THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The Great Game of History:

An Analytical Approach to and Analysis of the Videogame as a Historical Form

Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy: Media Culture and Society

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by

Adam Chapman, BA (Hons), MA

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To Ninian Kinnear-Wilson, my friend and mentor, who never lived to see me finish my work and to my Grandad Fred Kelly, without whom I would never have had the chance to start it.

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Contents

Gaming history is not a crass attempt to make the subject relevant to today's kids. Rather it's an attempt to revitalize history with the kind of technology that kids have pioneered. And why not? After all, the Game Boy generation is growing up. And, as they seek a deeper understanding of the world we live in, they may not turn first to the bookshelves. They may demand to play – or rather replay – the great game of history for themselves.

-Niall Ferguson 2006

Introduction

‘Granted, you have to understand that in a video game, they’re going to dramatize history and twist things to make the story more interesting. As such, it is important to note, for example, that we did not send in one dude to kill robo-Hitler; that was actually a team of seven people.’

-Comment by user Kevin Feasel on the *36 Chambers – The Legendary Journeys Blog*, March 18, 2013

‘I am fond of history - and am very well contented to take the false with the true. In the principal facts they have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as anything that does not actually pass under one’s own observation; and as for the little embellishments you speak of, they are embellishments, and I like them as such.’

-Jane Austen, 2012, 75

I am told it is June the 6th 1944, 6.35am, just off the coast of Normandy. The sky is grey, the water a little choppy. The other soldiers huddling in the landing craft all look scared. Ahead, one of them nervously taps his rifle against the floor. A commanding voice shouts ‘Clear the ramp, thirty seconds!’ Suddenly, I hear the whistling of distant artillery shells answered by the nearby crump of impact and jets of water. Soldiers flinch with each explosion. The occupants of a nearby landing craft all fall injured or dead, strafed by a swooping enemy fighter-plane. We speed past. With a bang our transport stops. The ramp lowers to the sound of artillery and ricocheting machine-gun fire. Suddenly we are underwater. There are soldiers, some dead, some struggling with wounds and the water is filled with blood and whizzing bullets that leaving spiralling patterns in their wake. Breaking the surface I run forward onto the beach. There are bodies everywhere and in the distance huge concrete bunkers spew machine gun fire. The sounds of explosions, gun-fire and men screaming are intense and confusing. Each impact is met with a geyser of sand and I can feel the vibrations of the close-by explosions. My objective is only to survive. I run to a crater occupied by one of my compatriots. With a loud bang the air is filled with fire. I pause for a second, startled. Now the crater is empty, its sole occupant vaporized. Just as I am about to reach the comparative safety of the depression, machine-gun fire stitches the sand in front of me. The beach turns black as my perspective falls to the floor, side-on. Nearby there is a

call for a medic but it is too late. Abruptly I am confronted by two words: 'continue' or 'exit'.

Thus ended my first teenage encounter with the opening level of *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, a first-person shooter (FPS) set during World War 2 (WW2). This game's achievements have been surpassed in the decade since its release but it has remained significant to me. Firstly, the chaos, sensory bombardment, random 'violence' and tension of this encounter became a reference point in my mind when thinking about the events of D-Day. Secondly, this was the first time I realized (however clumsily) that games could say things about the past and this was exciting because my role was not subsumed but was, in fact, the point.

Whatever we may think of historical film, few of us today would doubt its power to influence our perception of the past. Like my memories of *Medal of Honor*, how many of us when trying to conceive of the madness of those D-Day landings in some way reference *Saving Private Ryan* or before it, *The Longest Day*? For many it is 'impossible…to think of the Normandy landings without thinking of fuzzy images, the handheld camera close to the ground, the muted sound of *Saving Private Ryan*' (Engelen 2007, 562). Such films are important because they are 'public texts that people can refer to when communicating ideas about the world in the past and present' (Metzger 2007, 68) and because through contact with these kinds of experiential popular histories 'a person sutures him or herself into a larger historical narrative' (Landsberg 2009, 222). Accordingly, forms that encourage this kind of prosthetic memory are also important because they retain the ability to 'shape an individual's subjectivity and politics' (Landsberg 2009, 223).

