* every frame of the action videogame's animated images potentially contain information crucial for the game's eventual outcome, and this is potentially true every time you play. Of course—there are also many frames where nothing significant is happening. And the game's camera depicts both kinds of moments with utterly indifferent fidelity. Rather than narrative pacing or the framing of narrative events for emotional impact guiding the camera's system of image-making, the videogame image system more often serves an absolute integrity (continuity and reliability) of space and time. The continuity of spatiotemporal relations within the place and time of play comprises the material basis upon which, and through which, an action game like *Smash* is

played. A camera aiding players in making sense of the "situation of play," at any and every moment during play, will reflect this spatiotemporal integrity as a given.

A cinematic camera, even when depicting a game-like event like a boxing match, is not a tool facilitating play. But this camera's articulation of a diegetic and agonistic (competitive) exchange does facilitate spectator participation by the same logic as that just discussed above: by constructing the spatiotemporal situation of play. In this sense, the "shaky-cam" aesthetic and accompanying rapid-shot montage (hyper-fragmentation of space) so common in many cinematic action sequences, and intended to convey a sense of chaos, both come at the expense of a more direct and embodied participation in the perceived diegetic competition itself, the interplay of bodies (be it a shootout, a fight, a race, etc.). The *impression* of action (as perceptual disorientation) displaces embodied participation in the agonistic exchange: there is a vast perceptual (and, one might say, *ludic*) disconnect between the bodies of spectators (experiencing vertigo), and the diegetic bodies on the screen, engaged in (agonistic) conflict.

A videogame-inflected film would, at the most basic level, share gaming's obligation to clarity of action, even (or especially) in the face of chaos. Game or film, the integrity of time and space—as the substance in and through which these agonistic bodies engage—is not just an aesthetic preference; it is the terms of participation in bodily conflict that is given meaning or context by that dynamic (unpredictable) "situation of play," which the camera's aesthetic of continuity and legibility (by also obeying the integrity of time and place) helps, at each moment, to define. If a videogame-inflected cinema is different from what Laura Mulvey (1975) describes as narrative cinema's relay of looks stitching together an analytic (and gendered) division of space, then the distinction emerges during fluid depictions of bodies in highly legible agonistic action—moments when space is divided by action, not editing, and when the exchange of glances is less important than the continuous trajectory of the kinetic body. In games, the clear articulation of space facilitating rule-bound engagement is a precursor for involvement in action, and for greater bodily participation based on deeply embedded patterns of action that are depicted with detached clarity—a game's image is often bifurcated in side view (e.g.: "side-scrolling"[19] videogame), as if *dissected* for the maximum diagrammatic clarity of trajectories of movement governed by the rues of play. In this sense, *The Last Airbender* (2010) contains one of the most videogame-like moments in recent cinematic history when, in its final action sequence, its protagonist demonstrates his water ("bending") mastery in an absolutely fluidly depicted, side-scrolling action sequence (facilitated by cheat-cuts, wire-erasure, and a heavy use of CGI), wherein spectators are permitted to peer into a series of discrete agonistic challenges, and witness (perhaps even participate in) the protagonist's response, his spectacular, and slow-motion overcoming of all opposition.

This discussion focuses on the camera and optics—but it could also emphasize, in videogame-inflected cinema (and television), an eagerness for *process*, a thirst for kinetic details. The eschewal of analytical or elliptical montage isn't just about continuity; rather, continuity is in the service of process. One could say that Robert Bresson's films—e.g., *Pickpocket* (1959)— were a historical precursor to a videogame-inflected cinema. Recent Japanese animation (anime) fitting this mold (e.g., *Naruto*, *One Piece*) fixate on bodily action, frequently returning in plot to past fights in order to study, dwell, protract, and sometimes even map or diagram a historical situation of play. In the process these texts produce a complex commentary upon the body, including the mapping (making visible) of its interior, its flows of energies, and hidden capacities. They may not be explicitly about videogames, but in their emphasis on the body as a mechanism of power within a complex agonistic system, these anime represent better examples

for a conceptual overlap between visual narrative and videogames than those employed in most of the academic literature, which is either interested in literal adaptation or in structural qualities only (point of view, temporal mutability, etc.).

A far more prominent example of film-game convergence within the academic literature—and one that any account of film-game convergence cannot avoid addressing— is the videogame "quick time event," (QTE). The QTE is an interactive cinematic cutscene in games where players scan the margins of the screen and press the buttons depicted there in order to trigger the preferred narrative outcome. That the image of the button itself appears on the screen as an undisguised command to the player (having lost its narrative "cover") reflects the extent to which the "latitude of the player" has been diminished: players press the button with a narrow margin or "latitude" based only on reaction time, which they are generally only asked to minimize. Since the depicted button—which in the QTE is the only necessary statement of the situation of play required for player participation—is overlaid onto the camera's more dimensional articulation of the space and time of embodied (profilmic) action, the camera is freed up for more discontinuous, dynamic, or "cinematic" depictions of action (shot angle variation and rapid edits). But, as a result, the "process" of play is wholly detached from the cinematic spectacle to which the virtual camera then devotes itself.

In other words, the "game" played during a QTE moment is not typically the same game moments before or after the QTE. Were the careful spatial navigation and target tracking of in-game play for a game like *Resident Evil 4* (2005) still required in the game played during the QTE, then the QTE's dynamic and cinematic camera would produce spatial disorientation, seriously inhibiting the player's ability to create definitions of (and respond to) the situation of play. In fact, the QTE does not in any way inhibit the player from playing (a miniaturized new game, a game within a game). A QTE-heavy videogame (like *King's Quest*, 2015) is every bit as legitimately a "game" as a more traditional, arcade-like action game (like *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, 1992). But player activity in a QTE is largely "mimetic" or "make-believe," meaning that the gameplay "situation" is not very thoroughly stitched into the diegetic scenario (buttons "stick out" of the fabric of the image), and our engagement with the action of the cutscene requires an imaginative "reinsertion" of these thread-bare buttons. We might imagine—so the mentality goes—that it is *as if* we were suddenly participating in a dynamic, interactive narrative film (players are, to use Caillois' words, "playing at" playing the film). Like Maggie Simpson in the iconic opening credits to *The Simpsons* television show, players are not *literally* steering the car—they're engaged in a parallel (and much simplified) activity that converges with the cinematic scenario through make-believe. For a much more thorough exposition of make-believe play and videogames, see Chris Bateman's *Imaginary Games* (2011).

Games are extremely diverse—and though the entertainment industry tends to be risk-averse and prone to cloning past successes, videogames are still remarkably varied in form. Games can be many things other than spatial or timing-based motor challenges—even if, historically, and to this day, action games make up a huge proportion (to some recent generic analysis, a plurality)[20] of the gaming market. It must be noted that—like the reflex play of the QTE videogame—puzzle, strategy or rhythm games make smaller demands on the in-game camera than action games where players control virtual bodies moving through space. It is a Chess cliché that skilled players don't even need to look at the board. Non-action game genres often free up the virtual camera to do other things. The camera as such (and perhaps the entire visual field) becomes less important.

In one example, the *Fire Emblem* series (1990-present), tactical and strategic decisions are made in advance (rigidly static camera, isomorphic view of the map in a single extreme long-shot), followed by a dynamic cutscene dramatizing the combat outcome (low angles, shot/reverse-shot formations, long-shots), so that players oscillate between agents and spectators of the situation of play. Players "immersed" in the challenges presented by the tactical system may disable these cutscenes, which delay the interval between "attacks and counterattacks," add nothing (except *delay*) to the "definition of the situation" of play, and serve a primarily mimetic register: it is like *Battle Chess* (1988), meaning it is "as if" your Chess piece has come to life and attacked its opponent. These cinematics don't really matter to the game. However, players who are actively engaging in mimetically fleshing out each encounter on the battlefield—a make-believe play at the fringes of the rules' structural support—may be more inclined to leave them on, at least for significant (boss) battles.

In narratology and virtual-reality discourses, "immersion" is nearly always associated with narrative and make-believe activity (i.e., it is the *cinematic* camera and its involvement in plot that supposedly makes games more immersive). But it is worth pointing out that an engaging, rule-based game can perhaps better instantiate the qualities of immersion, which Janet Murray (1997) describes as a kind of embodied sense of being submerged in water (aka, a substitutive fictional space), forgetting about the conditions of mediation. When one points out that immersion happens almost everywhere—with hobbies, one's work or research, good music, exercise, in everyday embodied activities that have become habitual, or really any other engaging activity that commands full attention— one begins to question the usefulness of the term altogether. Or one at least questions its seemingly exclusive relation to narratology or virtual-reality discourses (Chris Bateman, 2011, discusses this tension in greater detail and to the same conclusion). Natasha Schüll's (2012) study of casino gambling relays an anecdote where new video poker machines with elaborate cinematic animations were scorned by gamblers (engrossed in their play) who saw the supposedly immersive CGI interludes as an unnecessary delay between hands, an interruption to the game's core loop.

As this short discussion of convergence discourse (specifically, formal tensions in games and narrative cinema) hopefully demonstrates, seeing all games as "interactive stories" can quickly lead to a phenomenological reduction of the medium of the videogame. And this potential reduction looms in all conversations about film-game convergence. The narrative framework would almost completely discount commercially and culturally significant videogames like *Tetris* (1984) that forego even superficial narrative content. Many more videogames, like *Tetris Attack* (1996), *Pokemon Puzzle League* (2000), or *Planet Puzzle League* (2007), do include a rough fictional world, but these worlds cannot motivate the core gameplay structure, which endures unchanged in all three games (each is actually the same "game" with a different fictional milieu). Some of the most classically recognizable games (e.g., the *Mario* series) are spatial platformers with little or no coherent narrative. Non-narrative action, strategy, or crafting games like *League of Legends* (2009), *Starcraft* (1998, 2015), and *Minecraft* (2009), have for many years been among the most popular of all commercial videogames. The narrative framework also marginalizes simulation genres, like sports or racing games, or physics simulators like *Kerbal Space Program* (2015). The recent phenomenon of "hook"-laden mobile games like *Candy Crush Saga* (2012) cannot be made sense of through narrative. As narratives, these games are absolutely incoherent. And even within the most popular of all story-heavy videogame genres, such as role-playing games (RPGs) such as *Final Fantasy*, players still typically spend most of their time outside of narrative, properly speaking, in long stretches of

repetitious gameplay between cinematic cut-scenes (engaged in the game's system of interactions, its "core loop"). What happens during play is not well understood using only established textual hermeneutics.

This isn't to say that the prevailing narratology model doesn't offer any insight to film-game convergence. Even if I find myself unsatisfied by their arguments, these voices both contribute to and reflect actual convergence strategies and well funded efforts to make games more cinematic. In other words, narrative convergence has become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy through which media industries push the envelope of gaming's cinematic mimesis (in terms of graphics and design) in the name of transmedia production and branding (for an overview of these media strategies, see, for example, Jenkins, 2006; Clarke, 2013; Hills, 2012). Aside from an increasing number of game-to-film adaptations (*Super Mario Bros., 1993, Mortal Kombat, 1995, Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, 2001, Resident Evil, 2002, Doom, 2005, Silent Hill, 2006, Hitman, 2007, Prince of Persia: Sands of Time*, 2010, *Angry Birds, 2016*), there are a number of narrative films which treat games as a generic thematic content, a patina of pixilation or heads-up displays (HUD) evoked through more or less overt references to gamer culture: *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* (2010), *Gamer* (2009), *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012), *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014), or *Pixels* (2015). Games are a topic of these films, and are treated referentially. This can be incredibly literal (*Scott Pilgrim*) or more abstract— Buckland (2000), for example, identifies an emerging cinematic category called "digital narrative," meaning a story reflective of the progression of a videogame, with its stratified challenges, discrete objectives, levels, and a more or less continuous sense of progression (this is roughly analogous to some arguments in the critical reception of the 2003 Thai martial arts action film, *Ong Bak*—e.g., Lee, 2005). As I will argue in greater detail below, even the game-like story structure in a movie is primarily *referentially* (rather than *experientially*) related to games. This approach, yet again, reduces a game to its most overtly narrative elements. E.g.: if *Super Mario Bros.* were a story (it's not), it would be a repetitious account of advancing from level to level. A movie like *Ong Bak* could be structured this way too, but this doesn't make the film "like a videogame," since the game was never reducible to the progression of plot in the first place (and, really, neither is the film). Comparing both in terms of narrative progression leaves out a more vital and important area of overlap. In short, *Ong Bak* really is a great example of a videogame-influenced film, but not because its story is structured like videogame levels. It is the film's breathtaking, embodied action that qualifies it as such.

Finally, the industry convergence model helps explain why so many big budget, high-production value (or "AAA," said "triple-A") videogames do increasingly look like action cinema. Action films and games targeting a young male demographic are advertised almost interchangeably, and sit side-by-side on platforms like the Playstation Store or Xbox Marketplace (game platforms which, in turn, become centralized media hubs within the home). There is something Kittleresque in the homogeneity of this top-down model of convergence. Highly "cinematic" videogames like the *Uncharted* series (2007-present) win awards for their storytelling and production value specifically because they show a difficult and complicated merger of forms—a full-force denial of what Matthew Kirschenbaum calls the "heterogeneity of digital data and its embodied inscriptions" (2008: 6). Videogame cut-scenes are nearly indistinguishable from the formal grammars and contents of action cinema—a fact increasingly also true of QTEs, which are pervasive in these games, from heavily narrative games like *King's Quest* or *Heavy Rain* (2010), to action games like *Resident Evil 4*, the *God of War* series (2005-2013), and the *Uncharted* series. Some games employ a variety of strategies in pursuit of a fully

interactive cinema while at the same time quoting extensively from a well-known film genre (e.g., the 2011 game, *L.A. Noire*).

"AAA" videogames have become the most recent staging ground of André Bazin's "myth of total cinema," the idea that cinema will someday achieve full verisimilitude with nature, and that "cinema," as it might be, "has not yet been invented," (Bazin, 1967: 21). Virtual reality discourse tends to justify "total cinema's" shortcomings (its having fallen short of fully substituting the real) through a vague futurism rather than as an avowed wish or "myth": totally immersive ("Holodeck") virtual reality (aka "total cinema") *is just around the corner*. Such has been the refrain since the mid-1990s.[21] Peter Lunenfeld ("The Myths of Interactive Cinema," 2004) has traced this "myth" in discussions of film-game convergence, and James Newman ("The Myth of the Ergodic[22] Videogame," 2002) has done so in relation to videogames specifically, as a response to narratology discourse (e.g., *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Murray's influential narratology text). Within "total cinema" discourse (as well as in the related virtual worlds and narratology discourses), one can say that *videogames have become ensnared in cinema's founding mythos*. There is a kind of inescapable momentum to the approach of seeing games *as* interactive cinema. And the more we see of those celebrated and well-financed games designed to extensively reference cinematic style, the more difficult it can be to think of games and cinema as fundamentally distinct media with their own "embodied inscriptions". This makes approaches to the convergence question that lie outside the narratology framework (like Galloway's treatment of "gamic cinema" in terms of different kinds of optics) so interesting and important—if few and far between. Popular games and cinema do share important elements in common, but I suggest that the goal of articulating these commonalities benefits from a sensitivity to the ways in which the two media are distinct.

To that end, this chapter contributes to the small body of work exploring media convergence through an extra-narrative rubric. It emphasizes the important possibilities that develop (for thinking about the place of games within the wider entertainment media networks of convergence culture) when, instead of assuming that all games are interactive narratives, we think of games in the ways that psychologists or game designers might—as compelling play fantasies or gameplay "hooks" (pleasurable, structured repetitions in play) that are built upon these fantasies. This analysis is tailored for games, but can be productively applied to cinema as well.

Games give us a high-adrenaline and densely packed choreography of action with no "cuts." Their accomplishment (perhaps why they are exciting for storytellers) is the extent to which every gesture in long, unbroken stretches of repetitious action, is meaningful and emotionally engaging. The precise manner in which this meaning is generated in games and film—and what happens to it when the bodily gesture attached to it is separated from its context in play—will be the focus of the rest of this chapter. And it will be applied to the basic question of what a videogame-inflected cinema might look like when "videogame" here doesn't simply (and tautologically) already mean "interactive cinema."

Body Memory, Body Fantasy

Embodiment has become a common rubric in recent years for studying games such as *Dance Dance Revolution*, or controllers with "natural" user interfaces like the Nintendo Wii-mote or Xbox Kinect, or the phenomenon of "exergaming," meaning games that require a player to use their whole body to play (see, for instance, Behrenshausen, 2007 or Juul, 2010). But videogame embodiment is rarely discussed beyond these niche systems that call attention to the

player's body in overt and broadly recognized ways. Embodiment in cinema is a more established paradigm; for example, Vivian Sobchack's cinema phenomenological approach dates back to the early 1990s. And discourse on the body itself, in a variety of fields, underwent a kind of renaissance in the 1990s, including, "the late modern idea of the body as a project" (Shilling, 1993)—something we work at, maintain, improve, a condition of *becoming*. Perhaps most significantly for this research is the notion summarized by Jude Elund (2015) that since the 1990s, "there has been a rejection of brain-bound notions of identity and self-formation and a shift to analyzing the brain, the body and the world, wherein the body's interactions within the world, and perceived by the mind, are the essential features of embodiment and cognition" (Elund, 2015: 18). Approaches to embodiment such as Csordas (1994) and Gibbs (2006) explore the signifying power of the body as a cultural phenomenon as well as a biological one, so that "mind, body and environment constantly interact, being inseparable from social interaction and culture" (Elund, 2015: 18). When gaming's specific forms of embodiment are placed in dialogue with these other discourses, and when embodiment is seen as a regular (and yet little understood) aspect of *every game* (not just the games where players somewhat redundantly wave their own arms around) then a fruitful avenue for a theory of embodied content convergence emerges.

Hamilakis et al. (2002) argue that the body as a "project," as a perpetual experience of becoming, is related to "a fundamental change in the perception of the body within western modernity: the change from the Fordist western bodies, disciplined, rigid and regimented in time and space, to the bodies of late modernity," which is, in turn, an "economic reality… characterized by the attributes of flexible accumulation" (Hamilakis et al., 2002: 2). This notion of flexible economic accumulation in late modernity is embodied in a media industry where, in Henry Jenkins' 1999 words about media consumers, "we all roll our own," or, in other words, "we cobble together a personal mythology of symbols, images, and stories that we have adopted from the raw materials given us by the mass media." This media industry, the literature on embodiment suggests, broadly corresponds to the concept of a body with "flexible boundaries and fluid states, changeable to suit specific identities" (Hamilakis et al., 2002: 2).

This chapter (when read with those that follow) represents an original, sustained rethinking of content convergence that combines these approaches to embodiment in different media through the flexible conceptual lens of fantasy. When the fantasy in question is specifically bodily—bodies in game perform certain actions, which become graphed to a player's body, and recur at a bodily (pre-rational) level—Vivian Sobchack's formulation of cinematic identification is especially illustrative. She argues that as "cinesthetic subjects," we make sense of perceptual material in cinema on a bodily level *before* we understand it rationally:

> Indeed, in most sensual experiences at the movies the cinesthetic subject does not think of his or her own literal body (or clothing) and is not, as a result, rudely thrust offscreen back into his or her seat in response to a perceived discontinuity with the figural bodies and textures onscreen. Rather, the cinesthetic subject feels his or her literal body as only one side of *an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity* that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen. (Sobchack, 2004: 79)

Sobchack's model places embodied engagement in cinema into tension with deliberate, rational thought: as "cinesthetic subjects," we reflexively enjoy our bodily identification, and yet remain all the while fully conscious of the kind of "sensual enhancement" that comes from sensing one's own body's reflexive engagement:

> This sensual enhancement in which the body reflexively reflects—without a thought—on its own sensuality emerges in the most intense of direct engagements in which we 'feel ourselves feeling': a fantastic dish or incredible glass of wine in which we reflectively taste ourselves tasting, great sex in which we lose ourselves in feeling ourselves feel. (Sobchack, 2004: 77)

To this list of self-reflexive sensation, we might add the pleasure of *causing* a fantasy (in which one is, in turn, the *cause* of some action or spectacular effect), a consciously recognized wish staged for its own sake, what Richard Allen (1995) calls the "iconic imagination" of cinema spectatorship. This is an extension of feminist film theory's use of fantasy as a "way out of the apparent gender hierarchy inscribed in theories of the cinematic apparatus," but one specifically intended to account for the fact that "cinemagoing is a conscious and rational activity," its pleasures explicitly sanctioned and in accordance with "belief" (1995: 121, 122).

Voices of moral panic over violence in videogames sometimes adopt a framework similar to phenomenology's use of embodiment (but for very different reasons), but intended to raise the important question of what happens to a body memory, once internalized, and seemingly separated from "conscious" supervision. For example, Simon Penny (2004) has suggested that games train the body to kill *reflexively*, or *thoughtlessly*. In an argument that runs from Foucault's biopolitics (bodily discipline) and sports science (specifically, kinesiology's term, "muscle memory") to the well-documented historical collaborations between videogame developers and the US Department of Defense, Penny claims that games train players to kill people at a *pre-rational* or *bodily* level—so that when a shooter sets out to kill one person, he then tends to kill many others without knowing why (mass media—games—turn a shooter into a "mass" shooter). Henry Jenkins' (1999) testimony to Congress on gun violence and videogames takes a nearly diametrically opposed position, arguing that games are symbolic systems—not embodied violence—the full significance of which can only be discerned by consulting the subcultures that, in playing these games, provide the context for meaning-making. No doubt videogames train the body—Jenkins raises the question (rhetorically) of what meaning that training has, and how players put that to use. Regardless of whether a body memory can ever return and hijack consciousness (reflex killing), it is far more often the case—given the ratio of game players to school shooters—that the body memory is evoked for more mundane reasons, such as self-soothing, pleasurable imagining, or perhaps to express or externalize conflict—in short, for *fantasy*.[23]

In psychoanalytic disciplines alone the term "fantasy" has taken on so broad and inclusive a meaning that it can apply to almost any kind of mental functioning (see Steiner, 2003). In order to address an embodied pleasure shared within a range of popular entertainment media—including that which lacks a clear-cut "textual" or narrative meaning—I employ Abraham and Torok's (1994) productive narrowing of the clinical use of the term, "fantasy" to, specifically, the "*conscious experience of fantasy*," where the ego becomes "the site and spectator of inner events emerging from a realm not authored or controlled by the ego," and where fantasy becomes an envoy appealing for "interpretive understanding and collaboration" between patient and analyst (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 24). Fantasy, in this sense, is "the representation of a problem seeking expression," a viewpoint which differs from Freudian approaches that see fantasy as unfulfilled (or repressed) desire (the *cause* of a symptom). Abraham and Torok see the fantasy itself as symptom. Fantasy is something that "intrudes" upon the ego: "…it catches one unawares; the ego, absorbed in its current tasks, has suffered a break in its continuity" (1994: 30). Fantasy, in this narrowed definition, also has the qualities of

"untimeliness"—it "removes the ego from its immediate concerns," or is a "misfit" to present thought contents.

In sum, fantasy is a "*fleeting imaginary representation intruding upon the ego's activities and as being, in that context, a total misfit*" (1994: 30). This notion of fantasy is helpful precisely because of the "ambassadorial function" afforded fantasy here in a psychic apparatus that is understood as a "multilayered system" where messages (from "wordless affects to unconsciously guarded secrets") are exchanged—internally traded phenomena that are not consciously authored (1994: 25). This model simultaneously complicates the notion of "being a cause" (since we do not author the fantasy), and preserves conceptual space for discussing a part of the self not fully under conscious control—for instance, a *muscle memory* or *reflex*—that nevertheless communicates something to consciousness (a kind of *agentless agency*). This model does not reject id psychology or primal (unconscious) fantasies, both of which Linda Williams (1991) persuasively applied to cinematic genres of bodily excess in a manner that has influenced the present chapter.[24] Nor, on the other hand, does this chapter limit itself to discussing the three (and only three) primal fantasies that Laplanche and Pontalis (1968) identify in connection with Freud's ideas about childhood explorations of the origins of subjectivity and sexuality, and employed to cover over (or "screen" out) a repressed (traumatic) discovery.

Significantly, however, the intrusion of *conscious* fantasy—when defined as an intruding and compulsively repeating, misfit memory —does seem to suggest traumatic repetition. To question whether the body fantasy is traumatic repetition raises the productive possibility of seeing the fantasy's bodily provocation as something that overwhelms the spectator's sensorium, requiring, in Freud's terms, psychic "binding" (repeating for mastery, to "tone down" the intensity of the stimulus) in order to attain distance and mastery over the emotional power of that original experience (Freud, 1920). Nietzsche once said that "only what does not cease to cause pain remains in memory." This would certainly change the meaning of "Tetris effect,"[25] not to mention the impetus for other "echo chamber" experiences, like getting a song "stuck" in your head.

Perhaps even more to the point however, is what Kevin Rozario (2007) identifies in the uncanny recognition many witnesses and reporters felt on September 11th, 2001: the sense that the terror attacks and destruction were a movie. In the words of a *New Yorker* film critic, in reference to the looped news footage of the collapsing Twin Towers, "people saw—literally saw, and are continuing to see, as it airs in unforgiving repeats—that day as a movie" (Rozario, 2007: 177). Relaying an account of one reporter, who kept expecting Bruce Willis to land on the roof and fly people to safety, Rozario points out that this news footage was reminiscent of "images of mass destruction" that had been "the film industry's bread and butter for decades" (Rozario, 2007: 177). This national trauma—while preceded by widely shared images of destruction in cinema, games, and other popular media—exemplifies the dissociative detachment from lived experience of traumatic experiences more generally (a separation of body and mind). Experiencing trauma "as a movie" is an example of what Classen and Koopman (1993) refer to as "strategies that help bolster a sense of control" in that traumatic moment when control has been so unexpectedly lost (1993: 178). It isn't, in this sense, just that Keanu or Bruce might come to the rescue, but that seeing the event as a movie is like becoming spectator to a staged (controlled) spectacle within a familiar world designed for empowering (if vicarious) bodily sensations. And it is an effort to re-integrate the traumatic memory within a familiar narrative frame. Shusterman (2012) points out that trauma is a sort of implicit or bodily memory (like habitual processes or muscle memory), rather than a cohesive element of consciousness:

Because of trauma's intense shock and pain, the victim cannot properly integrate it into a clear, conscious, meaningful memory, since the experience overwhelms one's normal sense of self, rupturing the narrative continuity that gives meaning and stability to experience, including remembered experience. Instead, as the explicit narrative memory of trauma is significantly blurred or even lost in many of its details, so the traumatic memory thrives in implicit behavioral form in terms of somatic complaints such as flashbacks (that repeatedly relive the trauma)… (Shusterman, 2012: 100).

Body fantasy could, in this sense, be thought of as a provocative body memory seeking expression, working toward narrative integration. That the movies the traumatized Americans "*saw*" (when they looked at real-world phenomena they were not prepared to emotionally process) were actually examples of Chapter 2's "body-transcendence" fantasy film genre (e.g., *Die Hard*, 1988) is, as Rozario suggests, likely not a coincidence. These films are sense-making devices because of how they imbue spectators' bodies with an implicit capacity to register and respond to images of mass destruction. If trauma more generally, as Shusterman says, is an implicit or bodily memory that cannot be easily reconciled with the contents of the psyche, then body fantasy would stand as a mechanism *analogous* to that employed for the eventual integration of traumatic experience. The envoy function of fantasy is structurally similar to traumatic repetition. In the same sense that, from an evolutionary biologist's point of view, play makes use of existing behavioral systems while serving the evolutionary function of building and honing learned body schema, fantasy of the sort discussed here may be said to make new use of the *structure* of traumatic repetition, returning to a sensation that cannot quite be integrated into regular conscious experience. But in this case the fantasy is like what Caruth (2010) would call "unclaimed experience," not because this experience contains something that clashes with the ego (as in fully repressed materials), and not because it contains the shocking material of trauma (which we are not yet prepared to integrate into consciousness); rather, the fantasy retains the structure of unclaimed experience in order to protect the fantasy *from* consciousness. Fantasy makes this structure into a kind of playground.

Most discussions of repression paint a picture of a fragile ego desperately policing its boundaries and imagining its illusory unity (in efforts to win the "love" of the critical parental superego) by anxiously defending itself against ("censoring") unacknowledged libidinal ("id") wishes. This censorship (the distortion—e.g., condensation, displacement, considerations of representability— and subsequently unique structure of unconscious thoughts and wishes) is the topic of Freud's seminal *Interpretation of Dreams*. But Freud also discusses a different structure for repression in a later (1908) essay on creativity, play, and *conscious* fantasy ("The Creative Writer and Day-dreaming"). Briefly elaborating on the distinction here between conscious and unconscious fantasy is important for this research's use of the term, "fantasy."

Freud defines conscious fantasy as play that has given up its connection with "palpable and visible things in the real world" in order to protect play's underlying wish (ego ambition, or playing "at being grown up") (Freud, 1908: 26). The contents of conscious fantasy have become slightly disguised (not fully distorted as in "dream work") by a "second censorship" (as it has come to be referred by clinical psychoanalysts) in order to avoid shame and hide any "excessive self-regard … left over from [one's] spoilt childhood" (Freud, 1908: 28). The point of conscious fantasy is to retain the empowering, pleasurable experience of play while appearing reconciled (even to the self) with the need to "take [one's] place in a society that teems with individuals who nurse equal pretensions" (Freud, 1908: 28). The works of creative artists (we could also

view the game designer—or the politician—in this way) are meant to help us "overcome our repulsion" at ego-empowerment fantasy-play in order to "enable us, from now on, to enjoy our own fantasies without shame or self-reproach" (Freud, 1908: 33). This is the artist's "*ars poetica*," their secret technique (some structural inverse to the "second censorship's" mild disguise, some "encoding" to play's "decoding"), which, Freud speculates, might have something to do with toning down overt ego-aggrandizing, or else somehow reorganizing "the barriers that arise between each single ego and the others" (Freud, 1908: 33). Freud concludes his essay at this point, but the concept has been since taken up in clinical psychoanalysis for thinking about play and the transformations of fantasy in children and adolescents, who become their own "disapproving audience" once they begin to "continually internalize the social situation in the form of the second censorship" (Sandler & Sandler, 2003: 83).[26]

While the intrusion of fantasy imagery (daydreaming or body fantasy) appears structured like a traumatic repetition, it might be better thought of as an empowering and playful response to (rather than a disabling shock in the face of) deep-seated or embodied feelings of smallness, anonymity, or low self-worth—what psychoanalysis might describe as the pain of loss involved in finally recognizing the boundaries of the self (the "me") through a painful (and in the case of *fort-da*, pleasurable) carving away of the "not-me" (psychoanalysis' favored iteration of "what does not cease to cause pain"). Getting "stuck" on a videogame—or, maybe, getting a game "stuck" in you, replaying a bodily fantasy during the game and while away—is a basic and predictable part of engaging action videogames, revealing the way that fantasy mediates this engagement.

The pleasure of the "core loop" is often displaced onto story when we talk about games. But, as with trauma, this verbal displacement does not adequately integrate loop (play, fantasy) with story. Microsoft's recent study of narrative retention in videogames revealed that our culturally shared capacity to talk about videogames in terms of narrative does not accurately reflect our grasp of actual game storylines. The study found that despite respondents' listing of "the story" as the leading motivation for liking a game, few could actually recount important plot points from their favorite games (Moriarty, 2014). It seems even that narrative was not the actual basis of their bond with the game in the first place—at least not the narrative as such—but (and this is my own suggestion) was more likely just a readily available (or culturally acceptable) means for *talking* about this bond. Even if the adults interviewed about videogame play were under no pressure to dress up their experience by relating it to a more legitimate cultural object, like narrative cinema, how would they have *put into words* what is compelling about the melody in a song, or the contagious bodily gesture in a movie, game, or choreographed dance? Perhaps the more easily conveyed song lyrics, film/game storylines, and gamer culture's references to characters, in-jokes, plot-twists, and lore all supplant more direct bodily experiences with media that are comparatively more difficult to express verbally. This tension refers to an old dualism, that language is far from what is felt: the distance between "secondary" and "primary" processes in Freud's principles of mental functioning (1911), or between the realms of mental abstraction (ideal) and sensuous experience (phenomenal) in Western philosophy. And it reflects the tension just mentioned above between embodied (implicit or muscle) memory, and cognitive memory: "What the fingers have learned, the mind has forgotten."[27]

One challenge to writing about games, then, is the recollection, the re-activation of embodied memory, through language. In this sense, this chapter is also about the general challenge of how to write about games. It represents a prolonged effort to articulate something central to media convergence that tends to resist articulation, that might in fact seem to have little

symbolic meaning or content, and that exists alongside ready-made, easily communicated explanations for film-game convergence. It will probably always be a subtle point to argue that fantasy can be comprised of a bodily sensation, that this sensation can return to (or "intrude" on) unrelated conscious experiences, that (on one hand) this return can have purely idiosyncratic meanings, and that (on the other) the fantasy can also reflect widely shared cultural hopes and anxieties. Games help make this embodied fantasy process more visible—but don't, at the same time, perform the labor of putting *words* to this process.

So, rather than point to bodily schema in fantasy as an entirely novel lens for a new medium, built for games and games alone (like ludology's intended epistemological break with narratology)[28], this chapter seeks to reflect a videogame-ready hermeneutic back onto cinema. In fact, "body schema" is already key to cinematic discourses, from Sobchack's cinematic phenomenology and Bordwell's cinematic constructivism to Deleuze's "sensory-motor linkages" in the "action-image."[29] Body schema is a flexible and capacious term used in a variety of contexts—but its meaning changes when we return to it through videogames (and through fantasy).

Originating in neuroscience, the "body schema" refers roughly to an internalized map or plan (based on past experiences) used to make sense of the body's relation to space and its capacity to act on objects in the world. The concept has proven useful in phenomenology as well as in cognitive psychology as a pattern of bodily experience that broadly shapes our encounters with and understanding of the world (i.e., the mechanism by which we can be said to "think" with our body). And the concept has played a role in scholarly efforts to rethink the traditional Cartesian dualism of the body and mind (thinking as separate from corporeality). For example, Mark Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* defines body schema as "a recurrent pattern, shape and regularity" in one's "ongoing ordering activities" (such as "bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions") (Johnson, 1987: 29). Johnson emphasizes their dynamic flexibility "in that they can take on any number of specific instantiations in varying contexts" in order to discuss how these embodied patterns are important for higher-order (cognitive) meaning making (1987: 30). Take, for example, the "prelinguistic" notion (or "gestalt structure") of the concept of "force":

> In order to survive as organisms, we must interact with our environment. All such causal interaction requires the exertion of force, either as we act upon other objects, or as we are acted upon by them. Therefore, in our efforts at comprehending our experience, structures of force come to play a central role. Since our experience is held together by forceful activity, our web of meanings is connected by the structures of such activity.
>
> I want to explore the way in which patterns of typical experience of force work their way up into our system of meaning and into the structure of our expression and communication. (1987: 42).

Johnson goes on to suggest that these bodily "image-schemata" "do not merely form a background against which meaning emerges; rather, they *are themselves meaning structures"* in an epistemic domain, "because we generally use the language of the external world to apply to the internal mental world, which is metaphorically structured as parallel to that external world" (1987: 48, 50).

Body schema has also already been linked to games. Rikke T. Nørgård's (2011) research into videogame identification joins Newman's "The Myth of the Ergodic Videogame" (2002) in understanding videogame avatars primarily (and even in diegetically immersive games) as body

schema, not as fictional persona. This approach, of course, breaks with the vast majority of scholars who look at game characters through a narrative or dramaturgical lens, presuming the presence (and preponderance) of a player's alignment with the fictional persona of the avatar: e.g., saying 'I identify with Mario as a white, male, heterosexual Italian plumber.' Nørgård argues that "in player-avatar identity it is the avatars that are being embedded within the players' body schema" (a phenomenon she terms "centripetal corporeality") "rather than it is the players that are being prosthetically extended to the avatars," as in the more familiar (even MacLuhanesque) narrative or virtual-reality models (2011: 1). The important point to remember is that player-controlled characters (or avatars) are not just "visual output perceived," but rather are "corporeal-digital interaction experienced," and identification with one's avatar in play "unfolds in the body schema where the distinction between avatars and players [is] dissolved as corporeal player-avatar fusion takes precedence over visual player-avatar distinction" (2011: 6). And this fusion affects memory (therefore fantasy) as well:

> When thinking back on games played heavily in the past, we often don't only remember the visual output, cognitive puzzles or digital sphere. The memories of heavily played games are just as much recalled as corporeal-locomotive patterns and memories in the body. Players' bodies resonate with the avatar-shaped corporeal movements, imprinted in their body schemas as unique rhythmic compositions. (2011: 9)

Though they struggled to recount narrative events, were the players in the Microsoft study mentioned above (Moriarty, 2014) to have picked up the controller and actually play their favorite (heavily played) games, they would have found that they intuitively remembered how to play—even though this kind of memory does not easily manifest as a verbal response to survey questions. This chapter's interest in fantasy requires emphasizing the subtle point Nørgård (and Newman) make in this regard: games introduce new bodily schema to existing frameworks or "maps" for our encounter with all echelons of lived experience. This is part of a game's interpellation of the player, and must be considered alongside any analysis of thematic setting or narrative content in videogame genre.

Henry Jenkins (2007) was the first to highlight the significance of an overlap between games and films in terms of body memory. Jenkins suggests that, instead of storytelling, games (like early cinema) might best be understood as an embodied, "lively art," a "toy …for our delight" (2007: 26). While his chapter paints in broad strokes, and his analysis is meant mostly as a provocation, the approach is more appropriate for the convergence question than even Jenkins would likely admit, since his assessments of present-day convergence hews more closely to the narrative model. Nevertheless, following game scholars like Steven Poole, Jenkins highlights the "kinetic" pleasure in games, involving "the mechanics of motion and emotion, rather than those of story and character" (2007: 29). He even draws on David Bordwell's account of kinesthetic body memory—activated when we watch sports as well as action (in this case, martial-arts) cinema—to forge a broad, largely transhistorical analogy between cinema and videogames (worth quoting at length to demonstrate precisely how he relates these two media):

> By now, the aesthetics of the action movie and the video game are hopelessly intertwined: game aesthetics have clearly and directly shaped the emergence of the genres Bordwell discusses…. As game criticism emerges as a field, it will need to address not only the stories that games tell or the kinds of play that they facilitate, but also the formal principles that shape our emotional responses to them. Bordwell's account of the Hong Kong martial arts movie suggests two

intertwined factors: first, the ways that commonly staged actions appeal to bodily memories; and second, the ways that various aesthetic devices can intensify and exaggerate the impact of such actions, making them both more legible and more intense than their real-world counterparts…. Bordwell describes this second process as 'expressive amplification.' (Jenkins, 2007: 35).

In this account, popular or "lively" arts appeal directly to bodily memories—or bodily capacities triggered by an innate ability to mirror bodies on screen. Entertainment technology's "expressive amplification" of the "impact of such actions" makes them "both more legible and more intense than their real-world counterparts." The tools for "expressive amplification" hinted at in this piece are never explicitly spelled out, though, one supposes, following the reference to Bordwell, that they involve "legibility" and "intensity."

Though Jenkins himself offers no such intervention, it is possible to connect legibility with the aesthetic of continuity in Galloway's "gamic cinema" discussed above: the camera's role in facilitating Caillois' "constant and unpredictable definitions of the situation" of play. Action cinema can strive to be as legible as a videogame—but the two media remain more distinct in terms of "intensity" (and, therefore, in terms of fantasy). Having demonstrated that the two forms share in common a fervor for kinetic action and bodily engagement—an engagement facilitated by a certain kind of visual, spatial and temporal legibility, *both a body memory and a body fantasy*— it is important to also speak to medium specificity along these lines.

Action games, for the most part, entail the steady improvement of player skill and coordination through many hours of practice and repetition, which results in the steady acquisition of larger and larger "chunks" of information in long-term memory, which are then more easily (and quickly) accessed in future play. Loftus & Loftus (1983) describe videogame practice time as "logarithmic" ("every doubling of the number of practices leads to an equal increment in performance") (1983: 64). Developing the skill necessary to complete (or compete in) challenging action games is therefore very time consuming, even if far shy of the 10,000 hours supposedly required for virtuosity. The protracted timeframe of videogame play does not generally fit within Aristotelian narrative structure—rather than beginning, middle and end, Kinder (1991) describes games as brief beginnings, "extended middles," and indefinitely deferred endings. The distinction here between games and cinema becomes clear when one takes into account how Linda Williams describes recent "mega-melodrama" blockbuster action cinema as demonstrative of Brooks' "logic of the excluded middle" (here meaning a moral middle-ground left out of Manichean conflict) (Williams, 2012: 523).

With the exception of games built entirely around high-intensity QTE's (e.g.: *Asura's Wrath*, 2012), videogame play generally occurs in a relatively quiescent and focused state (game scholars are fond of saying "flow"—see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). With games, "intensity" is a fluctuating series of small build-ups and releases, a sustained engagement, prolonged "immersion," or deeply involved awareness of the "situation" of play and the complex elements that make it up. This kind of intensity can lead to paroxysms (as in spectator sports)—climaxes emerging organically from the game's interactive elements. But the meaning and function of the bodily schema in gameplay is not (à la cinema) to reframe and resolve accrued tension during a pre-scheduled narrative climax; rather, these schemata in play facilitate the prolonged and complex engagement with the game's whole field of play. Dan Fleming suggests that "Playing Mario well is a wonderful experience," but "playing for the first—and second or third or tenth—time can be very frustrating" (1996: 190). The point is to develop skill, the bodily competency required for absorption into play: "when it [finally] starts to come right there is a bodily ease

combined with a mental alertness that together support one's absorption" (1996: 190). One is absorbed when things start to become stable—this is the beginning of the prolonged quiescence of play.

Compared with playing an action game, the time spent watching an action film entails a much smaller amount (proportionally) of embodied action, which is usually bound to a film's (four or five) expensive, visual-effects heavy action sequences. This cinema uses the time between action to establish the stakes of these impending fights. By the time the action sequences occur, the accumulated sleights, misrecognitions, and injustices that have been absorbed—the villain's "disequilibrating" presence, which eventually reaches a climactic intensity, as well as the wider stakes of the conflict— *all become body schema*, the raw material for a body-wish. These accrued tensions create a wished-for return to equilibrium that is conveyed (and given satisfaction) by body fantasy, here an "ambassador" for a subtly disguised piece of the self, a piece that remembers the embodied sense of smallness from childhood, as well as the creative transposition of social conflicts into bodily play that it inspired. The virtuoso body display (long anticipated, often discussed by characters in the film directly or indirectly) emerges from an elided 10,000 hours of practice (or some equivalent in untapped natural ability), and arrives on the scene, in these films, as the solution of all conflict, the protector of loved ones, and the answer to feelings of powerlessness. It often looms, but rarely appears directly until the timing is just right. This bodily display is connected to the moments of greatest intensity in these films.

The next chapter introduces and tracks a specific body fantasy in both games and films. It focuses both on the generally unobserved ways this fantasy connects the two media, as well as the ways the media remain distinct in their support of this fantasy.

CHAPTER 2. THE 'BODY-TRANSCENDENCE' FANTASY IN VIDEOGAMES

While videogames and cinema share a variety of "play fantasies" ("core loops" or "core hooks") in common, there is one in particular that seems to be driving film-game convergence, a desire to dramatically exceed bodily constraints or to answer feelings of powerlessness with transcendent bodily displays of power—a fantasy which I term the *fantasy of bodily transcendence*.[30] This fantasy entails the pleasurable repetition of certain evocative bodily kinetics—a clever or unexpected gesture, an effective maneuver that alters our understanding of the body's relation to space, perhaps representing an economy of motion (like Freud's 1905 definition of a joke, a "saving in expenditure" when inhibitions are released). The bodily gesture evokes the notion of impediment or inhibition in order to both identify with it, and to overcome it. And in this sense the gesture represents a special capacity for bodily expressions of power, as well as an imagined magical continuity with the world. The body transcendence fantasy is difficult to recognize as a fantasy because of its extremely simplistic textual meaning. The fantasy is always bodily before it is (or whether it is ever) cognitively or rationally understood. The bodily basis of the fantasy could be applied to cinema as well (see discussion of Sobchack below), and the main difference from this point of view between films and games is that it might be a rare case when action games are ever anything significant (have any coherent meaning) *beyond* this kind of embodiment.

The body transcendence fantasy's "bodily hook," or the snippet of unique kinetics the game (or film) provides, can be largely personal and idiosyncratic: my own imagination compulsively repeats the choreography from a well-known action film (*The Matrix*): the Agent's rooftop landing (lunge position) early in the film as he jumps the gap between two buildings in pursuit of the hero, Trinity. This gesture does occur at a significant moment in plot, a moment when the police officers are left behind, filtered out, sidelined, and made to express disbelief at the impossibility of the bodily action of the inter-building leap. But the scene is not a strongly emphasized moment otherwise. Why it sticks out to me is not otherwise clear—why the lunge position itself (a regular bodily configuration from the exercise classes I attend at my university gym) has taken on an "obtuse"—in Barthes' (1978) sense of the word— sort of significance beyond that given the maneuver in the film. The meaning of any one bodily gesture is "mutlistable," characterized, in Ihde's sense (1999, 2012), by ambiguous possibilities in both its structure and history: "Within multistability there lie *trajectories*—not just any trajectory, but partially determined trajectories" (1999: 47). The gesture is negotiated culturally and historically, is part of an individual's "body project," but is also strongly influenced through pre-existing *trajectories* of meaning. Ihde's concept is applied to technology and the relative freedom individual users have when making use of it—but the tensions in the concept (ambiguity of meaning, subverted intentionality, user versus designer) are easily incorporated into play, as Guins (2014: 11-12) has already done.

The assortment of affective motions from popular videogames that endure as corporeal "hooks" in my own embodied imagination have, as far as I can tell, a personal and idiosyncratic meaning. But the analysis developed here discusses videogame kinetics as widely shared experiences of embodied action, repeated across entire genres of videogame play, and connected in turn with broader cultural meanings. They include the way Mario (in *Super Mario Galaxy*, 2007) soars through space and summersaults just before landing at the start of each mission (this

happens hundreds of times throughout the game); the way Hoy Quarlow jabs then pivots 360 degrees, counter-clockwise, to strike Little Mac with an opposite back-hand (an oft-repeated and initially difficult-to-avoid attack in *Super Punch-Out!!*, 1994); the way Alucard back-dashes while attacking forward (a valuable maneuver for controlling position in *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, 1997); or, similarly, the unexpected motility that stems from "wave-dashing," an advanced exploit used frequently in *Super Smash Bros. Melee* that allows skilled players to glide on the ground while stringing together other attacks not normally possible while moving—a motion that is hypnotic to any players who have struggled to control running and positioning in this game. It is not immediately clear why this imagery (and my own imagined bodily participation) is empowering as it flashes through memory during moments of stress or anxious thought, paired sometimes with exhilarating sensations of velocity when riding in cars or trains, or timed with hypnotically soothing sensations of sliding before sleep (a kind of drowsy or "hypnagogic" imagery).

But the idea that a body transcendence fantasy can also be culturally embedded and shared is supported, for example, in the bodily quotation and parody of Trinity's "bullet-time" kick early in *The Matrix*, a body-transcendence sequence which was marked and emphasized, famously, through a novel camera technique exhaustively referenced in other media, and even the focus of academic conversation (e.g.: Rehak's "Bullet Time as Microgrenre," 2007). The lunge landing, mentioned above as an idiosyncratic preoccupation, also recurs within the action-hero genre as an example of bodily quotation or rhyme. The lunge can be spectacular and enthralling—an ostentatious pose. But it can also signify struggle, submission, or defeat. In *Underworld*'s (2003) final moment of action, the protagonist leaps and slashes at the film's villain, landing gracefully in a lunge and remaining in this pose as the effect of the slash (splitting the villain in twine) slowly sets in. The lunge's slow, steady absorption of force becomes, in this moment and others that rhyme with it, a concomitant absorption of recognition following the revelation of a surprising bodily display: for example, the first chase scene in *The Matrix*, when the agent jumps dozens of feet into the air and across a gap between buildings, or in *Watchmen* (2009) at the moment when Adrian Veidt, having just outrun several bullets in spectacular slow motion, disables his would-be assassin with a stanchion from the lobby in a fluid, continuous spiraling arc of motion, ending in a lunge. We recognize the lunge as a container for power, as in *The Matrix: Reloaded* (2003) when Neo lunges, builds force, and launches into flight, mirrored in the anticipation of Superman's slow (ground-shaking) take-off in the trailer for the *Man of Steel* (2013). And the position is made into an explicit, self-reflexive element of the superhero genre in *Deadpool* (2016): deemed the "superhero landing." The lunge position both represents a build-up of muscular tension, moments when the earth is left behind or re-encountered but in order to be negated as a limit (a powerful landing), moments of misrecognized strength, and a tension between spectacular mobility and stasis, a power-pose. When Little Mac (from the 2009 series reboot, *Punch-Out!!*), is knocked down, he sometimes catches himself in a standing lunge (granting players one more chance to prevail), marking the position as one that mediates between falling and standing, like Yoga's warrior pose, which freezes this posture, or the football quarterback's kneel, which dips a knee all the way to the playfield, ending the play, but also thus acting as symbol of control (of the ball, of the clock, of the game), a bodily posture that activates a rule, that serves a function, and also becomes an emblem of the game.

Many cinematic videogame adaptations reference that game's (or game character's) unique kinetics, suggesting at least an awareness of the significance of the shared embodied

pleasure. A prominent example of this is *Doom*'s extended first-person point-of-view sequence, which occurs near the end of the film as a sort of climax or anticipated moment of clever bodily merger between game and movie adaptation. However, videogame adaptations do not have any special claim to videogame-inflected body fantasies. Though they may be the cinematic texts most apparently in dialog with games as a medium, game-to-film adaptations are not exemplary of videogame-like identification within a film. If anything, their structure—given the challenge of adapting a non-narrative form like a game—tends toward the conventional. And in this sense, these films are less "gamic" than are the action films discussed in this chapter, which rarely reference videogame culture at all, and tend to break from (or play with) formulaic storytelling patterns. This chapter's definition of games as assemblages of "core hooks" (undergirded by play fantasies) overtly clashes with the meanings assigned games by narratologists, as well as industry executives or filmmakers who (judging by their most overt filmic framings of games and gamer culture) so clearly define games by their fictional settings, characters, and bare-bones plot scenario.

This chapter argues that film-game convergence can be best (most meaningfully) understood as the influence games have had in the recent upsurge of an action-hero cinema wherein transcendent bodily capacities resolve narrative conflict. This reimagined space of convergence implies a wider area of overlap than movies with explicit references to games (it actually excludes some movies *with* explicit reference to games, like the *Super Mario Bros.* movie), and is supported by the timing of the resurgence of what Shaun Treat (2009) has called the "superhero zeitgeist" of the late-1990s, and 2000s (*The Matrix* is often identified as influential to the popularity of the genre). Henry Jenkins (2006: 119) argues that as games left the arcades and entered homes in the 1990s, they helped produce a generation of consumers who were "educated on nonlinear media" and therefore came to prefer a new kind of "fragmented" cinema in the late 1990s (e.g.: films like *Fight Club*, *Being John Malkovich*, *The Sixth Sense*, and *The Matrix*—all from 1999). In this sense, game-like films require especially "active spectators" who are used to *playing* their media and who enjoy repairing the wholeness of those fragmented texts by "[making] connections on their own time and in their own ways" (2006: 199).

While the timeline is helpful and supported by the actual chronology of the rise of home-videogames in the 1980s and 1990s, this is part of Jenkins' definition of convergence that sees games as (fractured) narratives, and that emphasizes purely formal distinctions between the narratives of games and films (i.e., they tell the same stories, just in slightly different ways). And yet, despite what I consider the problematic definition of games at work here, the films Jenkins references—especially *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*—do rely heavily and in exciting ways on liberating (and often violent) bodily potentials found in videogames, a violence safely ensconced within the framework of highly structured (Caillois may have said "formalized"), agonistic (i.e., "competitive") play. But, as I argue in greater detail below, this game-film alignment has less due to the purely formal "nonlinearity" of videogame narratives, and more to do with how this cinematic genre makes use of kinetic bodily schema as a way to make sense of, stage, and resolve narrative conflict. As Linda Williams said of narrative and (dance) number in musicals: "Narrative informs number, and number, in turn, informs narrative" (2006: 68). Drawing on the literary tradition of serialized comics and graphic novels about superheroes, as well as a longer tradition of action cinema, these films employ a melodramatic mode where the body—and its unique ("special") capacities—becomes the site of a new kind of truth, which speaks to contemporary concerns and anxieties about identity.

It isn't so much that games influence the shape of this melodramatic narrative; in fact, scholars of manga and comics demonstrate that the influence is much older than games. Rather, this genre of film has become a mainstream phenomenon as part of a broader cultural interest in the body as a transcendent site of "I'm specialism"—a longed-for confirmation of inherent specialness that Hal Niedzviecki recognizes in North America's fascination with reality TV, a fantasy of being discovered or having one's banal, lived experience observed and broadcast to others. The narrative trope of "special" bodies in superhero comics reflects a shared fantasy negotiating a body's outward appearance (what Freud would call a cutaneous bodily ego) and its invisible interior: the body with unawakened potential which waits for a knowing gaze (a trained eye) to discover it like a diamond in the rough. Games not only contribute to this wish but likely comprise the most sustained fixation on its elaboration in entertainment media.

To Jenkins' list of nonlinear or fragmented narratives, this chapter counters with a "special bodies" cinema (and television) where corporeal revelation calls upon (activates, mobilizes, *reverses*) established body schema in a moment of transcendent overcoming, and in this way addresses spectators in an especially embodied (participatory) manner. Notable examples (in no way an exhaustive list) include *Carrie* (1976), *Matilda* (1996), *Dark City* (1998), *The Iron Giant* (1999), *The Matrix* (1999), *One Piece* (1999-present), the *Harry Potter* films (2001-2011), *Equilibrium* (2002), *Naruto* (2002-2008), *Underworld* (2003), *X2* (2003), *The Incredibles* (2004), *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), *Serenity* (2005), *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005), *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008), *Iron Man* (2008), *Heroes* (2006-2010), *Naruto Shippûden* (2007-2016), *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Watchmen* (2009), *Kick-Ass* (2010), *Let Me In* (2010), *X-Men: First Class* (2011), *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014), and *Daredevil* (2015). These films and television series bridge a variety of different genres and incorporate a wide array of different influences, from animation and Asian and American martial arts cinema to American comic book and sci-fi fan culture. They may seem to comprise a broad action genre—but the emphasis here is on a kind of melodramatic mode that emphasizes action rather than pathos. And the pleasures at the heart of their carefully structured plots are very similar in kind to the pleasures of action gaming: *playing with body schema*, and embedding this play within an emotionally tense, melodramatic narrative frame. Games may be feeding into the desire for this kind of embodied engagement in cinema. And yet the differences here between the two media are just as significant as the similarities. And this fantasy represents a novel method for approaching questions of medium specificity.

Industry veteran Clint Hocking, who delivered a talk at the Inventing the Future of Games 2013: Interactive Storytelling Symposium in Santa Cruz, California, suggested designers distinguish between story and play by noting that "narrative is usually low frequency and high amplitude," whereas "gameplay [verbs] are usually high frequency, low amplitude." Moments of body transcendence in cinema and television usually follow lengthy, anxious build-ups—with the moment of bodily action representing a dramatic release of accrued tensions. Often, fights are decided by a single action or gesture—one that occurs only once in the entire narrative (low frequency, high amplitude). But with the exception of games built entirely around high-intensity QTE's (e.g.: *Asura's Wrath*, 2012), these climactic "narrative" moments *in games* are rare, and stand in stark contrast to the ocean of time spent in relatively quiescence. In the videogame's exact repetition of actions over many hours of play, no single gesture does more than any other to imprint a meaningful (or incidental) gesture in bodily memory (high frequency, low amplitude). After playing a game for an extended period of time, its incorporated schema recur as an embodied replay, that near-hallucinatory sensation that one is *still playing the game,*

colloquially called "Tetris effect."[31] Games train us to internalize—take pleasure from, but also "master" and commit to (muscle) memory—certain compulsively repeated bodily gestures and actions. Long after the game is powered off, and the almost palpable hypnagogic imagery subsides, these actions remain as a *fantasy material*, a powerful latent possibility in imagination. As fantasy material, the meaning of these internalized schema is in flux. But a solid starting point for interpretation might be to note the possibility of their retaining even a small associative trace of the feelings of power to which they were originally attached in videogame play's recurring moments of perceived mastery, when stubborn obstacles or other challenges yield as a direct and objectively felt result of skills the player has developed.

The selection of long-term repetition in imagination of certain game (or film) maneuvers implies a deeper significance, but the game generally doesn't (or cannot) frame or "contain" these schemata within any particular diegetic moment. Action games are usually made up of a discrete number of simple actions that are repeated many times in a variety of situations in play over dozens (or hundreds) of hours—the time of embodied memory (long-term habituation, routinization) that tugs at the threads of meaning. As they pass from thought (intellectualizing action) to embodied habit, these bodily configurations in games take on a special meaning that is relatively autonomous from their purported representational content. Henry Jenkins (2007) very aptly describes the appeal of videogame characters not in terms of their appearance, backstory, or personality, but as figures reduced to particular kinds of "expressive movement":

> Games also depend upon an art of expressive movement, with characters defined through their distinctive ways of propelling themselves through space. Game designers have had to reduce character to a limited range of preprogrammed expressions, movements, and gestures, but as they have done so, they have produced characters, like Mario and Luigi or Sonic, who are enormously evocative, who provoke strong emotional reactions. (2007: 36)

During play, the mind-numbing repetition of a small set of actions can seem like a "semantic satiation" (repeating a word until it loses meaning). And yet the extreme iteration and novel recombination of a small set of maneuvers somehow imbues those actions with a power to evoke "strong emotional reactions"— the seeming opposite of the reduction in intensity usually associated with the extended repetition of actions (e.g., Fordism). Though Jenkins does not elaborate upon or specify these emotions, this dissertation chapter (and the next) connects them to melodramatic pathos, though with different intensity and frequency.

