

# **WAR AND PLAY**

## **Insensitivity and Humanity in the Realm of Pushbutton Warfare**

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## **Biography**

Devin Monnens is a game designer and critical game theorist. He graduated with an MFA degree in Electronic Media Arts Design (eMAD) from the University of Denver in 2008, researching, designing, and critiquing antiwar games. Devin has presented his research at the Southwest/Texas American and Popular Culture Association Conference and at Colorado chapter meetings of the International Game Developers Association (IGDA). An active member of the IGDA, Devin works closely with the Videogame Preservation Special Interest Group (SIG), dedicated to cataloging and preserving videogames as well as their history and culture, and also started the Game Developer Memorials SIG, which records and shares the memories of the lives and work of deceased game developers from around the world. His professional research also includes such diverse topics as narratology, gender and games, socially conscious games, and biogaming, and his work is built upon a foundation of literary theory, art history, and medieval studies. Devin strives to create games that reshape the way we imagine our world, the nature of humanity, and ourselves through the languages of play and simulation, pushing the boundaries of the medium to help games realize their potential as a means of artistic communication.

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# INDEX

Introduction	1
Defining Antiwar Games	2
Depictions of War in Games - Six Major Points	8
Conscientious Commercial War Games - Metal	
Gear, Metal Slug, and Cannon Fodder	14
Problems With Antiwar Rhetoric	21
Problems With Games - Are Games Inherently	
Violent?	26
Winning and Consequence	33
Critically Reading Games - Model Games and	
Model Players	40
Confronting Consequence - Shadow of the	
Colossus	43
Revisiting the Six Characteristics of War Games	48
Additional Themes: - The Experiences of War	53
Languages of Design and Critique	56
Antiwar Games	58
 Bibliography - Works Cited and Works	
Consulted	61
Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography of	
Antiwar Games	65
Appendix B: Antiwar Bibliography	87

## Introduction

Ludic wars are black and white – 1's and 0's. They enforce shallow rhetoric that 'our side is good' and 'the other side is bad' without questioning the nature of that rhetoric or the mechanism which communicates it. Under this logic, the Space Invaders are coming for the sole purpose of colonization, subjugation, and genocide – there can be no quarter and no attempt at diplomacy is ever suggested. There is no why, no context for this conflict. After all, 'they're just aliens' and 'it's just a game' where an alien is a Nazi is a terrorist is an Orc is an Orc is an Orc, a target for the player's realistically rendered weapons and intricately modeled toy soldiers and nothing more. There is no point beyond destruction.

While the presence of such narratives would normally not be a problem, it becomes one due to the lack of dialectic – there is no other voice countering or questioning this overarching statement and its monolithic moral system. Whereas film's Rambo has his *Full Metal Jacket*,<sup>1</sup> videogames have no voice to put the pain of soldiers and tears of widows into context.

Games rarely, if ever, ask, 'Why are we fighting?' or, 'What's my motivation as a soldier?' The motivations of the game's characters are rarely considered. Does the game make the player think differently or is it simply shallow, lacking introspection and focusing merely on mechanism? Few games about military conflict consider the value of human life. There is no realization of the impact of one's actions, that each side suffers because the survivor must perform and endure ills to survive while the fallen has ills performed upon him.

How can we hope to investigate these problems in games of push-button warfare where the basic underlying mechanism is how to position one's soldiers to achieve a military objective or how to direct one's firepower to do the same? How can the value of human life be calculated and the gravity of one's actions understood when the only two outcomes are win and lose, 1 and 0? This paper investigates the overwhelmingly one-sided rhetoric currently extended by the medium of the game and how this medium may be used as dialectic and human response to military conflict through the production of antiwar games.

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1 Kubrick, S (1987). *Full Metal Jacket*.

## Defining Antiwar Games

Simply put, an antiwar game is a game that produces an antiwar message. Of course, a definition such as this is deceptively simple and requires a deeper investigation into each part of this compound term.

Let us begin by defining the term ‘game.’ In general, most of us have a good idea what games are, though we often have trouble putting that concept into words. Out of the many people who have tried,<sup>2</sup> Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman’s definition from *Rules of Play* seems the most concise and best directed towards an analysis of games as design:

“A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.”<sup>3</sup>

While Salen and Zimmerman’s definition of games is not as rigid and restricted as we might like,<sup>4</sup> they admit that “[a]ny definition of a phenomena as complex as games is going to encounter instances where the application of the definition is somewhat fuzzy.”<sup>5</sup> They take this as an opportunity to further explore what games are rather than to discard the definition as inadequate or to take the approach that any attempt to define games is futile.

This paper will also not be limited to the subject of videogames but will incorporate non-digital games as well. Most contemporary studies of games are focused primarily on the digital component of the medium, the videogame, due primarily to its novelty and capabilities but also to the large profits earned by the industry. This paper will not take the stance that videogames are somehow inher-

2 Salen and Zimmerman have a nice layout of game definitions in their landmark book, Salen, K, & Zimmerman, E (2006). *Rules of Play*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.; p. 72-82; see also Juul, J (2005). *Half-Real*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press; p. 29-36

3 Salen, K, & Zimmerman, E (2006). *Rules of Play*. Cambridge: The MIT Press; p. 80.

4 For instance, this definition contains puzzles, has conflicting definitions with role playing games, and also has trouble capturing ‘sandbox’ games like *Sim City*. Salen, K, & Zimmerman, E (2006). *Rules of Play*. Cambridge: The MIT Press; p. 80-82.

5 Salen, K, & Zimmerman, E (2006). *Rules of Play*. Cambridge: The MIT Press; p. 82.

ently different from physical games as a medium,<sup>6</sup> but instead, like Salen and Zimmerman, sees all games as part of the same medium, differentiated only by equipment, interface, and complexity. While videogames may certainly allow for the modeling of much larger and complex worlds than physical games,<sup>7</sup> their digital nature does not somehow make them a different medium than the board game.

The second key component of this dual term is antiwar. Antiwar is opposition to war in general or to a particular war. Antiwar movements may be formed to either protest or stop a conflict that is already occurring, such as the Vietnam and Iraq antiwar movements, to prevent a conflict from occurring, such as the Iran antiwar movement, or to oppose war in general, or some aspect of it. Of course while there are many other ideologies connected with an antiwar ideology, such as pro-peace, pacifism and antimilitarism, an antiwar ideology has distinct differences from those ideologies, though they usually intersect with antiwar movements at some level. For example, pro-peace initiatives search for nonviolent solutions to conflict, whether military or urban, and are thus not limited to opposition to war itself. Pacifism is opposed to all violence, not just military conflict, and antimilitarism is opposed to conflict between states in particular and the presence of a military body in general as well as its glorification. Thus an antiwar protester might not be pro-peace, pacifist, or antimilitary or he or she may be all.

When we consider antiwar media, we are talking about media such as art, film, literature, music, and, of course, games that produce an antiwar message. However, antiwar media approaches and their effectiveness change over periods of history, geography, and circumstance, and also depends on audience response. As a result, some media that may at first appear to be antiwar is in fact not, or may have been so only at one time, while other media that are explicitly antiwar may be interpreted by some audiences as pro-war.<sup>8</sup> The

6 Alexander Galloway, for instance, suggests that videogames have more in common with word processing software than they do with boardgames like Chess and Checkers due to his privileging of the computer over the game. Galloway, A (2004). *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

7 Juul, J (2005). *Half-Real*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press.

8 For instance, Fumio Kamei’s *Tatakau Heitai* (Fighting Soldiers) (1939), a propaganda film, was denounced by the *kempeitai* (Thought Police) as being an antiwar film because it depicted tired soldiers rather than fighting soldiers and failed to glorify the Japanese war effort in China.

result is a complex system that we will investigate in greater detail later on.

Antiwar media often depicts the graphic violence, horrors, and stupidity of conflict and the human cost of war. After the advent of psychology, antiwar works, particularly those after World War I and the discovery and definition of shell shock,<sup>9</sup> also tend to explore the psychological trauma of war, a theme that has become much more central to antiwar media after the Vietnam War, which produced a much greater recognition of the psychological effects of combat. It is also notable that antiwar media rarely has an effect on preventing or ending a war or offering solutions to conflict, as most media about war is created after the depicted conflict has ended: as a result, these works seek primarily to evoke empathy, sympathy, and anger from their audiences.<sup>10</sup> Notable exceptions are primarily antiwar media produced in conjunction with war protest movements, in which case they tend to reflect and reinforce public discontent surrounding a particular ongoing or impending conflict.

Antiwar media provides us with a view of the sobering truth of military conflict. We simply cannot ignore the effects of war on people and the environment, and antiwar media provides us with a means of exploring and demonstrating these effects as well as producing the cathartic effect of releasing our anger, frustration, and sorrow. Antiwar media also comes into direct rhetorical conflict with action films that often take a pro-war or jingoist stance. When we look at action films like *Rambo*<sup>11</sup> and even *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*,<sup>12</sup> we can put this gung-ho balls-blazing action into so-

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Arnold, M Fighting Soldiers. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Midnight Eye Web site: <http://www.midnighteye.com/reviews/fightsol.shtml>

9 Shell shock and similar psychological distresses has likely been present in all wars, but only became recognized as a psychological disorder resulting from war only through the discipline of psychology, which was able to identify and define psychological disorders. As the theory goes, it is much easier to recognize something once you know how to define it and understand how it works.

10 Anti-War Film. (2008). In *AllMovie* [Web]. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://wc04.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=24:D|||955>

11 Stallone, S. (2008). *Rambo*.

12 Spielberg, S. (1989). *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Stephen Spielberg has also commented on the inherently different themes between *Indiana Jones* and *Saving Private Ryan* in the documentary, Bouzereau, L (2004). *'Saving Private Ryan': Music and Sound*.

bering perspective through antiwar films like *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*.<sup>13</sup>

Antiwar games are important to produce because they extend the antiwar message into a new medium with new capabilities of expression, by allowing the player to experience the event and explore the system of war. Antiwar games investigate socially conscious themes and produce messages that games have historically tended not to explore and will help push the boundaries of the medium of the game, not only through redefining what we think of as games but also what we think games can do. As the medium matures, we will see games tackle a wider range of topics than simple entertainment, and we are already beginning to see such maturity through blockbuster titles like *Shadow of the Colossus*<sup>14</sup> and compelling independent games like Newsgaming's *September 12th*,<sup>15</sup> as well as, of course, the wide spectrum of art games. There are many artists, critics, and game developers actively exploring concepts of how games make meaning and how to produce games with meaningful and impactful content. Other media such as film and literature have already built a comprehensive critical and design language, but games are still struggling to develop such a structure. A universal critical and design language for games can be better developed and understood through the production of antiwar and other socially conscious games. But how do we produce such games and what would a successful, canonical antiwar game look like?

When we consider what the central idea of an antiwar game would be, we can pull examples like *Apocalypse Now*, *Johnny Got His Gun*,<sup>16</sup> *Guernica*,<sup>17</sup> and *The Green Fields of France*<sup>18</sup> and say 'the anti-war game would be something like this, producing these kinds of emotional effects and making these kinds of statements, only in game form.' Which is a useful place to start, but the reality is much more complex, as the medium of games is radically different from film, art, literature, and music. While videogames often incorporate many elements of these other media, games themselves are inherently dif-

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13 Coppola, F (1979). *Apocalypse Now*.

14 *Shadow of the Colossus* (PlayStation 2, 2005). Team Ico: SCEA.

15 *September 12th, A toy world* (Flash, 2003). Powerful Robot Games: Newsgaming.

16 Trumbo, D (1972). *Johnny Got His Gun*. New York, NY: Bantam.

17 Picasso's painting depicting bombing of Guernica by Fascist forces. Picasso, P (1937). *Guernica*.

18 Bogle, E (1976). *Green Fields of France*.

ferent from other 'passive' media through two primary components: action and simulation.

Action is essentially what we call play, the ludic act.<sup>19</sup> Action is the performance of the player, his or her interaction with the game system that makes the game operate and progress. I don't use the term 'interaction' because the term is so widely used and misused that it has been rendered meaningless. DVD players are considered interactive; you push buttons and the movie plays, but they're not games. It can even be argued that you can interact with a dead opossum by lifting it up and dropping it – you touch it, it moves, it's interactive. Of course, in the formal sense, interaction is perhaps best described as a system of communication as forwarded by Chris Crawford, where one party communicates, the second party analyzes the communication and sends a response, which the first party in turn analyzes and responds.<sup>20</sup> While this definition is fairly concise, it is not as direct as 'action' or 'play,' which both contain aspects of the term 'interactivity.' I am also hesitant to use the term 'play' to describe player activity, due not only to its associations with childishness and frivolity but more importantly because not all player activity is considered a ludic act, as Alexander Galloway suggests.<sup>21</sup>

Simulation is an abstract model of some aspect of the world outside the game (what we tend to call 'reality' or 'the real world').<sup>22</sup> The simulation does not reproduce every aspect of 'reality' but only the parts that matter to the simulation. Where games are concerned, these aspects of the external world are only interpreted in such a way that makes sense to a game: thus, the simulation in a game need not be completely accurate with our understanding of how the real world

19 Ludic is derived from the Latin *ludens*, which was used by Johann Huizinga to discuss the play of games in his seminal *Homo Ludens*. Huizinga, J (1971). *Homo Ludens*. Boston, MA: The Beacon Press.

20 Crawford, C (2003). *Chris Crawford on Game Design*. Boston, MA: New Riders.

21 Galloway divides game activity into ludic and nonludic actions (in the original text, Galloway uses the terms 'play' and 'nonplay', though ludic and nonludic are more descriptive and concise terms for a study of games, following Johann Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*). Galloway, A (2004). *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

22 'Reality' is in quotations because there is often some philosophical and epistemological conflict as to the nature of 'reality.' 'Reality' in this sense will be anything outside the game; the game refers to systems outside of itself and interprets those systems in a simulation.

operates but instead designed with player experience in mind.<sup>23</sup> For instance, if we are simulating a car for a racing game, we would want to simulate how the car moves, but we probably wouldn't be interested in what temperature it melts at or how much water it displaces.<sup>24</sup> In fact, we probably wouldn't even simulate how the engine works, merely how the vehicle moves on different terrain at different speeds. We also wouldn't model how the car moves too accurately, as that would mean the game would become so difficult that only professional racecar drivers might actually win the game. Instead, designers fudge the physics to make the game more playable, to make it a bit more 'fun.'

When we look at games about war, what aspects of war are being simulated and why, and how is war represented? In order to answer these questions, we have to understand where war games are at currently; then we can understand where we have to go to make antiwar games.

23 Ian Bogost goes into great detail on simulation in *Persuasive Games*, using this example of the racing game. Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. See also Baudrillard's analysis of simulation and representation: Baudrillard, J (1988). *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Poster, M. Stanford: Stanford University Press; p. 166-184 retrieved from [http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Baudrillard/Baudrillard\\_Simulacra.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Baudrillard/Baudrillard_Simulacra.html).

24 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. I also speculate that when games put the player in a role, they provide him with skills the fictional character would have. Thus, when we play as a racecar driver, our character has years of racing experience under his belt and knows how the car works and how to fix it but the player doesn't have to know these things. As an example, in the *Red Dwarf* episode, "Gunmen of the Apocalypse," the crew takes a mission inside the virtual reality game *Better Than Life* where they gain special knife throwing, gunslinging, and fist fighting skills from the characters they play. When these skills are taken away from them by the Gunmen of the Apocalypse, they are no longer able to use their weapons with the same level of skill. Grant, R. & Naylor, G. (1993). "Gunmen of the Apocalypse," in *Red Dwarf*, Series VI, Episode 33.



## Depictions of War in Games – Six Major Characteristics

War has been depicted for centuries in many different kinds of games. Games may be specifically about war, or they may only abstractly represent a conflict. For instance, Checkers suggests the movement of soldiers across a battlefield and Go the placement of troops at key positions. Even the lowly game of Tic-Tac-Toe may be considered a fierce battle of territorial control, and all the militarist and colonialist narratives it implies.

We can divide games about war into popular genres like first-person shooters,<sup>25</sup> scrolling shooters,<sup>26</sup> two-dimensional and three-dimensional action games,<sup>27</sup> strategy games,<sup>28</sup> 'god games',<sup>29</sup> role-playing games,<sup>30</sup> combat vehicle simulators,<sup>31</sup> war board games,<sup>32</sup>

25 *Halo: Combat Evolved* (Xbox, 2001). Bungee: Microsoft Game Studios. *Medal of Honor* (PlayStation, 1999). DreamWorks Interactive, L.L.C., Electronic Arts, Inc. *Call of Duty* (PC, 2003). Infinity Ward, Inc.: Activision Publishing, Inc.

26 These may of course be vehicle-based or 'run 'n gun' shmups (short for 'shoot 'em ups'), sidescrolling or forward scrolling. Examples include *Space Invaders* (Arcade, 1979). Taito; *Raiden* (Arcade, 1990). Seibu Kaihatsu; *Gradius* (Arcade, 1984). Konami; *Contra* (Arcade, 1987). Konami; and *Mercs* (Arcade, 1990). Capcom.

27 *Bionic Commando* (Nintendo Entertainment System, 1988). Capcom; *Gears of War* (Xbox 360, 2006). Epic Games, Inc.: Microsoft Game Studios.

28 *Ogre Battle* (Super Nintendo Entertainment System, 1994). Quest: Enix Corporation. *StarCraft* (PC, 1998). Blizzard Entertainment, Inc. *Advance Wars* (Game Boy Advance, 2001). Intelligent Systems Co., Ltd.: Nintendo of America, Inc.

29 *Sid Meier's Civilization* (Windows 3.x, 1993). MPS Labs: MicroProse Software, Inc. *Populous* (DOS, 1989). Bullfrog Productions, Ltd.: Electronic Arts, Inc.

30 Some RPGs may take place during a war of some kind, such as *Final Fantasy III* (Final Fantasy VI) (Super Nintendo Entertainment System, 1994). Square Co., Ltd.: Square Soft, Inc.; and *Arc the Lad Collection* (PlayStation, 2002). Arc System Works Co., Ltd.: Working Designs.

31 *Jane's Combat Simulations: Advanced Tactical Fighters* (DOS, 1996). Jane's Combat Simulations: Electronic Arts, Inc. *Abrams Battle Tank* (DOS, 1988). Dynamix, Inc.: Electronic Arts, Inc. *Silent Service* (Nintendo Entertainment System, 1989). MicroProse Software, Inc.: Ultra Software Corporation. *Descent: Freespace – The Great War* (PC, 1998). Volition Incorporated: Interplay Productions, Inc.

32 This includes a wide range of displace, chase, and space games such as Chess, Ftafl, and Go, as well as modern war games descended from

miniatures war games,<sup>33</sup> card games,<sup>34</sup> and physical team games.<sup>35</sup> These games may depict historical wars, speculative future wars, fictional wars, or the wars of fantasy and science fiction; the wars depicted may be abstract<sup>36</sup> or naturalistic.<sup>37</sup>

When we talk about depictions of war in games though, we have to specifically state what we are referring to when we say 'this game depicts war.' There are obviously many different forms of violence depicted in games, from the urban gang violence of *Grand Theft Auto III*<sup>38</sup> to the sword and sorcery of *Dungeons and Dragons*,<sup>39</sup> and the violence depicted in war games is not always the same.

