

DIFFERENCES IN DESIGN
VIDEO GAME DESIGN IN PRE AND POST 9/11 AMERICA
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DIFFERENCES IN DESIGN
VIDEO GAME DESIGN IN PRE AND POST 9/11 AMERICA

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ABSTRACT
DIFFERENCES IN DESIGN
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Video games are constructed through a bundle of processes meant to imitate an understanding of the world through the associations of the technology used to create a game and a design team. From opening doors to courting a mate, videogames can and do explore a wide variety of societal structures. This thesis presents an examination of the processes that occur within and during the making of 12 action videogames made between the years 1996 and 2006. It examines the intent of game makers by analyzing the content of videogames cross-referenced with fan-produced archival playthroughs of these games. Using the 2001 World Trade Center attacks, a point at which the American collective consciousness changed, I aim to display how local culture influences video games and how video games imitate that change. My preliminary results suggest that video games do typically pull from the local culture. Games from 1996 generally imitate

the fear of scientific progress and environmental destruction. By 2005, videogames imitate post-2001 culture through a greater focus on war safety through constant companionship, nesting or development of a living space that is constantly under attack, and antagonists changing from world-conquering leaders or scientists to an unknown, obtusely motivated charismatic enemy. As such, videogames are a means through which sociologists can examine the associations between technology, people as developers, and players. This research has important implications for the current state of public discourse about videogames that is typically focused on negative effects.

INTRODUCTION

“The comparative study of games is one that promises an important contribution to the history of culture. The questions involved in their diffusion over the earth are among the vital ones that confound the ethnologist. Their origins are lost in the unwritten history of the childhood of man.”

~ Stewart Culin (1894)

This study presents an examination of video games made in America and how they change over time. Specifically, this thesis examines the relationship between the 2001 World Trade Center attack and the rise of first-person shooter, action video games (please see Appendix 1 for more information about these types of games). The methodological premise of this study is that play is a reflection of culture and as such, the video games that we play are indicative of the culture that game comes from (Caillois 1967; Culin 1894; Huizinga 1950). This study analyzes games made by the Japanese during the same period as a means to further understand the impact of culture on play. This relationship seems obvious because in the past twenty years, the United States has entered three declared wars, two metaphorical wars (terror and drug), and suffered the most significant attack on American soil since World War II.

Within traditional social science, there is an imbalance of research on violent content in games (Anderson 2008). Of 966 journal articles produced on media violence between the years of 1921 and 2004, psychologists produced over 50% of them (Anderson 2008). Little sociological work has been done to examine how culture impacts the design of games that sell well within a population.

BACKGROUND: PLAY AND CULTURE

Play is a constant state of being that exists concomitantly with culture; how we play displays how we understand the world (Huizinga 1945). The easiest way we can study play is through games (Culin 1894). As Stewart Culin (1894) notes, the study of games is important as it allows researchers to better understand culture. This thesis is interested in a particular kind of game that has come about in the past 40 years: video games. Early in their history, these games were recognized for their unique contribution of the melding of entertainment and computer technology (Bing 1982; Hemnes 1982). This blend of technological innovation and play in video games must be purposefully and consciously written so that a computer can display the product game designers want to show an intended audience (Dyer-Witherford and Peuter 2009; Juul 2005; Squire 2006). Thus, this conscious creation of play bound by technological limitation was beginning to allow researchers to begin studying play and games. However, most studies of video games are focused on violence, particularly violent children's programming and the effects of violent video game content (Anderson 2008; Hapkiewicz 1979; Trend 2005).

Instead of thinking of games in terms of a reflection of culture (as this thesis will attempt to do), psychologists have tried to explain violence present in games as the cause of violence by players outside of the game (Anderson, et al. 2010). This work has resonated with the American public (Anderson 2008), partially due to a moral panic that began during the early 1980s arcade boom (Kaplan 1982) and through another moral panic began by a series of suicides and murders associated with pen and paper gaming (Hately 1999; Ziegler 1983). This psychological research was central in the creation of legislation intended to censor and restrict video game creation and consumption that has

only recently been rejected by the Supreme Court (08 U.S.C. 1448 [2011]). In conjunction with the rise of this academic work, the impact of computer technology, more recent moral panics, the foreign usurpation of video game market control, and the rise of moral sensitivity after the events of 2001, public opinion of video games became significantly more negative throughout the eighties and nineties (Adsoy 2011; Aoyama and Izushi 2002; Asimov 1982; Donovan 2010; Kerr 2006).

As a result of the constant negative ideological language about games, almost all work about video gaming begins defensively (Anderson 2008). Even the new discipline of game studies, thought to have started in the beginning of 2001, was again focused on media violence by the end of that year (Aarseth 2001; Trend 2005). Without a definition or a place to begin exploration of video games that is not defensive, social science has not moved past these early studies. Further, as academics we have yet to study video games in the way we study other entertainment media. For example, there are very few studies that explore: who makes video games, where video games fit within entertainment media, what parts of culture video games reflect, why video games continue to be so popular, the potential importance of where video games are made, or how video games work as socializing agents.

WHAT IS A VIDEO GAME AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Currently, there are a variety of definitions for the term “video games.” The most common definition among social scientists seems to be, “games on computers, consoles, handhelds, iPods, personal digital assistants, and mobile telephones” (Anderson, et al. 2010). This broad definition avoids contextualizing games to their relative culture and has detrimental implications. For example, this definition ignores the idea that players are

playing a unique game at a unique time. It also ignores that game designers are restricted by our ability to personify ourselves in a digital environment (Murray 1997). It ignores the teleological traps inherent in writing off the personification of computers (Latour 1996).

Psychology-based researchers do not traditionally consider contextual ideas including: What is going on in society at the time of this game's creation? Who are you on the battlefield? Why are you there? Where are you? Why is this game popular? By avoiding the exploration of the actual game, researchers have black boxed games as a non-varying entity. So, what is a game?

In the newly formed discipline of "game studies," an inter-disciplinary group of researchers, one of the most popular definitions of game is from Salen and Zimmerman (2004): "A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (81). This definition enables games to be studied as games in that it allows for identification but says nothing of where the rules come from, what the measurement of the outcome will be, or even what is meant by the term, "conflict." These are all culturally ambiguous terms. For game studies, this definition works as the target of research are the games themselves. As is, this definition is incomplete for any work that involves the social sciences.

Most games (board or otherwise) are culturally-infused, culture-producing objects (Juul 2005). Win conditions, player representations, goals, rules, and possibility spaces all reflect the cultural outlook in which the designer had (Huizinga 1950). Second, the representations of objects and ideas within a game (objects like: doors, governments, religion, steering wheels, breathing, science, schools, a laboratory, or anything else

needed in-game) are all reflected aesthetically and functionally by the culture that visual designer comes from. Unlike board games, the standard large-budget, popular video game (labeled as AAA by game industry enthusiasts) is created by a group of people who are limited in their performance by the power of the technology. This process is also referred to as social construction (Latour 2005). You could also refer to groups of people engaged in multiple processes whose goal is the creation of a single object a, “process of processes.”

This "process of processes" is done by groups of specialized computer programmers, creative workers, producers and managers (O'Donnell 2010; Williams 2002). These workers actively construct a joint expression of a culture that is intended for a generic audience. Because video games are made by different groups of people from differing cultures, there are many interpretations of that audience. While not statistically representative, the design of a game resembles the process of quantitative analysis. Each member of the sample (in this case, the design team), adds their opinion via a list of items central to the design of a final expression – a vast bundle of rules and procedures called a video game. These bundles of rules are also called game mechanics and allow the intended audience to explore a complicated series of procedures bound together by a narrative or story (Juul 2005).

Global interaction has routinized types of games present in this entertainment media. Games can quickly be identified as things like “shooter,” “role-playing,” “action and adventure,” “sports,” and more. While these games are universally recognizable by fans or consumers, cultural input is still noticeable very quickly in how these games approach their characterization (Azuma 2006). Game mechanics are what guides a player

within any type of game (Juul 2005). For example, in the type of video games that are the focus of this study – action and adventure gaming – players run along a bound linear space called a level and are presented with situations in which they need to react quickly. These are commonly referred to as twitch reactions and are the focus of psychological games research (Breuer and Quandt 2011; Jenkins 2004; Provenzo 1991).

In these action games, players are limited by how the game is constructed. For example, during play I can shoot a gun at enemies but not at myself; I must load bullets into a gun while enemies have nearly limitless bullets they can shoot at me; there are only so many bullets that can hit me before I have to start over or before my character dies. Twitch-based games are traditionally called action-games with shooters being considered a subset of these. These are commonly referred to as the “core” video game within the video game industry (Gamespot 2011; Nutt 2011; Sinclair 2011). These games typically involve players being asked to achieve simple goals (get to the end of a line) but vary wildly in their means to accomplish those goals. Shooters are differentiated by the type of twitch-based actions. In shooters, the twitch action is based on two objectives: find target and destroy (Jenkins 2004). This is opposed to traditional action games which could be construed as dodge target and attack. The most basic example is the difference between the original *Super Mario Brothers* and *Duck Hunt* (Nintendo 1984).

Players interact with these rules typically through pushing a designated button to input commands (e.g. run, jump, pick-up, move arm, etc.). These commands are also governed by rules. For example, the “move arm” button can only be pressed so many times in a given time period; a character cannot swim in in-game water; a character has a bundle of pictures or frames it will use to display a character’s step before that character

can begin that animation again; an enemy's sword thrust has an effect on the player's movement frames, etc. However, these limitations are meant to control possible actions a player can take within the designated space. This space is commonly referred to as a magic circle—the metaphorical boundaries of a game by Johan Huizinga (1945) through which all current definitions of play and games are founded, including Zimmerman and Salen (2004). Thus bound in the magic circle of play, we can define a video game.

In short, games can be understood as a bundle of rules and procedures with a final goal that conditionally control the player but whose construction is pre-defined by the culture the majority of designers come from. As a finished product designed to generate sales and profit, we install and create video games inside our newest technologies and these are limited by cultural understanding of display and computational technology. A video game is created for a generic group of consumers for a proprietary format or formats that are also controlled by a specific company that has culturally bound rules of business participants must agree to. This is central to game creation and should be central to the study of video games.

IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS REGARDING THE STUDY OF TECHNOLOGY

As the driving force behind display technology and a primary means of exploring human-computer interfaces, research about video games needs to have a broader theoretical foundation than is currently employed. There are many epistemological and ontological issues within the studies of technology. I propose a means through which to correct the imbalance of work done with video games, video gamers, and game makers. The theory that sits at the foundation of the study of technology and society begins with

the basic tenets of disagreement between Emile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde (Ritzer 2008).

Durkheim believed that society was apart from the members of a society. This sui generis entity directed our actions. He argued that society was made up of what he called “social facts” and that the study of these facts could be treated as scientific objects (Ritzer 2008). Durkheim’s initial study, *On Suicide*, displayed the relationship between a member of a society and the group that that member belonged to by displaying how a single social fact, group cohesion, resulted in lower levels of suicide (Durkheim 2006). Durkheim connected the rules of order for that group and the actions that group took concerning suicide. Further, he believed that all social facts were created outside the members of a group and as such, could be manipulated for social change (Ritzer 2008).

On the other hand, Gabriel Tarde believed that society was a circulating entity through which any manner of objects would be called on to perform tasks that were aligned toward a goal. These tasks formed the basis of our social world which would not exist without its members. The basis for all of society was simply imitation (Kinnunen 1996). This imitation created circulating ideas that could change or alter at any time but were reinforced by objects we designated to hold the ideas groups of people had (books, newspapers, rooms, etc.). Generally, these creations would be referred to as figurations. A figuration is an idea or an object created by a group of people who all put some interpretation of society within that object’s makeup (Latour 1996). For example, the keyword and the Dewey decimal system of the card catalog in a library was designed to help catalog work whereas changes to this scheme allowed Google to rearrange this knowledge in ways the inventors of that system could not have imagined because no

member of society until that time had created it. A classroom is also a figuration. The makeup of the classroom designates everything that will happen within it (Latour 2005).

Tarde believed that the means through which to study a society was through individual or micro-level studies of people acting within a figuration (the formation of an object or what Bruno Latour (2005) would later call a controversy). He believed that subjectivity was a “contamination that moves constantly, from point to point...without ever...going through a social context or a structure” (Latour and Lepinay 2009-9). Through evaluating what the members engaged in a controversy linearly, sociologists can discern the basic shape of the larger entities humans constantly referred to with a designated term, shorthand, or black boxed concept (e.g. the economy, government, a factory, etc.). By staying at the micro-level and examining how individuals and objects are associated, we can ensure that this “contamination” does not overwhelm a researcher’s gaze.

Therefore, the basic theoretical perspective I employ for my thesis is figuration and imitation. Figuration is a point at which an unknown amount of associations (between people and things) coalesce (Latour 2005). Imitation is the repetition of ideas. Imitation becomes important because objects are society made durable (to quote Latour). If we take an object and begin to trace all associations with it, to its creation, we can see what all people involved were imitating. For Tarde, imitation is the basis of society. We as people, imitate beliefs and desires or motives transmitted from one individual to another. Imitation in this case, means those points where an object or person is suddenly associated with another (Kinnunen 2001). Because of this, Tarde feels that sociologists should be concerned more with what things associations have in common rather than how

those associations differ. In this way, we acknowledge the contamination that is subjectivity.

CHAPTER 1

Video games are important to society and important to sociologists then, because they are an object constructed by individuals, using technology that is meant to reflect culture. For the purpose of this study, I am concerned with video games labeled by retailers and crowd sourced fan sites as, “action.” I am further interested in the games that are run on computer technology that usually runs a specific kind of removable media that is generally connected to a display device. These devices are called consoles.

Like all technology, consoles have to be engineered and manufactured. Bruno Latour (1996) tells us that engineers ask questions about society and through their answer, critique society. That critique takes form as a piece of new technology (Latour 1996). Thus, in order to study the technology produced, the researcher must study the connections to society that surround that technology and trace the path to its current manifestation. Unfortunately, as I have shown, each study about video games tends to be a specific element of game culture instead of the games themselves.

PUBLIC OPINION AND VIDEO GAMING

Video Games to 1984

Video games were created in America during the cold war through a hack of new display technology meant for missiles (Aoyama and Izushi 2003; Burnham 2003; Kent 2005). Games like *Missile Command*, *Astrosplash*, *Combat!* and *Asteroids* appeared on

the shelves, a reflection of the worries of the time. These games tended to mimic the aura of disaster in American culture at the time but did so in a way that not only gave the United States ways to have fun with the political climate, but also to display superiority through the very technology that could destroy us (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009).

Video games became popular very quickly and from the late-seventies into the mid-eighties. Around 1984, the public-at-large abandoned video games as America had created them, labeling them a fad or a passing fancy due to over-production and market saturation (Aoyama and Izushi 2003). The major event that is used to symbolize the end of American video games was the dismantling of one of the original game companies, Atari, in 1984-5 (Aoyama and Izushi 2003). The abandonment of American-created video game hardware and software allowed Japanese firms like Nintendo and Sega, Inc. to study how the American industry's mistakes occurred and to gather enough data to stop the same mistakes from happening again.