Though the next section contains this chapter's major theoretical account of fantasy (what it means and how it functions in this context), it is worth touching on its bodily basis here, since the repetition of gameplay under discussion is a significant mechanism for embodied fantasy. Gameplay's repetition helps imprint a bodily *mantra*—but how this embedded material returns (whether the Tetris effect's ghostly repetition or otherwise), and what it means when it does, are less clear. Schilder's (1950) psychoanalytic account of "body-image" (postural awareness) conceives of this image (or "schema") as a "storeroom of past impressions" which "may rise into consciousness as images" but which exist primarily as a fundamentally embodied knowledge always influencing new perceptual stimuli (1950: 11). Interestingly, the "constantly changing" "postural model of ourselves" built up with each new bodily posture and impression includes tools and other bodily extensions: "Anything which participates in the conscious movement of our bodies is added to the model of ourselves and becomes part of these schemata" (1950: 13). Action videogames, in this sense, represent remote-controlled bodies whose motility and expression of force enter into our own more general bodily models for action. However, when an

actual limb or extension is lost, the "animated image" or "body schema" remains, and "a phantom appears" (1950: 13). A "phantom limb" is perhaps an apt way to think about "Tetris effect," as well as the psycho-somatic place of a body-transcendence fantasy. When amputees report the sense of "feeling" the lost leg (they, Schilder suggests, "may also forget about [their] loss and fall down"), this memory (enduring body schema) is already similar to a bodily fantasy of sorts, a resonance of something lost, a desire for its return, a *body-wish*.

As fantasy material, the creative application of a videogame's internalized action can be oriented toward real-world anxieties and body wishes, even though the action itself may be, as Paul Ward says of both animation and videogames, "totally created" in the sense that it "only exists and has only ever existed in the simulated representation itself" (Ward, 2002: 123). In fact, this may be one important way to think about the allure of videogames: as the potential to incorporate and make one's own the totally created (idiosyncratic and uncanny) logics governing motion and action within the game. That this motion will be internalized through repetition and practice, and that it will be limited to a small number of increasingly significant, pre-determined gestures (tiny, discrete player actions: run, jump, fire, punch, dodge, etc.), differentiates games from animation in general. Game previews (like some action films) flaunt snippits of this expressive movement. Steve Swink (2009) refers to this as "game feel":

> As players and game designers, we have some beginnings of common language, but we have never collectively defined game feel above what's necessary for discussing a specific game. We can talk about the feel of a game as being 'floaty' or 'responsive' or 'loose,' and these descriptions may even have meaning across games, as in 'We need to make our game feel more responsive, like Asteroids.' (Swink, 2009: 1)

Games promise fresh new "feels"; rather than simply new virtual worlds to explore, each game's "feel" includes unique bodily schema (irrespective of fictional setting) that will be attached to important gameplay functions within the game, and will also then remain as possible modes of bodily expression beyond the game and its diegetic spaces.

This fantasy can also be seen as a model of identification in games that is distinct from models focusing on identification with fictional characters within narrative (e.g., the "dramaturgical" model). In a body transcendence fantasy, rather than identifying with the body that does the leaping (i.e., "I am Mario"), this fantasy is more like identifying with the leap itself, or the capacity to leap that the videogame presents—a capacity which can become suffused with every other bodily experience of which one is capable, both within and without the game itself. Bodily schema in videogames hail players as raw material for a variety of fantasy encounters; they are grist for a psychic mill. And games have a unique ability to deliver the raw material for these fantasies over many hours of play.

But games do not necessarily fully motivate the uses or ends of the fantasy in everyday life—they source material more than other media, but also (by comparison with cinema especially) issue less coherent contexts for its subsequent redeployment. Body transcendence fantasies are an only loosely associated, and extremely diverse set of imaginative formations, where internalized bodily configurations are directed toward some purposeful end having to do with overcoming constraint (literal or figurative). These fantasies are (like what Richard Dyer says of action cinema's "thrills and elations") deeply related "to the human coordinates of the real world: the environments we live in, the social categories in which we have our being" (Dyer, 1994: 8).

On one hand, the fantasy points to the "real world" in that it clearly reflects (and can appear during) moments in lived experience when our agency is challenged and our bodies are inhibited, threatened, or stressed. For Dyer's analysis of the film, *Speed* (and action cinema of the time more generally),

> The price [for the thrills] is … in things. It is the transport system itself that is smashed about: cars, lorries, barriers, planes and even the roadway in a final eruption of a subway train from below. It is an orgy of destruction of one of the great frustrations of modern urban living—getting about. (Dyer, 1994: 8)

Speed fantasizes the destruction of a "great frustration of modern urban living—getting about." Were it a body-transcendence genre, it would focus, perhaps, on the "getting about" part more than the "orgy of destruction." But seeing the source of the fantasy in something that inhibits free and open bodily action is apt. So too, is what Dyer says of the disparities in whose thrills are "legitimated": "who gets them and who pays the price" (Dyer, 1994: 8). This is the second meaning of Dyer's claim that the fictions and thrills of action cinema (and I would add, those of body fantasies in games) point us back to the real world:

> To feel that it is OK to be unrestrained, to kick against what surrounds you, to thrust out into the world is what boys learn, not girls. To see women strain against the world may be inspirational, but also at some psychic level unbelievable. Heroes of action who are other than male and white (and straight and able-bodied) are still going to feel exceptional for some time to come. (Dyer, 1994: 8)

Henry Jenkins (1998) echoes this idea in his essay on gender in games ("Complete Freedom of Movement") by pointing to historical and sociological research that suggests boys are freer to set out in the world and treat public spaces (from urban streets to suburban back lots) as a "jungle gym" for kicking out, testing the body's limits. The action cinema and videogames in this chapter are decidedly part of "boy culture"—and in this respect the body transcendence fantasy is generally coded "male" and tied to both popular and academic discourses on masculinity, which often look to the body and style of male action heroes (from Arnold to Keanu) for help articulating contentious definitions of the masculine ideal. That said, female action heroes are less and less the exception, with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003); Trinity in *The Matrix*; Storm, Mystique, Jean Grey, and Rogue in *X-Men* (2000); *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*; *Catwoman* (2004); Elastigirl and Violet in *The Incredibles*; Susan Storm (Invisible Woman) in Fantastic Four (2005); Toph and Katara in *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008); Hit-Girl in *Kick-Ass*; River in *Serenity*; Hermione and the strong women of the *Harry Potter* books and films; *Super Girl* (2011-); Black Widow in *The Avengers* (2012); Melissa McCarthy's *Spy* (2015); Rey in *Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens* (2015); *Super Girl* (2015); Angel Dust and Negasonic Teenage Warhead in *Deadpool* (2016); and the female cast of the upcoming *Ghostbusters* (2016). That the films here tend to retain a longstanding Hollywood tradition of depicting heteronormative romance leading toward marriage—and that the role of female performers, more often than not, is to connect the male action heroes to a formulaic romantic tangent—does undercut some of the apparent progress of female characters breaking into the "boy's world" of action, comics, and martial arts.

But if the fantasy is tied to cultural struggles about the representation of female heroes in popular media—and indeed many of the games at the center of the recent discussions about problematic depictions of women in the games industry (see the "Gamergate" controversy or Anita Sarkeesian's web series about women in games)—then there are also reasons to hold back from imputing an absolute or essential predisposition for it that is based on gender. At the other

end of the century (and the other end of a spectrum between cultural context and evolutionary biology), the body-transcendence fantasy seems to refer to what Karl Groos' (1898) study of animal play refers to as the "feeling of pleasure arising from the consciousness of being a cause and culminating in the feeling of freedom" (in brief: "being a cause") which he links to the gambols of animals as well as to the status of make-believe play:

> The little polar bear that delightfully tore the paper bag to bits certainly felt the pleasure of 'being a cause'—'in working his own sweet will,' as Schiller has it in his Kunstlern. (…) Before going on, however, I wish to call attention to the absurd form this pleasure in being a cause sometimes takes even in rational beings. How many of us want to scribble or whittle or do something with our hands all the time, to break a twig and chew it while we walk, to strike the snow off walls as we pass, to kick a pebble before us, to step on all the acorns on the pavement, to drum on the window pane, to hit the wine glasses together, to roll up little balls of bread, etc. (1898: 88-89).

If the fantasy of bodily transcendence might also be expressed, at base, as the pleasure of "being a cause," then it must be noted that videogames purport to offer more direct access to this pleasure since they present us with an interactive environment designed specifically for players to consistently experience their actions as agency—a feeling that is captured, perhaps, in Dan Fleming's (1996) suggestion that we identify not with the character, Mario, but rather as a "powerful intervening force on his behalf" (1996: 190). Games—in one sense—are simulated environments where players feel themselves to be a fluid and significant cause of the dynamic action happening there. Mario games exemplify this sense of "being a cause," from pressing switches that flip platforms, to breaking bricks, launching fireballs, and stomping enemies, including turtle shells that can then bowl through a line of foes and crash through walls—all of this action tied to sound effects that seem to emanate from nearly every player action (foot-falls, jumping, ducking, collecting objects, defeating enemies, completing or failing a course, etc.).

The idea that the action film spectator participates in "being a cause" is, on the other hand, somewhat more obscure. Much clearer is how a cinema characterized by its thrills, sublime spectacles of visual effects, and kinaesthetic pleasure (film as roller coaster) makes the spectator's body the site of a variety of powerful *effects*. However, when a body memory is internalized, when we, like Sobchack's "cinesthetic subject," identify with and as bodies on the cinema screen through a "pre-logical non-hierarchical unity of the sensorium" (Sobchack, 2004: 69)—literally *before we know it*—we are already within an embodied participatory state that might be described as the pleasure of "being a cause" (especially when it recurs in and as fantasy). In action films that strive to make the trajectories of the body especially legible, we identify with characters whose bodies cause things to happen. And at the same time—with both games and film—the uncanny return of these bodily configurations make the player (and spectator) body simultaneously the cause of a creative imagining, and the site of an effect. Put differently, the recurring fantasy (the decontextualized bodily action, the "phantom limb" of Tetris effect) makes the conscious self, the "ego," the site of an emotionally resonant *effect* representing a wished-for causality emanating from an unacknowledged part of the self. When we leave action films, the bodily patterns that stow away might also bring along attendant narrative meanings, such as "I'm Specialism," or what Dyer described as the cultural sanctioning (for white, straight men) of an impulse to "kick out" against what constrains.

The meaning of the fantasy in recent commercial entertainment—when it is broadly culturally shared, rather than an idiosyncratic set of personal associations, which it also always

is—is no doubt still polysemic, though a rough sketch is possible. The theme of "special" bodies in American superhero comics—which Ramzi Fawaz (2016) connects to social movements in the 1960s that counteracted narratives of normalization (heteronormativity, white patriarchy, the cult of domesticity, etc.)—has taken on a less radical tone in American popular culture in the age of rampant superhero cinema and videogames. Bukatman (2003) makes sense of the superhero comic as a genre that broadly explores how "the body and its boundaries mark a concern with social boundaries and hierarchical order," giving special expression to a particularly turbulent developmental period: becoming a teenager (2003: 53). Bukatman links the genre's desire to "transcend the confines of the body" to the hormonal shifts and "facial eruptions" of puberty, which allows him to speak to what he observes as a structurally consistent (if at times "ambivalent") transcendence fantasy in superhero narratives:

> The bodily torment of the mutant superhero expresses a desire, a need, to transcend the confines of the body, to exist as pure spirit. As usual, however, such desires are fraught with ambivalence; hence the heightened transgression of its corporeal boundaries is accompanied by the hardening of the body. Still, the eyebeams of Cyclops, the telekinetic powers of Marvel Girl, the elemental forces controlled by Storm, even Wolverine's extensible adamantium claws—all of these pull the body past its margins. (Bukatman, 2003: 71)

The teenage body and its concomitant anxieties stand as an apt metaphor for narratives in which super powers pull certain bodies past their margins. But there is a generational dynamic at work here as well.

It is no longer marginal (nor specifically adolescent) bodies and identities that are marked as "special" in this genre. Rather, the genre seems to serve the broader imperative that Hal Niedzviecki (2006) terms "I'm Specialism," a new conformity. In slice-of-life reality TV like *The Real World* (1992-) or *The Osbournes* (2002-2005), Niedzviecki discusses the wish that one's everyday routine would be considered interesting television programming (the pleasure of imagining that one is observed in one's daily routines and that, in turn, one's lived experience is saturated with meaning). And Niedzviecki turns to reality talent programs like *Canadian Idol* (2003-) or *The X Factor* (2011-2013)—or, more precisely, to the phenomenon of people with no discernable talents lining up in the thousands to audition—in order to discuss the shared fantasy that one has as-yet unrecognized potential, the fantasy of being discovered that exceeds the specific developmental periods of childhood and adolescence.

It is possible to track an "I'm Specialism" in contemporaneous superhero movies—a moment in plot that might even represent a social anxiety, some experience of smallness, of the social (or physical) world closing in all around, and which triggers some hidden internal potential in "special" bodies, like Peter Parker atomizing the chaotic and complexly entangled high school hallway (in slow-motion "spider-sense," aka "bullet time") and standing up to the bully in *Spider-Man* (2002). Or, in the example of Clark Kent playing along at getting mugged for Lois Lane's sake in *Superman* (1978): the mugging would be an otherwise traumatic experience of powerlessness often associated with large urban spaces that is, instead, mediated by a special body that contains the threat in an exaggerated performance of nervousness and complicity, right up to the point where Clark has to catch the bullet fired at Lois in his hand as he pretends to pass out. The "joke" in both cases is that these bullies have picked the wrong anonymous losers (white, heterosexual, males) to pick on.

What once set exceptional bodies apart as a way to reimagine non-normative gender and sexual identities (as Fawaz says of "The Uncanny X-Men," 1963) is now perhaps—in America

at least— more aptly understood as a kind of celebration of white mediocrity (reality TV and "I'm Specialism") or even a kind of fantasized assent within a situation of powerlessness, what Jody Carlson (1981) described as a "politics of powerlessness" in her study on the political supporters of George Wallace, who unsuccessfully ran for president four times. Wallace's (conservative, white) supporters stuck with his unlikely candidacy as a kind of protest to their sense of shrinking power in Washington, Carlson suggests, because of political gains made by minority groups in the 1960s, such as with second-wave feminism, the Civil Rights movement, and the 1960s counterculture. In her assessment, Wallace's supporters' "sense of powerlessness" was deeply ingrained—they were aware that a party-wide opposition to social progress was no longer possible—but they still threw support behind a splinter candidate whose tactics (overt race baiting, blunt delivery of sentiment, and vilification of the press should sound very familiar to those who have followed the recent political career of Donald Trump) expressed a "show of outrage" with little or no chance to produce policy change (Carlson, 1981: 6-7). Like Congressional Republicans, who have now voted to (unsuccessfully) repeal President Obama's signature healthcare law more than *sixty* times, Wallace's supporters "[chose] to remain in the same kind of lonely, individual struggles that Wallace dramatize[d] rather than participate in the kinds of actions that would solve real human problems as well as dispel feelings of powerlessness" (1981: 7-8). In short, Wallace's supporters chose to enjoy the fantasy of "being a cause"—a show of force for its own sake—over the option of *joining a cause* (an increasingly foreclosed possibility). The use of fantasy in politics, Jacqueline Rose (1998) and Stephen Duncombe (2007) have argued, can actually help communicate a new vision for the world, and so *change* the world. But Rose and Carlson also express skepticism of the effectiveness of a political fantasy that, no matter how "outrageous [its] contents," is likely "powerless to affect or alter the surrounding world" (Rose, 1998: 2) when society's "surveying mind" is errant—when the fantasy remains a niche vision.

Popular media play a role in articulating and developing such fantasies—and they mutually influence one another not just in terms of shared formats and styles, but also in the kinds of fantasies they elaborate. Tom Engelhardt (1995) argues that, following a swell of nationalist rhetoric in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, media industries responded with fantasies of victory—part of a broader nationalistic "victory culture," which, Engelhardt argues, ended with the Vietnam War, leading to a gradual "societal disillusionment" (Engelhardt, 1995: 3). But before it ended, he suggests, media texts emerged that began to complexly contain both war's "triumph" and "mocking horror" (a blending he calls "triumphalist despair"):

> Almost immediately, Hollywood's film studios began producing war movies in which, from Wake Island to the Philippines, a savage, non-white enemy ambushed and overwhelmed small groups of outnumbered American soldiers. In these films, too, however, defeat was only a springboard for victory. Such triumphalism in a moment of despair was not just a propaganda ploy to mobilize a shocked nation. Triumphalism was in the American grain. From the president to ordinary citizens, it seemed second nature to call on an American culture of victory hundreds of years in the making to explain such an event. (Engelhardt, 1995: 3-4).

The "politics of powerlessness" and "triumphalist despair" both describe some of the double pull of this fantasy, and the role that media play in sustaining it. And, indeed, some of the films Engelhardt references—the white American victory against Asian forces—are part of an Asian martial arts cinema that both demonstrates this type of American exceptionalism while at the

same time standing as an early form of a body-transcendence fantasy within an embodied visual-narrative structure.

There is much overlap between a recent videogame-influenced body-transcendence cinema and what Mina Shin (2008) calls the "Asian invasion" or "Hong Kongification" of Hollywood cinema following *The Matrix*, and including martial-arts films that star Asian-American actors like *Shanghai Noon* (2000), *Rush Hour 2* (2001), *The Tuxedo* (2002), *Kiss of the Dragon* (2001), *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Charlie's Angels* and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (2000, 2003), *Cradle 2 Grave* (2003), and *Bulletproof Monk* (2003), as well as those that do not, such as *Daredevil* (2003) and Elektra (2005) (Shin, 2008: 48). Shin, echoing a claim made by David Desser (2000), points out the problematic legacy for these films of a kind of cultural appropriation in post-Vietnam martial arts B-movies where "American protagonists use Asian martial arts to defeat Asian villains":

> Desser argues that the formula of the Western hero mastering Asian martial arts while Asians appear as villains may be seen as a legacy of the Vietnam War: the fantasy of mastering Asia and Asian culture. As Desser observes, it is interesting that in many films Asian martial arts masters appear aging, weakened, and usually sexless. He succinctly puts it, "It is as if Asia is no longer able to defend itself and must pass on its legacy to the West, which is better able to use Asia's skills and knowledge." In short, white conservatism is reflected in the narrative structure of the new genre in which white heroes use Asian martial arts to satisfy white fantasies. (Shin, 2008: 58)

This "white fantasy" of defeating the Asian villain using Asian martial arts is alive and well, and on full display in one of the most recent superhero vehicles, Netflix's *Daredevil* series. But what is the legacy of this tradition in terms of shared fantasy and "triumphalist despair"—where is the "disillusionment" of victory culture Engelhardt diagnosed in the 1990s?

This is a very rough sketch of the context for the question of where "special" bodies fit into popular media fantasies in the superhero zeitgeist of the early 2000s. The performance of defeat (especially when staged as a misrecognition) seems more often to serve as a proof or protection of some latent internal capacity (some "I'm specialism") that should never be underestimated. If mid-century social change rendered certain bodies "special" in comic books, and helped raise their visibility for a generation of readers (even while sometimes asking that these heroes protect their specialness—their difference—and remain "invisible") (Fawaz, 2016), these same social changes also spurred a conservative response, a "politics of powerlessness" (an "I'm Specialism," a "triumphalist despair") which may *still* hold sway (if not simply over American partisan politics, then also) over western entertainment media's message to demographics with shrinking power: narratives that oscillate between restraint (*a superhero assenting to being mugged*) and dramatic release (pushed too far, dramatic victory is the only option).

In these texts, the body has become a key site for meaning making—the bodies of different races and classes of people, as well as the body of the individual, the meaning of which is tied to everyday agency, everyday feelings of power and constraint. Walkerdine (1986) sees the body at the center of a web of domestic tensions: class, gender, race, family, entertainment media, and the home—all tied together by our conscious experience of fantasy, and so visibly expressed, in the case of her essay, in the ritual repetition (the "video replay") of *Rocky II* (1979) by male family members at home. She describes the blue collar worker's fantasy of escape in the body of the fighter:

> The fantasy of the fighter is the fantasy of a working-class male omnipotence over the forces of humiliating oppression which mutilate and break the body in *manual* labour. Boxing as a sport is a working-class-specific development of fighting, in which young poor men break their bodies for prize money. (Walkerdine, 1986: 173)

The film's underdog figure, Rocky Balboa, expresses the spectator's own fixity in a variety of emasculating dependencies, which are overcome by winning: "Masculinity as winning is constantly played across by the possibility of humiliation and cowardice (that he is 'chicken'); Rocky's body is constantly presented as beaten, mutilated and punished" (1986: 173.).

The body is what, in Dyer's analysis, is inconvenienced, made uncomfortable in the frictions of social interaction and transportation—including those that necessarily frame every trip to the cinema, when we leave home and enter a shared (and fraught) social and gendered world. The body is the focus of the temporal logic of delay in childhood, which Freud naturalizes by saying the wish of every child (underlying both play and fantasy) is to be grown up, to be big and strong—but which queer theorists might expand, laterally, to include other kinds of rarely acknowledged growth (and fantasy plays a role here as well). Videogames may have helped reactivate an interest in embodied engagement with media, where winning and mastery through training is a regular, everyday experience mediated by the body. But they hardly invented this wish, nor will it die with them.

Action Game Genres: Platformers, Fighters, and Shooters.

In the 1990s, the "Mario" platformer[32] was one of the most visible genres of videogames played at home. Also vying for referential visibility (i.e., what appeared when other popular media made references to games) at this time were arcade-style "fighters" like *Street Fighter* (1987) or *Mortal Kombat* (1992), and "shooters" like *Gradius* (1985) or *Contra* (1987) and their progeny. While far from exhaustive, this broad industry slice of platformers, fighters, and shooters is fairly representative of 1980s arcade-style "action" videogames that moved into the home in the 1990s, known for their "sensory bombardment with intense, high volume and velocity play" (Newman, 2002: 14). Playing the games in these groups requires skill (tuned reflexes, or "hand-eye coordination"), a bodily absorption in the act of play at the level of muscle memory, an intuitive understanding of the rules governing play, and a continuous awareness of the state of play as conveyed (mostly) through the game's images. Growing up and feeling welcomed within the (typically very masculine) gaming cultures that traded secrets, strategies, and narratives of expertise also doesn't hurt. What follows is a description of the kinetic "themes" (patterns of affectively charged bodily action) these game genres were built around and—where possible—commentary on how the "body transcendence fantasy" functions differently from genre to genre (and game to game).

In the *Mario* platformer, players move along the side-scrolling game's horizontal axis, a progression contingent upon first overcoming opposition that is usually cast along the vertical axis. But progression (like meeting "objectives") is perhaps too prosaic a description of the play here. Altice (2015) suggests that "*Super Mario Bros.'s* engine was built for athletic platforming" (Altice, 2015: 175).[33] Its world coheres not around a stable or consistent diegesis, but around kinetic, "athletic" action. In these games, players are offered a wide latitude of spatial freedom when engaging obstacles. It's not just a matter of timing—a once-and-for-all gesture that Barthes (1983) used to describe pachinko in Japan. Players can change their mind (or respond to an always-evolving spatial scenario) and influence the arc of a jump mid-air by pressing forward or

pulling back, or by holding the jump button down longer to go higher, or pressing it briefly for a short hop—a logic preserved when bouncing off an enemy's head or certain obstacles, leading to the possibility of combination-bouncing on a string of enemies. Subsequent three-dimensional Mario platformers (starting with *Super Mario 64* in 1996) expanded the side-scroller's vertical and horizontal capacities by adding a third dimension (z-axis, depth exploration), along with the ability to fly or swim with full three-dimensional freedom of movement. While *Mario 64* retains the series' sense of inertia—Mario's weightiness, his ability to slide on the ground, his momentary delay at the start of a run—its platforming challenges differ from the prior side-scrollers like *Super Mario World* (1991). The spatial challenges in the three-dimensional games are less thoroughgoing—there are large open stretches without clear enemies or obstacles. This isn't necessarily indicative of a broad shift in the genre, or in Nintendo's sense of play; the new side-scrolling entries in the series (most recently, *New Super Mario Bros. U*, 2012) repeat the older formula of providing a universe that coheres only according to the spatial challenges it offers for platforming.

Mario's sidescrolling "geometry of playability" (Fleming's term) is rectilinear, forcing players at times to halt and work through the spatial problem in advance of performing them. One could say the genre's body fantasy is at times contemplative compared to that of *Mario's* 1990s rival, *Sonic the Hedgehog* (1991), a game that seems to encourage players to race through the stage without pause, making play more purely improvisational. Sonic's trigonometric (sinuous) stage design facilitates the game's rush of impressions, its speed—an idea taken to a kind of extreme by the later *Uniracers* (1994), a game about unicycle racing along winding, side-scrolling paths (the bike's one wheel reflective of Sonic's blue circularity). These games—and their promotional materials—emphasized velocity to such an extent that Dyer's essay on *Speed* might as well have been about these games as well, except that they don't instantiate that notion that audiences want their thrills to be "situated" within a narrative frame (that, one might lament, tends to exalt heterosexual, white, male heroes). Instead, the "frame" for play in these games is better described in Jenkins' (2007) terms (above): as an engagement with characters defined mostly by their evocative bodily motion.

The platformer genre waned in prevalence in the late 1990s and early 2000s (games touted as platformers, through and through, nearly disappeared)—but other emergent popular genres (among the most successful at this time were first-person shooters and online role-playing games) incorporated platforming elements into their play, from the first-person parkour[34] game, *Mirror's Edge* (2008) to the cinematic *God of War* series (2005-2010) and the morally ambiguous superhero game, *Infamous* (2009). Playing *Infamous* entails exploring an open, sandbox-like urban space and acquiring greater strength and new abilities in order to better enjoy (and further explore) this space—it exemplifies the "accretions fantasy," a play fantasy about slowly accruing objects and abilities to correct weakness (discussed at length in Chapter 3). But the game's platforming core is a body transcendence fantasy.

Infamous' protagonist is a morally ambivalent superhero who can channel electricity from his limbs, scale buildings, slide conductively along power wires, and cannonball off skyscrapers, all without suffering bodily harm. On the quest for greater accretions, players assemble an altered bodily capacity to act in space. The body fantasy here might, again, readily be described in language very similar to that which Dyer (1994) uses to describe the pleasure at the heart of a film like *Speed:* "an orgy of destruction of one of the great frustrations of modern urban living—getting about" (1994: 8). But while many things are destroyed in the game's action (one ability targets idle vehicles, turning them into bombs that set one another off in chains of

explosions), its thrill stems less from destruction per se, and more from a general transcending of the frictions of this space—a transcendence which includes not just vehicles, buildings, or enemies (obstacles that intervene between player and goal), but also gravity itself, and the laws of physics more generally. The well equipped player (eventually) enjoys the experience of—to borrow phrasing from Max Frisch's *Homo Faber*—"eliminating the world as resistance," (Nye, 2006: 198).

What Frisch described as "The technologist's worldlessness" ("diluting" our encounter with the world, such as "by speed, so that we don't have to experience it") David Nye connects to the disembodied departure to cyberspace, exemplified in the technologically futuristic figure of the cyborg ("the cyborg wants to escape the 'meat body' into the matrix of electronic communications, literally to become disembodied") (2006: 205). But the game imagines a world of reduced resistance achieved through the figure of the transcendent body, which is, in turn, both aesthetically and functionally *foregrounded* as the phallic mechanism of this partial conquest of the laws of physics. Moreover, this overcoming of the world as resistance is related to the acquisition of player skill (the player's own muscle memory, the ability to manipulate this multidirectional bodily facility, to aim, gauge jumps, map controller inputs, and improvise a response to the exigency of a situation), which also develops along with in-game abilities. So rather than the escape from the body promised by cyberspace discourses, the action videogame player's body is doubly implicated by the game's embodied pleasures (the fantasy of a body that transcends, the player's literal bodily training). In addition, the imagined source for the fantasy itself could be described as the infrastructural limitations and frictions that stem from the burden of too many bodies in one place, what Dyer described as the impetus for *Speed*'s cathartic release: the crowded urban centers and the frustrations of "getting about." The body fantasy in *Infamous* includes (and resolves) these frustrations, as well as the sense that large, over-crowded, and complicated spaces (from vertigo-inducing skyscrapers to anonymizing crowds of people) de-center the individual. In *Infamous*, players are given recompense for these feelings, becoming an unquestioned center of attention, motility, and power—literally the place towards which electricity flows, and then from which it leaps powerfully outward in a litany of experiences players enjoy of "being a cause."

For example, one way to move around *Infamous'* urban space is to skate along elevated train tracks, drawing power from the third rail and following the same transit routes as electric train cars in the existing transportation infrastructure. This moment mimics, perhaps, some of the actual experience of riding a train over an urban area—but in this case involves using only your unique bodily capacity as a superhero to manipulate electricity as a propulsive (and magnetic) force. Players can build speed and leap off the rails at any point, soaring through the air a considerable distance, then either hovering to the ground, or shoot down like a bolt of lightning. It isn't so much that one seeks to destroy this transportation infrastructure à la *Speed* (actually players are tasked with restoring some of the city's stuttering infrastructure, areas of the power grid that are offline, since the hero's abilities must be recharged by contact with electricity). Rather, the superhero body transcends the need for this transportation system, and not *everyone*'s need for it, just "his majesty the ego," that special figure empowered by the very structures that inhibit, confine, and control everyone else. That others remained bound to this mode of transportation is important for the contrasting confrontation of the "normal with the superpowered" that is a staple of the superhero genre (Reynolds, 1992: 14).

And yet, this description of the body-transcendence fantasy is unsatisfying, since the cyberspace logic of instantaneous tele-presence would be a better example of "transcendence"—

cutting out the train tracks altogether, along with the very meaning of distance. But from the point of view of fantasy, and an embodied fantasy, instantaneous transport doesn't offer players much of a chance to *be with the obstacle*. It doesn't acknowledge the importance of the source of frustration itself in the formula that takes pleasure in its undoing, the significance of marginal improvement or the dance of temporary conquest.

So, *Infamous'* super-powered body's supplanting of the train—one of the most noted icons of a modern transportation's "conquest" over the world as spatial and temporal "resistance"— might seem, at first blush, an instantiation of a cyborg (cyberspace) logic. But it is better understood as a preservation of the player's body (and the frustrations that have weighed upon it), as, in other words, a *body fantasy* that draws on and manipulates the existing bodily schema of riding a vehicle at high velocity through space. By maintaining meaningful contact with that which is playfully overcome, these moments in the game (repurposing the transportation system for transcendence) reflect the strategies of Coney Island roller coaster design, as outlined by Kasson (1978), which mimicked and expanded (perhaps even offered recompense for) the everyday transportation of alienating labor, like mining cars or the subway commute to work.[35] Industrialization's transformation of time and space outlined by Schivelbusch (1977)—and developed by critical film studies in work like Doane's (2002) book on *Cinematic Time*—implicates widely shared, embodied ways of perceiving (and engaging) the world, from everyday lived experience (like riding the subway or going to the cinema) to more abstract concepts like how a culture perceives time and space.

In seeking to eradicate temporal and spatial limits, cyberspace's virtual realities also seem to negate the body, along with its accrued frustrations and its embedded schema from everyday encounters with these limits, which are in turn so central to this kind of play, fantasy, and pleasure.[36] Platformer videogames demonstrate the broader idea that conscious fantasy is not so much the liquidation of all limits and constraints—a dream world where all desires are instantly satisfied— but rather a prolonged engagement with the mechanisms of the very frustrations and limitations that give rise to the body wish in the first place. The schemata always evoke what they overcome, what in the first place they were trained to engage. *Infamous* is in many ways an extension of the body fantasies in the earliest platformers, which already staged a wish to jump, to leap and exceed familiar bodily restraint by moving constantly through perilous or difficult spaces (perhaps even as an exciting recompense for the easy seated and stationary posture of videogame play itself).

Super Mario Galaxy (2007) (and its 2010 sequel, *Super Mario Galaxy 2*) complements the "familiar" body fantasies staged in a game like *Infamous* with the implantation of *new*, as yet unimagined, bodily affordances—in this case having to do with the flow of gravity and the most basic bodily schema used for distinguishing up from down, and that imagine the gravitational horizon as a flat line. *Galaxy* represents impossible spatial relations—a universe of cobbled together blocks, cylinders, donuts, spheres, and planetoids, all relatively small and discrete but given significant gravitational pull, so that Mario is able to run all the way around their entire surface area, putting out of order established categories of "up" and "down." Players can even temporarily enter into orbit around an object by performing a running leap that, if executed properly, can slingshot Mario into the gravitational well of nearby objects with partially intersecting gravitational fields, resulting in temporarily equilibrated figure eights, the illusion of flight. The specially tooled physics system affords a wide array of unimagined bodily positions and capacities, such as a jump that becomes an upward fall (to the "bottom" of the object directly above).

So thoroughly has *Galaxy* confused the normal coordinates and axes of the television screen (players soar upward through warp stars, play inverted, running and jumping toward all axes of the image in unexpected ways) that it might be safe to call it the complete overthrow of the supremacy of the horizontal axis—a visual logic that is as cinematic as it is "gamic," in reference gaming's "side-scrolling" era. Kristen Whissel (2006) has identified a new generation of CGI-effects films that make greater use of the screen's vertical axis, comprising "the spatial dialectics of contemporary cinema's vertical imagination—its tendency to map the violent collision of opposed forces onto a vertical axis marked by extreme highs and lows" (Whissel, 2006: 23). These films have been influenced by a range of cultural objects including the "visual logics of video games and virtual reality" (Whissel, 2006: 23). Whissel's research is highly influential to this chapter's conception of cinematic body fantasy, but is also apt for thinking of the use of the vertical axis in (especially) platformer videogames:

> Precisely because verticality automatically implies the intersection of two opposed forces—gravity and the force required to overcome it—it is an ideal technique for visualizing power. Verticality thereby facilitates a rather literal naturalization of culture in which the operation and effects of (social, economic, military) power are mapped onto the laws of space and time. Hence, in recent blockbuster films, vertically oriented bodies and objects imply a relation not just to the laws of physics but also to the spaces and times that define a fictional world's prevailing order. Vertical movement thereby gives dynamic, hyperkinetic expression to power and the individual's relation to it—defiant, transcendent, or subordinate. (Whissel, 2006: 23)

Insofar as the *Mario* platformer can be thought to have a "fictional world," its "prevailing order" *is* its laws of physics, the visualization of power through vertically opposed forces ("gravity and the force required to overcome it"—the leap). Crawling slowly along the ground, lowly Goombas are purely "subordinate" to this universe's spatial expression of power; Mario is transcendent. That a certain "naturalization of culture" has been mapped onto these laws is also not hard to see—but this reading is clearer in the melodramatic action cinema Linda Williams calls "mega-melodrama," noting that the "extreme highs and lows" Whissel describes share the "absence of a middle ground" with the melodramatic mode (Williams, 2012: 523). But the body (and body fantasy) are necessary intermediary terms connecting these disparate media. The diegesis of action games like the Mario platformer tends not to cohere around notions of cultural order. In games, objects (enemies, obstacles) are not just "mise-en-scène" or Merleau-Ponty's (1945) "spatiality of position." Rather, they constitute Merleau-Ponty's "spatiality of situation," representing space and spatial relations in terms of potential actions and goals (a "situation" of play). And this is perhaps nowhere else as overtly clear as in the abstract (floating) geometry of space in the *Galaxy* series. Rather than evoke the familiar setting of bodily anxiety—the urban landscape and transportation system—*Galaxy*'s thematic setting of outer space can perhaps best be made sense of as a thin premise to create an entire universe that is a series of provocative object relationships meant to poke fun at our most basic bodily schema. If the world "coheres" at all, it is as a spatial correlate to a fantastic body, as a series of possible trajectories that demonstrate the body's transcendence.

The other genres of 1990s action games are generally faster and more frenetic than the platformer (with its contemplation of space). The fighter's focused representations of bodies set in agonistic conflict pulls emphasis away from the geometry of its levels or "stages." The shooter tends toward kinetic abstraction and the dissolution of bodily boundaries, which contract and

expand until there is no clear "body" on the screen with which to enter into fictional or dramaturgical identification (the dissolving of figure, often in the absence of "ground"). The platformer, by comparison, represents a sustained coupling of figure and ground, perhaps even a magical continuity. Tension ebbs and flows as long as players move forward through the obstacles. Many platformers include countdown clocks as a gentle nudge to players, who, if they chose to (and there is sometimes temptation to do so),[37] could simply stop progressing and dissolve the game and all its constitutive logics—a move that many game scholars celebrate as playing against the rules, defying the logics of the game (e.g., Galloway's notion of "counter-gaming" or Flanagan's "critical play").[38] Fighters, by contrast, are better equipped to interpellate their players within prolonged and tense diametric opposition.

In the traditional fighting game, injuring the body of one's opponent is the principle function of *agôn*. The structure of the game's opposition is mostly linear and this opposition is constitutional—in fact, it is usually impossible in this genre to do anything other than directly face one's opponent along a horizontal axis. The vertical axis isn't really part of the game; players hop into the air mostly as a dodge, a momentary absence from the ground. And combatants push each other away from the arena's midpoint in a flurry of maneuvers that represent, in motion and effect, a power emanating from the body. This cohesive genre has changed little since the arcade days—and the porting of arcade titles into home spaces with popular titles like *Street Fighter II* (1994), *Clayfighter* (1993), and *Mortal Kombat* (1992). While the visuals, number of moves and number of fighters have developed, the underlying formulas and mechanics of the early arcade fighters are still largely intact in the most recent iterations, such as *Street Fighter V* (2016).[39] Since players must focus on the often complex (and arbitrary) button sequences that trigger special maneuvers (and can't *do anything else* in the game while the controller is given over to this pre-ordained sequence of button presses), the fighter game encourages one to identify with the energy that ultimately escapes the fighter's body, or propels the body across the arena in a burst of power, once that button sequence is successfully completed and the maneuver takes hold. The player could also identify strongly with the usefulness of that move, the one that is dependable in a pinch as well as the one that, though difficult to perform, sets the player apart among peers precisely for the move's inaccessibility. The maneuvers act as a sort of stand-in for character personality, and become the basis for a player identity (especially in professional tournaments). Famed American professional *Smash Melee* player, Ken Hoang, is known for using Marth (a sword-wielding fighter in the game), and has a distinct style of play (he is the namesake for what is known in competitive circles as the "Ken Combo"). This is an extreme version of the more broadly shared idea that a player may identify with a certain style of play after spending a great deal of time with a fighting game. Myers (2009) suggests that the kind of "locomoter play" described here ("running, jumping, and using our bodies") is often overlooked as a basis for (or prerequisite for) our engagement in "social" or "object play" through videogames, which are more often the focus of commentary (Myers, 2009: 46, 49). But fighting games showcase this level of videogame play. Goto-Jones (2015) extends Myers' analysis to the question (specifically) of mastery in fighting games, which he connects with the Zen arts (including martial arts): "In both cases, the key is a form of habituation through repetition, in which complex, nuanced movements are broken down into simple constituent parts that are then repeated and repeated until their performance no longer requires conscious thought" (Goto-Jones, 2015: 48-49). Goto-Jones concedes that there are many "everyday" examples of "habituated and sublimated movements" other than Zen art ("tying our

shoelaces, driving a car, etc.") and that equating it with Asian martial arts might be seen as a "crude, naïve (or even offensive) Orientalism" (Goto-Jones, 2015: 49).

Nintendo's *Punch Out!!* series seems to reference American boxing rather than Zen martial arts. The game adopts an over-the-shoulder point of view—opponents still face one another but along the z-axis—so that the player's tiny avatar (in the foreground) fades from view, reflecting the need to focus on the motions of each unique, computer-controlled opponent. The boxers' bodies face each other, soldered in place, a distillation of predicting, dodging (permitted only temporarily), and counter-attacking. There is no spatial navigation in the gameplay—no manipulation of cameras or tactical decisions about position. The game is about learning (at the level of reflex) the cues, timing, and behavior of each opponent's patterned attacks. Some attacks are even designed to take advantage of habitual play patterns. *Super Punch-Out!!*'s Hoy Quarlo, for example, begins a particular attack by swinging his glove in a 360-degree arc *away* from the player (reaching into the background of the ring) before returning to the player's opposite side. One's initial reaction is to dodge the moment the attack begins, which leaves the player's fighter entirely exposed when the move finally lands. Having to accommodate, or preserve space in one's muscle memories for this kind of exception to the game's rules about dodging leaves a deep mark on the embodied memory players take from the game. The move becomes an expressive centerpiece of Quarlo's repertoire, as well as (at least in my case) an affectively charged rhythm that recurs in player's imaginations long after the game is complete. Nintendo designed an entire character around this concept in their series reboot, *Punch-Out!!* (2009). This game's Aran Ryan (who first appeared in the SNES title) inverts the pattern established with all other fighters: dodge then counter-attack. Players who dodge any of Ryan's moves will be unable to land a follow-up. The only way to hit him is to strike *before* his attack lands which requires, to an extent, un-learning the game's well-established patterns.

Psychologists of memory call this "interference," when one's ability to learn something new is inhibited by past memories that conflict with the new material. Interference requires that long-term (in this case, "implicit" or bodily) memory be pulled back into working memory, which runs against the independence of cognitive and motor functions (discussed above): players have to go back again to *thinking* about dodging. In this way, the *Punch-Out!!* series involves an active working and re-working of body memory, and posits the body as an always shifting cognitive puzzle, as a range of patterned trajectories revealed by tiny "tells" (a raised eyebrow, a catch phrase, a small twitch of the glove, etc.) which the player must interpret and react to in a fraction of a second. When these tells are only understood cognitively (i.e., when first learned), the player cannot respond in time to avoid the attack—there is not enough time for thought. But when each opponent's tell (and the bodily pattern and trajectory) become muscle memory, they exist as a pre-formed pattern, which is easy to see (or *feel*) in its entirety and to react to effortlessly. That the game can (and does) later subvert and capitalize upon these pre-existing patterns makes its fighter's quirky ways of moving into deeply evocative figures (emblematic of Bordwell's "expressive amplification" through bodily engagement). The bodies in *Punch-Out!!* are defined by their unique kinetics, and players experience power through the precise acquisition and negotiation of these bodily terms.

Given how centrally bodies (and the forces and trajectories that escape them) figure in "fighter" games, this genre might be described as the least abstract—and for that reason, perhaps the most politically problematic (in terms of gender representation and violence)—of the action genres. Compared with the fighter, platformers are relatively abstract and "geometric." But compared with platformers, shooter games are in their own league of abstraction. The shooter

most clearly demonstrates the flux of a body in play. And shooters open up the vertical axis of the image even more than platformers by emphasizing how the body becomes dispersed across the screen in every direction through a series of expansions and contractions. Against enemy fire, the shooter body seeks to minimize itself, to shrink away from a barrage or weave through openings in a radiating wave of shrapnel. And at other times, the shooter's body projects force outward in centrifugal gunfire, stretching toward (and policing) the boundaries of the frame.

While shooter bodies are usually free to roam the full dimensions of the screen, even grounded (anthropomorphized) shooter bodies (e.g., "run-and-gun" shooters like *Contra*) make frequent use of the vertical axis to evade enemy fire. It may seem counterintuitive to say so (since the actual "body" in these games is often small and minimally "animated"), but this action genre more than the others, in its fluctuation of spatialized expressions of agency, exemplifies Ngai's notion of "animatedness," an affective measure of the "elasticity" of animated bodies:

> the affect manages to fuse signs of the body's subjection to power with signs of its ostensive freedom—by encompassing not only bodily activity confined to fixed forms and rigid, specialized routines (Fordist or Taylorist animation), but also a dynamic principle of physical metamorphosis by which the body, according to Eisenstein, seems to 'triumph over the fetters of form' (what we might call 'animistic' animation). (Ngai, 2005: 100-101)

If the "body" in the shooter game is permitted to include more than just the literal representation of the avatar (and an analysis of gameplay, where this "avatar" fades from consciousness, suggests it should), then the shooter exemplifies the dynamic physical metamorphosis in Ngai's "animatedness" that exceeds the fixed forms and rigid structures of a videogame's discrete actions, binary inputs, and rectangular screen space.

In war-themed "run-and-gun" shooters like *Contra* and its progeny (e.g., *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, 1992), bullets spiral away from the protagonist in 360-degrees as a way of policing the margins of the screen, managing a hostile frontier that continuously spawns new threats from all angles. Bosses, when they arrive, occupy the screen's midpoint, forcing players to dodge around the screen's peripheries, shooting centripetally toward the center, at the boss's glowing point of vulnerability (often a sensitive internal organ protruding from the boss's monstrous corporeality). The boss's expulsion of players from the center introduces a tension to the game's spatial logic: players orbit the screen's periphery as if planning a return to that focal point, that center which is also the farthest point from the screen's dangerous outer boundaries. The frequent reference to vulnerable bodily organs (the boss's) placed at the screen's "bull's-eye" reflects how the game is casting the player's own embodied participation as a dance of center and periphery.

The diversity of games as a medium is also true of the side-scrolling shooter genre, which contains significant variety in its organization of space and action. The earliest games in the genre, e.g., *Space Invaders* (1978) or *Galaxian* (1981), involved manipulating tiny space vessels and shooting at enemies only in direction, along the arcade screen's vertical axis. Many space or aircraft-themed shooters retain this bird's-eye view on screen space. But in games like *Gradius III* (1989), the side-scrolling screen orients players on a horizontal axis, with gunfire concentrated forward (toward the right). That enemies still emerge from all margins of the screen (even behind the player's ship) complicates and confuses the act of dodging and the act of shooting. At its most difficult moments, this kind of shooter becomes what is referred to as "bullet hell," exemplified in games like *Ikaruga* (2001) where the screen is frequently completely overwhelmed with lasers, blast waves, and bullets—projectiles known collectively as

"dakka" (onomatopoeia for the sound of machine-gun fire). This of course only scratches the surface of the shooter genre.[40]

Bullet hell games epitomize the role played by muscle memory in action videogames. Playing these games requires pure flow: thoughtless, reflexive (even meditative) action. Staying alive in the genre requires a seemingly constant string of split-second decisions, but the recognizable cognitive subject is not the source of these decisions, and is not even aware of them. It is an overwhelmingly complex playfield that can only be navigated in a state of relaxation. A popular Youtube series (the PBS "Idea Channel") calls "bullet hell" games meditative—the overwhelming complexity of the action forces players into a kind of "autopilot," where bodily engagement takes over. The video argues that the bullet hell player acts "without intention," is "unconcerned with guidance altogether" (Rugnetta, 2013). The video even compares bullet hell to crowd-watching in the streets of São Paulo, Brazil, one of the most populous cities in the world: "maybe you focus on one thing here, one thing there. You focus on yourself. Or you go on a kind of autopilot. This autopilot in the face of complexity" (2013). By linking this genre of game (and its agentless agency) to a range of cultural objects (*Where's Waldo?* books, *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, *The Matrix*, and arcade-style action games like *Contra*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Castlevania*), the video emphasizes an empowering embodied reaction to overwhelming challenge and complexity.

The emergence of games using particle and lighting effects to dramatically increase the sense of chaos on screen (such as *Geometry Wars*, 2005) highlights the vertiginous pleasures of the genre. The body transcendence fantasy, it might be said, rests upon misidentifying the self as the master of the shooter's complex visual display. Through the genre's contractions and expansions, players feel themselves intimately connected with the screen's action as a body that can avoid, repel, and overcome the game's on-screen energy bursts as well as negotiate its deadly, off-screen spaces. If the waves of bullets were analogized to a ripple in a pond's water, then it could be said that the player is the perceived *cause* of that ripple. At the same time, play is clearly caught up within a sort of surrender to the visual-kinetic undulations on screen.

While so-called "casual" and mobile games have returned in many ways to gaming's "arcade roots" in recent years (Murphy, 2008), arcade-style action gameplay has also had an afterlife in the world of independent game development. Major corporations like Nintendo still make traditional action games—most recently, *Super Mario Maker* (2015) is built around user-generated level design and online social interactions (playthroughs, votes, comments, sharing), perhaps a rejoinder of sorts to Sony's own side-scrolling (user-generated-content-heavy) *LittleBigPlanet* physics-heavy platform series (2008-2014). But the sidescroller received an aesthetic makeover and critical renaissance in independently designed games like *Braid* (2008) and *Limbo* (2010), the former of which was one of the most commented upon indie games of all time (before *Minecraft*, 2011) because of how it expanded the platformer's spatial concerns with temporal ones (players manipulate the flow of time to overcome the game's obstacles), and aspired to tell an "adult" story about a failed romance.

More recently, the shooter genre has enjoyed an indie reawakening. The indie game, *Broforce* (2015) is an ironic, reference-heavy nostalgic throwback to Hollywood action stars of the 80s and 90s. A traditional—if especially frenzied—pixelated arcade-style shoot-em-up like *Contra* (but with destructible terrain like *Terraria*, 2011), *Broforce* assigns players a randomly chosen hero—a "bro," even when gendered female, including anyone from Mr. T to Rambo, Conan, RoboCop and Ripley (Van Damme, Stallone, and Schwarzenegger all make multiple appearances for iconic, exaggerated "hard body" action stars from this era)—each of whom

possesses unique shooter capacities. Blade, for example, uses a sword (short range) but can deflect enemy fire and move more quickly than most other characters; Schwarzenegger's Terminator character wields a long-range minigun, but the force of the bullets push him back (preventing its prolonged use). The game's modifiable terrain offers a variety of approaches to each set of obstacles and enemy soldiers, allowing for emergent strategies depending on the character in supply. And the game's assortment of referential characters—which players cycle through frequently (usually not playing as one character for more than a minute)—encourages improvised make-believe play. The Hollywood figure (randomly assigned, but immediately "grasped" through very simple visual art and shooter mechanics) is reduced to a frenzied (but unique) capacity to cut through space; the amount of personality built into character mechanics is evocative of body definitions in the fighter genre. In this sense, every violent encounter in *Broforce* becomes a potential, emergent narrative scenario that draws from decades of generic awareness—either a triumph that builds on the existing infrastructure of bodily empowerment this fictional persona already represents, or a guffaw-inducing defeat when a formerly omnipotent *Die Hard* (1988) Bruce Willis is undone by a stray bullet or a small piece of some falling debris.

Though a highly visible constituent of the shooter genre, *Broforce* will likely win no awards and do little to restore the shooter to its former arcade-era and early home gaming glory. A contemporary, independently designed "bullet hell" game (which is almost never identified as part of the bullet hell genre), on the other hand, has become one of the most critically acclaimed (and fan-embraced) games of the year. The visually simplistic *Undertale* (2015) is normally described as a parody of the genre of the role-playing game and its typically brutal imperialist narrative framework of conquest and extermination. In *Undertale*, players can choose to kill everything, the "genocide" path, or else kill nothing, the "pacifist" path (these are the terms widely used for describing the game's modes). *Undertale*'s narrative, however—which is well written, effective, and concise (unlike so many poorly written, verbose, clunky and incoherent AAA "cinematic" games)—quickly, and with broad strokes, establishes emotional attachments with the generally endearing and humorous characters (even supposed enemies), so that finding a way to avoid killing them becomes a sort of puzzle. For example, Toriel—the first major character players meet when their avatar (a small, ambiguously gendered child) falls into the underground world of monsters and dungeons—is a maternal figure who saves you from your first fight, then leads you (literally, by the hand) through the game's initial dungeon traps and enemy encounters, so that you can arrive safely at her house, where she has run ahead and baked you a pie to make you feel at home (I say "you" here deliberately—as these early moments really smartly reflect the role of the player at the start of a role-playing game: weak, vulnerable, lost, anxious). In order to progress, players must kill Toriel. There is a way to spare her, but it is not obvious.

What is often overlooked about *Undertale* is that the game's battles, which take place in a symbolic action window under the game's RPG dialog box, are "bullet hell." In the battles, the protagonist's red heart avoids a series of clever and unique "dakka" which, in turn, symbolize something about the enemy character (and their story or "situation"). For example, one enemy—a depressed ghost—cries, and players must dodge the tears. As players find a way to cheer the ghost up, the dodging requirements change. The battle therefore expresses something of the enemy character's personality (perhaps the answer needed for a peaceful resolution)—but it also requires muscle training and often (especially with bosses) a flow-like surrender to a range of visual and acoustic stimuli. When players are near death, Toriel's fire magic—which she used to

bake you that pie—swerves to avoid the protagonist's heart; Toriel throws the battle, so that players can kill her, and this is expressed without warning through the bullet hell action mechanic. Meanwhile, the game's major characters, their emotionally resonant role in plot, and the unique dakka players brave to defeat them (either peacefully or violently), merge together and constitute the major affective through-line of the game. The game, in other words, has pushed the expressive capacity of the bullet hell genre, employing its bodily surrender to tie player engagement to simplistic narrative details (often through the deployment of clever symbolic puns or puzzles).

Compared with platformers and shooters, fighters have generally remained more cloistered within their own generic conventions, less apt to blend with other genres or game mechanisms—though by no means is the genre defunct. One of Nintendo's flagship series, *Super Smash Bros.*, is a kind of fighter-platformer blend that introduced considerable modifications to the formula, including making greater use of the vertical axis in play, and drastically speeding up the rate of agonistic exchanges. *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter* are alive and well, but they remain firmly connected to their arcade roots. Competitive players use a traditional arcade stick, rather than a standard console controller, so their input scheme, like the genre itself, never has to change. Regardless the fate of these three broad action genres since their arcade heyday, the videogame industry has retained their core of embodied action in a variety of other genres that have woven the kinetic action of play around other fantasies. This chapter might also have discussed other game genres, like the highly kinetic first-person shooter, physics-based games like *Boom Blox* (2008), racing games like *F-Zero* (1990) or *Mario Kart 8* (2014), dance and aerobics games like *Just Dance* (2009), and the wide world of sports simulation games. So pervasive is the kinetic core, and so thoroughly and diversely have games answered the call for fresh and unexpected bodily provocations, that it should be (and often is) described as one of the constitutive features of the medium.

Though this chapter has sketched some bodily permutations in popular action videogame genres, it cannot really aspire to categorize all body fantasies in videogames. Like the melodramatic action cinema discussed in the next chapter, games represent polymorphous possibility, a Foucauldian multiplication of the forms of pleasure attached to the body, a body which has become a flexible medium for exploring and negotiating cultural anxieties about the relation between the individual and a wider social order. The body-transcendence fantasy's deployment of the body, or legible bodily action, is an imagined answer to these anxieties that converts them into the same spatiotemporal terms (force, trajectory) that defines the transcendent body in its capacity to act. As such, it is attached to gaming's kinetic core as a key logic and purpose within the entire industry's creative production.

The next chapter discusses this same fantasy but in a different medium. Cinematic spectators may not have as much time with a specific film to develop motor memory or "chunks" of information—but generic awareness, past viewing experiences (especially repeat viewing), and an in-built mimetic capacity (mirror neurons) mean that bodily schema also play a key role in a melodramatic action cinema, which has been influenced by the feelings of mastery and empowerment of popular arcade-style action videogames of the 1980s and 90s. A film may make creative use of widely embedded schemata, either building on what it surmises its audience already knows or feels (or will repeat-watch to acquire), or else upending these schemata by introducing something unexpected that is difficult to assimilate. The latter includes new patterns that clash with existing schema, such as with trauma or a repressed impulse.

Singer (1979) discusses the affective quality of fantasy as a kind of "affect regulation" when we return (in fantasy, play) to an experience that clashes with established schemata. Singer and others call this "miniaturization"— reducing in scope and seriousness by approaching something confusing or troubling through fantasy or play (e.g., experiencing a traumatic moment as if it were a movie). It might be called "miniaturization on the big screen" when blockbuster action films use the body to transpose and engage wider American cultural anxieties. Such anxieties include scale (one's smallness in a crowded world, the meagerness of one's political voice), acknowledgment (social recognition, "I'm Specialism"), bodily threat (war, terrorism, home invasion, disease), opportunity (employment, career advancement, and education in a time of economic decline), and inclusion (social stratification, belonging, and the looming specters of racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia). The new and difficult-to-integrate bodily schema is a perfect medium for persistent cultural anxieties—both must be "played" and replayed until they no longer exceed our capacity for integration. If there is indeed trauma in this repetition, it may lie most clearly in the feeling of loss when we exit the "magic circle" of the videogame or the space of the darkened movie auditorium, departing a magical kinetic universe and returning to a body so hampered by space and time, so unremarkable and un-magically connected to (or at odds with) the spaces (and other bodies) that surround it. The body-transcendence fantasy—its ability to stitch together disparate media—is a direct answer to this separation anxiety, a phantom limb to lagging empowerment.

CHAPTER 3. THE 'BODY-TRANSCENDENCE' FANTASY IN CINEMA

> The bodily torment of the mutant superhero expresses a desire, a need, to transcend the confines of the body, to exist as pure spirit.
>
> Scott Bukatman, 2003: 71

> To describe an artwork as 'transgressive' is to offer it a compliment. […] Boundaries are to be deprecated; they resonate with everything that is petrified, stale, encrusted, immobile. Boundary-breaking is to be admired; it resonates with everything that is fluid, fresh, unencumbered, mobile
>
> Anthony Julius, 2002: 20

In contrast with videogame studies, film studies already contains a significant corpus of work exploring both the signifying power of the body in action, and of the digital visual effects that now as a rule both instantiate and augment that body. Kristen Whissel's *Spectacular Digital Effects* (2014) argues that although the mode of spectator address known in film studies as the "cinema of attractions" [41] is in some ways apt for thinking about CGI sequences in digital visual effects cinema, it ultimately fails to account for how the modern-day digital effects sequence "appears at key turning points in a film's narrative to emblematize the major themes, desires, and anxieties with which a film (or a group of films) is obsessed" (Whissel, 2014: 6). Whissel demonstrates how, rather than spectacularly disrupt narrative progression (à la attractions cinema's "aesthetic of astonishment"), these modern-day effects sequences are complexly connected with a film's narrative, and this interconnectedness is fundamental to the "signifying power of digital visual effects" (2014: 4). Her notion of an "effects emblem" is useful as a framework for thinking about body fantasy in cinema because the body in this fantasy genre also becomes an "emblem" to the film's wider thematic concerns and narrative conflicts.

Lisa Purse (2007) has argued that digital bodies play a central role in "the narrative and identificatory processes that ground our sensory and psychic engagement" in digital visual effects cinema (Purse, 2007: 7). Her analysis situates bodies as emblems of sorts for the significant thematic and narrative import they carry in their spectacular but also "purposeful" action:

> Action cinema measures progress, failure, and success through the hero's body. Hence the plots of such films often function as "narratives of becoming" that dramatize a journey towards mastery of the physical that enables the hero actively to reinstate equilibrium at the film's end. This narrative of becoming is emphatically visualized through the spectacle of the body in exhilarating purposeful action. (Purse, 2007: 7-8)

Purse's analysis focuses on the spectator's identification with these bodies, which she (following Prince) thinks depends on an embodied sense that these digital figures are "corporeal beings subject to Newtonian space" (Prince, 1996: 30). Roger Ebert's criticism that digital bodies don't always lend the impression that "flesh and blood are contending with gravity" isn't just a gripe about minute imperfection in *Spider-man*'s (2002) CGI sequences (Purse, 2007: 9). Rather,

Purse argues, perception of the "momentum, weight, and impact" of virtual bodies is "essential to the spectator's ability to identify sensorially with the body in action" (2007: 19). Since, as Purse (following Sobchack) suggests, "the spectator's sensorium makes sense of the images on screen at an instinctive, bodily level before his or her rational mind makes sense of the images at a narrative level," this failure to properly instantiate the CGI body and its actions disrupts a deep-seated identification process (Purse, 2007: 8).