This paper will define war as an organized, large scale, violent conflict among two or more opposing factions. War is both the conflict and the state or period of armed hostility in which it occurs. It may be formally declared or undeclared. War may consist either of soldiers, conscripted or volunteered, fighting in an organized force, or it may contain guerrilla or irregular armies and resistance fighters. War proper is differentiated from tribal warfare or feuds between two tribes or families in that it is generally large-scale and state-organized. War is not a conflict of dungeon crawling or planetary exploration,<sup>40</sup> nor is it urban conflict, though it may sometimes occur in urban settings. We will not consider abstract struggles such as the War on Drugs, which can hardly be considered wars as defined above.<sup>41</sup> War games may also depict the actions of a single individual

*Kriegspiel* designs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as *Memoir* or the Avalon Hill games.

33 *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* (Miniatures, 1983 – Present). Games Workshop.

34 *Echelons of Fire* (Collectible card game, 1995). Medallion Simulations. War (Card game).

35 Capture the Flag, Paintball. We will, of course, exclude freeform play using toys such as toy soldiers and toy guns as they are not standardized, rule-based play.

36 Chess, Latrunculi.

37 *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (Xbox, 2003). Electronic Arts Los Angeles: Electronic Arts, Inc.

38 *Grand Theft Auto III* (PlayStation, 2001). DMA Design Limited: Rockstar Games, Inc.

39 *Dungeons and Dragons* series. (Role playing game, 1974-present). Tactical Studies Rules, Inc.

40 Though exploration may suggest colonization, which can lead to war.

41 The Wars on Drugs, Poverty, and Terrorism are conflicts of ideology, of ideas rather than conflicts between two armies. We cannot consider these as wars as defined above, though they may contain actual wars. For instance, the United States is not 'at war against



or small group of soldiers within a larger conflict as well as the movements of large armies.

We can consider wars between good and evil, but only when conflict between armies is concerned. Thus a game like *The Legend of Zelda*,<sup>42</sup> which depicts a struggle between the forces of good and evil, is not a war as defined above, as it is merely the struggle of one hero against the hordes. This is not to say that *The Legend of Zelda* does not depict wars,<sup>43</sup> just that the battles of *Zelda* are not a conflict between large bodies of soldiers. Hyrule knights certainly appear, as do Moblin armies, but they are never depicted in armed conflict against each other and the effects of these wars are never directly considered.

When we examine this broad range of games depicting war, from action games, first person shooters, combat flight sims, strategy games, board games, and paintball, we begin to identify a set of six characteristics that define the rhetoric of war games:

The first is that there is a focus on combat as action, a placement of artificial violence in a safe environment for the sake of entertainment. This action may be defined as any combination of the direct use of a game weapon through player input, the strategy of placing and moving soldiers on the battlefield, resolving combat using indirect methods such as dice rolls, the movement of the self or an avatar within the artificial battlefield, and the logistics of resource management. From *Halo* to *StarCraft*, these war games are about participating in or directing combat and not much else.

The second is that the player is usually placed in an empowering role, such as an elite soldier, the pilot of a powerful vehicle, the bearer of a BFG,<sup>44</sup> a troop commander, or is placed a position where he can become empowered through successful play. This empowerment is often assisted by an opportunity to allow the player to make mistakes

terror,' an abstract concept not limited to a single faction or culture, but rather is at war against 'the terrorists [who attacked America and Americans overseas],' against Al Quaida. This becomes particularly obvious when we consider that the United States has not taken action against such groups as Israeli terrorists fighting Palestinians.

42 *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo Entertainment System, 1987). Nintendo Co., Ltd.: Nintendo of America Inc.

43 Such as The Imprisoning War in which the evil Ganon was sealed into the Golden Land, as described in *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* (Super Nintendo Entertainment System, 1991). Nintendo EAD: Nintendo of America Inc.

44 Short for 'big f'n gun'

without necessitating the loss of the game, such as through a health bar, a shield system, or large armies.<sup>45</sup> Even when death does occur, there is always the reset button or a stock of extra lives. Thus, the death of the avatar, the loss of a soldier or unit, or a combat wound is rarely instantly fatal to the player, merely providing him feedback and allowing him to adapt his strategy.

The third is that the player is placed within the position of a commander directing a group or army of soldiers or into the shoes of an individual soldier or military unit on the battlefield. We do not tend to see the player in the position of a noncombatant or civilian, excepting perhaps a few instances of prisoner escape games,<sup>46</sup> but rather in the position of a combatant who either performs or directs military actions on the battlefield.

Fourth, the motives of the heroes and the villains are usually beyond question. The hero or protagonist is doing the right thing while the antagonists are demonized. Players don't need to question whether or not that zombie alien Nazi is really just a tragically misunderstood victim of war, drafted into a conflict he doesn't understand, but simply believe that he is an active agent for the powers of evil – or at least a force unrepentantly opposed to his own. Of course, many strategy games allow the player to control either side of a conflict, even in more abstract games like Chess and Go where the pieces are differentiated only by color.<sup>47</sup> Yet even in the case of a World War II game where the player may play as the Axis or the Allies, the player never questions the motives of his army but merely asks how is he going to win in the given situation.<sup>48</sup>

Fifth, in relation to the first and fourth points, the violence itself and the nature of warfare is never questioned. Violent action is the

45 It also results in the accusation that these games are simply 'adolescent power trips.'

46 *The Great Escape* (PlayStation 2, 2003). Pivotal Games Ltd.: Gotham Games, for instance, though even as a prisoner, the player is still a soldier, an imprisoned enemy combatant.

47 Symbolism of colors such as black and white notwithstanding, the pieces are more or less undifferentiated.

48 Though his prejudices might lead him to more willingly sacrifice some of his soldiers. For instance, when I play *StarCraft*, I am more attached to the lives of my Human and Protoss soldiers than I am for the buglike Zerg, who are less human and I am therefore less affected when one of them dies. While not every player will have these same reactions, it does demonstrate that we place different values on our characters based on their appearances, whether consciously or unconsciously.

key component of how the game is played, and its presence and consequences are taken as a given, if not a necessity. As a result, casualties are assumed as unfortunate but necessary consequences of combat and indeed expected – if you want to play soldier, someone will have to play the corpse. And because battle is a key component of these games, it in turn becomes a spectacle, particularly in videogames where military combat is illustrated in moving images, though the drama and spectacle may also be suggested in paper-based games.

Sixth, little value is placed on human life. The exceptions to this are where the player's own life is concerned or the survival of his army or military unit as an effective fighting force (as a whole, rather than in regards to the lives of the individual soldiers, though some individuals may be considered more valuable than others), the lives of fellow team members,<sup>49</sup> and the lives of friendlies or other non-playable characters the player is supposed to protect as a prerequisite of achieving a mission objective, such as civilians or prisoners needed for questioning. In the case of strategy war games, the death of a single soldier will usually go unnoticed, and it is often only when enough soldiers are lost to impact the player's strategy that the value of soldiers' lives increases.<sup>50</sup> As a result, when we play a game like *StarCraft*, the game provides little incentive to keep casualties to a minimum: whether it takes five casualties or five hundred does not matter, so long as the mission is accomplished.

While these six points may be found in many games, they are particular characteristics of war games. It is also important to note that not all war games contain all six points, though many contain several.

Because most war games focus on these main points, they fail to depict war in a more serious or realistic tone, as an antiwar game would. They may render a soldier's weapon realistically or simulate the movement and combat of troops on a battlefield with a high degree of accuracy based on real-world data, but they are ultimately limited in scope and abstraction to the core components necessary for the game's design. Even when we can define a game as being 'grit-

49 Though not always! In some games, squad members are so poorly programmed so as to be worthless or may actually have little impact on a battle's outcome.

50 A similar phenomenon occurs in action or shooter games where the last life or last few points of health become considerably more valuable than the first or when the last few points before an extra life is earned or a high score is met become much more valuable.

ty' in the visual style popularized by *Saving Private Ryan*,<sup>51</sup> a gritty appearance does not mean the game has the same underlying social and psychological commentary the film had. It is the result of a fallacy about how a visual style somehow makes the game more 'mature' or 'realistic.' Because games simulate, when we talk about war games simulating reality, we are only talking about a very limited perspective of real war that can hardly stand up to a real soldier's experience.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, war games aren't about critiquing war, but rather they are about playing soldier. They give players an excuse to shoot things and blow things up in a safe artificial environment, and to observe the spectacle of large masses of men and machines at war. And they suggest that all a soldier does is fight without asking why or what it means to him and the people who are not fighting.

Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with a game like *Contra*, *Halo*, or *StarCraft*. All these games serve a purpose, primarily of escape and entertainment, and they fulfill that purpose very well. However, it becomes an issue when all games about war produce the same insensitive messages, messages that are not negative to war and may in many cases be positive, that war, at least in game form, is fun to play, while simultaneously telling us little about what war actually is.

Thus the *real* problem is when these are the *only* messages we are receiving from the medium.

Film can make do with its Schwarzenegger and Stallone action flicks, but for each *Rambo* on the market, there is a powerful collection of *Full Metal Jacket*'s to provide an alternative message and create a dialectic between popularized and glorified Hollywood views of war and the gritty, sobering reality of the horrors and stupidity of military conflict and how it affects people.

Games, with few exceptions, lack that alternative message.

51 After the release of *Saving Private Ryan*, a lot of war films borrowed Spielberg's gritty style, as in *Enemy at the Gates* (2001) and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006).

52 Williams, S (2005, December 6). Apocalypse Not. *The Escapist*, 22, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue\\_22/137-Apocalypse-Not](http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_22/137-Apocalypse-Not)

### ***Conscientious Commercial War Games – Metal Gear, Metal Slug, and Cannon Fodder***

For the most part, alternate representations of war in game have been fairly scarce, at least for earlier than the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>53</sup> Part of this relates to how games have traditionally been interpreted as a means of entertainment and escape rather than as systems of meaning. With the rise of commercial board games in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and following the spirit of the times, games were created specifically with moral and instructive purposes, such as *The Landlord's Game*<sup>54</sup> and Milton Bradley's *The Checkered Game of Life*,<sup>55</sup> demonstrating that even simple boardgames can produce messages about such topics as the land rent system and morality in life, and at least leave open the possibility of antiwar games. However, commercial games remained largely entertainment oriented into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and it was only through a few works of art such as Yoko Ono's *Play it by Trust* (1966)<sup>56</sup> or the New Games Movement<sup>57</sup> that antiwar messages were produced. Where war was concerned, games were designed as entertainment, often with the goal of accurately simulating historical combat,<sup>58</sup> and later through early arcade games

53 In recent years, a rise in readily available game design software and political and personal response to 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced an extensive collection of antiwar games and games commenting on war.

54 From which *Monopoly* was inspired.

55 Lepore, Jill. The Meaning of Life "The New Yorker," May 21, 2007.

56 Ono, Y. (1966). *Play it By Trust*. An all-white chessboard inspired by the use of game theory as a Cold War strategy. Criticized by chess masters as not being effective because a chess master is trained to keep track of piece locations, *Play it by Trust* in fact reaffirms its message when we recognize that the chess master is only a specialized individual trained to in a different kind of tactical vision, like a general, while ordinary individuals simply can't tell the difference.

57 The New Games Movement was a product of 1960s San Francisco counter-culture formalized by George Leonard in *The New Games Book*. The movement was designed to transform how people play games, as it suggested that the way people play affects how they view their world. The New Games Movement non-competitive, friendly games that removed physical, social, and economic barriers to play as well as criticizing the focus on competition and winning. Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E (2006). *Rules of Play*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

58 These war games evolved from the Kriegspiel of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which were used by European militaries as training and simulation tools.

of the 1970s and 1980s where the player shot digital aliens and soldiers. Generally, commercial games about war have abstracted war into strategies of combat and tactics, focusing little on war's impact, though there have been several notable exceptions.

One videogame series commonly stated as possessing an antiwar rhetoric is the popular *Metal Gear* series.<sup>59</sup> *Metal Gear* was the brainchild of famous game designer Hideo Kojima and is based on the tagline, 'Tactical Espionage Action.' The original games (*Metal Gear*<sup>60</sup> and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*<sup>61</sup>) were produced in direct response to Kojima's concerns about the way games were being played at the time, primarily that the player's objective was to shoot everything and kill as much as he could in order to win the game while earning lots of points toward a high score.<sup>62</sup> Kojima developed *Metal Gear* in such a way that the player was encouraged to avoid encounters with the enemy, to sneak around enemy bases while avoiding detection. Simply running around, shooting everything in sight would result in the arrival of more soldiers, who would quickly overpower the player. The player was thus essentially rewarded for avoiding combat and sparing lives, even though he still had the option and sometimes the necessity of doing so.

The game's modern sequels, *Metal Gear Solid*<sup>63</sup> and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Guns of the Patriots*<sup>64</sup> continued the series' tradition, this time giving the player a tranquilizer gun and rewarding him with the highest score of "Big Boss" only after he manages to beat the game without killing anything.<sup>65</sup> *Metal Gear Solid's* narrative also contains antiwar undertones, such as the reluctance of the protagonist, Solid Snake, to fight and kill, the effects war has on soldiers, and cyclical systems of betrayal.<sup>66</sup>

59 More commonly referred to today as the *Metal Gear Solid* series, the games originated as 'Metal Gear' in the 1980s.

60 *Metal Gear* (MSX, 1987) in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* (PlayStation 2, 2005). Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc.

61 *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (MSX, 1990) in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* (PlayStation 2, 2005). Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc.

62 Solid States. (2007, March). *Edge*, [173], [54-61]. The game's publisher, Konami, had also produced the popular *Contra* series, which is played in this fashion.

63 *Metal Gear Solid* (PlayStation, 1998). Konami Co., Ltd.

64 *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (PlayStation 2, 2001). Konami of America, Inc.

65 These games include attack dogs and birds as well as soldiers and guards.

66 Solid States. (2007, March). *Edge*, [173], [54].

The series' titular *Metal Gear* also reinforces a central message about the threat of nuclear apocalypse. *Metal Gear* is a giant bipedal mechanical tank with nuclear launch capabilities, a powerful weapon capable of firing a nuclear missile from anywhere on the globe. It has been described by *Edge* magazine as "a distressingly human...weapon...not so different from the game's cloned and genetically modified soldiers, who whether heroes or villains...are always automatons to some degree, seldom in complete control of their own actions."<sup>67</sup> The apocalyptic threat of nuclear war is always a hinging point behind the *Metal Gear* games, and Solid Snake constantly strives to prevent nuclear attacks through his missions.

*Metal Gear Solid's* strongest antiwar message arrived in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*,<sup>68</sup> where Solid Snake confronts the ghost of a long-dead psychic called The Sorrow. The Sorrow combats Snake by transporting him to a haunted river where he is confronted with the vengeful spirits of everything he has killed so far in the game, from animals and guard dogs to the ghastly spirits of dead soldiers, each bearing the grisly wounds Snake had inflicted. Snake is unable to attack the ghosts and must instead avoid them while walking upstream through the fast-flowing river. As a result, the player is directly confronted with the consequences of each life he took and forced to deal with them, to look upon the faces and twisted bodies of his victims: the more people he killed, the longer the river, with a player who indiscriminately kills staying in the river for twenty minutes or more.

Kojima continues to explore aspects of war and how it affects soldiers in *Metal Gear*, and his upcoming *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*<sup>69</sup> will be exploring these themes within an actual battleground that seems taken straight out of contemporary Middle Eastern conflict. Kojima is interested in portraying violence in games differently, in making the player aware of the costs of war and its stupidity. A lot of this comes from Kojima's approach to accurately representing conflict and forcing players to see the results of their actions, as he did in *Metal Gear Solid 3's* battle with The Sorrow. In a 2008 interview, Kojima has stated:

67 Solid States. (2007, March). *Edge*, [173], [57].

68 *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (PlayStation 2, 2004). Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc.

69 *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (PlayStation 3, 2008). Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc.

"If you don't see the pain, you can't understand what you've done, and you'll pass through battles without taking responsibility for your actions. I don't want to ignore that. I want players to think, even if it's just a little, about what violence and war are."<sup>70</sup>

Of course, while Kojima may consciously seek to negatively portray war here and there and make players aware of his message, his games are ultimately about action and empowerment.<sup>71</sup> While the games do give players the option of choosing whether or not to kill, the player is ultimately not confronted at every step with the consequences of killing, excepting rare sequences such as The Sorrow. Whether or not a truly antiwar game can be produced in a game that is about stealth and combat remains to be seen, though Kojima's designs certainly take an interesting and conscientious direction along these lines.

*Metal Gear* hasn't been the only game to comment on war. Some interesting comments in fact come from one of the most unlikely places, a side-scrolling run 'n gun shooter called *Metal Slug*.<sup>72</sup> The *Metal Slug* games are by no means antiwar games: they are instead absurd action-packed side-scrolling military shooting games loosely designed after the *Contra* series, with a high level of realistic character detail and humor derived from slapstick and excess. They have an incredible level of cartoon violence, with massive explosions, bullet wounds that spurt out an unrealistic amount of blood, and other mayhem directed at the hapless Nazi-esque soldiers led by their military dictator, General Morden, who suspiciously resembles Saddam Hussein. And yet, these games contain several bizarre messages that might be considered war commentary on some level.

The most interesting of these is the ending sequence to the original *Metal Slug*.<sup>73</sup> After the player has destroyed the enemy forces and ousted General Morden, we see the credits sequence begin with a

70 Fear, E (2008, January 3). Jade Raymond Interviews Hideo Kojima. *Develop*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.developmag.com/news/29006/Jade-Raymond-interviews-Hideo-Kojima>

71 We don't have to go much further than looking at some of the game's other bosses to see that *Metal Gear Solid* really isn't an antiwar game. For instance, in the same game with The Sorrow, Snake fights a boss who shoots bees from his hands.

72 *Metal Slug* (Arcade, 1996). SNK. Part of a series.

73 *Metal Slug* (Arcade, 1996). SNK.



smiling soldier folding a paper airplane and sending it flying into the air. We follow the paper airplane as it flies over the battlefields the player has just fought through, upon which we see the corpses of dead soldiers and the ruins of demolished military vehicles. It is an odd juxtaposition of a harmless toy representing a military plane flying over fields of destruction caused by real weapons, a sequence that becomes even more surreal through additional imagery. In the jungle stage, we see flocks of brilliantly colored parrots flying past waterfalls, rainbows, and the bodies of soldiers lying in the river; in another sequence we see a girl weeping over a soldier's grave, and a gust of wind lifts her hat away. All of this imagery is shown while the game's commando music blares. The credits sequence ends with a large portrait of a soldier's helmet lying in the dirt next to a tank track, a small plant sprouting nearby with the words 'PEACE FOREVER!' written below.<sup>74</sup> (Oddly enough, a second ending appears if two players beat the game together. This time, the paper airplane flies over the battlefield and all the soldiers are alive, smiling, dancing, and joking while a Japanese pop song about friendship plays.)

Just how are we supposed to interpret this sequence? At one level, seeing the effects of all the destruction the player just caused in a genre that usually obliterates any result of violence with disappearing corpses and continuous advancement through new, unconquered areas, is awe-inspiring. On the other, it produces some odd messages that make us think about our actions in a different way. Perhaps it is a recognition that there is a distinct difference between the violence depicted in a game and the real world violence it simulates, that we will ultimately be better off if we have 'peace forever' in the real world and leave the fighting to the safety and fantasy of game space. Despite the game's obvious militaristic themes, *Metal Slug's* ending does produce imagery that could be considered an antiwar message given a different context, though in relation with the rest of the game, it is a bizarre design choice to say the least.