The Rise of Japan

In Japan, the foundations for the modern video game industry were established very quickly after the dismantling of Atari. Unlike the war-obsessed video games created in the United States, Japanese games were tied to the already established comic (manga) and animation sectors (Aoyama and Izushi 2003). Most players did not realize their games came from Japan until the American companies began producing video games again (Consalvo 2012). In these Japanese games, almost all semblance of Cold War rhetoric disappeared from video games for the next decade and were replaced with manga inspired cultural images (Aoyama and Izushi 2003). Cultural messages of the United States as expressed through console video games mostly disappeared. In their work,

Aoyama and Izushi (2003) use this event to demonstrate their term they call “cultural proximity” or the cultural nearness of the people designing hardware to the personnel designing software for it.

Nintendo, seeing a lack of software regulation as the cause of the American video game industry’s decline, assumed complete control of development for their hardware. In order to make a game for their hardware, a video game manufacturer had to pay Nintendo a licensing fee that allowed the Nintendo “Seal of Quality” to appear on their packaging and the necessary code for the copyright detection chip to allow the game to run on their hardware (O’Donnell 2010). Nintendo then told that manufacturer how many units and within what time frame the game could be released. By 1985, Nintendo became a household name – one-third of the households in America owned a Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). This victory lasted for almost twenty years for Japanese game makers (Kent 2005). By manufacturing hardware and controlling the software for that hardware, American video game firms suddenly found themselves behind cultural barriers that originated with control and proper business etiquette that American video game companies had not had to learn and had actually gone to court over several times (Aoyama and Izushi 2003). Video games were further relegated to the domain of children and while adult fans of American games moved to the blossoming personal computer (PC) market. Computer games were then labeled with derogatory terms that had previously been used for pen and paper gaming (Kent 2001). This division between console and PC games would continue to be associated with American gaming until the release of Microsoft’s Xbox 360.

A competitor of Nintendo's, Sony Computer Entertainment (SCE), introduced a CD-ROM based video game console in America in 1995 called the *Sony PlayStation* (PS1). This system became a tremendous success after the release of the hit video game *Final Fantasy VII* took game of the year in 1997 (Kent 2005). Sony, an international company entering the video game market, brokered several deals that allowed for their video game system to attract as many software developers as possible (Donovan 2010). It was during this time that the American console game market began to gain significant momentum as it was no longer bound by the cultural boundaries that had hindered it (Aoyama and Izushi 2003; O'Donnell 2010). By 1999, SCE's share of the video game market rose to 55% (Aoyama and Izushi 2003; Donovan 2005). In 2000, SCE released a successor to the *Sony PlayStation*, the *Sony PlayStation 2* (PS2). The release of the PS2 and its competitor created a shift in profit margins that inevitably allowed American developers to regain power within the video game market.

Personal Computer Gaming and Console Gaming Meet

The release of the PS2 was mirrored by Microsoft's *Xbox*, an American firm's first foray into the video game industry since the end of the Atari era in 1984. By 2009, the successor to the Xbox, the Xbox 360, has surpassed the *PlayStation 3* in sales (Jenkins 2007). This event symbolizes the return of hardware and software cultural proximity to America. For the first time in nearly thirty years, video game software is being made for video game hardware that comes from the United States. Microsoft, through its extensive Xbox Live service, combines internet-based gameplay through a video game console, thereby recombining video games and computer games. It is this success which points out that right now is the time to study video games, video game

culture, and culture's effect on video games. This re-establishment of American norms and values in the production of popular console games occurred in conjunction with cultural changes that came about directly after the 2001 World Trade Center attacks.

CHAPTER 2

9/11 AND CULTURE

Because this thesis is concerned with the link of culture and play in the form of video games using 9/11 as a culture-influencing event, I need to establish how the media reflected cultural change after September 11th, 2001. Quay and Damico (2010) state that nearly all communication media changed significantly as a direct result of this event. Television and film most obviously show these changes through the way it has integrated terrorism as a backdrop to narratives not usually associated with it (Quay and Damico 2010). *Sex in the City* featured episodes influenced by terrorism as did many other Romantic Comedies (2010). The World Trade Center disaster represents one of the most “spectacular display(s) of media violence in the history of human communication” (48) (Trend 2007).

Slavoj Žižek tells us that the significance in the media display of 9/11 is not in how real it all seemed, but how much like media entertainment the disaster felt (Žižek 2002). Researcher David Trend echoes Žižek saying that while media violence studies had been retreating from academic circles in 2000, the 9/11 events reset the bar for media violence debates in that reality and fantasy suddenly seemed to perfectly reflect each other. Trend (2007) also states that the environment of violence in the years after this event created a means through which the media violence researchers of the 1990s could reestablish their foothold in public discourse about violence and media. There are several changes to culture that have appeared in the years after 2001 that, if reflected in popular

video games, could provide support to the idea that video games reflect the culture that they are created in.

For example, the concept of warfare changed dramatically in the years following the attacks. This is best displayed through the lawyers who worked for the George W. Bush Presidency. In his book about the justification of their actions through constitutional interpretation, John Yoo, a lawyer in the Department of Justice between 2001 and 2006 states, “It is no longer clear that the United States must seek to reduce the amount of warfare, and it certainly is no longer clear that the constitutional system ought to be fixed so as to make it difficult to use force” (Yoo 2005 ix). Instead of mutually assured destruction as displayed in movies like *Top Gun*, “do not fire until fired upon,” (Proser 1985) we began to see the concept of “preventative war” as displayed in television shows, e.g. 24.

In conjunction with more war, there was also a tremendous rise in patriotism for the United States reflected in and augmented through basic shifts in how entertainment media portrayed terrorism and war before 2001 via the news and entertainment media (Altheide 1996) and after. The key change came from a movement started by key advisors to the Bush Administration. Karl Rove, advisor to George W. Bush, reportedly met with publishers and financiers in Hollywood to ask on behalf of the Bush Administration for less “anti-America” entertainment in television and film (Quay and Damico 2010). In addition to this rise of “pro-America” entertainment, there has also been an increased desire to censor opinions and challenges to government decisions outside of entertainment media (Lambe and Reineke 2009). Concurrently, researchers have seen a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence in teenagers who were in high school

at the time of the attacks (Murphy Jr. et al. 2006). Teenagers, as late or as early as 2006 indicated that the value they placed on ideas like “survival, safety and security values (a world at peace, freedom, national security, and salvation)” (399) increased significantly (Murphy Jr, et al. 2006). The ideas that had dominated teenage life in years previous, “self-esteem and self-actualization” decreased in importance (Murphy Jr. et al. 2006). In addition to staying home more than traveling, people began to nest or to stay home and focus on creating the perfect home environment.

Nesting had multiple consequences throughout the United States. There was an increase in DVD rentals, sales of cooking products went up, comfort food sales began to rise, and Do-It-Yourself channels on television and the Internet began to become more popular (Quay and Damico 2010). Shooter video game sales from American developers increased dramatically after these attacks as well as how the content and context of popular games changed. Contrasting this shift was a significant rise in the United States residents taking steps to ensure a more fulfilling life. People left their current career or actively sought new careers, often suddenly or without reason instead of staying with boring or unfulfilling jobs (Quay and Damico 2010).

This extended to relationships as well. In general, people began to look for more fulfilling life-experiences (Murphy Jr, et al. 2006; Quay and Damico 2010). Religiosity increased significantly during this time as well. Many scholars have noted that the World Trade Center attacks were a reminder that religious-imbued action was still a reality in the secular, scientific progress-based world of the United States (Juergensmeyer 2004). Fear of dying without having a fulfilling life was suddenly important to American life and ideological outlook (Quay and Damico 2010).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to test the possible impact of the World Trade Center attacks on video games and further understand the connection between video games and culture, I formulated research questions that focus on tracing associations between people and a technology. Exploration of these questions begin with the release of a video game and then traces associations to that game by fans, news outlets, game creators, and other technology. By using a significant cultural event like the World Trade Center attacks, sociologists can begin to trace the associations each of these groups have and use the difference between cultures as a measure of influence.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do action video games reflect ideological shifts through their content?
2. How do action video games reflect the majority culture present throughout their development?

I sampled “action” video games through sales data and again by year of publication given the general type of play and availability to me to play. The games that will be part of this sample are reported best sellers since 1996 through 2006. By using games that have sold well, I expect those games (as movies do) to most accurately reflect our associations to other people; thus meaning in their ideas being more diffused (Moretti 2011).

ON SAMPLING

Through sales figures generated at the analytics website vgchartz.com in November of 2010, I assembled a dataset of the top 1000 video games since the release of the NES in 1984. I then removed sports, wrestling (WWE, WWF), fighting (Street

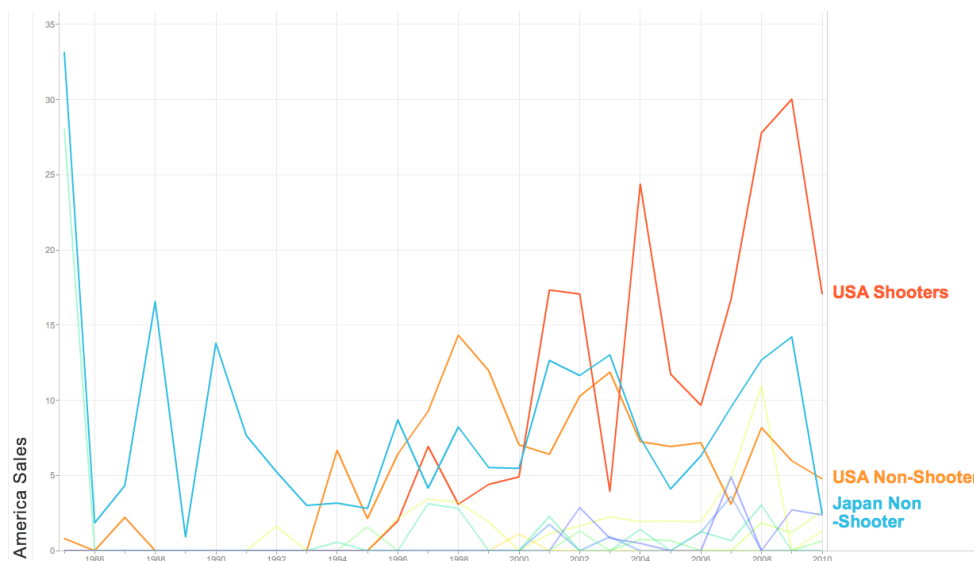


Figure 1 - First Person Shooter Sales Over Time

Fighter), racing (Mario Kart), puzzle (Tetris), party (Mario Party) and simulation specific games (The Sims, Civilization, etc.). What was left is what is commonly referred to as the “core” video game group: action and adventure gaming (Iwata Asks 2011; Sony keynote e3 2009, Nintendo keynote e3 2011). As illustrated in Table 1, the popularity of video games within American culture has shifted between games from Japan and games from America. As of 2011, Japanese video games are selling a significantly lower amount of units to American consumers. Conversely, as figure 1 shows, sales of American created games, especially shooters, have risen dramatically.

Data and Method

Initially, I constructed a dataset that consisted of 1000 of the bestselling videogames from 1985 to 2010. These data were based on cumulative sales data from vgchartz.com, the selection criteria for this dataset was: 1) no sports games; 2) no sequels unless they are on different systems; 3) console only; 4) American based sales data; and 5) each game must be more than a score attack (e.g. *Missile Command*, *Asteroids*, *Donkey Kong*, *Pac Man* are games that feature high scores). The games left over are what are commonly referred to as the “core.” These games are the driving force behind the modern game industry. I then condensed the sample of games to 5 years before and after 2001 in order to control for the growing sense of fear within society leading up to 2001 and the impact of 9/11 5 years after the attacks.

In order to analyze these games, I used data obtained through three different methods: briefly playing the games; crowd-sourced wikis, instructional material from companies like *Brady Games*, frequently asked questions, reviews, “let’s plays,” and interviews and press pieces on how these games were developed. These variables allowed me to trace the shape and scope of video games from their inception to the present.

Dataset variables include:

- demographic data for main character (if known)
- culture of development
- type of game
- sales figures (estimated)
- system
- year of publication
- publisher
- developer and other variables

It is difficult to sample video games in that there are very few quantitative surveys done about them that incorporate information about the games themselves. There are very few pre-formatted, pre-assembled datasets that multiple researchers can evaluate. For this study, I assume that popularity would be a good indicator of cultural messages and design successes based on research about the popularity of movies that indicates that more than 30% of positive surprise (buying outside an individual's normal purchasing habits) movie sales can be attributed to social ties (Moretti 2011). Thus, word of mouth relates to sales much more significantly than previously believed. Through sales figures generated at the fan-driven, freely available video game analytics website www.vgchartz.com, I generated a list of 1000 best sellers in April of 2011. VGChartz is unique in that these numbers are difficult to obtain. Regular, structured, cumulative reporting of sales data has not been reported freely and publicly until VGChartz began operation.

These sales data encompasses three different markets: Japanese sales, American-sales, and European Union-sales. According to these data, action games make up approximately 40% of all best-selling video games since the release of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in the United States. In order to better represent the diversity of action video games, I removed sports, wrestling (e.g. WWE, WWF), fighting (e.g. Street Fighter), racing (e.g. Mario Kart), puzzle (e.g. Tetris), party (e.g. Mario Party) and simulation specific games (e.g. The Sims, Civilization, etc.). Many call this group of video games that are left over "the core" (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2011; Iwata 2011). I then combined multi-console releases, perspective of the player (first, third, side-scrolling), country of development (or, in some cases, the majority culture represented at the time of development), publisher, and release date using data from

www.mobygames.com in order to narrow the list to 350 to 400 of the top selling “core” or action video games in the United States since 1984.

These quantitative data allowed me to examine the concept of cultural proximity described by Aoyama and Izushi (2008). The popularity of video games within American culture has shifted between games from Japan and games from America. Japanese games have retained comparable market figures since the mid-1990s while American-developed games gained approximately 1.2 billion dollars each year since 1995 (Adsoy 2011). At present, the American video game industry is worth twice the Japanese game industry (Adsoy 2011). I then purposefully selected 12 games: 6 from Japan and 6 from American developers that I owned but were as comparable as possible. For example, comparing *Grand Theft Auto III* (England 2006) to *Super Mario 64* (Japan 1996) would not provide a lot of data due to radically different design goals. However, *Grand Theft Auto III* (England 2001) and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Japan 2001) are different perspectives on the same idea – the sandbox – and this provides unique opportunities for researchers.

Second, because place and time are relevant to culturally infused objects, I will conduct a more in-depth qualitative analysis of current video games. I designed a study using Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) combined with the video game specific ideas present in Dutton and Consalvo’s research (2006). The result is a sample of 12 action games spread out evenly through the years 1996, 2001, and 2006. This sample takes into account the changes in graphic processing, changes in design due to more powerful hardware, and the reification of the game industry as a living, breathing entity

capable of only producing games for “the core” (Gamespot 2011; Nutt 2011; Sinclair 2011).