The *bodily* effects emblem in CGI cinema, then, is a somewhat fraught category potentially undermined by embodied identification. Purse applies this critical standard to "Neo's 'gravity-irrespective' body" in the Burly Brawl sequence of *The Matrix: Reloaded*, a film she reads as self-aware enough of its own limitations (its own overtly non-indexical bodies) to employ a "compensatory" and "noisy dance track in an attempt to heighten the sensory impact of the fight, alongside sound effects that aurally simulate the crunching collisions of pro-filmic bodies that are distinctly absent from the visual frame" (2007: 19). That the action sequences in the first *Matrix* film were so compelling by contrast is explained, in large part, because of the first movie's preference for live-action over CGI.

But the binary Purse and other film scholars mobilize here to explain the disconnect between, say, the first and the second *Matrix* films, is problematic because of what it excludes: namely, the "poorly executed ('perfunctory'), unconvincing, two-dimensional 'cartoons'" that, in this argument, are opposed to the "forceful three-dimensional materiality indicated by notions of 'flesh,' 'blood,' and 'gravity'" (2007: 9). This framework for evaluating the digital body is structured by the outright exclusion of non-photorealistic, animated and videogame images, the latter of which are often two-dimensional and pixelated, and not just because of technological limitation.[42] And yet Sobchack's formula (a basis for Purse) also conspicuously lacks flesh and blood ("*an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity* that has as its other side the figural objects and bodily provocation on the screen"). Cinematic phenomenology emerges from a tradition that often explores the ways conscious engagement with the body employs structures that exceed the body's literal corporeal boundaries and likenesses (e.g., gestural habits of daily life, prosthetics, tools, phantom limbs, etc.). Our capacity to mirror figural structures is not limited to literal replications of our own physiology, and—as demonstrated above—these structures of bodily provocation have a variety of sources in popular entertainment, some photorealistic, but many rather graphically abstract.

On the other hand, there is something resonant and important in Purse's analysis about the spectator's discerning eye for embodiment, about one's ability to detect (and expect to see) CGI bodies with depth ("complex muscle and tendon structures") and the realistic simulation of "physical forces of weight and counter-weight, mass, momentum, resistance, torque, impact and so on" that act on these bodies (2007: 11). What is it about cinema that seems to make such strict demands on "pro-filmic bodies," and how can games and animation—which overtly frustrate these demands—be, nevertheless, so often discussed as embodied media? One explanation is what is known as the "uncanny valley," which says that the more closely an aesthetic approaches photorealistic depictions of normal, healthy bodies, (without quite arriving there) the more alienating it will be to spectators; highly stylized aesthetics escape the scrutiny and consequent effect of distance. In this sense, concerns over indexicality (pro-filmic flesh, blood, and gravity) are recast as verisimilitude (being unable to tell the difference), and near approximations trigger an anxiety about the body which stylized examples allow to remain dormant.

But a second explanation offers a way to connect cinema with (rather than distinguish it from) embodiment in other, less indexical media. Perhaps in these films the flesh-and-blood

index (or its perceptual equal) is not quite what anchors identification, and is not (primarily) what is lost in that moment when, with bad CGI, one can "tell when the film switches from live actors to virtual ones" (Purse, 2007: 9). Perhaps instead this perceptible "switch" represents a rupture in the "definition of the situation" of play, or a severance of the action sequence's play space (its physical reality) from the spatiotemporal world of the rest of the film. In other words, the agonistic scenario, and its legible depiction, also affects a spectator's ability "to identify sensorially with the body in action." A perceived shift in the very terms governing the interaction of physical bodies—or the sense that different bodies are operating under different sets of "rules"—serves as a reminder at the worst possible moment that the competition is not authentic, but staged. And since the indexically recorded human body is such a well-established perceptual (schematic) category, the pressure to convince a discerning eye that two bodies are spatiotemporally contiguous falls on the digital body in the form of a very high demand for verisimilitude that Purse (following Prince) has already described, but under the rubrics of corporeal indexicality and Newtonian physics.

The "bad CGI" that troubles immersion in many action films does more than provide the felt impression that this body is not the body it was a moment ago (not the body one had previously identified with)—it also suggests, perhaps even more centrally, that this bodily action is no longer "rule-bound." The agonistic scenario does not need to have actually happened (historical truth is not the point), nor does it need to have been "possible" or "realistic" as in its correspondence to limitations we think of in our lived-experience. But the scenario does need to be "real" in the sense Caillois (1958) intends when he says that ruled games are "played *for real*" ("*As if* is not necessary."): that "rules themselves create fictions," or self-contained artificial realities whose laws "are imperative and absolute, beyond discussion" (but also "precise," and "arbitrary") (1958: 7,8; original emphasis). In Loftus & Loftus' example of the Chess experiment demonstrating the concept of "chunking," expert players are able to remember the layout on boards reflecting actual games better than they recall randomly generated boards (see Chapter 1, note 10). The boards that are laid out to reflect a "real" chess match (one played by the rules) represent patterns very familiar to the experts, who recognize in them an entire scenario (a bigger "chunk") rather than a bunch of individual pieces randomly placed. Whether an actual Chess game was played, and whether Chess is somehow meaningfully representative of real-world phenomena, are less important than the legibility of an agonistic encounter which activates body memory, triggering "mirror neurons" that fire when we perform an action or when we observe someone else performing the action (Rozzolatti, 2005).

The significance for embodied participation of a legible agonistic scenario could be used to further develop Purse's critique of *The Matrix: Reloaded*. The film doesn't merely sometimes suffer a perceived "switch" from flesh-and-blood to rubbery, "gravity-irrespective" bodies (undermining embodied participation within the agonistic exchange). The film's narrative conflicts are not readily instantiated in its action sequences; there are often no clear stakes, and not much struggle within the film's often subdued fight sequences. Neo's face-off against the three agents early in the film is the first time Neo returns to action since the concluding events of the 1999 film, where Neo had realized his full potential to manipulate the rules of the machine world. Neo's body-transcendence moment in the first film (he can fly, stop bullets, and move and think quickly enough to fight with one hand behind his back) liquidated that film's tense agonistic struggles. *Reloaded*'s first bout, then, must rise to the difficult challenge of conveying some sort of stakes (some tension or struggle) to a fight that is a foregone conclusion. Neo's observation that these agents are "upgrades" does little to displace his assumed spatiotemporal

mastery. Neo remains fully in control of a quick victory that is *minimally* effortful: in his long, flowing coat, affected poise, and stoney demeanor, Neo is neither struck nor knocked off balance. When Neo must later prove his identity to Seraph, gatekeeper to the Oracle, the ensuing performance is more dance than fight: no blows are landed in a tight choreography that includes gracefully stepping onto and leaping across the tables that line the room. Aside from a cup of chopsticks that is knocked over, there are no immediately clear stakes in the fight—just as there is no rising action, no unexpected reversal of fortune, no hidden bodily capacities, and no provocative gesture (so important to the first film's closely fought bouts)[43] serving as clever solution to a difficult spatiotemporal situation. In short, there is no need to create new "definitions of the situation" of the fight. As Caillois says, "[e]very game of skill, by definition, involves the risk for the player of missing his stroke, and the threat of defeat, without which the game would no longer be pleasing. In fact, the game is no longer pleasing to one who, because he is too well trained or skillful, wins effortlessly and infallibly" (1958: 7).

Not every action sequence in *The Matrix Reloaded* lacks agôn to the same extent, but the film is troubled by uncertainty about where tense, embodied conflict fits within a plot about cyber bodies and computer glitches with limitless potentials. Within this framework, the spatiotemporal rupture of switching to obviously CGI bodies poses more of a problem than it otherwise might. When the agonistic scenario is legible and connected in a clear and emotionally resonant (embodied) manner to major conflicts in plot, small lapses in the believability of its effects can be forgiven, even at an implicit, bodily, or "pre-rational" level. [44]

The sense that the agôn is actually happening within its own diegetic (or "rule-bound") framework, within its own "magic circle," influences the transcendent body's relation to plot in the rest of the film. The body is not just caught up in action but, in Purse's words, in "purposeful action." This videogame-inflected cinema encourages its spectators to become caught up in embodied identification with an agonistic scenario—watching these films means playing with body schema, and deploying these schema as *fantasy material* for addressing broader cultural anxieties and concerns related to the body.

In its ability to transform action into *purposeful* action, the fully animated Japanese series, *Naruto* (2002) and its continuation as *Naruto: Shippûden* (2007), succeed in their staging of empowering body fantasy where many effects-heavy Hollywood films fail. Many Hollywood action-hero films abbreviate or fragment their action (e.g., with shaky-cam and rapid montage), occluding the fight's agonistic core, and do too little to adequately motivate or situate this action within a broader narrative frame. *Naruto*, on the other hand, presents a sustained (even obsessive) articulation of bodies in purposeful action. These bodies, and the way characters (and plotlines) dwell on them, stage wish-fulfillments about overcoming resistance in response to a range of culturally resonant anxieties about the status and significance of the individual body. Despite the series' lacking indexical motion or verisimilitudinous laws of physics, and despite its presentation of an overtly flat, "cartoon"-like world, *Naruto* stands as among the best and clearest examples of what, I think, Purse means when she describes *empowerment* through bodily identification in CGI action films:

> Such a body serves as the site at which fantasies of empowerment are made physical, so that the action hero's displayed corporeal form functions simultaneously as pleasurable spectacle, as the driver of the action movie's narrative of becoming, and as the object of the spectator's sensory, experiential process of identification. (2007: 22-23)

The body in an animation like *Naruto* is not precisely a digital "effects emblem"[45] in the manner Whissel explores in CGI cinema, but it is still an emblem. And it is a sort of apotheosis of videogame-inflected body-transcendence visual narrative. The body in *Naruto* represents a uniquely meaningful register (a "site of intense signification") for spectatorial engagement, a densely packed (sometimes allegorical) cluster of narrative meaning, both representing and resolving narrative conflict.

The series' agonistic moments—set against a feudal warring culture—are made up of and resolved through martial arts combat. Usually, the resolution comes as the result of the discovery of a new bodily capacity, or the perfect implementation of something learned in training. And training itself is often an explicit focus of plot. Throughout the series, bodies are perpetually being transformed in some way, overcoming some previously unassailable barrier, mastering a new technique. It is not just, in Purse's formulation of action cinema, a "narrative of becoming" with an embodied capstone moment; rather, *Naruto*'s is a narrative of *bodily* becoming. Here, technological discovery and advancement is a science of the body and its hidden powers. And all the action sequences—including the training—are made highly legible through temporal manipulations like slow-motion and repetition (planning an attack, visualizing it in advance, then returning again afterwards for better comprehension, embodied replay). In this series, then, the body is the agent of restored equilibrium, the place where an empowerment fantasy becomes "physical," and at the same time the place to which the spectator's implicit, embodied identification is bound to the screen (in *an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity*).

Most significantly, *Naruto* is meticulously "rule-bound." This is a crucial aspect of the legibility of its action—action which, in turn, serves as staging ground to character identity and conflict, and that culminates in development (usually tied to expanded bodily potential). The series goes to great length to demonstrate that its fictional universe is rule-bound, made "real" in the sense of its ludic consistency (as if it simulated fights, rather than representing them) and that, within its ruled structures, opposition can both be met and dramatically overcome. Action is sometimes painfully forestalled while a scenario is dissected, affordances and weaknesses enumerated. The series even maps out rudimentary visual schematics or diagrams, and teaches its viewers the rules governing the interaction of bodies in this fictional universe. These rules are complicatedly based on a kind of bodily energy ("chakra") which can be manipulated in a variety of ways (as well as exhausted or blocked at specific points), and which is used to augment physical capacities (absorbing a fall, clinging to the surface of a lake or walking on the underside of a tree branch) or sensory abilities (chakra-infused eyes with drastically expanded visual capacity, or the ability to hypnotize and confuse others). These rules are perpetually expanded throughout the series, and are often openly discussed as a prelude to the fight. And when past plot is summoned for the fight's build-up to convey stakes (often the literal re-use of scenes from past episodes, in flash-back), the distinction between story and rule becomes subtle: both are used to construct the "definition of the situation" of play.

An example from the first season of *Naruto* demonstrates all these points, and is worth tracking for a moment to instantiate what can seem like an abstract idea about bodies. The way that rules in *Naruto* are expressed, sustained, and (when bent) commented upon or reconsidered, requires analysis of the action sequence itself, as well as how the plot is made to frame (and always encroach upon) this sequence. The episode, "Gaara Vs Rock Lee," takes place within the third and final stage of the "Chūnin Selection Exams"—a rigorous screening process to determine which ninja are promoted to the next rank, and which fail (or die). The preadolescent

students undertaking the exam are guided by referees who, though older, more accomplished ninja, too often seem lax in their oversight and suffer from a range of conflicts in interest (the nations supplying exam participants and referees have at best tenuous relations to one another). The exam is meant to evaluate each ninja's readiness for greater responsibilities and higher-rank missions—as such, it represents a familiar emotional framework as a rite of passage, evaluation by powerful adults within an alienating institutional setting. This setting involves sometimes being outside the purview of the observation of authority figures, and feeling unprotected against, or perhaps abandoned to, the will of bullies or those with mal-intent. But the setting is also a reason for intense and sustained scrutiny of ninja bodies and personalities (and their hidden capacities). In the final stage of the exams, students engage in direct, 1-on-1 combat in tournament-style elimination: the fight is over when a fighter is incapacitated or killed.

In "Gaara vs Rock Lee," one of the main characters, Rock Lee (from the Hidden Leaf Village, the setting for the series) faces off against a foreign combatant, Gaara (From the Village Hidden in the Sand). We have already seen Lee fight—his character is introduced as an honorable but naïve optimist specializing in hand-to-hand combat, who is extremely fast, and who adores and emulates his sensei: they share a green, full-body jumpsuit, a fervor for excessive physical training, and an aphoristic worldview ("let the power of youth explode!"). Aside from his selfless (nearly suicidal) last-minute rescue of Sakura (also of the Hidden Leaf) against a competing band of ninjas in the first portion of the exam, little else is known of Lee's character or abilities. And we have also already seen Gaara at an earlier stage in the Chūnin Exam, where he darkly murders several competing shinobi in cold blood (far in excess of necessity according to the objective of that portion of the exam, which is simply to collect a certain number of scrolls). Gaara carries a giant gourd on his back filled with sentient, chakra-infused sand, which moves autonomously to reflexively protect him from attacks, and which Gaara can also manipulate actively, shaping it into limbs and tendrils to snare, surround, and crush his victims so powerfully that they explode in a shower of blood. Ninja that cannot fight from a distance are vulnerable against Gaara, who stands on the battlefield, immobile and arms folded, his sand acting of its own accord, while his opponents tire. The "randomly" selected matchup of Rock Lee and Gaara in the final stage of the exam is portentous for Lee.

And though spectators know well Gaara's threat, his abilities are unknown to Rock Lee and the match-up observers (competitors, their sensei, referees, and onlookers) who line the massive indoor arena used in the final phase of the exam. After Rock Lee's first attack is repelled by the living sand, and he retreats to a safe distance to size up the situation, the action slows to accommodate a series of verbal and facial reactions from spectators (e.g., Naruto: "So *that's* what he's got in that gourd"). One character, upon seeing the sand, suffers traumatic repetition, and can only mutter "that…" and is interrupted by a flash-back of Gaara's earlier ninja slayings, which he witnessed from a hidden vantage point. This narrative material (Gaara's "sand burial") is brought back to frame the stakes of this fight.

The pacing of the fight is even more relaxed than in the Shōnen Jump manga (Japanese comic) source material—this is partly a commercial imperative to protract narrative events in a (futile) effort to not "catch up" too quickly to the manga. But, in effect, the manner in which the body in *Naruto* is written into narrative— in Peter Brooks' (1993) terms, made a "narrative body" —is consistent across its media instantiations.[46] The technique of interrupting action in order to update our definition of the situation of play was possibly meant to vivify (or elucidate) the manga's illustrated panels—but the anime actually expands these reflective moments, to the effect that the fight's legibility and narrative integration remain a top priority. That the fight is

"interrupted" is sometimes not even fully perceived since, rather than a cut-away to parallel action taking place elsewhere, the interruptions here are usually verbal commentary on the fight, and often introduce important information for making sense of action (in response to an implicit question arising from the contest). When this commentary provides an analysis on a complicated and initially bewildering moment in the fight, the result is a suturing effect where the embodied, kinetic action becomes stitched into the narrative interplay between characters (which sometimes even involves lengthy asides or flashbacks).

Rock Lee is the last to verbally react to Gaara's sand and resolves (in internal monologue) to get past this "sand-manipulating jutsu." And since Lee's body is the focus of this agonistic moment—since he is making definitions of the situation *as a player* in the game—his decision about how best to proceed leads back into action as he runs in for a series of attacks: spinning jump-kicks and punches. He notices the sand creeping up behind him and uses a kunai blade (standard ninja tool) to attempt to cut it down. To the astonishment of onlookers, Lee's every attack is repelled.

Like action sequences in the anime series more generally, this fight's highly detailed animation and bodily kinetics are framed in medium-long and long shots that emphasize fluid arcs and trajectories of force—though not with an extensive use of long takes. The action is interrupted, again, by the commentary of onlookers from the balcony above (Sakura: "Even as fast as he is, Lee can't get anywhere close to him"). Naruto comments that Gaara is using the sand as a shield, but he is corrected by Gaara's sibling, Kankurō, who chooses to reveal in a lengthy aside (characteristic of anime storytelling more generally): "*He's* not doing it; the sand is protecting him of its own accord. It's almost like a living thing. It'll come to Gaara's defense without his doing anything. That's why Gaara's never been injured. No one can get at him. No one's ever even been able to touch him." Gaara follows this news with a menacing remark at Lee: "Well, is that all? I hope you haven't finished entertaining me"—Gaara is merely toying with the outmatched Rock Lee. Lee's intense physicality is not just put into relief by Gaara's absolute stasis, but it is mocked. A tension begins to build over the fight's likely gruesome outcome.

Gaara's sand finally snags Lee by the ankle and, playing with him a bit more, throws him into a wall. Lee springs back, and attempts once more, in futility, to punch through Gaara's defense. The commentary that then interrupts the fight reflects on difficult situation Lee faces (Sakura: "I don't get it. He's only using taijutsu. Can't he see that's never going to work? Why doesn't he get some distance and use ninjutsu?"). Ninjutsu, here, refers to a kind of chakra manipulation, initiated by hand gestures, that projects force beyond the body in a variety of ways (breathing fire, extending one's shadow, imbuing a fist or blade with electricity, producing a "shadow clone" or copy of one's body, etc.). Along with Taijutsu (hand-to-hand martial arts combat) and genjutsu (or the use of chakra to hypnotize or control the thoughts and perceptions of others), ninjutsu comprises one of three basic types of ninja combat. Sakura's question at this moment is meant to reintroduce context necessary for following the fight, but at the same time it introduces new (clarifying) information about Rock Lee himself.

Might Guy (Lee's sensei), responds to Sakura with confidence: "That might be a good idea. That is, if he had any. Lee has no ninjutsu or genjutsu skills at all." Sakura is taken aback— as these three skills are learned at a very young age in ninja training. Guy continues, amused: "That's nothing. You should have seen how hopeless he was when I first met him. No talent whatsoever." At this point in the fight, Lee is tripped, and Gaara's sand looms overhead and splashes downward, apparently trapping Lee, causing shrieks and one onlooker to announce "it's

over." But Might Guy chuckles, and the next shot reveals Lee's flight (in a tightly held reverse-summersault) into the vertical axis of the frame, where he perches atop a giant, ornamental statue of hands performing a ninjutsu sign. Far atop the statue, at a safe distance from the sand, Lee's position reflects what Whissel (2014) has described of the spatial logic of "new verticality" in action cinema, where "struggles between protagonists and antagonists hinge on the degree to which each is able to defy or master the laws of physics making extreme vertical settings pervasive, almost regardless of genre" (2014: 14). The elision of Lee's actual escape from the sand prefigures the embodied action about to come.

At this moment of pause in the fight, Guy sensei continues: "A ninja who can do neither ninjutsu nor genjutsu is certainly a rarity. Lee has only his taijutsu to rely on. Some might even consider that a disadvantage. But that's what makes him a winner." This explanation is meant as a provocation, a question or tension the next moment is meant to answer spectacularly. Guy addresses Lee from the balcony with a thumbs-up, shouting, "All right, Lee, take 'em off." Lee, surprised, counters: "But, Guy sensei, you said that was only a last resort when the lives of very important people were at stake." But Guy, thumb still raised, reassures: "That's right, I did. But this is an exception." Lee, elated, ("Really? Really!?") pulls back his socks, revealing thin leg weights secretly wrapped around his shins. This prompts surprised reactions from onlookers, who set to work immediately re-evaluating their understanding of the agonistic situation in light of this new information. One of Lee's peers jeers, "How old fashioned," and a fellow sensei remarks: "Leg weights? Basic training equipment." The meaning of this revelation is not immediately clear: reactions range from Naruto's "Totally cool!" to Kankurō's "Totally dumb." Lee himself weighs in (unaware of the side-chatter): "That is better. Now I will be able to move freely." He holds the weights at his sides and then drops them to the ground. As they fall, Gaara's sister, Temari, remarks: "Come on. You really think you'll be able to get through Gaara's defenses just by dropping a couple of pounds of weight?"

The weights hit the ground and release a massive explosion of force that ejects plumes of dust to nearly the full height of the multi-story ninjutsu hand statue, suggesting their weight was in fact superhuman. Lee, atop the statue, where moments prior he held his leg weights aside, and now plumes representing their weight engulfs the statue, stands as a potent bodily emblem to the power of an unexpected secret and—within the broader logic of the series—a moment of pause to reconsider the assumed hierarchical position of taijutsu. Onlookers are reduced to gasps and stunned silence. Might Guy continues his guidance, so his permission is unmistakable: "All right. Now go!" Rock Lee issues a "Yes sir!" to further cement their relationship based in discipline and respect. Gaara glares at Lee, unaffected by this revelation, until Lee, with an airborne leap at a speed that outstrips the eye's capacity to track motion, seems to disappear, and Gaara's eyes widen (at this point the most "animated" he has been in this fight).

In stunned silence, onlookers can only watch—or try to watch—as Lee lapses into and out of visual space so that he appears in flashes of motion, outstripping Gaara's sand. A series of shots demonstrates the significance of this motion—a fist penetrating the defense right next to Gaara's temple. Another fist from another angle that, though not controlled enough to hit Gaara, fully enters through his defensive sand barrier and passes behind him. Onlookers find words: ("so fast" "amazing"). A bullet-time-inspired circular tracking shot orbits Gaara, as he tries to respond to Lee's movement, so that both camera and Gaara (along with his now painfully slow sand defense) fluidly spin in continuous motion, while Lee flicks into and out of the visual frame in rapid discontinuity. Power is here represented as a freedom from the constraint of continuity. And where before Lee's bodily trajectories were dynamic, fluid, and continuous, he now appears

to be "cheating" the laws of space and time. Lee's rigor for extra effort, his never skipping a training session, not a single repetition or lap—nor, it should be noted, the full articulation of a single spoken syllable (Lee never uses contractions in his speech)—is now dramatically inverted in an elated, indulgent, parent-sanctioned expenditure of all that work. Filling in the story of Lee's training, Might Guy voices over the fight: "I could see that Lee had no aptitude for ninjutsu or genjutsu. So we skipped them and focused all of his time and energy into developing his taijutsu. That way we turned his disadvantage into a blessing. Now he doesn't need those other things to win, because he's transformed himself into the world's greatest taijutsu specialist."

At the delivery of this line, and to the astonishment of the crowd, Lee lands a hit on Gaara: an areal heel-drop. Gaara's injury (he now bears the mark of this blow in the form of a red cut on his face) prompts a split-screen simultaneous reaction shot from Gaara's siblings and Rock Lee's classmates. Lee slides backwards in a half-runner's pose, with the fingertips of one hand on the ground to aid in his deceleration. He comes to rest—in this bodily posture that both represents intense speed and its controlled stopping point—as something different from before, with new bodily potential, and new recognition for it. The body is reflected in onlookers who, collectively provide the function of articulating the "definition of the situation" of play: "I don't believe it. Gaara's been hurt!" and "Impossible." Naruto: "Whoa, that's scary. And I thought he was quick on his feet before. He's been that fast all this time?" Of course, Gaara still has as-yet unseen bodily capacities of his own, and the balance of power in the fight changes hands several times before its difficult and ambivalent conclusion.

The serial form of the anime allows for lengthy asides about bodies mediated by rules, limits, strategies, and constantly renewed efforts to make sense of a situation of play that shifts underfoot. The unexpected bodily ability is the basis of "key turning points" in action. In terms of the series' broader narrative, this fight serves to establish Gaara, who will play a major role in the rest of the series, but it also reveals much of the relationship between Rock Lee and Might Guy, who refers to Lee as initially "hopeless" precisely to underscore his pupil's "narrative of becoming." The arduous training up until this examination is compressed and represented in the intense weights that are dropped. And the conflict between the size of the weights and the size of their explosion repeats for emphasis the "impact" of the body secret, so that it is abundantly clear that in this world, the body possesses a tremendous latent potential which connects each person to the past and to one another in unexpected ways. The fight also demonstrates the difference between Rock Lee and Gaara on the basis of the presence (and total absence, respectively) of a parental bond. While Might Guy behaves like a proud father figure, one later learns that Gaara is an orphan—supported only by fearful siblings. And because of the demonic sand, which protects him *like* a parent from both those who would harm him *and* who would love him, Gaara has known neither harm nor love ("no one's ever even been able to touch him"). Gaara wins—and Lee is maimed to such an extent that the on-site medics proclaim he will never fight again. Lee would have died were it not for Might Guy's last-second intervention, a move (in violation of the exam's rules) that cements his bond with a pupil who seeks nothing other than approval, and leaves Gaara in awe, unable to understand why such compassion would be shown the fight's loser.

Together with other serialized narratives on television (other Japanese anime like *One Piece* or American superhero series like Netflix's *Daredevil*) new action-hero films adopting similar "narrative body" techniques (like *Kung Fu Hustle* or *The Matrix*), and action videogames, *Naruto* epitomizes a highly kinetic and legible body-fantasy genre. The genre

contains a wide array of animated television shows and films, whose number and popularity have risen since videogames entered the home. But there are many historical precursors to the body-transcendence genre. And this genre's narrative mode (melodrama) has a long and varied history.

Melodrama has existed throughout cinema's history. Linda Williams (2012) provides a concise definition:

> Peter Brooks calls melodrama the very "logic of the excluded middle" (15). If traditional "patterns of moral order" have become confused in a modern era in which good and evil are no longer clear, then it has long been the job of melodrama to reveal—through either the recognition of a villain with a tinge of the Gothic or the suffering of an innocent victim—a "moral legibility" that can discern both (Brooks, 20). Melodrama is the way a mega-melodramatic popular culture reassures itself that we—the good folks, the blue avatar—are good and those who threaten us are evil. It is not necessarily a drama of the defeat of evil by good but the all-important recognition of a good or evil that was previously obscure. (Williams, 2012: 523)

For scholars of the form, a "moral legibility" ("the all-important recognition of a good or evil that was previously obscure") is central to the melodramatic mode. In the examples Linda Williams (2001) has traced in melodrama as a mode of *bodily* excess, these stories begin and end in a "space of innocence," involve a "dialectic of pathos and action" ("a give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time'"), and "Manichaean conflicts between good and evil" ("the excluded middle") (Williams, 2001: 28-40). What is made visible upon the body is *pathos*: a tear or other emotional signifier that exposes a previously hidden, interior truth.

For Williams (2001), what was "new" about melodrama at the turn of the last century was "its reliance on personality—and on the revelation of personality through body and gesture—as the key to both emotional and moral truth" (2001: 41). Reaffirming what Peter Brooks (1976) described as a loss of the sacred following the French Revolution, Mellor and Shilling (1993) suggest that the "extensive desacralisation of social life," along with the loss of a centrally maintained moral order, led to an increased cultural fascination with the individual's *body* as a site of truth and moral legibility. Mellor and Shilling argue that the failure "to replace religious certainties with scientific certainties" has lead to "a privatization of meaning" that has left "increasing numbers of individuals alone with the task of establishing and maintaining values to guide them and make sense of their daily lives" (Mellor and Shilling, 1993: 413). The consequent "concern with *self-identity*" has changed our relationship with the body, and with consumer culture:

> With the decline of the religious frameworks which constructed and sustained existential and ontological certainties residing outside the individual, and the massive rise of the body in consumer culture as a bearer of symbolic value (Shilling 1991), there has been a tendency for people to place more importance on the body as constitutive of the self. (Mellor and Shilling, 1993: 413)

The games and action-hero cinema discussed in this chapter have been produced within a social order where the body is increasingly constitutive of the self. This is one way to think of the burden carried out by a body-transcendence fantasy. What is new, then, about a present-day videogame-inflected melodramatic mode, might tentatively be described as *its reliance on embodied, agonistic action, as revelatory of unexpected or unrecognized potential, that is key to both emotional and moral truth—and that truth is "I'm special"*.

A body-transcendence narrative genre elucidates the moral order of an age of "I'm specialism." A continuation and ratcheting up of Brooks' "body as an 'epistemophilic' project" (1993: 6): this genre's "desire to know" what is special about its bodies presents this knowledge as a response to anxieties about scale (the bigness of skyscrapers, the smallness of the individual), where the (often spatialized) extremes are between misrecognition (obscurity, lack of talent or ability) and dramatic revelations of "I'm specialism." This is the body with special powers, the body that can collapse spatial and temporal barriers, transcend the social and infrastructural frictions of modern urban life. And this power must be recognized within a moral order that privileges being singular, being special, being famous, and being discovered.

The moment of transcendence itself occurs at a key turning point in plot, often pulling much previous narrative material into a dramatic release, and marking the transcendent body in narrative as a "narrative body." Functionally, it is important to note how the fantasy moment launches spectators both forwards and backwards in time, reconsidering past impressions through excited bodily anticipation. The moment of transcendence hinges on the recognition of an initially misrecognized body or bodily capacity. In this way, it makes frequent use of an "underdog" or "minimal figure," an initially misrecognized person, or a premature "definition of the situation" of play that introduces a challenge, a narrative conflict, and a space for agôn. Often, innocence (an innocent person, a space of innocence, or the "innocent" belief in one's own specialness) is threatened in order to spur the revelation of a previously hidden power that then visibly intervenes and thereby attains recognition.

Hong Kong martial arts film, *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) is a key example of recent action films addressed to a global audience where dramatic bodily revelations emblematize narrative tensions, and previously assumed bodily capacities must be reconsidered. The film uses its CGI largely for comedic effect—and its action sequences are sometimes visual puns (e.g., in a parody of the Burly Brawl fight sequence from *Matrix Reloaded*, Sing kicks dozens of identically dressed opponents away to the sound of pinball bumpers). It makes tongue-in-cheek reference to Bruce Lee's films and biography, Hong Kong martial arts pulp novels, American superhero comics (a dying fighter warns that "with great power comes great responsibility"), Hollywood dance and horror films (there is even a direct reference to the Shining's hallway full of blood), and Japanese animation, which is (at times) very serious in its handling of the body's kinetics, and, at other times, stylized and exaggerated, even "cartoon-like" and slapstick. But, like the anime to which it pays homage, *Kung Fu Hustle* is also capable of taking its action scenes seriously (it employs the same Chinese martial arts choreographer as *The Matrix*, Yuen Woo-ping), and sustains multiple smart and legible body fantasies throughout a complex layering of misrecognition and dramatic revelation.

When the Deadly Axe Gang attacks a tenement complex ("Pig Sty Alley"), three skilled martial artists shed their identities as local shop keepers and manual laborers to defeat scores of gang members. The gang is about to axe a tenant for standing up to them when their leader is struck and disabled (back broken) so quickly that nobody witnesses the act. This defiance leads to the retaliatory hailing of scores of gang members who douse a mother and child in kerosene and threaten to incinerate them—this establishes the Manichean stakes of the stand-off—unless the culprit of the attack is revealed. The guilty party (Pig Sty Alley's "coolie," or grunt manual laborer, seen earlier carrying large sacks of flour) emerges in time to dramatically catch a tossed lighter, a moment of revelation anticipated by omission of the initiating transgression against the gang. Rather than couch martial arts within a narrative about traditional institutions and lifetimes of training, the narrative frame for this film explains that the only way to escape mob violence is

to blend in to the "poorest neighborhoods"—and so when it turns out the coolie is a martial arts master, single-handedly engaging over fifty Axe Gang members, his abilities emerge dramatically as if out of nowhere. And he is joined by two others—the tailor and the donut maker—who dramatically cast aside their work-a-day identities. The tailor is a feminized gay man who cowers as an Axe Gang member closes in on him in his textile shop. Like with the coolie's initial attack, the following shot of this gang member flying through the shop's plate glass poses a question as to an occluded, off-screen source of power. In the next shot, the tailor slides the metal rings from his clothing rods onto this fore-arms to protect them and lend them greater mass, and then joins the fight. Aware its ability to surprise has waned, the film then shows the donut maker overtly preparing to join the fray as well—but the precise moment of his arrival is occluded. The gang-wielded machine guns that fix Tailor and Coolie in their sights are suddenly whisked out of hands by an invisible force revealed (in the next shot) to have been the donut maker's bamboo kneading stick. Donut then spectacularly smashes the gang's remaining guns and joins the fight. Though these three kung-fu experts shed their cover narratives, there is a clever continuity between disguise (profession, cover narrative) and fighting style. Their introduction earlier in plot had established a sort of slice of life in an idyllic and self-sufficient community of workers and craftsmen—a space of innocence that, when threatened, spurs the identification of the renowned (but retired) Twelve Kicks, Iron Fist, and Hexagon Staff. When these fighters are referenced later as famed fighters with wide-reaching reputations, this information somehow resonates with their everyday façade.

In retaliation for their defeat, the Axe Gang hires two skilled assassins who, catching the shop keeps off-guard, decapitate one and mortally injure the other two. But the assassins' finishing blow is deflected by an obscure, off-screen source (like the coolie's and tailor's elided initial attacks, this prepares for a dramatic revelation). When they attempt to scale the building to investigate the source of the attack, the pair of assassins is inexplicably brought back to the ground by yet another unseen force. In a clever play on continuity editing, the assassins' feet are framed in close-up as they leap out of the top of the frame, but, instead of a match cut, the shot holds as their feet fall back to the ground, followed by a third pair of feet in the middle. The next shot reveals the Pig Sty Alley landlord, seemingly drunk or asleep, between the assassins. In previous altercations, the morally dubious slumlords, landlord (oily-haired, skinny, promiscuous and placating) along with his landlady wife (loud, physically violent, cigarette in mouth and curlers in hair), had both hidden from fights, cowering behind closed doors. Landlord's appearance at this moment, then, is a surprise that only makes sense as the assassins start to throw punches. Landlord's rubbery composition and stringy hip rotations completely and effortlessly repel and redirect their attacks so that the assassins repeatedly strike each other. The assassins pull back for a ranged counterattack, only to be completely upended by the landlady's deadly "Lion's Roar," a sonic blast from her super-inflated lungs (now recognized as the source of the off-screen interruption to their earlier attack).

By introducing each martial arts master in hiding by a signifying absence, an unseen and bewildering intrusion into the fight from the battle's fringes, the typically forgotten space of frightened onlookers, the film synechdochically (for these are just small parts of the structure that) *sutures*[47] spectators to these turning points in the action. And yet (a second "stitch") there is, as with the shop keeps, considerable continuity in the dramatic revelation that the landlord and landlady are even more powerful martial arts masters: his slippery personality and passivity in the face of conflict, and her brusqueness and loudness, are both born again in their fighting styles. It is as if, in a moment of unveiling, their narrative identities were converted into new

bodily capacities, into idiosyncratic ways of moving, like the arcade videogame's reduction of personality to kinetic action.

The twist here signals not just playfulness, but a flexible, dynamic fantasy potential. It isn't merely a surprise—it is a cognitive dissonance, an example of interference from past impressions about the bodies in question. The serious moments in battle—when something is "at stake," such as when the shop keeps battle the hired assassins—present a tightly and compelling "rule based" arena for action. While these rules are not always perceptually real (i.e., in "Newtonian" space), they obey a ludic consistency. And seemingly small touches to the choreography mark these bodily interactions as serious, and agonistic. For example, when one of the assassins attacks the tailor inside his shop, and the tailor fights back (metal rings around his wrists), his attacking arm's force requires the leverage and counterforce of his opposite arm, which swings the opposite direction, colliding with and damaging the wall in this narrow and confining space. The wall almost redundantly registers the marks of his *other* fist's successfully landed punches—a gesture which contributes, on an embodied or implicit register, to the legibility the tailor's kinetic vectors of intentionality. This attention to detail does not so much factor directly into the fight's "definition of the situation" in the way that, with *The Matrix*, an agent punches at Neo, misses, and instead knocks out the corner of a subway support column (hitting the wall emphasizes the force of the punch that missed its mark). Rather, the tailor's counter-balancing fist's effect on the wall marks the space as thoughtfully intact in terms of agôn, or in terms of the physical rules under which the tailor's powerful fists operate, rules which grant the tailor both strength as well as limitation.

Such thoughtful agonistic details in the film's major fight sequences are at odds with the overtly cartoonish—and "bad CGI"—scenes that, earlier in the film, marked the slumlords as figures of physical comedy. Not only were landlord and landlady treated exclusively as comic relief (as morally depraved, cowardly, and self-serving) but their bodies were similarly marked as non-agôn (in the landlord's non-Newtonian fall from a window when his wife catches him with lipstick on his cheek, and the landlady's Wile-E-Coyote-like chase scene earlier in the film). When these same bodies suddenly enter into the serious, agonistic arena as hidden masters, it requires a revision of embodied material. The shock of this revelation is not *just* a plot twist—it works directly to provoke interference with a spectator's embodied understanding of two unassuming or "minimal" figures who are, at a key turning point in plot, reconfigured as transcendent bodies.

In these moments, the film courts an especially kind of playful spectatorship that makes use of body fantasy—a kind of "ludic spectatorship" (akin to Harrington and Bielby's notion of "ludic reading"). The sudden eruption of a secret bodily identity involves spectators in a dual motion, one part "additive comprehension,"[48] or a reassessing glance backwards, and one part "iconic imagination,"[49] or an imaginative speculation about the effect of motions already underway. Both happen implicitly, at the level of muscle memory. By casting the spectator both forward and backward in time, a narrative past and an agonistic future, the film achieves a merger of narrative and bodily tensions. The transcendent body contains both temporal movements, simultaneously: unassuming exterior (past) with boundary-exceeding, table-turning hidden ability. These bodies, reconfigured in and through action, are dense clusters of narrative meaning, emblematic of a series of bodily anxieties the film engages. Core among these, is a misrecognition of a hidden, latent "specialism."

In many martial arts films that emphasize the act of training or "becoming," a hint as to the specialness of the film's often unassuming protagonist shines through during a moment of

bodily reflex, not coincidentally the level at which an audience presumably identifies with embodied, on-screen action. For example, Mr. Miyagi's witnessing Julie's reflexive leap onto the hood of a car that almost hits her in *The Next Karate Kid* (1994), and his recognizing, in this moment, her prospective aptitude for training. In these narratives, a believed-in, but as yet unproven bodily potential, hovers (in latency) as conflict intensifies, emerging only at a key turning point. But the same writing of the body into narrative takes place in the revelation of already-masterful (already proven) talent, that is only misrecognized momentarily, such as by hapless punks who also, in these moments, fail to observe the respect due one's elders (as in *The Quest*, 1996),[50] or due one another as a matter of "manners" (as in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 2014). Sometimes the bodily misrecognition is more complexly woven into plot, as in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), when Yu Shu Lien drops her tea cup and Jiao Long catches it without spilling (or even allowing the china to clatter), revealing (only to Lien) her martial-arts training and aptitude, and marking her as the key suspect in the recent theft of a valuable artifact. The thief's bodily reflex gives her away unintentionally, but only to the investigating detective, who signals (in turn) an eagerness for the guilty party to return the stolen sword without punishment. Long's bodily reflex signifies both guilt, but also the potential to transcend the petty theft and other crimes to which it has recently been employed.

 Kung Fu Hustle represents a condensed and intensified form of this narrative trope. The film is both self-aware and eager to push the limits of this process. When the landlady threatens the leader of the Deadly Axe Gang, she overtly references Bruce Lee's pose from *Return of the Dragon* (1974)—closing her fists then thumbing her nose wordlessly. But this is not just a reference, it is meant to emphasize her corporeal difference—her small stature, the literal smallness of her wrists, the accoutrement of a card-playing, chain-smoking, middle-aged woman, cigarette perpetually hanging from her mouth. Because one senses, implicitly, the threat she poses—aided in large part by a digital-effects body that eschews Newtonian physics—her bodily mirroring of this martial arts pose tugs at the conventional image (young, male, muscular) of transcendent heroism. The film is repeatedly engaged with the sentiment of mistaken first impressions, and with undermining expectations about the appearance of a strong, skilled, or "special" body. It is the focus of the entire introduction of The Beast (the film's central antagonist), who so doesn't look his part that the Deadly Axe Gang threatens to rough him up to spur some sort of demonstration of his skill. A small, old disheveled man with thick glasses, mostly bald, and wearing only an old tank top, some shorts, and cheap plastic sandals, the Beast sits, cross-legged, and casually defers the moment of demonstration—there is a kind of showmanship (even perhaps an aesthetic of astonishment) in the delay. The Beast does not *prove* his identity by revealing some mark upon his body, or by signifying some emotional interiority, but by demonstrating his skill. To this end, he fires a gun at his own head, from less than a foot away, and—in extreme slow motion—catches the bullet between his index and middle finger. No sooner has he accomplished this than the Axe Gang enthusiastically embraces him and he immediately initiates his fight with the "two fated lovers" (Paris and Helen of Troy—the warrior names of Landlady and Landlord in the English translation) who wait in the casino next door. That these two actually love each other enough to brook such a romantic comparison is significantly at odds with their performance as philandering slum lords. So, their unexpected presence in the casino, their introduction to the Beast, is a re-introduction to spectators, but one that sadly comes right as the Beast nearly kills them both, a play with what Williams (1991) describes as "classical" melodrama's temporal logic of "too late."

Though it doesn't employ a melodramatic mode, *Super Mario RPG* (1996)—the first Mario-themed role-playing game—contains a running gag that Mario (who never speaks) is consistently misrecognized throughout the game, and must on several occasions prove his identity by jumping, since he ("Jumpman") is defined by this action. That this treatment should occur in the first *Mario* game with a "narrative" is not a coincidence: it represents an intuitive space of overlap between the kinetic body in the action of gameplay, and the "marked" narrative body within a new melodramatic mode (The Beast's bullet along with Mario's jump). Jesper Juul (2005) describes his excitement that, in videogames, rules and fictions can have varying degrees of correspondence, so that bodies are open to dynamic, unexpected juxtapositions and capacities:

> In the fighting game *Tekken 4*, players can choose between a number of different characters. In this case, we have chosen the small girl, Xiaoyu versus the big muscular Marduk. The representation of the game leads us to believe that Marduk is a stronger character than Xiaoyu but, in actuality, her strength is on par with all the larger characters in the game. In my experience, the discrepancy between the outward appearance of the characters and the rules governing their behavior tends to be considered humorous. Here the surprising difference between what the representation suggests and what the game rules determine adds depth to the characters in the game. It also ties into the story of David versus Goliath, and the supposedly amazing powers of martial arts. In this case, the representation cues something that is contradicted by the rules, but this incongruence is an interesting effect. (Juul, 2005: 179, 183)

Though Juul is careful to distinguish games from narratives elsewhere in his book, his ideas about contrasts of scale, and tensions between appearance and underlying "rules," are better suited for narrative than the long-term repetition of videogame play. His book's prior discussion of how "the more experienced a player was, the less the graphics mattered" (and the more the players saw the game "as a set of rules") seems to fall away in this moment of reflection on the fighter's body and identity in play (2005: 139). After many hundreds of hours playing *Smash Melee*, players respect the choice of any top-tier character—this includes the cute, round Jigglypuff, who, in the right hands, is lethal. In fact, it is a benefit to use a character with a small "hit box" (the two-dimensional space which can actually be hit by attacks—an invisible boundary that matches, but doesn't *perfectly* align with, the more complicated visual outline of a character's three-dimensional body). Juul's overarching argument about agonistic videogames (especially those played competitively) suggests that if games flirt with a tension between the size and stature of bodies, and their rule-bound capacities for action, this playfulness quickly gives way to an investment in learning and mastering the rules. What Juul describes here in *Tekken 4*—the "humor," or perhaps exciting moment of misrecognition—is a distinctly *narrative* (and melodramatic) function that would play a very small roll in the context of a game's competitive play.

In action cinema, however, the figure of the underdog prepares spectators for a series of misrecognitions, bodies overcoming presumed limitations, and narratives of becoming that cast social anxieties in terms of bodies, scale, and space. It should be noted that gaming has also long-exploited this figure to frame the situation of play, where the game's agonistic demands require that the odds seem always stacked against the avatar: e.g., Little Mac's need to dodge most attacks in *Punch-Out!!*, *Contra*'s large bosses, armies of opponents, and solitary player-controlled soldier. But whether a videogame's underdog avatar is a "minimal figure" as Dan Fleming describes Mario, or a "maximal figure" of hard-body, over-the-top masculinity like

Kratos from *God of War* (2005) doesn't change the fact that, in an action game, the body schema becomes severed from a clear narrative context precisely because of the sheer force of repetition required to learn and "master" the game (internalize the pattern). Both Mario and Kratos overcome many hours of opposition on their way to their goals, and both leave behind a distinct bodily pattern within the player's own schemata. That Kratos is an obnoxious and pathological male fantasy and Mario has as much personality as an empty box (design textbooks frequently describe avatar personalities as "containers" for a spectator's wishes) doesn't really matter for the feelings of empowerment (the spatial freedom of the leap, "being a cause") attached to these bodily configurations. Cinema, by comparison, presents a body fantasy nearly fully intact, already embedded within a narrative.

    Sherlock Jr. (1924), for example, provides both the figure of the underdog, as well as his dreamt-of retribution, his magical continuity with the physical world. The projectionist in the film is berated by his boss, intimidated by strangers, rejected by his romantic interest, wrongfully accused of theft, and outsmarted by his rival. But when he later falls asleep at the projector and enters a film-within-a-film (his fantasy), he becomes Sherlock Jr., who experiences a spatial mastery in a series of surprising and virtuoso stunts, and ultimately enjoys romantic success. Gladfelder (2005) suggests that this "inner film" is a "wish fulfillment, a projection of the boy's desires," and the cinema screen "is a mirror in which we see ourselves as another… providing the mechanism for an imaginary self-assertion and mastery over all those forces that, in the everyday world, frustrate and confine us" (2005: 153). The film presents the fantasy within a narrative structure—containing both the irritant and its imagined removal.

    While *Sherlock Jr.* is a clear precursor to a body-transcendence cinema, it differs for how neatly it contains its own fantasy structures. One cannot quite extend the same argument to a film like *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995), though its action sequences hinge on its protagonist, Keung's, magical continuity with a dangerous, urban space. An important difference is the latter film's fixation on the body itself, how magical continuity (rather than emerging from a dreamed-of meta-persona) is an extension of Keung's well trained and disciplined physicality, his flexible and adaptable body. *Rumble* lacks a fantasy bookend, and it generates a narrative (bodily) excess. The body exceeds the narrative frame while, at the same time, holding it together. Keung wins—despite always being misrecognized as a minimal and solitary figure facing many larger opponents—because he makes use of ladders, cars, light fixtures, chairs, refrigerator doors, ceiling pipes, shopping carts, skis, and literally anything else that is at-hand. It is not just that Keung outwits larger opponents—as in Bettelheim's (1976) interpretation of fairy tales like "The Fisherman and the Genie," which, he suggests, appeal to children because they relate to the smallness of the underdog, and the need to outsmart bigger (adult) foes. A body-transcendence fantasy is also at play. In this fantasy, spectators are pulled into a fantasized continuity with the material world. Keung's body flows harmoniously through his cluttered surroundings in fast and fluid "smooth improvisations" (Sudnow's term for playing the Atari game, *Breakout*). Elements of Mise-en-scène become implements of play, a "spatiality of situation," part of the body's arena. And like Sherlock Jr., (and, by extension, the "ludic" spectator) Keung's relationship with these pieces of the physical world is automatic, reflexive.

    Superhuman reflexes are a transcendence trope in comic-book superhero films, such as *Daredevil* (2003), *Watchmen* (2009) and *The Avengers* (2012). Characters dodge or catch projectiles automatically, as a pure expression of body capacity, a sensory-motor loop that ties the hero to their surroundings and intervenes on their own behalf, and sometimes, like in *Spider-Man 2* (2004), to their own bewilderment. Like playing a "bullet hell" shooter, going on

autopilot is a kind of prerequisite. And it is partly for this reason that *Ong Bak* (2004) is an especially videogame-like film.

Like *Rumble*, *Ong Bak*'s protagonist (Ting) forges a magical continuity with his surroundings, entering a flow-like state as he side-flips between panes of glass, leaps through tiny hoops with a mid-air split, and vaults over cars. But, unlike in *Rumble*, Ting's small stature is meant to be misleading, lulling opponents into a false sense of security. When Ting enters a fight, it ends quickly, following a clear trajectory of intentionality in which a boney protrusion (knee or elbow) collides with the opponent's head or face with the full force of a mid-air leap or cartwheel. *Ong Bak* has been described as a videogame-like film already:

> With its progression of 'levels' and specific skill sets to overcome, the Fight Club sequence is a very close, very exciting analogue to a video game. Ting even has a kind of "power move" familiar to gamers, a wind-up-and-release lunge of the body's bluntest parts (elbows, knees, shoulders). (Lee, 2005)

This description is wanting—the movie isn't *really* structured as level-progression, and a match in a fighter is *never* really decided by a single knee to the head (usually many exchanged blows, most often punches, kicks, grapples, and energy beams that make up play's "extended middle"). But the intuition is correct. The film is videogame-like in its fluid articulation of bodies in conflictual action, with emphasis on technique, trajectory, and impact. Spectators' embodied participation is further facilitated by the fact that a single blow can end an anticipated fight—this breaks with a martial arts convention wherein bodies sustain a great deal of punishment in the ebbs and flows of the narrated fight, and signals to viewers that consideration of the rules governing the interaction of bodies (a flying knee to the head is sufficient for victory) takes precedence over the story's assumed need for greater payoff to dramatic build-up and release. The fight's shortness is an anti-climax. And the film is videogame-like in its establishment of boundaries and limits that an underdog overcomes in a spectacle of a body pulling itself beyond its margins. Ting's body represents a hidden and consistently misrecognized capacity to leap beyond the limits of what is normally possible. The spectator's implicit embrace of this kinetic, bodily action—the wish that it really *were* already our own muscle memory (as our mirror neurons suggest it is)—reflects one's "possession" of a particular way of acting in a videogame.

But the outward appearance of bodies in games and cinema, despite efforts to conflate the two (e.g., critical commentary on how *Ong Bak* is videogame-like), differ significantly. The videogame's rigid and extreme repetition of the exact motion (a small jab that happens in less than half of a second) hundreds of times per play session, and over the course of hundreds of such sessions, represents a functional abstraction of actual body motion, but one that allows its mapping to a range of simple button inputs, and therefore a more literal sense of bodily incorporation (a closed motor circuit). The cinematic body compresses the implied repetition required for training (body mapping) into a single transcendent moment, which the spectator possesses fantasmatically. The motor circuit of embodied cinematic identification remains open on both ends. While the videogame has a closed (known) set of specifically enabled actions, the cinematic body is a less knowable potential force—not even excessive repeat viewing of a choreographed action sequence exhausts the cinematic body's potentials for action (which may simply have not been expressed during plot), leaving this body always open to the epistemological project's need to know. That DVDs frequently offer a glimpse "behind the scenes" reflects this. The cinematic action body's adaptive responses to the exigencies of agôn *and* plot—each motion unique in some way—challenge spectator's efforts to imaginatively possess or embody these kinetics. This is a body whose specific avenue towards resolving

conflict catches us unawares, prompting a backwards-facing, repetitious incorporation of bodily action. We only possess it in fantasy.

The body that is initially misrecognized is a ready-made schema for identification. It is one of several different devices used by new action cinema to launch spectators quickly into a mode of fantasized bodily participation. In the examples above, past narrative material (sometimes lengthy exposition) is pulled into and resolved through a brief action sequence. Repeated slights and transgressions pile up as narrative tension, which the transcendent body releases. But in other films, no narrative preamble is required for a fantasy of bodily transcendence. The body itself seems to contain all the energy needed for release in fantasy. The backwards movement of "additive comprehension" is stymied in these transcendence fantasies, which pose questions that can only be answered by moving forward. Action sequences at the beginnings of films like *X2* (2003) and *The Matrix*, for example, use body fantasies to launch audiences expectantly into plot.

X2 opens with its most memorable action sequence: Nightcrawler's infiltration of the White House. Since no characters have yet been established, this sequence relies on an immediately felt bodily identification. Of course, for fans, Nightcrawler's ability to "teleport" is already understood; but, making sense of what is at stake in this early moment in plot is primarily a matter of feeling the defenses of the invaded space. The White House is a charged cultural image and an immediately understood agonistic scenario: "protect the president" is a real-life mission, for which secret service agents train, as well as a recurring popular narrative scenario in espionage novels and films. But it is also a game used by paintball players, iterations of which appear in multiplayer first-person shooters, such as the "Pop a Cap" team scenario in *Perfect Dark* (2000). On top of this graspable agonistic scenario, *X2* piles a small army of secret service agents, panicked bystanders, and a maze of lengthy corridors that frame and heighten the visibility of those who traverse them, making this introductory sequence not entirely unlike a platformer videogame's spatial obstacles.

At the moment when Nightcrawler leaps from his clothing—his disguise— his transcendent bodily capacity both reflects and overcomes this fortified space. He begins a bodily motion in one place but completes it in another, converting the White House's feelings of inaccessibility into a transcendent bodily display. Similar to moments in Rock Lee's fight against Gaara, *X2's* camera's enunciation of space is fluid and continuous, emphasizing the connectedness of different motions through a series of slow-motion pans while Nightcrawler's body (like the unshackled Lee) cuts across space and time. The camera (one might call it a "ludic camera") demonstrates flexibility in capturing and conveying the agonistic scenario. It jumps around to portray key events or to refresh the "state of play." But it also slows down to make complex bodily action legible. This temporal expansion allows for dwelling on and internalizing (centripetal corporeality) action cinema's densely signifying fantasy body.

In the opening scene of *The Matrix,* Trinity's oft-cited encounter with a team of would-be arresters is perhaps the historical example that introduces this camera strategy. "Bullet time" could be seen as a means of portraying a moment of heightened intensity, simultaneously, from multiple points of view. It creates a pause for considering the tension of imminent release—a preservation of the fluidity of unexpected agonistic motion as well as a desire to possess total-field awareness of either a complex or an emotionally dense moment, like an instant replay in real time: immediate introspection, an effort to incorporate what cannot be processed right away, seeing one's life as a movie. Like the landlords' bodies in *Kung-Fu Hustle*, Trinity's body contains both intervening force and minimal figure. She is, in their combination, mistaken as

"one little girl." Agent Smith's lines that "the orders [to wait for the agents' arrival] were for your protection" and "your men are already dead," initiate a temporal conflict. When, in that next scene, a police officer approaches Trinity with a handcuff, it is clear that the men are not "already dead," but the stage is set for an anticipated misrecognition. The backward movement Smith sets into motion, the moment when the audience wonders if it has misread Trinity's situation, or if important plot material has been elided, runs quickly into the wall of the movie's having just begun, and so spectators are left hanging awkwardly before launching into bullet-time's iconic imagination, a moment when the temporal tension is resolved in transcendent bodily action.

Galloway suggests the bullet-time effect represents the "mutability" of time in a videogame—but one might argue instead that manipulations of the flow of time are frustrating disruptions to videogame play. In action cinema, these effects may be game-like, but only in the sense that they heighten both the emotional significance and the legibility of cinematic action, helping to convey some emotional aspect of play's situation.

Like with Trinity, the body-transcendence moment that crops up without narrative precursor can be a way to introduce a character. For example, the initially innocuous Chiun, Remo's first target in *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins* (1985), is actually a martial arts master meant to evaluate Remo's potential aptitude as a student. Chiun dodges all Remo's bullets by listening to the tightening of tendons in the trigger finger—a trick he later teaches Remo. *The Dark Knight* (2008) reintroduces the Joker through a body-transcendence temporal manipulation. Joker crashes a meeting of mob bosses early in the film, claims he's going to do a magic trick: he will make a pencil jammed tip-down into the table "disappear." The exposition of the trick (its being non sequitur, the stagey magician hand gestures) prompts calls for Joker's removal, but as a guard approaches, Joker grapples him and slams his head onto the table, impaling him through the eye socket. When the guard falls with the pencil ("Ta-da! It's… gone"), we learn that the trick was about prediction (not disappearance), and this revision of the recent past casts us forward in anticipation of Joker's demonstrated ability to stay several steps ahead, and of his tendency to use this ability for sheer brutality. The emotion produced in moments like this is not quite that associated with the melodramatic mode, but it can resemble a kind of pathos.

In her essay on cinematic "body genres" Linda Williams (1991) references Italian critic Franco Moretti, who argues

> that literature that makes us cry operates via a special manipulation of temporality: what triggers our crying is not just the sadness or suffering of the character in the story but a very precise moment when characters in the story catch up with and realize what the audience already knows. We cry … not just because the characters do, but at the precise moment when desire is finally recognized as futile. The release of tension produces tears …. (Williams, 1991: 11)

In the pathos of melodrama Williams describes, audiences anticipate a moment when characters "catch up," releasing a narrative tension that had been a costly disequilibrium of important knowledge. In action cinema's temporal manipulations, the spectator is the one who is challenged to "catch up" with the film's explosion of energies in transcendent bodily displays. And oftentimes this anticipated moment is just that—a moment. But a moment where a retrospective tension is introduced to plot. Or a moment when a longstanding disequilibrium is not treated as futile, but resolved through a transcendent bodily display—emotional excess fuels the body fantasy.