Most of us can then relate to the idea of cinema or television as part of our interpretations of the past, but what about the other media success story of the past 100 years: videogames? Certainly, historical videogames are extremely popular. For example, according to *vgchartz.com*, WW2 FPS *Call of Duty: World at War* has now sold over 13 million copies worldwide. So too, historical game series like *Brothers in Arms, Civilization, Assassin's Creed, Europa Universalis* and *Age of Empires* have all sold millions of copies. Whatever its variable fortunes in other popular forms and however incidentally, it appears that history in the videogame form is thriving. As Rosenstone notes,

> 'for every person who reads a book on a historical topic...many millions of people are likely to encounter that same past on the screen. Rather than dismissing such works….it seems more judicious to admit that we live in a world shaped, even in its historical consciousness, by the visual media, and to investigate exactly how...[they] work to create a historical world.' (2006, 12)

This thesis is an attempt to begin such an investigation of the videogame form, which may be influencing the ways we understand, think, talk about, and engage with the past. This is the first deep exploration of the videogame from this perspective and is thusly not only an original contribution to knowledge but also a much needed one. Indeed, like Rosenstone notes of film, games 'may well have already changed the way we see and describe the past' (2006, 158) and yet they are barely understood. Despite their appeal, the discipline of history has shown little interest in these games and 'this lack of engagement with populist media suggests a shirking of a wider public duty' (De Groot 2006, 411). Whilst there is research from other disciplines, much of this concentrates on the content of individual games or the possibility of utilizing historical videogames in formalised historical education, with the latter, in particular, often resulting in unsustainable and hyperbolic claims. Before we can really make any claims about the formal pedagogical implications of historical videogames or their impact on popular culture we must achieve some understanding of the form itself, the representations it can create, the stories it can tell and the engagements with the past it allows.

Accordingly, this thesis will not ask the normative questions about the usage of games in education or even if games *can* be history. Ever since that first encounter with *Medal of Honor* it has seemed perfectly obvious to me that history can indeed be a great game and that great games can be history. Of course academic work cannot survive on such impressions but in this regard at least, the existing research that will be encountered throughout is quite enough to further support the idea that to at least some players these games are history. Furthermore, I have written about the question of whether games can be history at length elsewhere (Chapman 2013A). This thesis is therefore written from a position which presupposes that the videogame *can* function as a historical form. Instead the research questions here are *what* can games offer and do as history and *how* do they accomplish this? Additionally, how should we *analytically approach* these historical videogames and thus, understand them?

Of course, firstly we must define the term 'historical videogame'. This is relatively easy. Within almost any genre of videogame there are examples that we could highlight as historical, 'Thus we wish to define a historical game outside the parameters of "activity" (shoot, manage, take a turn), and within that of its world setting' (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007, 204). Thus historical videogames are those that attempt to represent the past and thus to produce some kind of resonance with a wider (broadly defined) historiography. 'Videogame' is used in its most conventional and everyday sense to imply the typical screen-based games that are found on personal computers (PC), mobile devices and consoles.

Methodology

As Aarseth notes, there are, broadly speaking, three practical methods for researching games, 'we can study the design, rules and mechanics of the game, e.g. by talking to the developers of the game.....we can observe others play, or read their reports and reviews....we can play the game ourselves. While all methods are valid, the third way is clearly the best, especially if combined or reinforced by the other two' (2003, 3). Accordingly, it is mostly this third method that has been used here, though it must be specifically clarified that this has often been done precisely as a way to gain insight into rules and mechanics. Naturally, I am therefore not making large claims about what players do or don't do with these games but instead what they *can*, the opportunities that exist within the text. In terms of theory, the aim has been to develop an approach for historical videogames that remains conscious of the dual nature of modern videogames and thus includes understanding both action/agency and narrative/representation and the interplays between these aspects. Accordingly, this research focuses on the videogame as an historical form and seeks to weave existing historical theory and analysis, with game-focused research that emphasizes the unique qualities of games and play, as well as some other wider influences (most notably, Gibsonian psychology). This allows an exploration of how games produce representations and what they offer by doing so through game-play.