One war game that *does* take a clear stab at criticizing war is the action title *Cannon Fodder*.<sup>75</sup> *Cannon Fodder* is a quirky, satirical

74 This scene appears at the end of *Metal Slug* 1-5 and does not appear in *Metal Slug* 6. Incidentally, *Metal Slug* 2<sup>nd</sup> Mission portrays a similar scene where the protagonist says 'I really dig this peace thing.' <http://www.vgmuseum.com/end/ngpc/a/ms2.htm>

75 *Cannon Fodder* (Amiga, 1993). Virgin Interactive. Originally for the Amiga, the game was later ported to many other systems, including the Sega Genesis, Atari Jaguar, and 3DO.

look at war, from the opening title sequence with its red corn poppy symbolizing remembrance for the war dead and the bizarre pop song *War Has Never Been So Much Fun*.<sup>76</sup> Full of biting satire, *Cannon Fodder* demonstrates the logic of cannon fodder and the stupidity of war, though in a darkly humorous and entertaining form.

*Cannon Fodder's* antiwar messages hinge primarily through the representation of the individual troops in the squads. Each soldier is given a specific name (names are not used twice), even though each soldier is merely an interchangeable cog in the war machine, to be replaced by the next victim. At the end of each mission, the player is reminded of the names of all the soldiers killed, and each soldier gets his own gravestone on Boot Hill, past which each soldier marches on the way to and from the battle zone (also satirically dubbed the "slaughter area"). The higher the deceased soldier's rank, the better the gravestone. It is also notable that while most war games depict quick, painless Hollywood kills, *Cannon Fodder's* wounded soldiers will lie on the ground, screaming and writhing in pain: the game's instruction manual asks you to kindly put them out of their misery.<sup>77</sup>

Each time a soldier survives a mission, he gets promoted, gaining greater accuracy, speed, and attack range. As a result, soldiers who have survived more missions, particularly the two starting soldiers Jops and Jules, become more valuable than the raw recruits. The unique names of the soldiers, coupled with their voice acting and the time invested in them by the player, mean that players become more attached to their higher-ranking soldiers, sometimes even expressing their emotions for the death of a grizzled veteran like Jops or Jules.<sup>78</sup> The player is thus more likely to send his raw recruits out

76 The theme song contains the lines: "War! / It's never been so much fun!" and "Go up to your brother, / shoot him with your gun, / leave him in his uniform / dying in the sun!" Videos depicting the title sequence, commercial, and live performance by the song's composer may be seen on YouTube. Cannon Fodder Music Video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDxCBx9Xb1I>); Cannon Fodder Amiga game intro (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiYuq6Ac3a0>); Cannon Fodder theme played on game Controllers (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7XiXQ6wEyM>)

77 Penn, G, & Root Associates (1993). *Cannon Fodder Instruction Manual*. <http://files.the-underdogs.info/games/c/cannon/files/cannon.pdf>

78 Arkhaine, (2002, July 31). Cannon Fodder Player Reviews. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from GameFAQs Web site: <http://www.gamefaqs.com/console/snes/review/R17938.html>. The Classic Game: Cannon Fodder. *Retro Gamer*, [35], [28-29].

into unexplored territory to locate the enemy forces, implicating the player into the logic of cannon fodder. As Falstaff said to Prince Henry in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, "they'll fill a pit as well as better [men]."<sup>79</sup>

*Cannon Fodder* reinforces its antiwar satire in other ways. The Boot Hill screen contains a sports-like scoreboard, with the words 'Home' and 'Away' representing the number of casualties sustained by both sides. Behind Boot Hill, a long row of new recruits lines up into the distance, eagerly awaiting their turn on the battlefield. The game's instruction manual is also full of quirky passages, such as the description of the game's high score table, which keeps track of the kills and rank of each soldier in a twisted form of bureaucracy:

"When a trooper dies, his performance is not forgotten – unless he didn't score enough points to register with the High Scoring Heroes Bureau (who manage the High Scoring Heroes Table)."<sup>80</sup>

Finally, *Cannon Fodder* solidifies its satirical message in the last line of the instruction manual:

"[D]on't try playing this at home, kids, because war is not a game – war, as *Cannon Fodder* demonstrates in its own quirky little way, is a senseless waste of human resources and lives. We hope that you never have to find out the hard way."<sup>81</sup>

Despite its overt attempts at satire, *Cannon Fodder* received a lot of negative publicity from both the British press and the Royal British Legion, whose knee-jerk reaction was to consider the game an insult to the honor of the army and its veterans, particularly those of the First World War. The Royal British Legion forced the game's publisher, Virgin, to include the disclaimer, "This game is not in any way endorsed by the Royal British Legion," and made them remove the corn poppy from the game's cover.<sup>82</sup> It also couldn't have helped that the game was released on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary or Armistice Day.

79 *Henry IV*, Part 1.

80 Penn, G, & Root Associates (1993). *Cannon Fodder Instruction Manual*. P. 13 <http://files.the-underdogs.info/games/c/cannon/files/cannon.pdf>

81 Penn, G, & Root Associates (1993). *Cannon Fodder Instruction Manual*. P. 18 <http://files.the-underdogs.info/games/c/cannon/files/cannon.pdf>

82 Of course Germany, who ironically started two world wars, banned the game from sale outright. *Cannon Fodder*. (2008). In *Wikipedia*

Of course, because a lot of the gaming press focused on *Cannon Fodder's* humor and play control over its seriousness (particularly the fact that you can continue to shoot a dead soldier while he's down to make him 'hop around like a bunny'<sup>83</sup>) – and the fact that no other game of its type had really sought to present itself as a criticism of war – media illiteracy fueled by angry, ignorant arguments on both sides of the fence hardly helped the game's message get across to the public.<sup>84</sup> However, whether or not players dwelt long on the game's message is another point of contention, given most reviews' focus on how well and fun the game plays and its dark humor.<sup>85</sup>

### *Problems With Antiwar Rhetoric*

While *Cannon Fodder* may have been the only game of its kind at the time to really make some form of conscientious statement about war, we really have to question the effectiveness of its message. If players continually praise the game's solid play control and dark humor while failing to talk about its antiwar commentary, do they really get the farcical antiwar message communicated by the game? Do they really care, or are their opinions changed in any way by the game's rhetoric?

In fact, this is a problem common with all the games mentioned above. While the games contain antiwar messages in some form or other, they are not explicitly antiwar games and thus this rhetoric is not consistently and strongly applied throughout. While on the one hand, whatever messages the games contain were communicated to large audiences due to the game's popularity, on the other hand, the games were popular because they appealed to crowds who appreci-

[Web]. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannon\\_Fodder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannon_Fodder)

83 Penn, G, & Root Associates (1993). *Cannon Fodder Instruction Manual*. P. 18. <http://files.the-underdogs.info/games/c/cannon/files/cannon.pdf>

84 The long drama is recorded here: AP2, Poppy Game Insult to Our War Dead. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from AP2 Web site: <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/ap2/dissent/poppy.html>

85 For example, one review on GameFAQs is titled "Control sadistic little men and make them kill other sadistic little men!" Which sums up the game fairly well, but hardly touches on the game's satire. Arkhaine, (2002, July 31). *Cannon Fodder Player Reviews*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from GameFAQs Web site: <http://www.gamefaqs.com/console/snes/review/R17938.html>

ated their military action content. Producing a full-fledged antiwar game may thus require a completely different set of design methods to reach an audience of comparable size.

Some of these problems of ambiguity and effectiveness are part of antiwar media as a whole. One of the biggest problems with producing antiwar material is that the message can be undermined by the action the material depicts in order to illustrate its messages, how the logic of illustrating the horrors of war to show how war is hell sometimes backfires. As a result, some audiences are drawn to the action scenes shown in antiwar films and literature, focusing on these sequences over their messages and consequences, becoming energized and excited by the spectacle of war. And this can distract them from the message of the piece.

This is exactly what commentators talk about when they say that nearly any antiwar film has a scene where audiences become energized by the action. In the case of *Apocalypse Now*, this is the famous helicopter attack sequence where Richard Wagner's "Flight of the Valkyries" plays as the soldiers raid a Vietnamese village. Audiences may become focused on the action and the mayhem while completely missing the point of the sequence or not caring much about it – that the Vietnam War is mad and nobody has a clue what they're doing out there; as a result, people are dying for no reason in a stupid, pointless war. All of that ends up being taken for granted, dismissed as part of the job. In fact it was this scene that was described in the book and film *Jarhead*,<sup>86</sup> where the soldiers watch *Apocalypse Now* before being called to war and are completely energized by the helicopter attack sequence. In the commentary with director Sam Mendes, Mendes describes how 'all antiwar movies are basically pro-war movies when you play them to marines.'<sup>87</sup> Is this problem then one of media literacy? Or will there always be audiences like the marines in *Jarhead* who will cheer a blatantly antiwar film?

Another philosophy regarding the portrayal of war in film is that a war film encourages the audience to support the conflict by making them encourage the action. Such a belief was forwarded by Shah Rukh Khan, the actor who played the Indian emperor turned Buddhist, Ashoka, in the film of the same name.<sup>88</sup> In the documentaries, Khan says he finds that when audiences watch a war film, they end up cheering for one side during the battles, usually whichever

86 Mendes, S (2005). *Jarhead*.

87 Mendes, S (2005). *Jarhead*.

88 Sivan, S (2001). *Asoka*.

the film places its sympathies with.<sup>89</sup> Thus, if we look at a film like *Saving Private Ryan* where there are Americans fighting Germans, audiences end up cheering for the Americans. However, as a result of supporting one side over the other, those same viewers end up in effect cheering for the war – they want the war to continue so their side will win and they can see the other side punished and the action to play out. We find this underlying factor in many war films, and it ends up becoming a part of many antiwar films as well as a result of the action sequences. Antiwar is not simply about producing empathy for one side of a conflict but for anyone involved, a recognition of the humanity in both combatants rather than the demonization of one side over another.

These same issues apply to games, perhaps even more so because games are about action and require players to participate in that action. Players realize that if they do not fight that their character will die – life equates to play; the thrill of living is the thrill of fighting and death is an end to that thrill and that play, made safe through entertainment. When we look at a game like *Cannon Fodder* and *Metal Gear Solid*, while these games may produce antiwar messages, players are not so conscious of reading these messages as they are at trying to succeed at the game.

Is an action sequence that is clearly meant as a demonstration of the horrors of war truly ambiguous and thus simultaneously a glorification of war even as it condemns? Or is it an innate nature of action sequences as Mendes and Khan suggest, and thus a product of the action scene itself?

Interestingly, it appears to be lack of action that produces stronger antiwar messages. When there is no action and only the consequences of war are illustrated, then we have nothing to cheer for. If we remove the action – the battle scenes – but leave in the suffering, then we have a message that cuts straight to the sober, depressing core. This is likely one reason why Holocaust and other genocide narratives are not as popular at the box office as a war film.<sup>90</sup> We understand completely what we are getting into when we watch a film

89 Sivan, S (2001). *Asoka*.

90 Example: *Saving Private Ryan* netted 216.7 million; 300 got \$210.59 million (not an anti-war film by any means). Here is how the film compared with other war and antiwar films:

*Saving Private Ryan* – 216.5 m domestic (481.8m worldwide) – 1998 – 4.69 (102.7 m tickets)



or a read a book about a Holocaust narrative – it will be a story about victimized people in a helpless situation where there is nothing anyone can do about it. The characters are beaten, tortured, and murdered and are incapable of defending themselves from such attacks.

In a military narrative, the victim of war is given an ability to fight back – a rifle, a grenade, a vehicle. He is trained as a soldier to fight (though obviously not always with the same skills and experiences) and is placed in a situation where he is obligated to fight back. In a genocide narrative, the victim does not have this luxury – the victim is Spiegelman's mouse to the cat, unable to defend against his aggressors.<sup>91</sup> This is a different kind of violence than the violence of the battlefield where the guilt of killing one man in battle is just one

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Schindler's List – domestic total gross of 96 million (321.3 worldwide) – 1993 – 4.14 (77.6 m tickets)

Apocalypse Now – 78.7 m – 1979 – 2.51 (31.3 m tickets)

Hotel Rwanda – 23.5m domestic (33.8m worldwide) – 6.21 (3.7 m tickets)

Life is Beautiful – 57.5m domestic (229.1m worldwide) – 4.69 (61.9 m tickets)

Full Metal Jacket – 46.3 m domestic – 1987 – 3.91 (11.8m tickets)

The Deer Hunter – 1978 48.9m – 2.34 (20.8 m tickets)

Letters from Iwo Jima – 13.7m (68.6m worldwide) – 2006 – 6.55 (10.4m tickets)

Flags of our Fathers – 33.6m (65.9m worldwide) – 2006 – 6.55 (10.0 m tickets)

Of course, there are likely to be many reasons why a war film does better than a genocide film, but I'm going to assume a primary reason is content, specifically action. For instance, does it sell better because it is inherently a better movie (Schindler's List rates higher than Saving Private Ryan and won more oscars... Do we judge the quality of a film based on its score on IMDB, the score by a panel of critics, the number of oscars it won, the number of tickets sold/money made at the box office? There is no absolute when audiences fluctuate; we can merely say that this war film sold more tickets than this anti-war film or this genocide film). These numbers have been adjusted for inflation and are based on ticket sales. Box Office Mojo (2008). Box Office Mojo. Retrieved March 11, 2008, from Box Office Mojo Web site: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/>

91 Spiegelman, A. (1996). *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. Pantheon.

of millions, all of whom share the same guilt,<sup>92</sup> and is instead one of cruel brutality to a helpless population. It also produces a different kind of tension and suspense when the survival of an individual or small group of unarmed individuals is placed in the hands of an armed group, merciless and sadistic.

It is this powerlessness, this limiting of options to fight back that in turn produces a powerful message in the antiwar narrative, something that cannot be undermined by the adrenaline rush of combat. Through that message of powerlessness against the horrors of war, the true impact comes through. It is not through fighting with other soldiers where a character is active and struggling but when the struggle does not matter to the narrative and only the effect of the violence on people is important.

In Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*, we are presented with a narrative like this. Here, the protagonist has had his limbs and face blown off by a shell in World War I. He is confined to a hospital bed for the rest of his life, his face and body hideously disfigured, unable speak or hear, only reflect. The narrative is divided between two sequences: what happens to Johnny in his hospital bed and what happened to Johnny before he was drafted where he had the advantage of things he had always taken for granted. Trumbo thus focuses on what Johnny has lost – his ability to move on his own, to see, to hear, to run, to hug, to kiss, to love, to be with his family and his friends – and his lover. These are losses shared by all the dead and maimed of war, and once we see this loss through Johnny's eyes, we realize the full impact of war, specified to a single individual.

Trumbo accomplishes this in large part because he does not focus on combat scenes, which would only serve as a distraction to his message. In fact, there are only two combat scenes in the entire book: one describes how Johnny was hit by a shell while the other describes a series of German soldiers who keep getting killed at the same place on the barbed wire. *Johnny Got His Gun* thus seems more effective because Trumbo spends so little time on the war and more time on Johnny, his life, and his loss. This is a story about *people*, not about *action*, specifically the kind of resistant, violent action that can sometimes take center stage in antiwar narratives.

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92 Kobayashi, M (1961) *Ningen no joken III* (The Human Condition III).

### ***Problems With Games – Are Games Inherently Violent?***

In regards to the above criticism of antiwar narratives, one question we may find ourselves asking about games themselves is whether or not they are inherently violent. Such a question is important when dealing with antiwar narratives and the design of antiwar games as it questions just how effective an antiwar game can be. Here, a negative answer seems particularly tempting in an age where violence in games and other media is particularly prevalent, seemingly unregulated, and readily demonized out of context. Indeed, even the long history of games is marked with hundreds of war games or games abstracting war from Chess and Tafl to *StarCraft* and *DOOM*. Is violence inherent to games or are games about violence merely one approach of many?

If we recall Salen and Zimmerman's discussion on games, conflict is central to our definition:

“A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial *conflict*, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.”

While the fact that the conflict is artificial and not real has important connotations with this statement,<sup>93</sup> when we say that conflict is a central component of all games, this statement requires further clarification. Though all games have conflict, this conflict need not be violent,<sup>94</sup> as games like *Chutes and Ladders*, *Tetris*,<sup>95</sup> and tennis demonstrate. In this regard, we should consider ‘conflict’ as a struggle between two opposing forces or an obstacle preventing or impeding the immediate attainment of a goal: this conflict may be violent, but it doesn't have to be. To simply conclude that because games are about conflict must mean all games are inherently violent is obviously false.

Of course, use of the term ‘conflict’ itself in describing the obstacles of a game has inherent inadequacies. For one thing, the term ‘conflict’ is derived from the late Middle English word *conflictus*, to

<sup>93</sup> As games are also simulations, so the artificial conflict is simultaneously a simulation of a real conflict.

<sup>94</sup> In fact, this is central to Chris Crawford's discussion about games in *Chris Crawford on Game Design*. In fact, violent conflict seems to be the most visual kind as it simply, clearly, and powerfully illustrates struggle. Crawford, C (2003). *Chris Crawford on Game Design*. Boston, MA: New Riders.

<sup>95</sup> *Tetris* (Nintendo Entertainment System, 1987). Nintendo.

strike together or contend, which conjures imagery of more violent struggles, the clashing of knights and the crossing of swords. Of course, the modern *conflict* is not used solely in the martial sense, as the phrase ‘conflict of interests’ demonstrates, though its dubious origins are notable and necessitate a continuous emphasis on the fact that the conflict of games is not inherently violent in nature.

If the concept of conflict itself is not inherently militaristic, does the same hold true for particular game structures? For instance, if we examine the history of boardgames, a large number of titles are inherently games of war, such as Chess, Go, and Tafl. While the underlying conflict of games themselves may not be militaristic, do certain game rules and structures originate with military conflict in mind?

To investigate this concept, we should start by analyzing traditional game forms that have existed for centuries, as described by David Parlett in *The Oxford History of Board Games*.<sup>96</sup> In this book, Parlett divides traditional (largely pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century)<sup>97</sup> games into four basic categories: Race, Space, Chase, and Displace.

Race games – “The board represents a linear race track with one or more starting and finishing points, and the aim is to be the first to get one's piece or pieces from Start to Home.”<sup>98</sup>

Space games – “[P]layers enter or move pieces upon a two-dimensional board with the aim of getting them into a specified pattern, configura-

<sup>96</sup> Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>97</sup> Parlett's categorization of games is inherently different from other board game historians such as Murray and Bell, who each define games based on the fundamental activity described by the game (i.e. war, hunt, and race) as typical of the early activities and occupations of man' (Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 8-9). Parlett, instead, focuses on the formal qualities of the games, the actions performed rather than their descriptions.

<sup>98</sup> Parlett, 10. It is notable that race games are most likely evolved as a form of tracking dice totals and player progress visually as opposed to adding large numbers together (Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 19-21)

tion, or spatial position. They include games of placement, movement, and both.”<sup>99</sup>

Chase games – Bilaterally asymmetrical games such as Tafl where one player has fewer pieces than the other and the objective of the player with the greater number of pieces is to capture or contain the pieces of the player with the smaller number of pieces. The player with the smaller number of pieces must either bring his pieces to a position of safety or capture enough of his opponent's pieces so as to make defeat impossible.<sup>100</sup>

Displace games – Games “played on two-dimensional boards in which the aim is to achieve dominance by capturing all one's opponent's material, or so much of it as to render its eventual annihilation theoretically inevitable.”<sup>101 102</sup>

It is notable that out of the four categories of board games described by Parlett, two of them, chase and displace games, contain games specifically described as ‘war games’ or ‘siege games’, thus suggesting these categories contain inherent militaristic properties. Further, out of all the categories, race games appear to contain no games possessing militaristic properties while displace games almost completely contains games about abstracted military conflict, excepting the Mancala group.<sup>103</sup> What components of these game types make them more amiable to simulating military conflict than others?