The temporal structure where large amounts of narrative tension are released in the transcendent bodily display creates a model of catharsis. Sleights and injustices accrue (often stored in the "reservoir" of the villain) until, at a breaking point, the transcendent body, and our own excited bodily participation, allows for a release of this tension in bodily excess (play). This mode of body-transcendence has a popular cinematic prototype in *Carrie* (1976)—a film about a girl with telekinetic powers who is tormented by mean-spirited classmates and a domineering, over-religious mother. The sleights against Carrie pile up until, at their peak, she is summoned on stage as Prom Queen, but only as a ruse to douse her in a bucket of pigs' blood. Her mother's warning, "They're all going to laugh at you" echoes like a mantra in her mind as Carrie uses her powers to kill everyone in the gymnasium. *Carrie's* morbid tone—it is adapted from a Stephen King novel and considered a horror film—is somewhat undercut by the exhilaration of this (body transcendence) moment, when, in a dramatic climax, hours of restraint, inhibition, disappointment, and humiliation culminate in a seemingly out-of-nowhere display of sustained force and retribution.

The videogame-inflected equivalent of *Carrie* would be something more like *Equilibrium* (2002), which couches its conflicts more explicitly in terms of carefully trained, aestheticized gun and sword violence. The film's expository moments establish a dystopian, Orwellian future of total adherence to an authoritarian regime, and the repression of all emotion and individual sentimentality. This setup is not, itself, a body fantasy—but it is a sustained and complex set of social and physical restraints. And when a team of police order Cleric John Preston's execution upon discovering his possession of a puppy in the trunk of his car (a "sense crime"), both self preservation and puppy defense sanction a graphic action sequence as Preston leaps through the air and, using rapid-fire pistols concealed in his sleeves, blasts dozens of officers as if his body were acting reflexively. The pistol fire's symmetrical machine-like precision is shown almost diagrammatically, in a top-down camera, in rhythmic barrel bursts. The tension of the situation— the cold heartlessness expressed in the police officers (their dress, demeanor, and Draconianism) opposite the puppy, the diametric opposite, pure emotion— along with the need to reject the Orwellian social values, the sudden presence of John Preston's own long-repressed emotions, the officers' misrecognition of Preston's elite combat training as a Cleric, and a visceral alignment with the side protecting the puppy—are all called upon in this moment of relatively concise spectacular bodily action. The protection of the puppy is not just an elaborate justification for violence. The display of the force becomes a kind of pleasure, an aesthetic appreciation of the systematic (trained, machine-like) killing of the police team.

A more recent example of cathartic body transcendence, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014), experiments with protracting the moment of release. The scene takes place within a racist, xenophobic, homophobic, anti-Semitic sermon at a fundamentalist Christian church. Kingsman, Galahad—a highly trained killing machine who plays a paternal role in plot and with whom we are, in several other ways, already "in identification"— sits in the audience as a clear outsider to the sermon's vitriol. The film's emphasis on the ruddy face of the hate-spewing pastor, and his own emphasis on hate (less on biblical verse), is careful to cover as many bases as possible in assuring that nobody in the film's audience is left feeling at ease in this space. Having heard enough, Galahad rises, and is accosted by the woman next to him, who asks what his "problem" is, to which he responds: "I'm a Catholic whore, currently enjoying congress outside of wedlock with my black Jewish boyfriend who works in a military abortion clinic. So hail, Satan, and have a lovely afternoon, madam." This moment of verbal transcendence (or catharsis), however, is just prelude to the moment that follows. In a somewhat transparent

narrative contrivance, the villain's doomsday device is a subliminal signal that triggers an aggression center in the brain (while lowering inhibitions) so that those within range are compelled to kill one another. The church is a staging ground for the technology—but not a great one, since a more sedate location would have better demonstrated the device's effectiveness. From the point of view of body-transcendence fantasy, all the accrued aggression and perceived helplessness, the powerlessness one feels—especially as a possibly liberal-leaning, younger audience member—in the face of hatred and ignorance is suddenly sanctioned for an orgiastic, frenetic, and extremely visceral display of violence. Since Galahad is, at the level of muscle memory, an elite killer, his (reflexive, primal) rampage through the space leads to a minutes-long killing spree (employing any weapon at-hand) that is so fast-paced that it is a challenge (but not impossible) to track despite the action's relatively fluid articulation. The sequence is continuous except for several cheat-cuts and cut-aways to onlookers who cringe or express awe at Galahad's survival.

The catharsis model doesn't need to be so gruesome. In some cases, the moment of body-transcendence represents an intervention *against* shocking displays of violence. Given the tone of other Pixar films, it is surprising when, in *The Incredibles* (2004), a missile converges on a small airplane carrying a mother and her two children, and its collision cannot be avoided. There is a visceral threat felt when the missile detonates, and this is amplified by the mother's last-second envelopment of her children within her own rubbery corporeality (a return to the womb). When, in the next moment, all three plummet thousands of feet to the ocean below, the children's screams are unsettlingly authentic—and the threat of violence occasions a repetition of the mother's protective gathering of her young (and transformation into a parachute). A similar surprise occurs later, when enemy soldiers attempt to machine-gun the son, Dash—a fate only avoided because of the last-second envelopment of the boy in his sister's force-field (a mimesis of the earlier rescue). And, finally, the villain's return to the superheroes' domicile to kidnap their infant and carry him up into the sky. Baby Jack-Jack's cries of separation anxiety ring surprisingly true for the stylized animated world. The baby turns this anxiety into rage, in a body-transcendence moment that reveals its roots in what Freud would call an infant's "omnipotence of thoughts": Jack-Jack explodes into flames and transforms into a heavy metal and a goblin-like creature, eventually exceeding the villain's grasp. In all three examples, an unexpectedly mortal threat intrudes into a stylized world, taking advantage of likely deeply in-built schema (for making sense of the structure of a certain kind of family), and heretofore unseen bodily capacities dramatically resolve these family threats in a moment of catharsis.

In *The Iron Giant* (1999), a robot crash-lands on Earth, suffering an amnesia-inducing blow to the head (which leaves a dent). After the robot befriends a young boy (Hogarth), the plot follows this friendship as the boy protects his new "pet" against government investigators, and as the giant innocently investigates his new world. The giant's curiosity is met by repeated lessons in restraint: all Hogarth's efforts to hide the giant; the protective "instinct" and gentleness the giant shows toward the Hogarth; and the giant's naiveté. It is difficult, at times, to not side with the giant's genuine efforts to avoid discovery, to contain his bulk, to "be quiet" (so clearly a repetition of something often told Hogarth by a constraining and alienating adult world).

As military forces give chase in the film's final moments, Hogarth and the giant are shot down from the sky and crash together, Hogarth cupped in the giant's hand. Tanks close in on the crash site as the giant regains consciousness and believes Hogarth (unconscious) to be dead. The army continues its attack, and, at this moment, the dent in the giant's head pops out, and not only does the film's message of self-control collapse, but it is dramatically inverted as the giant

exudes unrestrained vocalization (a scream) and force: he transforms into a towering arsenal of alien weaponry replete with glowing compartments and snake-like appendages all previously hidden by his placid exterior. Whereas before the giant's body matched the tones of his surroundings in the natural light that fell on him, now he generates his own hues of purple and green, serving as the cause of bright explosions that wipes out military artillery on a death march away from Hogarth's body. Spectators are inverted, as if on a roller coaster loop, into an identification with the giant as the invader from outer space. Or—it may be more precise to say—that we identify with the build-up (the tolerance) and then sudden release of tension in a body that, we might imagine, possesses great inner strength (or at least an internal conflict) that belies a placid exterior.

The Iron Giant is a film with a complicated relationship to the world of superhero comics, but is not quite a comic-book superhero film itself. In a similar sense, this genre of body-transcendence film is part of the "superhero zeitgeist," but not equivalent with the genre as a whole. Many superhero movies are inspired to play with bodily boundaries and capacities, but end up failing to "activate" the embodied response of spectators. Some superhero films contain carefully choreographed, highly legible action sequences which deliberately undercut and frustrate any sense of empowerment. *Watchmen* (2009), for example, seems to almost always pit spectators against the fight's spectacular and generally unchallenged victor.[51] Other films undercut body fantasy by failing to articulate a legible agonistic scenario with clear stakes (shaky camera, "bad CGI," lagging sense of clear rules), or by failing to connect the action sequences to more general narrative concerns. Even movies that make explicit appeals to gamers, such as *The Prince of Persia*: *the Sands of Time* (2010), often fail to construct a ludic arena where bodily fantasies can be entertained. In the "generic" action sequence of films like *Terminator Salvation* (2009), *Gamer* (2009), *300* (2006), *Ninja Assassin* (2009), *Transformers* (2007), *James Bond: Quantum of Solace* (2008) and others, hyper-fragmented editing and a shaky camera replace an intelligible agonistic exchange with a mere signifier of chaos meant to disorient, impressing the idea that action has occurred, but not in such a way that permits detailed participation. Henry Jenkins (2006) was right that transmedia storytelling provided the rationale behind *The Matrix: Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix: Revolutions* (2003). But this chapter disagrees with the argument that *Matrix'*s transmedia experiment failed simply because the story had gaps that audiences weren't willing to fill in by seeking answers in other places. The second and third *Matrix* films disappointed because they did not privilege the body fantasy so central to the original film. That both *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* spend more time outside the Matrix than within is only the start of their issues. These observations about failure in cinematic adaptation and sequel planning are not intended as a critical standard. The games and films discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 are exemplary because their pleasures and successes are a starting point for talking about how they mediate our encounter with body fantasy. Failed attempts to effect a merger of forms are equally instructive.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

The fantasy of bodily transcendence, which connects action games and action-hero cinema, is an important yet implicit part of the games and narrative media discussed in the chapters that follow. A new bodily capacity may not be the overtly professed reason for embarking on a quest in a role-playing game, but the possibility of gaining a power-up that alters

one's ability to cut through the game's spaces (and oppositional forces) is a shiny lure motivating exploration; it also contains a bodily hook that binds the player to the game in extended play, and beyond. The unique and always-improving bodily capacity—the body-as-project—will *hail* the player even when the game is powered off. And in this sense, a body-transcendence fantasy doesn't just connect disparate media at home. It permeates domestic space, looming at the interstices between pleasurable and repetitious encounters with films and games, as well as in daydreams that depend on the medium of imagination. Home might even be the only place where one is fully comfortable using one's own body to act out imagined configurations or gestures (from improvised dance to mock martial arts). While games inform this research's understanding of cinema, and cinema informs its understanding of games, it is almost always the case that some notion of body (and thus corporeal space outside the text altogether) is also an important part of analysis. The relation between body and home will become more explicit in Chapter 4, where the body fantasies discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 still pertain, but are partially subordinated to a separate fantasy, a "tether fantasy," an especially spatial expression of feeling safe and connected to a secure base, or else feeling exposed and needing to seek out that secure connection.

In fact, the fantasy of bodily transcendence might be described as the most immediately recalled or grasped fantasy of those in this project. "Like riding a bike," the internalized body schema is the imaginary mechanism closest at hand for expressing a fantasy—and, in this way, tends to play a role in staging other fantasies, which contain both bodily dimensions as well as more abstract spatial or numerical qualities that are less directly expressed as bodily provocation. But even postulating this relationship requires a more sustained contemplation of the difference between simply imagining a fantasy (eyes closed), elaborating it as a cinema spectator, and acting it out in videogame play.

I hazard to say that the body-transcendence fantasy in imagination, to use Clint Hocking's terms for gameplay and narrative verbs, more closely resembles the "amplitude" and "frequency" of cinema than of games. The low-amplitude, high-frequency actions of videogame play require a persistent and stable world maintained over a long period of time. The computer system has the advantage here over the ephemeral products of (even vivid) imagination. Tetris effect itself—though an uncannily accurate mental simulation of prior videogame play—might be better described as a sudden flood of rule-bound imagery and action than as a prolonged and concretely seen image. Imagined body fantasy that isn't an echo of very recent play (Tetris effect) might be described as a bodily wish in search of the rules that will lend it stability and allow it to endure as the slightly more concrete Tetris effect does: as a clearer vehicle for the expression of a wish. Tetris effect is like a fading imprint or afterimage of the propping function of a videogame's rules of play: actions perpetually repeated in play which demonstrate the consistent presence of a set of governing logics.

This is one way of thinking about the relation between "trellis" and "vine." The trellis is a structural support, something encountered "for real," very much definable and measurable, something in the real world and in service of Freud's "reality principle"—which, by the way, could also be characterized as "low amplitude."[52] The vine is fantasy, including make-believe play fueled by libidinal energy and in service of the pleasure principle (which could also be "high amplitude"). At the moment in the trellis-vine pairing when fantasy's "as if" becomes subordinated to a gameplay verb that one performs "for real," the videogame could be said to "bind" fantasy to a rational structure. In terms of Freud's (1911) two principles of mental functioning (see endnote 52), this could be described as lending a primary process the support and sanction of a secondary system.

Of course, the films discussed in this chapter also represent structural support for fantasy—just one that differs in terms of amplitude and frequency: different modes of expressing a shared fantasy. In film's melodramatic body mode, there is often a prolonged buildup and then a dramatic release of tension in the transcendent body display—a moment which overwhelms and leads to a kind of self-reflection (Sobchack says that one experiences oneself experiencing), and a need to process or come to terms with the intensity of the embodied pleasure. These films take body fantasy to new extremes, and help connect it more explicitly to shared cultural concerns. Conversely, games are more aptly understood as an abstracted staging ground for a new bodily capacity, for making it one's own through the acquisition of skills and body schema. The more one plays, however, the less one remains in control of these schema, which seem to recur in fantasy following prolonged practice—reflecting perhaps how these schema become more cohesive internal representations, and therefore more suitable fantasy envoys, the more developed they are (the bigger the mnemonic chunks).

Though they also entail embodied kinetics, the fantasies in Chapters 4 and 5 involve more than just one body's joyous leaps, or one body's experiencing its own embodiment. They also involve moving into and out of a protective enclosure, fixing external objects to the body, and encountering the corporeality of others in new ways. With body-transcendence, the figure of the non-player character is typically understood as an obstacle, a spatial or temporal challenge to be overcome, a threat to be internalized and mastered. With the fantasies that follow, the body of the other is more often an insurmountable threat—something to flee from. Rather than be transcendent, the player's body—however defined—amounts to feelings of weakness and vulnerability. In the fantasies that follow, a more complex web of intersecting factors come into play, and the roles of cinema and videogames shift with respect to the play fantasies they foster.

CHAPTER 4. THE TETHER FANTASY: A POETICS OF SPACE FOR VIDEOGAMES

> Imagination about travel corresponds in Verne to an exploration of closure, and the compatibility between Verne and childhood does not stem from a banal mystique of adventure, but on the contrary from a common delight in the finite, which one also finds in children's passion for huts and tents: to enclose oneself and to settle, such is the existential dream of childhood and Verne. The archetype of this dream is this almost perfect novel: L'Ile mysterieuse, in which the manchild re-invents the world, fills it, closes it, shuts himself up in it, and crowns this encyclopedic effort with the bourgeois posture of appropriation: slippers, pipe and fireside, while outside the storm, that is, the infinite, rages in vain.

> Roland Barthes, *"The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat"* (1957: 65)

> The dream proceeds on its way in linear fashion, forgetting its original path as it hastens along. The reverie works in a star pattern. It returns to its center to shoot out new beams. And, as it happens, the reverie in front of the fire, the gentle reverie that is conscious of its well-being, is the most naturally centered reverie. (…) The fire confined to the fireplace was no doubt for man the first object of reverie, the symbol of repose, the invitation to repose"

> Gaston Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1938: 14)

When the *Steam Addicts* website prompted game developer Andrew Spinks to react to claims that his game, *Terraria* (2011), was a rip-off of *Minecraft* (2010), Spinks responded: "People need to understand that *Minecraft* isn't a game anymore, it's a genre" (Terraria Mania). Spinks suggested the games share "gameplay mechanics" in common but did not otherwise describe their shared generic boundaries (nor did other publications circulating this interview). *Game Informer* magazine, in reference to the Spinks interview, ventured no further than admitting that "the similarities are immediately apparent," that there is no point to "bother dancing around them," and that "*Terraria* is a lot like a 2D Minecraft" (Turi, 2011: 41). Perhaps these elliptical moments are no more than part of a broader tradition of discomfort with thinking and talking critically about entertainment media. But perhaps there is something about the shared features of any two games that resists enunciation. *Game Informer* called both games "addictive world-building sims," echoing the notion that their chief shared feature is gameplay. To an extent, this is true. Even though one game is three-dimensional and employs a first-person camera while the other looks like a 16-bit-era side-scroller, playing both games involves the modification of a virtual environment—digging, chipping, cutting, and building structures using items, tools, weapons and armor all crafted from the game world's own harvested materials. The case could be made, however, that there are radical differences distinguishing the gameplay of each.[53] Nevertheless, some key feature connecting these games encourages us to look past differences in both gameplay and the games' surface-appearance—something, as the games'

press coverage implies, that is easy to sense but difficult to put into words. Curious readers are left wondering which aspects of a genre, if any, *Minecraft* and *Terraria* share, and whether that genre began with *Minecraft*. Playing both games will allay most curiosity, while still leaving unarticulated that which makes these games so similar. The discrepancy between what is felt and what is said here provides an opportunity to explore the role fantasy plays in the structure of videogames. Like the melody to a favorite song, a play fantasy can account for a significant part of the pleasure of a game while remaining difficult to describe—for both songs and games, there is a tendency to deflect attention to what *can* be easily described, that which is textual or linguistic (lyrics and story).

This chapter tracks the transmedial flow of an especially dynamic play fantasy which exists in different entertainment media in the home—and is, I will show, an important part of our conception of the suburban home itself. This "tether fantasy" is the dominant thread binding *Terraria* and *Minecraft* together while setting them apart from other "sandbox"[54] and crafting games. But it is not the only core fantasy in these games—it combines, in them, with a second fantasy, an "accretions fantasy," with which it shares a special affinity. And while the accretions fantasy is the focus of the next chapter—most of the games discussed here require at least a provisional understanding of its definition as well.

The "tether fantasy" is the pleasurable process of oscillating between feeling safe and feeling exposed, dwelling on the boundaries that separate the two. In turn, an accretions fantasy can be defined as the pleasurable process of correcting a weak or vulnerable body by accruing objects from the world of gameplay. *Terraria* and *Minecraft* are unique because they represent the vanguard of games designed primarily around tether and accretions fantasies, rendering the fantasies visible in new ways. But tether and accretion fantasies run through a variety of games across the whole history (and pre-history) of the videogame industry. They usually combine to form the rough "genre" of the RPG ("role-playing game"),[55] which, in recent years, has taken on new, hybrid forms that are increasingly difficult to categorize. These two fantasies are remarkably pervasive within commercial as well as independently designed games. Their rapid proliferation provides an opportunity for discussing fantasy as a central formal element in the design of games, for engaging questions about how to map videogame genres, and how to explore the connection between games and other cultural objects, practices, and spaces. One goal of this chapter is to introduce new terminology and critical concepts for the study of videogames. In particular, it considers new ways of thinking about videogame identification beyond both narrative immersion and the vague ineffability of the bodily-affective models in neo-ludology.

In the past decade, emerging theories for new media have largely avoided direct engagement with conversations about how to define the videogame such as the narratology/ludology debates. By considering tether and accretions fantasies, this chapter will intervene in the still-crucial (if overshadowed) line of inquiry into those features of videogames that make them interesting and unique. For the narratologist's tendency to conflate story and play, these fantasies offer an alternative to "plot" for understanding those long stretches of play between cutscenes. In return, they offer a fresh way of imagining gameplay intersecting with game narrative in what tend to be plot-heavy genres of games. And for the ludologist's tendency to fragment videogames into a heterogeneous mixture of story and play, these fantasies offer a means of re-unifying the object of study. Players don't need to be conceived of as rapidly oscillating between players and spectators, between amorphous identity experiments and rigidly fixed subjects, or between rules and fictions. Seeing players as pursuers of a fantasy process that is woven across the game's structures through play and story alike allows for the conceptual

incorporation of a wider variety of both fictional and ruled game elements within videogame interpretation.

The Tether Fantasy

> There is a rhythm in experience that can easily be observed, the rhythm of concentrated and dispersed attention, of directed and undirected thought, of objective and subjective experience…. Like those simple animalculae that stretch out long pseudopodia into the surrounding water in search of food, retiring afterwards into a state of apparent passivity while digestion takes place, so does the child seek experience, and, having come into contact with reality in some form, retires within himself to understand and consolidate what he has acquired. (Dr. Ruth Griffiths, 1935, qtd. in Klinger, *Structure and Functions of Fantasy*, 47).[56]

There is a pleasure in extending and contracting the self across space. Marshall McLuhan, of course, famously conceived of a medium as extensions of the body—"autoamputation"—a term that incorporates a contraction into the extension. But this pleasure also lies in moments that stretch our conception of the word "medium," such as the diurnal ebbs and flows of sleeping and waking, the expansionist colonial drive to discover, conquer, and control the unexplored world, or even the emotional power of an improvised shelter during a freak thunder storm. Seen as an activity that structures play, gratifying oscillations of this kind constitute a "tether" fantasy, which stages encounters with boundaries separating a series of meaningful binaries: the known and the unknown, the safe and the unsafe, the friendly and the hostile, the light and the dark, and life and death.[57] The benefit of the term, "tether," lies in its plurality of meanings: it is the device that keeps a pet fixed to a home space, the astronaut fixed to the space station, or, in psychological terms, the child emotionally fixed to the parent. The word invokes the umbilical as much as the electrical cord—and videogames are midway between these two sites. "Tether" ultimately describes the importance in fantasy of maintaining some sort of a connection (regardless of the form it takes) with a feeling of safety associated with a place where one withdraws from a harsh, critical or dangerous world. And yet there is pleasure in anticipating both sides of the fantasy; the thrill of exposure is not necessarily always balanced with the reward of respite. Being "caught"(or nearly caught) in a dangerous situation can be its own kind of tether play. In some forms of tether play, for instance, *not* escaping the thunderstorm is more pleasurable because it allows for an experimental exposure of the self (though not quite an "exhibitionism").[58] Actually getting caught in the storm stands in for a make-believe and more perilous exposure, a staged lapse in our general encapsulation, a stress test for our in-built capacity to sustain the storm.

In geographical terms, the tether fantasy often involves the notion of frontier, the exploration of dangerous or exotic spaces. In the environs of domestic worlds, it evokes Henry Jenkins' use of the terms, *home base* ("the world which is secure and familiar") and *home region* ("an area undergoing active exploration")—spaces that children move back and forth between in exploring the boundaries of their domain (Jenkins, 1998: 267).[59] Home, in fact, is one of the tether fantasy's central terms, especially when home is seen as a space for respite or defense from the world, such as in the old saying, "an Englishman's house is his castle" (Raglan, 1964:

12). The tether fantasy evokes images of fortification, from the walled cities and castles of medieval times to the hermit crab in his shell. Barbara Klinger described the modern-day home theater as a "home fortress," noting how these domestic spaces and the entertainment media they contain help activate a fantasy of enclosure or withdrawal paired with an imaginary journey into far-off spaces (Klinger 2006, 51). This dual and simultaneous movement of withdrawal and expansion is characteristic of the tether fantasy, and explains the mechanism by which the fantasy can become *nested* so that different sides of the oscillation become embedded within one another.

In psychological terms, tether play stretches back before subjectivity; it could be seen as a derivative of "fort/da" or a "womb fantasy"—the desire to return to that autotelic encapsulation prior to birth, or to the womb-like continuity with the bosom of the mother. D.W. Winnicott and Melanie Kline theorized the importance of transitional objects, those first partial objects that allow a developing psyche to avoid confronting me/not-me divisions. The transitional object is supposed to be outgrown, "decathected," even though it stands as the model for play and creativity in adulthood (the safe space where the ego is allowed to be what it wants without questions about what it is). Thinking about a tether fantasy encourages us to consider everyday routines[60] as creative acts permeated by a playful impulse: as we leave one site of adult identity for the next—whether it is bed, the cubicle at work, a car, or home—we are leaping from stabilization into a space of expanded possibilities, and back toward unifying encapsulation. The tether fantasy is a transitional behavior that no individual outgrows. What was once, perhaps, a trauma or separation anxiety, has become, in a tether fantasy, a repeatable source of pleasure. Play, for D.W. Winnicott, was an "intermediate" space, a "resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (Winnicott, 1965: 2).

The tether fantasy can even be expressed in the architectural choices with which a home is built. The term "fantasy" describes the playful mode that functions sometimes actively and at the center of attention, but perhaps most often works as a strong background concern underlying some foregrounded activity. The architecture design book, *Patterns of Home*, extolls the virtues of home space in terms other than those of conscious fantasy: "One of the fundamental pleasures that shelter offers is the sense of a solid, stable, and protected place from which you can look out over a 'great beyond'" (Jacobson, et. al., 2005: 207). But when the authors elaborate on this combination of "refuge" and "outlook," they begin to describe an emotion stemming from pointed moments that play on a fantasy of enclosure and expansion:

> This can be vividly experienced on a hike in the hills, when you finally arrive at a stone lodge that provides shelter and a view out over the landscape below. Good homes invite their inhabitants to enact this drama daily in a variety of spaces. Some examples from our everyday experience in good homes include sitting inside the house near the fire with the rain beating down on the roof and looking out the window to see the water coming down; hiding upstairs on the balcony, peering through the railing, and listening to the adults' party below; and relaxing on the covered front porch, watching life go by on the street below. (2005: 207)

"Fantasy" in this sense expresses a relationship between imagination and setting. The tether is a background to some activity in the foreground, be that activity a conversation, a board game by candle light, or a movie. That a tether fantasy so readily operates at the peripheries of consciousness helps the current conversation about videogames in academia, as one way of thinking how narrative materials can remain active (but in the background) during the extended

activity of play. In the broadest sense, a tether fantasy broaches what information scientist Orrin Klapp (1978), in *Opening and Closing*, describes as "a natural tide or rhythm throughout the living world," which he sees as an ebb and flow across a dizzying range of phenomena including windows (open in the spring, closed in winter), eyes (open for morning, closed at night), mind (open when young, less so when old), and so on (1978: 14).

The fantasy finds expression in a range of more traditional texts, from cinema and television (space operas, zombie-apocalypse narratives), to classical literature (siege and adventure narratives) to children's literature to poetry. Susan Scheftel's (2014) analysis of William Steig's children's books identifies a range of concerns related to the psychoanalytic subfield of separation-individuation (pioneered by Margaret Mahler), from which originated the term, "tether fantasy". Robert Frost's "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" is rife with tether imagery:

> Whose woods these are I think I know.
> His house is in the village though;
> He will not see me stopping here
> To watch his woods fill up with snow.
>
> My little horse must think it queer
> To stop without a farmhouse near
> Between the woods and frozen lake
> The darkest evening of the year.
>
> He gives his harness bells a shake
> To ask if there is some mistake.
> The only other sound's the sweep
> Of easy wind and downy flake.
>
> The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep.

The poem's premise of stopping midway between origin and destination could be read as dwelling on exposure, coldness, darkness—pausing at a moment when the tether is most extended, as a pleasure that is wrapped up in and yet (as expressed by the confusion or anxiety of the horse) stands apart from the day-to-day affairs (like travel). The tension between safe and exposed is made overt by the fact that these snow-filled woods belong to someone who is, at that moment, safe and warm in a house in the village. The poem's oft-acknowledged metaphorical treatment of the deferment of death ("The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep") is cast in the pleasurable terms of a tether fantasy—the strange allure of this moment of pause, the temptation of exposure, the beautiful (but difficult) distance that looms between the protagonist and their destination.

Perhaps most visibly and significantly, the tether fantasy finds elaboration in a range of videogames. In the broadest group (and loosest definition of a tether), players leave home behind fairly early and venture far into dangerous and exotic places on a quest, winning greater

autonomy from some safe and recuperative space. In these *lifeline* tether fantasies, there are moments or places for pause and recuperation, and these places are home-like in function and appearance. But they are inessential to play, and follow one another in a repetitious series of substitutions. Players test and expand the tether's capacity to reach, seeking out and mastering (rather than just waiting for) threatening exposure.

In a second group of games, players build, modify, reinforce, defend, or repeatedly leave and return to some home spaces. These *home-base* tether games focus on a safe space the player is tasked with maintaining (or of maintaining a protective connection with). This genre of games is more restricted, and is a more recent phenomenon in part for technical reasons discussed more below. But it also represents an exciting area for growth within the "grammars" of videogame play.

Finally, these two types of tether fantasy can actually be combined in what was, as of just four years ago, a largely "theoretical genre,"[61]—but a genre that has since acquired a surprising number of examples, many in the past eight months, clearly rushed onto the market to capitalize on this moment of growth (many still are in beta testing). Rapid generic transformations are afoot, but this is only really clear if you see these recent games as *perpetuum mobile* tethers, or a manifestation of Otto Rank's womb fantasy that serves as an imaginary solution to "the problem of permanently dwelling in and fitting into the mother's womb" (Rank, 100). In this genre, home becomes a mobile vessel, and goes along for the journey into dangerous spaces. Leaving and returning to this vessel is a micro-oscillation between safe and exposed that falls within the broader oscillations of the ship's own need to return to safe harbor, issue repairs, or else replenish its supplies as direct result of that foray into unexplored space.

These three broad categories of tether fantasies represent unexplored generic terrain within videogame studies. Studying them in isolation would contribute knowledge to this field. But the tether fantasy is also a useful analytical tool for relating games to other, primarily representational media. Doing so changes our understanding of the range of media influencing the design of games, as well as the historical narratives that shape our understanding of media convergence. Finally, the tether fantasy is an important tool for thinking about games as a specifically domestic leisure—as the fantasy is in a significant sense, both played in and around the home, and about the home (at least home as a fortified, suburban space of withdrawal and restoration).

Umbilical Play: the Lifeline Tether Fantasy

Nintendo's *Chibi-Robo! Plug Into Adventure!* (2006) transforms a suburban house into an exploration-ready landscape laden with secrets and spatial puzzles. Its titular hero, Chibi-Robo (literally "Mini-Robo") may stand only several virtual inches tall, but he is tasked with mapping the Sanderson's modest, middle-class home, which greets Chibi as a series of vast expanses, mountainous furniture, and hidden crevices. In this complex space, Chibi must perform various duties like picking up trash, scrubbing stains, and embarking on fetch quests to help ameliorate familial conflict. As the game progresses, players collect valuable objects around the home and steadily earn robot upgrades that allow encounters with the farthest reaches of the home. *Chibi-Robo!* (*Chibi!*) provides a unique and symbolic tether fantasy because of the black electrical plug the mechanized protagonist drags behind his body (the plug is half the size of Chibi himself). Every robot action requires energy: walking, running, climbing, spraying water or gliding with a

helicopter blade across gaps between furniture. Chibi's energy ticks down in the corner of the screen just like the electric company's power meter—sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, depending on the rate of expenditure connected with Chibi's various activities. Chibi must manually insert his plug into an outlet before power is fully exhausted. The plug is a literal tether signifying a fictional dependence on electricity and, in terms of play, it activates a real fantasy of dependence that pervades the games' varied tasks and spatial navigation. In its plug, *Chibi-Robo!* represents a popular, though especially legible, form of tether play that structures games about maintaining a restorative connection to safe space, or, more simply, a *lifeline* tether fantasy. As a lens for studying videogames, fantasy was defined in the dissertation's introduction as a coherent wish structure made intelligible *at the smallest unit of play* (a gameplay "verb") as well as during play's extended repetitions. Fantasy serves as the synthetic means by which patterns of play (from discrete gestures to broad configurations) are grouped together and made sense of. In this case, a *lifeline* tether fantasy is the means by which the plug always trailing behind Chibi is transformed from a burden into a central pleasure of the game. The fantasy connected to the plug is a valence, a charge that play acquires in those final few steps taken toward that distant outlet, nearly exhausted. This charge is the exhilaration of feeling restored near the point of total fatigue and then oriented again toward the horizon of challenging encounters and new spaces. Like the plug itself, the ebb and flow of the tether underlies all activities in the game.

The plug's simple function of mediating between the tether fantasy's two states—setting out, fully charged, and later returning, weary and drained—could be related to a basic pattern of subjectivity identified in psychoanalytic writings. Chibi's tether is like the string in *fort/da*, Freud's game of "disappearance and return."[62] In this game, the string connects the child to the mother-substitute (the thread reel), but this connection is, in Freud's interpretation, a means of winning autonomy from the painful feelings associated with the perceived departure of the real parent (through mastery or *psychic binding*). While the game in Freud's developmental narrative serves the purpose of helping the child develop its secondary system of thought, it remains, as a game, a dialectic of autonomy from and connection with the comforting maternal symbol. This dynamic has appeared in influential psychoanalytic studies of technology, such as Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together*, where Turkle describes the "tethered self" of pervasive networked computer technology as a state of perpetual connection to parents, family, and friends, who are now never more than a text message away.[63] D.W. Winnicott, writing about a clinical session with a child who liked to play with strings, saw the string as a symbol for "wrapping up" and "holding of unintegrated material," and on an interpersonal level, it was an "extension of all other techniques of communication," but one that could be taken so far as to "[change] from communication into a *denial of separation*" (1965: 19). In *fort/da,* the child may discard the parent-substitute, but the string (like a cellular phone) also allows the child to recall the parent at any moment. In a tether fantasy, moving away from and returning to the comforting presence of the parental symbol becomes detached from the developmental narrative; the game is a justification in itself. Staging separation becomes a means of remaining connected, even while play trains players to tolerate more severe or prolonged separation. The string in *Chibi-Robo!* repeatedly activates this dialectic of autonomy and connection.

In most tether games, the "string" of the lifeline is not made so literal in play; it remains an abstract tension. Games about exploration often test the player's ability to reach a checkpoint. Players remain tethered to one point of safety while setting out into uncertain terrain in search of the next, forced always to decide whether to forge on ahead or turn back. The *Metroid* games (and some *Castlevania* games based on the *Metroid* formula) are known for this play structure.

Typically, the series' protagonist, Samus Aran, lands on some alien planet or distressed space station, leaves the safety of her ship and ventures farther and farther into dangerous space, saving game at various pre-arranged save points dispersed across the map. *Metroid Prime: Echoes* (2004) for the Nintendo Gamecube, like *Chibi-Robo!* for the same system, literalizes this tether play about being connected to a safe space. In *Echoes*, Samus must enter a parallel dimension where the very atmosphere corrodes her space suit. And in order to proceed through this world, players must hurry between bubbles of light (safe zones), minimizing exposure to this atmosphere. Players can bravely seek, in darkened spaces beyond the safe zones, power-ups that might lessen the corrosive effect of the environment. The thrill of this risk somehow combines with the lure of unknown rewards, drawing players away from safety. When players brush with deadly exposure or barely manage to return to that point of safety, the fantasy's pleasure is heightened.

The *lifeline* tether is not limited to the save-point format. *Chibi-Robo!* accomplishes its *lifeline* tether fantasy with the electricity/battery system. Other games, like *Minecraft*, *Terraria*, and *Pikmin*, employ a diurnal cycle, so that moments of dilation and contraction in gameplay are set in advance by the design of the environment. *Minecraft* players can tempt fate and venture into monster-filled darkness at night—sometimes, the last leg of a journey must be made in these dangerous conditions. But the *Pikmin* games have always been more rigid on this point: any of the player's faction (of up to 100 player-commanded pikmin creatures) left on the planet's surface at nightfall are automatically surrendered to nocturnal predators. As the clock counts down to nightfall, players separated from pikmin must frantically seek them out. Nightfall in the *Pikmin* games, then, activates a kind of lifeline tether between player and pikmin—the latter are child-like, under the care of the player, and are completely helpless on their own. Even one unaccounted for pikmin can, in these tense tether moments, produce a kind of separation anxiety—and leaving one behind on the planet's surface initiates a cut-scene of the pikmin's death. The drama of returning to the spaceship and escaping into orbit under duress of a countdown timer happens twice in *Super Metroid*, but it occurs at the end of every simulated day (fifteen minutes of play) in *Pikmin*.

As the *Pikmin* example demonstrates, sometimes players themselves serve the function of safe space. In these lifeline tether moments, the player becomes responsible for the safety of others. This responsibility can generate a great deal of stress when those at the other end of the lifeline are relatively helpless—e.g., Natalya Simonova, who tends to walk directly into the line of fire in the Archives stage of *GoldenEye 007* (1997), or Ashley Graham (the president's daughter) who, at several points in the game, is carried away by zombies in *Resident Evil 4* (2005). These examples represent isolated moments in play (one is not responsible for these characters throughout the game). And one cannot help feeling thankful to, once again, only have to worry only about one's *own* safety moving forward. But there is an entire subgenre of tether fantasies wherein players are that safe place for others (including other players).

In dungeon crawlers like *Diablo II*, for example, each individual character's affordances and weakness intersect in mutual compensation with the skill sets of others on a team. The healer would die quickly if placed on the front line of combat, but can remotely replenish the health of the heavily armored melee character (the "tank") who takes on that vanguard position. The dungeon crawler team is strong when working together, and weak when separated, according to pre-existing affordances which, in turn, are foundational to one's identity in play. One is useful because of the unique role served in the game's situations of play. In other games, players swap or share these functions dynamically during play. In games like *Gears of War* or *Fire Emblem*,[64]

the proximity of allies on the battlefield allows them to offer one another support (reviving, healing, or providing each other a temporary stat boost, aka "buff").

Finally, it is important to comment on the notion of a player's budding sense of skill coming to serve as its own kind of lifeline tether. Not all players experience an equal number of brushes with death during difficult games; skilled *Metroid* players, for example, may have forgotten the save-point *lifeline* tension altogether. To them, saving game may be more a convenience than a lifeline. By allowing the moment of difficulty or exposure to occur at the player's discretion, allowing players the freedom to roam around between safe points, the *lifeline* tether fantasy intersects with the pleasures of agonistic embodiment. The player who has acquired the necessary skills to advance becomes Dan Fleming's "powerful intervening force," and manages play's complexity between those two lifeline safe points (the one left behind and the one sought next). Fleming's discussion of side-scrolling platformers changes in light of tether play. Skill allows a player to intervene on the player-character's behalf as a guardian, someone who watches over and performs a specific set of skills when most needed, at key moments in play—not as a steady, ongoing endeavor, as in a standard platformer. In lifeline tether play, the skilled player develops and performs this protective function autonomously, expressing a part of the self that is isolated over and against feelings of weakness and self doubt—feelings which emerge and fluctuate as a function of the tether (one's proximity to safety). If the tether is a valence or potential charge that hovers above play—in a game like *Metroid*, "play" involves exploration, platforming, puzzle-solving, shooting and evading—then one can say that one's identity as a skilled player also hovers over play in a tether game as a hidden potential, a secret weapon on reserve for those stressful moments just before the next point of safety.

The category of the lifeline tether applies to a great many commercial videogames, including perhaps the entire genre of the role-playing game (RPG), making it a key example of what Wardrip-Fruin (2009) calls gaming's "operational logics," or shared patterns of meaning built into the algorithmic functions of computational media. RPGs consistently involve exploring a dangerous space from the safety of one save point (literal or figurative), searching for the next, and hoping it is discovered before the party is exhausted (which, depending on the game, usually results in a "game-over," and the need to restart from the last save point). Many RPGs offer the option of saving game from a menu, accessible at most times. But these games still rely on the pattern of moving between safe and dangerous places. Other games merge the function of saving with the function of replenishing the party's health and stamina (e.g.: sleeping at the inn to recuperate, and talking to the inn-keeper to save).

Since the RPG is usually construed as a story-driven genre, it is important to note here briefly how this fantasy can take on a narrative shape. In most role-playing games, a lifeline tether fantasy is couched within a quest narrative, within lore-filled themes of exotic transport. In this frame, a lifeline tether can have different symbolic forms expressed in a range of narrative devices. But the function of these devices in play is consistent: to provide a point of safety amidst a wider world of uncertainty and danger. For example, safe spots are represented as spiritual "tears of light" in *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (2011), as everyday electrical outlets in *Chibi-Robo!*, as coffins in *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (1997), or as a single space ship waiting on the planet's surface in *Super Metroid* (1994). In each example, a tether fantasy connects the game's plot (its fictional setting) with the recurring activities of play. Using a tether fantasy in this way blends what ludologists claim is so difficult to combine: story and play. And while I contend that fantasy is an intermediary term between story and play, it may be

more precise to say that the player is brought from gameplay into plot events and back again by following the thread of a single fantasy.

Part of the tether's capacity for bridging gameplay and narrative involves its tendency to persist as a tension in the background of some other foreground activity (background to play as much as to plot). When it appears in narrative media, the tether is often literally backgrounded, as a setting or backdrop which asserts a low-grade pressure on the "foreground" activity of plot. For example, *I Am Legend* (2007) begins with a series of domestic activities, a daily routine of exercising, foraging, cooking, and cleaning, which culminates, as the sun sets, in the sounding of a watch alarm—at which point these activities must be left off, and the windows shuttered with metal plates, to keep out the looming threat of the infected populace, which roams the street after night fall. The sounds of their moaning and shrieking outside penetrate the protagonist's (Robert Neville's) home to such an extent that he sleeps in a fetal position inside a womb-like bathtub (an extra layer of psychic protection). The threat contained within this post-apocalyptic urban setting is latent during the day, serving as an ominous backdrop to subsequent daytime events in the film's plot. It becomes foreground at key moments, including the film's narrative climax. This foregrounding occurs mostly after dark, but also once during the day—when Robert ventures into one of their darkened dens to rescue his dog—and once at dusk, when he is caught outside at the threshold between day and night.

In the same manner, the tether fantasy can operate from a videogame's fictional frame, even when it has little to do with that game's *gameplay*. For example, in the indie game, *The Long Dark* (2014), players attempt to survive in the Canadian wilderness after a cataclysmic snowstorm. The avatar can freeze to death or die of blood loss after being attacked by wolves, and must forage abandoned buildings or cars for temporary warmth, food, and supplies. Gameplay is structured as a lifeline tether fantasy of leaving one safe point and venturing out towards the next. But much of this play consists of quietly wandering around a snowy wasteland. The tether is more *active* in the background, in the game's fictional frame, in the serene and yet deadly natural world that surrounds and eventually overwhelms the player.

And there is a second sense in which this fantasy is "background" to some foreground activity in narrative or play. Barbara Klinger (2006) addresses this relationship in her discussion of *Panic Room* (2002) in relation to America's infatuation with armoring itself through technology and entertainment media following the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Klinger identifies in home entertainment systems a desire to "[control] the ebb and flow of media within the comforts of a self-defined refuge" (2006: 9). It isn't simply in entertainment media that viewers entertain the fantasy of "seek[ing] shelter from dangerous, invasive forces" (2006: 51); rather, the home (or home-theater) itself has increasingly been imagined in popular media as an "inner sanctum" that can "provide the cocooning effects of the fortress" while being "equipped to bring the world to the home viewer" (2006: 51) As is clear from Klinger's own examples of fortification imagery ("home fortress," fallout shelters, suburban cul-de-sacs), this desire for a restorative connection to safe space is not just a symptom of trauma following 9-11, but rather is a recurring, perennial pattern of human experience. In the tether videogames discussed above, one could say that the home supporting gameplay is itself always that safe space one is connected to in play—even if this becomes background to home entertainment's departures and excursions in videogame or narrative space. In short, home space represents the first and most important site for the expansion of the *lifeline* tethers.

In the context of the fantasy's position as a backdrop to some other activity, it is important to highlight a specific psychological component of the tether fantasy: it does not

represent repressed contents or desires. The fantasy is a play with the liminal, with what is hovering just off screen as a potential intrusion or disruption to order, a threat kept at bay—or, on the other hand, a safe space that (one is happy to know) is nearby if needed. Not thinking of a distant loved one at every moment of the day does not mean that person is blocked from memory; hearing alarming news about their general vicinity (e.g., a terrorist attack, hurricane, mass shooting, etc.) might activate fear for that person's safety, bringing their image to the front and center of consciousness. But outside of such an emergency, it is considered pathological if everyday tether experiences are so consistently at the forefront of attention that they disrupt daily life, such as with the patients of Salman Akhtar (2009), coiner of the term, "fantasy of a tether".

Akhtar's patients are obsessed with tether fantasies stemming from unresolved separation-individuation (the process of separating from the parent as toddlers and developing a stable, autonomous identity and sense of self). Akhtar describes one patient, Jack, who is anxious about needing to travel far from his therapist, and is consoled by the fantasy of "a long rope by which he was tied to [Akhtar's] office" (2009: 75). Another enjoys jogging but is "constantly worried that he would end up too far away from his home, be unable to find his way back, and get hopelessly lost," and, as a result, only jogs around his block—a pathologically restricted orbit (77). As a *preoedipal* concern (before the onset of the Oedipus complex), the tether fantasy normally (in non-pathological cases) persists *in the background* of subsequent oedipal transformations—Akhtar describes this as the fantasy's "muted form" deep within "certain ubiquitous human traits" and behaviors (2009: 85). And separation-individuation (the phenomenon that gives rise and shape to the fantasy) is not static—it is part of an ongoing process that "continues to evolve and stabilize through subsequent development, even during adult life" (Akhtar, 1999: 9). Tether videogame play could be seen as a way to bring this "muted" or background process to the foreground at key moments in play. From the psychoanalytic perspective, this repetition (or "reverberation," as Akhtar says) of separation-individuation can serve the very practical purpose of working through remnants of what was a traumatic process even when completed successfully.

But Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory (a school of behavioral psychology that explores the same developmental period as separation-individuation) speaks even more clearly to the pleasure of "activating" or bringing a tether to the foreground. Attachment theory postulates that behavioral systems are distinct but interrelated—in this case, an "attachment" system for seeking protection and security, and an "exploratory" system for venturing out and discovering one's surrounding environment. The relationship between these systems is central to attachment theory in that the confidence required for exploratory behavior is predicated first on the demands of attachment for having a connection to one's "secure base" (which is originally the "attachment figure," or protective parent, but can later refer to literal places, or internal representations of others, or aspects of the self). Karlen Lyons-Ruth (1991) describes the relationship succinctly: "the 1-year-old infant uses the mother as a 'secure base' from which to explore the environment during times of safety and from which to seek comfort and security at times of stress" (1991: 4). The attachment figure becomes an anchor to the infant's explorations of the outside world—and these systems hardly disappear in adults (even if the secure base itself changes). The point to emphasize here is how tether videogames reveal the *attachment system* underlying the oft-remarked spirit of exploration or "spatial navigation" in videogames. Tether games sometimes activate attachment by introducing a threat that requires players to seek out their secure base and postpone further exploration until security is reestablished. And, crucially, the soothing and comforting feelings produced from connecting with one's secure base in times of stress can be

accessed by any part of what Holmes (2014) calls the "secure base cycle"—including the introduction of threat (Holmes, 2014: 9). For example, the Norwegian word for the coziness occasioned by winter, "koselig," reveals a cultural awareness of how inclement weather can trigger the secure base cycle, leading to a particular kind of pleasure (huddling around the fireplace, drinking warm drinks, holiday lights, etc.).

In this sense, imagining a threat can be a way to produce a "secure-base" experience, to bring to the foreground what had previously been a background concern for the purpose of self-soothing or metacognition (thinking about thinking). Compared with other media, videogames offer tethers that are especially "front and center," with greater intensity, and for extended periods of time—this is part of why I argue that games deserve a special place in our inventory of tether or secure-base experiences in everyday life. But, as is discussed more next chapter, much activity in tether videogames occurs with the tether hovering as a *nearly* forgotten background concern.

From Castle to Hut: Home-Base Tether Games.

> [W]henever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build 'walls' of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection—or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts. In short, in the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter.
>
> (Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* 5)

Seeing the tether fantasy as a *lifeline* already evokes home space, even if no such correlative exists within the game; home is part of a tether fantasy, almost at its root. Scholars of home have noted the importance of home for the construction of subjectivity, as part of that pre-subjective "pleasure ego," a charged site for gender politics, an emblem of a culture's attitudes about privacy, and a cradle for the post-bourgeois family unit. Fantasy and play that have become part of one's day-to-day reality are obviously intertwined with home space. But tether fantasies have a particularly resonant relationship with the home spaces since they stage, in fantasy, ventures into dangerous space from the safe connection that home represents. The *home-base* tether fantasy makes home an explicit and persistent part of play in the game. Rather than venturing into danger by a relay of substitutive safe spaces, games built around a *home-base* tether fantasy repeatedly stage a departure from and return to a home-like hub. Not at all mutually exclusive with the *lifeline* fantasy, the *home-base* develops from a *lifeline* tether that has become anchored to one resonant space in play. This distinction between fantasies may seem subtle, but it holds broad ramifications for videogame genre and, consequently, for our understanding of the fantasy. The anchoring of a *lifeline* tether within a home base opens new avenues for the development of the fantasy, requiring extension and refinement of the theoretical basis of a *lifeline* tether. The home base supports a new fantasy of negotiating the boundaries demarcating emotionally resonant spaces, such as inside from outside. Play in this genre always entails the belief that two disparate domains are colliding at the home's porous barriers. The base itself takes on a unique significance in play that is in excess of the importance attributed to the *lifeline* tethers attached to it.

In terms of its fictional trappings, home is a popular and recurring setting in videogames. There are even genres of games about "playing house" based on mimetic fantasies of observing

the fictions or performing the functions (duties, chores, general upkeep or management) of modern domesticity.[65] And while the genre of *home-base* tether fantasies is growing, it is still relatively restricted. Two recent titles on the vanguard of games built around tether fantasies more generally—*Minecraft* and *Terraria*—achieve a particularly sharp and nuanced *home-base* tether fantasy by combining a crafting/building system with a diurnal combat cycle.

In both games, players begin the game in a state of disorientation, dropped in the middle of a procedurally generated wilderness, totally exposed and defenseless. Players must fend for themselves by building tools, chopping wood, and erecting some sort of provisional shelter—all before the first sunset, when the game's hostile creatures emerge and pursue the player (*Minecraft*: spiders, zombies, skeleton archers, and silent "Creepers" that sneak up on players and explode; *Terraria:* zombies, slimes, and floating eyeballs). In each game's initial moments, home emerges from the hastily modified environment: players might simply dig a hole in the ground or a hillside and then close the entrance, awaiting morning in darkness. After the following day's material-gathering, home begins to serve as a space one identifies as protective and, perhaps, as an expression of intentional design. This design is never separated from the game's agonistic tensions—challenge, threat avoided by skill, combat, reflex, clever design of base, and efficient use of materials and items. Each day in *Minecraft* and *Terraria*, gathering materials and storing them in home space involves stretching out into the wild and returning to a home that serves to protect, to store, and to organize materials whose deployment is necessary for survival and thus for play to continue. Stretching out always entails the threat of becoming lost, dying, and losing all accrued materials; and so stretching out in these games employs a *lifeline* tether fantasy. While there is no tiny, black plug in *Minecraft*, players are loath to wander too far from safety near sunset. The game forces players back inside with the threat of monsters, which emerge suddenly and can damage even well armed players. Once inside at night, players can sort through inventory screen, start ovens to cook meat or fire crafting material, and engage in any form of internal home renovation. They can also continue to expand the boundaries of home by digging deep into the world's underground cavities for rare ores.

In a *home-base* tether fantasy, expansive pushes outward are tempered by the rhythm of withdrawal and stock-taking. And the home the player builds is at the center of these different phases of the *lifeline* tether fantasy, as mediator, but also as that fantasy's point of intelligibility. Home's design reflects the tether fantasy of stretching out and returning; it takes on a special psychic significance by serving as a dynamic anchor point for the *lifeline* tether fantasies that feed into it. There is a tension associated with being away from home—being afield, beset by monsters or a rain storm, or overburdened with a full inventory of gathered materials; no matter how far one travels, one must eventually make the return trip home or else lose all one's spoils. This tension is an expression of home's function as that ultimate container, the life-sustaining storage space and safe space that can envelop the player, but away from which the player can always choose to venture. Home space is always "present" for the adventuring player in a *home-base* tether game in the lingering threat of not completing the excursion and returning home. Being exposed loses its charge when that is the only way of *being* in the game. The same is true of being protected. *Minecraft*'s central procedural rhetoric, over broad swaths of time and play, encourages players to maintain equilibrium between two conflicting spaces, and between these two ways of *being*—to find channels between each that balance "open" with "closed." Since players themselves are tasked with designing and building these home spaces in the game, much of the game involves dwelling on those vital boundaries so central to play. But this dwelling on boundaries is built upon and supported by that rhetoric of opening and closing, and could not

exist without it: building a castle in a *Sims*-like game would not carry the same psychic weight, or, in other words, would stimulate a different kind of fantasy, one that captures vital traces of the world through mimesis. The home players build in agonistic play remains intact as a palimpsest for the tensions in a series of *lifeline* tether fantasies. At a certain point (especially in *Minecraft*), players can pause and look at the structure (from the inside or outside) and experience a *home-base* tether fantasy *just in that act of looking* at the dense overlay of *lifeline* tethers.

The *home-base* tether fantasy is not simply an extension of the *lifeline* tether fantasy; it is also a modification of it in a manner nearly analogous to how Jacques Lacan's lectures revise Freud's interpretation of *fort/da*. Rather than the disappearance and return of a comforting parent-proxy, Lacan describes *fort/da* as a process of extending the boundaries of one's domain by a "centrifugal tracing" of that "ever-open gap" left by the mother's departure (1973: 62). As Kaja Silverman has noted in her reading of Lacan, the French psychoanalyst "interprets the story more as a parable about the disappearance of the self than the disappearance of the mother" (Silverman, 168). And while Silverman sees the game as an account of a division of the self, one's being, which fades at the subject's entry into signification, what is most important perhaps for the current discussion of manifestations of conscious fantasy is how Lacan's interpretation of *fort/da* involves domestic space in this crucial moment for subjectivity. In this reading, "fort" and "da" form the first fully intact and closed signifying unit, the beginning of the radical self-alienation of the symbolic order.

As noted, Lacan's seminar breaks with Freud's reading of *fort/da*'s thread reel as a symbolic replacement for the mother; for Lacan, the reel is a partial object, [66] a part of the child at play. Lacan points out that the child in *fort/da* doesn't fixate on the door to the nursery (the point through which the absent mother would return), but rather plays in that space that "the mother's absence has created on the frontier of his domain—the edge of his cradle—namely, a *ditch*, around which one can only play at jumping" (Lacan, 1973: 62). In other words, the child doesn't anxiously tend to the mother's disappearance and return; rather, the mother's departure opens an empty space for the child to play at striking a stable and autonomous identity. And *fort/da* is about this activity of identity stabilization cast in spatial terms: the division in the subject is imaginatively "overcome by the alternating game, *fort-da*, which is a *here or there*, and whose aim, in its alternation, is simply that of being the *fort* of a *da*, and the *da* of a *fort*" (63). Lacan's oscillation emphasizes fluid identification within shifting spatial coordinates, a kind of doubling of the self: being the *here* to a *there* and a *there* to a *here*. The bobbin reel is an agent of this doubling, a tool for the child to explore the "frontier of his domain," which begins with that nursery or bedroom space, and then expands beyond the confines of home (63).

The tension between "home base" and "home region" discussed above, takes on a more explicit role in identity formation.[67] Bachelard argues that home introduces stability and continuity to the subject: "Without it, man would be a dispersed being…. Before he is 'cast into the world,' as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle" (Bachelard, 1964: 7). The child tracing this newly identified territory in *fort/da*, intends to make himself into "a being of consistency, recognizability and unity," to use Ellie Ragland's words (1964). Lacan's reading of *fort/da* is helpful for explaining how the unconscious becomes structured like a language (emphasis placed on the verbal utterances, "fort" and "da," as linguistic signification),[68] but it must also be acknowledged that the unconscious here described is also pointedly spatial. Space in Freud's *fort/da*, stretching out the tether (banishing the mother-symbol), produces a kind of controlled

(separation) anxiety. Space, in Lacan's account, is a product of literal separation, but one that in turn produces the opportunity of a "centrifugal tracing" of that "ever-open gap" left by the mother's departure (oscillations between "here" and "there") as a response to that absence (1973: 62).

The benefits of Lacan's *fort/da* for thinking about a *home-base* tether fantasy are numerous. First, it grants the ability to see the thread reel as a self-representation, which is helpful for thinking of tether games as fantasies about the mobility of the playing child. The child is static in Freud's *fort/da*; mastery of the parents' (dis)appearance precedes the child's own motor capacity to come and go. In Lacan's reading, the child explores a new world by seeing the thread reel as a cast-off piece of the self, projected into space left open around the crib. Second, Lacan's reading offers a model for the participation of emotionally charged spaces in subject-formation and, it follows, in the maintenance always required to preserve the image of the self. This idea is similar to what Mark Johnson (2013) argues about bodily schema, or basic psychological (neurological/perceptual) systems that order our encounter with (and capacity to make meaning of) the world. One of the most basic bodily schemas, Johnson argues, is "our encounter with containment and boundedness":

> From the beginning, we experience constant physical containment in our surroundings (those things that envelop us). We move in and out of rooms, clothes, vehicles, and numerous kinds of bounded spaces. We manipulate objects, placing them in containers (cups, boxes, cans, bags, etc.). In each of these cases there are repeatable spatial and temporal organizations. (2013: 21)

This model provides a way of thinking about the deeply rooted imbrication of the body and space, and thus for thinking about how space can become activated in the deployment of fantasy scenarios in play. Toying with his or her earliest spaces of containment is part of the child's development of a bodily schema through which he or she will henceforth make sense of the world. This is the cognitive/physiological point of view. In the psychoanalytic/Lacanian view, boundedness and immobility, overcome by a playful (imaginative) leaping into the unknown, characterize our first emotional relationships to space, to our initial investigations into our location in the world. And a tether fantasy reaches back to these formational experiences.

Finally, Lacan's *fort/da* explores the notion that the splitting of the self as a means of plunging difficulty can have the effect of stabilizing identity. This last affordance could shift Winnicott's notion of play as an enabling place where one is freed from making me/not-me distinctions to a notion of play as a place where one is freed from making "here"/"there" differentiations. Of course, since play engages that space in a leap, an overcoming of a barrier, play hinges precisely on those differentiations. Identity is somehow buttressed through a self-projection onto a spatial division, and a *home-base* tether fantasy is how that division is resolved and yet preserved. To totally resolve the division would mean to lose the differentiation that made those spaces work as sites for the projection in the first place. Splitting off a piece of the self in play is a particular instance of what Lacan referred to broadly as *Spaltung,* a subject's internal dividedness.[69] This fundamental dividedness is both projected onto external space as well as "overcome" in *fort/da* by combining, in one's attention, a *here* and a *there*, two distinct but juxtaposed spaces that one bridges in that playful leap: "man thinks with his object," and in *fort/da* "it is with his object that the child leaps the frontiers of his domain" (1973: 62).

There also appear, however, to be several productive drawbacks to Lacan's formulation. First, the boundaries so important to a home-base tether fantasy become reduced to a "ditch" that is leapt over in play (not much of a boundary). Second, both the stretching out and the return of

the thread reel are collapsed onto one another and made more or less identical as "centrifugal tracing". They were more unique in Freud, and tether games rarely treat them as identical, inverse motions. These limitations to the theory can, when explored briefly, actually enrich our understanding of the tether fantasy.