Year	Origin	Title	Publisher	Developer
1996	USA	<i>Crash Bandicoot</i>	Naughty Dog	Sony Computer Entertainment
1996	USA	<i>Shadows of the Empire</i>	Lucas Arts	Nintendo
1996	Japan	Super Mario 64	Nintendo	Nintendo
1996	Japan	<i>Kirby Super Star</i>	Nintendo	HAL
2001	USA	<i>Halo: Combat Evolved</i>	Microsoft	Bungie
2001	USA	<i>Grand Theft Auto III</i>	Rockstar	Rockstar
2001	Japan	<i>Devil May Cry</i>	Capcom	Ninja Theory
2001	Japan	Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	Konami
2006	USA	<i>Saint's Row</i>	THQ	Volition
2006	USA	<i>Gears of War</i>	Microsoft	Epic Games
2006	Japan	Lost Planet	Capcom	Capcom
2006	Japan	<i>Dead Rising</i>	Capcom	Capcom

Figure 2 - Games Qualitatively Examined

Qualitative Methods – Ethnographic Content Analysis

Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is a methodology created to using the principles of qualitative methods (Altheide 1987). It can be used to evaluate multiple media by viewing these media as documents. This project attempts to take into account the mutual influence of culture through an examination of the interaction of game makers, games, and video game players or fans in addition to the population of individuals who do not play video games. These three groups are connected by many social links. By tracing these associations between humans, non-humans, and the ideas between the two – we can glimpse the makeup of what it is we are referring to when we

say the loaded term, video games. Different disciplines understand video games in different ways but each has its weakness. In the present, most social sciences understand games as a direct line from the game to the player (refer to figure 3):



Figure 3 - How Social Science Sees Video Games

In this model, players do not have any influence on games. The people who make the games are not considered in any fashion, video games are only one object, video games. Players, while detailed, are just that: people who play video games.

The newer discipline of “Game Studies” understands video games differently (figure 4):

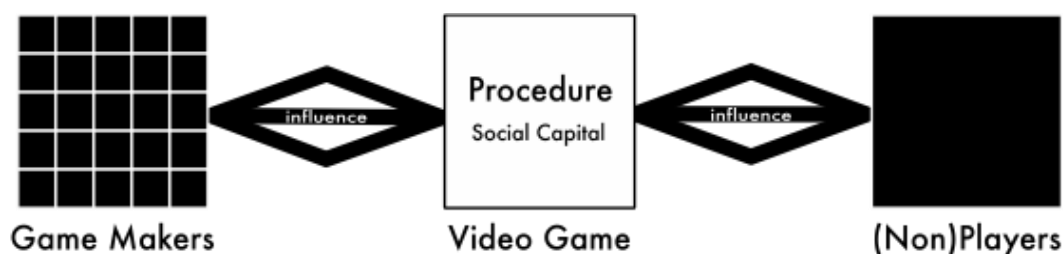


Figure 4 - How Game Studies See Games

Game makers are black boxed into terms like, “independent” (small studio) or “AAA,” (large studio). The games themselves are not confined to a black-box. Each game is a unique entity worthy of detailed study. Games are only understood in terms of design philosophy and how effective their communication of that philosophy is. Impact and influence of culture is merely a result of the game maker’s perspective. Players and Non-Players are not discussed in any way but as people who play games. This is due, in

part, to game studies being a direct response to the psychological study of video gaming as well as the result of traditional social sciences disregarding the idea that communication with a non-human is communication worth studying (Latour 2005). Game studies are studies of social capital and anomie in that they examine how game makers set goals and the means to attain those goals. The measure of a game is in how well game makers communicate these two ideas (Juul 2005).

Game Studies do not generally consider what type of person (demographically) the game designer is. Procedures within games represent different aspects of society designers wish to bring to a players attention (Bogost et al. 2010). These are ways for a player to feel the impact of social capital or how privileged the group they have been socialized into really is. For example, in *World Farmer*, families could decide to attend school or buy food, not both (Bogost, et al. 2010). In the countries where these games would be played, this is not a decision they will have to make. *Minaret Attack*, acknowledges the social capital of Muslim religious beliefs in that no matter how many minarets are destroyed, eventually you cannot destroy all of them (*Minaret Attack*).

This study aims to overcome these obstacles by reformulating the relationship of game makers and players in so much that these are people, who are produced by culture, working together with other people, who are also produced by culture, to produce an object intended to emulate the real by constructing a fantasy setting around it – the magic circle. By removing all black boxed ideas, we gain an ability to discuss video games as a complicated social process made up of many different actors including hardware, firmware, game makers, and fan culture (refer to figure 5). I propose the following model as an alternative:

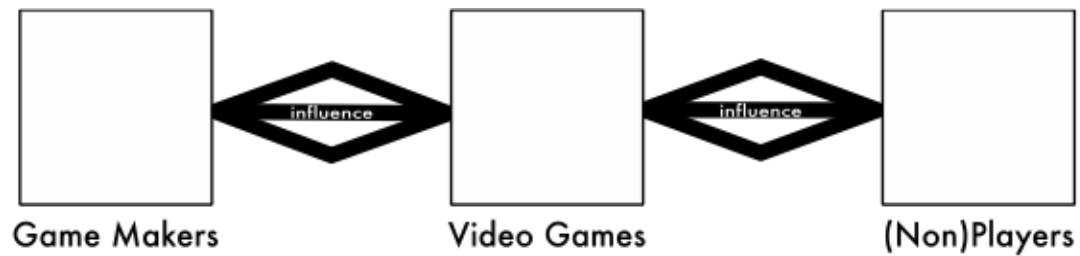


Figure 5 - What Should Be a Paradigm in Game Studies

Qualitative Method - Operationalization

Given the weaknesses of the other studies of videogames, and that “culture is difficult to study because its most significant features are taken for granted” (Altheide 1996-2), there are currently no best practices or standard social science methodologies through which a video game can be examined thoroughly (Consalvo and Dutton 2006). Through technological development in communication-based media, people have gained tremendous abilities to communicate ideas of and about culture. Historically, social science has not adjusted its method to incorporate how technology changes the way in which cultural messages are interpreted or translated (Latour 1996). Altheide developed ECA over the tenure of his career as a means through which to address these weaknesses. He is not concerned with effect but with how media displays culture (Altheide 1996).

ECA approaches communicative media (texts) quantitatively and qualitatively through bundled set of questions referred to as a protocol. These are essentially “list(s) of questions, items, categories, or variables that guide data collection from documents” (Altheide 1996 26). ECA is considered an emergent method. Researchers construct protocol based on their technical understanding of a media-related topic. This method assumes that that technical literacy will change and that this results in a variety of shifts

in how a researcher will collect data. It allows a researcher's experience with a series of text to shape and mold their research questions and the research process (Besel, et al. 2009). The strength of ECA is its three levels of analysis: frames, themes, and discourse. Frames are the boundary for discussing a particular event and focus on what and how it will be discussed (Altheide 1996).

In this case, the frame will be how a video game represents the reality of the characters involved within the game itself in addition to the programming language, physical media and system it is on. Each game employs a means through which a player controls a character called a user interface (Consalvo and Dutton 2006). This interface also displays relevant information about characters for players (mostly how many times a character can be hit or how close to a "game over" they are). By studying how games communicate information with players, researchers can examine how this interaction has changed over time. For example, in the video game Mario 64, a player knows that they have X amount of lives and that they can take X amount of hits before they lose a life. This binds the player to a limiting amount of progress they can make to the game's ultimate goal. Additionally, the player is forced to wander an empty castle hunting for clues about where they should go next. This game, the first 3-dimensional (X, Y, and Z axes instead of just X and Y) action-video game, significantly altered the concept of video game levels that Mario games had previously established.

Most action video games are broken down into sequential portions that were initially called levels (Kent 2005). At first, these levels were simple lines with obstacles (jump over this block, dodge this projectile, etc.). As games grew more complex, this simple line began to branch into different directions. Instead of a straight line, it would

deviate in multiple directions. Players were offered choices and games began to resemble choose-your-own-adventure books. Levels were then moved into radial sections with a center point. Players begin at a point and progress by finishing multiple objectives. Beginning at the end of the 1990s, games began to resemble sandboxes with the world in these games meant to be metaphorical sand (objects within a virtual environment) that gave players tools they could use to customize or play a character in their own way (Gee 2005).

While action video games have yet to fully escape linearity (a narrative always begins and ends), they are starting to resemble their own take on reality. Themes are the “recurring typical theses that run through a lot of the reports” or the dominant ideas that take shape within the material (Altheide 1987). In this study, themes are how characters move and act throughout a game as well as how a player can use those characters. Dutton and Consalvo (2006) call this the “Interaction Map” or how players interact with other players and non-playable game characters. This also includes the “Object Inventory” or all the objects within a game (Consalvo and Dutton 2006). These interactions and objects communicate the themes a game possesses. One constant theme game makers must struggle with is how a character behaves in pre-constructed exposition (cut-scenes) and during play.

The gap between what a character does in pre-constructed scenes and what a player decides to do with the character within a game is called cognitive dissonance (Chiou and Wan 2007). This could also be construed as the means a goal could be attained in the real world versus the way that goal is constructed in a videogame. For example, in *Devil May Cry*, a player can be impaled by a sword in a pre-constructed

scene without dying. In fact, Dante, the main character, simply pulls the sword out of his chest and barely flinches. However, in game as a player, a group of enemies within a playable section can end the character's life by simply striking the player enough times. A possible theme would be the changes to video games as game makers struggle to overcome this gap and how the attempts to bridge it differ by culture, if at all. These themes – what a game shows us to unite the interface and character abilities – will allow me to examine video games through the influence of the 2001 World Trade Center Attacks. By systematically examining similarities and differences between games, we can glean how certain cultural shifts are reflected in how we play.

Discourses are direct references to cultural ideas. Altheide refers to discourses as “the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things” (Altheide 1996). For video gaming, this is what Dutton and Consalvo (2006) call the “Gameplay log.” This gameplay log includes such ideas as sexual orientation, sexualized personae, what a hero is, what a villain is, and what means a villain will employ to accomplish their goals. News reports often share ideological grounding (Altheide 1996). Video games are also entertainment media and pull ideas from these ideologies. Given that media reports are locally produced, the differences between games from Japan and games from America should be observable. An example of this would be the representation of a Japanese woman in an American game and a representation of an American woman in a game made by a Japanese developer. How media representations are used can say a lot about those creating the representation and those represented by it (Williams, et al. 2009) and thus show the cultural link video games possess.

ANALYSIS

To trace associations of these games, I played through them from the beginning of that game's narrative to its end with a maximum time limit of ten hours. I consulted www.gamefaqs.com for any questions I had about the mechanical nature of these games as well as the more recent fan-created media, also referred to as "let's play's" for games with different endings at different levels of difficulty. Additionally, I examined the development and public reception of each game in various ways. In order to form a more complete picture of a game's impact, I examined developer interviews and comments in popular press like the game industry news website *Gamasutra*. Because the process of making a game is so guarded, these small bits of information from the developers themselves were invaluable in that they offered insider information on the process and hurdles of game design. *Game Developers Magazine* contained a significant amount of "Post Mortems" or, articles that briefly reviewed design hurdles and goals (game developer magazine rules).

By accessing information about each of these games from different avenues, I gained a large snapshot of the design philosophies of the time as well as trends concurrent with culture. All notes and comments I have about each game were recorded in word files named and categorized by game. In total, there were nearly 200 pages of notes in addition to strategy guides, YouTube videos, and web-based news articles that were gathered through the protocol created before the study began. I edited the protocol 5 different times in order to best incorporate frames, themes, and discourse with the four items outlined in Consalvo and Dutton's piece on qualitatively examining video games –

Gameplay Log, Object Inventory, Interface Study, and Interaction Map (2006). The final protocol can be seen on the next page.

PROTOCOL

- I. NAME OF GAME – (NAME)**
 - a. Descriptive Data**
 - i. Date of Publication**
 - ii. Development Studio**
 - iii. Publisher**
 - iv. Systems Published On**
 - v. Sales Data**
 - 1. Japan, USA, EMEAA (Europe, South America)**
- II. FRAME** – are the focus, a parameter or boundary through a lot of the text
 - i. User Interface** – How does the game communicate with the player
 - ii. Physical Level Construction** – Each level contains a series of obstacles, how or what are these objects.
- III. THEME** – These are general definitions or interpretive frames. Themes are the recurring typical theses that run through a text and are more basically tied to the format used by journalists who have a short time to tell a story that their audience can recognize and that they have probably heard before and, moreover, to get specific information from sources that can be tied to this.
 - i. Movement and Actions** - move sets or powers
 - b. Narrative**
 - i. Definition** – Each video game has a narrative that serves to connect the player to the game. It is the means through which a game's procedures are communicated. What is the message here?
 - c. Impact of Level**
 - i. Definition** – Each level influences the entirety of the narrative. How does each section do this?
- IV. DISCOURSE** – refers to the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things.
 - a. Non-Player Characters**
 - i. Definition** – Who are the non-playable characters in this game? What do they represent thematically? How do they do this?
 - b. Player Characters**
 - i. Definition** – Who does the player, play as? Does this ever change?
 - c. Objects (Items, etc.)**
 - i. Definition** – What does a character carry? How does this change what a character does?

EXPECTED FINDINGS

Ethnographic Content Analysis expects a researcher's perspective and understanding of a subject to change as they familiarize themselves with their research subject. When I began, I understood that Johan Huizinga's work forms the basis of how to discuss and think about play in society. Unfortunately, culture and play are essentially synonyms in his work and this relationship is problematic when the goal of research design is to display the relationship of the two. In the English language, it is difficult to construe play as a serious topic unless you are discussing professional sports or children's playground games. The reason for this is the Aristotle-based etymology of the word play, "The propensity for children and animals to leap." (Huizinga 1950). In other languages, there are multiple words for play and the multitude of places it has in society. For example, in Japanese, the word for play is generally translated to 遊ぶ or asobu. This word can also mean to study with a teacher as well as the performance needed within the strictly enforced Japanese tea ceremonies. Honorifics also have a basis in the Japanese language. The 遊ばせ言葉 or asoba se kotoba literally means "the play language" (Huizinga 1950).

In the United States, the language and relationship of play is more difficult to discern. For example, we play the stock market rarely refer to it as a game. We play roles (teacher, student, customer, etc.) but do not acknowledge them with special language like the Japanese. Normally, the sense of where a game was created has little bearing on a player's conscious experience after play begins. While a player is engaged with a video game, the player often achieves the sense of flow (Chen 2006). Flow is, "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (4)

(Csikszentmihalyi 1990). This idea is at the center of many different ways that games are currently studied. As a researcher in sociology, I felt that I should avoid reaching this stage of play. By doing so, the many items that have remained hidden would become observable.