99 Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 11.

100 Ibid, P. 12

101 Ibid, P. 13

102 Parlett also talk to some length about modern boardgames, starting with the first commercial boardgames of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but does not attempt to categorize these into specific categories.

103 Mancala is played on a looped racetrack and consists of ‘sowing’ beans or seeds into holes with the object of capturing (or displacing) the most beans and (usually) removing them from the board (Parlett, 207). Parlett suggests the game's origins and connections with the abacus and Backgammon (217) but defines it as a displace game due to the removal of pieces (207), so his categorizations of boardgames into Space, Race, Chase, and Displace may not be as concise as they initially seem. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*.

At first, we can state particular rules that do not suggest military conflict in any way. These include the simple movement of pieces, the placement of pieces, the rolling of dice or casting of lots, and the movement of all pieces off the board to a ‘goal’ space. All of these are basic elements of movement and positioning and the generation of randomness.

It is not until we look at other particular rule constructions that we begin to see the formulation of abstract militaristic narratives enacted through play. Such rules include:

The capturing or removing of game pieces from play.

The movement or placement of pieces to gain territorial control.

The movement or placement of pieces to restrict the opponent's movement or placement of pieces.<sup>104</sup>

The military narratives suggested by such rules should be fairly clear. The capturing or removing of pieces from play suggests death or capture on the battlefield.<sup>105</sup> Chess is a particularly strong instance of this through the pieces' clear representation of medieval soldiers. Territorial control suggests the placement of soldiers or fortifications or symbolic statements of intent to gain influence or control over land or declare one's sovereignty over a region and to express one's capability to defend that territory from invaders. Again, Chess is a useful example as the possible future moves of a piece affect the movement of other pieces by designating what is a ‘safe’ move and what is not.<sup>106</sup> However, space games such as Go, which are about

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New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

104 In fact, one adage has claimed that mobility is a key factor in warfare and that victory comes through restricting the mobility of one's opponent.

105 Parlett refers to the removal of pieces from the board as ‘capturing’, a term which suggests interesting interpretations. Are we to believe that pieces are merely ‘captured’ or taken prisoner or that the soldiers they represent have been ‘killed’ in combat? Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

106 Modern war games contain a more graphic illustration of this rule. Games by Avalon Hill contain ‘zones of control’, or areas of surrounding spaces which military units are able to attack. Units may attack any opposing force positioned within one of those spaces.

positioning rather than capturing pieces, are explicitly about territorial control. While the pieces are not abstracted military units as in Chess, the black and white stones of Go reflect the placement of troops and the controlling of territory and capturing of prisoners, and the rules are even described using militaristic terms.<sup>107</sup>

Restricting the movement of an opponent's pieces can suggest their surrounding by an armed force and resulting choices of surrender or annihilation. While many chase games such as Fox and Geese include pastoral themes and have often been described as 'hunt-games',<sup>108</sup> the central win scenario of 'cornering your fauna' is easily converted to a military theme by replacing the fox and geese with the soldiers of two armies of unequal forces, suggesting a theme of siege or military rebellion. In fact, the most militaristic game of Parlett's 'chase' group, Tafl, explicitly uses military terms in its rules, and is often defined as a 'war game'.<sup>109</sup>

We can expand Parlett's categories a bit further by investigating new forms of play introduced through other digital and physical games containing military themes:

Touching an opponent to capture or call them 'out'  
(some forms of tag).<sup>110</sup>

107 Parlett, 167-176. However, it should be admitted that Parlett does not use the term 'war games' to describe the family of Go games including Othello, as he defines these games as about the claiming of space rather than of material. Despite using Murray's term of 'war games' (167), Parlett simultaneously defines his games of material control as 'displace games', based on the removal or displacement of pieces from the game board (12). Interesting enough, even simple games such as Hex and Tic-Tac-Toe (Noughts and Crosses) can also be abstracted as games of spatial and territorial control, suggesting a military or colonial conflict over terrain. I further investigated this theme in Colonialist Tic-Tac-Toe as part of my antiwar games thesis. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

108 Murray uses this term. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 186.

109 Murray, for instance, defined Tafl as a war game. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 186)

110 It is interesting to note that the touching of another player to call them 'out' or capture them also has thematic connections with the concept of *coup* from Plains Indians military culture. In a *coup*, a warrior harmlessly touches his armed opponent with a stick rather killing him with his weapons to symbolically represent a kill. *Coup* was an

Striking an opponent (fencing, boxing, digital melee combat).

Hurling or firing a projectile at an opponent (dodge ball, paintball, digital projectiles).

Using dice or some other random number generator to determine a battle's outcome (most modern strategy war games, *Dungeons and Dragons*).

Each of these rules can be used to symbolically and safely represent the killing or capturing of an opponent in a game. The first three rule components of touching, striking, or hitting an opponent with a projectile can symbolically and/or visually represent real combat with swords, spears, firearms, or other weapons. Though this action has been rendered safe by the game environment (excepting, of course, instances of bloodsports), it may either abstractly or naturalistically depict military combat, such as the swordplay of a Creative Anachronism live-action role-playing game, the digital gunplay of a first person shooter, or the capturing of an opponent through the tag action in some forms of Capture the Flag. The use of dice to determine the outcome of a battle is a symbolic representation of the actual combat; players are particularly encouraged to mentally visualize combat in *Dungeons and Dragons* and other tabletop role-playing games. Of course, role-playing games also allow for a wider range of actions; simply stating an attack in particular free-form role-playing games that do not use dice or other random number generators may be enough to simulate combat.

However, as Parlett's chase group of games<sup>111</sup> demonstrates, militaristic themes of a game often arise from a larger context, as described by a game's visual components, narrative (or textual) components, and the integration of game rules into a whole. While a game's visual and narrative components may blatantly suggest military themes (such as defining a game's pieces as 'soldiers' and 'kings'

incredibly dangerous task to execute as the warrior attempting *coup* could not strike back against his opponent and warriors who managed to execute a *coup* were greatly honored.

111 And here, Parlett admits that chase games do not easily form a complete genetic whole. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 186-187.

and their actions as ‘capturing’), it is often the game’s combination of rules that ultimately suggests or accommodates military themes. Thus, the presence of one of the above listed rules alone may not necessitate violent or military themes (though capturing or displacing pieces or striking an opponent more often suggests violent action than other rules),<sup>112</sup> it is a combination of multiple rules to generate basic gameplay themes of strategy or action that more easily suggest the presence of an underlying military theme.

Thus in late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, variations of Foxes & Geese were modified into military-themed games like Ritterspiel (The Knight’s Game) in which a smaller military force was pitted against a force of larger size.<sup>113</sup> Both Fox & Geese and Ritterspiel are chase games that involve the goal of complete immobilization of the opponent’s pieces or removal of enough pieces to prevent that immobilization from occurring; moreover, their board layouts and formal rules are nearly identical. The folk origins of this genre a basis on pastoral themes such as protecting one’s livestock and the cycles of nature, later modified into games about hunting and war by an elite class. What once was an open field or farmhouse with wild predators now becomes a fortress and surrounding land populated by soldiers engaging in siege.<sup>114</sup> While the multi-colored stones and tiled game board are inherently abstract, the game gains its themes through

112 A notable exception is *Zuma* (Flash, 2003) PopCap Games, in which colored balls are fired as projectiles at other multi-colored balls. It is a puzzle game in which the player must create strings of identically-colored balls before time runs out and the balls fall into the center hole. The simple act of firing a projectile is thus not explicitly violent.

113 Parlett, 191. Parlett also references the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Perugian game *Ludus Rebellionis* (The Game of Rebels) which presumably depicts a rebellion against the king and queen or two generals. (189-190). Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

114 Often called ‘Beleaguering’ games – Parlett, 191. These could even be used to represent historical battles, as in the British proprietary game, *The Officers and the Sepoys*, which represented the sieges of the Kanpur and Lucknow garrisons in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 (191-192). The transition of traditional folk games depicting pastoral themes to games with military themes may have connections with both the rise of nationalism in Europe as well as the development and popularization of *Kriegspiel* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

narrative interpretation even though the rules themselves may accommodate a wide range of themes.

Parallel lines of opposite-colored pieces may easily suggest two armies arrayed on the battlefield; one piece displacing another from the board can suggest the death of the other piece. These are abstractions that become more specific through the game’s visual imagery and its operation within a larger context, and some imagery more easily suggests real-world analogues than others given different cultural contexts. As a result, some forms of games seem more inherently militaristic in theme than others or might be ambiguously interpreted as such.

Ultimately, what we see when we look at a game board in its most abstracted form are representations of game space that serve as simulations, abstractions of world space, and people and objects moving through and interacting within that space. The game space may be linear or two-dimensional; it may be flat or include terrain, but ultimately when visual and symbolic components are taken away, the game world becomes abstract. What happens within that space and what that space represents is determined by the game’s designer and aided by game rules, representational components, and terminology, as well as by cultural interpretations of those elements.

## Winning and Consequence

One final category we should explore regarding fundamental qualities of games is player motive, particularly regarding goals and consequences. We often take for granted that players will automatically play to win rather than with other motives such as to lose, draw, teach, or otherwise ‘misplay’ a game.<sup>115</sup> This key behavior of ‘playing to win’ is not only central to our formal definition of games (that ‘quantifiable outcome’) but is also prevalent in game rules: we need to know how the game is won and lost before we can play. Culturally, we also tend to valorize one outcome over another, privileging winning the game over losing<sup>116</sup> and stress proper adherence to a game’s

115 Rafael Fajardo recognizes several ways of playing in a work-in progress syllabus. Fajardo, R (2008). Syllabus. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Taketurns Wiki Web site: <http://taketurns.pbwiki.com/Syllabus>

116 Jesper Juul found valorization of a game’s outcome so important that he uses it in his definition of games. Juul, J (2005). *Half-Real*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press.



formal and informal rules.<sup>117</sup> Even when we consider videogames with multiple endings, we continue to see valorization of outcome where some endings are deemed better than others.

If we examine the importance of winning and losing to play and culture, we find that a player's actions during the game – how the game is played – tend to become more important when considering a player's adherence to proper cultural etiquette rather than when considering the internal consequences for the world the game represents. For instance, in a game of Chess, the loss of a few pawns to achieve victory is inherently identical to the loss of all the pawns to do the same: both are strategies that result in a win scenario. The number of pieces lost and difference in final score often only lets us know how skilled or lucky each of the players was, a measurement of skill possessing little external symbolism. Similar to popular interpretations of real conflict, we tend to reduce the results of a battle into numbers: a life becomes a statistic used to abstract and measure the outcome of a battle. Lives and experiences are reduced to numbers and diagrams of military maneuvers, like pieces on a game board.

How do we reinterpret the meaning of winning and losing in a game and must we always define a game's result in terms of this win-loss binary? How can we always interpret games in this manner when in the real world things are not always defined by conflict and measured in terms of victory and defeat? Must we always think of games as equal contests with equal chances of victory and defeat when in the real world 'victory' is not always possible? Once we consider consequences of actions and the end result of a game as the consequence of a series of actions, we can begin interpreting the conclusions of a game in different ways, to judge the game's outcome from different perspectives. For instance, how does the interpretation of the outcome change from the perspectives of different players or characters in the game? After all, if victory for one player means defeat for another, when we measure the outcome of a game in terms other than victory and defeat, we can begin interpreting what this new form of outcome means and represents.

Among games that have been questioning outcomes of victory and defeat is *FiFa Fo FUM!!*<sup>118</sup> produced by the Sweat collective. In *FiFa Fo FUM!!* players take the roles of iconic coffee farmer Juan

117 Not only the rules of the game but also the cultural rules that determine how we play.

118 *FiFa Fo FUM!!* (Stagecast, 2006). Sweat.

Valdez and ruthless Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar in a soccer game. In the game, part of a much larger project, Juan is approaching Pablo for money. Pablo, who is a fan of soccer, challenges Juan to a match in exchange for the money. Though game logic dictates that Juan would receive the money as a result of winning the match, the game's victory screen tells a different story: because Pablo has been publicly humiliated by losing the match, he kills Juan and stands triumphantly over his corpse. On the other hand, if Juan plays a good game with Pablo but Pablo wins, he will reward Juan with a bag of money for giving him such a good time.

As a result, *FiFa Fo FUM!!* challenges our interpretations of what it means to win and lose. While the game states that everything is upside-down in Colombia, could this message not also be reinterpreted in a war game context? In such a scenario, can a player really claim to have won the game when he lost thousands of men in the process? Just how much worse was the alternative of losing – or not playing at all? More games need to further explore what it means to win and lose. When a game like *FiFa Fo FUM!!* explores through play the old adage that winning is not everything, it lets us consider what playing, winning, and losing are really about and how we might design new games that explore and question this relationship, an investigation that is important to the design of antiwar games.

Similarly, we need to investigate the nature of consequence in games. Consequence has become a central exploration to the work of Gonzalo Frasca, who suggests that games lose their dramatic impact due to their reversible nature, the fact that that moves can be taken back, saved games reloaded, and the world reset to avoid failure.<sup>119</sup> For this reason, he believes that it is impossible to create a critical game about the Holocaust because it could easily be turned into sadistic propaganda by simply playing parts of the game where characters are killed and then resetting the game or turning it off before the Judgment of Nuremberg arrives.<sup>120</sup> In games, Frasca argues, death loses its sense of finality and is merely a setback rather than a terminal end to the game's narrative; the world can always be reset and the dead be brought back to life.<sup>121</sup> As a result, Frasca argues that the only way to truly produce a critical game about the Holocaust

119 Frasca, G (2000). Ephemeral Games: Is It Barbaric to Design Videogames after Auschwitz?. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Ludology.org Web site: <http://www.ludology.org/articles/ephemeralFRASCA.pdf>, page 3

120 Ibid , page 5

121 Ibid, Page 6.

would be to create a game that could only be played once and whose consequences are final to the players, meaning they would be unable to continue or restart the game at a later point.<sup>122</sup>

On the one hand, Frasca's argument suggests a problem of audience interpretation. Media can be interpreted in many ways, not always in the way the author intended: thus, not all players will play a game in the same way, just as not all audiences will react to a film in the same way. It is for this reason that the marines in *Jarhead* are able to interpret *Apocalypse Now* as a pro-war film. Simply because a message might be interpreted by one audience in a way different than its intent does not mean that message should not have been created in the first place. However, the misinterpretation of the message may have powerful consequences when people feel very strongly about their interpretation of it, a fact that is further exasperated when the audience has inherent biases towards the media or venue in which that message is presented.<sup>123</sup>

On the other hand, Frasca's argument is based on concepts of linear narrative media such as film and literature: videogames are inherently interactive and nonlinear. As a result, we need to approach the interpretation of consequence in games differently than we would in linear, noninteractive media. While it is true that games can be replayed and different choices made,<sup>124</sup> we should not view this as a failure of games to produce tragedy<sup>125</sup> - particularly when consid-

122 Ibid, page 8-10. Frasca calls such a game a 'one-session game of narration' or OSGON.

123 Such a situation occurred with *Mega Man vs Polish Immigrant*, a 'retro machinima' political cartoon criticizing the tasing of a Polish immigrant by the Royal Canadian Police airport security in Vancouver. Despite the author's intent to criticize the RCMP's over-reliance on tasers, a supposedly 'nonlethal weapon' that has killed and seriously injured many individuals throughout its history, the film was interpreted by some as a tasteless hate video that mocked a tragic event and the victim. The cartoon gathered extensive negative response in the media both in Canada and in Poland. Much of this seems to be that the author had not intended or expected the cartoon to be viewed by such a large audience and as a result designed it with imagery that was only best understood by the relatively smaller audience who had played or was familiar with the original videogames off which the cartoon was based.

124 I.e. That Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' is irrelevant because the possibility of 'to be' is always present through replay. Frasca, G (2000). *Ephemeral Games: Is It Barbaric to Design Videogames after Auschwitz?*. Retrieved

ering games containing linear narratives where no choice exists.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, at least one solution to this problem of choice arises from the concept of unwinnable games, a genre that Frasca himself has been instrumental in developing in part as a response to his own call for 'serious' games.<sup>126 127</sup>

In an unwinnable game, the player is given the illusion that victory is possible. However, it soon becomes apparent that it is impossible to win and playing becomes fatalistic. As a result, players lose interest in playing - if the game is unwinnable, then this means any choice the player makes is rendered meaningless as it has no impact upon the game's outcome.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, it also provides the player with an opportunity to reflect on the game's structure and its underlying message: why is the game making me lose?

Of course, unwinnable games have been around since nearly the inception of the videogame. Unlike videogames of today, early early arcade games such as *Space Invaders*<sup>129</sup> and *Centipede*<sup>130</sup> featured endless waves of enemies and lacked a final victory screen. As a result, the player's efforts were doomed to end in death and defeat beneath the cold letters of 'Game Over.' It was impossible to defend against the *Space Invaders* forever, there would always be another wave of

February 3, 2008, from Ludology.org Web site: <http://www.ludology.org/articles/ephemeralFRASCA.pdf>

125 Such tragedy is usually produced through narrative sequences rather than ludic sequences - in other words, through cutscenes. In *Final Fantasy VI*, the evil wizard Kefka poisons the water supply of Doma Castle, killing nearly everyone inside. In *Arc the Lad 2*, soldiers invade a peaceful village and massacre the family of the protagonist before his very eyes. It is the atrocity of these events that affects us, perhaps moreso in *Arc the Lad 2*, which takes on an immediacy through the proximity of the soldiers to the unarmed civilians. Even though these scenes are noninteractive rather than ludic, they can certainly produce a powerful dramatic effect on the audience.

126 *Kabul Kaboom* (Flash, 2002). Gonzalo Frasca.

127 *September 12<sup>th</sup>, A toy world* (Flash, 2003). Powerful Robot Games: Newsgaming.

128 Interesting enough, it might also be interpreted that the game or its designer is 'cheating' the player by producing a scenario in which the player always loses while simultaneously providing the illusion of victory. Such an approach aligns with cultural concepts of fair play, that the playing field should be level and each player should be given equal chances of winning. Unwinnable games question this concept.

129 *Space Invaders* (Arcade, 1979). Taito.

130 *Centipede* (Arcade, 1980). Atari: Midway Games.



UFOs on the horizon, another Centipede rampaging through the mushroom forest, and the player would eventually succumb to fatigue and mistakes.

Yet these unwinnable games differ from the unwinnable games created by Frasca and others and discussed by Shuen-shing Lee.<sup>131</sup> This is because arcade games featured high score tables: the conflict of these games was entirely about the game's specific objective (to destroy all the enemies, to clear the level), but rather about achieving the highest score possible.<sup>132</sup>

Critical unwinnable games, however, rarely possess score tables and limit the conflict to that defined by the game's narrative and explicit goals. They communicate a rhetorical message about the conflict depicted in the game, often by stating that such a conflict is pointless, ill-founded, and its strategy flawed or poorly executed. Gonzalo Frasca's two unwinnable games, *Kabul Kaboom* and *September 12<sup>th</sup>* both explore this concept through action and simulation and their strong use of both visual and textual symbolism.

*Kabul Kaboom* is a critique of the United States' simultaneous and inconsistent strategies of aggression and relief during the War in Afghanistan. While dropping bombs aimed at military targets, the United States Air Force simultaneously dropped food packages to relieve the battered civilian population on the ground, casually dismissing accidental civilian deaths from so-called 'smart bombs' as 'regrettable but necessary.'<sup>133</sup> In the game, the player controls a wailing mother who must catch hamburgers dropping from the sky while simultaneously avoiding the rain of bombs. The image of the woman is taken directly from Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, which depicts the bombing of the city of Guernica by Nazi planes on April 27, 1937.<sup>134</sup> The game's background contains a screenshot from footage of a night-time missile strike on Kabul. The woman will inevitably hit a bomb and be indignantly and mercilessly blown to pieces.