Specifically, I aim to achieve this by organising this thesis around a proposed analytical framework for approaching historical videogames which is demonstrated by analysing two particular game series: *Brothers in Arms* (*BiA*) and *Sid Meier's Civilization*. This means that the thesis is comprised of two models, one for understanding how

videogames can function as history through the issue of interaction (Chapter 1) and one for understanding game-based narrative (Chapter 5). Excluding the latter, Chapters 2-7 each deal with one of what I propose should be understood as the five basic core structural categories of historical videogames, *Epistemology and Simulation*; *Time*; *Space*; *Narrative*; and *Affordances*. There are also a series of structural sub-categories situated under each of these main headings. Breaking historical videogames down into this series of structural categories serves a number of purposes. Firstly, this is because we cannot make sweeping claims about historical videogames as a homogenous category because of their variety in both representation and game-play. Secondly, by breaking down these games into distinct but overlapping structures we begin to create an understanding of what role each plays in creating historical representations and opportunities for player action and importantly, how variations in these structures change these representations and opportunities. Consequently, and thirdly, this also allows the analysis contained here to speak far beyond the two historical videogames series analysed and for the framework to be reapplied. By considering these core structures independently, the conclusions drawn about each can be easily reapplied to games which operate through different *combinative* structures, which I refer to as 'game-structures'.

Consideration of these fully combined game-structures and their possibilities begins with the important category of affordances. However this really comes to fruition when we situate these game-structures within existing historical discourse and practice (Chapter 8 and 9). There I explore *BiA* in comparison to traditional reenactment and *Civilization* in relation to counter-history and postmodernist theory and thus, really begin to get to grips with not only *how* videogames are functioning as history but precisely *what* they offer. Finally, the last chapter (10) returns us to more universal but vital considerations and looks at the relationship between learning to play and historical representation.

This proposed approach to historical videogames is purposely designed to privilege consideration of the videogame as a historical form over the content of individual games (Chapman 2012). What follow then are not pure close readings or content analyses and are instead mainly formal analyses. When content is considered this is normally only in relation to the functioning or pressures of the formal structures or to explore how it is used to give the formal operations particular meaning. Thus the particular fictive

(neither fiction nor truth – Munslow 2007B, 6) historical worlds that the games produce do not interest me as much as the interplay between rules, agency and representation that sustains them. Whilst of course one could perfectly feasibly analyse on the basis of say adherence to evidence or the meaning of storylines, I am interested in the differences and similarities of the videogame's workings in comparison to our other historical forms and practices and this understanding is the core aim of this thesis. Accordingly, this more complex approach is intended to inherently refute the notion (which, as Munslow notes, seems to be commonly assumed) that 'history presupposes the authority of content over form' (2010, 168) and therefore, acknowledges Ankersmit's arguments that 'our relationship to the past should focus less on the acquisition of new data on the past itself and more on the language we use for speaking about the past' (cited in Rosenstone 2006, 36).

I do not wish this thesis to become yet another entry into the debate on whether games can or should be understood as narratives (see Eskelinen 1999; Frasca 2003; Pearce 2005; Juul 2005). However, let me briefly note that given my approach I will, like Ryan, be using a 'functional ludo-narrativism that studies how the fictional world, realm of make-believe, relates to the playfield, space of agency' (2006, 203). My reasoning is thus; the epistemological position that I have indicated below that I occupy, strongly adheres to the notion that history is a narrative practice. Accordingly, if games can be history then (as a historian approaching historical games) ignoring narrative is not a luxury that can be afforded; this is too useful a concept to exclude. If these games are working as history then we must accept the possibility that there is potential for narratives to be written into games and/or to emerge from them. Therefore the idea that these games are in some way working *as* and/or *in relation to* narrative, is the basis of the arguments contained herein. This is taken as a given from which to work. Of course there is also the simple point that regardless of academic posturing these games are already regularly treated as narratively charged objects by both critics and players within popular culture (the context within which I look at these games). The aim here is not to show that videogames are always narrative or must be considered this way. Nor does my approach ever relinquish the notion that games are competitive systems designed to be *played*. What I propose is that alongside this, narrative, as it is experienced and created during play/narration, is a useful tool and concept for understanding how videogames function as history.

As MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler argue, when it comes to historical videogames it is 'disproportionate to argue in blanket terms that they are not capable of providing detailed and often morally challenging representations of history, but equally not *all* historical games provide the same levels of education, accuracy, or information' (2007, 203). Within the grouping of what we have termed 'historical videogames' there is a huge variation in, not only quality, but types of representation, game-play and thus, history. It is for this reason that the two game series that will be examined here have been chosen in particular. *BiA* and *Civilization* represent two of the most popular and prevalent genres of historical videogames (FPS and strategy respectively). Each has been chosen because they are exemplary within their type of game-structure and because each bears a remarkable structural resemblance to a great many historical games. Thus by examining these historical videogames we actually reach conclusions about many, many more. Furthermore these particular games have been chosen because of their oppositional structures; together they represent two of the most extremely distant positions on the spectrum of historical representation through videogames. By this I mean that I expect that most other game-structures will lie somewhere between these two games, combining the different core structures of the two in different ways. For example, open-world action-adventure games like *Assassin's Creed* tend to combine some similar spatial characteristics to *Civilization* with the same simulation style as *BiA*, whilst utilizing a narrative structure that exists somewhere between the two. Of course there will always be limiting cases and future developments, but by selecting these two game series I aim to take a pragmatic approach that maps out an area within which most historical videogames will in some way lie.

Brothers in Arms is a first-person shooter videogame series, set during WW2, in which the player can assume the role of members of the American Army 101st Airbourne Division during various European battles of the conflict. The game is inspired by the *Band of Brothers* television series and tries to adopt a similar tone of authentic reconstruction. *BiA* is notable not only for the seriousness with which the subject matter is approached but also the inclusion of tactical elements of WW2 combat (the player controls two teams of men) often ignored in similar games. WW2's 'grip on memory and myth' (Reynolds 2001, 469) is very noticeable in the realm of videogames. Accordingly, *BiA* not only represents a large portion of these games in terms of game-play genre but also historical setting. Whilst the player-characters (Sergeant Matt Baker and Sergeant Joe Hartsock) and their squads are fictional, many of the characters above

the rank of lieutenant are real. Similarly, whilst the specific narratives of Baker's squad, which focus on the interpersonal relationships of members of the squad as they try to withstand the horrors and losses which they are exposed to, are fictional, it is also generally historically typical. Furthermore, the battles the squad take part in all actually occurred. As the historical advisor for the game, Colonel John Antal, elegantly put it to me when interviewed, '*Brothers in Arms* is a historical fiction that depicts the true-to-life actions of a squad of paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division in WWII' (Chapman 2008, appendix I).

Figure 0.1 – Box Art of *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* (Covergalaxy.com)

By comparison *Sid Meier's Civilization* series is a turn-based strategy game in which the player is given the task of leading a particular 'civilization' (e.g. Roman, English, Egyptian) from prehistory to slightly beyond the present day. *Civilization* is extremely popular and is widely recognized as one of the finest examples in the genre, as well as having been significant in the formation of the very genre itself. The game regularly places highly in top PC game lists and creator Sid Meier is widely recognized as a significant figure in the games development community. In the game the player must choose the path of the civilization by making decisions about: researching technology (chosen from the extensive and interlinked 'technology tree'); diplomacy; domestic policy (social, religious, legal etc); civil ideology/government type; military logistics,

strategy and development; urban and agricultural development, as well as a number of other factors which the game highlights as historically significant.

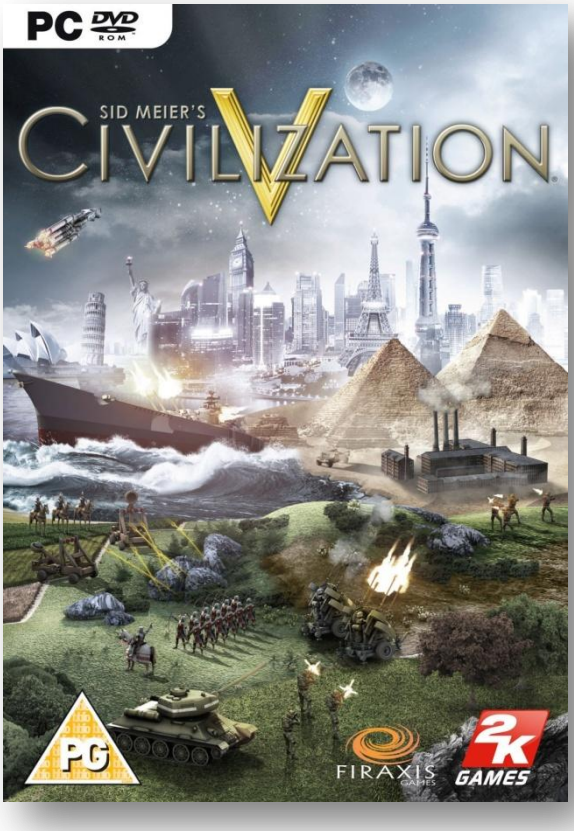

Figure 0.2 - Front cover of *Civilization V* (amazon.co.uk)