Historically, new hardware (*PlayStation*, *Nintendo 64*, etc.) radically altered how video games were constructed. I felt that this worked in favor for the researcher. For example, in 1996, American console game developers had just started making games for new CD based systems and the Naughty Dog developer blog produced in 2010 on the development of *Crash Bandicoot* (United States, 1996) showed just how much adversity these companies had to overcome (Gavin 2011). Entry to the console market was marked with a very broad frustration with Japanese hardware manufactures. Many of these PC and pen and paper game makers had not been able to make the games they wanted because hardware manufacturers like Nintendo restricted the types of games they would approve for their console (O'Donnell 2010). With a CD-based system that broadened the market to much more diverse representation of developers, new and different types of games could be made. I fully expected to see American developers deliberately trying to maintain a distance from the precedents of business and design that their Japanese predecessors had established as time went on. In many ways, this seemed obvious given that many of the most popular games made between 1984 and 1995 were games made in Japan.

My preliminary research on 9/11 and video gaming came up with very little at first. The very first protocol I constructed resembled a checklist of items that video games contained: hero name, ethnicity, gender, villain name, villain ethnicity, gender. However,

as I developed these ideas more through expanding and recalibrating my overview of the research on 9/11, I began to expect that things had changed. As a video game fan, I knew games had grown more violent since I was a child. However, I also knew that the games had reattached themselves to reality in ways that I had not fully explored. After this recalibration, I expected to find more references to security, more game characters to fear some unknown entity and more than all of this, to be seeking fulfillment in their fictional lives. I expected more quests and more effort to be placed on seeking meaning in life. These expected findings were not too far from actual results.

CHAPTER 4

INITIAL FINDINGS

The Impact of Time

To give these findings some historical context, the game development climate changed very substantively between the years of 1995 and 2001 and even more radically between 2001 and 2006. It is important to understand these changes in order to better understand the reason why particular game design trends were popular at the time and how they impacted game design later. This particular aspect is the impact of hardware on the development of software, an important hindrance and enabler of differing magnitudes covered in the work of Aoyama and Izushi (2002).

In the mid-1990s, Sony and Nintendo began development of a joint project called the *Nintendo PlayStation*, a disc expansion to their popular Super Famicom (Family Computer, Japan) or Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) (Donovan 2010; Kent 2005). This product failed famously and ultimately put Nintendo at odds with Sony. The result was the eventual release of two different devices from either company: The *Nintendo 64* and the *Sony Playstation*. The Playstation was the first new console not created by Sega or Nintendo in nearly a decade (1985-1995) (Kent 2005). The games made for these systems were some of the earliest games to use polygon-based graphic

processing engines and were responsible for the growing popularity of this system (Kent 2005).

Sony immediately began to pull ahead for a variety of reasons. The most important of those was that Nintendo hardware restrictions had begun to be resented. Many game makers, especially in the United States, stated rather bluntly that Nintendo was stifling creative game designs (O'Donnell 2010). Nintendo rigorously controlled the number of games produced for their system. In addition, Nintendo's censorship policies had begun to clash with game design trends that had begun to occur, symbolized by the release of violent games like *Mortal Kombat* and *Doom* (Donovan 2010; Trend 2007). *Doom* creator John Romero was quoted (Donovan 2010) as saying, "With *Doom* we wanted to shock people with everything" (260). Sony's final product, the *Sony PlayStation* was a CD-based system that was more in line with the American Computer Game industry. The system was extremely inexpensive to develop for because most game makers could simply port or translate their programming code directly to the *Playstation* hardware. This cheap development and redeployment of older intellectual properties was attractive to investors. Additionally, the cost of development and printing compact discs in comparison to cartridges was enormous (Kent 2005).

Additionally, whereas game designers were relegated to a single *Nintendo 64* cartridge's worth of data, *Sony PlayStation* games could use many compact discs as they needed. This meant that games had almost limitless data potential (Aoyama and Izushi 2003) though it would take some time for developers to break old habits (Gavin 2011). Due to a strong initial sales drive, Sony would win the format war that these two systems symbolized (Dyer-Witthford and de Peuter 2011). Each of these facts contributed to the

games selected for evaluation. With their victory, the cultural barriers around production of media were removed. The result was that American and European console video game fans could suddenly buy games from developers who shared a common culture with them (Aoyama and Izushi 2003).

To reiterate, the sample and research questions for this study are:

Year	Origin	Title	Publisher	Developer
1996	USA	<i>Crash Bandicoot</i>	Naughty Dog	Sony Computer Entertainment
1996	USA	<i>Shadows of the Empire</i>	Lucas Arts	Nintendo
1996	Japan	<i>Super Mario 64</i>	Nintendo	Nintendo
1996	Japan	<i>Kirby Super Star</i>	Nintendo	HAL
2001	USA	<i>Halo: Combat Evolved</i>	Microsoft	Bungie
2001	USA	<i>Grand Theft Auto III</i>	Rockstar	Rockstar
2001	Japan	<i>Devil May Cry</i>	Capcom	Ninja Theory
2001	Japan	<i>Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty</i>	Konami	Konami
2006	USA	<i>Saint's Row</i>	THQ	Volition
2006	USA	<i>Gears of War</i>	Microsoft	Epic Games
2006	Japan	<i>Lost Planet</i>	Capcom	Capcom
2006	Japan	<i>Dead Rising</i>	Capcom	Capcom

Figure 6 - Games Qualitatively Examined

1. In what ways do action video games reflect ideological shifts through their content?
2. In what ways do action video games reflect the majority culture present throughout their development?

Each of these 12 video games is defined by the time they were produced. The cyclical nature of influence over hardware combined with globalizing factors reduces the unique cultural content of each of these games as we get closer to the present. As such, I have categorized these games by year and am defining differences that are cultural within each of the time-based categories within this discussion.

DISCUSSION

In order to organize these findings, I have placed each topic in Dutton and Consalvo's toolkit for the qualitative analysis of games in its own section organized by year and context at the time of their release. These markers serve two purposes. First, I separate the games into components so that I can discuss them as distinct portions of a whole. Second this section is separated by the year of release because thematic groups differ by year of release.

First, I will frame this analysis through the user interface (UI) these games employ. The UI encompasses all of the data needed for a player to reference during play (Consalvo and Dutton 2006). A user interface allows the researcher to note what information about a game character is important for the player to know. These data have changed over the years but are generally representations of a character's health, information about items, and a map or location marker of some kind.

Next, I will discuss the objects of these games. Items in-game such as potions, books, weapons, and armors are present in video games and have been present since their creation. These items serve as tools a player will use as they attempt to achieve the goals set forth by designers or learn about the world in which they are trying to achieve those goals.

After UI and in-game objects, I move from the surface of these games into how a game interacts with players. This includes talking to non-playable characters or hearing non-playable characters talk to each other. These interactions are an important means through which a game communicates information about the world they are playing in. Consalvo and Dutton have labeled the interaction map (Consalvo and Dutton 2006).

Finally, I will explore the “everything else” portion of Consalvo and Dutton’s method: the Gameplay Log (2006). This concept explores the reasons why characters run, duck, shoot, and slide the way they do (Consalvo and Dutton 2006). It also captures narrative elements and background information about the game contained in supplemental materials like the instruction manual or wikis devoted to the game.

Interface Study

The User Interface is the means through which a game communicates information with the player about the character they are playing (Dutton and Consalvo 2006). The UI generally communicates things like health or life points, item currently using, enemy information, and a map. This also includes a menu that is typically accessed through a single button press. This pause menu stops the game and allows the player to access certain information without having to worry events in-game. This menu generally takes up the entire screen. Beginning in the late 1990s with the use of polygon-based models, the user interface has slowly moved from a separate space to integration with the game itself.

1996 – User Interfaces – New Norms

(Left to Right: *Crash Bandicoot* (United States), *Kirby Super Star* (Japan), *Shadows of the Empire* (United States), *Mario 64*(Japan).



These 4 games all display very minimal information to the player (health, enemy health (sometimes), and a collection count of some kind (stars, apples, lives, etc.). As players, we do not always remember how much life our characters have left and so there is a need to have it on screen somehow. These representations were originally something like pie pieces, apples, or some arbitrary bar tied the challenge of completing a game. However, the life bar has gained more permanence as a representation of a real death.

For example, *Crash Bandicoot* (United States, 1996) is not a “complicated” game from the player’s perspective. However, the game was complicated by technical standards. For players, Crash can only take 1 point of damage. The user interface reflects this by containing only one item, apples collected. Crash can occasionally take more than

1 point of damage but this is tied to the Tiki Mask, in game. This mask is characterized by a Tiki Mask that floats around Crash. It changes color as Crash collects more so different colors symbolize more damage, more hits that Crash can take. This game was complicated through the way it used polygons. At the time, the Naughty Dog studio used polygons in ways that had not been attempted yet (Gavin 2011). On the other hand, *Super Mario 64* (Japan, 1996) was complicated through the freedom the player was given to wander around a 3dimensional environment. This game combated the 90s malaise by offering characters bright, colorful environments and moments of flight that were very rare at the time.

This malaise was due to a general shift of video games being created for more “adult” audiences due to new types of games created outside of the console market in the United States (Donavan 2010; Kent 2005). These “adult-centered” 3-dimensional games gained in popularity with audiences who began to tire of the cartoon or childish content of Japanese games (Donovan 2010; Dyer-Witherford and Peuter 2009). This change was generally correlated with the complicated post-Cold War world sense of finality (detonation of a bomb) in narratives (Jackson 2000). This cultural malaise throughout the 1990s correlates to a general trend in the 1990s for more technologically complicated video games (Gavin 2011). There were less and less new “types” of games. The Sega Genesis and the Super Nintendo began to lose favor because of their “child-like” game content.

Super Mario 64's (Japan, 1996) user interface offers a little more information than *Crash Bandicoot's* (United States, 1996) because Mario can take quite a few hits before the player loses a life. However, the game does not communicate how many are left

unless the player has just been hit seemingly because *Mario 64* is more of an exploration of digital environments rather than a journey to stop an evil scientist. Also, in *Mario 64* (Japan, 1996) we see the central component to the game in the upper right hand corner: star collecting. A player needs to constantly refer to the amount of stars that they have early in the game in order to know what doors they can open in the castle.

The most different UI in this sample is *Kirby Super Star* (Japan, 1996), a side-scrolling action game on the *SNES*. In side-scrolling games, players generally only go in one direction, to the goal. These games are symbolic of the modernist perspective of culture that is omni-present within the United States. Each level has a goal and each level has a higher number but the higher the number, the more able the character is to achieve those goals. In these types of games, the user-interface takes up a significant amount of the screen due to the game not needing to use all of it. This was a common practice with side-scrolling games. In 1996, video games gained another dimension (with the addition of a Z-axis and as such, and began to generate items with polygons instead of pre-drawn characters. Because of these new environments, type of information needed by the player changed. In this sample, *Shadows of the Empire* (United States), *Mario 64* (Japan), and *Crash Bandicoot's* (United States) are all polygonal environments. In order to talk about these 3dimensional user interfaces, it is necessary to move to the 2001 game sample.

2001 – 3-Dimensions, Integration, and Mini-Maps

In Order (left to right): *Devil May Cry* (Japan), *Grand Theft Auto III* (England), *Halo: Combat Evolved* (United States) and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Japan).



Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (Japan, 2001), *Halo: Combat Evolved* (United States, 2001), and *Grand Theft Auto III* (United States, 2001) all use nearly identical data points though the placement changes. The Japanese games place their information in different locations than their American counter-parts with exception to *Devil May Cry* (Japan, 2001). *DMC* still uses the same UI information that *Kirby Superstar* employed – within the game as opposed to being boxed off. The biggest difference within games made in 2001 compared to games of 1996 is more extensive pause menus. Each of these games, with an exception to *Halo: Combat Evolved* (United States 2001) have a map that can be accessed via a pause menu.

Because levels in video games were growing more complicated, it was necessary to create a system to maintain maps of levels. Dante, in *Devil May Cry* needs to be able to see what part of the castle they are in and what rooms are available to them. The environments in this game do not always lend themselves to noticing a door over a wall. *Metal Gear Solid 2* needed a map because characters would often mention parts of the base that Raiden needed to get to. Without a reference, a player may spend hours aimlessly wandering around if they did not take sufficient notes. Also, these games often required a save menu that needed an ability to select the portions of memory that the game may be saved to. Because video games had moved from cartridge-based systems (which housed onboard, flashable memory for save files), it became necessary to create removable media (memory cards) that could travel between consoles. Additionally, these interfaces often provided text about the game through tips about weapons, or in *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s case, a hint system embedded in a radio transceiver.

Each of these games forces the player to memorize differing amounts of data. In the late 90s when players were just beginning to see 3-dimensional environments, players were not given a map and so had to memorize the paths needed to complete a level. Beginning in 2001, we see players beginning to be told where to go. *Halo: CE* (United States, 2001) and *GTA III* (England, 2001) made very explicit where the destination of the current mission was. *Devil May Cry* (Japan, 2001) and *Metal Gear Solid 2* (Japan, 2001) would provide maps of areas and context clues through conversation on where the goal was, but it was up to the player to determine where they should go. These games continue the trend began by the 1996 games. The major factor of difference is whether or not the game is "on-rails." This term refers to train tracks where players cannot go off of

a pre-constructed path. Games on rails challenge their players through obstacles along its path. By 2006, the user interface began to take more of an active role in these games.

2006 – Less Info, More Arrows

In order: *Left to Right: Dead Rising, Gears of War, Lost Planet: Extreme Condition, Saint's Row.*



By the time 2006 arrived, game-makers began to explicitly tell the player where to go. This indicates a degree of growth associated with the authority of the game's designers. Primarily, these directions are provided through text that flashes in some way, shape or form in conjunction with arrows guiding the way. While not correlated directly, this growing degree of telling is associated with the degree of security that Americans have in the present. The airport line in the post 2001 world is cordoned off and funnels people through a checkpoint after making sure they have been checked. Once checked, they are funneled off to the next area where they are checked again and sent on their way

only to repeat the process in reverse once they have arrived at their destination. Video games have slowly evolved to resemble the means through which we funnel vast amounts of people. Earlier in game development, console games were constructed with a degree of discovery at the center of their user inter-face. In today's society, that has been replaced with an arrow pointing where a player should walk.

The information about a character over time show how our perceptions of what was necessary to know during a game changed. The slow movement of the UI to the screen space of environments that showed off new technology shows an integration of data within everyday life. Health took over all UIs with an additional meter that represented the secondary attributes of a character. In this way, the UI, combined with the player, represented Body (the avatar or object the player uses), Mind (the player), and soul (the secondary attribute like magic or some other force). These elements of these games and the similarities they contained remained constant over time in comparison to each other. The unique aspect of the UI is separated only by how much control it represented. The addition of arrows pointing the way to the goal with Japanese games allowing more exploration and varied spaces shows a moment outside of design trends influencing the general nature of games. The want for safe, predictable environments in the midst of a seemingly uncontrollable situation reflects the associations of United States citizens starting in the mid-1990s, culminating in the World Trade Center Events of 2001.

Object Inventory – More Real

Items in video games are directly related to everything a game wants to accomplish. In *Super Mario 64* (Japan, 1996), the player knows (from previous Mario games) that when they see a coin, that's a good thing. When the player sees a mushroom

that isn't purple, something beneficial will happen to Mario. When they see a Star, they know that they've accomplished their task or that they will become invincible. While this sentiment was true of many of the games before 1996, something replaced them – guns and med-kits. Until the middle of the 1990s, video games on consoles were intended to be universal. Nintendo had created the *Nintendo Entertainment System* in order to bring families together. This was central to all of Nintendo's products and is still central to that design ethic today (Donavan 2010). Nintendo's standard operating procedure set the bar for family oriented programming and was successful due, in part, to pornographic games that had begun to appear on Atari's systems at the end of their lifetime (e.g. *Custer's Revenge* (Moriarty 1983)). These games began to appear due to the constant marketing of video games to older and older males.