131 Lee, Shuen-shing (2003, December). I Lose, Therefore I Think: A search for contemplation amid wars of push-button glare. *Game Studies*, 3, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0302/lee/>

132 See Salen and Zimmerman for more information on game conflict. Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E (2006). *Rules of Play*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. P. 250-258.

133 Lee, Shuen-shing (2003, December). I Lose, Therefore I Think: A search for contemplation amid wars of push-button glare. *Game Studies*, 3, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0302/lee/>

134 Picasso, P (1937). *Guernica*.

Shuen-shing Lee describes the game as a tragic message about survival "in a no-exit space with endless warfare going on, the civilian victim chases and dodges, receives and rejects simultaneously, doomed to perish indignantly within moments."<sup>135</sup> Indeed, the message is made even more clear through the game's intense difficulty, where the player cannot expect to survive the onslaught for more than a few seconds before the game is over: gathering relief food is simply impossible in such a situation.<sup>136</sup>

By using imagery from Picasso's *Guernica*, Frasca reinforces the message of the original painting and carries it over to modern warfare. In war, civilians are always casualties, and there is fundamentally little difference between the bombing of Guernica and the bombing of civilians in the Afghan War of 2002. Though the United States Air Force was not deliberately bombing civilian targets as the Nazis were in the Spanish Civil War, it is the naivety of the strategy and the insensitivity to the civilian deaths which Frasca criticizes in this game. By allowing the player to experience the message through a game, Frasca produces a level of immediacy and empathy that might otherwise not have been achieved through passive media such as film, literature, and painting.

Frasca's second game, *September 12<sup>th</sup>*, is a critique on United States foreign policy regarding the war on terror. *September 12<sup>th</sup>* is a game designed around failure. The player is offered to fire at terrorists wandering a Middle Eastern village with guided missiles. However, the missiles fire at a slow rate of speed and as a result are highly inaccurate – by the time a missile reaches its target, the terrorist may have already left the area and civilians wandered in. When civilians come upon one of their dead compatriots, they will mourn over the body and then become terrorists themselves out of anger for the loss of their friends. As a result, the game is unwinnable – any attack of this nature made on the terrorists will only serve to produce more terrorists. Violence begets more violence in a never ending cycle of revenge and retaliation.

The imagery of *September 12<sup>th</sup>* has been simplified and abstracted to better communicate its message. While civilians are shown in blue clothes, the terrorists wear black clothing with white hoods and carry machine guns. The houses are simple square structures. Inter-

135 Lee, Shuen-shing (2003, December). I Lose, Therefore I Think: A search for contemplation amid wars of push-button glare. *Game Studies*, 3, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0302/lee/>

136 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. P. 85

estingly, on the ground is painted pages of the Koran, perhaps suggesting how deeply important the religious text is to the people and culture of the region and how it is rooted into the very foundation of their country.

*September 12<sup>th</sup>* has been criticized as being both pacifist and insensitive. The game has on the one hand been accused of being insensitive to terrorist attacks by being interpreted as a statement that the United States and other countries should not retaliate against such terrible acts as the results would be futile. On the other hand, the game has also been accused of being insensitive in its depiction of terrorism by reducing characters to iconic representations of what we think a terrorist looks like. Gonzalo Frasca has responded that his game is specifically a critique on the ineffectiveness of the United States' strategy on fighting terrorism, rather than as a call to do nothing:

“Through this piece we want to encourage players to think critically about the efficacy of the United States' current strategy against terrorism. Terrorism is a terrible problem and we think it should be fought in a more intelligent way.”<sup>137</sup>

### ***Critically Reading Games – Model Games and Model Players***

*Kabul Kaboom*, *September 12<sup>th</sup>*, and other games of this nature speak to a different kind of audience, what Shuen-shing Lee calls the ‘second-level model player.’<sup>138</sup> Lee borrows this term from literary theorist Umberto Eco's concept of the second-level model reader, that is, the reader who will read for more than just the book's narrative (as a first-level reader only would) and will instead try and understand what the author is saying and how he or she wants to affect the reader. Similarly, a second-level player will play the game for something

137 Newsgaming.com, (2003, September 29). “SEPTEMBER 12th, A toy world” – Political Videogame About The War On Terror. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Newsgaming.com Web site: <http://www.newsgaming.com/press092903.htm>

138 Lee, Shuen-shing (2003, December). I Lose, Therefore I Think: A search for contemplation amid wars of push-button glare. *Game Studies*, 3, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0302/lee/>

more than just to win or to find out what happens next and will try and understand what the game is trying to say and how it wants to affect the player.

However, an audience of ‘second-level players’ is certainly not large, nor is it well-developed. Games with more obvious and direct messages such as *Kabul Kaboom* and *September 12<sup>th</sup>* are, of course, easier to read, but the more subtle a game's message or the more it distances itself from the traditional approaches of other media such as film and literature, the more difficult the game is to read and the smaller the audience who will be able to understand the game's message fully. This dilemma results from a dual combination of a lack of knowledge in how to build games that will produce powerful underlying messages and also from a lack of knowledge in how to read the messages produced by games. Simply put, most players don't tend to think that games can produce messages and thus will dismiss a game that is unwinnable as being poorly designed. Some cultural critics have already investigated on some level what the underlying structures of games mean,<sup>139 140 141</sup> though more importantly, some, such as Stephen Poole<sup>142</sup> and Tim Rogers,<sup>143</sup> have attempted to provide interpretations of individual games. However, we have yet to establish a truly universal underlying theoretical structure for game analysis similar to those found in film, art, and literary studies.

As a result, we have seen little (though not a complete lack of) development of ‘second-level model games,’ that is, games that will try and affect players, to tell them something about themselves and the world around them rather than to simply provide an entertaining ludic (and sometimes narrative) experience.<sup>144</sup> However, because

139 Poole, S (2000). *Trigger Happy*. New York, NY: Arcade Publishing.

140 Wark, M (2006, May 22). *Gamer 730RY 1.1* in *The Future of the Book*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.futureofthebook.org/gametheory/>

141 Church, D (1999, July 16). Formal Abstract Design Tools. *Gamasutra*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19990716/design\\_tools\\_01.htm](http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19990716/design_tools_01.htm)

142 Poole, S (2000). *Trigger Happy*. New York, NY: Arcade Publishing.

143 Rogers, T (2004). The Literature of the Moment. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Large Prime Numbers Web site: <http://www.largeprimenumbers.com/article.php?sid=mother2>

144 Incidentally, it seems that treating games as something more than just entertainment, as something other than ‘fun’ is a key component in the development of such games. While this is not to say that ‘second-level model games’ can't be happily entertaining, it is to

games of this sort are so new, they should provide us with hints of interpreting them. Game development still requires not only a solid design vocabulary, but also a critical vocabulary for discussing games. One promising approach is Ian Bogost's design and analysis of rhetorical games, games that produce convincing messages.<sup>145</sup>

When discussing rhetorical games, Bogost presents a concept of games that forward a message through simulation and action using ideologies represented by the game world and its operation. Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric describes how games produce messages of this sort, by using processes, particularly computational processes,<sup>146</sup> to effectively persuade an audience to accept a logic or message.<sup>147</sup> Simply put, Bogost is interested in how games make effective meaning.

Bogost describes how games make meaning as a system of internal logic by studying how the game simulation operates, through its rules, what the simulation includes and excludes, what actions are possible, and what their consequences are. Rules determine what can and cannot be done as well as determine the consequences of actions. As a result, game rules and consequences reinforce internal logics, ideas of how the world operates and what behaviors are encouraged and discouraged.

Rhetorical meaning is thus created through the complex interactions of a game's rules as well as its visual and narrative components. How the game is played as well as the results of the game determine what type of meaning is created by the game; the larger and more complex the system, the more possibilities for meaning emerge, sometimes from unintended angles. A second-level model player is able to identify, examine, and interpret these meanings, and to critique them if necessary. What results is not simply a process of try-and-try again through a desire for victory and to see what comes

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recognize that we can produce games that can be thought-provoking and compelling like film and literature without relying on shallow concepts such as 'fun,' 'escapism,' and 'entertainment.' Thankfully, I am not alone in calling for such games: Spector, W (2006, October 3). "Fun" Is a Four-Letter Word. *The Escapist*, 65, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue\\_65/381-Fun-is-a-Four-Letter-Word](http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_65/381-Fun-is-a-Four-Letter-Word)

145 Bogost, I (2006). *Unit Operations: An approach to videogame criticism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

146 Bogost is, after all, discussing videogames.

147 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. P 2-3.

next, but of trying to understand what the actions and their effects mean.

The rhetoric produced by unwinnable games such as *Kabul Ka-boom* and *September 12<sup>th</sup>* is the concept that defeat is inevitable in the given situation. Further, an unwinnable game that deploys a rhetoric of failure by making the game unwinnable or forcing the player into a loss situation, as in the case of *September 12<sup>th</sup>*, demonstrates that the desired goal is impossible to achieve given the tools and strategies provided by the game's designer.<sup>148</sup>

### **Confronting Consequence – Shadow of the Colossus**

Of course, games may explore a wider range of scenarios than simply providing unwinnable situations to produce a message. The key component in regards to consequence for the second-level model player is in reflection on the results of one's actions. This means the game must internally comment on player actions, either by directly questioning or commenting on them or by producing a situation in which the player is encouraged to confront and consider the results of what he has done.

One such game that asks players to question their actions and interpret what it means to achieve victory is *Shadow of the Colossus*,<sup>149</sup> the ludic masterpiece created by Fumito Ueda and Team Ico.<sup>150</sup> In this game, the player takes the role of Wander, a young man who is determined to bring his love, Mono, back from the dead at any cost. Hearing of a legend where the gods of a dark and forgotten land will grant his wish if he follows their instructions, Wander takes Mono's body down the perilous road to The Forbidden Land and presents the gods of the temple with his request. The voice in the temple tells him that only if he slays the sixteen colossi who inhabit this land will they grant him his wish. It is here that the adventure of Wander begins, a journey that will take the player through a world of immense size and wonder and bring him introspection and emotion.

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148 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. P 87-88.

149 *Shadow of the Colossus* (PlayStation 2, 2005). Team Ico: SCEA.

150 Team Ico created their original piece, *Ico* (PlayStation 2, 2001). Team Ico: SCEA., a game that has been considered by many to be one of the first games that can truly be called art, which does more than simply entertain but presents us with beauty and emotion.

One of the first things we notice about *Shadow of the Colossus* is the mood it evokes through its environment. The Forbidden Land is a barren, desolate landscape almost entirely devoid of life – only a few small lizards and birds populate it along with the sixteen imposing colossi; as a result, killing anything only serves to make the world seem lonelier.<sup>151</sup> What beauty exists here is lost in the deserts of emptiness and desolation, a melancholy wonder that can never be appreciated and whose attractions can never be shared, a world that can only be experienced and appreciated by one person walking alone. Great fissures divide these verdant oases of beauty with desert and ruin, deep cracks in the earth the hint at a buried and forgotten trauma that once tore across the land, not unlike the emotional trauma and loss felt by Wander.

The only truly noticeable inhabitants of The Forbidden Land are the sixteen massive colossi Wander is charged with killing. The player is overcome by their immense size and power, yet is able to overcome them through Wander's cunning and maneuverability, to slip through the kinks in their armor and strike where they are most vulnerable. When Wander slays a colossus, he is assailed by the dark energies trapped inside the beast, energies that violently lash out and seep into his body, slowly degrading his physical appearance and leaving his once-fine clothes in tatters. Killing is thus negatively reinforced: the blind, determined will of Wander causes him to ignore the adverse effects he causes to everything – nature, his body, even his loyal horse – all for the sake of bringing back his love, Mono: and at every step of the way, the player guides him towards his inevitable destruction. Just as his love consumes him, so too does the dark spirits of the colossi consume Wander.

Yet even as we watch and guide Wander to destroy the sixteen colossi, those towering wondrous beasts of melancholy grandeur, we can't help but feel pity for them even as we slay them, their sad animal eyes watching every action of their executioner with a deep, unfathomable emotion. While we are first struck with awe and trepidation at their immense size and ferocity while simultaneously feeling a malevolent determination to destroy them, these feelings of agon are soon lost when the colossus has become overpowered and we re-

<sup>151</sup> This design decision is in stark contrast to most games, which are inhabited with large numbers of small, weak enemies that provide the player with regular obstacles to overcome. Ueda and his team deemed such a design to be unnecessary to this game, focusing instead on the massive and diverse challenges presented by the sixteen colossi.

alize that its fate is in our hands and we can no longer understand the driving force behind Wander's desire to kill to bring back the dead.

The climactic battle with the sixteenth colossus, Malus, has perhaps the most dynamic sequence of this sort in the whole game.<sup>152</sup> The battle begins with Wander in front of an open field some distance away from the colossus, who sits atop his throne in the midst of a fearsome thunderstorm and a visage as grim and unyielding as death itself. When Wander runs towards the colossus, Malus throws explosive fireballs that throw Wander back in a ferocious blast and can nearly kill him in a single hit. To reach the colossus, Wander must travel through a series of trenches while Malus's fireballs explode all around him, creating a sequence reminiscent of a World War I bombardment. When Wander finally reaches the base of the colossus, he must make the hazardous climb to the top, avoiding the fiery, shifting gaps in Malus's armor.

Yet when Wander finally reaches the top of this fearsome foe, Malus suddenly turns out to be far weaker, his arms incapable of plucking Wander off his body, and able to only wave them limply in a feeble attempt to shake him off while gazing at Wander with sad, animal eyes. When Wander finally reaches the head of Malus, the colossus is completely defenseless and Wander can easily stab his sword into the colossus's defenseless skull, quickly killing him. As Wander lowers his blade for the final blow, we catch a glimpse of the entirety of The Forbidden Land from the vantage point of Malus who sits chained to his throne at the top of the world, the world Wander had just fully explored and suffered through to get here. Gone are the deadly fireballs and the fearsome death gaze, replaced only with sad, silent eyes, bringing the player's emotions from fear and revulsion to pity and fatalism, for at this point the player has no choice but to finish the task before him: Wander has gone too far to turn back now, even if he ever had the desire to do so. It is transition that may be found in some level in other battles with the colossi, but is perhaps most potent during this final sequence.

By letting us see the effects of violence on each colossus as well as its face with those deep eyes, we gain a sense of pity for the colossus, even as we kill it, a feeling that is greatly enhanced by the game's masterful soundtrack. Though we are controlling a character

<sup>152</sup> A list of the colossi and their names is found here: Sinclair, R., & Rodoy, D (2006, August 21). *Shadow of the Colossus Plot & Theory Analysis FAQ*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from GameFAQs Web site: <http://www.gamefaqs.com/console/ps2/file/924364/41817>

who is determined to kill all of the colossi at any cost to himself or the world, we cannot help but question his actions and ask whether all this blood and violence is truly necessary, even as the narrative moves forward to its inevitable conclusion.<sup>153</sup> It is the simple act of forcing the player to look into the eyes of his opponent and to see not hate and revulsion but pity and sadness, a small piece of humanity and self and the empathy that accompanies identity. The barren landscape that surrounds it all provides no answers, only an overwhelming sense of loss and desolation, suggesting that the true answers must come from within, from our own interpretation of it all. As a result, we think about *Shadow of the Colossus* long after we have set down the game controller and Wander's travels have ended.

Similar to the sequence in *Metal Gear Solid 3* with The Sorrow and the ghosts of the soldiers Solid Snake has killed, *Shadow of the Colossus* forces the player to confront the consequences of his actions and invites him to reflect on them. It is in this manner that these two games are able to produce such responses from their audiences, by calling forth submerged emotions that make us think.

When we apply this idea to the production of antiwar games, we have to consider how to produce that same sense of identity between not only the player and the character, but also between the player and his opponents, to see his self within his actions and their correspondence with reality. This is not merely the task of making the player see the physical effects of violence but rather to make him contemplate their human and psychological effects.

The act may be as simple as giving the player a choice to perform a good deed or a bad deed. For instance, in *Chrono Trigger*,<sup>154</sup> the player becomes at one point falsely imprisoned inside the dungeons of Guardia Castle. After breaking free and exploring the dungeons, he sees another prisoner trapped in a cage: the player may either free the prisoner or leave him to be executed. While freeing the prisoner will grant the player the gratitude of the man and his fiancée, if he is left to be executed, his lover can be seen at the dock, crying and wor-

<sup>153</sup> In fact, the game seems designed with the sense of the player's inevitable victory in mind; the colossi each have a special solution to how they are defeated, and we know from narrative tropes that if a story is told, it should reach the conclusion promised in the beginning. The sadness and fatalism of *Shadow of the Colossus* merely reinforces this sense of inevitability and the player's ever-growing skill.

<sup>154</sup> *Chrono Trigger* (Super Nintendo Entertainment System, 1995). Square Co., Ltd.

rying about when he will come home. This is a simple choice that requires virtually no effort on the part of the player (merely choosing a decision from a menu) with a direct connection to its consequences that can produce a strong emotional response.

Unfortunately, there are far too many players who are eager to bring their characters along the path of the Dark Side. Matt Sakey has reduced the types of players to three simple types – those who play for good, those for money, and those for evil:

1. "It is my honor to rescue Timmy from the well."
2. "Pay me for rescuing Timmy from the well."
3. "I will fill the well with Drano and dissolve Timmy. Then I will murder you and eat your spleen."<sup>155</sup>

While we may see this as a shortcoming of games and suggest that players will always desire the option to be evil, there is a strong distinction between allowing players to perform evil acts and to directly and immediately punish players within the game's internal moral system. We should also be aware that just because we can allow players to perform vile acts within a game does not mean that all games should have this option: the presence of such an option simply allows for the production of a different kind of game than one that does not. As a result, to expect all games that offer that choice or even cater to players who wish to play as evil characters is a shallow and restrictive order. There are many different kinds of players, just as there are many different kinds of games, and innovative game development is about expanding both audience and genre. Games should not be considered machines allowing the player to do anything under the sun or to only allow the player to do what other games have done before, and as we have demonstrated, there are multiple ways of producing meaning in games.

<sup>155</sup> Sakey, M (2008 January). Talking With Transistors. *IGDA: Culture Clash*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://www.igda.org/columns/clash/clash\\_Jan08.php](http://www.igda.org/columns/clash/clash_Jan08.php)



### Revisiting the Six Points About War Games

It is now time to return to the six points about war games I identified earlier. If war games feature these messages, how do we subvert them or produce different messages about war?

*War games tend to focus on combat as action, a placement of artificial violence in a safe environment for the sake of entertainment. This action may be defined as any combination of the direct use of a game weapon through player input, the strategy of placing and moving soldiers on the battlefield, resolving combat using indirect methods such as dice rolls, the movement of the self or an avatar within the artificial battlefield, and the logistics of resource management.*

We need to produce games that provide options other than performing violence. War is not simply about fighting and games need to demonstrate this fact. Providing the option to capture enemy soldiers instead of literally or symbolically killing them is one option, but it still foregrounds military action and strategy, as demonstrated in Chess. When we create games about war, we should consider other situations our characters or players might encounter, particularly ones where the player cannot or should not shoot, or where the decision to shoot or not becomes irrelevant. For instance, if the player is trapped behind the lines and enemy soldiers are nearby, shooting would only serve to attract more soldiers. Or perhaps the player must convince enemy or fellow soldiers to surrender in a hopeless situation through a complex system of diplomacy and communication across language barriers. As a result, the player will be encouraged or rewarded for using alternative strategies to violence.