In truth, the first limitation can be resolved by teasing Lacan's use of the word, "ditch," which emphasized the gap or open space left by the mother's departure. The barrier Freud describes is the edge of a crib, a *hard barrier* separating the child's space and that other space so totally that by tossing the reel into the crib, it essentially disappears, ceasing to exist. Lacan's ditch metaphor evokes the image of a *soft barrier*, one that can be moved beyond, allowing for magical feelings of transcendence, a sense of wholeness by overcoming limits. Rather than repeating in the child's play space the kind of absolute separation the wall or nursery door provides for the child (as that which literally separates parent from the child), the image of a ditch implies connectedness between the child's space, and the repudiated space of external reality. This connectedness is reinforced in *fort/da's* string, an attachment forged across that divide. In the game's "centrifugal tracing," boundaries are drawn onto undifferentiated space through play; this division is, in other words, a necessary addition to space, but one that cannot be absolute. The ditch functions, structurally, as a permeable boundary that allows two distinct spaces to come into contact, but tenuously, so that play can engage in their repeated combination and separation. This "soft" barrier is important for a *home-base* tether fantasy.

This discussion of the ditch helps emphasize the extent to which the *home-base* tether fantasy really depends on an articulation of permeable boundaries through which the tenuous categories of me/not-me become interposed with the spatial junctures, "here" and "there." The tether fantasy is activated at times when one's status as "here" is set into relief by an event happening somewhere out "there," a real event that has a real and not just implied connection to the world inside. For example, in *Terraria*, a monster approaching from outside has the capacity to enter the house under certain conditions. Or, in an "inverse" tether fantasy, one can return to one's home base after dark and, looking in from the darkness outside, experience being the "there" to the warmer and more personal "here." That these two spaces come into proximity without losing their distinctness is an important but hitherto only implicit point in all examples of a tether fantasy in this paper. Recall that the architectural design book (Jacobson, et. al., 2005: 207) labeled as "good homes" those in which one could imagine "sitting inside the house near the fire with the rain beating down on the roof and looking out the window to see the water coming down." Two spaces clash in an encounter—and the barrier that separates them is activated by the production of the sound of this clash. These spaces could be manmade and concrete, or natural and only present to indirect perception, such as a cumulonimbus cloud crashing into a sunny day. Atmospheric events like hail or rain rebounding off the roof or windows of a dwelling emphasize the proximity of inside and outside, but also heighten the sense that these two spaces are somehow opposed, making the boundary between inside and outside more important, and more tenuous.

Even feelings of comfort, warmth and encapsulation—and the complementary feelings of tension, coldness, and painful exposure—become projected onto the home boundaries. Freud himself revealed the extent to which the body is involved with the boundary play of a tether fantasy in his anecdote about the "cheap enjoyment… obtained by putting a bare leg from under the bedclothes on a cold winter night and drawing it in again" (Freud, 1930: 40). Momentarily disrupting the body's thermal equilibrium in order to take pleasure in both the tension of exposure and its release in the leg's recovery is a basic form of tether play. The body reaches out

to those boundaries separating warm from cold as a kind of correlate or extension: in bed, the boundaries move close to the body and take the form of "bedclothes" or covers, pajamas. At other times, the boundaries expand. But the boundaries always, even abstractly, correspond to the body as grounds for any tether fantasy. Some notion of body always determines the meaning of the spaces that become opposed through terms like "dangerous" and "safe" or "warm" and "cold," since the terms refer to effects upon some body that would experience them as such.

It is significant when questioning identification in videogames to note that the "ditch" in *fort/da*, like the boundary in a *home-base* tether fantasy, becomes stitched into the player's sense of self. In this stitching, the tether fantasy gestures back to the moment of radical bodily alienation that *fort/da* represents for Lacan in Silverman's reading. In videogames, the body is conveyed through a sense of vulnerability, as that which can be harmed and must be protected through play. And the opposed spaces that activate the *home-base* tether fantasy's boundaries in the games so far discussed are characterized for their unique effect on the protagonist's body. The tether fantasy's spatial oscillations ("here" and "there") disperse our identification with the avatar. The tether fantasy implies a doubling of one's spatial coordinates, an identification with an area that is broader than the literal space taken up by the avatar at any one time. It is not so much, as has been sometimes suggested, that the videogame avatar corresponds always and exactly to the partial object of the thread reel from *fort/da*, but rather that gameplay that requires players to conceive of both an internal space and an external space in tandem offers a chance for play to reflect the division of the self, for the player to be "here" and "there."

The second productive limitation—that Lacan's reading collapses the expansion and contraction in *fort/da*—is related to seeing the fantasy connected to the game[70] as a closed signifying circuit. Like the notion of "ditch," the collapsing of the circuit is not a limitation, strictly speaking. That extension and contraction become combined in the notion of "centrifugal tracing" is no more a problem than using the very term under discussion, a "tether fantasy." It is for the sake of theoretical synthesis that one has recourse to such terms, and thinking about the effect of the whole circuit (the fort + da, opening + closing, extension + contraction) helps push past the sticky circularity of binary opposition. But this synthesis can (and must) be accomplished with particular sensitivity to the unique components so grouped. As videogames demonstrate, both the extension away from home base and the return to its encapsulation are significant in their own right. In most tether games, *the oscillation is asymmetrical*. And in many games, one side appears in near total isolation from the other. How this is accomplished is something of a mystery, at least from the point of view that sees each term in the fantasy as entirely constituted by its opposite. This section offers the solution of the concept of fantasy "nesting," discussed more below.

It is important, therefore, to think both in synthetic terms ("tether," "centrifugal tracing,") while keeping in mind key distinctions between their constituent pieces. Some groupings deliberately efface key differences between terms, such as Porteous's account of the old maxim that "home… cannot be understood except in terms of journey," an expression which imbricates leaving and returning (Porteous, 1976: 387). Despite the appropriateness of the term, "centrifugal tracing," this notion requires the supplemental information that, in *fort/da*, "the child leaps the frontiers of his domain." What remains unstated in the formulation is how re-absorbing the self (contraction) corresponds to leaping the frontier (expansion); we already know that the sum of these gestures is a gradual tracing of one's personal, subjective space.

In Freud's binary, *fort/da* serves the goal of psychic binding, or the need to master (through repetition) the influx of disruptive stimuli. But Freud hesitates to collapse the "fort"

onto the "da." In fact, he considers the relative weight of each term ("fort" and "da") when pondering whether the mother's "departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter ["da"] that lay the true purpose of the game" (Freud 1920, 15). Freud concludes that while "the child cannot possibly have felt his mother's departure as something agreeable or even indifferent," it cannot be denied that "the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending." (15). Moreover, Freud suggests that the prevalence of "departure," or the isolated appearance of "fort," might be cause "to reflect on the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego" (1920: 12). The entry of masochism in a discussion of *fort/da* introduces a productive asymmetry to that binary. But at this point it also represents a shift in tone: Lacan's "fort" is a playful leap into the gap left by the mother's departure; Freud's masochistic "fort" evokes separation anxiety. This tension does not necessarily spell diametric opposition. In fact, it is possible, as John Kucich does in his study of masochism in Victorian culture, to make the case that masochism can be empowering. Kucich argues that masochism serves as a substitute for parent-child intimacy: "If parental figures have become identified with the pain they cause, then aggravating such pain can magically evoke their presence and overcome separation anxiety" (Kucich, 84). This "oedipal masochism," [71] helps complicate one's understanding of the pleasure systems in games that compulsively emphasize the "fort" in a *lifeline* tether fantasy, such as zombie shooters and slashers.[72] These games serve a "da"-like function through the intermediary of imagined parental punishment. Kucich also suggests that fantasies of parental abandonment can also produce positive feelings of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Leo Bersani's (1986) reading of *fort/da* conceives of sadism and masochism as entangled sources of pleasure:

> But the child's suffering is now inseparable from two sources of pleasure: his representation of his mother's suffering and what I take to be the narcissistic gratification of exercising so much power. In reality, there is no sequence here: rather, there is a single satisfying representation of a separation painful to both the mother and the child. In other words, mastery is simultaneous with self-punishment: a fantasy of omnipotence and autonomy (the child both controls his mother's movements and doesn't need her) is inseparable from a repetition of pain. (1986: 58-9)

Moreover, both "fort" and "da" can be combined (while remaining as conceptually distinct as possible) in the image of home as a space of psychic fluctuation. This is expressed as a contraction in Gaston Bachelard's notion of the "function of inhabiting," and as an extension in Francis Spufford's account of "armchair travel to the far North." After discussing these models briefly it will be possible to respond to a broader number of games with unique fantasy organizations. In other words, Bachelard and Spufford offer insights that will help distinguish between games that prioritize opening or closing, help decide when each side of the binary is in play, and help determine how, exactly, one feeds into the other.

Bachelard's phenomenology of home strives to articulate the emotional experience of inhabiting space. He calls this experience the "function of inhabiting," or how psychic reality unfolds in and become attached to the very walls of a home (1964: 63). The "function of inhabiting" is a dialectic composed of "palace moments" and "cottage moments" (63). The recurring image of the "cottage," the contracting half of this dialectic, has at its core what Bachelard calls a "hut dream," or a pervasive fantasy stretching back to the idea of humanity's earliest fortifications against nature. To illustrate a "hut dream," Bachelard cites a French novel (Henri Bachelin's *Le serviteur*) in which a character relays a fantasy he enjoyed as a boy:

> At these moments, I felt very strongly—and I swear to this—that we were cut off from the little town, from the rest of France, and from the entire world. I delighted in imagining (although I kept my feelings to myself) that we were living in the heart of the woods, in the well-heated hut of charcoal burners; I even hoped to hear wolves sharpening their claws on the heavy granite slab that formed our doorstep. But our house replaced the hut for me, it sheltered me from hunger and cold; and if I shivered, it was merely from well-being. (qtd in Bachelard, 1964: 30-31)

The child's fantasy of being isolated and bonded with his father in the magical space of the hut "in the heart of the woods" represents an extreme form of closing; in terms of *fort/da*, withdrawal in a "hut dream" is like pulling that string (and its many attachments) back in for consideration, an ebb. By evoking an external and threatening space that brushes up against the imagined boundaries of the simple, one-room structure, the child brings about a compression of space, a return to a womb-like security and connection with the parent. Like the child in Lacan's *fort/da*, this imagery functions via a splitting of the self: one part tending to the hut's interior, another imagining a dangerous space outside, intruding into the interior by the wolf sounds. When the little boy in the story said goodbye to visitors who were about to leave the house, he imagined another fantasy that strengthens the function of inhabiting by imagining a dangerous space outside:

> When our companions left us, their feet deep in snow and their faces in the teeth of the blizzard, it seemed to me that they were going very far away, to unknown owl-and-wolf infested lands. I was tempted to call after them, as people did in my early history books: 'May God help you!'. (qtd. In Bachelard, 1964: 41)

The child's imagined or vicarious departure verges on becoming a "fort" in imaginative play, what Bachelard refers to as the "reverse of the function of inhabiting," and which he characterizes with Rilke's poetry: "When the storm rages and lashes the trees, in the shelter of the house, Rilke would like to be out-of-doors," (1964: 42). But it is clear that this "fort" is part of that original "function of inhabiting" since Bachelard folds the surrender to the elements back into the fortifying "hut dream" by pointing out that exposure is actually part of the pleasure of "the house's resistance," that there is comfort "in all the elements which, even in their rage, see the abodes of men and agree to spare them" (Ibid.). In Bachelard, the thrill of being out-of-doors feeds into the pleasure of home, and the fantasy of departure reinforces that of paternal connectedness.

Francis Spufford dwells somewhat longer on the idea of the domestic pleasure of imagined exposure—sans the Oedipal overtones—when arguing that the 19th-Century British public eagerly consumed (the sometimes tragic) news accounts of polar exploration because this produced an experience of "armchair travel to the far North," or the deployment of imagined travel from the comforts of home in order to produce "a tingling disruption of the domestic realm" (Spufford, 1997: 47). [73] As Jennifer Turner states, discussing Spufford's study vis-à-vis the rhythms of adventure novels ("Scary, safe again. Scary, safe again"), a central term in this "tingling disruption" is "Schadenfreude" (roughly, a pleasure taken in the misfortune of others): "There they are freezing on the ice, dying of thirst, infested by aliens on a leaky spaceship; here I am on my cozy sofa, about to have my snooze" (Turner). Imagined exposure is paired with a tangible embrace of the comforting and welcoming implements of domesticity. In Spufford's account, the British public enjoyed the narratives of nature's conquest by brave explorers but took particular interest in news that explorers met with tragedy in their struggle against the

elements. Spufford extends his analysis of the pleasures taken in this kind of unhappy ending when he describes a related Victorian fascination with "romances of catastrophe," natural cataclysms in literature expressing "a dreamed-of conquest *by* raging elements" (1997: 26). From the natural sublime comes, in the conquest by raging elements, a "sublime of defeat" (26). The "sublime of defeat" takes Bachelard's "reverse of the function of inhabiting" a step further in describing the pleasure of imagined exposure. The far-reaching consequences of this exposure challenge the separateness implied in the term Shadenfreude. It is not crucial, in a tether fantasy, to presume that the pleasure is based on imagining the misfortune of an *other*—that home becomes more appealing by imagining (even sympathetically) those less fortunate, out of doors. Nor is it necessary always to see tether play as a masochistic exposure of the self, as an attempt to inflict some sort of psychic pain by imagining tense situations from the safety and comfort of home.

Determining the position of the "self" in fantasy is not always easy.[74] And a tether fantasy deploys multiple pieces over spatial arrangements that complicate the very notion of a localized identity in play. The fantasy is often clearly masochistic in its pleasure: the self-splitting is itself a painful division, and then one piece is cast away from a comfortable and protective place, into unknown and frightening places (under the bed, behind the door, in the corner—horror films play their own kind of *fort/da*). And yet this masochism is deeply empowering, and threat rarely leads (in idealized play) to an actual destruction of one's boundaries, even in play; rather, the presence of threat allows those boundaries to serve as a site for projecting internal dividedness onto an external object. The threat makes the boundary feel *alive*. The central tenet in a *home-base* tether fantasy is that boundaries mediate two distinct spaces which are in active communication with one another while remaining distinct spaces—this is the conclusion from the discussion of Lacan's use of "ditch," the "soft barrier." With this basic rule in place, a wide variety of tether games can emerge, depending on the game's rules and design, which can be described as *home-base* tether fantasies through the models discussed above.

It does not require much of a leap to see Bachelard's "hut dream" in *Minecraft*. Players must literally build a hut to keep dangerous monsters outside. Often, the only source of light that first night indoors is the fire burning in your stove, assuming you've had time to build a stove and gather wood. What the game cannot convey in literal warmth and coldness it does through the use of dynamic lighting, the presence of malicious monsters, and the fact that every barrier is a "soft barrier" (one always in communication with space outside, but capable of separating them sufficiently when needed) built entirely upon the game's capacity for unlimited rearrangement of spaces and materials. The game even evokes that other space through the use of off-screen sound, much like in the opening sequence of *I am Legend*, when the film's protagonist, who lives in a fortified apartment, goes to bed (curled into fetal position in bathtub) to the unnerving sounds of hordes of zombies roaming the streets. In *Minecraft*, wolves may not sharpen their claws at the doorstep, but zombies do moan just outside—and if they sense you within, they may even startle players by pounding at the door. The use of monsters in games such as *Minecraft* and *Terraria* constitutes an extreme form of barrier play. But a tether fantasy can be inaugurated just by observing how the player-built fortification separates and yet connects two distinct spaces. Both games employ dynamic lighting, so that sunlight can stream through openings in the day, and the tone of artificial (torch) light at night transforms space and the boundaries that define it. Darkness can encroach on the hut walls and activate them in a manner akin to the sounds of hungry predators outside. In short, every activity both indoors and out of doors is never far

removed from the experience of a *home-base* tether fantasy in *Minecraft*. *Terraria* has a much cooler relationship to home base,[75] but still begins with the fantasy's spatial tensions in mind, and attempts later in play to reactivate them during events like the "blood moon" (zombies can open doors and come inside) or the arrival of a "goblin army" that raids and loots the player's home base. Both events are announced in advance, requiring players to return to home base and defend it.

Not all *home-base* tether games express such a textbook example of the fantasy. There is a sub-genre of *home-base* tether games based on active but stationary defense, expressing (in fantasy) a fixation on tightening boundaries, on "closing," to use Klapp's term. In these games, there is no world outside—no way of leaving the space of fortification—and play takes the form of defending against waves of invading enemies. In what are called "Tower Defense" (TD) games, such as *Desktop Tower Defense* (2007) and *GemCraft* (2008), players position sentries on a map to prevent enemy forces from reaching their destination, usually a goal or exit on the opposite side of the map.[76] In a twist on the TD format, games like *Dungeon Defender* and *Orcs Must Die* (*I & II*) combine laying traps with over-the-shoulder "hack-and-slash" play. Enemies pour into the player's territory and must be stopped before reaching one or several fragile crystals (or passageways) the players are tasked with protecting. The genre seems most like a *lifeline* tether fantasy in the inverse: play is about protecting some other, vulnerable space. While there are moments in *Minecraft* that resemble this TD genre, such as when a player must stop everything and respond to a monster that has broken into home base, there is a much richer array of *home-base* tether activities in *Minecraft*. For *Dungeon Defender*, this moment of responding to a break-in becomes a moment frozen in infinite repetition. As such, the games help articulate an important aspect of a *home-base* tether fantasy relating to the importance of barriers in play.

Dungeon Defender and *Orcs Must Die* are like a re-enactment of Freud's cell-membrane analogy for "psychic binding." This analogy, also from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, opts for analogy with the traumatic breach of a cell wall rather than activating a dialectic of leaving and returning. When an influx of stimuli breaches the psyche's "stimulus shield" (like a cell boundary), all other mental functions are momentarily thrown out of operation (even the pleasure principle) and the psyche must tend to "the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of" (Freud 1920, 33-4). Games that fixate on protecting home-base, like the Tower-Defense genre, stage this process of binding. Playing the game, mastering the waves of invading enemies that have broken into player territory, is like what happens in Freud's account of physical trauma: "cathectic energy is summoned from all sides to provide sufficiently high cathexes of energy in the environs of the breach" (Ibid., 34). The psyche's response to physical trauma benefits from having that specific, cathectic, location (Freud says "organ"), which helps the mental apparatus stabilize that influx of energy.[77] Seen simply as a retroactive attempt at mastery, and as an inverse *lifeline* tether in play, the TD games correspond more to Freud's *fort/da*. But seen as a shoring up of one's own territory or psychic space, the defense of one's own boundaries, which become repaired and strengthened throughout play, it is a *home-base* tether that has become frozen in its contracting phase. In this way, TD and other defense genres of videogames can be assembled under the heading of *home-base* tether fantasies, even though they really only fixate upon the repetition of exposure, of traumatic moments when all play must stop and turn towards that "environs of the breach."

On the other end of the spectrum from the TD genre, *Chibi-Robo!* places far more emphasis on stretching out and exploring the world, gradually increasing Chibi's range by

expanding the limits of his tether. The game ultimately straddles the divide between *lifeline* and *home-base* tether genres. The electrical plug/outlet circuit identifies it as an emblem of the former. But at the end of each simulated 12-hour cycle, Chibi returns to his hut-like "Chibi-House" where he tabulates points, earns money, purchases upgrades and plans for the next day. The game gestures towards a *home-base* tether fantasy but never quite arrives there via the Chibi-House. This is because each time a player enters or leaves the house the game cuts to a loading screen, which decisively separates what happens inside from what happens outside in play.

In a similar manner, a whole host of videogames merely hint at a *home-base* tether fantasy, pushing the work of the fantasy beyond the scope of the videogame and its structures: players in games like *Super Metroid*, *Beyond Good and Evil* (2003), and *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime* (2005) must imagine that it is "as if" the boundaries of home or home-like spaces actually juxtaposed a *home-base* tether fantasy's two emotionally resonant spaces. But like the vine on a trellis, a new fantasy offshoot (*home-base* growing out of a *lifeline* tether) can grow only so far beyond that network of support before its weight is no longer sustainable. The *home-base* tether may express a more developed form of a *lifeline* tether fantasy, but it comes second because it is, as a result, far less prevalent. In fact, two dominant videogame industry practices undercut and inhibit this fantasy, often pushing its elaboration into the uncertain terrain of imagination and play spaces beyond the game.[78]

The first constraining industry practice involves departing home at the outset of the game in favor of a feeling of progress related to the traversal of space. It is often the convention of narrative progression in quest games to employ "home" as a representational space left behind very early in play. Driven forward by plot, players aren't given reason or opportunity to dwell in any one space for very long—nor are there means by which one can dwell on any space when every area in the game is merely one stop along the "string-of-pearls"[79] narrative. This practice effectively negates home's base-like function, even in imagination-heavy play. In order to sustain the home tether fantasy, a game must, as in *Chibi*, give players frequent incentive to leave and return.

The second constraining tendency requires only small portions of game space be loaded at once, and disparate but contiguous areas to be loaded separately, one at a time. This industry practice could be cast in technological terms: the premium attached to loading discrete areas separately is due to a general prioritization of photorealistic graphics over the continuity of play. The game is presented in small chunks so that each visible portion enjoys maximum graphical output without overburdening the game's processor. It should also be noted that it is a vast simplification of the design process to not have to account for the interaction of bodies with or across significant boundaries separating distinct spaces, like the protective wall around a town or the front door to a home. Making home boundaries more permeable would mean putting internal and external spaces into contact; these spaces employ different lighting modes, weather effects, play modes (combat versus conversation), different camera systems (one for each space, plus a third for the transition between spaces), etc. As a result of this tendency toward graphical separation, different spaces in a game, such as inside a home and outside, are so radically detached from one another that it could be said that only one *exists* at a time. Home boundaries are absolute and unassailable; inside space is no longer in conversation with outside space. The specter of threat is entirely gone when one can rest assured that the monsters outside have not yet been loaded, and never will while the player is inside. The entirety of the game's rich experiences and capacity for exploration are disconnected from its interior spaces, its pockets of

safety and restoration. Rather than bringing about a splitting of the self in a *fort/da* relay, most inside/outside boundaries in videogames completely sever the *fort/da* process—they cut the string, so to speak, so that the partial self inside loses contact with the partial self outside. One is either *entirely* inside, or *entirely* outside. There is no space in-between, no juxtaposition of difference, and no tension mediated by a home boundary. In order to pass through such game boundaries, one must suffer montage. A home base in a tether fantasy must offer potential exposure but safely and manageably—this is why few zombie games offer a *home-base tether fantasy*.[80] In a *home-base* tether, enemies can still attack but must first filter through a bottleneck, come through a gate or doorway (players of cooperative first-person shooters automatically understand how a game's spaces exert a pressure on the action they stage).[81] In videogames, spaces that are loaded separately (like every space in *Chibi-Robo!*) are no more spatially contiguous than two pro-filmic spaces combined through continuity editing.

If, nevertheless, a host of videogames that have not yet fully internalized the *home-base* tether fantasy (such as the handful listed and hundreds alluded to in the preceding paragraph) remain connected to a *home-base* tether fantasy, it is by the aid of actual home bases, via a process called "nesting." *Nesting* describes the means by which one fantasy becomes embedded inside another. It is a significant concept related to how fantasy becomes acted out across a variety of media in one's day-to-day activities. It describes how that fantasy-vine, once it outgrows a particular text's trellis, finds support once more in some other structure, so that its total support beyond the initial trellis is not levied upon imagination. Again, this is not to knock imagination (see endnote 78). Rather, *nesting* represents the means by which imagination sometimes draws on outside resources to support its extra-textual endeavors vis-à-vis the game in question. A videogame about fortification, for instance, resonates when played within a home with some of the architectural tropes of castle: the sense of withdrawal of the keep, the impression of fortification and womb-like enclosure. When focusing on debates over medium specificity, it can be jarring to move so quickly in analysis from *home-base* tether fantasies in *Minecraft* and *lifeline* tether fantasies in films like *Panic Room* to a discussion of imagined or actual fortress-like homes. It may require a hyperbolic example like the aptly named "Safe House" in Poland, a two-level domestic fortification featuring "movable concrete walls that can pretty much isolate the entire residence when the owners are away," to illustrate how everyday spaces can themselves serve a function analogous to that of entertainment media in supporting the play at the heart of a tether fantasy ("Imposing Concrete Residence in Warsaw: Safe House").[82] Bachelard's "function of inhabiting" is not just a model for thinking about one's emotional relationship to home spaces that can be applied to videogame tether fantasies—it is also a way of understanding the relationship between these fantasies and actual home spaces. A tether fantasy is part of how a home's spaces expand and contract—and each individual entertainment object can perform different aspects of this oscillation incompletely or imperfectly. The relationship between these different fantasy segments lies at the heart of the term, *nesting*.

Perhaps most importantly, *nesting* helps mediate between *fort* and *da* in a *home-base* tether's spatial oscillations. It helps explain how one segment of the fantasy can appear in a game in asymmetry to or isolation from the other. Recall Freud's "cheap pleasure" of "putting a bare leg from under the bedclothes on a cold winter night and drawing it in again" (Freud, 1930: 40). Freud calls the game "cheap," in part, because its pleasure is (literally) the zeroing out of artificially created tensions: there would have been no need to warm the leg if it has not been extended in the first place.[83] The bare-leg game would benefit greatly from its player's having had a more justifiable reason to temporarily shun warmth—the dog needs to go out, the wind has

blown open the screen door and it needs to be shut, etc. Then, returning to bed would provide this relaxation of tension while escaping the artificiality (deliberateness, circularity) of the exposure. In this sense, "cheap" means unmotivated, and thus not sufficiently disguised. But this possibility leads to a second explanation: the game is "cheap" because it is isolated, removed from its embedded position in the daily routines that tether fantasies usually find themselves. The fantasy becomes *rich*, in other words, through a process of nesting, when one tether fantasy is housed (or framed) within another. The familiar image of reader curled up by a cozy fireplace with an adventure novel may be archetypal for tether nesting. But no instance of a tether fantasy above is without some degree of nesting, insofar as inhabiting home space can activate one tether fantasy and home entertainment media can activate another. The principal affordance of the notion of *nesting* is that the pleasure of the extension and that of the return can be interposed, cast in separate (though not totally unconnected) terms that then become intertwined less in their contents than in fantasy's capacity to frame disparate materials.

This interposition of the fantasy's openings and closings can occlude the very fact that an extension and contraction have both occurred, since a story of perpetual exposure can be paired with uninterrupted enclosure at the site of reading. Somehow, in this occlusion, *nesting* reinvigorates the fantasy while tying together the various spaces of its unfolding. This is Francis Spufford's "tingling disruption of the domestic realm," his "armchair travel to the far North," which is the reading of adventure stories about exploring dangerous spaces from the warmth and safety of home. This is Gaston Bachelard's "function of inhabiting," a reinforcement of a sense of home through elements opposing it, such as winter, which "strengthens the happiness of inhabiting. In the reign of the imagination alone, a reminder of winter increases the house's value as a place to live in" (Bachelard, 40). This is also Henry Jenkins' self-described "intensity of experience" that he felt as a child, reading an adventure novel while (dangerously) "settled into [his] treehouse during a thunder storm" (Jenkins, 1998: 265). In Jenkins' example, there are three *nested* tethers. First, the semi-private treehouse is tethered by proximity to the safety of parental oversight, thus is a space of departure nested within or perched upon the domestic realm, a *lifeline* tether fantasy. Second, the adventure novel of exploring strange and dangerous places is a *lifeline* tether nested within (and a "tingling disruption of") the first. Finally, with the clash of the thunderstorm with the undoubtedly tenuous nature of the foundations and walls of the treehouse, the third tether fantasy—a clash of inside/outside spaces, a *home-base* tether—floods and envelops the first two. The terms of one layer's "opening" (exposure) can enter into an exchange with another layer's "closing" (return to safety).

These fantasies of exposure invoking extreme natural events (in Jenkins, Turner, Spufford, Bachelard) are strongly *centering*. Like in modern apocalyptic narratives, in which the rest of the population has been reduced to zombies or destroyed entirely by blizzard, the reader or player occupies a special space of intelligibility, as if the whole world has been, in a literal sense, reduced to the other side of that division between inside/outside, self/other, and safe/exposed. These narratives bring about a heightening of actual home boundaries by playing—in fantasy—with the tensions that constitute those boundaries. Through *nesting*, actual home spaces can become mobilized in this empowering sense of unification, how in Lacan's sense, the projection of internal divisions onto external boundaries can help shore up and stabilize identity, if only for fleeting moments.

Perpetuum Mobile: The Womb Fantasy and Theoretical Game Genres

> The theme of heroic *invulnerability* is also to be explained as a kind of permanent uterus, which the hero brings with him into the world as armour, horny skin or helmet (magic hood), but which still betrays in the single mortal place, as, for example, Achille's heel, how strongly even the hero was once purely physically attached to the mother.
>
> Otto Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*, (107)

> To like ships is first and foremost to like a house, a superlative one since it is unremittingly closed, and not at all vague sailings into the unknown: a ship is a habitat before being a means of transport. And sure enough, all the ships in Jules Verne are perfect cubby-holes, and the vastness of their circumnavigation further increases the bliss of their closure, the perfection of their inner humanity. The Nautilus, in this regard, is the most desirable of all caves: the enjoyment of being enclosed reaches its paroxysm when, from the bosom of this unbroken inwardness, it is possible to watch, through a large window-pane, the outside vagueness of the waters, and thus define, in a single act, the inside by means of its opposite.
>
> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (66-67)

In the model of the trellis and vine introduced in this dissertation, it is assumed that fantasy eventually extends beyond the structural support of rules in any game. In one sense, this is because the term, "fantasy," also includes imagining an action not currently possible in a game's carefully circumscribed set of potential actions (or affordances). This chapter's final section represents an effort to trace the tether fantasy beyond its current structural instantiation in commercial games. It argues that the games industry is perpetually engaged in this same process on at least an implicit level in their efforts to expand the generic boundaries of gaming with follow-ups to extremely popular titles, such as *Minecraft*. What I term a "*perpetuum mobile*" tether fantasy refers to the desire to prolong the shelf life of *home-base* tethers by taking home along on the excursion, allowing home to come into closer contact with the prolonged extensions of a *lifeline* tether fantasy within a wider field of exploration.

Perpetuum mobile is Otto Rank's (1924) term for a mobile "womb fantasy," or the wish to return to the womb and re-experience birth, to overcome the original and most severe of all traumas, the birth trauma. For Rank, the womb fantasy entertains the promise of returning to a space that can satisfy all bodily needs, ease all tensions—something like the nirvana principle. Specifically, "*perpetuum mobile"* describes a "mania to invent," to devise some machine or other means of discovering a solution to "the problem of permanently dwelling in and fitting into the mother's womb" (Ibid., 100). *Perpetuum mobile* literally means "perpetual motion," typically in reference to pieces of music played with a continuous stream of notes. But in Rank's sense the term relates more to "the motion of a hypothetical machine which, once activated, would run forever unless subject to an external force or to wear," (OED, "perpetual motion"). Such a machine would be a closed and entirely self-sufficient circuit, generally considered an impossibility (a fantasy)—and this makes it an apt metaphor for the wish to return to the womb. This is a womb one can take along while confronting the trials and difficulties of life. Rank

offers the charged imagery of the Zeppelin in this discussion, a fortress floating on the wind, but one might also add Captain Nemo's Nautilus from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Star Trek*'s Starship Enterprise, Han Solo's Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars,* or the mobile castle in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004).

As the examples suggest, narrative media have, to date, almost exclusively provided the "structural support" for a *perpetuum mobile* tether fantasy. In each example, plot centers around a vessel that travels through dangerous spaces, sustaining life by keeping the safe, comfortable interior spaces separate from the harmful space outside: the vacuum of outer space, the crushing depths of the ocean, a war-torn countryside. And while each vessel has an ostensible energy source, and protecting or resupplying this energy is often a central drama of these narratives, the mobile dwelling is often treated as if it were a fully self-reliant, encapsulating space of protection and restoration (a womb). The narratives' tethers involve characters' needing to leave this protective space, and then return—a drama often repeated with the mobile fortress itself.

For example, in a well-known sequence from the popular film, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), the Millennium Falcon hides from imperial ships in a cave on an asteroid. Parked inside the cave, the vessel waits out the storm of bombs aboveground. But the Falcon's crew leaves the ship's protective interior and ventures out into the cave in order to remove parasitic creatures from its hull. At that moment, they discover that the cave is actually the throat of a "space slug" (Exogorth). Han Solo's memorable line, "this is no cave," initiates the dual *lifeline* tether, the double escape of *perpetuum mobile*: the race back to the ship, and then the ship's flight from danger—in this case, just squeezing through two giant teeth as the Exogorth closes its mouth. This is just one of many instances in the *Star Wars* series when the ship's crew ventures away from the ship and then races (or sneaks) back, just in time for a narrow escape. Once inside, the crew defends the ship as if it were a *home-base* tether, operating guns when necessary and, sometimes, powering down engines and hiding. At quieter times, the ship serves as a domestic space for preparation as well as relaxation.

As a *perpetuum mobile* vessel, the Millennium Falcon takes as its model and inspiration Captain Nemo's ship, the Nautilus, from the 1870 science fiction novel, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. The Nautilus' technological advancements—it is faster, stronger, cleaner, more efficient and quieter than any ship of its time—do not make it primarily into a war machine. Rather, emphasis is placed on the Nautilus's endless sustainability. Nemo has designed it in order to withdraw from the world, to live forever under the ocean. The ship draws everything it needs—power, food, water, and stimulation (adventure) from the surrounding waters. Of course, there are exciting *lifeline* moments throughout the novel when the crew leaves and returns to the ship, such as a spear-gun hunting expedition into a kelp forest.

Such journeys away from the safety of the *perpetuum mobile* vessel would become the dramatic axis of nearly every episode of the space opera, *Star Trek*. The Starship Enterprise can beam its crew in and out of danger, can lose and regain its defensive shields, and can sustain damage but narrowly escape. The imagined technologies of *Star Trek* allow for an array of last-second rescues, such as when crew stranded on a planet in the destructive path of an expanding sun are suddenly teleported to the safe enclosure of the Enterprise, which then also escapes by fleeing at "warp speed." This plot or some variation occurs multiple times throughout the *Star Trek* series, as well as in the more recent rebooted television show, *Battlestar Galactica*. These "closed world" narratives share in common an endless stretch of dangerous, unexplored space, and unremitting intergalactic conflict. A colonialist impulse to know and master an unknown space seems to be corollary to the repeated *perpetuum mobile* pleasure in their plots.

The tone in a *perpetuum mobile* film like *Howl's Moving Castle* is markedly different. The film's ambulatory castle always moves across a picturesque countryside, fueled and held together by the spirit of a fire elemental (literally, the castle's hearth). The castle's front door is magical, connected via portals to different building fronts in different parts of the world. Shoppers and postmen bring business to the castle by knocking on different doors miles apart, leaving the castle's heart connected to a network of social and economic exchanges. But when troops break down one of these doors, they find the building's interior empty, abandoned; forceful entry violates the protocol for establishing distant contact. The film's central dramas revolve around moving away from or towards these portals, being safe within the castle at times, and being caught in enemy fire outside it at others. But the tether fantasy in *Howl's Moving Castle* becomes troubled in pointedly nostalgic imagery, connecting present concerns to figures and spaces of the irretrievable past. Similarly, in many of Miyazaki's other films, such as *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Ponyo*, and *My Neighbor, Totoro*, both *lifeline* and *home-base* tether fantasies help evoke nostalgic feelings of a comforting, parental presence, family togetherness, and domestic warmth.[84]

Bittersweet longing in these films seems to occasion the tether fantasies they contain—the moving castle is a romantic image for both retaining a connection to one's past (staying "in the womb" of a lost embrace) while seeming to, at the same time, move on an encounter the wider world. But the tethers in these narratives are never figured through infinite narrative ingemination like the iterative space operas. Rather, the desire to dwell in these nostalgic spaces always gives way to a forward compulsion, a need to confront difficult truths and come to terms with the impossibility of a return to a comforting past (or figure from the past). Miyazaki's tether always breaks down. In *Howl's Moving Castle*, the castle is ultimately destroyed and its inhabitants dangerously exposed on a vertigo-inducing cliff face. Sofî, the film's protagonist, decides to break the magical contract that holds the castle together in order to free Howl from his obligations therein, in large part because she loves Howl and longs for a new life together. In other words, the promise of dwelling forever in the womb gives way to a message about leaving the nest.

Perpetuum mobile tethers seem especially suited to episodic or serialized narratives—as in, for example, the notoriously long-running manga and anime series, *One Piece* (1999-present), about a band of pirates who sail the ocean in the "New World" encountering a variety of dangers both within their ocean vessel and—more often—separated from it (and each other). But in this sense, this particular mode of fantasy also seems suited to extended videogame play. In fact, just as it has long been a part of the spatial imaginings of narrative media, so too has it long been a part of games. But it has tended to only appear within a game's narrative frame, not within the structuring support of rules. It has only been since *Minecraft* that game designers have found new ways to build a *Perpetuum mobile* tether into gameplay. And in this sense, the fantasy serves as an apt example of how, in the trellis and vine analogy, a make-believe fantasy that reaches beyond rules' structuring support, can be said to precede the development of new play genres, gesturing toward theoretical generic terrain.

As noted, many games have contained *perpetuum mobile* in their narrative frames. For example, *Super Metroid*'s gameplay is largely structured around a lifeline tether fantasy of venturing deeper into the unknown caverns of Planet Zebes. Save points are spaced at intervals along the way, and power-ups help extend the reach of the tether along the way. But within the narrative frame, one save point is different from all the others: Samus Aran's space ship both brought her to this planet, and hovers always just above the planet's surface, awaiting her return.

Following the game's climactic battle against antagonist, Mother Brain, the entire planet self-destructs. Players have only minutes to retrace their steps through the game to Samus's ship—and must do so as the entire world begins to list and fall apart. Once players reach the ship, they must enter it, then watch it slowly lift off, as the count-down continues; all that is left behind will be destroyed. This final *lifeline* tether's contracting phase of rapidly returning to the start is a pre-scripted, narrative moment in the game—not one that recurs in play according to regular player activity. If the game's *lifeline* tethers are encountered and staged "for real," then the *perpetuum mobile* tether at the game's outset and conclusion remains a fictional backdrop, a latent potential, throughout the rest of play.

More than a decade later, in Nintendo's most recent major *Metroid* entry, *Metroid Prime: Corruption* (2007), the *perpetuum mobile* fantasy remains locked within the game's narrative. The game multiplies the moments when Samus must return to her ship and perform some action—we are even given a point of view shot from within the ship—but these are all pre-scripted narrative moments. Players are never permitted, in gameplay, to explore space through the intermediary of the ship. Bringing the ship along for the adventure remains only an implied part of play. The situation is the same for a host of other games that embrace the idea of *perpetuum mobile* without, ultimately, settling on the elements of design that would provide for it in gameplay. For example, in the now-retired massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), *Star Wars Galaxies* (2003-2011), players could choose to travel all across the galaxy, but arriving at a planet always triggered a cut-scene; players could only land at pre-designated sites represented by pre-rendered cinematics. This fact undercut the *perpetuum mobile* tether fantasy in the same way that montage and loading screens separating inside from outside undermine a *home-base* tether fantasy: by asking players to merely imagine the relation between inside and outside, rather than enacting that distinction dynamically in play. This same limitation also applies to would-be *perpetuum mobile* tether games, *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime, Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story* (2009), and *Mario & Luigi: Dream Team* (2013), which all depict two simultaneous spaces (one inside, one outside) using the dual-screen of Nintendo's handheld systems (DS and 3DS). There is a shift in scale in the spaces depicted on these two screens, and the space with larger scale usually possesses some power of motility. But these games are all pseudo-3D (a blend of 3D spaces and cartoony, 2D sprites) and movement from one space to the other is never continuous or fluid in a way described as important to a *home-base* tether fantasy.

And technological development is not, by itself, to blame for game design which relegates fantasy to make-believe elements (beyond the trellis). After all, as of just a few years ago, the NES title, *Blaster Master* (1988) contained the most intact *perpetuum mobile* tether fantasy in videogame play. A side-scrolling adventure game that, at first glance, seems a lot like *Metroid* (1986), *Blaster Master* is unique for how it divides its man-machine ensemble: players either ride around the game's maps in an armored (but surprisingly nimble) tank, or else may exit the tank (at any chosen time, with full fluidity) and proceed on foot as Jason, the tank's pilot. There are maze-like dungeons containing difficult bosses throughout the game, which players must proceed through on foot, leaving the tank behind. The first dungeon can only be accessed by travelling to the bottom of a body of water. Players can move the tank underwater, but its movement is greatly hindered by the water's resistance. It is much easier to leave the tank at the water's edge, and to swim down to the dungeon as Jason, who moves fluidly through water, and who needs to leave the tank behind to enter the dungeon anyway. Leaving the tank at the edge of the water activates a *perpetuum mobile* fantasy that teeters right on the edge of agonistic and

mimetic instantiation. Deliberately leaving the tank idle at the shore has the effect of treating the body of water *as if* it were a real lake, into which one would probably not drive one's tank. The coupling of tank with shoreline has the effect of wrapping the game's first dungeon more fully into that tether dialectic of "safe and exposed." As the game progresses, the tank acquires body, weapon, and wheel upgrades, so that it can access the world more safely and freely. But the ritual of separating from the tank to venture into the game's most dangerous places remains a perpetual tension at predetermined moments. There are other, more banal times, when one might choose to exit the tank to deal with enemies that are too short to hit with tank fire but that cannot be jumped over because play takes place in a narrow corridor lined with spikes. These moments seem deliberately designed to remind players that it is in their own self-directed play (not just at pre-scripted moments or cut-scenes) that they can choose to leave that protective vessel and forge a *lifeline* tether fantasy across the game's many diverse spaces. In this way, *Blaster Master* achieves in play what *Super Metroid* and *Metroid Prime: Corruption* only effect in story.

In the past several years, this new videogame genre has begun taking shape (with over 50% of its major titles appearing in the past year alone). *Starbound* (2013) is a follow-up to *Terraria*, which adds to the latter's *home-base* tether the experience of beaming to different worlds from a space-ship, a hovering home in the sky. And both *Space Engineers* (2013) and *Starmade* (2014) take *Minecraft*'s three-dimensional block construction into outer space, where players design and pilot a fully destructible space ship. This player-built vessel houses and protects players, storing all their materials and belongings, while shuttling them across the galaxy. More recently, *Empyrion: Galactic Survival* (2015) and *No Man's Sky* (2016) have begun to focus more carefully on the relation between mobile vessel and planetary exploration.

In these games, there exists a bizarre confluence of *perpetuum-mobile* game fantasy, fictional frame, *and* method of production. Many have been held in a kind of perpetual alpha- or beta-testing modes (e.g., *Starmade*, *Empyrion*, or *Planet Explorers*, 2014), always releasing patches and updates, but never being "finished"—as sandbox games, they don't typically contain any sort of narrative ending. And some (e.g., *No Man's Sky*) tout their capacity for endless exploration of countless procedurally generated planets across innumerable solar systems and galaxies—a simulated universe as impossible to explore in its entirety as is our own universe. Paradoxically, for that reason, it might as well be *as if* the universe had a "quadrillion" planets. One wonders if producing this much space "for real" is a wise use of production resources.

These games represent a very recent generic cycle. The work of imagination they represent long precedes them—but the key to carrying out *perpetuum mobile* in extended videogame play was likely contained somewhere in the home-base tethers of *Minecraft*. The rapidity with which this host of games—representing in large part an effort to carry *Minecraft*'s built fortification forward as a perpetual motion machine capable of exploring the (literally) unending stretches of the universe—is in stark contrast to the vague theoretical genres of the "holodeck" or cyberspace. Other theoretical genres, like political or persuasive games, moved quickly from statements of intent to working prototypes. But what this final section proposes is neither a vague utopian wish about computer technology (e.g., to erase mediation itself) nor a purpose detached from commercial gaming altogether (e.g., videogame technologies repurposed for artistic or political expression). Rather, it shows how gameplay fantasy is fed from a variety of cultural objects and, in turn, influences the design of new configurations of rules and therefore videogame genres.

This section began (at a time before there were so many examples of *perpetuum mobile* videogames) as an effort to describe a vine and imagine a trellis that would extend its reach in

structured play. Now there are many examples of games that satisfy some if not most of the tenets it originally laid out. Suffice it to say, therefore, that a *perpetuum mobile* videogame trellis would contain all the affordances of a *home-base* tether as evidenced in *Minecraft*'s system of static defense, but this tether play would be nested within a framing *lifeline* tether structure, where the player's vulnerable character, and the vessel itself, would become temporarily superimposed: sometimes the ship represents the protective fortification a vulnerable body must seek out, and sometimes the ship represents a vulnerable, vital membrane that must itself seek respite from the dangers it encounters.

In the section on *home-base* tethers, *nesting* was a concept that helped picture the imbrication of tether fantasies across different media (cinema, novels, television) and orders of experience, (domestic space, shifts in weather or season, nostalgic memories). This concept helped incorporate games that emphasized only the opening ("fort") or only the closing ("da"), since one could point to play as one part of a wider nested secure-base experience. Part of the fantasy stretches into spaces and media beyond the structures of the videogame. *Perpetuum mobile* differs for how it incorporates a range of *nested* tether fantasies fully within the game's structures, built into trellis. The asynchronicity of the opening and closing phases of these nested tethers is what lends *nesting* that "tingling disruption," when one domain is perturbed by tensions introduced from another. Tether fantasies may be uniquely suited for analysis of media *nesting*. The very image of a nest, or the idea one fantasy containing another, is, already, a kind of tether fantasy. But there is no reason to restrict analysis of *nesting* to tether fantasies alone. And, in fact, most games containing a tether fantasy contain a separate fantasy as well, a fantasy of accretions.

Conclusion: Questions of Beginnings and Endings

There is a compelling case to be made that games have been influenced since their beginning by cinema. But games such as *Minecraft* and *Terraria* break with cinematic tradition in the elaboration of a set of fantasies that either stretch back before cinema's beginning, or else, in the case of the "accretions fantasy" discussed in the next chapter, are rather unique to the format of games. The fantasies may not have been initially present in the earliest arcade videogames, but gaming's own history is linked to the development of tether fantasies. The seminal game *Spacewar!* was designed in the early 1960s by enthusiasts looking for new ways to experience *Skylark*'s space-opera adventure narrative, once it was decided that cinema would fail to provide such an outlet. Nolan Bushnell repackaged and released *Spacewar!* as *Computer Space* in 1971 as both the first arcade game, and the first commercially available game. The game underperformed—much conventional wisdom held that it was too complicated to play: the ships could accelerate, decelerate, rotate while moving, fire missiles, and teleport—and all this under the influence of the gravity from a nearby sun. This wisdom was implicitly validated when its much simplified arcade-style follow-up, *Pong* (1972), became a runaway success. The tether fantasy was a clear part of early text-based adventure videogames played at home, which, like the earliest role playing games, were inspired by the contemporaneous and popular Dungeons & Dragons board game. Very early from their time in the home, videogames have served as a site where tether and accretions fantasies motivate long hours of play and help foster the development of new genres of gameplay. While the tether fantasy was already present in those oft-cited progenitors of the "fantasy" videogame (meaning a game with a medieval, magical fictional setting), such as the works of J. R. R. Tolkien[85] or Robert Louis Stevenson, the tether is

becoming newly visible in recent videogames that seek ways to carry play forward. And while the fantasy is apt for describing repetitious play and the nesting of entertainment media within the rituals of everyday life, it does not necessarily for this reason always signify cyclical time. In games, it represents a kind of lateral growth, a generic proliferation. As a collectively held anxiety or fascination—as with backyard bomb shelters during the Cold War, for example—the fantasy is connected to historically specific concerns at the both the individual and collective levels about an empowering connection to a secure base.

The study of tether fantasies complicates our understanding of empowerment in videogames. The tether fantasy, in particular, helps emphasize how masochism—a tense or frightening sense of exposure in play—can be empowering. Focusing on a popular masochistic empowerment fantasy helps redeem the very notion of empowerment in games, first of all, by breaking down the binary that aligns the masculine with the sadistic and the feminine with the masochistic surrender. The notion that fantasy implies gender positions is not totally foreign to the study of videogames. That gender position relates to differences in play fantasies has already been suggested by games scholars like Henry Jenkins and Derek Burrill. It could be argued that the tether fantasy seems, at first glance, like a gender-neutral fantasy—every child experiences separation from the parent, undergoes fort/da, and can experience a womb fantasy. But the very notion of *oedipal* masochism, already implies differences along gender lines. In Jessica Benjamin's view, the boundary preservation central to most tether fantasies would be an extension in fantasy of a male-dominated culture characterized by "unbearably intensified privatization and discontinuity," a fierce need to maintain the "rigid and tenacious… boundary between individuals" (Benjamin, 1980: 169-170). Under Benjamin's framework, the tether fantasy would be a male fantasy when it seeks to protect the integrity of the self or home base, and a female fantasy when it takes pleasure in exposure and the dissolution of the boundaries of the self. John Kucich's study, by contrast, deals explicitly with the notion of pre-oedipal masochism, or a cultural and historical masochism freed from the family drama, rigid gender lines, and "oedipal oppositions of dominance and submission" (Kucich, 2002: 83). The relational models of psychoanalysis Kucich employs emphasize "preoedipal conflicts of individuation and separation," calling for a more open and fluid treatment of the terms of dyadic relations in play (Ibid.). It is not easy to resolve the conflict in these two approaches, but it is tempting to question the usefulness of calling a mode of engaging the world *inherently male* while simultaneously proclaiming it a cultural norm adopted by men and women, alike, under patriarchy. The alternative view runs the risk of remaining blind to substantive differences between self-assertion and self-effacement in the cultural construction of gender positions in games. Clearly some awareness of both is necessary.

It may be more productive for the question of gender bias in videogames to tap into the tether fantasy's long history of gender vis-à-vis domestic spaces. Scholarship on the formation of the bourgeois family has pointed to the Victorian era as the time when women overtook the domestic sphere. That men, in this time, began to leave home for work, thus altering the power dynamic of home spaces, has been an underlying assumption of much historical work in the field of leisure studies (the *doctrine of separate spheres*). It is clear that literature in which a character ventures away from home has long been a part of domestic leisure—from Homer's *Odyssey* to the "Adventure Island" novels Henry Jenkins cites in his study of early 1900s boys lit (e.g.: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Treasure Island*) . But, as Jenkins is apt to note, these stories possess strong gender binaries. Janet Wolf demonstrates that the "heroes of modernity"—the traveler, the flâneur—are all men, and that the public sphere has been "primarily men's

experience" (Wolf, 37). David Morley suggests that narratives and discourses celebrating travel "have functioned historically to limit the access that women have generally had to mobility, in so far as the traveller has, in effect, almost always been constituted as 'he'" (Morley, 68). For the women in the studies Morley cites, the Victorian home was not a space for withdrawal and respite:

> The modern, for them, did not mean undertaking heroic voyages or making great scientific discoveries in a world from which the traveller could then return to existing security, to home as tradition. No such place existed for them. Home was not a bounded space, a fortress into which the individual could withdraw and from which all others could be excluded. (qtd. in Morley, 2000: 63)

These studies suggest that at least one aspect of the tether fantasy was, historically, masculine—the element that saw home as a space of rejuvenation, a space for leisure away from the workday's labor. As Lynn Spigel notes, feminist scholars have challenged this easy binary, noting that for post-WWII American women, the home was "indeed a site of labor," even while it was sold in magazines as a "place of revitalization," leading to bizarre inventions like the TV-stove (Spigel, 73). Even as children, boys are generally given greater freedom to leave home than girls, and Jenkins' study (which cites Anthony Rotundo's influential study, *American Manhood*) suggests that this departure was, for boys, central to their identity; girls, by contrast, not only remained behind, but felt resigned to the domestic labor of the maternal sphere, even in fantasy.

Though these kinds of arguments about gender can be compelling generalizations (which admit, of course, many exceptions to the rule), it is still difficult to imagine that an entire gender would be denied access to certain spaces in fantasy. Spigel's *Make Room for TV* highlights a cartoon from Better Homes and Garden, in which a husband approaches his home (bundled up under snowfall) and, glimpsing his wife setting the dinner table through the dining room window, imagines a leisurely evening smoking a pipe and watching a boxing match on TV. Meanwhile, his wife, at work indoors, enjoys a fantasy of her own in which she and her husband dress up and spend an evening out, at the cinema. The two tether scenarios (being inside and imagining being out, or vice versa) are out of sync with one another, but not diametrically opposed. Since the 1950s—the rough period of Spigel's study of television—this gendered division between domestic and public labor of earlier historical eras has changed along with broader political transformation, such as the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 2013, 58.9% of married women held jobs, compared with 74.2% of married men.[86] There is a clear disparity here—but in the 1950s, only 1 in 5 married women held jobs outside the home.[87]

And gendered divisions within the home are not the only way to think about culturally and historically specific relations to a tether fantasy. The family's gendered divisions may be less significant than the division within the reproductive unit between parent and child. Following Rotundo (1994), Henry Jenkins (1998) has argued that children's relationship to the home has changed historically, with shrinking natural or "wild" spaces, and decreasing trust in unsupervised access to space outside the home (leading to the phenomenon of "latch-key children"). The child's relationship to domestic space is likely far more explicitly engaged with a range of playful tether experiences than is the adult's. Given child labor laws and wide-shared attitudes about the significance of play, children simply have more time in the home to develop these connections.

And, finally, the tether fantasy can be traced beyond the family hearth in culturally shared tethers, such those that figure in Cold-War era backyard bomb shelters, gated communities, or

panic rooms. While fantasy, as a lens, may seem to reflect an ahistorical mode of thinking, it is important to keep in mind how the major terms, tensions, and anxieties the tether fantasy engages—from gender roles in relation to home space to the very notion of domestic comfort itself—do actually have recorded histories. Thinking about fantasy historically is a productive way to reconsider the media-archaeology of videogames themselves. It is important to think of games as related to a wider range of cultural transformations beyond their status as subsidiaries to the emergence of computing technology. Even the act of connecting videogames more explicitly to the history of the home itself would be a step in the right direction. One way to do this is through a tether fantasy and (as Freud's analogy of putting a bare leg out of one's bedclothes suggests) the emergence of the notion of domestic comfort.

Rybczynski (1986) argues that comfort (as "an objective idea") and its corresponding forms of embodiment have a history dating back to the bourgeois era with technologies like indoor plumbing, central heating, and paned glass.[88] Home, in this time, became more private and intimate, the "seat of family life" distinct from the medieval hall, which was a place of work, not leisure or comfort. But it is important also to consider the idea of the medieval fortification, which the bourgeois pattern of "inhabiting" only gradually replaced. Despite its association with the emergence of a middle class, Lukacs' (1970) etymology of the word, "bourgeoisie," reveals that it

> had nothing to do with capital; it had very much to do with the city. 'Bourgeois,' 'Burger,' 'burgher,' 'borgheses' meant city-dweller. For the European city as it grew during the Middle Ages was different from the Greek polis and the Roman urbs as well as from the modern American city. It had walls that provided for security. They made for a sharp physical separation of the city from the surrounding countryside. (Lukacs, 1970: 620-1)

Even though the bourgeoisie transformed medieval notions of domesticity, the term (and corresponding social organization) were rooted in the image of the walled city, which became a sort of metaphor for the home during the bourgeois era. And home, in turn, acquired a kind of *psychic* defense built according to the previous model, the medieval fortification. The tether fantasy somehow bridges this divide—between bourgeois comfort and the logic of the walled city—as is reflected today in scores of videogames that adopt medieval settings and themes, but that are played within a media-rich and comfortable domestic space (far from the "harsh and dull" world of medieval fortifications) (Lepage, 2002). So many medieval videogames offer "armchair travel" to the feudal past—or at least a revised and romantic image of this past that revels in heightened agonistic encounters, untamed wild spaces, and the binary structure of walled fortifications.

As a critical lens, the tether fantasy helps expand the notion of empowerment by pushing the conversation of games beyond rebuttals of what Sutton-Smith terms the "rhetoric of play as frivolous," including questions about whether games are socially or developmentally helpful, whether they might serve an educational function, or else are deleterious in their dumbing down of children or in their embodied enactment of violence. Thinking about the tether fantasy in gameplay is a way of engaging games as pleasurable, self-motivating activities. And it speaks to games as leisure and entertainment in the home, rather than in the classroom, the art museum, or the clinic. Moreover, the emphasis on fantasy highlights affinities between games and older cultural forms, connecting games to changing notions of gender, race, childhood, and leisure within the home. Fantasy pulls the study of videogames into the domain of everyday life, where

the banal and the meaningful collide, and where it really matters whether all people have access to the same kinds of hopes, desires, and guilty pleasures.

CHAPTER 5. THE ACCRETIONS FANTASY AND THE BUSY WORK OF QUIESCENCE

> "What is the very best and the most preferable thing for Man?" asked King Midas of Silenus, to which he eventually responded with a "shrill laugh" and "Miserable, ephemeral species, children of chance and of hardship, why do you compel me to tell you what is most profitable for you not to hear? The very best is quite unattainable for you: it is, not to be born, not to exist, to be Nothing. But the next best for you is—to die soon."
>
> Nietzsche, (1872: 27)

The "opening" phase of a tether fantasy in videogames almost always reaches toward something more particular than a vague horizon of possibility. Often, the tether is interwoven with a "fantasy of accretions" to form the rough genre of the role-playing game (RPG). In this genre, a lifeline tether generally plays backup to the accretion's desire to reconstitute, repair, strengthen or harden a body the player is somehow made to consider fragmented, damaged, weak, incomplete, or otherwise vulnerable. A rhythm emerges that is in some ways unique to each game, but in other ways is part of a widely shared pattern of braving a difficult situation when weak so that, if successful, a small amount of security can be gained in the face of these feelings of weakness. In the RPG, the lifeline tether is activated as players set out into dangerous spaces (the "field" of play), advance until near defeat, then withdraw to safety (back to the village or castle) to replenish supplies and recuperate, "refueling" at a secure base. This refueling usually also entails an accretion, which can also be made sense of as a modest extension of the tether itself, a change in the very rules that establish the tether's feelings of safety and exposure: as a result of previous extensions into dangerous (but also treasure-laden) spaces, players can purchase better equipment, level-up, or otherwise upgrade their characters so that when they advance again, the same field is slightly less ominous, and players can reach a new point, slightly farther from home base. This pattern of overcoming a difficult or frightening situation in order to win some small increase in security is repeated indefinitely throughout the game, becoming a core reason for playing that eventually spreads over and motivates a proliferating variety of actions within the game's wider universe, including collection tasks, errands, side-quests, secret-hunting, and simply wandering or exploring space. Even a narrative RPG's cut-scenes, which often introduce characters or main-line quests, become valuable or interesting because of the prime accretions they establish as goals for that chapter of play. That so much busy activity (in games boasting 60+ hours of gameplay) can become subordinated to the accretions fantasy leads me to refer to this fantasy as an "accretions project."