However, after nearly a decade of programming family friendly games, violent video game programs began to sell extraordinarily well. Whereas items were meant to aid the player by allowing more hits and different ways to combat enemies, offensive weapons from reality began to dominate video gaming. Almost all of these games have 4 different types of weapons: pistol, shotgun, rifle (assault and/or sniper), and a projectile launcher (rocket/grenade). Health pickups began to simply be boxes strewn about the battlefields that could be found by simply looking for a red cross. Power-ups like mushrooms or stars were replaced by ammo or different guns and these items began to resemble the traditional weapons of the armed forces. This reflected reality as well given that the items were no longer magical mushrooms and stars. Aside from *Doom*, there were changes in culture that these games were feeding off of. Throughout the 1980s, the Cold War rhetoric celebrated the machinery of war without using it. In 1991, the Gulf

War began and through this war, combined with 3dimensional processing, video games seemed to begin to celebrate the soldier instead of its machinery.

In the sample of games from 1996, there is only one game that has guns of any sort: *Shadows of the Empire*, a video game from the popular science fiction universe, *Star Wars*. Each of the other games had items that resembled the type of hero that they wanted to portray. Mario is a simple hero who contains nearly every move they will be able to do until the end of the game. The only exceptions here are the hats that Mario can wear that allow him to become invincible and walk on the bottom of bodies of water and the winged hat that allows him to fly. Kirby is unique in the powerups that it allows but these are not so much items Kirby picks up but enemies he can inhale to gain their powers. In this case, the power of these enemies is tied to the power that Kirby could contain. *Crash Bandicoot* (United States, 1996) has only 1 item which is the tiki god's visage. This item allows Crash to be hit more often and if he finds enough of these masks, he gains invulnerability for a short time. With exception to *Shadows of the Empire*, each of these games symbolized the evil of guns in that the bad guy used bullets whereas the hero used power that resided within.

Beginning in 2001, the weapons began to take this form: pistol, shotgun, rifle, and projectile weapon. At first, these weapons were tied directly to the game worlds. The player could use the weapon they saw fit as they saw fit with one exception – *Halo: Combat Evolved* (United States, 2001). This game took the concept of multiplayer first-person shooting as it had been in PC gaming and brought it to the console. This game brought together teams of individuals and set them against each other. This game was unique in that it contained expansive maps where most games had narrow corridors to

fight in (Donovan 2010). *Halo: CE* was further defined by combining other elements from popular games in a much more polished fashion than ever before 2001 (Järvinen 2002). This was one of the first first-person shooters on a console to bring this formula to the console and in many ways, *Halo: CE* (United States, 2001) set the feature set each game like it would need to attain in order to sell well.

As I have shown, first-person shooters became the norm in America and their sales skyrocketed. By 2006, the United States was in 2 different wars (Afghanistan and Iraq) and the soldier on the battlefield had become the norm for video gaming. The 2006 sample, *Dead Rising*, *Lost Planet*, *Gears of War*, and *Saint's Row*, all use these items despite their being made by different companies and despite their having been made in Japan and the United States. These games differ in the means through which the player uses these items due; it seems, to the fact that the urban environment had become the center stage for war (like Afghanistan and Iraq). The battlefield was no longer clearly marked and tactics had begun to change. In *Gears of War*, the player is locked in a vicious battle with an enemy that wants all humans destroyed. The player uses these items to battle conscious enemies who use tactics and pin down players. Each route the player can take ends in a shoot-out reminiscent of the Old West.

The guns in *Gears of War* are meant for 2 different tactics then, hold ground and pick off enemies and rush their position. The shot gun and the chainsaw edge of the Lancer (the assault rifle) accomplish this whereas the other weapons, including the Lancer's assault rifle function, are meant to pick enemies off from far away. In the other 3rd person shooter that is in this sample, *Lost Planet*, the player uses their weapons to stay alive in a harsh environment. Their weapons are meant to directly confront enemies and

the enormous “bosses” of each section require a variety of tactics. Sometimes the player must hide; sometimes the player must pilot a walking tank to accomplish their tasks. This game, unlike *Gears of War*, ends up being more about political intrigue over energy competition.

On the other hand, *Dead Rising* offered a different interpretation of this change in war. *Dead Rising* allows the user to grab nearly everything that is nearby and use it for a weapon. The main enemies in this game are zombies and as such, any blunt object will do (as per convention). However, there are special enemies in game. Psychopaths force the player to rely on the conventional weapons that the player seems to have grown used to: pistol, rifle (assault or sniper), shotgun, and projectile weapons. *Saint's Row* takes place in the ghettos of an urban environment named Stillwater. The politics of Stillwater revolve around the plight of citizens who live in the gang war imbued urban environments of American metropolitan areas. To the game designers, the only choice for them is to pursue violence in order to gain respect. If they gain enough respect, they will be able to take over territory and gain money, fame, and property (*Saint's Row Instruction Manual*). The weapons for this game resemble those that you would find in movies about the inner city but who all break down into those same 4 types: pistol, shotgun, rifle (assault or shotgun), and projectile launcher (shotgun/grenade).

It is unique that each of these games after 1996 contains nearly the same weapons. *Halo: CE* (United States, 2001) has alien equivalent weapons; however, they are still based on those types. The context for each of these weapon groups differs by game but they do reflect a growing desire for protection. Master Chief (*Halo*), Dante (*DMC*), Claude (*GTA III*), and Raiden (*MGS2*) all exist to take certain things back from

overwhelming odds. They work their way through various levels and gain more power as they go. The 2006 games are all about having a level of power at the beginning of the game and slowly losing it over time. *Gear of War* (United States, 2006) and *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition* (Japan, 2006) are generally concerned with the competition that occurs between humans and the things that can bring them together. As these 2 games proceed through their narrative, the players are continually fighting and winning small victories but losing major battles. *Saint's Row* (United States, 2006) and *Gears of War* are about combating various types of enemies in specific locations in order to gain stability in an unstable environment. These two types of games reflect the political nature of the world trade center world by hoisting safety and stability over winning; or, as the win condition.

Additionally, whereas the 1996 games *Mario 64* (Japan, 1996) and *Crash Bandicoot* (United States, 1996) concerned themselves with increasing the amount of hits their heroes could take, only *Devil May Cry* (Japan, 2001) allowed the player to gain more life. In *Halo: CE*, Master Chief could obtain an overshield to temporarily augment his shields. Claude, from *GTA III* and Raiden from *Metal Gear Solid 2* could not gain more life but could augment it with an item. Body Armor in these games did not award more health but did allow the character to be struck a few times without penalty. Interestingly enough, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* removed Body Armor from the game in all difficulties above "very easy" (Birlew 2001). This is interesting because in more difficult modes, the game designers seem to feel that the extra body armor would hinder, or make too easy, the challenge of the game.

Generally, the movement of items like mushrooms and stars to weapons that resemble those used in the real world reflects Žižek's slow collision with actual reality with the reality we had been creating with the media. This is best reflected in the items characters used. Even within fantastic settings like a constructed alien planet billions of miles away, a marine can still find an M-16 to shoot aliens who speak English. In this way, we perhaps see the relation of the culture that existed in the United States to that which exists in video games.

Interaction Map – More Noise in the Background

As games grew more programmatically complex over time, they began to represent more realistic interactions from “reality.” In 1996, video games were just beginning to enter the 3-dimensional realm. *Kirby Super Star* (Japan, 1996) is the last of the “old fashioned” platformers (for a definition of platformers, please see Appendix 1) to be made until they began to be manufactured as retro-games a decade later. Interactions in platformers are relatively simple in that they usually have two different functions, press button to continue or use attack to defeat. For example, Kirby had several racing modes (constantly moving in one direction) and also had a puzzle mode through which Kirby went through ruins looking for different types of items. However, these games were very simple in how players interacted with the game itself. *Crash Bandicoot* (United States 1996), *Super Mario 64* (Japan, 1996), and even *Shadows of the Empire* (United States, 1996) all followed the same type of construction despite being “more advanced” than *Kirby Superstar* was graphically.

These early videogames concerned themselves with exposition in certain scenes that would happen outside of the game. In these scenes, the player would view the

motivation for the next level. In *Super Mario 64*, this was not done through these types of scenes, rather, it was done through the number of stars needed to enter a door and the star the player wanted to get in that particular painting. *Shadows of the Empire* (United States) was relegated to interactions that happened in these scenes and *Crash Bandicoot* (United States) only had a few interactions spread throughout the levels. In short, the interaction map for this game could be drawn as a series of lines that begins and ends with a player pushing a button and getting a response with that response being relegated to a small set of contingencies based on the power-ups available in that level. As time went on, this level of interaction grew.

Beginning much earlier than 2001 but very established by this time, video games began to have more atmospheric interactions. This meant that non-playable characters would converse in the background and that if you were to interact with them, different types of things could happen. In *Grand Theft Auto III*, the character could drive around in cars that non-playable characters drove. When the character needed a car, the character would grab the person in the car and yank them out. While this occurred, a small audio sample would play. However, once the player was in the car, they were suddenly listening to the radio station that that character had been listening to. In *Devil May Cry* (Japan), the feedback the character got from the background of the game still resembled that of the older games but bosses, or mid-bosses, would randomly exclaim things throughout the level.

In *Metal Gear Solid 2* (Japan), characters would change their behavior based on the player's proximity and action. For example, because the game is a sneaking mission, if a player was wandering too close too quickly to an enemy, that enemy might suddenly

realize the player is there and attempt to run away to signal an alarm. The designers also placed a wide-variety of different ways to avoid enemies once the alarm was triggered. One of these was hiding in lockers or under tables and watching while the enemies passed or failed a series of awareness calculations based on the player's actions. These interactions took the shape of branched possibilities instead of action/reaction.

Halo: CE (United States) would also perform these checks though once Master Chief was close enough, the enemies would not stop trying to kill the player until they were destroyed. The enemies would exclaim things like, "Oh no! Big Demon!" or "Grenade! We're all going to die!" When Master Chief was being helped by friendly soldiers, these non-playable characters would make exclamations based on actions like, "ah, they're even uglier when they're dead!" or "You got insurance on this thing?" (DCTV UK 2003) when driving a vehicle with passengers. These exclamations became a precedent until 2006 when different types of interactions began to appear.

By 2006, video games with multiplayer had taken the gaming communities by storm. In addition, the lone commando on a mission had lost favor with audiences. The games in this sample, *Dead Rising* (Japan), *Saint's Row* (United States), *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition* (Japan), and *Gears of War* (United States), use the interactions of the previous sample's games in new and different ways. For example, *Gears of War* (United States) has a constant stream of battles while exposition is happening. The player needs to listen to someone talking to them while moving and dodging enemy attacks. Further, while each level has a series of scenes that take place outside of the game, these scenes are rendered using the game's engine. Until this time, most scenes outside of gameplay were pre-rendered movies that would play.

Second, *Dead Rising* (Japan, 2006) took all of the interactions that occur and combined them into a single place with a timer. So, certain conversations can only happen in certain places at certain times of the day. Also, certain types of interactions can only happen in a given amount of time. *Saint's Row* (United States, 2006) delegates certain types of interactions to happen given the amount of rep a player has at any given time. They want to indicate that how well known you are is indicative of what a person can do in life. Further, as the 3rd Street Saints (the gang that the main character joins at the beginning of the game) gain more territory, the likelihood that the player will be shot at by passers-by will go up. In these ways, these games try to emulate a living, breathing world. This is indicative of many of the issues brought forth by 9/11 in that these interactions make danger seem more prevalent and alive. This is a general reflection of the unsafe global environment that the citizens of the United States were reminded of after the World Trade Center attacks (Žižek 2005).

The most difficulty in examining the atmospheric interactions of these games is that they are the product of technological changes in the power of a processor and the amount of available memory. These changes allow designers to construct more realistic environments. As characters gained more dimensions, game worlds did as well. Shigeru Miyamoto said, when asked about the technology behind *Mario 64* (Japan, 1996), “The Nintendo 64 allows me to make a complete miniature world in a box...I am finally able to complete this dream” (Nintendo Power 1995). So, the changing technology of video games allowed for more complex environments to be created but also allowed designers to realize the visions they had for the worlds they wanted to create; sometimes these visions had existed for decades. However, this technological change does not limit

general analysis of games over time. Rather, it strengthens the relationship to culture these games share by requiring more and more cultural references. Changes in graphic processing simply lead to more representations graphically, instead of textually as they had in the past. Finally, with Interface, Objects, and Interactions defined, we can get into the games themselves.

Gameplay Log – Depth and Narrative Themes

The gameplay log is a vast amount of information that encompasses all of the rest of the videogame. Emergent patterns and various Like the other sections, this discussion will be broken down by year as the categories, or themes, generally coalesce by year. Each item in Dutton and Consalvo's toolkit could be construed as a product of culture. In the case of the gameplay log, all of the subtle nuances of play are taken into account. This includes things like the narrative, the movement, the exposition of non-playable and playable characters, the makeup of those characters, and the world all of this takes place in.

1996 – Nature v Technology

The most striking similarity of the games made in 1996 is the role of science and technology. In each of these games, there is a considerable amount of emphasis placed on the dichotomy between the protagonist and the antagonist. The protagonist of each of these stories is a happy-go-lucky hero paired against a sinister evil who uses technology or some scientific means to cheat their way into power. *Crash Bandicoot* (United States, 1996) is set against Dr. Neo Cortex, a genetic engineer who is manipulating Australian marsupials in order to breed an army he can use to take over the world. In this game, Crash falls out of a tower and must make his way back up a mountain. As a failed

experiment, experimented on against his will, *Crash Bandicoot* (United States) resembles the general fear of drug trials and secret scientific experimentation that dominated the 80s and early 90s (Gavin 2011).

Mario is set against Bowser in *Super Mario 64* (United States), whose use of machinery (e.g. cogs, chains, fire, and guns) and magic has allowed him to accomplish his goal of stealing the stars and Princess Peach of the toadstool kingdom. While Mario is helped by a variety of people, including Yoshi, a dinosaur and the citizens of the Toad Kingdom, Mario games are generally set against their being a helpless, peaceful race of beings. Mario, an outsider, is the only one able to take Bowser down and generally does this by slowly taking down Bowser's defenses until he is able to be taken down.

Mario games are generally an invasion of peace by ambition for power. Mario, an outsider that lives with the peaceful people of the Toad Kingdom, must set out to restore the balance that this ambition has created. The link to culture here is that almost all Mario games avoid use of technological based weaponry. These weapons are reserved for Bowser, who exists in a world of fire and lava. As these games have moved through history, they generally reflect the feeling of the time and *Super Mario 64* (Japan) was no exception. The wealth and prosperity of the world is constantly under attack due to power and this everyman, Mario, must sometimes take it upon them to take their peaceful existences back.