Games can also examine other aspects of military life beyond combat situations. Perhaps best implemented in an adventure or role-playing game format, war games can also investigate a soldier's life marching, scouting new terrain, and dealing with the weather, environment, and his fellow soldiers. For instance, we could provide the player with an obstacle like transporting heavy equipment by hand over rough terrain or dealing with fierce storms.<sup>156</sup> We

<sup>156</sup> Such experiences are graphically described in Mailer, N (2000). *The Naked and the Dead: 50th Anniversary Edition, With a New Introduction by the Author.* Picador.

should not immediately dismiss such game designs as 'boring' and 'worthless' for their seeming lack of action but should explore them as possible character building scenarios. A game need not simulate every second of the long hours of boredom soldiers experience, but with proper design, it should be possible to create small scenarios like these which are compelling enough to stimulate players on different levels rather than simply focusing on shooting and troop movements.

*The player is usually placed in an empowering role, such as an elite soldier, the pilot of a powerful vehicle, the bearer of a BFG, a command position, or a position where he can become empowered through successful play. This empowerment is often assisted by an opportunity to allow the player to make mistakes without necessitating the loss of the game. Death of the avatar, the loss of a soldier or unit, or a combat wound is rarely instantly fatal to the player, providing him feedback and allowing him to adapt his strategy.*

Such a design can be subverted simply by placing the player in a situation where they are not empowered. While some games will explore this theme by placing the player in a prison cell or submitting him to tortures by the enemy,<sup>157</sup> the player is still in the role of a powerful action hero who will be able to endure the tortures inflicted and later escape and recover his strength to fight the enemy again with a vengeance.

By contrast, the average soldier is just an ordinary person. Further, in the history of conscripted armies, he usually has little training and is treated merely as cannon fodder. While modern professional armies tend to provide their soldiers with much better training, not every soldier is elite, nor can they all become elite. Once the player is placed in the role of an ordinary soldier, not an elite soldier, the game gains a different theme.

Further, if the player is placed in a position where he is not very strong and his opponents are much more powerful than he is, the player will be presented with a different set of objectives and strategies. Fighting may not be the obvious choice as in traditional games – if the player tries to fight, he will be killed. As a result, the game

<sup>157</sup> *The Metal Gear Solid* games often feature scenes like this.

can investigate themes and situations where the player is confronted with overwhelming force and must attempt to survive with his comrades in such adverse conditions.

*The player is placed within the position of a commander directing a group or army of soldiers or into the shoes of an individual soldier or military unit on the battlefield. We do not tend to see the player in the position of a noncombatant, excepting perhaps a few instances of prisoner escape games, but rather in the position of a combatant who either performs or directs military actions on the battlefield.*

Here we can put the player in the role of a civilian within a combat zone. This provides a different set of gameplay than strategy and shooting. At the same time, designers need to avoid the desire to make the game a narrative of underground resistance by limiting the situations in which guns are fired. If the player's character must shoot a gun, it should be in a unique situation and not just an ordinary act of gameplay. The game then becomes a tale of survival rather than about combat, of avoiding or enduring obstacles rather than violently confronting them.

*The motives of the heroes and the villains are usually beyond question. The hero or protagonist is always doing the right thing while the antagonists are demonized. Players don't need to question whether or not that zombie alien Nazi is really just a victim of war, drafted into a conflict he doesn't understand, but simply believe that he is an active agent for the powers of evil – or at least a force unrepentantly opposed to his own. Of course, many strategy games allow the player to control either side of a conflict, and in more abstract games like Chess and Go the pieces are differentiated only by color. Yet even in the case of a World War II simulation where the player may play as the Axis or the Allies, the player never questions the motives of his army but merely asks how is he going to win in the given situation.*

Games need to encourage players to question the actions and motives of their characters. Instead of blindly following the instructions handed to them by their commanding officer, players can be given orders that are morally ambiguous or clearly obscene, though here great care must obviously be taken in how such orders are presented. How will the player react to such orders when presented with a situation where he must shoot prisoners or unarmed civilians or fire upon a hospital ship? How will the player react when he discovers his character is fighting on the 'wrong side' or losing side of a war, and that he no longer agrees with his country's motives? Instead of dismissing such scenarios as simulations for sadists, by producing immediate and clear consequences to these actions and by illustrating the protagonist's responses to them, the game can produce difficult questions for the player to answer. Is the player's character morally opposed to these illegal orders, or is the character forcing the player to take these actions as part of the game's narrative? After all, games need not always place the player in a situation where their avatar is assumed to have the same motives as the player but can make the player accept a particular role as part of playing the game.

*Violence itself and the nature of warfare is never questioned. Violent action is the key component of how the game is played, and its presence and consequences are taken as a given, if not a necessity. As a result, casualties are assumed as unfortunate but necessary consequences of combat and indeed expected – if you want to play soldier, someone will have to play the corpse. And because battle is a key component of these games, it in turn becomes a spectacle, particularly in videogames where it is illustrated in moving images, though it may also be suggested in paper-based games.*

By questioning violent actions in games, we become aware of their real-world consequences. Death in war is tragic and more games need to demonstrate to players that shooting someone is not alright simply because it is in a game but that the actions performed within game space are simulations of real-world actions. Games have the capability of producing a moral connection to the results of violent action by confronting the player directly with their consequences, by



making him realize their impact, and by exploring the results of such actions on the psychology of the character who performed them.

*Little value is placed on human life. The exceptions to this are where the player's own life is concerned, the lives of fellow team members, and the lives of friends or other NPCs the player is supposed to protect in order to complete the mission, such as civilians or prisoners needed for questioning. In the case of strategy war games, the death of a single soldier will usually go unnoticed, and it is often only when enough soldiers are lost to impact the player's strategy that the value of soldiers' lives increases.*

Games can place value on human life and demonstrate the moral consequences of taking a life. They can pose difficult questions such as the justification of taking a life or watching the suffering of another, even if that life is considered despicable.

The value of life in games should extend beyond the value of the individual – specifically the player's character, where living equates to playing and death is an end of play, however temporary. Such a design involves producing empathy for others, in creating dynamic characters the player can care about and in producing and reinforcing underlying moral systems through rules and play. Further, once we establish games that demonstrate the value of human life, we can then explore these themes more by developing characters who challenge or disregard that system and by demonstrating how this affects the relationships of those around them.

Finally, games can produce the most difficult form of empathy of all, empathy for the enemy. Even though the player may have to kill the enemy in order to survive, this does not mean he can't recognize part of himself in those he is forced to kill. Further, by limiting the number of deaths in a game and the instances where the player is forced to kill to a very small number, the effects of such an act become much more powerful than if they are repeated every few seconds. As a result, the game can focus more on the psychological impact that killing had on the player's character and ask the player to consider the consequences of these actions.

### ***Additional Themes – The Experiences of War***

If there is any part of our return to the six points of war games that we might expand on further, it is a call for games that further explore the experiences of war. Games can certainly abstract combat sequences or graphically illustrate combat, but when it comes to replicating a soldier's experience for the player, games are considerably lacking. For instance, how many games can produce the feeling of fighting a war in a country the soldier doesn't understand, against an enemy he can't see, and for a cause he does not fully grasp? Games need to explore and produce these aspects of war and investigate some of the basic experiences of what it means to be a soldier, rather than simply describing combat. After all, a soldier does more than fight and experiences more than combat.

When we examine the experiences of soldiers in war, from the Peloponnesian War to the War in Iraq, they often boil down to a few basic concepts, and recount many of the same basic experiences.<sup>158</sup> They would include complaints about the heat and the cold, of being tired and hungry, and of doing lots of marching, often while carrying heavy equipment. Their equipment would often have not seemed good enough, and perhaps it really wasn't. Their lives would have consisted of hours and hours of tedious boredom, followed by only minutes of the sheer terror of combat. And they would have lost good friends, and would have seen and perhaps done horrible things on the battlefield. When we create games about war, antiwar or otherwise, we need to explore these and other aspects of military life, rather than simply focus on those ten minutes of combat and stretch them out to a ten-hour game.

At the same time, we also need to focus more on civilian life, a facet of war usually ignored. These are stories and experiences of the people at home, of how families and communities were affected by the loss of loved ones, and of when the war literally comes home, when the bombs fall or enemy soldiers march through the streets.

One particular theme of this sort that needs to be described further is the experiences of women and children, a narrative that often is ignored in privilege of the experience of men at war. Telling these narratives, both on the home front away from combat as well as in war zones should be another goal of antiwar games, demonstrating that war deeply affects people of all ages, men and women. And with

158 Cole, J. Burns stuck to his vision. (2007, July 22). *Rocky Mountain News*, p. 7, Spotlight.

such narratives should come an audience as diverse as the characters presented and their perspectives about their world.

While an in-depth analysis of gender and games is beyond the scope of this paper, we ultimately should consider the types of audiences who would play an antiwar game. Traditionally, games about war have been the realm of male audiences, both young and old, rarely played by girls and women, though there are obviously exceptions.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, videogames in general have largely been a pursuit of younger males, though this audience is gradually broadening to include audiences of all ages, particularly through the so-called casual games movement geared towards a mainstream audiences that include girls and women. 'Games for girls' are thus no longer pink Barbie-themed adventure games but 'games for everybody' like *Wii Sports*, *Guitar Hero*, and *Katamari Damacy*, with nonstandard videogame hardware such as the Nintendo Wii leading audience diversification.<sup>160</sup>

At the same time, the core designs of the majority of commercial games have not changed much from the arcade tropes of the past: shooting, jumping, action, and puzzle-solving. As a result, when we think about the concept of an antiwar game, we are inclined to think of it within these tropes, such as a shooting or jumping game with an antiwar message. Will new audiences be willing to play games in these traditional genres, even if they are presented as being second-level model games? Or will they feel uncomfortable with the prospect of participating in digital combat as opposed to merely watching the action unfold as in a film?

For instance, despite the lavish praise I have already given to *Shadow of the Colossus*, how many people will reject it due to the simulated violence the player is required to perform in order to advance the game to its conclusion and other prejudices and barriers? If *Shadow of the Colossus* is art, which both the game's creator, Fumi-

159 There are, of course, older women who play games about war or violent action games, one of the most notable hubs for such players being the Quake Women's Forum (<http://qwf.planetquake.gamespy.com/>).

160 The Nintendo Wii uses a revolutionary controller similar to a television remote control with motion and tilt-sensing and an analog stick 'nunchuck' extension. *Wii Sports* uses the 'Wiimote' like a baseball bat or tennis racket for intuitive play control. The system challenges developers to create new ways of playing games and games that appeal to wider audiences, and this audience diversification has been key to the system's success.

to Ueda, and myself, a critic, believe it to be,<sup>161</sup> then it is a work of art that requires a more specialized kind of audience with an ability to skillfully operate the game's complex control system,<sup>162</sup> have excellent puzzle solving skills, and a desire to accept the game's premise that the player must direct Wander to slay each of the 16 colossi. As a result, audiences who might have been willing to accept the game's premise in a non-interactive form may not be able to play it or even feel comfortable playing the game, even though this emotional connection is crucial to understanding *Shadow of the Colossus*. To believe we could intimately understand *Shadow of the Colossus* in a manner other than playing it would be the equivalent of believing we can make literary interpretations about a book without having even read it or critique a film without having even seen it – such a concept would be, of course, preposterous in the established world of literary and film critique.<sup>163</sup> How can we show broader audiences that games like *Shadow of the Colossus* are thoughtful and artistic, to describe what the game means to someone who has never played a videogame before?

This is a barrier we need to overcome if we are to ever present artistic games such as *Shadow of the Colossus* or antiwar games to a broader audience and we need to question whether the barrier is one of perception or taste. Might these audiences be troubled by the belief that fictitious, fantastic, digital violence is considered equivalent with enacting real violence or are they simply not interested in the content presented? Do we simply continue to make games in the old ways for a limited but known audience or do we find other ways

161 Fumito Ueda has stated that games are an art form in an interview regarding his previous game, *Ico*, also regarded by many as a work of art. "I regard not only games but also anything that expresses something - be it films, novels or manga - as forms of art." Barber, O. A Break from the Norm. *The Guardian* Aug 18, 2005 Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2005/aug/18/games.shopping>

162 *Shadow of the Colossus* utilizes the PlayStation 2's controller, one of the most complex game interface devices on the market, which contains sixteen buttons, two analog control sticks, and a cross-shaped D-pad for directional movement. Even though many games, including *Shadow of the Colossus*, do not make full use of the controller, such a complex interface device proves a considerable barrier to audience interaction, though one that experienced players often take for granted.

163 And unfortunately, far too many critics are more than willing to discuss games without having any intimate knowledge of them, an unacceptable approach.

of bringing the message to new audiences, to share with them games can be critical and that alter our worldviews?

Perhaps designers are also daunted by the concept of representing aspects of war other than combat, that it won't sell or nobody would want to play it because we don't think it would be fun. Maybe we are afraid we will be unable to portray these experiences sensitively enough. Games need to explore other types of actions and experiences and need not focus on the same narrow, shallow rut of actions and themes directed at limited audiences, and designers should not be afraid to innovate, even if it is only through small steps.

Certainly, some aspects of these themes I have proposed may not work well with particular game genres that are more action-based, such as the first-person shooter. While part of this may be limitations of genre rather than limitations to the designer's animation, this does not mean these games can't begin to explore these themes or that other genres like adventure and role-playing won't be more amenable to them.<sup>164</sup> Innovative game development is about more than just creating simple formal modifications or tweaks to existing designs as it is sometimes lauded. True innovation comes through significant formal change, or through thematic exploration, to build games that can produce messages, that can do more than simply entertain, that can make us think about ourselves and the world around us.

### *Languages of Design and Critique*

Through the course of this paper I have made some discussion of languages of design and critique, a concept that requires some clarification else we stand the risk of conflating these two terms. To begin with, the term language used here is a toolset, a system, a method that frames our understanding or approaches to a particular subject, such as games. Language here is used in plurality as languages often appear in multiplicity – there is more than one way to accomplish a goal and many different goals to accomplish, necessitating multiplicity, and multiple languages – or approaches – may be deployed simultaneously towards a particular end. Thus if we examine literary studies, we find a multiplicity of approaches such as Marxism, femi-

<sup>164</sup> In large part, this is because these games are more heavily focused on narrative rather than action, though this obviously doesn't mean that we shouldn't lose sight of producing meaning through action and simulation, the key ludic components of games.

nism, formalism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and psychoanalysis where each of these literary theories may be considered a critical language.

Languages of Design are systems of tools for creating: meaning, messages, systems. A language of game design allows the designer or design team to understand how to not only produce a second-level game but also to understand how to produce any other kind of game and to understand how it operates and why it operates in the manner it does. A language of design allows designers to envision the results of changes to existing designs and to understand why those results occurred and to also use that language to create designs that produce the desired goal. Thus, languages of design will tell us not only how to make a second-level model game but also in a more traditional sense of game design, how to understand and design 'fun.'

Languages of Critique are systems of tools for analysis: reading, interpreting, critiquing. Critical languages of games allow audiences to read and interpret messages, if they exist, and to also analyze or generate meaning in games where such messages were not purposefully produced.<sup>165</sup> Critical languages also serve the purpose of determining how and in what ways one game is different than another and how successful a game was in its design. Thus, a critical language can also determine how meaning or design might have been better produced.

A critical design language is one that considers both design and critique: it analyzes how a game is made, how the design functions and how meaning was made, and it communicates how to create a similar design. Such a language suggests a strong historical knowledge of the medium: not only a history of how games have been made in the past but also how games are being made today and a cross-analysis of games from different historical periods and design movements both chronologically and ahistorically.

Both the critical and design languages of games function through an understanding of action and simulation: how rules, rule systems, player options, and an analysis of what is simulated and what is not serve to create meaning. A designer needs to understand this relationship in order to better understand how to create game designs;

<sup>165</sup> For instance, an analysis of *Pac-Man* as a capitalist parable where consumption of food is equated with consumption of goods where the consumer is never satiated; the original game was simply based on a design about eating. Poole, S. *Trigger Happy*. New York, NY: Arcade Publishing.

an audience needs to understand that same relationship in order to better understand the games they are playing.

Languages of design are required to produce second-level model games; languages of critique are necessary to analyze the meaning present in such games. Without them we will merely stumble forward in our quest to generate meaning through games and to understand such meaning, whereas with them designers and audiences can follow the guidelines of a previously explored paths for the production and analysis of meaning in games.

Note that we already use multiple languages of design and critique when dealing with games, though because the videogame medium and the field of game studies are both still very young, these languages have yet to crystallize into formalized theory as we find in film or literary studies and thus we have difficulty communicating and sharing methods of analysis and design. This is what game designers discuss when they stress the need for a design vocabulary: they seek ways for them to communicate the ways they design games with other designers so they may inform each other in their work.<sup>166</sup> Though it is likely such crystallization will occur naturally as both the medium and design field evolve, the concerted effort of designers and critics to encourage its formation will likely have profound impacts on the future of the medium, just as these languages are being formed with the future in mind.

### ***Antiwar Games***

When we reexamine these six points about war games, we see both a great need and a great opportunity to expand the messages of war games beyond the simplistic experiences of combat and tactics they most often depict. These are themes that can be expanded on not only through narrative but also through action and simulation, through player experience and choice. Whereas rhetoric in film and literature is passive, the rhetoric of games is active and experiential. Producing games whose rules and structure as well as their visual

<sup>166</sup> Two notable examples are the work of Doug Church and Greg Costickyan. Church, D (1999, July 16). Formal Abstract Design Tools. *Gamasutra*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19990716/design\\_tools\\_01.htm](http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19990716/design_tools_01.htm) Costickyan, G. I Have No Words & I Must Design. (1994). Retrieved February 29, 2008 from <http://www.costik.com/nowords.html>

and narrative components explore these themes to create meaning is a key component not only to antiwar game design but to meaningful game design in general.

While antiwar games can use the rhetoric of illustrating the horror and stupidity of war and its psychological effects, this approach is clearly hazardous through the possible ambiguity and misinterpretation of the message by creating the opportunity for the audience to focus on the action sequences over the significance of their results or by insensitively depicting such events. On the other hand, showing the effects of combat sans the violence itself to produce this same message can create a much stronger and more direct effect, though doing so requires a different approach to making games than we normally follow. There is also the possibility for games that demand a call to action, to change foreign policy and strategy, to end current conflicts and prevent future conflicts from occurring, a strategy of mitigation and prevention rather than of reflection and remembrance.

An antiwar game can follow any of these strategies and may do so through a wide variety of themes. Several antiwar games that explore such themes are described and analyzed further on in the appendix. Producing antiwar messages through games in this manner requires understanding how games operate, not only through understanding how they produce meaning through rule-based action and simulation coupled with visual and textual imagery, but also how the medium's limitations require a different set of strategies for exploring themes and producing messages differently from other media. These limitations should not be seen as disabilities to the medium but rather as opportunities to use different strategies for producing new messages. As long as we remain rooted in our desire to tell stories and create rhetoric in the language of old media, of film and literature, we will ignore the new and unique means by which games are able to create meaning through their own universal language that is separate from but reinforced by the language of 'old media.'