At the end of this project, the avatar's often hardened, seemingly inorganic body can no longer be "pierced" by the monsters that once posed serious threats. Nor, at this point, is there really much of a tether fantasy. Each unit of power won by the protagonist's increasingly armored body represents a gradual disabling of the tether fantasy. In fact, if tether fantasies fade into the background—so that players quietly leave and return to safety without regularly

acknowledging it—then the accretions fantasy tends to occupy conscious attention more fully. In part this is because it splits the tether's feelings of vulnerability into a feeling of weakness in the protagonist's body that has, as its other half, some small store of power out there in the field somewhere, waiting to be acquired. Any unknown space in the game could contain something valuable, something that results in a small increase in strength, or else can offer a breakthrough in one's abilities (not just a slightly stronger shield, but a totally new spell that fundamentally alters one's relationship with the game, its challenges, and all its spaces). Any time one defeats a certain monster, it might randomly drop a rare, sought-after item. This potential looms in the foreground as the tether is backgrounded—at least until that point when one decides that it is best to turn back and keep what has been acquired rather than push further in a weakened state. As a relay that feeds into (and draws from) the lifeline tether, the accretions project can be sustained for longer periods of time than a tether fantasy alone. Moreover, the hunt for accretions is built on feelings of vulnerability, not strength. Because of this, the conclusion of accretions play must be perpetually and actively deferred. When the game no longer threatens the player's security, the far-off treasure loses its allure, just as the player can no longer feel *stronger*. While Jenkins and Fuller (1994) note that New World travel writing often spoke of immanent treasure or lost cities never to be found ("just over the horizon," arrival "to be deferred to some later date"), the RPG similarly prolongs a duration between departure and arrival through its combination of tether and accretion.

While Chapter 4 addresses the ways videogame space (including "spatial navigation" and "exploration") is typically discussed, this chapter takes aim more specifically at the role of "power" as a mechanism for identification in videogames. The accretions quest is sometimes described as a *narrative of becoming*, aligning it with a simplified sort of achievement ideology. At the same time, its emphasis on squirreling away wealth and power for personal use resonates with neoliberal economic ideology. But in the fantasy's near-complete eschewal of the cultivation of player skill, it cannot be said to subscribe to these views wholesale. In some sense, accretion is opposed to skill, giving the fantasy a complicated relationship to Sutton-Smith's "rhetoric of play as power." In most RPGs, there is clearly some skill in knowing which actions to choose in the often turn-based combat, but such skill only goes so far. A more powerful enemy "gates" the player, halting progress, because that enemy's stats are too high, and the player's are too low. "Accretion" means changing the relation of those stats, changing the terms of combat. Motor skill does not usually enter into this process. If, however, the player's motor skills *are* involved in combat—as they are, say, in an "action RPG"— then the accretion would represent a marginal shrinking of the role skill plays in a fight's outcome. Often the rate of a game's accretions reflects that game's narrative of self-improvement: the player character becomes stronger as a result of practice, experience, and the spoils of war. Like with actual bodily training, the character may even improve a great deal at first, and then more slowly over time (logarithmic growth). But the player's own skills are rarely ever implicated in this narrative through play, let alone timed to the rate of character stat progression.

Instead, the rate of accretions is better understood through the logic of casino gambling. The manner in which the level-up is held in abeyance for a time, then released all-at-once at preordained intervals of play, relates to what psychologists call "schedules of reinforcement," or what game designer Chris Bateman calls "incentive systems": a well-trodden approach to thinking of videogames (especially RPGs) as structured like slot machines or other gambling devices which manipulate players through careful control over the release of rewards (Bateman, 2011; Schüll, 2012). However, as Bateman points out, a variable-reward schedule (randomly

timed payouts at a pre-set rate) is far more "compelling" than the fixed-rate reward system of "stratified progression" (Peterson, 2012: 341) in RPGs.[89] This is presumed to be because, with variable rewards, one can never predict when the payout will come, leading to the experience of always almost winning. The fact that console games mostly employ a fixed-rate rewards schedule perplexes Bateman, and poses a problem to approaches that too quickly conflate videogames and gambling.

Bateman's perplexedness likely relates to a broader assumption in game studies that RPG accruals are "extrinsic rewards" (congratulatory prizes or affirming well-wishes) doled out after a set amount of time spent tediously fighting or gathering materials. As may be clear by the term "accretions fantasy" itself, this research contends that accruing power-ups is "intrinsically motivating"—the new acquisition is valuable almost exclusively in the terms of how it affects the player's ability to subsequently acquire new gear, experience, gold, or upgrades.[90] Even the word "reward" is not entirely accurate, since here *the whole process* of seeking and finding a power-up in an RPG or accretions-based adventure game like *The Legend of Zelda* series is inseparable from the pleasure of equipping it, and using it to help with future accretions. Put differently, because the accretion extends the radial reach of the tether, the accrual process is complexly interwoven with the player's experience of tethers. Further, the dependability of the payoff and the sense that, once attained, this accretion has been "put in the bank," also distinguish accretions games from the high-risk, variable-reward schedules of gambling. Many RPGs include variable-reward drops in *part* of their collection quests—meaning that while most of the game's goods can be found in chests or purchased, some (especially rare) items must be dropped by a particular enemy (which only drops the item a small percentage of the time). This strategy may *deepen* the appeal of exploring a game's spaces, by adding the experience of always almost winning (enjoying the anticipation of possibly winning the item in every battle with this particular enemy)—but it does so by building this anticipation on top of a secure foundation of regular, dependable (stratified) progression, aka the wider "accretions quest." This quest draws its energy from the reliability of the improvement—not *just* from the surprise of randomly winning a rare reward.

Role-playing games comprise innumerable creative means of offering players tiny flecks of *permanent* security. Were accretions capable of being lost, then accruing more would actually increase the perceived cost of a potential loss, and increase the anxiety attached to such an outcome. This is why the accretion means significantly less in a "Roguelike," or a genre of games ostensibly structured like an RPG, but where death is permanent (a feature somewhat redundantly termed, "permadeath"). In permadeath, all accrued items and abilities are lost forever. In the fantasy of accretions, the *permanent* accrual of a small increment of power or sense of security is a (phantasmatic) transfer from game to player of an ephemeral wish *for* permanence. This wish is covered over by the smallness of each upgrade, and by the periodic experience of vulnerability that exists alongside the increasing stability enjoyed throughout an accretions project. How the accretions fantasy is intricately interwoven with other fantasies in play—especially a tether—is significant for understanding the structure of a wide variety of games (including the RPG), as well as the underlying motivations for the accretions fantasy itself. Games, as a medium, control the careful balance needed by the accretions fantasy by ceding some store of power while, at the same time, ratcheting up the challenges and expectations for progression.[91] Games are also capable of creating a rule-bound space where one experiences invulnerability and uncontested power. Accretions projects build toward this outcome without ever arriving. There is nothing stopping a game from beginning with this

condition. But the fact that very few games ever do reflects the accretion fantasy's "ars poetica," the "secondary revision" of its overt ego-centrism. As this chapter demonstrates, the accretions fantasy offers a profound quiescence that is precariously underpinned by endlessly busy activity, expansion, and growth.

Compared with the many examples of a tether fantasy in everyday life discussed in Chapter 4, there are relatively few examples of an accretions fantasy outside of table-top RPGs (e.g., *Dungeons & Dragons*) and videogames. However, there are some loose analogs in daily life. The fantasy is perhaps gently reflected in "banking" activities that invest part of a present moment in the future. These include time spent training at a gym, practicing a dance routine, or learning one's profession. One *earns* a relaxing evening at home by spending a long day at work, crossing tasks off a list. An accretions experience could also refer to the accumulation of prestige or wealth, taking solace in one's social standing ("resting on one's laurels"). Accretions can also be related to hobby collections, greed, hoarding, or trophy-taking. Hal Foster (1991) points out that the earliest definition of trophy was, "arms of vanquished enemy"— war as "hypertrophy," both in terms of overdeveloped strength, and the reduction of people to trophies (1991: 71). At an extreme, the "fully armored body" of the RPG accretions quest suggests something like what Walter Benjamin calls the "dreamt of metallization of the human body" (Benjamin, 1968: 242), or what Foster's work (in dialog with Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*) refers to as "the (proto)fascist obsession with the body as armor," and with imagining "this armor as a prosthesis that served to shore up a disrupted body image or to support a ruined ego construction" (1991: 66). Foster considers this post-World-War-I bourgeois obsession as, firstly, a disavowal of "physical mutilation," and, secondly, as a desire "to 'prepare' … for a trauma that has already come" (1991: 73).

But in banal, everyday life, the accretions fantasy is a renewed chance to imaginatively associate the forward passage of time with growth in size, stature, and strength— a relationship with time children experience through delay. The fantasy could also be described as having a special imaginary relationship to confidence through make-believe play. Caillois' (1942) description of the emotional power of childhood games involving *hidden treasure* speaks to this relationship. Treasure, he argues, augments a child's sense of self in play, representing power not only in the secrets and autonomy it signifies, but also through the magical affordances (and sense of growth) this treasure brings to the body. Of necessity, the treasure is "brilliant, rare, difficult to acquire"—something taken from the adult sphere, the "odd-ends of adult occupations" (260). Shiny substances are best, such as the "steelie marble," or mercury, the "liquid destroyer of substances," which is stolen "drop by drop, during physics class, risking dread punishment" (Caillois, 1942: 255-6). These treasures reflect, in their form and emotional energy, both the effort exerted to win them, as well as parental prohibitions ("humiliating prohibitions": "don't play with fire, don't pick up knives") regarding the boundaries of play (1942: 259). A videogame like *Pikmin* 2 (2004) stages this pleasure in a strikingly literal manner: the game's goal is to find any such tiny treasures, meaning discarded remnants of consumer culture lying about a garden (what Caillois would call "coin of another realm") and stow them away in your ship's hull. For the average player, many tiny pikmin will die collecting this treasure—or fighting the monsters and avoiding the environmental hazards that surround it. In a different mode of play, players can summon these collected objects before the game's virtual camera simply in order to gaze at them ("brilliant, rare, difficult to acquire") and turn them around as they glitter in the game's simulated sunlight.

That this play mode in *Pikmin 2*—where one pauses the forward progression of the game and contemplates, through visual inspection, the treasures one has collected— is firmly to the *side* of the game's primary quest helps put Caillois in dialog with recent queer theory on the figure of the child, specifically Kathryn Bond Stockton's notion of "sideways growth." Stockton describes the category of the child as "queered" (made strange) by both money and delay. With respect to the former, Stockton asks, "what kind of money, what coin of the realm, do children grasp? Is there an obvious economy of candy, with libidinal pleasures of consumption and destruction?" (2009: 5). Being excluded from most adult categories of economic exchange seems to set the stage for trade in the "coin of another realm"—which for Stockton is blissful indulgence in candy ("Bataille for kids"), but which might also be thought of as Caillois' hidden treasure. And Stockton conceives of the delay facing children as "their supposed gradual growth, their suggested slow unfolding, which, unhelpfully, has been relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence, 'growing up') toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness" (2009: 4). She describes as a central drama to childhood, "their propensity for growing astray inside the delay that defines who they 'are.' Children grow sideways as well as up—or so I will say—in part because they cannot according to our concepts advance to adulthood until we say it's time" (2009: 6). Insofar as the accretions fantasy is a kind of simulation, what it gives concrete value to through rules is precisely a kind of growth.

Stockton is interested in sideways (or backwards) growth that is unacknowledged within hetero-reproductive frameworks of growing up. This kind of growth is particularly helpful for thinking about the "growth" of fantasy alongside the structural support of entertainment media like games. As is discussed in Chapter 4, Salman Akhtar argues that the "preoedipal" tether fantasy persists *alongside* the subsequent permutations of the Oedipus complex—if the tether fantasy could be said to grow (and the proliferation of tether videogame genres seems to suggest this is possible), then such growth would seem to constitute a queer sort of sideways growth. Since separation-individuation is supposed to be largely resolved in childhood, its persistence beyond that would be precisely the kind of unacknowledged or "ghostly" growth that doesn't seem to contribute to "growing up."

Seeing the accretions fantasy as a sort of sideways growth would require reading against the grain of its seeming obsession with getting bigger and stronger. But the fantasy also seems to have built-in and self-imposed delay mechanism, where it expresses power by slowly shoring up weakness, deferring the assumed endpoint of invulnerability. It is helpful how Stockton thinks through Derrida's notion of "delay as the inescapable effect of our reading along a chain of words (in a sentence, for example),"

> where meaning is delayed, deferred, exactly because we read in sequence, go forward in a sentence, not yet knowing what words are ahead of us, while we must take the words we have passed with us as we go, making meaning wide and hung in suspense. What kinds of thoughts about growth emerge when key material issues from childhood (children's legally enforced delays) intersect with theorized notions of words? (Stockton, 2009: 4)

The "wide and hung" suspension of the videogame's accretions quest is also predicated on a "legally enforced delay" written into the rules of the game. It isn't just that new meanings (and experiences of sideways growth) occur for players in this suspension—so too does the assumed verticality of the fantasy change: its mission to grow up, its continual progression toward better and stronger items and character stats, when matched with similarly ratcheted up enemy strengths, instead becomes a matter of slowly finding a sense of security (a different kind of

growth, perhaps) in a situation of deferred or suspended upward progression. In short, the accretions game creates a space within temporal delay for imagining other kinds of growth and empowerment.

Caillois argued that by hiding treasured objects, the playing child "assures his own life and stows it safely away," "[basing] his personality on the possession of this imaginary secret," which allows for new bodily affordances (1942: 258). In the act of hiding,

> …the power invested in these objects enables you to go beyond what is normally possible: it permits you to disappear at will, to paralyze from a distance, to subdue without a struggle, to read thoughts, and to be carried in an instant wherever you want to go. (1942: 257)

In Caillois' sense, hiding treasure conceals a piece of the child's fledgling identity so that fantasies of empowerment can be occasioned through play, based in the possession of a secret space freed from adult oversight, a consolidation of the self that is protected from scrutiny—or that, in its magical function, subdues such scrutiny. The hiding game where a forbidden object is "guarded in the crook of a tree or locked in a sunken vessel" (1942: 257) can serve as the basis for a tether fantasy about making brave ventures into the adult realm from a point of security. But the notion of having removed a piece of one's vulnerability (and hidden it somewhere secret) is more accretion than tether.

As Caillois suggests about the material and aesthetic qualities of the child's magical treasures, there is something in the accretions fantasy that prevents the treasure from being reduced to a mere instrument of progression. In its luster and power to enthrall, the treasure represents thrill and taboo, magic and escape. The body behind an accretions project shines with a totemic appeal that aids empowering identifications, and becomes the very treasure the player protects and which, in turn, offers fantasies of transcendence ("go[ing] beyond what is normally possible"). Contra the discussion in Chapter 1 of psychoanalytic theories of preserving play and fantasy by interiorizing it (internal object-relations and body memory), here the secret is housed elsewhere, far outside a body, which, in turn, escapes feelings of vulnerability.

Whereas a tether fantasy tends to shift identification away from the literal body of the avatar (the body becomes projected onto external boundaries demarcating safe from dangerous space), the accretions fantasy often (though not always) operates in tandem with the avatar's body, which becomes the primary site for the investment of accrued power. The body of the avatar stands in for this power, and sometimes is made to appear equivalent with it. From a game design perspective, employing the avatar's body as the site of identification for an accretions fantasy helps ease tension between story and game, so that identifying with the fiction figure in plot means identifying with the process of becoming stronger, more secure, better fortified, more agile and better equipped. But the accretions project can bring about a kind of dispersed identification as well. If, as scholars of embodiment suggest, all identification is *bodily*, then play fantasy demonstrates how the player's body does not always correlate to the fictional body in the game. Sometimes (in transcendence) the body reflects the internalization of a wider field of spatiotemporal relations; sometimes (in tether) embodied participation is mapped onto the boundaries that separate inside from outside; and sometimes (in accretion) the body is dispersed across every space in the game, waiting to be gathered and added to a growing sense of security.

The Bodily Accretion: the Decorator Crab, the Corvette, and the Dispersal of the Self

Fleming (1996), Kinder (1991), and Jenkins (1995, 1998) all challenge the notion that players identify directly with the fictional representation of the avatar. For Jenkins, there is an

underlying narrative, a *second* narrative that represents the motivation of play (exploring new worlds) and subverts the "surface narrative" (Princess rescue plot) (1995, 1998). For Fleming and Kinder, the player's capacity to engage the game through its geometry or "play" challenges the rigid fixity of subject positions still associated with narrative identification. This dissertation establishes that identification in a videogame stems from the player's engagement with a fantasy in play—Caillois describes play as "imagination and conduct" bound together, serving as "doubles, [lending] each other mutual support" (Caillois, 1942: 255). One identifies with play, is gripped and compelled by it, when there occurs this combination of "posture" and "belief," both of which Caillois suggests stem "from the same source" and "act jointly" in play (255). The conscious fantasies described in this research are designed to reflect that shared source for imagination and conduct in videogame play. But play is dynamic, and identification shifts as play stretches over long periods—sometimes grounded in the graphical depiction of virtual bodies, and sometimes eschewing the notion of body altogether. In a tether fantasy, the body is threatened and safe; one identifies with the oscillation between these states. In an accretions fantasy, the body (or a substitute) makes good a lack through the accrual of power from the world; one identifies with the process of *becoming powerful*.

      Shigeru Miyamoto (famed Nintendo developer, creator of Mario, Zelda, Star Fox, etc.) characterizes the RPG as a "system" in which "you are completely bound hand and foot and can't move" (qtd. in Kohler, 2004: 88). No amount of skill or virtuoso play can change this situation— gone entirely is the capacity to leap beyond one's bounds at the heart of a transcendence fantasy. Miyamoto views the initial helplessness of the protagonist and the lack of options generally available at the beginning of RPGs as harsh and arbitrary constraints: "only gradually, as your character gains powers, do you become able to move your hands, your feet… you come untied slowly. And in the end, you feel powerful" (88). It makes sense that Miyamoto would conceive of strength as a freedom of movement, since his games are credited with popularizing the platformer genre, and therefore are emblematic of bodily transcendence in play. But this conception of the RPG, in which a weak protagonist slowly becomes unshackled according to a pre-determined schedule of level-ups, tests Dan Fleming's argument about videogame identification. Fleming suggests, specifically in reference to platformers, that, "it is not that one identifies with Mario (he's too minimal a figure) so much as that one begins to feel like a powerful intervening force on his behalf" (Fleming, 1996: 190). When the accretions quest gets under way, it isn't so much that the player enjoys more power or spatiotemporal or bodily *control* (hands and feet becoming "untied slowly"). Rather, the player-character itself (the avatar, the protagonist) becomes a container for a range of powers and abilities. The player is not a powerful force that, all-at-once, due to expert timing and reflexes, rescues the game's protagonist from a bottomless pit. Instead, identification in an RPG is indirect, a displaced pleasure in watching another gradually *becoming* powerful, a sensation felt mostly (if not entirely) at the moment of change (less weakness). If a character stops getting stronger, that character becomes difficult to identify with in an accretions quest. Simply *being* powerful loses its meaning in this fantasy.

      For example, at the outset of *Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon* (2009), Jagen, a character in the player's party, is far stronger than all the other characters. Relying on Jagen early in the game makes the early chapters relatively easy. But since Jagen begins a class above everybody else (i.e., he begins at a much higher level), he gains very little experience when defeating enemies. There is for this reason a built-in incentive to avoid over-using Jagen: if the player uses only this character in combat, all the others will fail to develop and realize their potential, which (not

incidentally) is to eventually far surpass Jagen in stat development. In other words, it is *wasteful* to over-use Jagen. Not every RPG offers this choice between using the already-powerful character and using a much weaker character with greater potential to improve—but this does represent a visible (or self-aware) example of the tension between *becoming* and *being* strong, between the forestallment of arrival and premature arrival, in accretions play.

An accretions fantasy's sense of *becoming* can be concentrated in the image of the avatar's body. But, like a tether fantasy, the accretions project also disperses the player's identification over the game's broader field of play. What matters for the accretions fantasy (aside from the graphical depiction of treasure) is how the game defines power. Often, the game produces a tension by introducing an overly difficult enemy, treacherous stretch of land, or an inaccessible but visible passageway—all of which are encountered before the player is prepared to surpass them, leading to a sense of lack. This tension (this lack) is then ameliorated in moments of accretion, reduced a tiny bit at a time. Eventually, it is as if the player (better armored and capable of reaching new places on the map) takes up ownership over the game's inhibiting factors, leading to empowerment through accretion (which is always predicated, first, on lack). The accretions game defines power as the permanent, marginal correction of lack. The promise of this permanent strengthening is spread, piecemeal, over the entire game's many spaces. In games like the *Legend of Zelda* series (popular from the mid-1980s through today), virtual spaces aren't just graphical representations of geography and architecture; they also possess secrets, treasures hidden beneath the landscape's surface—fairy fountains, pieces of heart, rupees, etc,—made sense of as pieces of the player split as if by Zeus in Plato's *Symposium* (but more complexly fragmented than what is possible along Oedipal lines of sexual difference).

RPGs typically have at least some narrative component, and are in many cases among the more narrative-heavy games. The accretions avatar tends to serve a specific function in narrative, often in stories about protagonists with humble beginnings who grow stronger and enjoy expanded capacities during play. But if a narrative tether fantasy highlights spatial tensions (e.g., inside and outside, near and far), then a narrative accretions fantasy tends to pull diegetic space into the body and image of the avatar as a site where power resides. Accretions games that concentrate this accumulation of power in the space of the avatar can be broken down into at least two narrative categories: objects accrue to bodies according to the outside world's logic (which I term the "decorator crab" body), or they accrue to a logic implicit in the body itself (which I term "Corvette" body). Finally, in an accretions fantasy, power is not always expressed as a function of the hero's body. In accretion games that distribute power over a series of menus or many bodies in play, one could say that player identification is more consistently dispersed throughout play.

"Decorator crab" accretions games employ concentrated identification according to an external logic. In such games, the space of the game exerts a pressure on its protagonist, who becomes like the eponymous sea creature which, feeling vulnerable, affixes anemones, sponges, and rocks to its shell so as to acquire the characteristics of surrounding environments (defensive mimesis) and guard against predators like the octopus, which the anemone will sting. In *decorator crab* accretion games, play brings about diverse accretions that never really assemble into a coherent whole. These objects may reflect their environments of origin or different gameplay mechanisms assembled in a way that cannot cohere into a unified play-identity—instead, they persist like trinkets, mementos of places visited. A popular example is Link, from the *Legend of Zelda* series. Each venture into a dungeon garners souvenirs that pile up on an

inventory screen. At times, Link is a sort of relay for these items, a jack-of-all-trades who represents a vast array of capacities for tackling the puzzles of the game's dungeons. At other times, he is unified with sword and shield, attacking enemies or roaming the field. The player moves through diegetic space as Link, but all the while holds secret power tucked away somewhere else, like a concealed weapon that belies Link's generally meager exterior. From humble beginnings with empty inventory screens, players are propelled into an extensive collection quest by a sense of lack, seeking power from the spaces they encounter. Initial feelings of lack are piqued in games like *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1997) by premature encounters with the game's powerful antagonist. Like the "narcissistic scar" Freud says results from a child's loss of perceived omnipotence over the world, the sting from this premature encounter with the main antagonist reverberates across the entire accretions project as a kind of magical continuity with game space, the desire to melt away and hide the self in a world that threatens and challenges, and to constitute a new ideal in this world's image. In the process, the game's virtual spaces ultimately provide a variety of ways for the player-character to prevail by taking pieces of that world into the self. The decorator crab fantasy promotes a feeling of confidence about going out into the world by forging harmony with it. The "Corvette" accretions fantasy, in contrast, involves negating the world as resistance.

"Corvette" accretions games employ concentrated identification according to an internal logic. In the Corvette accretions fantasy, objects are pulled from the game-world and assembled upon (and stylistically integrated with) the avatar's body. The best example may be Samus Aran (of the *Metroid* series) and her shiny suit of armor. If Link is an eclectic crustacean, then Samus is a well-oiled machine, a tank with a polished coating. Instead of hiding treasure in a menu (*Zelda*) or in a chest inside a player's base (*Minecraft*, *Terraria*), in the Corvette fantasy the body itself becomes a treasure, a fetishized emblem of power that stands apart from the surrounding world. All of Samus's treasures mesh neatly in the "Chozo" armor system, accruing to an aestheticized sense of self both in the body's image and in a matching set of gameplay actions. New Corvette accretions tend to relate to (reinforce, augment) one another according to a pre-planned and cohesive strategy, as component pieces of a coherent whole. Occasionally, games employing this fantasy contrive to explain how such perfectly suited items that fit exactly onto the protagonist's body can be scattered around the world just waiting to be recovered in a collection quest.

In *Metroid Prime* (2002), for example, Samus loses several suit functions in an explosion during the prologue and the rest of the game is largely about re-establishing those los abilities. Accruing largely means growing *backwards* to an original state of plenitude that frames and directs a present state of lack. Whereas Link bears traces of the worlds he encounters as he grows stronger, Samus' quest to re-acquire her ideal self reveals the extent to which the world is already designed for her. Samus' body becomes a key, morph ball sliding perfectly into mechanisms that seem to have no diegetic motivation. The game's world and its play are bent to the demands of an accretions fantasy. And the game's most rewarding moments are often the change in Samus' appearance after a new accretion—the warm glow of the Varia suit and the Gravity Suit's cool blue hue. When players aren't encountering themselves in the environment (as bits of power spread out, "wide and hung in suspense"), *Metroid Prime* takes every chance it can to show Samus' glossy suit: elevator rides, morph-ball transition animations, suit upgrades, etc. During these moments, players float outside of Samus' first-person POV (the camera system employed during most gameplay) to marvel at the spectacle of her armor. The body is lost to visual possession when control is regained and first-person viewpoint restored. At this moment,

the body shifts from a glossy emblem to an unseen but unstoppable combustive force—and players then resume seeking that lost object perpetually, piece by piece, in the game's many exotic spaces.

The distinction between decorator crab and Corvette may seem subtle, but it is important for thinking of the role fantasy plays in game genre. For example, it is almost exactly the difference, respectively, between the original *Mega Man* series and the *Mega Man X* spin-off series, a shift that represented a significant kind of generic growth. The original Mega Man acquires the weapon of each boss he defeats. While some weapons are useful throughout, each is intended as a weakness for one of the eight unique bosses. Switching weapons changes the color of Mega Man's outfit from blue to a variety of pastel colors, but the list of weapons does more to mark the places Mega Man has visited than to accrue to his core image—their power is a diversity spread over the game's menus, present in his own body only one at a time. As in *Zelda* games, bosses are like puzzles, and winning depends on the tactical deployment of one weapon among many. In the *Mega Man X* series, however, in addition to the collection of boss weapons, players also find upgrades predestined for the protagonist, X, hidden long ago by his inventor. These upgrades significantly alter X's ability to act in the world. From reducing damage received to altering the frequency with which he can dash or jump in the air, these upgrades accrue directly to the hero's body in play as well as in appearance. X does not so much reflect his past environments as he builds an idealized version of himself.[92]

While the accretions game can fixate on the virtual body as an image of power, it does not always do so. In most RPG's, an abstract and quantifiable substance mediates between the player and the game world, appropriating identification by progressing over time while the hero's body remains unchanged. When a character levels up or finds an equippable item, the new accretion prompts a visit to a menu where the modification of power can be visualized, weighed, and organized in relation to other items and stats. A player withdrawing to the menu from the game's three-dimensional, diegetic space, encounters his or herself in a kind of numerical specularization. Identification is caught in that relay between the diegetic field of play (withholding accretions) and the menu where players squirrel away what has been acquired. These trips are often the most exciting and rewarding part of the accretions game—into the menu to unlock an anticipated ability, and back again to the field, for playful, undirected experimentation, which is never fully divorced from those first steps toward the next accretion. Games like *Diablo II* (2000), *Dungeon Hunter: Alliance* (2009), *X-Men Legends* (2004), *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* (2006), *Castle Crashers* (2008), *Dungeon Siege* (2002), and even *Paper Mario* (2001) use an attribute-point system to coerce players into the menus, again and again, to participate in the modification of their avatar's burgeoning set of abilities.[93] While not all genres of games use menu screens in this manner, and not all menu navigation involves an accretions fantasy,[94] it is the case that RPGs almost always employ menu navigation as a means of dwelling on the accretions project. Were the mission of the entertainment industry to merge cinema with videogames the sole impetus for design in the industry, cinematic games would dispense with menu systems altogether.[95] The reverse seems to be the case, even in many of most "cinematic" games, such as the *Mass Effect* or *Dragon Age* series, in which narrative consistently takes a back seat during play's extended middles to the accretion fantasy's perusal of player stats and organization of inventory lists.

In an RPG, the player's energy spreads across the game's geography during the many hours that make up tether and accretions play: heroes explore new areas, defeat the foes found there, and draw strength, gear, and enhanced abilities from those encounters. A space that, at the

game's outset, seemed wild and daunting can, upon a later return, feel domesticated. But some games articulate this sense of mastery more directly than others by replacing the solitary avatar with an unadulterated fantasy of power spreading over space. In Risk-like games, such as *Galcon* (2009), virtual territory is disputed, captured and applied to the player's sense of self, which grows in strength as the player's banner blooms across the screen. Occupying more territory means one's armies generate more quickly. Players issue instructions to mobs of forces, such as the plant creatures in *Pikmin* (2001) that swarm whatever lies in their path. Tower defense games like *Plants Vs. Zombies* (2009), *Tower Madness* (2010), or *Orcs Must Die II* (2012) involve stationing a variety of sentries on a map to prevent invasive forces from reaching their goal. Defense games may seem like the inverse of a fantasy of becoming more powerful by spreading out, but as more weapons are assembled, the player's gauntlet often touches every corner of the map, built outward from a central space of vulnerability. At the game's outset, and when an enemy comes close to the protected area, an inverse *lifeline* tether can become activated. But as the player's influence spreads, an accretions fantasy takes over. The same dispersal of power across space founds the tactical RPG, such as *Final Fantasy Tactics* (1998) or *Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn* (2007). Both games place significant emphasis on the modification of the bodies of heroes. But, since there are many bodies (each allowed only one turn per round), players are forced to identify with an interface that directs large groups of bodies to deliberate points on the map. In the beginning, perhaps, the team is concentrated in one corner of the battlefield—but maximizing control over space means reaching out to meet the exigencies of battle in every direction. As is the case with tower defense games, when space itself becomes grafted to the player's sense of power—when spreading out builds an unstoppable momentum—then *lifeline* and *home-base* tether fantasies give way to an accretions fantasy.

Moreover, the strategy genre—including RTT ("real-time tactics") and RTS ("real-time strategy") games—perhaps more effectively than any set of games so far mentioned subordinates geographic space to an expression of accrued skills, enhancements and power. Players conquer the map, striving for bigger cities, vaster civilizations, and more armies. The more land a player occupies, the faster resources flow into the coffers, and the more the player is in control of global events. It is difficult to see a tether fantasy in RTS games; what might be the tentative expansion of a home base initially—deciding to cut down a nearby forest or build a bridge to explore resources across a river—eventually gives way to a steamroller accretions project that can never again contemplate its own smallness or tolerate any limitations to its expansion. In the beginning of RTS play, a feeling of vulnerability simultaneously inaugurates a tether and an accretions project. But, as the game progresses, the accretions project compels play to the ends of the map so that the self (through a dispersal of identification) is once again spread over and continuous with all that is known. This fantasy is only reined in by starting a new round of play.

Quiescence and a Trellis of Disguise

A tether fantasy is *unambitious* in its pursuit of wish-fulfilling patterns of containment and release, or contraction and expansion. Because the tether's wish can remain hidden or "off screen," it often avoids the need for disguise that Freud ("The Creative Writer and Daydreaming") described as necessary in play and fantasy to protect against feelings of shame (for ambitious, erotic, ego-centric, and childish desires). In this way, the tether can mostly bypass the "second censorship" exerted on other conscious fantasies. Again, clinical psychoanalysts use the term, "second censorship," to describe the pressure to avoid shame that is applied to conscious fantasies before they can be openly enjoyed. This pressure is distinct from the primary,

super-egoic censorship, which acts against repressed impulses (*unconscious* fantasy) in maintenance of ego integrity.[96] That the tether fantasy moves with such facility between different kinds of media may be correlated with this censorial approbation, or the open manner in which the fantasy can be enjoyed.

The accretions fantasy may, on the other hand, pose representational difficulties for the player's ego, requiring a special framework that disguises its wish-fulfillment in games. Not only does the accretion's collection quest express an ambitious ego fantasy of becoming more powerful, but this ambitious ego fantasy covers up a wish that might be described as a dangerous reflex seeking the eradication of all disturbances, a death drive, what Tarlow and Bauman call an "eternal suspension, and thus a perverse victory over bankruptcy".[97] One could say that, at base, the accretions fantasy is a symbolic pursuit of quiescence, a wish for things to remain constant, for the player to be able to live forever, to shore up the body, the family, the world, or experience itself. In the special structure of an accretions fantasy, this desire for constancy is expressed in a variety of busy activities, so that always doing something becomes expressive of doing nothing. This paradox is the result of the revision and disguise a constancy wish undergoes in order to become the accretions fantasy.

Laplanche and Pontalis define the "principle of constancy" as the

> Principle according to which the psychical apparatus tends to keep the quantity of excitation in itself at as low a level—or, at any rate, as constant a level—as possible. Constancy is achieved on the one hand through the *discharge* of the energy already present, and, on the other hand, by *avoidance* of whatever might increase the quantity of excitation and *defence* against any such increase that does occur. (Laplanche and Pontalis, original emphasis, 1968: 341-2)

They link the constancy principle to the Nirvana principle without collapsing the two: the Nirvana principle expresses "an echo of the idea of the death instinct," and thus "must be understood as something more than a law of constancy or of homeostasis: it is, rather, the radical tendency to reduce excitation to zero-point" (1968: 273). This distinction between emptying out and maintaining homeostasis would become analogous, in Freud's later writings, to the distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, respectively; it is clearly an important distinction. The accretion fantasy's disguised wish expresses both tendencies, emptying out and maintaining constancy.

At its base, the accretions fantasy seems like a Nirvana wish: each accretion, once stored away and "saved," can never be lost and brings play one step closer to the complete *invulnerability* central to Rank's womb fantasy (which is frequently compared to a wish for the Nirvana state). In this way, Rank's womb fantasy seems to correspond more closely to the accretions fantasy than the tether; the latter always welcomes some degree of vulnerability. Where videogames are concerned, it seems as though new accretions are won from hard work and constant activity, and they push the player forward in narrative progression, often occasioning tense confrontations. And yet, with each new accretion following these tense confrontations, the player becomes more heavily armored or otherwise adrift from the game's perils. Nothing really in life offers this kind of security. As with what Kathryn Bond Stockton says of "sideways growth," one might say that the accretions fantasy is "something related by but not reducible to the death drive; something that locates energy, pleasure, vitality, and (e)motion in the back-and-forth connections and extensions that are not reproductive" (2009: 13). She refers to these "connections and extensions that are not reproductive" as "moving suspensions

and shadows of growth" (2009: 13)—and this might strangely be the best way to describe the accretions fantasy: a shadowy growth, a moving suspension.

The accretion fantasy's guarantee of a kind of security (but within a framework where these feelings of security are always moving out of reach), is useful for addressing Galloway's (2006: 6) assertion that videogames like *Dope Wars* have more in common with accounting software like *Quicken* than with traditional board games. It is true that, structurally, taking stock of one's cash, debt, guns, and supply of heroin in the fantasy *Dope Wars* is not entirely unlike putting one's own expenditures and assets in order with a program like *Quicken*, where one can see rates of spending and earning, calculate interest on savings, make projections, etc. A key difference, though, is that one feels more *secure* in the (hopefully) far more precarious business expenditures in *Dope Wars*, where players can, in the course of a game, start with very little and yet still come to feel powerful and established, with money and influence stowed away and protected by accretions mechanisms. Part of how an accretion is assured this safe keeping is in the videogame's absolute legislation, its unambiguous dictation over the law of the land—in short, its very status as a game, separate from reality, where one can flirt with gaining or losing power without risk of either. It is as much an enactment of possession itself—the fantasy of truly having something that you can never lose—as it is a certain kind of possession that corrects weakness.

In the case of most videogames, this possession is embodied, or somehow related to bodily vulnerability, and thus correcting lack has become the "body project" par excellence for a videogame era. Like Freud's death instincts, bodily accretions in an accretion game "give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new" (Freud, 1920: 46). This ancient goal is to "[become] inorganic once again"—based on Freud's assumption that "everything living dies for *internal* reasons" and that the "final goal of all organic striving" should be some "state of things" which has been already attained, or an "*old* state of things" (Ibid., 45-6). The inorganic material represents, for Freud, life material emptied of all its tensions. This notion is reflected in the refrain of the Iron Islands and the Drowned God religion in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and, subsequently, the *Game of Thrones* television series: "What is dead may never die"—a sentiment accompanying a severe kind of religious rite, a baptism in which the servant is held underwater until they drown, and are reborn stronger ("with salt," "with stone," "with steel") if they revive on the shore and spit up the water.

It is a regular occurrence in accretions videogames that new accretions make the player's hero closer to this goal of becoming *inorganic*: hardening the hero's skin by turning it into substances like diamond, stone, or metal, or else, by equipping strong armor, making the body like these substances through analogy. But beyond bodily hardenings, accretions videogames have found myriad means of converting fragile organicity into more stable substances. As play progresses, a hostile force's capacity to disturb the player, to make those "hit points" fluctuate, to knock the avatar back, or confer a status ailment, always lessens. Near the end of many accretions games, enemies that were once a threat (perhaps even a boss) can no longer inflict any damage at all.

And yet the player rarely feels what could be called the end-effect of the Nirvana principle's "death instinct," the instantiation of Freud's provocative (but provisional) hypothesis that "*the aim of all life is death*," since the Nirvana principle is usually covered in play by something more closely resembling a constancy principle. In other words, in an accretions fantasy, the desire for quiescence is never expressed as such; instead, it is disguised behind the

most active material of gameplay: collecting, hacking, wandering, shooting, speaking, buying and selling. The accretions fantasy might best be described as a wish for quiescence entirely covered over by a series of pressures, disruptions, and exposures. And a tether fantasy serves as the main representative of these excitations that intersect and challenge the accretion fantasy's Nirvana wish. By combining with a tether fantasy, the increased protection of the accretion is always paired with the challenge of direr tether scenarios. In this way, a stable middle-ground is struck somewhere between the gameplay's anxious peaks (when the tether is most "extended") and calming valleys (diminished tension when the new accretion boosts the player's stats). In the RPG, newfound strength ultimately leads to a renewed sense of weakness in new spaces in the game.

The constancy wish is a disguise that allows the player to pursue, in one strata of activity, ever-greater power and stability while, in the other strata, the player can feel consistently challenged and threated (narrative events, looming bosses, tense tether scenarios). To be more precise about how this combination of tether and accretions leads to the situation of "constancy," it is helpful to return briefly to the definition above, based on two distinct but related processes: "Constancy is achieved on the one hand through the *discharge* of the energy already present, and, on the other hand, by *avoidance* of whatever might increase the quantity of excitation and *defence* against any such increase that does occur" (Laplanche and Pontalis, original emphasis, 341-2).[98] First, balancing the accretion with the tether creates constancy as *discharge* in the sense that the tether's build-up of tension is released at the moment the boss is defeated in the dungeon's deepest level, in a burst of accretions. Any tension the player encounters in play eventually becomes discharged in the reward of the accretion (not getting anything "good" for beating the boss can feel anticlimactic). Every accretion has a double value: as release of tether tension but also as permanent acquisition and modification of the player's capacity to act on game space. While the discharge of tension is large but temporary (often exciting but must be repeated throughout play), the modification of player capacity is small but permanent. By focusing attention and energy on the discharge of the tether tension, a glimpse of infinity escapes with each accretion.

Second, constancy is *avoidance* in the RPG in the sense that players will avoid areas that are known to be "beyond reach" in terms of the strength of enemies, availability of restorative potions, etc. Those areas will be engaged when the threats contained become manageable, when the "quantity of excitation" or challenge falls to within an acceptable range. Building up one's stats in an already mastered area in an RPG so that new areas are less challenging is called "grinding," and one's willingness to engage in this activity primarily reflects one's preferred degree of tether tension, or that acceptable range of excitation in exposure.

Finally, constancy in an RPG is *defense* in a plainly visible way. But it is not pure defense—not a static defense, or total defense (as in that complete return to inorganic substance, the total loss of vulnerability, at which point the word, "defense," loses its meaning). Nor does defense mean avoidance—it refers more to having something like a "stimulus shield," the capacity to deal with threatening stimuli when encounters are unavoidable. In an RPG, this might best correspond to a feeling of confidence that must, in play, be constantly buttressed, modified and expanded. It is not, after all, true self-confidence, but a fantasy about confidence built on feelings of anxiety and weakness, like Theweleit's fractured fascist who never really formed a coherent ego, and so must supplement himself with an armored or mechanized body. *Defense* in a constancy wish involves maintaining a tension, always both armoring the self and pushing forward into danger (testing the armor). The promise of new accretions means no rest, no

satisfaction with current inventory; accretions games are characterized in plot and play by a compulsive forward movement.

The Nirvana wish can hide behind the "constancy principle" in an accretions quest precisely because strength (*defence*) is conveyed as an inverse to lack—lack is the only feeling the games can produce directly. Brushes with defeat can produce a genuine panic in the player. But were enemies to fall in droves at the swing of the sword, the game would seem without challenge as an agonistic experience, which would limit its ability to act as an accretions fantasy. In short, *agôn*'s demand for conflict is at odds with the Nirvana wish's reduction of all tensions to zero. Strength can, as a result, only be enjoyed as an escape from initial feelings of weakness, as a hampering of feelings of vulnerability. Feelings of weakness inaugurate an accretions fantasy, but they also run ahead of the fantasy as a subtle anxiety about future encounters. The moment no further opposition or threat remains in the game is the moment all those accrued objects lose their magical allure, becoming useless. Being the strongest one in the game is entirely anathema to the accretions fantasy. This moment of "being" (as opposed to the game's long process of "becoming") always signals the accretion fantasy's outer boundaries, its true ending. In many RPGs, the final boss (of the main storyline) is not the strongest enemy—players must continue playing, finding secrets and levelling up, long after "beating" the game (finishing its story) before facing the strongest character. Beating this character (e.g., Culex from *Super Mario RPG*) signals the true end of the game, and the presence of such a character in many RPGs is a kind of acknowledgement to the sadness of endings. That the game must eventually end produces a tension, a truth that must be hidden and deferred during play. Along these lines, while the tether fantasy tends to connect virtual spaces with the space of play, lending itself to *nesting*—or the interweaving of fantasy experiences across media and sensory modalities—the accretions fantasy tends to fixate on gameplay to the exclusion of the notion of an outside beyond the collection quest.

The structure of the accretions fantasy is complex, a cover for a cover. That new powers tend to allow the player to rise to the exigencies of the situation in play demonstrates a constancy principle and covers over the Nirvana wish to negate the world as difference. The need for disguise (to never acknowledge the death drive behind the accretions fantasy) lends a potential explanation for the relative scarcity of the accretions fantasy (historically), limited even now mostly to iterative, game-like frames. The accretion game's "ars poetica" depends on a number of formal qualities seemingly unique to games.

The RPG's use of narrative progression produces a division in form which often assists the accretions fantasy, allowing for two distinct strata of activity: one (gameplay) pursuing incremental release of feelings of power and stability and another (narrative) tending to the demands for exposure and disruption made by the *lifeline* tether moments. The tether fantasy disrupts the accretion's wish for stability. The Nirvana wish remains tonally opposed to the tether fantasy's turbulence, but the constancy wish (a cover for Nirvana) enters into dialog with the tether, finding equilibrium. This division allows a Nirvana wish to pupate in the background of a variety of tether scenarios, so that as the game's narrative leads players to more and more dangerous places, the accretions quest assembles a variety of safeguards to mediate these spaces, such as health potions, spells, or special items that protect against one-hit kills or allow for instant egress from battle.

RPG's tend to pile as much busy activity on the player as players are deemed capable of handling. The perceived outer threshold for our capacity to take in this complexity has been greatly expanded by recent mobile, free-to-play games working on an accretions model to

"hook" players and monetize their desire to complete sets (like Japanese "gacha box" slot-machine-like mechanisms). But even in traditional RPGs from the 1990s and 2000s, players must navigate maps and parse conversations to satisfy both main and side quests, perform near-constant menu work involving item and power organization, track complex upgrade chains, decide between difficult trade-offs, trade among several forms of currency, and sometimes even acquire and provide shops with both raw material and the monetary cost to forge new weapons. *Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift* (2008), with its intermeshing of a random-drop loot system with an equipment-based, job-skill system represents a perfect example of tedium made fun in service of an accretions fantasy. Players collect bits of loot from a variety of places (as random monster drops, as rewards for completing quests, or other contests) which are then used to craft new items which, when equipped by the character of a certain "job" (e.g., fighter, defender, dark mage, etc.), allows that character to gradually learn new abilities (magical attacks or special stat-boosting effects)—and once they are learned, that character will always have access to those moves, allowing for new equipment to be sought out and equipped. In this system, players are always seeking loot, forging weapons, buying weapons, equipping and training for skills, learning skills, trading equipment, and changing jobs—and this is just one leg of the broader game's busy player activities. The sheer complexity of these actions, and the ways in which many small tasks and incremental improvements are precisely specified, express the unique relationship between the accretion fantasy and games.[99]

Narrative Accretions

The trellis for an accretions fantasy in a role-playing videogame centers the player in a busy collection quest, which usually contains dozens of hours of seemingly tedious, repetitive, even work-like behavior. But when the fantasy appears within principally narrative media, the collection quest itself is usually elided. In fact, the accretions fantasy in narrative media tends to emerge through villainous activity, the squirrelling away of immeasurable wealth, power, or life itself—and it helps characterize the villain as corrupt or unnatural, and set the hero apart as a vulnerable underdog, as someone (by contrast) *unprepared* for the looming confrontation. If heroes collect things in these narratives, it usually means unraveling some inappropriately accrued power, an anti-collection quest. For example, the villain Apocalypse both accrues new mutant powers (by stealing the bodies and abilities of others) and "collects" his *four horsemen* in the first half of *X-Men: Apocalypse* (2016). The villain Sylar in *Heroes* (2006-2010) is compulsively driven to acquire new powers—a process undertaken by cutting open his victims' skulls and examining their brain, post-mortem. The villain Orochimaru in *Naruto* (2002) acquires new host bodies for his soul, a process that renders him invulnerable—he has no body of his own and so cannot be killed. He is also a seeker of forbidden jutsu (his professed reason for wanting to live forever is to continue acquiring this knowledge and power). And, perhaps most notably, Tom Riddle's accretions quest to become the immortal Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series has already taken place before the narrative's first plotted events occur. Readers (along with Harry) learn much later that Voldemort has divided his soul and hidden it within "horcruxes," or seemingly harmless everyday objects, which Harry must, in his own quest, subsequently accrue (and destroy). Though Harry learns a variety of different offensive and defensive spells, he insists on using the relatively weak and simplistic disarming spell ("Expelliarmus") in all his duels. If Harry changes at all in his reverse-accretions quest to destroy Voldemort's horcruxes, then he is weakened and alienated. Voldemort is vilified precisely

because of this compulsion to eradicate all vulnerability; and Harry is characterized as strong for his reliance on friends, and for exposing himself to danger in order to protect others.

Readers and viewers are free to take vicarious pleasure in these often monstrous accretions villains—but there is also doubtlessly a pleasure in identifying against the figure in the fantasy, in opposing the accrual of power, in finding the chink in the armor, bringing the demigod back down to earth. The fantasy is, in any case, as much a fixation on vulnerability as it is the pursuit of its opposite. Thus, players can simultaneously enact their own accretions quest in a game like *Paper Mario*—fighting enemies and accruing star points in order to level up and carry more badges, or else enjoy larger supplies of health (HP) and magical energy for special moves (FP)—while, at the same time, fighting against a villain who, like Voldemort, cannot be killed while his soul resides elsewhere. Tubba Blubba, the third boss of, *Paper Mario* is "invincible" as long as his body's heart remains hidden in a well underneath a windmill, which is locked by a key that Tubba Blubba keeps in a chest in his bedroom. Players must sneak into Tubba Blubba's castle, avoiding any confrontation with him, steal the key while he sleeps, and then race back to unlock the windmill (Blubba in chase) and attack his heart. All the while, players store their own "hearts" away more securely.

The anti-collection quest tends to the wish-fulfilling structure of the fantasy (perhaps even aiding its demands for toning down egocentrism), but also meets the demands of plot. The need for rising tension in narrative climax is at odds with the accretion fantasy's drawn-out, stabilizing collecting process. Both RPG collection quests and modern fictional plots drive toward equilibrium, and arrive there only at the end (on the topic of plot, see Peter Brooks and Gerard Genette).[100] But each makes this journey differently. In RPGs, the accretions fantasy is a game spun over long periods of time, and in which the player's feelings of stability slowly rise with the diverse affordances of accrued powers. Narrative fiction, on the other hand, establishes a tension in plot, which, once begun, is only resolved at the story's climax—a situation which compels readers forward by denying either too easy or early a return to equilibrium. In the RPG, hours of busy but dependably gratifying activity are associated with greater and greater feelings of stability and control. While the games tend to strive for a balance in the structuring of their challenge, it is true that the more power is accrued, the more means there are of escaping harm's way. A steady increase of stability would be the very definition of banality from a narrative point of view, the opposite of "tense," or "rousing" plots filled with unpredictable twists and turns, all building to a dramatic conclusion. The RPG's collection quest, were it transposed directly into narrative, would mean undermining the very tension/pleasure model of popular storytelling.

Narrative cinema has proven no more effective at manifesting a direct accretions fantasy. While reading a lengthy novel can produce a feeling similar to the collection quest's long hours of busy but stabilizing "work," the collection quest itself is too tedious, repetitive, and unmotivated in its duration to pass for plot.[101] Perhaps more importantly, the accretion's numerical expression (one means of its feeling autonomous, stable and trustworthy in fantasy) is too cerebral for action cinema's kinetic and spatial aesthetic. The RPG represents strength and ability through numbers specifying with precision, nuance, and reliability, what has been accrued. It allows players to focus with reliability and precision on the exact amount of change. That even very small amounts can be specified, different items compared and contrasted precisely (often by a fraction of a point of difference), allows the fantasy to pervade nearly every aspect of menu and item organization. But this emphasis on stats works against narrative immersion, and emphasizes the arbitrary rules that bind play and separate it from bare, perceptual reality. The tension between narrative immersion and numerical specification

underlies Warren Specter's recent call for (narrative) games to adopt simulation strategies different from those employed in tabletop RPGs, like character stats and levels.[102] Such a change would undoubtedly aid diegetic immersion, but at the cost of a core pleasure of the accretions genre.

Analogously, while cinematic accretion fantasies do appear in action genres, such as martial arts or other body-training films, the numerical and enacted process of "becoming" is always mostly if not entirely elided in plot. In action cinema, years of training tend to emerge spontaneously; the surprising display of transcendence is a synecdoche for all the concealed work that is shown, at most, in a brief montage sequence. Action films seem to prefer the sudden eruption of a totally hidden power to the meticulous documentation of training and growth. As discussed in Chapter 3, the omitted "work" of bodily training returns at key moments through a bewildering kinetic display. In *Dark City* (1998), for instance, the memories of a lifetime of training are literally injected through a syringe. In fact, *The Matrix* (1999), *Dark City*, *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), *Salt* (2010), *Serenity* (2005), *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (2004), and *The Iron Giant* (1999) are all fairly recent, popular films in which an accretions fantasy is a repressed subtext to the dominant *body-transcendence* fantasy.

Interestingly, the reverse condition—a submerged body-transcendence fantasy beneath an accretions project—is more likely to be true of videogames. *Earthbound* (1994) is an example of an RPG that adopts a *cinematic* body fantasy. Near the end of the game, its hero undergoes a breakthrough and his psychic powers "radically expand."[103] Through a narrative revelation, a pulling together of various memories and experiences, the boy genius unlocks hidden potential, expressed numerically by huge stat jumps. Despite narrative body-transcendence moments like these in videogames, the central pleasure in an accretions fantasy typically involves the steady accumulation of power and stability, a fact which *in both its means and ends* counters convention in action cinema. Specter's wish to dispel the RPG's quiet contemplation misses the point of the fantasy governing that gaming experience.

The genre of anime (Japanese animation) needs special mention for its often meticulous efforts to stimulate an accretions fantasy in its martial arts fighting. Serialized anime like *Naruto* (2002-2007), *Naruto: Shippûden* (2007-present), and *One Piece* (1999-present) actually manage to structure their broader story arcs according to the logic of an accretions project. In the *Naruto* series—which, by the way, shares a striking number of narrative features in common with *Harry Potter*,[104]— an accretions project is organized around the noble pursuit of the protagonist, and the series' long-narrative form allows for seasons-long training sessions honing a particular maneuver that will then, throughout the rest of the series, remain within Naruto's repertoire. His careful acquisition of skills, near the end of the series, eventually vault him beyond what was thought possible in his world. But, like with an RPG, the villain remains several steps (and several orders of magnitude) ahead.

In *One Piece*, a single pirate (Monkey D. Luffy) sets out to conquer the ocean, slowly accruing new crew for his ship (and eventually ship upgrades as well) across dozens of seasons of serialized narrative. In its universe, special power can be attained by consuming "devils' fruit," and the serial is very much organized around this accrual of power and the honing of new techniques and abilities (like *Naruto*). All the while, Luffy and his crew amass pirate bounties from the world government, a kind of tongue-in-cheek stand-in for their experience level in a role-playing game. Enemies are sized up by the amount of their bounty, and the protagonist's small stature belies the large sum offered for his head.

Though a long-running serialized narrative, the television show reflects the accretion logic of a role-playing game in four basic ways: acquiring new maneuvers and fighting skills, amassing larger bounties and reputations on the open sea, acquiring new crew members, and upgrading or acquiring newer and bigger ocean vessels. Narrative tension in the series actually derives from these accretion metrics, most often as the threat of losing that which has been painstakingly gained. Though new crew are added frequently in the early parts of the series, not everybody in the crew has an especially large bounty. The tension demanded of plot often takes the form of tether relations between characters—the weak and strong are separated in complex, months or years-long serialized plots, kept away from the ship (perpetuum mobile tether), and caught in intense, multilayered combat that always pushes nearly every crew member to the brink of death (or beyond). After a major threat is surmounted, the crew finally reunites and shares a tremendous feast, recuperates its energy, and sets out on the ship for the next challenge stronger than before (tethers restored). One of the most tense seasons is one in which no lives are actually threatened, but a scoundrel pirate captain nearly swindles Luffy out of several of his crew in a series of contests (like a Pirate Olympics). The stakes of the face-off take direct aim at the crew as signifiers of stability and security.

A more recent serialized American television show, Nickelodeon's *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008), organizes its story even more tightly around an accretions quest of learning all four methods of "bending," a magical/spiritual capacity to manipulate elements (air, water, earth, fire) and employ them in bodily combat. The Avatar—a unique mediating figure reincarnated upon death, and defined partly by the ability to learn all four kinds of bending—embarks on a collection quest that carefully emphasizes bodily training in relation with each episode's well-choreographed altercations. While Aang, the Avatar, steadily gains confidence in his powers as a master of bending, he remains a child wracked by insecurity and self-doubt (beset by insomnia ahead of his final encounter). Not only is his ultimate battle against the fire lord rather daunting, but, during this fight, his friends are spread out and at great risk. Their own struggles are intercut with (intrude upon/interrupt) the Avatar's showdown. The series' accretions fantasy never provides stability for the viewer, as the collection quest is overwhelmed by feelings of threat and separation. And yet, in a move that reflects the way an RPG might be said to "divide" or "split" player identification—between busy action and a desire to slowly return to a totally inactive (inorganic) state—the avatar is also spiritual position, and comes equipped with an "avatar state," which Aang enters passively, channeling the combined power and training of all previous avatars.

Naruto, *One Piece*, and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* all represent earnest transpositions of accretions into the realm of serialized narrative. *Harry Potter*, in contrast, inverts the accretions fantasy. A more recent anime, *One Punch Man* (2015), both quotes the format of a role-playing game, and parodies it. Its protagonist, Saitama, is like an end-game RPG hero—so over-powered that he kills all opponents with one punch. The disparity in strength is represented by the disintegration of his opponents' bodies, as well as by his utter boredom from lack of challenge. And the series pokes fun at both the impossibility and the inexplicability of his abilities: when asked how he developed such strength, Saitama naively reveals his struggle to find the discipline each day for 100-situps, 100-pushups, 100-squats, and a 10-kilometer run—a workout regiment, his interlocutors suggest, that explains nothing. While the rest of the heroes in *One Punch Man*'s universe struggle against seemingly endless monster attacks, Saitama wanders in search of a challenge, seemingly out of place.

As the production dates of these examples suggest, the use of accretions as a narrative device is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that had previously mostly functioned through ellipsis. It seems that role-playing games have offered a model for addressing the tension between, on one side, the drive to make players feel exposed or threatened (struggle, narrative conflict), and, on the other, the late-stage collection quest's gratifying feelings of stability. Narrative climax in RPGs usually employs a *lifeline* tether at its most extended point; at the end of the story, players are usually farthest from home, most exposed. In these climactic moments, the game enjoys the helpful interference of a tether fantasy, which meets narrative's demands for an oscillation between safe and exposed, which temporarily supersedes the accretions game's continuation toward greater stability.[105] To use an example from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, Aang may have mastered his bending and learned to control his "Avatar state" as an expression of a finished accretions quest—but a series of interlocking tethers destabilize this situation in order for the climax to have compounded tension: all the other intercut battles (involving endearing characters far less powerful) deep within the enemy Fire Nation during a moment when fire-nation powers are cosmically enhanced by a comet flying overhead. *One Piece* also manipulates the tension of a tether fantasy in climactic moments when the near-invincible Monkey D. Luffy— whom, like Saitama, we are sure could defeat any antagonist—is asleep, lost, hypnotized, or trapped under water as his companions near death. This separation of strong and weak and subsequent relationship of stewardship within the accretions party represents a means of deferring the accretions endpoint (by introducing a lifeline tether's tumult) and offers an opportunity for spectators to identify with a *powerful intervening force*. In this sense, this arrangement in narrative reflects something of what Fleming described of videogame identification, where the player (through skill) becomes their own intervening force.