In *Kirby Super Star* (Japan, 1996), Kirby is set against multiple foes. The first is King Dedede, who has stolen all of the food in Dreamland. This mammoth penguin desires all food, everywhere. In order to get it back, Kirby, another peaceful outsider, must walk to the King's House and get the food back. He must also face off against the

Meta-Knight, who is trying to use a vast mechanical ship to take over Dream Land. In this part of the game, Kirby must destroy a vast ship that has appeared in Dream Land. The surprise in this game is that the Meta-Knight is like Kirby, an outsider of the same race. This game says of culture, that our technological prowess will follow us everywhere.

Finally, Dash Rendar from *Shadows of the Empire* (United States, 1996) is set against the mechanical superiority of Prince Xizor who desires to replace Darth Vader as the Emperor's right hand. While this is a science-fiction universe, Star Wars' theme of good side as a balance with nature and the dark side as an imbalance is shown through a variety of scenes in the original *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983). Luke Skywalker, who is fighting his father, Darth Vader, cuts off his mechanical hand. Seeing the hand on the floor, Luke looks at the hand that Darth Vader had cut off in the previous movie. He realizes that in order to remain pure, he must maintain his feelings and not succumb to the Dark Side or technological fetishism. Throughout this game, Dash is set against more and more difficult opponents, each of whom rely on technology to defeat him. While not a Jedi himself, Dash relies on himself to get out of situations and the help of his companion Leebo, a mechanical companion who helps Dash with logistics from his ship. All things *Star Wars* generally revolve around the ideas of power and the sacrifices necessary to attain that power.

All of these games reflect a world that feared technology and science, but loved it all the same given that each of these games is on the latest "state of the art" system at the time. These characters are all outsiders to their game which generally reflects a globalizing world. Culture was uncomfortable, Japanese and American, with what the

unknown other was doing. However, both sides seem to believe that one person could make a difference and that difference is something worth fighting for. By 2001, the general malaise of the Cold War's end had worn off, the tech bubble had burst, and video games were beginning to regain some of their power thanks to the now established power of the Internet.

2001 – Freedom of the Sandbox

The fiscal makeup of the gaming industry began to change shortly after Sony came out ahead (Donovan 2011; Kent 2005). During that time, the American Computer industry had grown by an average of 1.2 billion dollars per year since 1995 (Adsoy 2011). 3-dimensional polygonal gaming had become the standard and massively multiplayer gaming had begun to shape the gaming landscape by bringing simultaneous play to much higher levels of sophistication (Gavin 2011). The 4 games in this sample each pursued a unique focus within game design that has been omnipresent present since their creation. The interesting overall view of these games is that all of them take place on or involve earth but in different ways. This was not the norm in the previous games. The first game in this sample is what many call the quintessential sandbox game – *Grand Theft Auto III* (Boba Fatt and the GamePros 2007).

Grand Theft Auto III (GTA III) (England, 2001) was a game that was actually developed in England but published by an American developer turned publisher. While this game should not have been included in this sample as it is not entirely American developed, I included it due to my ignorance of this at the time. However, the content of *GTA III* is extremely poignant to this thesis and so, my mistake is fortunate. *GTA III* is what many call the original sandbox game. This game had a central narrative but due to

the nature of the open world the players were given, it was not often completed. *Grand Theft Auto III* takes place in a fictional New York City called Liberty Island and displays many stereotypes about the criminal element in the city. The theme of *Grand Theft Auto* games is generally, “do what you need to succeed.” This game, the first of the 3d series, sets this precedent. The interesting thing about this game is what was not included. The character in figure 6 – Darkel – was not included in the final version of the game officially. However, the voice actor was credited in the credits and early reports of early builds often discussed this character:



Figure 7 - Darkel (Grand Theft Auto III)

This character was unique. He was a homeless man who wanted to destroy the economy of Liberty City, the fictional city that was based on New York City that *GTA III* takes place in. According to fans at the Grand Theft Auto Wiki, this character had the following missions assigned to him (copied verbatim from Darkle’s page):

- **Child's Play:** It involves bombing a school bus full of high schoolers.
- **School's Out:** Blow up a high school building.
- **I Scream, You Scream:** Lure pedestrians to an ice cream van and then blow it up. This mission was reassigned to El Burro, and the pedestrians were changed to Forellis.
- **The Suicide Mission:** This involves driving Darkel's men to a place where they blow themselves up, killing lots of people.

- **Bank Money In Flames:** Blow up a bank van with money inside.
- **Rampage!:** Get a rocket launcher and blow up some cars. This was replaced by a rampage icon.
- **Welcome To Hell:** Burn some people alive with a flamethrower. This was also replaced by a rampage icon.
- **So Long Curtly:** Darkel thinks that Curtly protected Novy when his men tried to kill him. You need to kill Curtly.
- **Dodo Practice:** You have to learn how to fly a Dodo for the terrorist missions.
- **Flight Delay:** Bomb the airport with a Dodo.
- **Stadium Flight Fright:** Darkel's favorite football team has lost the game. You need to bomb the stadium.
- **Love Hurts:** This was the final mission in the game. Darkel wants Claude to crash a Dodo into the Love Media building, destroying it, and killing Donald Love and Claude.

These missions were almost all removed from the game while those that were not were reassigned to a different character (GTA Wiki: Darkel). While it is impossible to know why these missions were removed, the similarity to 9/11 hints at the reason for their removal. Interestingly enough, Darkle can be found in-game wandering the streets of Liberty City. Unlike *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*, this game was not delayed due to the World Trade Center attacks and the game became available on October 22nd, 2001. The only other notable change to the game came in the form of re-rendering the police cars in game to not so closely resemble NYPD cars. *Halo: Combat Evolved*, did not take place on earth, but on an artificially created ring capable of destroying all life in the universe.

In *Halo: CE* (America 2001), Master Chief begins his experience in Halo on a ship running from aliens who are determined to destroy earth. This collective of alien races called the Covenant, has decided that destroying humanity because humans are an affront to their gods (Instruction Manual). Throughout the game, humanity is slaughtered on *Halo: CE* with exception to Master Chief, a technological and genetic triumph: a

super solidier. This game was not influenced directly by the events of the World Trade Center but the religious overtones certainly speak to the events that occurred at that time. Throughout *Halo: CE*, Master Chief and his artificial intelligence, Cortana discover that the reason Halo exists is because the creators discovered a being that was set to consume all living beings in existence and make them into a single entity. Called Flood, this group of nearly mindless zombies were trapped on Halo and cordoned off in a tiny chamber inside the weapon itself. Humanity is the last remnants of this group of beings and the Covenant had been bred to seek out and destroy them. According to *Halo*, religion was a tool of subversion and misdirection and before the attacks of 9/11; this was the dominant ideological stance in America before President Bush (Durham 2004). On the other hand, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* believed that all ideas were troublesome in the wrong hands.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (MGS2) was a sequel to one of the most popular PlayStation 1 games of all time, *Metal Gear Solid*. These games were all directed by a Japanese male named, Hideo Kojima. This game was constructed to convey the restrictions freedom brings. Kojima says that his intent was design a game that communicated ideas about memes for this game (Metal Gear Saga Chapter 5). His concern he is exploring through constructing these games is that of what sort of world we will pass on to our children. *Sons of Liberty* takes place in New York City and involves a group of terrorists from the United States who want to free the United States from the rule of a group of computers called the Patriots.

This game was set to be released in September of 2001. The main narrative involves the current president of the United States in-game, George Sears, assembling a

group of (freedom fighters or terrorists depending on the player's perspective) soldiers, in an effort to free the United States from a group of supercomputers called the Sons of Liberty. Near the end of the game, Sears takes a massive walking tank carrier named Arsenal Gear attacks New York City. In the original scene, the Arsenal Gear was defeated after destroying many parts of New York City through a cut-scene. Its final resting place was just blocks away from the World Trade Center. This scene was removed from the game. However, in a supplement to the game: *The Document of Metal Gear Solid II*, the model for New York City post Metal Gear Ray is available for viewing and in figure 7 on the next page.

Kojima recently tweeted that he changed the name Raiden, the main character of this game, from the katakana for the word Raiden: ライデン to the kanji: 雷電 due to the similarities between the word "Raiden" and "Laden" (Ashcraft 2011). Further, the changes made to this game were compounded by the earlier Middle Eastern issues of the late 1990s (Metal Gear Saga Chapter 5). Originally, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Japan) was to be set in Afghanistan and Iran on a tanker that had an activated nuclear device aboard. The game was initially going to have a timer. The game was changed after 9/11. Within the game as published, the original script stated that as Sears died, the bloodied American Flag would fall on him as he lay dying on the hand of the George Washington Statue at New York City Hall. This symbolism was also removed though the exact reason is unclear. *Grand Theft Auto III* (England) and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Japan) represent the two games most directly influenced by the events of 9/11 because of their sensitive content and publication dates (October and September). In both cases, game content with similarities to the events of 9/11 originally developed as

cathartic entertainment was quickly and substantially changed in response to the cultural effects of 9/11.



Figure 8 - New York City After Arsenal Gear Crashes (Metal Gear Solid 2, 2001)

Devil May Cry (Japan) is a game that challenged many conventions of 3d based video games. Its fast action, violent content, and style had not been seen before. While each of these games is important for different reasons, they share many striking similarities that were common in culture at the time. *Devil May Cry* starts in New York City but concerns itself with secret evil demons who want to enslave the human race. In a displacement of modernist rhetoric, *Devil May Cry* replaces the modern and the unmodern with Devils, immortal beings of great power and humans who possess “brief, transient lives” (Instruction Manual). However, this great evil that humans are incapable of defeating themselves can be defeated by an outsider to the humans, the half-man, half-devil named Dante. This game is a play on the types of games that came out in the 1990s. The outsider must save the peaceful, helpless strangers that inhabit the world he (almost always a he) has grown so fond of. The difference here is that while the antagonist in this

game is known, they do not show themselves at all and are unknown to the protagonist, Dante, for many chapters. In *Devil May Cry*, the enemy is a great unknown entity.

In fact, all of these games are about secret enemies hidden in plain sight that can only be stopped by a lone white male. By 2001, the non-human protagonists of video games began to be replaced by white males. Additionally, different white males traditionally sought to destroy the power of the world but were doing so well no one seemed to know who they were. *Grand Theft Auto III*'s villain was the wealthiest man in Liberty City. *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s antagonist was a genetic clone of a genetically engineered super soldier who had been assembling terrorist cells and plotting to take over the United States. *Halo: Combat Evolved* (United States) pits a genetically engineered white male super soldier against unhuman enemies spawned from common ancestors, the forerunners. The actual evil in *Halo: CE* is not known until the last 25% of the game. *Devil May Cry*'s villain is the least human looking of these games but the villain, once they appear, resembles a white male figure in the shape of a statue.

At the time of their publication, video games were mostly dominated by cartoon figures on consoles. However, the video game had been considered a male activity, particularly white male, for many years (Cassell 2002). The unknown enemy was a reasonably new development thanks, in part, to the end of the cold war and the "end of the end" in narratives (Jackson 2000). This could be correlated to the deindustrialization of America combined with the technology boom that also collapsed had left people suspicious of corporate giants. The idea that evil could be anywhere was supercharged by the 9/11 attacks. The next set of games offer exposition that originates in a world that had experienced the war on terror for approximately 5 years.

2006 – Freedom as a Buddy System

The games of 2006 were near the birth of the current generation of video game consoles: the *Xbox 360*, *Sony Playstation 3*, and *Nintendo Wii*. Each of the games in this portion of the sample built upon the foundation laid by the games from the previous generation and added an area of online multiplayer but also many unique aspects that deserve mention. These games, unlike the earlier games I had played, incorporated geographic data far more differently than other games had.

Dead Rising (Japan) takes place in a mall but this mall offers a space for exploration far larger than any game I had experienced for this sample. A remarkable thing about this game is what it takes to save one's game. A player cannot save in *Dead Rising* unless the player sits on the toilet or on a green couch in a rest area. There was a sense of privacy and safety installed with saving one's game; privacy in a mall filled with zombies and psychopaths. Unfortunately, while you were in these spots, time continued on the outside and you could lose the game by just sitting on the couch or toilet all day. Aside from this solitude, it is rare for Frank West, *Dead Rising*'s protagonist, to be alone. Frank is sent on a variety of tasks by government workers in the security office of the mall this game takes place in. In fact, Frank is very rarely alone in *Dead Rising* (Japan) aside from the lone survival mode. This sense of constant companionship is the most striking of similarities these games share and is a stark contrast to the games of 2001.

Gears of War (United States) incorporated solitude and privacy with attention to camaraderie in a much different way. This game didn't have save points that were removed from the general nature of the game. *Gears of War* revolves around the safety of hiding behind large barriers and taking shots at enemies when a friend is covering for

you. In *Gears of War*, there was always someone with you. Dominic, the second character in *Gears of War* follows the main character, Marcus Fenix, throughout this game. Frequently, the player is given a choice, left path or right path, top path or lower path, and another team of two that the player did not control would take the other path. When one character ran out of health, or died, the other member of the team could run over and revive that player with a manly pat on the back. This camaraderie is indicative of the sense of security that these games communicate.

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition (Japan) revolved around an energy source (thermal energy) that the player had incorporated with their body. As long as you have thermal energy, it will heal your wounds. This was balanced with a life bar but throughout the game, it was rare for my game to end because that bar emptied. This thermal energy is a constant companion in *Lost Planet* and its importance is delineated by the harsh conditions of the planet the game takes place on, a harsh frozen planet named EDN III. This planet was set to be colonized after the discovery of thermal energy. Unknown to the early colonizers, this planet was inhabited by enormous bugs. EDN III was set to be evacuated until it was discovered that the bugs were the source of this energy. *Lost Planet* begins in the middle of the operation to bring the population of bugs on the planet, the Akrid, under control. The lone character and his companion must seek out various objectives within the game's environment for his friends who rescued the protagonist from freezing to death. Companionship is set against the harsh, lonely isolation of EDN III.

Saint's Row (United States) is a game that was inspired by the gameplay of *Grand Theft Auto III* (England). This game, like *GTA III*, allowed the player to own a home but

unlike *GTA III*, it incorporated zones that were owned by different types of gangs. This was delineated on a map of influence. Each color on the map represents a different gang. The player's relationship to those gangs is nearly always, "shoot on sight." Gang violence, unlike the organized crime of *GTA III*, was the norm. This game was about the community and so, saving in this game could be done anywhere. Unlike *GTA III*, this game incorporated a sense of worth and accomplishment that was earned by your group of like-minded gang members. Street rep was a direct indicator of your gang's success (Daniels and LaLone 2012). This rep coincided with this game's sense of camaraderie, a posse. This posse grows as the player's reputation up through conquering new neighborhoods. This game is the only one in the sample that has consequences for the player. The narrative of this game revolves around a Shakespearean ladder of power where everyone below the person on top wants to be higher up on the ladder (Kott 1974).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the connection between culture and the games that culture produced. The findings suggest that culture and play are indeed associated through the associations between and among game makers. I argue that changes in some games (e.g. increased security, funneling through a game like security checkpoints at an airport, protecting one's home without thought or care given to why the home is under attack, buddy-systems, and more realistic weaponry) reflect the culture of terror that has been developing throughout the late 1990s and more powerfully since the 2001 World Trade Center attacks. These examples allow us to begin to examine games as a constructed object rather than a black boxed concept separate from society. The findings show how video games are connected with culture based on how these games changed as a result of the major cultural impact of 9/11. For example, the role of the hero changed from an unknown outsider helping the helpless to a white male working to overcome those who wish to gain power or to destroy that player's home.