Such an argument was produced by Dziga Vertov's seminal *Man With A Movie Camera*<sup>167</sup> nearly 80 years ago and was demonstrated within the medium of the motion picture itself. The film demonstrated the 'unique and universal language' of the medium of film, 'separate from the language of theater and literature.'<sup>168</sup> While no

<sup>167</sup> Vertov, D (1929). *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* (Man With A Movie Camera).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. "This film is an experiment in cinematic communication of



such equivalent has yet to be produced in games,<sup>169</sup> individual titles such as *Cannon Fodder*, *Kabul Kaboom*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *September 12<sup>th</sup>*, and *Shadow of the Colossus*, have each demonstrated one small capability of the unique and universal language of the medium of the game in one form or other.

If we are to seriously think about what games can be, part of our task will require redefining our definition of games and rethinking what games are. We will have to question fundamental aspects of games such as what it means to win and lose, and whether or not those are the only outcomes. We will have to better understand what it means to restart a game and try-and-try-again as well as to investigate alternate outcomes to games.<sup>170</sup> The more we understand this medium, the better we will be able to create games that can produce humanity, sensitivity, and reflection. To do so, we must believe in the capabilities of the medium of the game, that anything is possible so long as there is someone willing to try it.

Antiwar games will help us better understand and develop the medium of the game while simultaneously producing messages about war and society, about man and conflict and its terrible toll on human life, culture and society, the environment, and the sanctuary of the mind. It is my belief that through games we can produce messages that clearly illustrate this aspect of war and will call for us to seek means of ending conflict, of preventing future conflict by better understanding its causes and identifying possible conflicts as they arise, and in remembering the terrible cost of war. In doing so, we can help produce a world that is safer and in which we better understand and appreciate ourselves and the world around us.

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real events without the help of intertitles, without the help of a story, without the help of theatre. This experimental work aims at creating a truly experimental language of cinema based on its absolute separation from the language of theater and literature.”

169 I would propose such a title as ‘Human With a Game Controller’ to create ‘a truly experimental language of games based on its absolute separation from the language of film and literature.’

170 For instance, an equivalent of *Rashomon* (1950), which examines different interpretations of the same event.

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## APPENDIX A: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ANTIWAR GAMES

This appendix includes a selection of notable antiwar games and antiwar 'ludic media.' Even though Salen and Zimmerman's definition of games readily accepts and explores the fuzzy area between games and game-like systems, I will make a strict distinction between games and 'ludic media' as follows:

Games are as defined by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman:

"A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome."

Ludic media, on the other hand is interactive or noninteractive media that uses either game imagery, game media, or an interactive digital 'game-like' environment that is not governed by a complete combination of goals, rules, and a quantifiable outcome. As a result, ludic media is divided into several subcategories:

Machinima – Videos produced using videogame footage.

Ludic Performance Art – Performance art produced as a result of play, usually within digital game space.

Ludic Media Art Installations – Interactive or non-interactive works containing game imagery, game media, or an interactive 'game-like' environment, but are not themselves games.

Ludic media sometimes comments on the nature of the medium of games as well as on the simple, violent messages often produced by games. Yet all of these pieces selected were chosen because they produce an antiwar message of some form or other.

Many of the games and ludic media produced deal with the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the War on Terror. This is a direct result of the impact the War on Terror has on the world and how both terrorist attacks and United States military action have affected world politics and the world economy. In addition, it is a direct result of the contentious nature of the War in Iraq that has resulted in an



increasingly deep polarization in American politics and the increasingly restrictive and paranoid stance the United States government has taken in regards to national and international policies, as well as its reputation in other countries. Antiwar games are thus fueled directly by desires to protest and/or critique the current war in Iraq and the United States' current strategies in the War on Terror.

In addition, many games and ludic media utilize the genre of first person shooter as the basis of their medium. There are several reasons to suggest why the first person shooter has become the 'genre of choice,' as it were, for art games. First, many first person shooters contain level editors and other modification (mod) tools that allow users to create their own original levels, characters, weapons, and settings. The three-dimensional interactive nature of first person shooters means that this is one genre that gives users a powerful tool for developing interactive 3D environments. In addition, some older games such as *Quake* and *DOOM*, have also been made open-source, allowing for even greater control over development. In fact, there are few platforms other than first person shooter mod tools that allow individuals to construct 3D environments, particularly without costing the user thousands of dollars in licensing fees. The mod tools themselves thus provide artists and designers alike with a powerful medium of expression.

Second, first person shooter games produce powerful violent and pro-military rhetoric. Often criticized as adolescent male power trips, first person shooters rarely provide any alternative expression to the six major categories of war games, focusing instead on the creation of ever more photo-realistically detailed environments in which the player is encouraged to perform ever more graphically violent actions. By often placing the player into the willing role of a military or paramilitary warrior and sanctioning his actions within a two-dimensional narrative of good vs evil, the games produce a rhetoric of pro-military, pro-violent language made more powerful by the player's performance of the actions. Because the first person shooter genre rarely, if ever, questions these rhetorics or makes the player physically aware of them, artists are more willing to use this genre to express opposite rhetorics on violence, often in intensely polarized fashions and suggesting an interpretation of the digital games medium as a whole. Artist investigation into this genre is also further intensified by the continued appearance and sensationalizing of school shootings in the news, with reports that often accuse

videogames like first person shooters as being a key cause of these tragedies.

Lastly, it should be noted that many of these works are produced by small independent game developers or individuals or by artists and art collectives and that many of these pieces have only been produced in the past ten years. One reason for this has to do with the strong reactions our culture has to the War on Terror and media violence as well as the overall lack of critical commentary in videogames and the popularity of the medium in society. Such a situation makes the need and desire to develop critical videogames producing social commentary and a population of artists and designers willing to do so. The second reason is that digital game production materials, particularly those allowing the production of three-dimensional digital game worlds, have become much more affordable and accessible. Popular game production programs such as Flash and Torque as well as modification tools for first-person shooters like *Quake* and *Half-Life* provide raw material for the creative desires of a critical and activist population of artists and designers. The result is the proliferation of political and socially conscious games dealing with issues such as the War on Terror and American politics.

As an annotated survey of antiwar games and antiwar ludic media, this appendix serves as an overview of the current state of antiwar games and suggests possible alternate paths to take in the development of future antiwar games.

### ***A note about the game citation system:***

There is currently no standardize procedure for citing games in research papers. As a result, I am using my own system for citing games which provides the crucial information required for understanding a particular game's instance:

*Game Title* (Platform, Year of Publication). Developer: Publisher.

### List of Games:

<i>Activate: 3 Player Chess</i>	69
<i>Antiwargame</i>	70
<i>Beyond Manzanar</i>	71
<i>Cannon Fodder</i>	72
<i>Darfur is Dying</i>	72
<i>Domestic Tension</i>	73
<i>Fish</i>	74
<i>Haze</i>	75
<i>Kabul Kaboom</i>	77
<i>Madrid</i>	77
<i>Metal Gear (series)</i>	78
<i>Play it By Trust</i>	78
<i>Second Person Shooter and Second Person Shooter for 2-players</i>	79
<i>September 12th</i>	81
<i>Serbian Skylight</i>	81
<i>Sheik Attack and Vietnam Romance</i>	81
<i>The Great Game, 2002 and The Great Game, Iraq Expansion Pack</i>	83
<i>Velvet Strike and dead-in-iraq</i>	84
<i>Wolfengitmo</i>	85

### The Games

#### **Activate: 3 Player Chess**

*Activate: 3 Player Chess* (Java, 2004). Ruth Catlow and Adrian Eaton.

*Activate: 3 Player Chess* is a product of Ruth Catlow's website, *Rethinking Wargames*,<sup>171</sup> based on the subversion of the war game Chess to create antiwar messages by "[challenging] existing power structures and their concomitant war machineries."<sup>172</sup> The concept for the creation of the three-player chess game was based on an image which places all the pawns on one side of the board facing off against the elite pieces of the military and religious castes, asking that 'pawns join forces to defend world peace.' Because such a scenario cannot be won by the pawns, Catlow decided to create a game in which it was possible for the pawns to win.

Her chess variant adds a third player to the game, one who controls the movement of pawns and the placement of new pawns onto the chessboard. Whenever five turns pass where a piece is not taken, grass grows over the playing field; the game is won by the pawns once the field is completely covered with grass and the gridded space of the chessboard battlefield disappears into the background. The addition of pink and brown pawns directly addresses racial commentary on the game's black and white color system but also suggests cooperation among all peoples of the world to prevent war.

*Activate: 3 Player Chess* thus demonstrates a system whereby a war game is subverted into a game of war protest, a system that suggests if the common people unite to oppose a war, they can win and prevent the needless war caused by the authoritative few. It is a simple but elegant system that retains the competition inherent to

171 Catlow, R (2004). *Rethinking Wargames*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from *Rethinking Wargames* Web site: <http://www.low-fi.org.uk/rethinkingwargames/>

172 Ibid. Catlow also asks other people to present alternative forms of chess games. One image that is not on the site: Parlett also shows a picture of UN chess where pawns representing the UN line up in the middle between sparring chess players who look worried by their presence. Parlett, D (1999). *The Oxford History of Board Games*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. P. 309.

Chess, leaving relatively equal options for the success or failure of any of the three players.

### ***Antiwargame***

*Antiwargame* (Flash, 2004). Josh On: Futurefarmers.

*Antiwargame* is a political simulation of the War on Terror. In it, the player takes the role of the President of the United States and must make decisions based on how the country will direct and balance its resources among military spending, foreign aid, and social spending, as well as how to deploy and manage military forces. The goal is to successfully manage national and foreign policy in the wake of a deadly terrorist attack while maintaining a high approval rating.

In order to do so, the player must indirectly manage the interests of big business, which are driven by oil profits, by using the military to secure foreign oil reserves and protect the country from further terrorist attacks. In order to secure oil fields and retaliate against foreign attacks, the player must deploy soldiers overseas, where the media will send back images of the bloodshed; as more enemy soldiers are killed, the more the war will escalate as new soldiers join their ranks. In order to properly manage the war, the player must not only balance the budget between military and foreign spending but also manage the morale of troops overseas and control the media to keep the citizens happy.

Mousing over characters lets you hear their statements about the war, ranging from a desire to fight overseas or to stay at home, from a patriotic spirit and support for their country, to opposition to the war effort. The characters' statements randomly change, suggesting a fickle population that is not united along a single ideology.

While on the one hand the complex system of variables illustrates that managing the war on terror is no easy task, on the other, the game suggests a strong connection between the interests of big business and the use of the military to further those interests. *Antiwargame* creates its message by demonstrating the strategy for achieving the game's victory condition: the player can only succeed if he follows the logic of a business organization fed and protected by military action and that the populace must be pacified to prevent them from becoming dissatisfied with the war and becoming aware of its true purposes. As a result, the War on Terror is demonstrated as not

being fought for the security of America but rather in the interests of big business for securing oil revenues.

### ***Beyond Manzanar***

Thiel, T., and Houshmand, Z (1995). *Beyond Manzanar*. <http://www.mission-base.com/manzanar/>

*Beyond Manzanar* is a three-dimensional first-person environment created by Tamiko Thiel and Zara Houshmand where audiences explore a recreation of the Manzanar internment camp. Manzanar was one of ten internment camps built in America during World War II to imprison thousands of Japanese Americans during the war without due process out of racism and fear. The installation is an interactive 3D space with images alternating between peaceful settings of the home and paradise gardens and scenes of the internment camp and wastelands. When audiences attempt to reach a location of peace and paradise within *Beyond Manzanar's* environment, they are immediately teleported to a location within a prison or a wasteland, far away from the promising signs of paradise presented to them.

*Beyond Manzanar* was originally constructed in response to "blind attacks on people of Middle Eastern extraction after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, when the media erroneously linked the bombing with the Middle East."<sup>173</sup> Indeed, this connection is made more clear through the proliferation of Islamic imagery throughout the piece, from paradise gardens seemingly taken straight from Islamic manuscripts to the Arabic script hidden within the barbed wire fences of Manzanar. In the wake of September 11, *Beyond Manzanar* takes on a much stronger meaning with the cloud of racism directed towards Americans of Middle Eastern descent similar to that experienced by the Japanese in the World War II fueled by fear and anger over the attacks. Such racist hatred has underlying parallels with the Japanese American World War II experience and has had a long history of parallels with hatred towards Iranian Americans beginning in the Iran hostage crisis of 1979 and 1980.

While not technically a game (*Beyond Manzanar* contains no rules or quantifiable outcome), *Beyond Manzanar* has many game-like features similar to first person shooters and demonstrates simi-

<sup>173</sup> Thiel, T & Houshmand, Z (2001, September 24). *Beyond Manzanar*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Beyond Manzanar Web site: <http://www.mission-base.com/manzanar/911.html>

lar possibilities of expression within goal-based ludic space. In fact, we might consider *Beyond Manzanar* as a form of unwinnable game where players have the goal of reaching peace and paradise but ultimately cannot due to the racial hatred directed against them.

### ***Cannon Fodder***

*Cannon Fodder* (Amiga, 1993). Sensible Software: Virgin Interactive Entertainment (Europe) Ltd.

*Cannon Fodder* is described within the main paper.

### ***Darfur is Dying***

*Darfur is Dying* (Flash, 2007). Susana Ruiz: mtvU. <http://www.darfurisdying.com>

*Darfur is Dying* is the product of a team of students at the University of Southern California's Interactive Media Program at the School of Cinematic Arts. The project was produced as part of mtvU's Digital Darfur Activist Contest<sup>174</sup> for the creation of a game that would promote awareness and activism against the genocide in Darfur. *Darfur is Dying* places the player in the role of a family of Darfuri refugees who must collect water and grow crops to support their family and village while avoiding the Janjaweed militia.<sup>175</sup> The water gathering and village scenarios were originally two separate games that were combined into a single project.

The water gathering scenario is certainly the most striking of the two. In it, the player must direct their character across the desert to an oasis in order to gather water in an empty gas container. As they do so, Janjaweed in a military jeep patrol the desert; when the Janjaweed appear, the player must hide to avoid detection and death. Here the relationship between the Darfuri refugees and the Janjaweed is made simply and explicitly clear: the size of the jeep full of armed militiamen with automatic weapons simply dwarfs the crouching figure of the refugee as it emerges from the harsh and inhospitable desert. The power balance is clear, and the player has no means of

174 mtvU (2006). on mtvU: Darfur Digital Activist Contest. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from mtvU Web site: [http://www.mtvu.com/on\\_mtvu/activism/darfur\\_digital\\_activist/](http://www.mtvu.com/on_mtvu/activism/darfur_digital_activist/)

175 Janjaweed. (2008). In *Wikipedia* [Web]. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janjaweed>

defending against the Janjaweed. As a simulation, this produces a direct connection with the real life situation in Darfur where the refugees are unable to defend against the genocidal onslaught of the Janjaweed militia.

While *Darfur is Dying* itself is a noble attempt at raising player empathy, it does not produce any argument for resolving the conflict. As Ian Bogost writes, "mtvU might argue that the game fulfills one of its goals, to "raise awareness" about the conflict, but awareness is a tired, ineffectual excuse for the absence of fungible solutions."<sup>176</sup> mtvU has also been criticized for its motives and marketing behind the campaign as "exploitation of adolescent social conscience in pursuit of ad revenue."<sup>177</sup>

### ***Domestic Tension***

Bilal, Wafaa (May 4 – June 15, 2007). *Domestic Tension*.

*Domestic Tension* is a performance art piece designed by Wafaa Bilal, simulating the life of a civilian living in the Iraq war zone. Bilal constructed a paintball gun that could be controlled remotely by computer, inviting users to either communicate with him via chat or by shooting at him with the paintball gun. The piece explores virtual and physical experiences in war and privacy, raising awareness of the life of the Iraqi people and the home confinement they face as a result of the civil violence that has engulfed the region.<sup>178</sup> Through *Domestic Tension*, Bilal places himself in a similar situation where he is constantly threatened by participants in remote locations who he cannot see and who can choose to shoot at Bilal with an intent to

176 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. P. 96.

177 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. P. 97; quoting Journalist Julian Dibbell. Of course any activist or social awareness project by a large company should be questioned as most companies tend to have interest in the sustainability of their business and the continued growth of their company rather than in the interests of the common man. While it's possible MTV was pursuing a public relations bid in the sparking of *Darfur is Dying*, it has certainly increased awareness in the genocide, encouraged young people into activism, and created positive associations for videogames.

178 Bilal, W (May 4, 2007). *Crudeoils*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from *Crudeoils* Web site: <http://www.crudeoils.us/>

harm at any time. A video log exists of his performances, reactions, and experiences with *Domestic Tension*.<sup>179</sup>

By creating a ludic piece which has real-life consequences to remotely controlled digital actions, *Domestic Tensions* serves to illustrate how easily we resort to hate and violence to resolve our fears, frustrations, and discontent, and how readily we are willing to perform violent and sadistic acts to frustrate or physically harm others in a setting where we are not confronted with the direct and immediate consequences and responsibility to our actions, situations that are often abstracted or occur particularly in digital networked multiplayer games. *Domestic Tensions* also investigates what it is like for someone to live in a situation where they are constantly threatened with such thoughtless violence, not for merely a few minutes or hours but for months and years on end.

### ***Fish***

*Fish*. (Arcade Installation, 2001). John Klima. <http://www.cityarts.com/lmno/postmasters.html>

*Fish* is part of a collection of three interactive media art installation pieces called *Go-Fish* produced by John Klima about the connections between computer games and real life consequences. While this description suggests an argument that media violence causes violence and that simulated violence is the same as performing real violence, *Fish* directly explores this question by presenting the dilemma to the player in a dramatic fashion.

In *Fish*, the player takes control of a digital goldfish within a 3D maze modeled after first-person shooter games.<sup>180</sup> The object of the game is to transport the digital goldfish to safety while avoiding other, predatory fish. However, the game contains a biological component where live goldfish are stored in a tank, and the player's performance has real-life consequences for the goldfish. If the player wins the game, a goldfish is released into a holding tank with other saved goldfish. However, if the player loses, the goldfish is sucked into a second tank with a live oscar fish, who will subsequently eat

179 Bilal, Wafaa (2007). YouTube - mwafaa's Channel. Retrieved March 11, 2008, from YouTube Web site: <http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=mewafaa>

180 Klima, J "Fish". Retrieved February 5, 2008, from Postmasters Web site: <http://www.cityarts.com/lmno/postmasters.html>

the goldfish.<sup>181</sup> Such an event is rendered even more dramatic when we consider that the player must add a quarter to the arcade machine for the privilege of playing the game.

While not an antiwar game, *Fish* connects game play with real-life consequences, the question of "remote responsibility" raised by the results of players' ludic actions.<sup>182</sup> The game directly presents the player with the consequences of his actions and eerily suggests that the first person shooter games it models might also produce consequences for their real-world audiences. In any regard, *Fish* is one dramatic method of demonstrating directly presenting a player with consequences to his actions.

### ***Haze***

*Haze* (PlayStation 3, 2008). Free Radical Design: Ubisoft.

To begin with, a disclaimer: *Haze* is a first person shooter and as such, like *Metal Gear Solid*, is firmly entrenched in a largely pro-war and pro-violence genre of games. As a result, the game possesses the logic of first person shooters where the focus is on shooting things and if any antiwar commentary does exist, the player is ultimately an accomplice in the continuation of the war. Second, as of the writing of this paper, the game hasn't been released,<sup>183</sup> so the author has failed to play it and has only been able to see screenshots, videos, previews, and interviews on the title. This said, the game's lead designer, Derek Littlewood, has stated in an interview<sup>184</sup> that *Haze* will contain an underlying antiwar message, and as such it warrants inclusion into this bibliography.

The central theme of *Haze* is the difference between our perceptions of war and its reality. In the game, the player begins in the

181 Of course, Klima does not describe whether or not the oscar is getting food through other means – if players consistently win the game for a long enough period of time, is it possible that the oscar would die of starvation? Likewise, we must ask if the goldfish themselves are being fed through the installation.