Accretions narratives rely on a sort of bifurcated identification: one part thrill of exposure, one part steady accumulation of power. Engaging in an accretions fantasy means finding a way for part of the self in that division to remain always behind, nested in that safe, familiar place, such as in Caillois' description of the child's treasure-hiding game as confidence-building:

> It might be said that by this procedure he [the playing child] assures his own life and stows it safely away. He bases his personality on the possession of this imaginary secret. Comparison with the myth is once more revealing: here, too, the life, the power and the courage of the hero is fastened to an external and material soul: a weapon or a mirror, a feather or an egg; to some magnificent or humble but always fragile object, guarded in the crook of a tree or locked in a sunken vessel, in a place not easy to recognize or reach. (Caillois, 1942: 258)

The treasure in the child's game must be "fragile" in this formulation so that the hero can become strong—feelings of weakness become externalized in that treasured object and left behind in the hiding place. This has clear analogy to *Harry Potter's* Voldemort as well as to the accretions project in an RPG, where weakness is denied by the steady accrual of signifiers of strength. In a related argument concerning children's stories and psychic projection, Phoebe Cramer references the fairy tale, "the Giant Who Had No Heart," about a giant who becomes invincible by hiding his heart in a duck's egg, only to be undone when the egg is discovered by the hero and leveraged against the giant in exchange for men the giant has trapped. The egg is finally crushed, resulting in the giant's death. Cramer argues that we tend to cast away those aspects of the self we perceive as weak through projection. Projection, here, means "placing parts of oneself within another… demonstrated when the attack on the duck results in pain to the

giant" (Cramer, 2006: 75). By playfully distancing and making nearer that which is vulnerable, one achieves an experience of quiescence in fantasy, and a sort of confident growth—though not necessarily one recognized as productive.

Fragility is the shared motivation of the *perpetuum mobile* tether fantasy and the fantasy of accretions. The feelings of lack that initiate the accretions quest are similar to the feelings of vulnerability that lend the tether fantasy its teeth, the basis of any thrill of exposure. But if both fantasies involve some element of projection, then the means by which the projection is resolved differs almost diametrically. In the fantasy of accretions, the projected lack is never re-integrated; rather, it is pushed forever away, displaced by each new accretion, which is a fetishistic disavowal of that vulnerability. The accrued object represents weakness (castration, threat)—Caillois' "external and material soul"—wrapped up in the shiny, metallic luster of hidden treasure, which multiplies repeatedly, each new item, both advancing and yet proving the inadequacy of the entire collection quest up to that point.

In the tether fantasy, projected lack is re-introduced into the self through play. When there is tension in the game—when the player is in a dangerous space during a *lifeline* tether or out of doors during a *home-base* or *perpetuum mobile* tether—the player is re-united with a sense of fragility and a feeling of exposure. When the player has returned to a safe place, has closed the door or returned to the mobile fortress, then vulnerability is again momentarily cast away, projected onto some *other* boundary, some other layer of one's nested projection. In each tether category, feelings of fragility leave and return as a central part of play. Only a wished-for (and, of course, futile) eradication of such feelings motivates the accretions fantasy.

While the tether fantasy demonstrates an impressive range of media and tonalities, the accretions fantasy, as a refined and specialized means of expressing a Nirvana wish, has a more restricted scope and domain. And yet, as a portal to feelings of stability and the pursuit of quiescence, it is the fantasy par excellence for gaming's increasing generic hybridity. As this chapter demonstrates, it is not the only avenue to such feelings, and the combination of tether and accretions will continue to produce new forms of "sidelong" growth in the world of videogames and popular entertainment.

Conclusion: Hybrid Forms and Beginnings

Without trying to be prescient, this chapter and the last have argued that videogame technological development does not just mean games appearing more like cinema. Tether and accretions fantasies have recently surfaced in new generic formulations that forego a cinematic format. Games like *Rogue Galaxy, The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, Star Fox: Assault*, and even the most recent iteration of the *Lego Star Wars* series combine established videogame play schemas with fluid transitions between three-dimensional spaces, opting for a tether fantasy's spatial continuity over cinema's analytic fragmentation. *Terraria* pushes the sidescrolling platformer into new territory by drastically expanding the scale of navigable space over that generally available, opening up the game's vertical axis (players can both dig down and build upward), and employing dynamic lighting (including day/night cycles). In the process, through a combination of tether and accretions play mechanics, *Terraria* increases the density of game space, imbuing every geographic object with the potential to serve as a dwelling space, to *make home* out of what would normally be passing scenery or a surmounted obstacle. *Minecraft* does something similar for the category of first-person exploration games and three-dimensional space. Both games eschew cinematic language and storytelling in their pursuit of tether and accretions fantasies.

Videogames and cinema are actually converging in several ways, but this change is perhaps less significant than the variety of mergers and new fantasy combinations that have recently taken place *within* the world of gaming. In describing the genre of the RPG as well as games more difficult to classify, such as *Minecraft* and *Faster Than Light*, this chapter has described the "intersection" of tether and accretions fantasies. The term, "intersection," is perhaps not fully descriptive. In most games discussed, the two fantasies enter into something more like a relay: players are largely in one fantasy, then in another. One fantasy becomes active while another fades into the background. There are special moments in some games, however, when a true intersection occurs, leading to a densely packed tether-accretion hybrid. One example is the power-up that drastically shifts the player's ability to act in the game world, such as *Super Metroid*'s Gravity Suit or Space Jump upgrades. Once either is attained, the gameplay immediately following is dominated for a moment by the new accretion's effect on the player's ability to reach new places. Each accretions opens up avenues that had theretofore so stubbornly frustrated player advancement. These important accretions pull the tether fantasy into a state of quiet elation, wherein the game's world seems, for a moment, an exciting new space of possibilities. Tensions that had mounted in the form of obstacles weighing upon the player, or areas that, while visible, were previously unreachable, now race forward in consciousness, eager for release: "this ledge above the water, then that door in the first area I could never reach." The tether speaks through the new accretion, which amplifies the tether's organization around the desire to explore more spaces.

In this hybridity, it is often a body-transcendence fantasy that stitches tether and accretions so closely together. Every meaningful accretion in the *Metroid* series, as well as in the *Castlevania* series (which mimicked the *Metroid* formula in a string of games begun in the mid-1990s with *Symphony of the Night*, deemed "Metroidvania" by fans), modifies one's ability to transcend space, and occasions a new accommodation, a new bodily schema. In turn, a modified capacity to transcend space feeds back into the tether fantasy's desire for new challenges, new exposures. In *Castlevania: Harmony of Despair* (2011), players painstakingly upgrade spells and collect equipment—playing through the same levels over and over to do so. In the meantime, players develop greater manual dexterity, learn tricks and shortcuts, and become masters of the game's unique motions. In this hybrid genre, winning the accretion depends entirely upon mastery of spatio-temporal action, which connects that accretion to a player's feelings of transcendence in play. But the accretion also feeds back into the bodily transcendence fantasy since the best upgrades provide new and exciting ways of cutting through space.[106] This expanded capacity, in turn, modifies the tether, allowing players to explore dangerous spaces previously out of reach. Moments of transcendence—when one moves through the game's challenges with dynamic fluidity—are aided by the accretion, which becomes inextricably caught up in the player's own sense of skill, bodily schema, a capacity or reflex to act in game space.

Most popular games tend to summon multiple sources of reinforcement for play. The trope of new accretions as reward for overcoming significant challenges is pervasive in the videogame industry: it spans the divide between "hard core" and casual games, as well as between home consoles and iPhone apps. And it crosses the generic boundaries of first-person shooters, action-adventure games, hack-and-slash games, zombie shooters, platformers, and puzzle games. There is no "Moore's Law"[107] in the technological advancement of fantasy; fantasy can be culturally shared, and can be attached to imaginative projects that grow and change, but their timing is complicated and the rate of growth uneven.

The already mentioned tower-defense genre has seen recent activity in fantasy hybridity, with games like *Dungeon Defenders* (2010) and *Orcs Must Die* (2011). These games combine *lifeline* and *home-base* tether fantasies with an accretions game in a tower-defense, third-person shooter (also called "third-person brawler") hybrid. Players plan ahead of an invasion, laying traps to keep monsters from reaching a protected object or location. Then, the games switch to a battle phase in which both player-directed shooting and trap-activation cut down waves of enemies. All the while, players accrue valuable items and experiences that contribute to an overarching sense of becoming powerful. The accretions fantasy and moments of body transcendence (when the player-controlled "hero" wipes out a group of enemies that has managed to get past the traps) reinvigorate the game's rigid *home-base* tether structure (the stages are like highly ineffective home bases where all the doors have been left open).

Given the complex combination of gameplay fantasies at work in these games, there are multiple points of identification for play: one could identify with the body of the hero (in an accretions or bodily transcendence fantasy) or with the traps as accrued space. Players are both dispersed across chaotic game space and concentrated in the frenetic managerial and protagonist-grounded activity. In a similar vein, tether/accretions puzzle games, such as *Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes* (2010), *Sword & Poker* (2010), and *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords* (2007), disperse identification across a field of play while simultaneously grounding it in a burgeoning hero accretions project. These games combine puzzle-solving grid manipulation with an accretions fantasy. While the puzzle elements are always prominent during the game's action sequences, hero accretions improve one's capacity to manipulate the puzzle grid, making it easier to line up items and form chains or combos. Nobody would mistake images of gameplay from the puzzle genre for something remotely cinematic—these games are clearly more chess than film, and ultimately grounded in the drive to accrue power. The puzzle is subordinated to the accretion fantasy's demand for busy work.

The level-up and the notion of "stratified progression" that most of the accretion games share in common have their roots in tabletop role-playing games, most notably *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D, 1974). Of course, Gygax, the tabletop game's author, did not invent these concepts in a vacuum; in fact, he was inspired by contemporaneous games that already had progression systems (though far less developed than *D&D*). *Chainmail* (1971) developed the progression system that likely inspired Gygax, and was in turn influenced by older war-simulation games. Peterson (2012) traces the question all the way back to games like Checkers and Chess, which contained pieces that could be "upgraded" if a pawn or checker reached the other side of the board. He describes, however, an older tradition of simulating combat in which soldiers are *weakened* by battle. But he also notes the opposing idea that surviving soldiers gain wisdom or power, à la Nietzsche's "that which does not destroy me, makes me stronger":

> Their experience as veterans made them more effective in combat than unseasoned units. Napoleon's demonstrable faith in the capacity of his *Grognards* [Napoleon's Old Guard] perhaps inspired a quote often attributed to him: 'moral power is to physical power in war as three parts out of four.' The elite and experienced soldier has a mental state providing a decided advantage over that of novice troups, and this extraordinary ability outweighed factors like numerical inferiority. (Peterson, 2012: 343)

The transition from war as something that mutilates and disables to war as something that makes you stronger is a perfect example of the proto-fascist "armoring of the body" described by Foster at this chapter's outset. *Chainmail*'s innovative progression system—made many times more

complex and compelling in Gygax's fantasy follow-up— already represented an idea about war that more closely tied post-World-War-I notions of the militarized body. And perhaps the need to imagine an armored body coincided with the peak of the Cold War not coincidentally due to national experiences of vulnerability.

In this sense, the longed-for eradication of lack through the structural support of a fantasy trellis likely reflects culturally shared anxieties about the integrity of the body. But the effects of a political system that troubles and interrupts ego formation (the fascist's dreamt-of armoring of the body) find analogy with the not-yet-formed ego of the child, whose projective externalizations of weakness are normalized through the frameworks of developmental psychology or psychoanalysis. Outside of such political or developmental normalization, there is perhaps some space to describe the structures of empowerment within a videogame in a way that is attentive to the pleasures and purposes of what is perhaps *the* most pervasive and influential "core hook" in commercial videogames. There is special value in Caillois' Surrealism and Stockton's queer theory, as well as in the often outmoded psychoanalytic frameworks and modernist theories seemingly far afield of videogames and that are nevertheless contained within this dissertation. This value has to do with deviating from master narrative, finding and tracing unexpected and unsanctioned connections. The transhistorical genealogy made possible through the concept of fantasy—which is itself a term suspended across multiple disciplines for more than a hundred years, both over-used and critically evacuated—de-emphasizes clear distinctions between media. What opens, in turn, is hopefully a sensitivity to unexpected affinities that will be useful for engaging an emerging field of new media objects that, in some ways, are intimately familiar parts of daily life, and, in other ways, are irreducibly strange.

Conclusion: Videogames, Everyday Life, and the Fantasy that Never Takes Place

Videogames have been a part of home entertainment for over forty years. The home console market began in the early 1970s, grew quickly but crashed hard (1983), then roared back within several years, stabilized and continued to grow at a steady rate from the late 1980s through the 2010s. In 2015, the videogame industry brought in twice the money Americans spent on cinema the same year (and global games revenues are two and-a-half times the global box office).[108] In the same rough period of time (1983 onward), arcade videogames have declined in popularity to the point of nearly disappearing. Yet, while this means a largely *domestic* entertainment doubles the Hollywood box office, many conversations about games still tend to lack a sense of videogame domesticity. When games as a medium and gaming as a culture are referenced in popular representations (e.g. *Wreck It Ralph*, 2012) or academic scholarship (e.g., Castronova's *Synthetic Worlds*, 2008), they are still often construed through the laggard conceptual lenses of "cyberspace" or references to 1980s arcade culture.[109] By conceiving of games as daydreams, or conscious and empowering fantasies that structure long stretches of play at home, this dissertation represents an effort to recast games as home entertainment. This concluding chapter punctuates such an intervention with discussion of a particular game— Nintendo's *Animal Crossing* (2002)—that is deliberately structured to become imbricated in everyday life. Ultimately, this stitching together of the rhythms of gameplay and of daily life connects games to a particular kind of longing for home that is distinct from nostalgia for gaming's arcade past.

Animal Crossing was the focus of a web comic ("Animal Crossing Tragedy")[110] that has circulated the internet for a decade. In it, a girl introduces her ailing and wheelchair-confined mother to the game in question. To the daughter's surprise, the mother loves the game and plays it obsessively, continuing long after the daughter and her sibling stop. Mom plays so much that she neglects all else, and is teased for this. Mom then dies. Some time later, the daughter returns to the game out of nostalgia, and she finds that the virtual village is full of weeds and the animal villagers are concerned about her (and her mother's) long absence. In her home's mailbox, the daughter unexpectedly discovers dozens of gifts and sentimental letters from her now-deceased mother. Mom's time in the game—like idealizations of motherhood more generally—was about devotion to the family, about her selflessness rather than her own pleasure or emotional needs.

In truth, this story is almost certainly fabricated, and the trick it plays builds on the fact that the game itself sends players bittersweet notes and gifts from "Mom," and if these parcels are left uncollected, they accumulate over time. Read innocently, the line "every letter was pretty much the same" suggests a dying mother's ritual of surreptitiously preserving a saccharin-sweet, clichéd maternal love. But when one learns that the game sends these notes as a matter of course—that a fictional mother in the game perpetually misses her faraway child, the player—it becomes clear that the line, "every letter was pretty much the same," is sardonic. The narrator takes pleasure in mocking the gullibility of readers who are outside the (core) loop and aren't familiar with this aspect of the game.

But Animal Crossing Tragedy also touches on some of the ways a new gaming culture thinks of the domestic function of games in relation to family and gender roles. *Animal Crossing* is already associated with "non-traditional" (i.e., non-teenage-male) players. As a "casual" game—a game with no agôn, no clear-cut goals, deadlines, or stress-inducing challenges— players simply tend to their house, run errands, collect salable items like fruit or fossils, and slowly pay off a massive (though largely symbolic) debt. In the web comic, the daughter was

"always trying to convert [her] parents to videogames… and thought that *Animal Crossing* would be simple enough for them to get into." This aspect of the comic would likely resonate with someone who grew up in a home space generally hostile towards too much videogame play. I certainly remember unsuccessful efforts to hook my own parents on videogames.

Playing any game with a parent may represent an opportunity for bonding; but sharing empowerment fantasies in videogame play is something perhaps more complex. It is an opportunity to temporarily recast oedipal triangulation as pre-oedipal and dyadic play (secure base, sharing in accretions or the sense of being a cause). In some ways, parents joining in videogame play is like a return to what Winnicott (1971) described as play's "third space" freed from me/not-me (and real/not-real) distinctions, a state the parent facilitates by predicting and magically meeting the infant's wishes. In this case, the "third space" is also temporarily freed from questions about the "mispense of time," (Dulles, 1940) a state made possible when an avatar (and archetype) of the superego—the disapproving parent—switches sides to the ego, and joins the videogame.

As Murphy (2011), Guins (2014), Kocurek (2015), and Newman (2017) all argue, intergenerational play was a professed goal of early Atari-era videogame ad campaigns made when arcade games were first finding a foothold in domestic spaces. But, by the 1990s, as Jenkins (1998) has argued, games came to signify distance between children (especially boys) and the comparatively genteel and "maternal" domestic world. In the unpoliced "wild spaces" of their virtual geography, games seem to reflect different motivations for different subjectivities within the home. Of course, adults still play these games—they still have fantasies. But Sutton-Smith's rhetoric of frivolity would ask, "What kind of parents are they when they do?"

In the Animal Crossing Tragedy, the homebound mother suffers from Polio and MS, and is "bored" all day before discovering the game. This configuration of the parent recasts Mom in a lateral (rather than hierarchical) relation to the child who, in the comic's images, stands only slightly above her wheelchair-bound mother in the frame. Though reminiscent of the stay-at-home mother, the mother who becomes obsessed with *Animal Crossing* is one who "fails" at this (unpaid, often thankless) domestic job. This attitude is put into relief by the fact that *Animal Crossing* is a game in large part *about* "house-keeping": players begin with a tiny home (on loan) which they then improve and expand through a variety of peri-domestic activities. The mom in the comic is strategically protected from expectations about her role in parenting by not one, but two debilitating diseases. *Animal Crossing*, like domestic videogames more generally, is already clearly engaged with this tension between playing and working within the home, between departing (into a virtual space) and "returning" to home, to the rituals and daily activities necessarily done there.

Animal Crossing is emblematic of domesticity—of games in the home. It is not well understood as a fully immersive virtual world, as a second reality that entirely substitutes for *this* world, denying or escaping domestic space. It does not offer a "cyberspace" with militarized dispatches from an operator or handler, addressing the player as an undercover spy in a Cold War virtual reality or futuristic hacker ethos with references to neo-1980s arcade culture. Nor does the game offer a fantasy-themed virtual reality, as does *Second Life*. *Animal Crossing*, like many of Nintendo's software titles, addresses us in our homes. This game, and its ilk—the games discussed in this dissertation—are not just domestic. They represent a sustained contemplation *of* domesticity in the age of videogames. *Animal Crossing* requires adapting to the rhythms of life in a virtual village, which stitches the game into daily life both thematically and in the structure of its play.

Animal Crossing uses the Gamecube console's internal clock to unfold in real time, even while the player is away. Since much of what one can do in the game requires waiting on real-time cycles—specific events can occur at different times of year or month, day or night—the game is best played in relatively short spurts at different times throughout the day (or night). There are even twenty-four different affect-laden musical themes, one for each hour of the day—if one only habitually plays before bedtime or just after school, one will only encounter a small fraction of these themes (and the other events or character appearances the game contains). Power on the game at 3:00 AM and nearly everyone in the player's village will be asleep, but the player can catch nocturnal bugs in their net, fish, or dig for fossils—tedious, repetitive activity (chores). Play in this game is more about duration than power.

Animal Crossing can almost scarcely be understood outside of the rubric of a daydream about the home. The game still contains empowerment fantasies, but they are toned down. In its accretions project, players will discover a rare fossil or insect, or else purchase an item that expands collection possibilities (a shovel, a bug net). Collecting is not itself framed as a counter to weakness or exposure. It is largely ornamental, for decorating and customizing your character or home. And the game has only a very loosely defined tether fantasy—the pleasure of leaving home, collecting items and objects, then returning there to store or display them. Nothing happens in this world that would constitute an interesting "plot" or story. A colleague once described the game as being about capital. And there is certainly grounds for an economic analysis of *Animal Crossing*: players trade goods, pay off debt, perform repetitious (almost alienating) labor, and engage in conspicuous consumption.[111]

But the game's structure and tone make it more suitable for 'rhythmanalysis' (Lefebvre, 2004), which Apperley (2010) first applied to videogames (including *Animal Crossing*). Rhythmanalysis entails an almost ethnographic emphasis on the "practices and processes of play, and the locations in which they are enacted," contra more traditional "textual" approaches which view videogames "as an immersive experience" like cyberspace or virtual reality (Apperley, 2010: 18). Apperley positions videogames within a space of intersecting rhythms (between the "cyclical rhythms of nature" and the "linear, mechanical rhythms imposed by contemporary society") (2010: 19). And he suggests that the intersecting rhythms of play and rhythms of daily life instantiated in *Animal Crossing* are even better approximated by the release of *Animal Crossing*'s 2005 sequel (*Wild World*) on Nintendo's portable system, the Nintendo DS:

> The shift to a portable handheld console vastly multiplies the potential that the peculiar rhythm of the game has for intersecting with everyday life. The game was characterised by short bursts of play, while weeds were pulled and fruit, flowers and shells were gathered, followed by lulls in play, periods of waiting and aporia. … Navarro in his Gamespot review of *Animal Crossing: Wild World* states: that it, 'ultimately surpasses the last game, simply because of how much better suited its style of gameplay is for a handheld system like the DS.' The shift to portable, flexible play meant that now it could be played in the transitionary spaces, and fragments of time, which are characterised by boredom (the classroom, the doctor's waiting room, the tram) greatly increasing its potential to match the rhythms of everyday life. (2010: 21-22)

Nintendo's sequel, *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, on their first portable 3D console seemed to better implement the company's idealized vision of what it means to play games in the "transitionary spaces, and fragments of time" within the "rhythms of everyday life." This includes playing games in public spaces (classroom, train, waiting room)—but on a small,

privately held screen that seems to itself represent remote contact with home, a virtual home at least.

     The notion that media at home become entwined with the rhythms of daily life is hardly unique to videogames. Scholars of home-playback technology like the VCR have already made similar claims. Jordan (1990) argues that:

> Mass media have become inextricably woven into nearly every aspect of family life. The rhythm of family time is often set by the patterns of media use (…). For example, mornings may be initiated by newspaper reading. Interactions between family members are shaped in and around media content (…), and media settings offer a stage for the playing out of gender roles (…). Even space within the home is structured by media. (1990: 164)

And Walkerdine (1986) points out the especially masculine tilt of the viewing patterns and VCR use in the family she observes—the father controls the remote and has *Rocky II* on constant replay, re-framing key moments in the fictional fight for his family. Barbara Klinger's (2006) study of repeat viewing reveals a variety of reasons for watching a favorite film again—from a therapeutic turn toward what is familiar, to a sense of mastery—which reflect the variety of ways domestic media is wound up in the rituals and patterns of her students' everyday lives.

     As mentioned at the dissertation's outset, these kinds of home-media analyses tend to exclude the videogame consoles which occupied home-entertainment spaces even *before* the VCR. This occlusion goes hand in hand with the tendency to conceive of games as immersive virtual realities that separate their players from what we recognize as signifiers of daily domestic life: chores, meals, family, etc. But it is insufficient simply to counter this situation with the assertion that games enter into daily rhythms.

     We must also pose the question of what it means when these rhythms are filled and structured by the pursuit of feelings of unification and empowerment through a videogame's carefully structured repetitions. The decision to compare games to daydreams, to see them as pleasurable loops spun around an algorithmic structural support, implies an intimate relation between games and the spaces and temporal rhythms of everyday life. But it also changes the notion of videogame rhythmanalysis. Fantasy becomes a more tangible correlate to abstract rhythms (activities reduced to their temporal dimension), and this research has highlighted a unique set of fantasy *resonances* across media.

     One such resonance within gaming's overlapping rhythms takes place between play fantasy and narrative—an overlap that could open players to games, perspectives, and stories they would be unlikely to encounter otherwise. At the very least, play fantasy offers new ways to think about the relation between gameplay and narrative, and therefore offers new ways to think about what is unique about videogames as a possible storytelling platform. This work hopes to pick up the mantle of an oft-repeated (now forgotten) claim early in new media studies that hypertext narratives would open us to new kinds of storytelling, that we would become explorers of texts, rather than simply readers. This future "never happened"—at least not for storytelling (Johnson, 2013).[112] The hope lives on though in videogames, which, as a new medium, have come to serve as a sort of imaginary receptacle for lost futures (e.g., "total cinema," hypertext storytelling, cyberspace, etc.). But recognizing this potential requires going beyond purely structural qualities—gaming reduced to the notion of interactivity (a hyper- or "ergodic" text) or rhythm. Sensitivity to a game's core loop, its play fantasy, can reveal more about how gaming will alter our relationship to narrative.

For instance, the critically acclaimed "first-person interactive story" game (to borrow the wording from its Wikipedia entry), *Gone Home* (2013), tells a story of familial strife in middle-class American suburbia. This story is couched within a tether fantasy—a looming spatial tension or emotional valence—that alters the player's relationship to the narrative itself. There are no cut-scenes in *Gone Home*—just small clues (scraps of paper, journal entries, personal effects, notes left on the counter, etc.), which convey the game's story, strewn about a large, empty house. Players decide which pieces of information to read and when—but each narrative piece is an autonomous expression (written by different members of the family, relatives, and friends) to be read or listened to from beginning to end.

Gone Home is a kind of narrative architecture or spatial narrative, a story players piece together by following a breadcrumb trail of clues left in an explorable environment. But the game's distributed bits of story are not constellated across any space whatsoever. They are not only embedded within a pointedly domestic space, but a domestic space activated by an ominous storm outside. They are conveyed within a highly spatial tether fantasy. Wind and rain beat on the windows, occasional thunder claps sound in the distance and the electrical disturbance causes the lights in the house to flicker. The image of trees whipping around outside in the storm obscures the world beyond and folds the player into an enclosed narrative universe. Players not only move through this house in seamless, first-person navigation, but they enter darkened areas of the home and turn on lights in order to explore further, linking the familiar to the visible, and slowly earning a sense of resistance against the storm. Players even stumble upon an abandoned couch-cushion pillow fort—built by the protagonist's younger sibling to offer an extra layer of psychic protection. The fort faces a television screen running a loop of a local severe weather alert—a sight resonant for anyone who saw such warnings as precursors to special feelings of enclosure and togetherness: snow days, power outages, stories and board games by lantern light, etc.

In the game's culmination, the spatial fantasy and narrative threads converge, as players learn that the younger sister has gone outside, fled her home (and past), and braved the storm to pursue a secret love. In this case, the spatialized tether fantasy resonates with the function of the family as a "secure base" within the story, so that the storm outside, framing the story of an adolescent lesbian love, casts home simultaneously as that which protects and comforts, and that which entraps, stultifies, and represses. The tether fantasy brings this key narrative tension *into* play, into the act of navigation itself—a fact which lends immediacy and emotional intensity to the story. This is compounded by the likelihood that the player is engaging this game from within a domestic space of their own.

As a material through which different media resonate with one another, fantasy is useful because of its relative medium-independence. Fantasy is better suited for emphasizing continuity between media than differences (even though fantasy is differently instantiated in each different medium that supports it). Fantasy is like the "wonderful, leaping fish" Linda Williams (2001) discusses in relation to the melodramatic mode's capacity to transcend different media. Conceiving of a medium as "satisfying a core human demand," as Jenkins (2006) suggests, and seeing fantasy itself as a medium in search of a technological base, places slightly more emphasis on the concepts of *use* and *user* (user identity, user psychology) than do analyses of entertainment media that are more strictly technical and formal. But fantasy is ultimately intended to provide a more coherent and cohesive theory of the videogame text *as a medium* for both textual approaches and those that look at the specific (and historical) contexts of play. Home is one very important and overlooked context.

The concept of fantasy as a mediating force for overlapping rhythms connects games to domestic space more strongly than the sense of rhythmic overlap. Fantasy helps conceive of the product of this overlap as a particular kind of nostalgia. Whalen and Taylor (2008) define nostalgia as "looking back to an unattainable past and trying to bring that past into the present" (2008: 3). In their introductory chapter on nostalgia and videogames, they argue that gaming's unique "temporality and situated presence distinguish video games and electronic literature from other media" (2008: 5). In the same volume, Fenty (2008) argues that the "[g]ames players feel nostalgic about are games they put effort into to learn the game patterns and rhythms. People feel nostalgic about games they enjoyed being a part of—games that changed them" (Fenty, 2008: 25). Put differently, a rhythmanalysis of videogames already points to how games are situated within daily life. If we combine this with the notion that games are an especially embodied medium, and that we spend that "situated" and "embodied" time pursuing fantasies of empowerment, then the product is an especially intense and personal set of spatiotemporal associations—the very material of nostalgia.

Game create a seemingly enclosed psychic space that somehow comes to take on the flavorings of daily life in the days (weeks, months, or more) during which they were actively played. Picking up an old (but heavily played) game again and re-playing it years later is a bifurcating experience. On one hand, "like riding a bike," the game's embodied actions are easily recalled. Its virtual spaces are almost always unchanged.[113] And yet, on the other hand, if enough time has gone by, then little else in one's daily life likely remains as it was. Replaying an old, once-heavily-played game (a game that "changed you") is a rush of embodied recall, some of which is clearly and dependably re-instantiated, and some of which, though evoked through the same channels of embodied memory, remains noticeably absent.

Luce Giard's (1998) "Gesture Sequences" describes a kind of gestural, embodied memory that may serve as a model for thinking about videogame nostalgia. Giard's essay is about cooking, framed as a repetitious practice suffusing everyday life, one which is changing due to generational shifts in food preparation. Cooking, for Giard, means "sequences of gestures, bound together over and over again, that weave the indeterminate cloth of culinary practices within the intimacy of kitchens" (1998: 199). As an embodied and repeated activity in the home, cooking reveals "an entire *relationship to things* that the recipe does not codify and hardly clarifies," and that might not be so easily preserved (1998: 200). Cooking is a relentless affair, day in and day out. Yet, there is a bittersweet fondness for the repetitious planning, procuring, and preparation that permeated everyday life, including Giard's grandmother's methods for creating marmalade, and the way kitchens, pantries, or even the local grocer's shop were organized in the past.

The rhythms of videogames are slightly different. In cooking terms, playing a specific game would be like making the same dish for every meal, roughly everyday, for a month or two—then not making that meal again for years (if ever again). Returning to the old game means recalling that month, and its daily patterns—but it also puts into relief how broader rhythms (the whole of gaming's "indeterminate cloth" of repeated gestures) have transformed since the game was first played. Not only certain games, but the act of playing itself may (for many) be more associated with some times of year than others. The rhythms of childhood are influenced by school schedules, seasonal change, holiday vacations, and the videogame industry's own game-release patterns. Software firms tend to release most games during the fall, when school starts, and in time for the big holiday shopping rush. According to the games journalists who have openly addressed this pattern (e.g., Gause, 2014), game producers tend to avoid the summer,

when families are on vacation and children are outside playing, not at school. Gaming does not yet have a tradition of a "summer Blockbuster." School is considered an important part of gaming's rhythms, somehow a complement to videogame empowerment. School is, of course, cast as a place where one learns, where one behaves responsibly and invests in the future—and gaming is usually cast as an indulgent and irresponsible waste of time. But school is also somewhere children are constantly evaluated, and controlled by (sometimes unkind) authority figures.

Looking back on videogame play can generate nostalgia for the much larger pools of open time one had as a child for playing games. This is a more common and "conservative" sort of nostalgia, what Boym (2001) calls "restorative nostalgia" (the desire to restore a lost past), which is distinct from "reflective nostalgia," or a productive dwelling on the sense of loss, or the impossibility of the longing itself. Videogame nostalgia can also be seen as reflective. Replaying an old game connects us to a woven fabric that no longer exists, that is constituted by gaps, that is no longer connected to the daily rhythms that once structured it. This sense of disconnect or loss can be the point and purpose of returning to the older game in the first place. But the issue arises of how exactly these missing elements, the daily rhythms, were initially woven into play. Were these things—the life around the game room, the meal prep, the chores, the seasons, and the whole world beyond the game— not precisely what were turned away from in order for prolonged play to happen in the first place? In the Animal Crossing Tragedy, the mother turns away from her family and spends all her time in *Animal Crossing*—only, in the end, her family re-emerges within the game as her assumed reason for playing (secret devotion to family being the only reason one could possibly turn away from them at death).

Reflective nostalgia's emphasis on loss is an ideal way to describe how a videogame— with its full perceptual immediacy—is stitched into the rhythms of daily life: life enters the game as a foreclosed possibility, as that from which one turns away in order to focus on play. Games connect us to an absent moment because of their status as wasteful, pointless, and separate, as frivolity, as abnegated responsibility, and as the foreclosed possibility of, at that moment, engaging some other element of the world outside. If we play too much, we enter a space known as the "Dark Playground," a term from Tim Urban's blog about procrastination, meaning: "a place where leisure activities happen at times when leisure activities are not supposed to be happening. The fun you have in the Dark Playground isn't actually fun because it's completely unearned and the air is filled with guilt, anxiety, self-hatred, and dread" (Urban, 2013).

Videogame play is often compared to procrastination—especially when conducted at the wrong time, such as before one's homework or household responsibilities are completed (unless, of course, like the mother in Animal Crossing Tragedy, one is too ill to conduct one's usual daily business). But this comparison is a throwaway moral judgment that is, in turn, perhaps too quickly dismissed by proponents of games, those eager to recast games in a more positive light. In fact, framing videogames as procrastination, as time on a Dark Playground—and not, in so doing, dismissing *either* games or the possibility that they might be an ideal form of procrastination—allows for a fresh approach to thinking about both empowerment fantasy as well as how games might seem like a kind of restorative nostalgia, even when first played.

Ferrari and Tice (2000) synthesize behavioral and personality research on procrastination that demonstrates how "chronic procrastinators" are more "concerned and protective of their self-presentational image" than "nonprocrastinators," and therefore "[try]to avoid situations that may show an adverse negative image":

> For these individuals, it is better to do nothing than risk failure and look foolish. Because procrastination involves withholding the start of a task such that no effort is made that could be spent improving one's chances of success, procrastination seems to be a form of *self-handicapping*. Self-handicapping involves placing barriers in the way of one's own success as a strategic ploy to manipulate the attributional ambiguity of an evaluation (…). If self-handicapping results in poor performance, then failure may be attributed to the handicap or obstacle and not a personal lack of ability. (Ferrari and Tice, 2000: 74)

This definition of the psychological factors contributing to extreme procrastination expresses an especially clear diametric opposition between empowerment (self-confidence and active self-improvement) and empowerment fantasy (aka, procrastination on the Dark Playground or "self-handicapping"). The configuration of the videogame as an action requiring time that ought to be otherwise spent—time that is wasted—situates games (and empowerment fantasy) as loss. A potential future is deferred, and a kind of powerlessness, or a ludic surrender, is openly embraced. The game is an arbitrary set of rules, a separate realm that has no purchase on an oedipal world of social positions and responsibilities. The "self-handicapping" of procrastination is an imagined removal from a shared order of events where social statuses are gained or lost, a rescinding of a space and time of consequential evaluations, marks on one's permanent record, test results showing once and for all where one stacks up against everyone else. In other words, games can be both a form of procrastination, and simultaneously *take on the form*, in fantasy, of intentional "attributional ambiguity". What is turned away from when we play re-emerges in the structure of the game itself. This is one way to think about the relationship between gameplay and everyday life—the relationship is perhaps nostalgic in the first place.

Significantly, psychoanalysist, David Werman (1977) describes nostalgia as a "fantasy that never takes place":

> While fantasy seeks to fulfill a desire, nostalgia repetitively tends toward a fantasy that never takes place. In this way the desire is 'fulfilled' by not being realized, and so the subject is safe from the loss of the object, and the object is guarded by being kept in the nostalgic relationship. Outwardly the subject appears to mourn the lost object, but intrapsychically it is not actually given up; perhaps this is because the nostalgic relationship corresponds to the subject's own ego ideal. Hence, the nostalgic relationship is sought and maintained for itself. (Werman, 1977: 391)

The fantasies that structure videogame play in this dissertation all share in common their never being "satisfied." They too are "'fulfilled' by not being realized" over many hours of play. This includes the fantasy of being a cause, its politics of powerlessness, as well as its deployment of traumatic repetition (e.g., seeing a traumatic moment as if it were a movie) as a way to protect the fantasy from becoming fully consciously integrated (mastered, controlled, resolved). This includes the accretions fantasy's need to perpetually defer the point of arrival—the moment when one feels powerful is the moment when the game's power is revealed as illusory. This includes the tether fantasy's optimal orbit, its "perpetuum mobile," "the problem of permanently dwelling in and fitting into the mother's womb" (Rank, 1924: 100). Videogame play reflects the guilty and indulgent position it occupies in the home as a "mispense of time". When the accretions quest ends, and its feelings of power collapse into a sense of waste and finitude; when one goes outside, bleary eyed after a long session of videogame play, and is reminded of how stultifying it feels to experience only phantasmatic tether play, indoors; when one closes one's

eyes before bed and the effort to think about something important is interrupted by embodied repetitions of the game played earlier that day—in each of these instances, the reverberations of excessive videogame play spill over onto daily activities that surround play. These pleasures, and their effects, occur within a personal, psychic space—but one that is never far removed from our relationship with others, including our family and loved ones, in our home, our places of labor and leisure.

Fantasy can often seem especially wasteful, a kind of imaginative labor undertaken repeatedly but without ever having anything to show for it. Winnicott (1971) maligns what he calls "fantasying" or daydreaming, which he says takes the place of (but does not count as) actually living one's life. If seen as a "desiring machine," or Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "desiring-production," then videogame play can be recast productively as a kind of consuming that actually helps fantasy grow as a cultural form. Perhaps to future generations, gaming's domestic rituals of consumption will seem a historical oddity. In this future, zombie apocalypse narratives will cease to fascinate, the superhero film cycle will have finally run its course and, in a situation of greater economic and educational empowerment, America will have overcome its "I'm Specialism".

Notes

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[1] Sudnow (1983: 18)

[2] Marie-Laure Ryan, for example, has written about real-time narrative as a kind of emplotment of real-world events, such as in sports broadcasts (1993) or videogames (2004). Narrative, under this approach, is coterminous with all of phenomenal reality, as long as it is perceived or imagined by someone.

[3] For example, a game she designed, *Evoke* (2010), "a ten-week crash course in changing the world," asks players to read about and then further investigate real-world problems, to do something small in the real world to help correct the problem, and to report this in order to receive credit. The game is actually structured like a course—or, more precisely, a course is structured like a game (this is known as "gamification"), a spoonful of sugar for all the hard work to be done. The closest thing in Evoke to a game like *World of Warcraft* is the borrowed terminology: "accept your mission," "complete objectives," and then receive "credit," "heroic credit," or "legendary credit." Terms like "heroic" and "legendary" are taken directly out of the loot-based, dungeon-crawling role-playing games like *Diablo* (1996), *Everquest* (1999), or *WoW*, where the terms usually describe the relative rareness of a set of armor or equipment.

[4] Recent works on videogame culture, like Adrienne Shaw's *Gaming at the Edge* (2014) and Anna Anthropy's *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* (2012), effectively criticize the hetero-masculine aspects of the gaming industry. And important videogame historiography, like Kocurek's *Coin-Operated Americans* (2015) demonstrates that many of the industry narratives of gaming's founding fathers repeat the marginalization of female players. Moreover, conferences and events have begun to emerge that address issues of diversity and representation in games: see, for example, conferences like GaymerX, The Queerness and Games Conference, and Different Games.

[5] Kirkpatrick argues that early games contained a wide array of themes:

> In 1983-5 there were games about almost every conceivable human scenario including waiting tables in a restaurant (Wacky Waiters, 1983); adaptations of Shakespeare ('Macbeth: the computer adventure' 1983); being unemployed in an affluent North London suburb ('Hampstead' 1983); royal babies ("Di's Baby" 1984); scrumping apples (Over the Orchard 1983), and even a game version of the Bible (1982). There was a game in which the player assumed the role of a teddy bear defending a cot against other, invading toys (Ah Diddums 1983). (Kirkpatrick, 2015: 108)

[6] For a more detailed discussion of the influence of virtual-reality discourse on videogame conversations, see Goetz (2015).

[7] To be fair, in Kirkpatrick's research focus on the context of the United Kingdom in the early 1980s, there was less of a distinction between arcade spaces and home spaces. His analysis of early home computers as "underdetermined" technologies (ambiguously both educational and for games) locates games in a domestic context at the very moment of their "rhetorical closure," or the formation of a gaming culture. This research would contend that closure has not yet occurred with games: it has *slowed*, but it still gradually changes as the fantasies underpinning play continue to develop.

[8] Murphy argues that "televisual domesticity enabled later technologies, like the personal computer, to move from the public, corporate sphere into the private sphere of the home" (2011: 47).

[9] Aside from the works mentioned in this paragraph, consider looking at King and Krzywinska's book, *ScreenPlay*, Will Brooker's "Camera-Eye, CG-Eye: Videogames and the 'Cinematic,'" Clarke and Mitchell's "Playing With Film Language," Craig Lindley's "Conditioning, Learning and Creation in Games: Narrative, The Gameplay Gestalt and Generative Simulation," Paul Cheng's "Waiting for Something to Happen: Narratives, Interactivity and Agency and the Video Game Cut-scene," or David Herman's "Toward a Transmedial Narratology."

[10] Brooker (2009) contrasts games to films by arguing that "videogame aesthetics are associated with empty spectacle and cynical attempts at cross-platform marketing, both of which are presumed to take precedence over character and traditional storytelling" (2009: 124). His discussion focuses on the low cultural status of games.

[11] As concerns the narratology-ludology debate, it is important to know that the "narratologists" (scholars looking at games as interactive stories) argue that games are the next platform for storytelling, perhaps one step closer to a totally immersive virtual, diegetic reality (see Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck*). The ludologists, on the other hand, calls for a unique approach to the study of games and sees games and stories as at least somewhat at odds formally (see Espen Aarseth, Jesper Juul, and Gonzalo Frasca). Frasca has argued that the debates were blown out of proportion by those observing (see "Ludologists love stories too: notes from a debate that never took place"). Juul (in *Half-Real*) has also attenuated his stance since the publication of *First Person*, a collection largely structured by the debate. Despite these moderations, medium specificity is still a hotly contested subject in videogame journals and conferences, cropping up in essays about immersion, procedure, identification, agency, and film-game convergence. *Game Studies* (www.gamestudies.org) and *DiGRA* (www.digra.org) are great resources for studying the debate.

[12] It must be noted that this distinction (camera directing attention versus attention directing camera) seems to disappear in newly "immersive," virtual reality (VR) cinema. But if new VR cinema appears game-like because of its freeing of the spectator's attention to look around, this may be an exception that proves the rule. At any rate, it is important to maintain a distinction between videogames and virtual reality (VR) technology, the latter of which is really more a hardware apparatus than a genre of game. There are already games with "interactive" cutscenes wherein players can reposition a virtual camera while narrative events unfold (e.g.: *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, 2009). Even though players have influence over the camera, these moments are still more *cinematic* than *gamic*—they are clearly distinct from moments of interactive "gameplay"—what players do for hours at a time between cutscenes. Though games have seemed to instantiate VR technology better than other media, it may better represent a certain trajectory *within* cinema that has existed since before games, and which has grabbed hold of some segments of the games industry as a pre-VR staging ground. One way to think of VR is as a longstanding "cinematic" wish to inhabit the film—a make-believe wish to be present elsewhere ('it was *as if* I were really there'), the mediating presence of the camera (and screen) erased. In this sense, a film viewed through a VR headset, in which viewers can actively change their gaze, is not necessarily a *game-like* film. Games do not drive toward this experience, this sense of "being there." They begin with it as a founding premise, and then drive somewhere else—toward some play or activity that is facilitated *by* the premise of being an agent within a (narrowly defined) world of potential actions.

Games don't so much satisfy this wish, as begin with it as a founding premise, and then go elsewhere: players begin as agents within a (narrowly constrained) world of potential actions, and must then act within that space. Being "immersed" optically does not really speak to the play taking place in that *other* (virtual) space—unless we are discussing a purely make-believe kind of play (the play of pretending to be somewhere else). Convergence scholars like Bolter and Grusin (1999) who are apt to define games through an optical point of view, and the pleasure of navigating virtual space, are, in this sense, projecting a *cinematic* wish onto games.

[13] For extended discussion of different relations between screen and space in videogames, see Wolf (1997).

[14] There are, of course, notable exceptions that prove this rule. For example: the sudden and seemingly random "edits" or camera changes in a game like *Resident Evil 2* (1998) are deliberate and part of a more general strategy to de-center the player, to inhibit motion, reduce reaction time and complicate the navigation of space. In *RE2*, the difficult and indirect manner in which players move, aim, and discharge a weapon, the forced trade-off between moving and firing, and the jarring camera edits and canted angles all combine to produce feelings of vertigo and constraint, both of which heighten the game's genuine feelings of panic. But feelings of panic and spatial orientation are anathema to agôn, competitive or skill-based play. When they occur, they challenge agôn's centrality (and also note its pervasiveness as a logic that joins player and game), and in turn represent a subgenre in videogames where a sense of control is temporarily disrupted or taken away entirely.

[15] David Bordwell's application of cognition to film spectatorship emphasizes the role visual schemata play in perception: "Both bottom-up and top-down processing are inferential in that perceptual 'conclusions' about the stimuli are drawn, often inductively, on the basis of 'premises' furnished by the data, by internalized rules, or by prior knowledge" (Bordwell, 1985: 31). Bordwell highlights the fact that vision is unreliable and discontinuous and

we only see things in a smooth, fluid manner with the aid of "schemata-driven processes that check hypotheses against incoming visual data":

> Taken as a purely sensory experience, seeing is a bewildering flutter of impressions. The eye fixates many times per minute, using short and fast movements (called saccades); the eye rotates to compensate for head and body movement; the eye trembles involuntarily; and most of the visual information we receive is peripheral anyhow. Yet we do not experience a flicker or smear of percepts. We see a stable world, smooth movements, constant patterns of light and dark. To the extent that seeing is a bottom-up process, the visual system is organized to make its inferences in an involuntary, virtually instantaneous manner. … We assemble our visual world from successive glances which we constantly check against our reigning 'cognitive maps.' These maps tell us to ignore the eye's physiological tremor and to bring the most significant areas into foveal vision. (Bordwell, 1985: 31)

[16] Discussions of continuity make up an important part of the history of film studies. Continuity was part of what the Surrealists saw as cinema's genteel, bourgeois rationality; part of what apparatus theory's Marxist commentators saw as a false consciousness of ideality; and part of what the Lacanians of suture theory saw as a false unity (the highly discontinuous film we perceive as intact helps us see ourselves that way too).

[17] Most obviously, perhaps, is the example of Nintendo's flagship *Smash Bros.* series post-*Melee* (*Brawl* in 2008 and *Smash 4* in 2014) which has been in a bizarre crisis of identity. The cult following of *Melee*—which has been one of the most popular and longstanding competitively played videogames of all time, and is still part of a vibrant tournament scene today, despite there being multiple sequels—was a problem for Nintendo, who have openly stated that they intended the game to appeal to a broader, more family-friendly audience. Their *Smash* sequels have therefore strived to maintain some of the nuance and complexity of *Melee*, but have vastly simplified the combat engine, and strewn it with a variety of randomly generated items that completely and overtly disrupt the flow of play (in order to offer chaotic reversals of fortune for less-skilled players). One such item involves summoning a giant dog (from Nintendo's own *Nintendogs* series, 2005) which paws at the screen and completely visually obscures the agonistic action of the match. Perhaps never was there as poetic an image for the deliberate disruption of focused, agonistic gameplay—an apotheosis of the more general tension inherent to the requirement of spatial continuity of spatiotemporal agôn.

But, more subtly, the tendency should also be noted within many recent first-person shooters, such as *Wolfenstein* (2009), of "remediating" a kind of on-the-ground newsreel aesthetic, marking the virtual camera as a subjective participant in the violence of war via a range of disruptions and obfuscations to the continuity of vision: shaking, blurring, debris on the lens (dirt, water, blood, lens flair, etc.). In so doing, these games fore-front the first half of the Bordwell quote (note 5, above), about the busy and messy business of the eyes themselves—and proceed in ignorance of the second half, the part about human vision being part "top-down" or "by cognitive map": the mind's constant smoothing-over of lapses in stable image-making.

These recent FPS games may purportedly strive for verisimilitude of physiological vision (an especially "embodied" visual apparatus), but they miss the mark on perceptual reality, which is not just a passive recording of the world—a fact with which cinema long ago grappled (see, for example, *Lady in the Lake*, 1947). The narrow and confining optical point of view of any sustained first-person camera system challenges human vision by constraining it—in the camera's slowness, its lack of a periphery, and its detachment from other embodied sensory cues. Cinematic suture is a response to this: the suture system is about disguising the limitation (the incompleteness) of the image in any given shot, courting scopic identification by presenting images as answers to questions generated in prior shots, so that the film's "vision" seems to stem from the spectator's desire to see, and so that spectators can, in turn, identify with the masterful, all-seeing gaze of a camera which, at any given moment, actually sees very little.

The effort to highlight ruptures to vision in recent FPS games like *Wolfenstein* repeatedly and overtly frustrates visual possession of the game's action. Ironically, then, the much earlier FPS, *GoldenEye* (1997), offers a more "realistic" account of physiological vision—or at least one more open to a kind of optical identification. *GoldenEye*'s more direct and unproblematic, clear depiction of space (facilitated by a fluid, non-shaking camera, and brightly lit, simply designed and rectilinear architecture with long hallways and a great amount of open space) helps offer up its virtual arenas for visual possession. In this way, the game's rigid, "disembodied" camera aligns with (rather than repeatedly frustrating) the player's wish to perceive the space that is so pertinent to play.

[18] Loftus & Loftus present an especially clear account of "chunking," a concept related to learning and memory: "Psychologists talk of perceiving and processing 'chunks.' A chunk is anything stored in long-term memory as a unitary whole. For instance, the letter string MGAE is perceived as four separate letters—four chunks. But the same letters presented as GAME are perceived as one word—one chunk" (Loftus & Loftus, 1983: 79). In general, "the fewer the chunks you have to process in order to accomplish some task, the more efficiently the task can be done" (79)—a fact that has clear application to developing skills related to game play. The authors use the example of Chess:

> Various studies have linked the acquisition of expertise in game playing to the fusing of many small chunks into fewer large ones. Consider chess. In one experiment, various board positions were shown either to chess experts or to chess novices. The board positions were either random configurations of the chess pieces or they derived from actual games. Later the subjects had to reproduce the board positions they had seen. Neither the novices nor the experts could reproduce the random board configurations very well. The novices couldn't reproduce the actual game configurations very well either, but the experts could.
>
> The boards involved perhaps twenty pieces. Apparently, however, the experts saw the game configuration boards as a small number of chunks, because any configuration resulting from an actual game was bound to be very similar to some configuration that the experts had seen many times before. This wasn't true for the novices; hence for them twenty pieces constituted about twenty separate chunks. The random board configurations were unfamiliar to everyone and were thus perceived by all as many chunks. (Loftus & Loftus, 1983: 79)

[19] A side-scrolling videogame is defined by its virtual camera, which tracks the player's movement along a (usually) horizontal axis, reducing the field of play to just two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. The z-axis (depth) is removed from play.

[20] See, for instance, recent leading analysis of videogame genre, like Faisal and Peltoniemi (2015).

[21] I explore this tendency in greater detail in a videogame history e-magazine, *Memory Insufficient*: "Stepping Out of the Virtual Worlds Paradigm" (Goetz, 2015).

[22] "Ergodic" here means, roughly, interactive. The term comes from "ergodic literature," from Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext* (1997): "In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text. If ergodic literature is to make sense as a concept, there must also be nonergodic literature, where the effort to traverse the text is trivial, with no extranoematic responsibilities placed on the reader except (for example) eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages" (1997: 1).

[23] For more on the videogame violence debate, consult the exhaustively researched book, *Grand Theft Childhood* (Kutner and Olson, 2008).

[24] William's (1991) use of fantasy in discussing film genre was an inspiration for this chapter—and the notion of affect as a kind of bodily *excess* is one way to describe body *fantasy*. But the notion of the three (and only three) "primal fantasies" first outlined by Laplanche and Pontalis (1968) is limiting in a number of ways outlined by Matt Hills' (2002) compelling argument:

> Each fantasy works, like a myth, to explain the mysterious origins of the subject, and each has its roots in 'childhood theories', in other words, in the child's attempts to account for 'his' existence. These fantasies are therefore structurally limited to the sets of questions which confront the child: 'The originary fantasies are limited in kind to castration, seduction, and the primal scene of coitus between the parents' … Such a theory becomes incapable of explaining historical and generic 'fantasy,' i.e. the fantasies of film and forms of fiction, other than as reworkings of a limited repertoire of 'primal' or 'original/originary' fantasies. (Hills, 2002: 100).

In fact, Hills' book offers a great lit review of fantasy within feminist film theory, especially the works of Linda Williams and Constance Penley, which he then productively puts into dialog with fan studies.

[25] Tannahill et al (2012) define Tetris effect as "a form of hypnagogic imagery resulting from playing Alexey Pajitnov's *Tetris* that affects the player first during play and … when the player is asleep" (Tannahill et al, 2012: 2).

The game's play can "stimulate our visual system to engage in low-level pattern recognition," resulting in not just "seeing falling Tetriminos in their peripheral vision and while dreaming (Stickgold et al, 2000), but even find themselves attempting to mentally interlock real world objects…" (2012: 2). Media psychology refers to simulation theory or "internal processing"—the idea that our minds process an internal simulation of our experience of reality in order to arrive at understanding of and to predict the outcomes of events—to explain our capacity to experience Tetris effect. But Stickgold et al (2000) have found that "even amnesic participants with extensive bilateral medial temporal lobe damage produced similar reports [Tetris effect], despite being unable to recall having played the game" (2012: 2).

[26] Sandler and Sandler (1983) define this "second censorship" at length:

> The second censorship . . . has different developmental origins from the first. While it certainly contains other elements, its fundamental orientation is towards the avoidance of shame, embarrassment and humiliation. In its origins it certainly begins early in life, when the child can experience such emotions and begins to substitute conscious fantasying for play that meets with social disapproval. It reflects primarily the difference that existed in childhood between that which can be carried on in secret and that which can be allowed to be seen by others.. . . The comment 'Don't be silly' is one of the most powerful of the social prohibitions of childhood, and the fear of being 'silly' or stupid is profound. (Sandler and Sandler, 1983: 421)

Conscious fantasy, then, (and the play it supplants) is wish-fulfilling activity internalized in order to preserve pleasure and protect against shame. It generally means what it expresses with little modification. This dissertation is structured by such conscious fantasies—so it is important to note that this concept is distinct from unconscious fantasy, and from popular notions of "fantasy" as a rough synonym for anything fictional, or for a knights-and-dragons medieval setting. The notion of a "second censor" has been popular in theories of developmental psychology (e.g., Piaget, 1958) and object-relational psychoanalysis (e.g., Winnicott, 1971; or Sandler & Sandler, 1983).

[27] In their pioneering book on the psychology of videogames, Loftus & Loftus (1983) identified the significance for understanding games of the independence of cognitive and motor functions. They illustrate the concept through an anecdote about the difficulty of verbalizing instructions for how to find reverse in a sports car (the passenger had to slide into the driver's seat to find the gear): "His motor system knew perfectly well where reverse was, but his cognitive system apparently didn't have a clue. (And the motor system wasn't bout to reveal the whereabouts of reverse to its cognitive colleague)" (1983: 67). They point to learning research that found that "as learning progresses, it gets taken over to a greater and greater degree by the motor system," so that accessing a memory of embodied action is eventually only possible by calling on the motor system itself: "What the fingers have learned, the mind has forgotten" (67). Games make such use of a player's motor system, that a great deal of one's engagement with them is "forgotten" to the cognitive mind.

[28] Ludology—or the study of games qua games—was originally intended to establish a new interpretive method uniquely designed to address videogames as games, not in the terms of an already studied entertainment medium (like narrative cinema). This mission was first expressed in a series of contentious essays challenging the notion that videogames were a platform for storytelling.

[29] "Sensory-motor schemata" represented the pre-formed, perception-cluttering clichés—"sensory-motor linkages" that must be broken for a more authentic image (and perception) to appear— in Deleuze's *Cinema 2* book (1985: 20). This chapter's model of film-game convergence emphasizes how both action cinema and action videogames (genres that might epitomize one form of Deleuze's "action-image") feed into (and draw from) a common and constantly shifting supply of provocative bodily schema.

[30] The term "transcendence" carries a number of associations, such as the religious principle that situates God beyond material reality and the philosophical movement called Transcendentalism. The "fantasy of bodily transcendence" differs from the first because it does not require a religious framework and material reality is never left behind in the fantasy, but rather figures centrally in its action; and the fantasy makes no overtures to the American intellectual movement of the mid-19th-Century. The OED definition of "transcendence" is "the action or fact of transcending, surmounting, or rising above; excelling, surpassing," which nicely expresses the fantasy's

interest in a moment when some limitation is overcome, without necessarily jettisoning the notion of material resistance or struggle.

[31] "Tetris Effect" is a term for the general experience of having played any game long enough to see its play continued when one closes one's eyes or before bed, as a kind of side-effect of prolonged (embodied) engagement with the game, its images, and its systems. It is discussed more below.

[32] The platformer could most simply be described as a game about mastering space by overcoming challenges cast in spatial terms. Sometimes the genre makes terrain into a puzzle, sometimes it requires precise judgment and timing—in all cases it requires some degree of manual dexterity on the player's part. The most traditional representative is *Mario Bros.* games (1985-present), in which players jump from platform to platform, avoiding enemies and bottomless pits, and usually moving from left-to-right towards some goal.

[33] "Engine" here refers to a sort of software infrastructure, with built-in systems and graphical-mechanical "assets" that streamlines the development process. Altice highlights "metatile elements like pipes, blocks, and pits," which, he suggests, "could be positioned and arranged in various lengths and widths atop a looping backdrop of repeated scenery" that would lend visual consistency to game spaces without ever asking them to "cohere into a holistic world" (Altice, 2015: 175). Mario's obstacle-world precedes and is bent toward facilitating "athletic platforming," which might, in its simplest sense, be thought of most generally as horizontally oriented progression predicated on overcoming obstacles usually cast in the vertical axis.

[34] Briefly, parkour began as a kind of military obstacle course training and developed into its own sport or pseudo-martial art (without the combat). It involves using the body (freed of assistive technologies and equipment) to move over complicated spaces quickly and efficiently, including scaling walls, vaulting over obstacles, rolling, jumping, etc. *Mirror's Edge* tasks players with performing these physical stunts from a first-person perspective, which is itself a vertigo-inducing challenge that pushes the limits of a first-person optical point of view in play.