Further, I have shown this relationship through the interfaces of these games which moved from letting the player explore or simply walk from point A to point B to being lead via arrow or marker from one area to the next. This is reflective of culture in that it reflects how the voice of authority changed since the 9/11 world trade center attacks. These data suggest that games in 2001 were most directly affected by the terrorist attacks in that content in the games had to be changed immediately in an effort to remain

sensitive to current world events. Finally, the influence of a general desire for safety is reflected through the growing trend of friends or companions in popular games made after 2001.

Limitations

Overall, there were a lot of design limitations to this study. Each of these games represents a consciously constructed digital world and each game that is released is programmatically and procedurally more complex than the last. There is simply not enough time within the scope of this these to examine enough of these games to construct a more complete picture of the general sense of things from culture within these games. I took approximately one year to examine 12 games from 3 different publication years spread out over 10 years. The changes in culture, hardware, and game design are noticeably accelerated. Each game was also such a significant time commitment that I was unable to analyze all associations. Playing video games as a means of studying them is simply not complete. The researcher must also concern themselves with finding, categorizing, and organizing massive amounts of scholarly, player, and journalist created data about the game as well as their designers. This was what I spent the bulk of my time as a researcher doing.

Another limitation was the availability of the video games, video game magazines containing articles about the development of these games, and the guides that were developed and published to help fans complete them. Websites like www.retromags.com or www.emuparadise.org are particularly valuable because they scan older video game magazines and construct digital copies of older video games for this purpose. Without sites like these, quite a few resources would have been lost to history. Unfortunately, due

to copyright restrictions, these sites are routinely served “cease and desist” letters and are forced to shut down. Libraries, like academia currently, do not value the exposition of video gaming and do not make an effort to catalog and preserve the many aspects of fan culture. While this is changing with many new digital archives being opened around the country (like the University of Texas), these librarians face tremendous budgetary cuts. In the next few years, we may see these collections disappear because of money.

Technology advances are often difficult to separate from how game content changes. For example, the predecessor to *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Japan, 2001), was created as it was because the creator, Hideo Kojima, wanted to make a game that used polygons. In fact, video games made during the switch to polygon-based model construction, much like the shift to 3-dimensional movies that is occurring right now, was often filled with content created specifically because it looked neat (Gavin 2011). As researchers, we must always be careful to fully understand how physical changes in technology are and are influenced by the associations of the people who make it.

Directions for Future Research

Altheide work on video news reports and Consalvo and Dutton’s work on qualitative analysis on video games are compatible and should be used to further examine the minutiae of video gaming. Altheide incorporates an understanding of media texts that Consalvo and Dutton do not consider – the inter-connected nature of popular culture and technology. Consalvo and Dutton add a means through which we can research video games as something different than traditional media. The mixture of these two methods allows researchers to simultaneously view video games as both media and not media. This contradiction is necessary to understand in order to connect the technological issues

present in the technology of games and the content of games. It also separates the study of video games from game studies, a necessary and important distinction. While the discussion of video games as a traditional media are tenuous (Lantz 2010), more research needs to be done on video games using these methods as to better focus their methodological stances.

Perhaps through this more focused methodology, researchers can discern a way to study video games from different time periods in a way that ignores the graphic displays. Graphic representation of object is often the focus of research and this focus threatens to black box games in a different way than psychological research – that games are the representations of popular culture, not interactive software. In representations of popular culture like television series and movies, these things cannot change. In video games, players can explore the procedural rhetoric around these characters and form opinions of them (Bogost 2007). These studies would examine the source code and how it changed. This would mitigate another limitation of this study, technological change over time. Programming languages have not changed very much since their creation. This fact lends itself to study of a language fewer and fewer people understand in the world. By focusing on this linguistic commonality, perhaps a more coherent sense of intercultural difference can be discerned.

Also, the need for quantitative data that measure video game sales, content, and themes grows with the release of each game. Websites such as www.mobygames.com and each video game entry to www.wikipedia.org need to be held to higher standards and their data publically released so that we may begin to map the interaction of designers, manufacturers, developers, media outlets like magazines and television stations, and

players. Also, because video games have moved online, there is a growing need to use the data that these game companies continuously record in conjunction with census data.

Correlating gamer behavior to geographic area, income, ethnicity, and other socioeconomic factors could help map the fundamental nature of play and how it interacts with culture. By harnessing the results of these studies, we could understand how someone who is underprivileged expresses that circumstance. We could also discern how privilege is played out in the backchannels of monetary exchange of massive video game economies.

This thesis demonstrates that video games are an important cultural artifact. Future studies should consider the examples given in this thesis a way to view video games – as a sum of things, not a thing in itself. Video games, because of their conscious construction, have already provided unique insights into the influence of technology on the development of gender roles (Cassell 2002; Dietz 1998). Now that a link between video games and cultures is identified, future research should focus more on the nature of this connection. What else could video games say, when considered this way, about other aspects of our culture such as the perception of government roles or the usefulness of mind-numbing tasks? Ultimately, video games represent the most conscious attempt to create the sense of play within culture. These “worlds in a box” as Miyamoto called them, recreate so much of culture that we often overlook.

APPENDIX 1 – TYPES OF GAMES

Below, please find the definitions of the two types of games that were used for this project: Action and First-Person Shooters (FPS). These definitions (in addition to the types of games not included in this study) can be found at Moby Games' glossary of terms at: <http://www.mobygames.com/glossary/genres/>.

Action: In action games players are required to have good reflexes and quick reaction in order to overcome challenges. Action games typically focus on combat, during which the player must press buttons or keys rapidly or in timed intervals in order to execute attacks and other moves. Non-combat challenges may include avoiding traps, jumping, running, completing tasks within a pressing time limit, etc.

Common action sub-genres are shooters, fighting, and platform games.

Though most racing / driving, sports, and many simulation games contain action-oriented gameplay, they can be considered action games only if they specifically emphasize arcade-like, reflex-based gameplay.

Action games may include extensive non-violent exploration and/or puzzle-solving, or combine themselves with other genres, e.g. role-playing or driving.

Quick thinking is often required to succeed in action games; however, games that specifically emphasize quick thinking over reflexes are usually real-time strategy or puzzle games.

Shooters are action games in which the player character shoots enemies. The shooting is usually performed with firearms in these games; however, any weapon that dispatches projectiles qualifies, which makes many games (e.g. *Heretic*) that rely on medieval ranged weaponry or even magical projectiles shooters as well.

There are many shooter sub-genres, including fixed-screen shooters, scrolling shooters, rail shooters, and others.

Since the emergence of 3D graphics, 3D shooters, popularized by *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*, have become the leading representatives of the genre. This sub-genre is sometimes referred to as first-person shooter, though this definition is not very precise, since the genre's distinguishing feature are 3D environments, not the perspective; some 3D shooters allow players to switch between perspectives, while others enforce a third-person view.

3D shooters may incorporate elements of other genres, most commonly role-playing (e.g. *System Shock* games and *Deus Ex*).

Platform games (platformers) are action games in which the playfield is set up as a series of planes (floors, levels, or platforms) for the player to navigate.

Platform games often involve combat, but include additional challenges by making navigation hazardous. Often the challenges of overcoming environmental dangers surpass those posed by combat. The player character is usually required

to jump over gaps and damaging areas, or to access a different platform. In many platform games the player character is very vulnerable and can die easily from falling damage, environmental traps, or enemy attacks.

Early platform games (e.g. Donkey Kong) were confined to one screen and required the player character to climb in order to reach higher platforms. Later platformers, popularized by Super Mario Bros., began to focus on traversing side-scrolling levels, often within an allotted time limit, fending off upcoming enemies and jumping. This style, commonly referred to as jump-and-run, has preserved itself in many later platformers as well.

Other platform games, such as Prince of Persia, emphasize exploration, combat, and problem-solving in addition to the usual platform challenges. Such games have become known as cinematic platformers. This style has had a considerable influence on many 3D platformers (e.g. later Prince of Persia games, ICO, etc.), which incorporate extensive puzzle-solving.

APPENDIX 2 – PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

When I began this study, I had intended to keep this project strictly quantitative. I assembled a massive database using sales data from vgchartz.com and concatenated that database with data from Moby Games. When the scope of this project changed, that dataset formed the basis of a most purposeful sample. What this means is that I chose the games to be sampled based on several criteria. These criteria were:

- Year of Publication – Year Game was published
- Country of Origin – Origin of Game. This data was provided by Moby Games.
- Design Goals – This was a little harder. For possible sample games, I screened the interviews, played the game when it was available, and referenced discussions and reviews on Moby Games.
- Hardware Designed For – What console was this game designed for?
- Developer – Who actually designed and created the game?
- Sales Data – Separated by United States, Japan, and everywhere else.

The most difficult selection criteria were design goals. For example, it would be unfair to compare a game like *Mario 64*, a game designed by a primarily Japanese design team at a time when 3-dimensional games were unheard of with a game like *Halo*, a game that uses over 5 years of development time without having to design around the lack of technical data about 3-dimensional game spaces. As such, the games for this sample were delineated by year and paired up purposefully.

As an example, take the case of the 1996, *Super Mario 64*, *Shadows of the Empire*, *Crash Bandicoot*, and *Kirby Super Star*. Each of these games are unique; however, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Kirby Super Star* both approach the same ideas of game design in that they are both classic 2-dimensional platform action games. However, *Kirby*

Super Star approaches the idea from a now “classic” perspective that uses sprites with various frames of animation. *Crash Bandicoot* takes these ideas from the 2-dimensional games and inserts the new polygon technology into it. In essence, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Kirby Super Star* use similar ideas in different ways and are thus able to be compared properly. I noticed, as I began looking through possible sample material, that this was a constant across all years: old game ideas using new technology would be paired up or set against older games made with those same old game ideas. This is what I mean by purposeful sampling.

The pairs of games are (by year):

1996

Super Mario 64 – Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire

Crash Bandicoot – Kirby Super Star

2001

Metal Gear Solid 2 – Grand Theft Auto

Halo – Devil May Cry

2006

Gears of War – Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

Dead Rising – Saint’s Row

APPENDIX 3 – GAME INFORMATION

Each game of this sample contains an extraordinary amount of data and if someone has not been a gamer their entire life, it is difficult to explain what these games are “about.” As such, this Appendix is a bit of detail about these games. Each game will be broken down using this template with data provided by Moby Games and the physical boxes for each game. Each of these games will be assembled alphabetically in by year.

- **Name**
- **Publisher**
- **Year Published**
- **Developer**
- **Country of Origin**
- **Type of Game**
- **Perspective**
- **Hardware Designed For**
- **Sales Data**
- **Back Cover Text**

- **Name:** *Crash Bandicoot*
- **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment
- **Year Published:** 1996
- **Developer:** Naughty Dog
- **Country of Origin:** United States
- **Type of Game:** Action
- **Perspective:** 3rd-Person Perspective, Platform, Side-Scrolling
- **Hardware Designed For:** Sony Play Station
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 3.29
- **Back Cover Text:** "Enter the Vivid **3D** world of Crash Bandicoot, a marsupial on a mission! His brain's been scrambled, his girlfriend is held captive, and his arch nemesis has a big N on his forehead! And you thought you had it tough!
 - Over 30 beautiful levels with awesome sound fx and music plus the type of gameplay you've been craving
 - Encounter Bonus Levels, fiendish traps, hair-raising enemies, disappearing bridges – only now in all 3-Dimensions!
 - Uncover hidden areas and bonus levels!
 - A fantasy, cartoon world comes to life **EXCLUSIVELY** for the Playstation game console!



- **Name:** *Kirby Superstar*
- **Publisher:** Nintendo of America, Inc.
- **Year Published:** 1996
- **Developer:** HAL Laboratory, Inc.
- **Country of Origin:** Japan
- **Type of Game:** Action
- **Perspective:** 3rd-Person Perspective, Platform
- **Hardware Designed For:** Super Nintendo Entertainment System
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): .26
- **Back Cover Text:** Dream Land is under siege again! Our hero, Kirby, returns to instigate a rescue. King Dedede is snatching up Dream Land's food supply, but he's not the only one! Dyna Blade, Meta Knight and a slew of other evil baddies are on the loose and wreaking havoc throughout the land.
Use any of Kirby's amazing powers to create a "helper" to assist you in battle. Or have a friend join you for some two-player action and adventure. Enter the fray in Spring Breeze, enter a foot race against King Dedede in Gourmet Race and tackle a winged warrior in Dyna Blade. Hone your reaction skills in Megaton Punch and Samurai Kirby, then battle your way through the Great Cave Offensive, Revenge of the Meta Knight and Milky Way Wishes. Each game is different AND some extra-special surprises are in store for you!
 - Includes EIGHT action-packed games and special surprises
 - Two-player action is possible when you activate Kirby's 'helper' feature!
 - Huge 32-meg game provides excellent entertainment value for Kirby fans of all ages!
 - Battery back-up saves your progress and best scores!