182 Klima, J "Fish". Retrieved February 5, 2008, from Postmasters Web site: <http://www.cityarts.com/lmno/postmasters.html>

183 It appears currently scheduled for a May, 2008 release date.

184 Gaultier, P (2007, November 2). Spinning The Moral Compass: Designing Free Radical's *Haze*. *Gamasutra*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/2003/spinning\\_the\\_moral\\_compass\\_.php?page=1](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/2003/spinning_the_moral_compass_.php?page=1)



role of a Mantel Soldier, Shane Carpenter, an elite warrior wearing a full body exo-suit who views the world through a computer simulation on his visor. In the visor's depiction of conflict, wounds are not shown on shot characters and dead soldiers fade from the player's view like in the animations of old videogames. The player uses a combat enhancement drug called Nectar as a stimulant to increase combat skill, but one side effect of the drug is to make the enemy Promise Hand forces look more 'evil' and the fellow Mantel Soldiers look like 'shining knights.'<sup>185</sup> As a result, the player's avatar is fed a false image of war and the game's central theme of an artificial haze that prevents our viewing of the actual reality of war. Indeed, the game's iconic image of a wounded Shane Carpenter lying on the ground with a hole in his visor revealing a single shell-shocked eye perfectly displays this central theme.

The developers and writers of *Haze* intend to produce a more 'realistic' look at war<sup>186</sup> by flipping the player's role from that of a Mantel Soldier to a Promise Hand guerrilla. Once Shane Carpenter is presented with a glimpse into the reality of the conflict he is fighting in, he begins to question his actions and the motives for the war and what Mantel is doing to its people. As a result, the game attempts to explore the "complex moral issues associated with shooting human-like characters in games, rather than simply ignoring them."<sup>187</sup> By presenting the player with situations that allow him to question his actions, the game's designers hope to allow the player to view their world through a different perspective and to see their own life in a new way.<sup>188</sup>

Most intriguingly, Derek Littlewood suggests that his game's messages will be communicated through gameplay rather than narrative sequences, an indication that the game might actually produce some strong antiwar messages without focusing entirely on the 'fragfests' most first person shooters turn into.<sup>189</sup>

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid. "I've always thought that interactivity should be the medium with which games communicate their message -- it's the one factor that makes games unique, so we should use it to give players experiences they can only have with a game. If you're communicating your message purely through narrative, then it could just as easily be communicated in a film. So yes, we've always intended to communicate the core message

## **Kabul Kaboom**

*Kabul Kaboom* (Flash, 2002). Gonzalo Frasca.

*Kabul Kaboom* is described within the main paper.

## **Madrid**

*Madrid* (Flash, 2004). Gonzalo Frasca: Newsgaming.

Gonzalo Frasca's *Madrid* is a game about memorial and remembrance. The player must keep alight enough candles in a nightly vigil in order to illuminate the darkness with the light of hope and remembrance for those killed in terrorist attacks throughout the world. The characters holding the candles are people of all ages and races, representing the universality of the loss experienced by the families of victims of terrorist attacks. Each person wears a shirt with the name of a city attacked by terrorists, including Madrid, New York City, Oklahoma, Tokyo, and Baghdad. The game was created in response to the terrorist attacks on the city of Madrid.

Clicking the candles to increase their brightness seems to produce a meditative effect. However, this is undermined by a sense of urgency produced by the need to locate and click the small dim candles before the overall brightness of the vigil becomes too dim. As a result, *Madrid* is a rather difficult, but winnable game, and communicates to us that precision and diligence must keep memory and reverence alive.<sup>190</sup> Because the game has often been cited as forwarding a rhetoric of failure due to the game's difficulty (and association

of the game through interactive sequences rather than with narrative; the narrative elaborates on that message rather than delivering it."

On a further note, *Haze* is one of several first-person shooter games scheduled to be released in 2008 or already released in 2007 that contain political issues. *Blacksite: Area 51* (Xbox 360, 2007: Midway Games) deals with how war turns soldiers into monsters, both literally and metaphorically. *Army of Two* (PlayStation 3, 2007: Electronic Arts) investigates the world of military contractors and the politics of their intentions and the intentions of those they serve. *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* (Xbox 360, 2008: Codemasters), an alternate-history game about the invasion of the United States by the Nazis, purportedly explores and questions the reasons for why we fight. Of course, all of these games seem to have more in common with *Them!* (1954) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), two 'political' pulp science fiction B movies that explore McCarthy-era fear of communism.

190 Bogost, I (2007). *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. P. 89.

with *September 12<sup>th</sup>*), this suggests we still have a ways to go in order to produce games with a message produced through action and simulation that can be understood by wide audiences.

### ***Metal Gear (series)***

*Metal Gear* (MSX, 1987) in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* (PlayStation 2, 2005). Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc.

*Metal Gear Solid* (PlayStation, 1998). Konami Co., Ltd.

*Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (PlayStation 2, 2001). Konami of America, Inc.

*Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (PlayStation 2, 2004). Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc.

The *Metal Gear* series is described within the main paper.

### ***Play it By Trust***

Ono, Y. (1966). *Play it By Trust*.

To protest the use of games as a military strategy tool during the Cold War, Yoko Ono built a chessboard made entirely of clear Chess pieces, the object of which was to demonstrate that there was fundamentally no difference between the forces of either side. Further, because neither player could remember who owned which pieces, the conflict was rendered pointless.<sup>191</sup>

Most criticism directed against *Play it By Trust* was that chess masters could, of course, tell who owned what pieces and continue to play – they are trained to retain the layout of the board in their minds and calculate any number of future possible moves based on a given scenario. Thus it makes no difference whether the chess pieces are differentiated in color or not and according to them, Yoko Ono's message is rendered irrelevant.

However, ordinary people are not chess masters and are unable to remember the positions and ownership of pieces more than a few turns into the game. If ordinary players cannot retain a picture-perfect view of the board, can we honestly say that the characters themselves represented by the chess pieces really know who they are

<sup>191</sup> Of course, *Play it By Trust* also suggests alternative forms of playing Chess, of trusting the other player when he or she claims they own the piece they have just moved and to play out an entire game in this fashion.

fighting for? As a result, the argument that *Play it By Trust* fails at its message ironically reaffirms its statement, particular when the chess masters are equated with the Masters of War, whose job it is to keep track of who we are fighting and why.

### ***Second Person Shooter and Second Person Shooter for 2-players (2ndPS2)***

*2ndPS* (Second Person Shooter) (Blender and Python, 2006) Julian Oliver.

*2ndP2P* (Second Person Shooter for 2 Players) (*ioquake3 mod*, 2007) Julian Oliver.

Second Person Shooter is videogame art produced by New Zealand artist Julian Oliver that places the player's viewpoint into an externally controlled character, a second player or computer controlled 'bot, allowing the player to see his or her character from the perspective of another. Players thus control the movement and actions of their own character but must see the world from a separate, mobile perspective, an entity that is hostile to their existence. In Second Person Shooter, you must shoot yourself to survive – to shoot your own perspective, which is the viewpoint from the eyes of the character who is in turn trying to shoot you.

Second Person Shooter follows the concept of second person perspective from literature where the storyteller describes what the reader as a character is doing within the narrative. This is opposed to first person perspective, where the story is seen from the perspective of a single character or third person perspective, where the reader sees events happening to the characters through a viewpoint external to the protagonist. In videogames, the terms 'first-person' and 'third-person' are used to describe the player's viewpoint, either from within the eyes of the protagonist or from an external viewpoint.<sup>192</sup> These terms are usually used to describe three-dimensional computer games, which allow for multiple perspectives, though first and

<sup>192</sup> Of course, this is somewhat misleading because videogames do not really contain a camera, which simply records images. Instead, videogames produce images as seen from a particular perspective; they are image *generators* rather than image *recorders*. The term 'camera' was simply historically borrowed from film as a piece of vocabulary that most fit how perspective was used in three-dimensional games.

third-person perspectives may be present in two-dimensional games as well.<sup>193</sup>

Second Person Shooter uses a second-person perspective, that is, viewing the character you control through the perspective of another character moving on its own, a rather unique decision that produces a confusion of agency and location. By creating a mobile viewpoint independently controlled by the computer or another player, the player will not always have his own avatar within his field of vision and thus will not have the necessary visual feedback to know where he is directing his character.

Second Person Shooter was a single player game built in Python and Blender, while its successor, Second Person Shooter for 2-players (2ndPS2), was built in ioquake3, a *Quake 3* modification tool. Though Julian Oliver's development of the Second Person Shooter idea is currently geared towards the production of a strategic multiplayer arena version,<sup>194</sup> the possibilities of producing an antiwar game based on this concept are certainly there and need only be implemented given a different system of rules.

In terms of antiwar commentary, a second-person perspective allows the player to see the world through the eyes of the enemy, and forces the player to shoot at his own viewpoint in order to survive; but by destroying his viewpoint, the player loses his vision of the world. In a second-person shooter, death is at once liberating but also blinding: to kill is to become safe from harm, but also to become blinded to the sights of the world; to die is to suffer pain but to retain vision without agency and interactivity and to see one's self perish. By literally allowing the players to see the world through the eyes of their opponent, Second Person Shooter inherently allows for a more intimate relationship with the enemy not seen in many videogames.

<sup>193</sup> For instance, the classic two-dimensional role-playing series *Dragon Quest* contains a third-person overhead perspective when players move their characters around a world map and a first-person perspective during combat sequences where players see their opponents through the eyes of their characters.

<sup>194</sup> Oliver, J (2007, May 5). 2ndPS2: Second Person Shooter for Two Players.. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Selectparks Web site: <http://www.selectparks.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=654>

### ***September 12<sup>th</sup>***

*September 12<sup>th</sup>*, *A toy world* (Flash, 2003). Powerful Robot Games: Newsgaming.

*September 12<sup>th</sup>* is described within the main paper.

### ***Serbian Skylight***

Klima, J (1999). *Serbian Skylight*. <http://www.cityarts.com/serbsky/index.html>

John Klima's *Serbian Skylight* is a visual representation of American ordinance dropped on Kosovo in 1999 based on Department of Defense data. The piece is a non-interactive digital media video depicting bombs dropping from the sky and is installed on the ceiling of a gallery. Due to its realistic orientation, viewers feel almost as if they are in the middle of an air raid, and the constant, endless barrage or ordinance, each representing a real bomb, becomes overwhelming. By using computer-generated imagery of bombs, Klima makes a direct connection to our interpretations of 'the video game wars' of modern American warfare, from the First Gulf War to the Kosovo War and the distancing most Americans have from war through its presence in other countries. By interpreting the bombings in a videogame setting, Klima suggests that we far too quickly interpret war lightly and distantly with a sanitary disinterest or the light-hearted gung-ho nature of videogames.

*Serbian Skylight* and its accompanying player is downloadable through Klima's website.<sup>195</sup>

### ***Sheik Attack and Vietnam Romance***

Stern, E. (2000). *Sheik Attack*.

Stern, E. (2003). *Vietnam Romance*.

Eddo Stern's work explores relationships between games and reality, not only from the perspective of how we interpret the consequences of game actions but also in how games simulate aspects of reality. Through his machinima work, Eddo Stern takes footage from military action games and repurposes it to reclaim the games' imagery

<sup>195</sup> Klima, J (1999). *Serbian Skylight*. <http://www.cityarts.com/serbsky/index.html>

from both historical and ahistorical settings of entertainment to a critical and sobering view of the realities of the conflicts depicted.

Stern's piece, *Sheik Attack*, follows the military history of the Israeli people from early Zionist farmers to the building of a modern Tel Aviv using footage from *Age of Empires* and *Sim City*. Then the video turns to first-person shooter games like *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* to follow an Israeli commando on a clandestine mission. Eddo Stern plays with the visual language of first-person shooters where players see the world through the eyes of the character and his weapon is displayed prominently in the lower part of the screen. The Israeli commando moves in his mission, rifle or machine gun always in hand, dead-center, capturing a recording similar to the experience of a player. Eventually, the commando enters a house and discovers a woman kneeling on the ground with her hands behind her head. The commando pulls the trigger, and the woman falls dead.

The death of the woman represents the death of a real human being, a death that occurs hundreds of times every year in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. By taking a fictional action game and returning its imagery to historical and contemporary chronology, Stern is able to make us think about what this conflict really represents and how it continues to affect the people of this region today.

*Vietnam Romance* takes a similar approach by mixing footage from first person shooter games set in the Vietnam War where he reenacts famous scenes from Vietnam war films like *M.A.S.H.*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Platoon*, and *Apocalypse Now*. While the games themselves represent the action of a horrible war as "mythic-tragic" entertainment, by returning the games' historical imagery back into context, Stern is able to make us think about what the games are truly representing and how lightly they simulate a tragic war that saw so much anger, dissent, and sorrow.<sup>196</sup> By doing so, Stern is able to question how games depict historical and fictional wars and how the games often lightly and casually dismiss the consequences of war and the experiences of the soldiers who fought in them, reclaiming the imagery back into history and experience.

196 Halter, E (2006). *From Sun Tzu to Xbox*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press. P. 330

### *The Great Game, 2002 and The Great Game, Iraq Expansion Pack*

Klima, J (2002). *The Great Game, 2002*. <http://www.cityarts.com/epilogue/index.html>

--- (2003). *The Great Game, Iraq Expansion Pack*. <http://www.cityarts.com/iraq/index.html>

John Klima continued his commentary on war and videogames through the construction of the arcade machines, *The Great Game, 2002* and *The Great Game, Iraq Expansion Pack*. Both works visually interpret data released by the Department of Defense of United States Army and Air Force troop movements in Afghanistan, and in the case of *Iraq Expansion Pack*, in the Second Iraq War. This information was culled from news media footage in a period when there was little information about the war overseas, particularly in comparison with the media blitz of the First Gulf War. The title references the British term for the "diplomatic, political and military 'side-show'" between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia, a conflict which engulfed both Afghanistan and Iraq. The title name directly references the intelligence and espionage of the conflict popularized by Rudyard Kipling's book, *Kim*.<sup>197</sup>

Installed in a mechanized, coin-operated kiddie-ride helicopter machine, *The Great Game* serves as "a mockery of the remote controlled and so called "bloodless" warfare of the future" and its often videogame-like interpretation in popular media.<sup>198</sup> *The Great Game* explores and critiques popular metaphors of war as a game (in fact, the 'Greatest Game'), and the simulation of war in games in which war is distanced from us through abstraction and its consequences are never truly shown. Klima's work often considers questions of simulation and representation that videogames themselves often fail to ask: when we see simulated media about a war, are we watching a game about war or a war representing a game?<sup>199</sup> However, if *The Great Game* is a game about war, it is one that is being played without our control; the player has no way of controlling the game's

197 Klima, J (2001). John Klima: Shrinking Afghanistan. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from City Arts Web site: <http://www.cityarts.com/shrink/crit.html>

198 Klima, J (2002). THE GREAT GAME, 2002. Retrieved February 5, 2008, from City Arts Web site: <http://www.cityarts.com/epilogue/index.html>

199 Klima, J (2001). John Klima: Shrinking Afghanistan. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from City Arts Web site: <http://www.cityarts.com/shrink/crit.html>



progress or its outcome, but can merely watch as it unfolds in a digital simulation of war made to recall actual videogames.

### ***Velvet Strike and dead-in-iraq***

DeLappe, Joseph (2006 - ongoing). *dead-in-iraq*  
 Schleiner, Anne-Marie (2002). *Velvet Strike*.

Performance artists like Anne-Marie Schleiner and Joseph DeLappe produce anti-war protests within public online game space through subversive play. Anne-Marie Schleiner's *Velvet Strike* community places spray paint tags featuring anti-war messages and performs sit-ins with large groups of players within the *Half-Life: Counter-strike* online game, a game that pits terrorists and counter-terrorists in capture-the-flag style gameplay.

While *Counterstrike* is primarily entertainment, *America's Army*, on the other hand, is a propaganda game produced by the Army as a recruitment tool to encourage interest in the armed forces and raise dropping enlistment rates. Joseph DeLappe logs onto *America's Army* servers under the name dead-in-Iraq and constantly types in the names of American soldiers killed in Iraq and the dates on which they were killed.

Players often consider these protests and anti-war movements within game space to be spoil-sport actions where Schleiner and DeLappe are 'not playing the game properly', and are 'spoiling the experience' for 'serious gamers' who are playing to win and enjoy themselves. Here there is a set of expected player etiquette and behavior deemed as the 'correct' way to play and subversive gaming is seen as a crime worse than cheating.<sup>200</sup> Through their performances and protests, Schleiner and DeLappe both question what actions are considered appropriate in public play spaces while simultaneously producing anti-war messages through subversive play. And it's perhaps this aspect of questioning why we play and exploring new motives and kinds of play that is one of the more intriguing aspects of their art.

200 In fact, Johann Huizinga points to the spoil sport as being worse than the cheat because the spoil sport presents to the players that the game is artificial and not real, while the cheat at least creates the illusion that he is still playing by the rules and keeping the boundaries and illusions of the game's artificial world intact.

In addition, Schleiner and DeLappe both question our fascination with digital warfare while ignoring the real-life conflict that affects us every day. This statement is made crystal clear through DeLappe's screen captures of *America's Army*, which contain in-game messages from other players as well as the names of American soldiers who died in the Iraq War over pictures of dead digital soldiers from the game. Each dead American in *America's Army* is come to represent a real-world soldier who perished fighting in Iraq within a game being used as a recruitment tool to send more soldiers over to Iraq.

### ***Wolfengitmo***

*Wolfengitmo* (*Wolfenstein* mod, 2006). Evan Harper.

*Wolfengitmo* is a mod of *Wolfenstein 3D* created by Evan Harper and Winnie Tom that places the player in the role of a prisoner of the Guantanamo Bay detention center<sup>201</sup> who is attacked by American security guards and guard dogs. *Wolfenstein 3D* was originally about an American commando infiltrating Castle Wolfenstein, a fictitious Nazi stronghold where horrific experiments were conducted. In *Wolfengitmo*, the player takes the role of an unarmed and unidentified prisoner who has a black hood placed over his head and his hands zip tied. The Nazi flags and Hitler portraits of the original have been replaced with American flags and portraits of George W. Bush; the crucifixes, bone piles, and attack dogs retain the art of the original. In this mod, players are in the position of a victim who cannot fight back and can only be attacked and killed by the guards and vicious attack dogs. The juxtaposition of powerful images of freedom and soldiers who are supposed to be heroes attacking a faceless and defenseless prisoner is incredibly striking.

The game is of course unwinnable and may be seen as a metaphor for the lack of due process and tortures and humiliations presented against terrorist suspects in the wake of 9/11. Though the imagery seems more in line with the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the setting in Guantanamo Bay suggests criticism of the prison system currently employed against terrorism suspects. Evan Harper has stated that though he has had some comments about the work being in poor taste or political, he regards it as "an investigation into how games

201 Rebecca, (2006, May 14). *Wolfengitmo*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Selectparks Web site: <http://www.selectparks.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=469>



can comment on more serious topics.”<sup>202</sup> The imagery makes for a powerful commentary on contemporary events and an interesting twist on the original by placing the player in the role of an unarmed victim where any action the player takes is rendered meaningless by the fact that he can’t do anything to prevent the relentless attacks of the guards and dogs.

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202 Harper, E (2006). Wolfengitmo. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from Evan Harper’s Project Dump Web site: <http://a.parsons.edu/~evan/school/?q=node/29>

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This is not a complete and comprehensive collection of antiwar media but rather a collection of material I am familiar with.

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