[35] Kasson provided the following remarks about the significance of the "forms" of Coney Island amusements: "In the effort to suggest a dream or nightmare world, Coney abstracted features from the larger society and presented them in intensified, fantastic forms. Instruments of production and efficiency were transformed into objects of amusement, and life around them lifted from dull routine to exhilarating pageantry" (1978: 73). Kasson added that "Some of Coney Island's rides, in fact, were directly inspired by modes of transportation in use in industry and society at large, beginning in 1884 with the Switchback Railroad, a forerunner of the roller coaster" (1978: 74).

[36] This tendency is nothing new, as Claudia Springer's (1991) article on the corporeality of cyborgs demonstrates. Springer argues contra scientific and scholarly predictions that popular cultural texts, rather than "effacing the human body" actually "intensify corporeality in their representation of cyborgs. A mostly technological system is represented as its opposite: a muscular human body with robotic parts that heighten physicality and sexuality" (1991: 303). VR and cyberspace discourse is perhaps too quick to "leave the body behind" in order to enter the "holodeck."

[37] In a forthcoming publication, I write about a nostalgic impulse to halt the forward motion of the 1990s side-scrolling platformer game. This work focuses on the use of background imagery that helps situate play within the context of exotic transport. This imagery both activates "place" and exists as a sort of outer limit on what can be explored—resulting in a kind of nostalgic longing for geographic alterity (nostalgia for the place one has never been, and could never go). I describe nostalgia as a stalling of fantasy (a fantasy that "never takes place," following a popular psychoanalytic definition), and its effect is often the stalling of play, such as the forward motion of platforming.

[38] From my approach, this kind of "contrary" play is not, itself, ideologically liberating; it just represents a different use of the technology and a refusal to engage in the kinetic pleasures the game offers. The bigger question, from the point of view of fantasy, is why some players engage (have need for) these pleasures, and others find greater satisfaction in visibly (actively) subverting them by breaking or counteracting the instruments of their transmission (the wish is to be ironic, to be edified through the game or the overt rejection of a certain mainstream pleasure economy).

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[39] The *Smash Bros*. series represents a rare and successful deviation from the "fighter" formula.

[40] While no authoritative and sustained academic account of this genre exists, the Wikipedia entry alone reveals the difficulty of defining and tracking videogame genre:

> Shoot 'em ups are a specific subgenre of shooters wherein the player may move up and down and left and right around the screen, typically firing straight forward.
>
> Shoot 'em ups share common gameplay, but are often categorized by viewpoint. This includes fixed shooters on fixed screens, such as Space Invaders and *Galaxian*; scrolling shooters that mainly scroll in a single direction, such as *Xevious* and *Darius*; top-down shooters (sometimes referred to as twin-stick shooters) where the levels are controlled from an overhead viewpoint, such as *Bosconian* and *Time Pilot*; rail shooters where player movement is automatically guided down a fixed forward-scrolling "rail", such as *Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom* and *Space Harrier*; and isometric shooters which use an isometric perspective, such as *Zaxxon* and *Viewpoint*. This genre also includes "run and gun" games which emphasize greater maneuvering or even jumping, such as *Thexder*, *Contra* and *Metal Slug*. ("shooter game," Wikipedia)

The Wikipedia author suggests organizing these games by use of perspective, but this is of course just one way of organizing a vast array of different types of games in this genre.

[41] The cinema of attractions' "aesthetic of astonishment" was intended to directly address and "shock" or even "assault" audiences, and was self-reflexive of its status as an attraction, contra the later more recognizable mode of cinema characterized by "narrative action or empathy with character psychology" (Gunning, 1989: 121). Scholars such as Ndalianis (2000) have described an affinity between early cinema and recent, visual-effects films, the notion of a "1990s cinema of attractions."

[42] In fact, the recent action indie games discussed at the end of the last section adopt deliberately stylized graphics. *Undertale*'s aesthetic references 8-bit-era RPGs—a genre of games it criticizes while at the same time, exceeding in expressive capacity. *Undertale* returns to an older aesthetic to demonstrate how the industry's equation of expressivity with photorealistic, state-of-the-art visuals overlooks the potential in simpler (and older) visuals. And *Broforce*'s pixelated world is clearly an aesthetic in the service of emphasizing the complex and chaotic displays of kinetic force.

[43] These provocative gestures are numerous in the 1999 film, such as in the moment when, Neo's fist blocked, he strikes Agent Smith's throat by extending his fingers; the moment when Morpheus unexpectedly drops to his left palm after blocking Smith's punch, and then kicks Smith from the side; or the way Smith rises from the ground by inflating his upper body, a show of muscle's steady resistance of gravity. Neo's character develops in plots by exceeding the expectations placed on his embodied performance—the marginal extension of his fingers reflects this idea, and serves as an unexpected moment when a fist is repurposed as a kind of disguise for five unextended fingers. These moments represent significant moments within an agonistic exchange, revealing something important about a character's relevant bodily capacities, but also reflect broader tensions in plot.

[44] Matthew Vaughn's films, though exemplary of the body-transcendence genre, all contain at least one contrary element, one piece of illusion-disrupting and overtly bad CGI: e.g., Banshee's obviously non-load-bearing wing flaps in *X-Men: First Class*, Hit-Girl's blade that announces her arrival on the scene by penetrating through a villain's chest in *Kick-Ass*, or Gazelle's prosthetic (and bladed) leg that cartoonishly slices a victim in half vertically in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. Though these moments stand out as perceptive "switches" (from a world of flesh-and-blood to one that awkwardly also contains overtly cartoon-like CGI objects or abilities), they never matter enough to rise above the emotional grip of the agonistic scenario from which they protrude. An effective body-transcendence film builds a bodily anticipation with its story. These lapses in verisimilitude do not fully disrupt the integrity of the agonistic scenario—the smartness of its interweaving of plot within a transcendent body that overcomes physical opposition to restore equilibrium surprises its viewers. When this happens, the artificiality of a device can be recognized, and we can be perturbed with a sudden reminder that the agonistic scenario is fake, but can still remain caught up in a wish-fulfilling imaginative space that continues to unfold.

[45] Whissel distinguishes a traditional "emblem" with her term, the "effects emblem":

At its most basic level, an "emblem" is defined as a pictorial image that represents or epitomizes a concept, expresses a moral or lesson, or serves as a "representation of an abstract quality, an action, state of things, class of persons, etc." In contemporary cinema, spectacular visual effects often function as "effects emblems." I define the "effects emblem" as a cinematic visual effect that operates as a site of intense signification and gives stunning (and sometimes) allegorical expression to a film's key themes, anxieties, and conceptual obsessions—even as it provokes feelings of astonishment and wonder. (Whissel, 2014: 6)

[46] Peter Brooks (1993) argues that the body becomes written into narrative by being somehow *marked*. In his example from Homer's *Odyssey*, the moment when Odysseus' scar is recognized by his old nurse, is "not an intellectual recognition, but rather a dramatic finding-out from and on the body itself":

As in Aristotle's theory of tragedy—which is itself indebted to the Homeric poems—the moment of recognition is a dramatic climax, a coming into the open of hidden identities and latent possibilities. Here the recognition comes, as it often does in Greek tragedies, through a mark on the body itself. It is the body marked in a significant moment of the person's past history that enables recognition. (Brooks, 1993: 2, 3)

For Brooks, this bodily "mark" becomes "a linguistic signifier" that "imprints the body, marking it part of the signifying process" (1993: 3). The body thusly enters into narrative (becoming "a narrative body"), meaning "the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story" (1993: 3).

[47] "Suture" is a specialized film-theoretical term popularized in the 1970s for thinking about how the signifying power of film stitches viewers into its processes of meaning making, usually depending on a psychoanalytically informed notion of "lack." Jean-Pierre Oudart (1977) defines suture as follows:

prior to any semantic ' exchange ' between two images (Bresson asserts that images must only have an ' exchange ' value), and within the framework of a cinematic *énoncé* constructed on a shot/reverse-shot principle, the appearance of a lack perceived as a Some One (the Absent One) is followed by its abolition by someone (or something) placed within the same field – everything happening within the same shot or rather within the filmic space defined by the same take. (1977: 37)

Kaja Silverman's *Subject of Semiotics* (1984) and Stephen Heath's *Questions of Cinema* (1981) also provide influential definitions of the concept. Dramatic revelations like those in *Kung Fu Hustle* do not merely create a sense of lack by posing a question as to an occluded "other" off screen—they amplify this absent one considerably as a force that threatens a formerly omnipotent force on-screen, and which we later possess through embodied identification.

[48] Henry Jenkins uses the term, "additive comprehension" to describe films in which plot revelations alter the meaning of previous events, occasioning a return to the narrative for a subsequent viewing (Jenkins 2006, 123).

[49] "Iconic imagination" is Richard Allen's term for the imagination's power to release pleasure from imagined satisfaction, which Allen analogizes with an audience's fantasmatic play with cinematic images (Allen, 1995: 122). Allen makes the case that psychoanalytic film theory has undervalued the conscious mind and the role of the ego in its engagement with cinema and fantasy. Allen calls for a model of pleasure in cinema that accounts for "conscious fantasy", which means a person's ability to use his "visual imagination" in a daydream or fantasy to evoke "the effect of an event through which we have actually lived" (1995: 122). Allen argues that pleasure in cinema is largely dependent upon ego-driven *beliefs*:

The wish expresses itself in the form of iconic imagination precisely because iconic imagination possesses the requisite property of lifelikeness. Beliefs enter into such a wish-fulfilling fantasy, but they are no longer independent of the wish that is to be satisfied. Beliefs inform the fantasy only insofar as they conform to the wish; those that are contrary to the wish are excluded. Wish-fulfilling fantasy contrasts with a problem-solving use of the imagination in the effect it has upon us, since it will characteristically leave the person who entertains the fantasy in a state of heightened pleasure. (1995: 123)

Allen is right to note that much of film studies prior to his study, when drawing on notions of fantasy at all, emphasized unconscious fantasies (primal fantasies or "screen" fantasies) over conscious fantasy. In these approaches, conscious fantasy is considered a disguise for the unconscious wish at its base. But Allen may be too

hasty in saying that all beliefs "contrary to the wish are excluded." In fact, what may be central to conscious fantasy, to its co-opting of reality testing and problem-solving, are aspects of reality that are liminal in their relation to the wish—that oppose the wish, but are capable of being modified in imagination without violating any rules of reality (without challenging *belief*). What frustrates pleasure is what creates the wish, and—I suggest—this impediment cannot be dismissed if the wish (in its structural particularity) is to be understood.

[50] In the introduction to *The Quest* (1996), a group of thugs attempts to pick a fight with a hobbled old man (Van Damme in makeup). The bewilderment of the bartender (on whose behalf the old fighter intervened) serves as the recognition of unexpected potential, and spurs the film's retrospective unpacking of world-class martial artist, Christopher Dubois's narrative of becoming.

[51] The fights in *Watchmen* are generally one-sided (Dr. Manhattan Vs Ozymandias, Ozymandias Vs Comedian, Ozymandias Vs Rorschach and Nite Owl, etc.), and saturated with a sad sense of futility. One notable exception is Rorschach inside the prison, when an inmate attempts to shank him, but is overpowered and doused with boiling oil, to the memorable line, "I'm not locked in here with you—you're locked in here with me."

[52] On one side of the binary in Freud's (1911) two principles of mental functioning, there are the "primary processes" of the pleasure principle, including unconscious memory, poetry, fantasy itself, and cinema's oneiric qualities: all could be described as *high amplitud*e ("unbound" or free-flowing cathectic energy attached to a memory that can only be remembered in its full intensity, as a hallucination). On the other side are the "secondary processes" of the reality principle, including rational and conscious thoughts, with their "bound" or toned-down cathectic energy (*low amplitude*) spread over a wide field of signification and interest in the outside world. The relation of these two principles to frequency is less clear. The primary processes are characterized by repetition— and secondary processes with less patience for repetition. Game action, in this sense, seems to be "secondary" in its (generally low) amplitude or emotional intensity (like bound energy), and primary in its (high) frequency, in the need to repeat its imaginary wish-fulfillment.

[53] *Minecraft* involves taking control of a virtual camera, looking around, and exploring. The game is as much about appreciating the procedurally generated beauty of the environment as framing space in order to carve through it. In addition, players must avoid the monsters that appear periodically during play: building structures keeps enemies at bay. *Terraria*, on the other hand, is a combat-oriented, two-dimensional, side-scrolling platformer, in which gauging jumps and fending off the incessant flow of monsters are central to the action of exploration.

[54] "Sandbox" games have relaxed narratives (or none at all), and present only a play space with a discrete set of rules (like a physics system) that simulates an imaginary world for undirected play and experimentation. Some plot-driven games (such as *Infamous*, 2009) contain "sandbox" gameplay, meaning that players can pursue goals and push the story forward or, at their choosing, simply play around with the unique physics and combat system, exploring game space in undirected play.

[55] The RPG has many well-documented influences, such as pen-and-paper tabletop fantasy games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, Tolkien literature, early text-based computer games involving cave exploration, and even Greek epic poetry. When the RPG became a popular fixture of console gaming in the 1980s, it was largely associated with Japanese developers and audiences, despite many of its roots lying in Western games and literature. Due in large part to that influence, RPG videogames still tend to adopt a quest narrative, often with nostalgic, medieval overtones. Gameplay consists of exploring vast worlds, looting castles or dungeons, battling supernatural forces through indirect control, collecting armor, currency and "experience points," leveling-up, and managing a team of protagonists representing different "classes" (e.g., rogue, mage, warrior). Since the heyday of this traditional format in the 1980s and 90s, however, the RPG has become increasingly hybrid—sometimes totally abandoning its narrative signifiers (the medieval setting, dungeon looting, etc.). Today, puzzle games, first-person shooters, zombie games and world-building simulations all employ RPG elements like leveling-up, item equipping, and character customization.

[56] Eric Klinger provides a gloss on this marine analogy: "Play permits the accommodative stretching of available schemas so as to provide an experiential bridge between an established cognitive repertory and a strange new set of circumstances. Play thus gradually invests the new events with meaning, and promotes the cultivation of new

cognitive, verbal, and motoric skills" (Klinger, 1971: 47). As is so often the case, play is viewed as a tool for development.

[57] Videogames present myriad occasions for imaginatively leaping into the unknown, even launching oneself willingly into a playful death. Here the tether is expressed in the safety of the venture's pretend nature, the fact that it happens in play. These moments in videogames invoke Roger Caillois' "vertigo" category of games, the playful destabilization of one's sensory-perceptual equilibrium—roller coasters, bungee jumping, dancing.

[58] There is an obvious affinity here between a tether fantasy and the notion of masochistic exhibitionism in psychoanalysis. Freud, of course, aligns masochism with exhibitionism and its correlate, sadism, with voyeurism. A tether fantasy is a strictly conscious phenomenon—which isn't to say that some aspects of its underlying wish are not unconscious. Rather the term tether corresponds to certain conscious manifestations, which must be differentiated from their unconscious origins for the benefit of knowledge about the shape and patterns of fantasy as it appears. When exhibitionism and voyeurism take an explicitly sexual tone, the erotic thread dominates the conversation. The fact in psychoanalysis that the desire to reveal and to see are linked to the earliest buddings of sexuality, and to struggles with the death drive, should not render all subsequent flowerings as one and the same. In short, differences in conscious manifestations may not matter much to psychoanalytic theory, but they matter a great deal to the mapping of empowerment fantasies in videogames.

[59] The notion of tether fantasy as exploring exotic spaces is reminiscent of Henry Jenkins's account of "adventure island" boys fantasies in "Complete Freedom of Movement: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces." In Jenkins' account, exploration fiction stimulated the imagination of boys in the early 1900s who were rebelling against domestic, maternal culture. Adventure videogames, at the other end of the century, provide similar imaginary access to spaces beyond urban and suburban domestic confinement. In Jenkins' argument, both adventure narratives and videogames become mapped onto neighborhood spaces where children spin "fantasies of empowerment" by escaping confinement. Play is empowering in the sense that it allows for autonomy and confidence to develop

[60] Seen in this way, a tether fantasy is like Tom Apperley's use of "rhythmanalysis," a framework for "conceptualising the intersection of everyday life and the digital game ecology" (Apperley, 19). Everyday life itself is "made up from cycles, repetition and recurrences," which intersect with the game ecology at the site of the player's body (Ibid.). Discussing the work of Henri Lefebvre, Apperley makes the case that "The study of everyday life is not a glorification of mundane activities, but a drive to understand them, and their connections to wider human affairs, rather than dismissing it as trivial and eliminating the quotidian from the scholarly agenda" (Ibid., 20). A tether fantasy is one rhythm among many that recur daily—but one that plays an important role in the pleasure of videogames.

Gaston Bachelard employs something like a tether fantasy in his discussion of the rhythmanalysis of imagining one's "dream house":

> The two extreme realities of cottage and manor… take into account our need for retreat and expansion, for simplicity and magnificence. For here we experience a rhythmanalysis of the function of inhabiting. To sleep well we do not need to sleep in a large room, and to work well we do not have to work in a den. But to dream of a poem, then write it, we need both. It is the creative psyche that benefits from rhythmanalysis. (Bachelard, 1964: 65)

From this point of view, it is fantasy and the space of daydream that are most deeply affected by rhythmanalysis. Bachelard continues on the topic of that ideal dwelling place: "Thus the dream house must possess every virtue. However spacious, it must also be a cottage, a dove-cote, a nest, a chrysalis. Intimacy needs the heart of a nest" (Ibid.). It doesn't require much modification to see videogames like *Minecraft* as engaged somehow in a dialectic of cottage and manor, a daydreaming of dwelling in one's "dream house."

[61] Tzvetan Todorov (1970) distinguished two kinds of genres: *historical genres* and *theoretical genres*: "The first would result from an observation of literary reality; the second from a deduction of a theoretical order" (Todorov, 1970: 13-14). Todorov's discussion of genre is more strictly structural than this one, but the basis of *perpetuum mobile* is not so much games as they are ("observation of literary reality") and more "a deduction of a theoretical order." Namely, *perpetuum mobile* represents a special kind of "nesting" where a *home-base* tether fantasy becomes embedded within the oscillations of a *lifeline* tether fantasy. While there aren't yet games which typify this genre,

the capacity to describe it is one of the exciting benefits of the study of games as fantasy structures. These terms are addressed in subsequent sections.

[62] At this point in the chapter, it is hopefully clear that a tether fantasy is both like and unlike *fort/da*, which Freud's grandson first played by "taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on," and that later involved "a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it," (Freud, 1920: 13-14). Freud's grandson would hold the string and "very skillfully throw" the reel "over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o.' He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da' ['there']" (Ibid., 14). Freud called the game "disappearance and return" and suggested that the wooden reel represented the child's mother, and that by "staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach" he was taking an active role in the painful experience of his mother's comings and goings (Ibid.).

[63] In a passage describing an important aspect of what Turkle calls "the dislocations of the tethered self," she gives an example of the new connectedness of mobile phones in overcoming the difficulty of parental separation:

> When you leave home with a cell phone, you are not as cut off as before, and you can work
> through separation in smaller steps. But now you may find yourself in text contact with your
> parents all day. And your friends, too, are always around. You come to enjoy the feeling of never
> having to be alone. Feeling a bit stranded used to be considered part of adolescence, and one that
> developed inner resources. Now it is something that the network makes it possible to bypass.
> (Turkle, 2012: 243)

Turkle is concerned with the consequences of being always connected, never alone, and being in control of the extent of one's exposure to others, twice over: first, being able to escape into a private circuit between self and mobile device when in the presence of others, and, second, by building social interactions through mobile devices, one has greater control over how and when to respond. Turkle views these behaviors as related to security, self-image, and comfort, and sometimes describes the teenager's connection to his or her smartphone as borderline pathological. Turkle does not consider this connection to the parents (and staged separation) as a kind of play, like Freud does with fort/da. Connection to the parents and rituals of separation are traditional parts of growing up that Turkle says are changing with these new networked technologies. These changes entail potentially significant ramifications.

[64] In dungeon crawlers, the directionality of protective relationships are typically fixed in one's decision about character class. In other games, these roles are reversible and relate more to one's position in play than to any essential qualities. *Fire Emblem*: *Awakening* (2013) employs a support mechanic offering key benefits to characters attacking or defending while occupying adjacent spaces. Characters earn a relationship grade that reflects their general compatibility in battle—a stat which must be considered in tandem with each player's own class's unique affordances and limitations. In Microsoft's *Gears of War* games (2006, 2008, 2011, 2013), players can revive one another on the battlefield for a short period of time after falling. This provides an incentive to keep teammates nearby in addition to the trope of providing cover for teammates.

In a general sense, there is always the capacity for a loosely defined *lifeline* tether fantasy in any fluidly cooperative gameplay. But this capacity is heightened when players adopt unique roles in the fighting that result in an in-built but player-directed mutual dependency. The experience of serving as lifeline to a friend, or of benefiting from the friend-as-lifeline, brings with it a kind of fantasy coefficient beyond pleasurable feelings connected with not losing. Of course, the possibilities of these kinds of tether fantasies in cooperative gameplay are only barely understood and explored. Not all cooperative "tethering" really activates a tether fantasy: in *Resident Evil 5* and 6 (2009, 2012), for example, cooperative play sometimes splits players along pre-scripted paths: one player seeks out a switch, another must wait by the door. Sometimes one must provide cover to the other. Since these moments don't emerge naturally from gameplay, rescuing one's teammate feels directed by arbitrary narrative contrivances requiring players sometimes split up to solve puzzles.

[65] Many games take place exclusively within domestic spaces, such as *Mister Mosquito* (2001) or iterations of *The Sims* (2000-2014). But, like *Chibi-Robo!*, these games transform fictional home settings into other kinds of spaces in play. Mary Flanagan notes a vital tension between actual homes and the homes that serve as setting for games like *The Sims*: "If the classic American player's physical home is a cul-de-sac 'castle,' then the player's *Sims* house and the surrounding *Sims* suburb can easily become a vision of utopia where each player's house is constructed as a

world unto its own" (Flanagan, 52). These all-encompassing spaces, worlds unto their own, lack the vital aspect of home summed up in the metaphor of home as a "cul-de-sac 'castle,'" the presence of differentiation between inside and outside. This differentiation can be construed visually, but the more important the distinction is for play, and the more the terms of the division come *into play*, the more a game space can create a home-like space. A tether fantasy is very intimately bound to home (representations, conceptions, and poetics).

[66] Bob Rehak (2003) likened the videogame avatar to Lacan's *partial object* (something detached and yet retained), and this chapter has already discussed the intermediate object (Winnicott, Klein) in terms of a tether fantasy. While Rehak's analysis is insightful and helpful, this chapter makes an argument about identification in games that differs somewhat with the assertion that part of the game stands out from the rest (as a partial object), and instead embraces the idea that identification is sometimes fixed on an avatar, but at other times is spread across the whole field of play through the rhythms of tether and accretions fantasies.

[67] The "centrifugal tracing" model of home space, its coming and going, is reflected in Henry Jenkins' explanation of childhood play, which employs Frederick Donaldson's terms, "home base" and "home region." Home base is "the world which is secure and familiar," and *home region* is "an area undergoing active exploration"—both are spaces that children move back and forth between in exploring the boundaries of their domain (Jenkins 1998, 267). The tensions in these spaces are instrumental in childhood for building confidence and developing identity. "Centrifugal tracing" of one's domain, expresses the process of negotiating these two spaces.

[68] Of course, as Silverman argues, the game is also cast in terms of the verbal utterance, the earliest flowerings of linguistic signification. But the deployment of space cannot be ignored, and is central to playing with the partial object, the disappearance of the self. If it is said, following the emergence of the subject from the earliest practice of signification, that the unconscious is structured like a language, then it must also be conceded that the unconscious is also structured like a *space*.

[69] Anika Lemaire, in a monograph on Lacan, summed up *Spaltung* as being nearly analogous to what Freud's later writings described as the division between ego and id: *Spaltung* ("from the German *Spalte* = *s*plit") is "the division … between the self, the innermost part of the psyche, and the subject of conscious discourse, behavior and culture" (Lemaire, 1970: 67). The topic of splitting in psychoanalysis is both complicated and important—and some of Lacan's most enduring ideas relate to it: the misrecognition of the self in *The Mirror Stage* and the effects of the signifier on the subject (entry into the symbolic).

[70] As discussed in greater detail in the dissertation's introduction, the distinction between game and fantasy is tenuous. But this tenuousness is precisely the benefit of combining these terms. The Freudian model espoused in Freud's essay on the "Creative Writer and Daydreaming," fantasy is wish-fulfilling play that has given up its connection with tangible objects in the real world. But *fort/da* is precisely a game of giving up connection to tangible objects. The object is lost, or lost-sight of, when it disappears—replaced with the utterance "gone" ("fort" or "o-o-o-o"). It is the imagined presence of the parent that takes the place of the lost object. As this case demonstrates, fantasy (an imaginative, wish-fulfilling construct) is deeply imbricated with even the earliest formalized games that involve tangible objects.

[71] Kucich calls this "oedipal masochism," and notes that it can lead to a kind of imagined omnipotence in that "the sense of being unloved may be transformed into a general feeling of special competence and self-sufficiency" (Kucich, 2002: 84.). But he insists that scholars engaging psychoanalysis should also consider non-sexual or "pre-oedipal forms of masochism," that "in the absence of a powerful or punitive other … sensations of self sufficiency may come simply from the ritualization of suffering" (84). Somehow, masochistic "self-wounding" both occasions and "safely regulate[s]" "dangerously transformative energies, or desires for power" (84).

[72] Games like the *Resident Evil* series, the *Left 4 Dead* series, *Dead Island*, *Zombie-U*, or *Dead Space*, display only one-half of a tether fantasy in that the player is offered no quarter. Instead of the tank-like avatars that wipe out waves of invading enemies in *Orcs Must Die*, players in most zombie games wander the world in a prolonged state of vulnerability: weak, slow, low on ammo, and constantly dogged by hostile monsters. The promise of a restorative connection, a safe space, lies just around the corner, but it is never attained. When defensive structures appear in the game, they almost always prove unreliable. Progressing in play means remaining mobile; players are compelled

forward always, in a raw state of constant exposure and threat. This masochistic thrill appears in isolation from the reverse motion, the "da," the return of maternal plenitude. But it can be seen as a *lifeline* tether fantasy by means of Freud and Kucich.

[73] Spufford argues that fantasies of travel to exotic places (the North and South Pole as extremes) accomplished something significant about the Victorian readership's relationship to home:

> the subject of the poles somehow confirmed and satisfied an idea of what was closest at hand. Armchair travel to the far North—an increasingly popular pursuit—may have taken people out of themselves, but it must also have done the opposite; or exploration would not have spoken, as it did, to people's identities, where they lived, at home. (Spufford, 1997: 47)

[74] Given the many permutations and marked masochistic tendencies in a tether fantasy, it might be most productive to adopt an attitude towards fantasy like that of Laplanche and Pontalis, summarized by Linda Williams:

> …fantasies are not, as is sometimes thought, wish-fulfilling linear narratives of mastery and control leading to closure and the attainment of desire. They are marked, rather, by the prolongation of desire, and by the lack of fixed position with respect to the objects and events fantasized. (Williams, 1991: 10)

The benefit of this approach lies in its embrace of the playful vacillation of positions in the fantasy, the wonderful futility of determining one's culpability in a fantasy of exposure, whether it be a masochistic surrender or a pleasure taken in the misfortune of "others," such as characters in fiction.

[75] As *Terraria* progresses (narratively), home is less where players withdraw for safety and more a convenient site for storing and crafting important items. The player still acquires a charge when leaving home freshly equipped, oriented toward dangerous, new spaces, but as a function of play home wanes in relevance as players acquire powerful new equipment that serves the same insulating function. The feeling of progress the game offers seems to contend with the pleasure of feeling protected and exposed by returning to and reaching away from home.

[76] As with the more complex tether and accretion games that the Tower-Defense genre is usually said to have derived from—real-time strategy games like *StarCraft*—successfully defending one's territory often has more to do with the clever allocation of limited resources than anything else. It is actually true that the genre of Tower Defense emerged from a modified map of the first *StarCraft*. But the genre had other influences, such as the 1990 title, *Rampart*, a title set in medieval times and that involved defending a castle against sieging enemies. Play was broken into preparation/repair and combat/defense phases. It is not this chapter's intention to divest the Tower-Defense genre from its historical connection to *StarCraft*—but it must be noted that just because one genre emerged from a modification of an existing game, this does not mean the newer genre inherited the older one's governing play fantasies. It is true that playing *StarCraft* entails defending one's territory—but the game is emphatically about gathering resources and rapidly expanding one's grip on the world's map. This genre of game is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, in connection with an accretion fantasy.

[77] In Freud's economic model, physical and psychical trauma are both considered as influxes of energy that breach the stimulus shield. But the presence of a wound allows the system a point of fixation, a way to "bind" or master the painful impulses flooding the system. Freud suggests that psychic traumas that are accompanied by physical trauma tend to lead less often to traumatic repetition, since the injury's "calling for a narcissistic hypercathexis of the injured organ… would bind the excess of excitation" (Freud 1920, 38). For psychic trauma without a wound, those dangerous energies are more difficult to bind, especially when there is no system for mastering them. When psychic systems are not strong enough (in terms of their preparation, or the level of cathexis laid down in anticipation of a shocking occurrence, "fright"), or when the strength of the breach's level of excitation exceeds the powers of preparation, the system must strive to bind those impulses retroactively.

[78] It must be reiterated that by using the vine/trellis analogy with fantasy in videogames, this work does not seek to disparage the faculty of imagination. The growth of the vine beyond the trellis (ie., into imagination), is the very means by which (this work postulates) new game genres develop. It is only for analytical reasons that the chapter emphasizes the boundaries of the game by signaling moments when imagination must take over the lion's share of play's burden. The imagination is a powerful tool—but it is also unreliable; it may be where fantasies go in search of new application, new form. But it is also where fantasies fizzle and sputter, losing traction to some other concern.

⁷⁹ "String of Pearls" is a term game studies often gives to narrative structures in which progression remains linear, but each area of play (each chapter, level, stage, or world) represents a space of expanded play options that all eventually lead to some narrative event (cut-scene). This narrative event has the effect of narrowing or reducing the player's "latitude" (a diverse array of play options are reduced to the single event that pushes plot forward so the story and cut-scene can remain intelligible and intact despite play's diverse possibilities). Narrative as a bottle-neck to play can appear, when mapped out, like a string of pearls (each pearl represents play possibilities, the string represents the story). In many RPGs, each pearl roughly corresponds to a new geographic area with its own village, inn, weapons shop, etc.

⁸⁰ Zombie games are interestingly at odds with traditions in zombie cinema. Movies like *I Am Legend* and *28 Days Later* utilize *home-base* tether fantasies in a dynamic interplay of exposure and withdrawal set in domestic spaces. Even *The Walking Dead*, a serialized television show, structures its plot's major events around the oscillations of *lifeline* and *home-base* tether fantasies. But zombie videogames are usually stuck in the open (exposed) position, seldom offering any kind of solace or escape, compelling players forward with a sustained uneasiness and the perpetual threat of death—this includes arcade shooters like the *House of the Dead* series, the *Left 4 Dead* series, *Dead Island*, and the *Resident Evil* series. *Resident Evil 4* is a "progression" game containing highly permeable shacks the protagonist holds up in early in the game to evade an attacking mob of villagers. But these flimsy houses are better death traps than safe spaces of withdrawal. The limitation of a character-bound point of view, in a broader sense, is the basis of the game's constant feeling of vulnerability, which renders its permeable domestic spaces totally unsuitable for a *home-base* tether fantasy. See endnote 72, above.

⁸¹ An excellent example is the Facility level in *GoldenEye*'s multiplayer mode. Players can hole up in this level's bathroom, an elevated area that has only one point of entry, blocked by a swinging door, so that anyone invading the space must come dangerously close to an easily fortifiable barrier. Intense agonistic exchanges in play focus on guarding or pushing past that door, banking grenades or spraying bullets in well-timed strafe-attacks. Should a player defending the space die, then the game becomes a race. Exposed, vulnerable, isolated from teammates, the spawned player must return to the bathroom and arrange for safe entry. The defended space becomes a mechanism for accepting a friendly force while rejecting hostile ones—a process governed by a tether fantasy in play.

⁸² From the point of view of the fantasy, the visual narrative and the customizable (profoundly *openable* and *closeable*) home simply allow the tether fantasy opportunity to demonstrate different edges of its fuller articulation in imagination. In a similar fashion, when television news, popular fiction, and commercial messages evoke the specter of the home invasion, an underlying and playful thread of fantasy allows one to take pleasure in these traumatic scenarios. One ABC news show even mentions the film *Panic Room* for context when offering advice for how to fortify the home by turning a closet into a panic room and storing a cell phone there. In this case, making the family safe is an alibi for the playful *home-base* tether game that is attached to building a panic room or a backyard bomb shelter: such a construction necessitates a fantasy scenario, or a simulation of a variety of events that would test the integrity of this separated, fortified space. Home in its daily, lived-in experience, becomes super-charged with the presence of thoughts about fortification. This is an example of a figurative nest that is literally built in the home.

In the 2005 story featuring advice from "consultant," Bob Stuber, ABC news made the case that in order to fortify the home against "burglaries, home invasions and abductions," Americans should consider constructing a make-shift panic room out of the bedroom closet ("Turn Your Home Into A Fortress"). In making its case, the story articulates a surprisingly detailed fantasy scenario:

> By spending a few bucks on a dead bolt lock, some different hinges and a jam lock, and by storing your cell phone there at night, you can hide and keep your assailant at bay for a long time—time he doesn't have. While he's thinking, you can call 911, and by keeping a list of neighbors' phone numbers there as well, you can call reinforcements for help, too. (Ibid.)

Under the auspices of planning for the worst, this program provides a means of playfully imagining a space of fortification. While an actual home invasion would be a traumatic experience, the presence of a safe room (even if just in imagination) provides an occasion for playfully moving away from and toward that safe space while going about day-to-day business. It is crucial that, while this panic room may provide a life-saving function someday, it isn't a space where one feels confined. Rather, it is at hand for moments when thoughts of refuge become important. Lying awake at night, dwelling on the space between one's bed and a "panic room" becomes an imagined flirtation

with danger, a pleasurable exposure (being open, vulnerable, exhilarating) made possible by the proximity of the safe space.

[83] The bare-leg analogy is itself part of a longer quote left out when cited by major studies on early cinema's relationship with emerging communications technologies. Freud paints an ambivalent picture about modern invention:

> If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice; if travelling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable to relieve my anxiety about him. (Freud, 1930: 40)

And scholars like Tom Gunning have explored early cinema spectacle's function in helping to work through broad cultural anxieties about these new technologies.

[84] Examples include the storm in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, the storm and flood in *Ponyo*, and the bathtime sequence near the beginning of *My Neighbor Totoro*. In *Kiki's Delivery Service*, a young witch braves a strong storm to deliver an important package—later encountering stormy weather again during a climactic attempt to rescue a friend from a runaway hot-air balloon. The film's story about self-sufficiency and self-discovery within the constraints of one's inherited identity are given immediacy through tether devices such as needing the resolve to ride one's broomstick straight into storm clouds. *Ponyo's* tether imagery is even more severe. Its storm is supernatural, aided by the release of a magical elixir, and the mother and son protagonists must race back through the storm to their small home atop the hill before the roads are closed. At home (or home-base), they enjoy warm soup and tea—nearly self-sufficient save for an absent father figure. And, the next morning, the rest of the world rests under a calm and transparent postdiluvian water—the world is left behind, but not destroyed. It remains warmly lit, and nobody seems harmed in the flood. The poignant bath sequence at the beginning of the film, *My Neighbor Totoro*, sets up a *home-base* image of family bonding similar to *Ponyo's*. But this image of family intimacy gives way, later in the film, to separation, exposure, and loss.

[85] In *Computer Games: Text, Narrative, and Play*, Diane Carr et al. trace a lineage from adventure novels like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, through tabletop board games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, into role-playing videogames like *Bauldur's Gate*. While this connection is frequently invoked in conversations about the influences of the RPG, Carr et al. go beyond asserting that the RPG borrows "the inhabitants, flora and fauna of Middle Earth" and also make the case that "less obvious" aspects of the novels survived: "In *Balder's Gate*, characters become fatigued and ineffective if they do not get regular sleep. Sleeping for "8 hours" (which takes a few seconds of the player's time) restores the team's health and heals any injuries"(Carr et al., 2006: 23). The scholars extend to games an argument made by Jennifer Turner (2001) in a review of Tom Shippey's *Author of the Century* (a monogram on Tolkien). Turner suggests a broad tendency in adventure novels, to adopt temporal patterns of action and rest. Carr et al.'s formulation needs to be mentioned here because—though it is mentioned only briefly and left largely apart from their wider analysis of the games—these scholars deserve credit for crucial insights, such as the "sudden relief afforded by the pause button" (2006: 23) in the game's oscillations between the "sublime and the cozy," or between "Scary, safe again." (Turner, 2001).

Turner's own analysis also requires mentioning for the connections it raises. Turner strings together disparate novelistic genres ("explorers' tragedies, Westerns, space operas") on the basis of the "compulsively repetitive rhythm Freud writes about in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), and which he links to the 'death instinct', the desire to be free of all tension for ever (cf the 'And they lived happily ever after' of the traditional fairytale)" (Ibid.). Freud's death drive, as the chapter argues below, is perhaps not the best lens for thinking about *tether* rhythms; I argue that the push towards quiescence is more useful for thinking about the accretions fantasy. While the lineage of texts raised by Carr, Buckingham, and Turner is significant, it lacks a coherent theoretical frame (it shifts without warning from notions of the sublime to *Schadenfreude*, Freud, and mimesis—flipping back and forth between accounting for play and narrative structure) and is only applied in a piecemeal fashion to videogames. The tether fantasy is part of a broad theoretical frame that specifies certain consequences for player

identification, the connection forged between popular texts by participating audiences, and the design of interactive systems.

[86] Statistics are available in an online report http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2014.pdf

[87] Statistics are available online at http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2007/02/art2full.pdf

[88] As Rybczynski argues, the development of the design and technology of domestic structures changed slowly, with innovations we take for granted today (like central heating, indoor plumbing, bedrooms, and even paned glass for windows) taking hold gradually over many years. Rybczynski emphasizes a continuity between the houses in the middle ages and those of the early bourgeois era:

> A typical bourgeois house stood on the original medieval plot, but it consisted of four or five floors rather than two—which reflected the price and availability of land in the center of this rapidly growing city. The house was arranged around an internal courtyard. The lowest floors housed a commercial space and stables as well as the living quarters of the proprietor and his family, servants, and employees. … Although some people still slept in the *salle* on collapsible beds, there was a new room, which was often used exclusively for sleeping—the *chambre*. (Rybczynski, 1986: 38).

Nevertheless, he does maintain that "[b]efore the idea of the home as the seat of family life could enter the human consciousness, it required the experience of both privacy and intimacy, neither of which had been possible in the medieval hall" (48). And physical comfort as a concept is tied to this development of home (and family) as sources of *emotional* comfort:

> Comfort in the physical sense was still awaiting the eighteenth century and the improvement of such technologies as water supply and heating, as well as refinements to the internal subdivision of the home. But the transition from public, feudal household to the private, family home was under way. The growing sense of domestic intimacy was a human invention as much as any technical device. Indeed, it may have been more important, for it affected not only our physical surroundings, but our consciousness as well. (1986: 49).

[89] The "level-up" in the role-playing game is an example of what is called "stratified progression," (Peterson, 2012: 341) wherein a certain threshold of accretions (usually experience points, "experience," or simply "xp") is attained, setting into motion the incremental improvement of a variety of player-character stats, and sometimes the opening of new abilities or options for interacting with game spaces or characters. This process is not reducible simply to an external reward or "incentive system" detached from play.

[90] The "magic circle" of play requires that accretions have no real-world value. This, of course, is not always the case. Games scholars such as Mia Consalvo (2008) and Lisa Nakamura (2009) have studied the phenomenon of in-game economies in MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*—specifically, the phenomenon of "gold farming," which is a key example of how Consalvo challenges the notion of "magic circle," *and* how Nakamura describes racist attitudes within online game cultures. "Gold farming" is the exploitative process of paying people an extremely low wage to perform tedious in-game labor in a game like *World of Warcraft* in order to accrue in-game capital (such as gold or other materials) which is then sold for actual money on a real-world market exchange to wealthy players (from more developed economies) who would rather pay than actually perform this tedious labor in-game. As such, gold farming is an important social and economic phenomenon in and around MMORPG culture.

However, as outlined in the dissertation's introduction, the "separateness" of play doesn't mean de-contextualizing an actual instance of playing. Rather, it refers to the constitution of the game *as such*. In other words, the role of the *accretion* in the game's wider structuring logics, and in other similar games—including those that are offline-only and have no real market exchanges—should be studied alongside any analysis that looks at how this process *sometimes* becomes caught up in real-world economic disparities. As a preliminary observation, since gold farming happens in networked games, it seems like what is being purchased is not the accretion per se so much as a social status. In other words, the pleasure of playing through an RPG and slowly *becoming* stronger (tether and accretions) is obviated in pursuit of the status of simply (and already) *being* powerful. It is important for textual analysis to be able to think about the role of the game itself ("as such"—as a rule-bounded structural support for

fantasy) within a wider unit of engagement that also includes virtual chat rooms and online communities. Tether and accretions play can become wound up with online as well as real-world (domestic) play contexts.

[91] As the player character becomes stronger (more health and stamina, better defense, more restorative items, stronger weapons, etc.), the accretions game employs a variety of means of making the player feel vulnerable: monsters become more imposing, the labyrinths more complicated and trap-filled, sometimes parties are split apart, or powerful bosses cause unexpected status effects like putting the player's seemingly invincible warrior to sleep.

[92] It is worth noting that *Mega Man X* makes becoming more powerful a central theme in its narrative as well as its gameplay. By beginning the game with a premature encounter with a major antagonist (Vile), in which a still more powerful ally (Zero) intervenes on your behalf (in a cut-scene), the game uses its sparse narrative exposition to establish an accretions fantasy based on this initial feeling of weakness. This scenario also marks Zero as the ideal image X slowly reflects as his own body becomes an icon of power.

[93] *Dungeon Hunter: Alliance*'s insistence that players sift through and exchange a mountain of menu items (which arbitrarily fill up inventory capacity) seems absurd unless viewed as one of the game's central pleasures: dwelling on the project of accruing powerful objects. But this sorting also highlights how role differentiation is an important part of identification: rogue, warrior, magician—each class has different attributes in battle. Sorting menu items becomes a way of negotiating each player's function in the game. New upgrades accrue, it might be said, to this feeling of usefulness, to the player's identity stemming from a unique play function. The desire to feel powerful cedes some ground to the need to feel useful to one's team. And the players become tethered to one another for security, a connection that is strengthened during intense battles, and far from the safety of conventional "tether" points.

[94] Not all games containing menu systems involve tether or accretions fantasies. What makes the RPG menu unique is that a player is drawn into identifying with the menu as a site of power. Time spent there is caught up with feelings of strength and growth. Menu systems in platformer games or first-person shooters rarely function in this manner. Consequently, platformer/FPS players are rarely mired in the menu for as much time as RPG players.

[95] Warren Spector, the keynote speaker at the 2013 symposium on narrative in videogames, Inventing the Future of Games, called for an end to player stats, classes and levels in videogames (what he saw as simulation techniques of tabletop RPGs). Clearly, these attributes of RPGs encumber a cinematic mode of storytelling. But some of these qualities—especially character stats, levels and classes—are actually central to experience and specifying the effect of a new accretion. In other words, there are important elements of a game, central perhaps to the pleasure games offer, other than the story the game is telling in a pseudo-cinematic mode. And wiping away those elements in the name of streamlining narration would mean cutting out more than just the dumb inertia of games that don't know better than to remediate older forms.

[96] Recall that Joseph and Anne-Marie Sandler describe the "second censorship" as "the censorship spoken of by Freud as existing between the systems Preconscious and Conscious," and "having as its fundamental motivation the avoidance of conscious feelings of shame, embarrassment and humiliation" (Sandler, 1987: 336). This second censorship is different from the primary censorship in that the latter takes place "outside consciousness," in the modification, disguise or repression of unconscious fantasies or impulses which "arouse conflict" or "disturb the equilibrium" to such an extent that they cannot be allowed to be in any way acknowledged by the conscious self. The second censor, on the other hand, takes place within the *domain* of consciousness—the revised impulses are not in conflict with the ego; rather, they reveal to others the ego's ambitions or high self regard. In clear reference to Freud's essay on the "Creative Writer," Sandler and Sandler identify the development of the second censor with "the step of substituting conscious phantasising for play, and the need to keep such phantasies secret" (1987: 336). They even provide a helpful quote from a prior publication of theirs on the present and past unconscious:

> As the child develops the increasing capacity to anticipate the shaming and humiliating reactions of others (with all the additions he has made to his expectations arising from his own projections), so he will become his own disapproving audience and will continually internalize the social situation in the form of the second censorship. Only content that is acceptable will be permitted through to consciousness. It must be plausible and not ridiculous or 'silly.' In a way the second censorship is much more of a narcissistic censorship than the first, but the narcissism involved

often tends to centre around fears of being laughed at, as being thought to be silly, crazy, ridiculous or childish—essentially fears of being humiliated. (1983: 420-422).

The point of introducing the term, second censorship, into the present discussion is to reiterate that conscious fantasy too undergoes revision, and that this is key to the "ars poetica" explored in this research more broadly. "Ars poetica" is the expression Freud, in his "Creative Writer" essay, lent to the means by which the artist manipulates ambitious ego fantasies so that the audience's second censorship is not awakened by the display. A fantasy of being invulnerable, for example, such as expressed through the hero in Freud's essay, would be an ambitious ego fantasy that might arouse resistance in the audience and prevent the release in tension Freud described.

[97] Sarah Tarlow (2002) quotes these words from Bauman (1992) in a discussion of funerary practices which "emphasize the beauty of the dead body," suggesting death is "a suspension in the relationship" rather than "its closure or failure" (Tarlow, 2002: 92). For Bauman, death is both "the ultimate bankruptcy of love, insolvency which will never be redeemed," while, at the same time, "eternal suspension, and thus a perverse victory over bankruptcy" (Bauman, 1992: 206). Tarlow extends this idea, combining it with Shilling's (1993: 5) idea that the body is a "project," in order to argue that "the body is understood not only as the project of its owner, but something upon which others may work, particularly after death" (Tarlow, 2002: 94). This reading of funeral processions is an interesting analog to the narrative trope—in the rare instances of an accretions fantasy's appearance within fictional plots—of loyal devotees toiling to revivify a lost lead, a dead father (e.g., *Harry Potter*, *Naruto*, *Ghost Busters*).

[98] Of course, the "constancy principle" is not, itself, a wish so much as a mode of psychic functioning; RPG's don't express a "constancy wish" so much as they express a fantasy of accretions, which is the playful correlate to a disguised Nirvana wish. To be perfectly clear, then, the accretions fantasy disguises a Nirvana wish—to return to an inorganic state, to be invincible, to know no pain or impediment—through a blend of gameplay that resembles the "constancy principle," which is ego-syntonic.

[99] There is nothing in the genre of tabletop, role-playing games that prevents them from achieving the same end. The tabletop genre is far more flexible than many give it credit for. That medium uniquely favors role playing since nearly every aspect of its play is filtered through a group-social intermediary: the dungeon master structures the game and makes decisions as referee, the game's imagery and the actions and personalities of other players and characters are all generated by the player and player's peers during play. The current Wikipedia entry on tabletop role-playing games refers to the games as mimetic fantasies ("games of make-believe") buttressed by secondary systems ("rules of interaction"). To an extent, this definition suits tabletop games—it is also fair to call them "collaborative storytelling," as the article does. This moniker alone perhaps best separates the tabletop games from their videogame counterparts in the RPG genre. In the videogame, one pursues tether and accretions fantasies almost exclusively and over play's duration. Efforts to make the games more "narrative" often undercut these central play fantasies, which results in story seeming superfluous or disconnected from play. Story, on the other hand, is one of the major pleasures of the tabletop genre, for which the number-crunching in an accretions fantasy must often be put on hold.

If this seems like a quibbling point, consider how each game tends to become represented in narrative media. The "Advanced Dungeons & Dragons" episode of the television show, *Community*, builds its narrative around a game of Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) where each character's actions in the quest both reinforce that frame-character's personality and relationship to other characters on the show, but also helps push the central conflict of the episode forward. In other words, the television show's narrative merges seamlessly with the "story" being told through the role-playing in the game. Of course, an actual game of D&D would be far less eventful than the compressed version in the single episode of the show. But this compression does not change the basic nature of the play taking place. The mimetic game of role-playing lends itself easily to the show's frame narrative. Play can easily be revised and converted into narrative.

Contrast this with the "Dungeons and Wagons" episode of *American Dad*, in which characters enter an MMORPG (online, multiplayer videogame) in a similar attempt to merge the frame story with the "plot" of the role-playing videogame, resulting in a complete misrepresentation of the genre. What in the referenced genre of play would be the extended and repetitious exchange of blows until one side fell, a clash of numbers (damage dealt, damage received, damage recovered, max HP, attack power, body rating, status effects, etc.). In order to make the game play more suitable to narrative representation, the fight is depicted as if it were an action film: the physical prowess of the heroes fighting an impossibly large foe results in a series of leaps and dodges. The monster is treated like a puzzle—once his weakness is found, he is immediately defeated. The videogame, as is so often the case in

narrative representation, is here treated as a mere reference, reduced to superficial markers referring to gaming's lingo, its style or aesthetic. The competency or attentiveness of *Community* compared with that of *American Dad* notwithstanding, this is one telling example of how D&D and other tabletop board games mix tether and accretions fantasies in a solution of mimetic role-playing, social performance. In tether and accretions videogames, these two fantasies take center stage. And while the tether fantasy can be represented in narrative, the accretions fantasy is banal and repetitive, lacking the peaks and valleys of dramatic tension.

[100] Many guides to screenwriting employ an equilibrium model for plot: some early event brings about an imbalance in the diegesis (a build-up of tension), and the story is about how initial equilibrium is restored (tension released)— see any guide by Robert McKee. Scholars of narrative, such as Peter Brooks and Gerard Genette, note how plot is simultaneously a drive toward this state of equilibrium, and the invention of a variety of means of delaying arrival there. Brooks even provides an extended Freudian analysis of plot as a kind of pleasure principle equilibrium quest.

[101] This is, of course, a descriptive (not normative) statement. Building an RPG accretions project (in all its numeric detail) into a novel would make for an interesting experiment in storytelling.

[102] Spector made this call as keynote speaker at the recent conference, Inventing the Future of Games: Interactive Storytelling Symposium, hosted by UC Santa Cruz in 2013. See endnote 95 above.

[103] The moment when *Earthbound*'s protagonist, Ness, has his psychic-breakthrough can be read as a quotation of cinematic methods of revelation. During an important cut-scene, Ness has a vision which unlocks something in his mind: "Instantly, Ness's mind cleared, and he realized that he had possess great power! At that moment, Ness's psychic powers radically expanded!" Hours of meticulous gameplay spent building those stats are suddenly bolstered in one dramatic moment as Ness's stats all shoot through the roof. This narrative moment is a huge disruption to the accretions fantasy and could threaten to destabilize play—but it occurs so near the end of the game, and as a result of a narrative collection quest (collecting items from defeated bosses), so it both seems like a special bonus for conquering the game's principle dungeons, as well as the beginning of the story's final chapter. Interestingly, in this chapter, the protagonists opt to destroy their earthly bodies and become machines in order to travel backwards through time, a moment of reflection on the genre's "conservative" impulse to become *inorganic* once again.

[104] Note, just for example, the orphaned child who possesses a bizarre power trapped inside (made visible by some outward marking, which protects him in times of great peril, and related to some magical property wherein part of his parents' souls are still held within him), who joins an elite school to train near-magical capacities, who is hunted by a snake-like villain—a villain who has somehow become immortal and who kills the boy's substitute-guardian, the wise old leader of the school/community.

[105] While there are many examples of this kind of a helpful interruption to the accretion's stabilization process, it is worth mentioning an especially elegant example from *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*. Near the end of the game, Link, nearly fully equipped, loses all of his hard-won equipment while parachuting over an active volcano. He must then sneak around and recover equipment piece-by-piece. When the player realizes that all accretions have been lost, there is a moment of panic, a feeling of suddenly being very exposed—at the mercy of enemies the player had already decidedly surpassed as a result of various accretions.

More generally, the tether fantasy in the game's overarching narrative defines a player's purchase on the game differently: in play, the avatar may be a container to hold accretions, but, in cut-scene, the avatar becomes a spatial and dynamic body whose precise degree of accretion-preparation has no real bearing on the pre-determined stakes of story. The example from *Skyward Sword* extended the story (plot point: "Link suddenly loses his equipment") into gameplay, so that the spatial, dynamic, narrative body returns to play as the basis of this miniature (re)collection quest, as the baseline of that avatar-as-empty-container, as a dramatic reassertion that the Nintendo tether/accretion game is never merely a numerical collection quest, but is always caught up with other forms of bodily fantasies.

[106] Of course, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night (1997) established the addition of tether and accretions fantasies to the Castlevania series' decade-long platformer format, borrowing perhaps from influences like the Metroid series. But Harmony of Despair broke from the fantasy constellation of Symphony by sacrificing the tether fantasy in an

effort to heighten pressures for players to develop spatial mastery, through repetition and friendly online competition.

[107] Moore's Law refers to the prediction that the number of transistors within in a single integrated circuit will double every two years for a number of decades (it has recently begun to slow because of inherent limitations to development). While videogames have been direct beneficiaries of the steady increase in processing power implied by the "law," it must be considered that the rate of development of the fantasies underlying play tracks a different schedule—one that is less predictable, less even, and less clearly connected to processing power.

[108] The 2015 global box office brought in a record-setting 38-billion dollars, with an 11-billion just in the US (McClintock, 2016), but the 2015 global interactive entertainment industry made a similarly record-setting 91.8-billion, with 23.5-billion in the US alone (Global Games Market, 2016). Both records are attributed to the rapidly growing Chinese market, but the American industry also rebounded last year.

[109] Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011) is an apt example of how videogames are often construed. In this fictional novel, an eccentric billionaire hides an "Easter egg" inside his pervasive virtual reality videogame that players must find (in order to inherit his fortune) by acting out a litany of references to 1980s pop-cultural movies and arcade games (including playing a perfect game of Pac-Man). In this fictional universe, the styles and attitudes of the 1980s have returned in 2044—a concise expression of the durability of the cyberspace milieu for those who are still "stuck" there (as if in a perpetual boyhood) when thinking about games or gamer culture.

[110] To the best of my ability, I have tracked this story back to an old internet meme site, YTMND ("You're the Man Now, Dog"), where it appears as an animated gif titled "animalcrossingtragedy") featuring a blonde, white family, and a somewhat ambiguously gendered character narrator. But the story has also been assembled as a multi-panel comic and circulated on a variety of blogs and web forums

[111] *Animal Crossing*'s micro-economy (featuring alienating labor and commodity fetishism) would seem like a mimetic fantasy of growing up and having an expanded range of possibilities for economic participation. Kathryn Bond Stockton's (2009) study on the figure of the queer child points out that children participate only in a special, restricted economic exchange limited to certain kinds of indulgent consumption, including videogames (a "mysterious economy of candy"):

> What may be children's greatest vulnerability, according to the fictions I read for this book—also their greatest danger to adults—involves not sex but money. If children were to have more economic power, would they be less vulnerable, even less sexually vulnerable to adults, in some contexts? Or would they be more vulnerable? Being speculative, it is hard to say (though the fictional *Lolita* has an answer). What changes so dramatically for Anglo-American children in the early 1900s, according to all historians of childhood, is their economic role. Through labor laws, children, who were once working bodies in the labor force, cease to work for wages. How, then, are children made unique and strange by money? Among other ways, by *not* bringing money in the form of incomes into their families; by receiving, instead, an 'allowance' from their parents; by spending money on toys and consumer choices driven by media targeted at them (and later sexually aimed at them). Fictions particularly and uniquely address this child queered by money, along with its obvious appetite for media. (2009: 38)

Despite being excluded from full economic exchange, children, in Stockton's account, are *queered* by money, participating in the vicissitudes of late capitalism through proscribed channels of blissful media (and sugar) consumption. What this dissertation terms an "accretions fantasy," or trading and accruing valuable objects and a sense of power in a videogame, may, for example, also be understood as a compensatory play gesture for the experience of relative economic powerlessness—one of the only avenues open for a child to "consume" (purchase) the feeling of being powerful. And, perhaps even as a corollary to this, children receive their purchasing power from parents (who often limit or refuse videogame access), and in this way create both a situation of powerlessness and an especially alluring (forbidden) answer to feelings of powerlessness.

This is not to say that this avenue is closed to adults. Besides, *Animal Crossing* isn't offering as much of the feeling of being powerful. It offers duration—its framing of economy is "quaint" and "cute" in aesthetic. And this is in large part much of the point of playing. The ornaments sought are valuable in themselves (their literal graphic design) and, further, as accoutrement within an already cute and stylized world. The game is intended to be less stratified in terms of age or gender. Does it make an implicit rhetorical claim about capitalism? And how

effectively—what kind of an effect do we expect? Though the approach differs from this dissertation's goal of articulating a psychic space for textual analysis, the arguments of Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) linking games to capitalism (and empire) should be kept in mind when thinking about the place of games and other entertainment media in an often politically problematic global economy.

[112] Johnson (2013) provides an interesting history of the rise and fall of the promise of hypertext storytelling. Much of the excitement over the new medium went in the unexpected direction of web 2.0:

> It's not that hypertext went on to become less interesting than its literary advocates imagined in those early days. Rather, a whole different set of new forms arose in its place: blogs, social networks, crowd-edited encyclopedias. Readers did end up exploring an idea or news event by following links between small blocks of text; it's just that the blocks of text turned out to be written by different authors, publishing on different sites. Someone tweets a link to a news article, which links to a blog commentary, which links to a Wikipedia entry. Each landing point along that itinerary is a linear piece, designed to be read from start to finish. But the constellation they form is something else. Hypertext turned out to be a brilliant medium for bundling a collection of linear stories or arguments written by different people. (Johnson, 2013)

[113] This of course does not include games with significant network components or emulations of old games on newer platforms and at higher resolutions, which can end up looking very different from how remembered. And this also does not speak to the fact that when the game was first released, it was likely at or near the graphical vanguard. It is difficult or impossible to recapture the sensation of wonder one has when initially playing a new game with visuals the likes of which have never been seen before. Also, when playing a "new" (recently published) game, one has the sense that many others are playing it around the same time—this may be apparent within the game itself (as in the *Dark Souls* series), within an advertising campaign (seeing a commercial on TV for a game you're currently playing), or within social networks (where friends may discuss it). When one returns, years later, play may seem more solitary.

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