- **Name:** *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire*
- **Publisher:** LucasArts
- **Year Published:** 1996
- **Developer:** LucasArts
- **Country of Origin:** USA
- **Type of Game:** Action
- **Perspective:** 3rd-Person Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** Nintendo 64
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 1.99
- **Back Cover Text:** A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away... As Luke Skywalker and the Rebel Alliance struggle to defeat Darth Vader and the Empire, a new threat arises. Dark Prince Xizor, head of the Black Sun crime syndicate, aspires to take Darth Vader's place at the Emperor's side. To do that, he must eliminate young Skywalker. As Dash Rendar, it's up to you to protect Luke and help the Alliance defeat evil Xizor. Watch out for infamous bounty hunters and deadly storm troopers! May the Force be with you!
 - Storyline is set between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*!
 - Ten action-packed levels!
 - Several game modes!
 - Fly a snow speeder in the Battle of Hoth or ride a hover train through the junkyards of Ord Mantell!
 - Game progress stored in memory



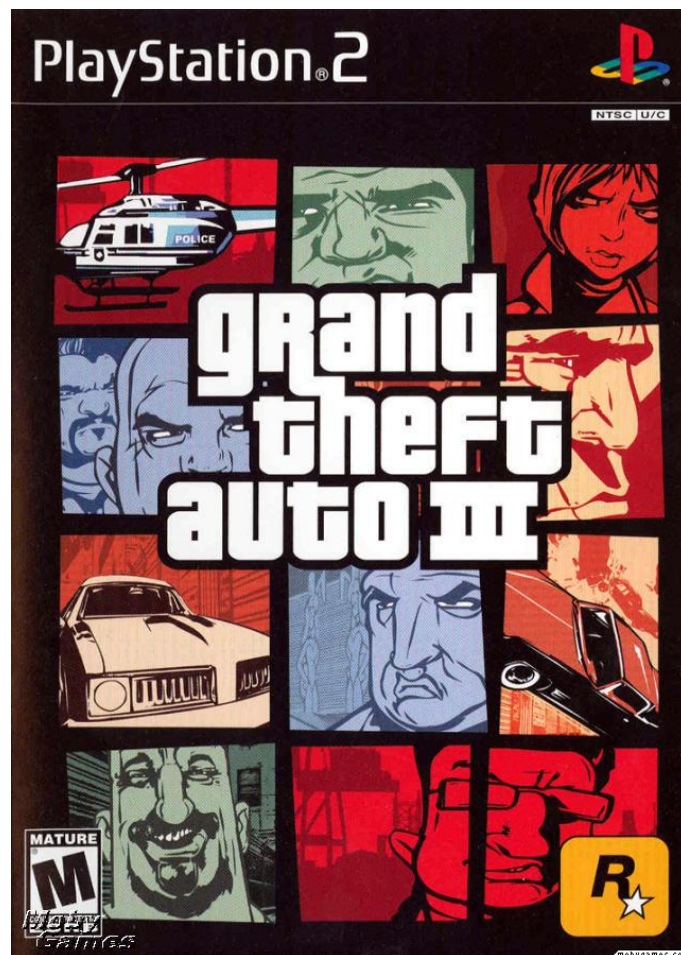
- **Name:** *Super Mario 64*
- **Publisher:** Nintendo EAD
- **Year Published:** 1996
- **Developer:** Nintendo of America, Inc.
- **Country of Origin:** Japan
- **Type of Game:** Action
- **Perspective:** 3rd-Person Perspective, Platform
- **Hardware Designed For:** Nintendo 64
- **Sales Data**(in millions, US Sales): 6.87
- **Back Cover Text:** Mario is super in a whole new way! Combining the finest 3-D graphics ever developed for a video game and an explosive soundtrack, Super Mario 64 becomes a new standard for video games. It's packed with bruising battles, daunting obstacle courses and underwater adventures. Retrieve the Power Stars from their hidden locations and confront your arch nemesis – Bowser, King of the Koopas!
 - Run freely in a grassy meadow, tip-toe through a gloomy dungeon, climb to the top of a mountain or take a swim in the moat!
 - Leap head first into a watery painting and soon you'll be searching for the surface in an underwater realm!
 - On-the-fly, 3-D rendered game play delivers action of the ruthless enemy attacks from every angle!
 - Find the Caps that give Mario super powers, ponder the mysteries of the pyramid, you can even race Koopas for fabulous prizes!
 - With the Nintendo 64 Controller and its analog Control Stick, Mario can crawl, kick down obstacles, swim, do reverse flips, and even stick the landing on his backwards somersault!
 - Saved game information is stored for up to four players in memory.



- **Name:** *Devil May Cry*
- **Publisher:** Capcom
- **Year Published:** 2001
- **Developer:** Capcom
- **Country of Origin:** Japan
- **Type of Game:** Action
- **Perspective:** 3rd-Person Perspective, Fighting, Horror
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Sony Playstation 2*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 1.3
- **Back Cover Text:** Legend tells of two millennia ago, in the darkest reaches of hell, a demon swordsman named Sparda, awoke to justice and rebelled against the devil to wage a one-man war to save the human world from damnation. Now, 2000 years later, a dark figure named Dante finds clues that the devil is rallying to rise up against mankind. Who was Sparda and how does Dante fit into this gothic puzzle? Deep within Dante's blood lies the power of ancient demons and the key to defeat hoards of the dark realm. Somewhere between a man and a demon lies our only chance for salvation. If he succeeds, the Devil May Cry.
 - Battle an Onslaught of Demonic Marionettes, Unearthly Phantoms, Grim Reapers, and Other Retched Souls
 - Build Up Power to Transform Into a Demon State to Inflict Devastating Attacks of Enemies
 - A Terrifying Action Thriller From The Creators of Resident Evil
 - Mesmerizing Graphics and Bone-Chilling Special Effects



- **Name:** *Grand Theft Auto III*
- **Publisher:** Rockstar Games, Ltd
- **Year Published:** 2001
- **Developer:** DMA Design Limited
- **Country of Origin:** England
- **Type of Game:** Action, Racing / Driving, Shooter
- **Perspective:** 1st-Person Perspective, 3rd-Person Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Sony Playstation 2*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 6.55
- **Back Cover Text:** Liberty City, USA. The Worst Place in America.
 - You've been betrayed and left for dead. Now you're taking revenge unless the city gets you first. Mob bosses need a favor, crooked cops need help and street gangs want you dead. You'll have to rob, steal and kill just to stay out of serious trouble.
 - Anything can happen out there.
 - "Grand Theft Auto 3 expands the very idea of what a game has traditionally been." – IGN.COM
 - "A Mafioso masterpiece" – Maxim



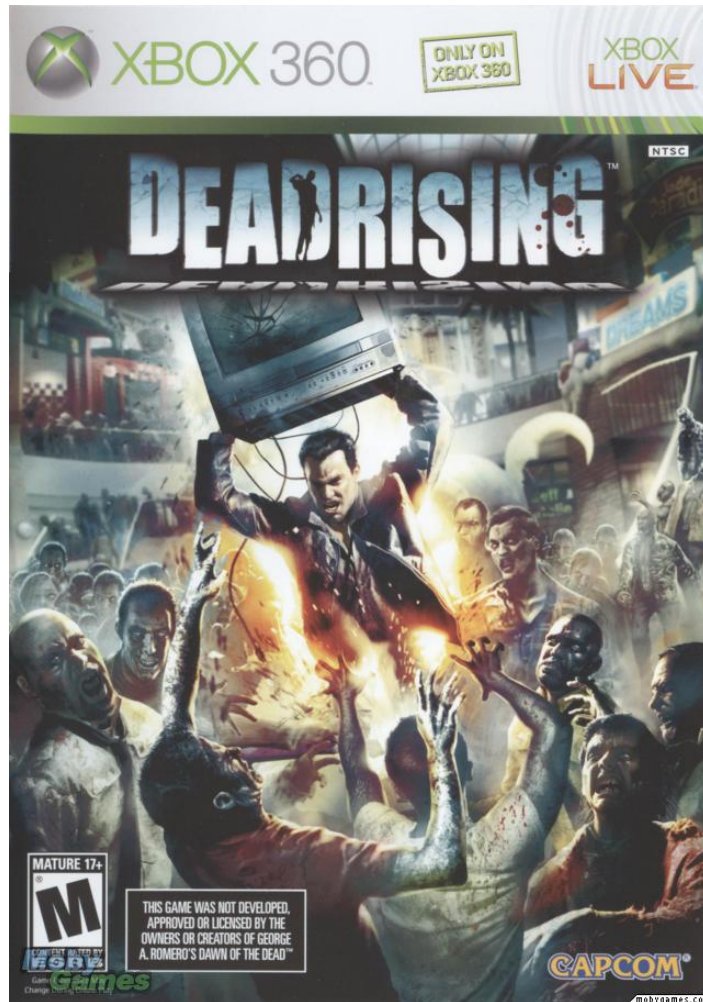
- **Name:** *Halo: Combat Evolved*
- **Publisher:** Bungie Studios
- **Year Published:** 2001
- **Developer:** Microsoft Corporation
- **Country of Origin:** USA
- **Type of Game:** Action, Sci-Fi / Futuristic, Shooter
- **Perspective:** 1st-Person Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Microsoft X-Box*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 4.91
- **Back Cover Text:** You are the last of your kind. Bred for combat, built for war, you are master of any weapon, pilot of any vehicle...and fear no enemy.
 - Bent on Humankind's extermination, a powerful fellowship of alien races known as the Covenant is wiping out Earth's fledgling interstellar empire. You and the other surviving defenders of a devastated colony-world make a desperate attempt to lure the alien fleet away from Earth. Shot down and marooned on the ancient ring-world Halo, you begin a guerilla-war against the Covenant. Fight for humanity against an alien onslaught as you race to uncover the mysteries of Halo.
 - Attack on all fronts – on foot or with a powerful array of assault vehicles.
 - Seamless, hyper-real indoor and outdoor environments.
 - Intense multi-player team battles, 4-player split-screen or multi-player system link play.
 - Unleash destruction with incredible human and alien weapons.



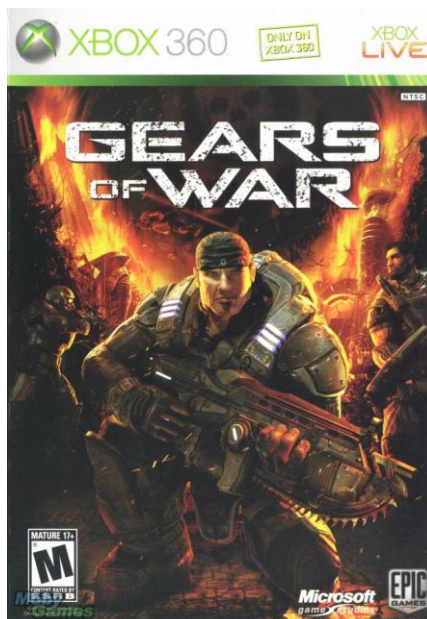
- **Name:** *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*
- **Publisher:** Konami of America, Inc.
- **Year Published:** 2001
- **Developer:** Konami Computer Entertainment Japan, Inc.
- **Country of Origin:** USA
- **Type of Game:** Action, Shooter, Spy / Espionage, Stealth
- **Perspective:** 1st-Person Perspective, 3rd-pPerson Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Playstation 2*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 2.29
- **Back Cover Text:** Solid Snake is back in the latest installment of the critically acclaimed series from director, Hideo Kojima. Top-secret weapons technology is being mysteriously transported under cover of an oil tanker to an unknown destination. Armed with an arsenal of new weapons, supplies and stealth maneuvers, it's up to Snake to infiltrate the transport and keep this deadly weapon of mass destruction from falling into the wrong hands!
 - New moves and infiltration methods, such as diving summersaults, hanging from ledges, and using disguises
 - Battle new, highly skilled opponents, as well as some returning vengeful foes
 - Fully interactive environment where bullets pierce steam pipes, smoke reveals laser beams and wet shoes leave footprints
 - Powerful musical score composed by Harry Gregson-Williams (Enemy of the State, Armageddon, The Rock)



- **Name:** *Dead Rising*
- **Publisher:** Capcom Co., Ltd.
- **Year Published:** 2006
- **Developer:** Capcom Entertainment, Inc.
- **Country of Origin:** Japan
- **Type of Game:** Action, Shooter, Survival Horror
- **Perspective:** 3rd-pPerson Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Microsoft Xbox 360*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 1.26
- **Back Cover Text:** Chop 'Til You Drop!
 - You are Frank West, A hard-edged photojournalist hell-bent on investigating the mystery at Willamette Mall.
 - It's swarming with zombies.
 - You have 72 hours.
 - Anything and everything is a weapon!



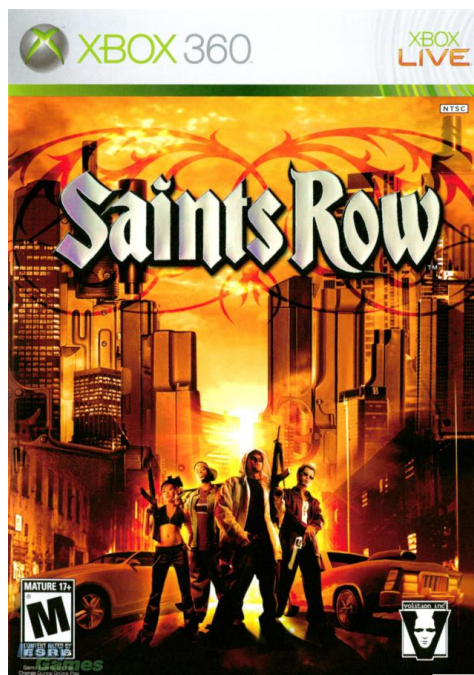
- **Name:** *Gears of War*
- **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
- **Year Published:** 2006
- **Developer:** Epic Games, Inc.
- **Country of Origin:** USA
- **Type of Game:** Action, Sci-Fi / Futuristic, Shooter
- **Perspective:** 3rd-Person Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Microsoft Xbox 360*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 3.87
- **Back Cover Text:** A nightmare from below. A hero from within.
 - The planet lies in ruin-cities crumbling, Man's greatest works fallen. Humanity is cornered, nowhere to run. The Locust Horde has risen, and they won't stop coming. They won't stop killing.
 - The Coalition is desperate for soldiers. The sick, the wounded, the imprisoned are all that remain. An inmate named Marcus Fenix, once left to die, is now charged with keeping humanity alive. He can take comfort in but one fact: The human race isn't extinct, Yet.
 - Features
 - "Take cover and return fire!" with the intuitive one-button cover system to blind fire, evade, flank, and ultimately destroy the nightmarish Locust Horde.
 - Lead your ragtag squad as Marcus Fenix, or recruit a friend to play squad mate Dominic Santiago and complete the full cinematic campaign cooperatively-online or off.
 - Dominate online in Human vs. Locust squad-based multiplayer. Eliminate downed enemies with a kick to the head or a taste of your chainsaw bayonet.



- **Name:** *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition*
- **Publisher:** Capcom Entertainment, Inc.
- **Year Published:** 2006
- **Developer:** Capcom Co., Ltd.
- **Country of Origin:** Japan
- **Type of Game:** Action, Shooter, Sci-Fi / Futuristic
- **Perspective:** 1st-person perspective, 3rd-pPerson Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Microsoft Xbox 360*
- **Sales Data**(in millions, US Sales): 1.27
- **Back Cover Text:** You were left for dead on the ice-covered wastelands of E.D.N. III. You awaken with only fragments of your memory. You must find your past, fight off your enemies and battle the elements to survive. All that can be trusted is your instinct as a soldier.
 - Intense 16 Player multiplayer action
 - Command heavily armored Vital Suits
 - Battle hordes of colossal Akrid



- **Name:** *Saint's Row*
- **Publisher:** THQ, Inc.
- **Year Published:** 2006
- **Developer:** Volition, Inc.
- **Country of Origin:** USA
- **Type of Game:** Action, Shooter, Racing / Driving
- **Perspective:** 3rd-p Person Perspective
- **Hardware Designed For:** *Microsoft Xbox 360*
- **Sales Data** (in millions, US Sales): 1.38
- **Back Cover Text:** Saints Row – Sinners Welcome
 - Welcome to Stilwater – an open world city with attitude, a city controlled by rival gangs, a city YOU are about to take over.
 - Make money any way you can
 - The options are endless: from theft & insurance fraud to street racing & pimping!
 - Customization = Style = Respect
 - With your hard earned cash build the respect you need to take over territories from rival gangs.
 - Key to the City
 - Go wherever & do whatever you want, but bring chaos, death & destruction to the streets of Stilwater & the city will fight back!
 - Take the fight online
 - Recruit friends & challenge other gangs online through Xbox Live!



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