Both series are critically acclaimed and as well as numerous spin-offs, ports, downloads and expansion packs, both feature a number of entries into their main series. The first *Brothers in Arms* game, released in 2005 and subtitled *Road to Hill 30*, was followed by two more sequels (*Earned in Blood* and *Hell's Highway* respectively). Similarly, since the initial release of *Civilization* in 1991 there have been four direct sequels (*II, III, IV, V*). In both cases these main series entries are what will be explored here. Often I will not specify a particular game, in these cases it is to be assumed that this applies to each game in the series. *BiA* has been played on Xbox 360 and *Civilization* on PC. In both cases I will be looking almost exclusively at the single player experience, though many of the conclusions drawn here can be applied to similar multiplayer experiences.

It is also worth noting that often conclusions drawn and examples used will apply to or include multiple games in a particular game series. However (other than the two main series) for the sake of sensible bibliographic brevity I have generally only specifically referenced the latest relevant entry in each game series referred to.

Epistemology

In his seminal *History on Film/Film on History*, Rosenstone writes that 'to accept film makers as historians, as I have been proposing throughout this book, is to accept a new sort of history' (2006, 159). It is in this same spirit that I use the term 'developer-historian' to describe the makers of historical videogames. This is in no way meant to reduce the achievements of the history profession as it is conventionally understood and indeed these practitioners are experts in producing history of a particular kind. However, this does not mean that film makers, game developers and novel writers, cannot be historians, just because they write history for different audiences, using different tools, metaphors, aesthetics and formats, or because they acknowledge the narrative status of history in varying degrees. Indeed,

> 'in turning the content of the past into a form like film we are actually not doing much that is very different in narrative-making terms than historians do when they write. And this is the crux of the matter and why postmodern history is all there is. Indeed, what makes 'proper history' different to 'postmodern history' (whether print or film) is the state of denial of adherents of the former.' (Munslow 2007A, 568)

Here we begin to hint at the last major thing that must be covered before we move into the thesis proper, the epistemological perspective: what I believe history 'is'. Certainly, I believe the above to be true, all historians, regardless of form, make a series of similar choices when they construct a history. 'They use preferred arguments, sift the past ideologically, emplot, select the sources to be offered 'in evidence', focalise, contract and extend time, make decisions about the relative merits of structure over agency, use rhetoric, acknowledge the role of the reader/viewer, employ inference, and so on' (Munslow 2007A, 569). This is somewhat unsurprising given that 'the practice of history on the page, like history on the screen, has never simply reflected or captured the meaning of the past, but has always created meaning for the past—and this because 'both textual and film histories are fictive constructions'' (Rosenstone 2007, 594). Of course the root of such a stance lies in the idea that 'the past and history are different things' (Jenkins 2003, 7). Whilst the past once existed, it is now gone and is unrecoverable. Thus history is distinct from this as 'the practice of weaving a narrative

representation, with the intention of producing meaning about the past. This type of narrative is separated from its fictional counterparts in that one of the many elements in its creation is the historian's interpretation of evidence' (Chapman 2013A, endnote 4). I also use 'history' to refer to the texts themselves, the processes of narration and thus, reception and discourse. 'Such a definition is intended to question and confront notions such as 'truth', which is as much (perhaps even more) aesthetic as evidential, and 'proper history' (normally perceived to be empirical-analytical and written representationalist), and instead embraces the universal narrative representational aspect of history in all forms and cultural roles' (Chapman 2013A, endnote 4). This is, of course, a postmodernist perspective on history. Such a position 'assumes an unbridgeable gap between the events of the past and the ever-shifting representational efforts of an ever-changing present, an assumption that instead reflects upon the contours of the present (and the position of the subject within it) and their relationship with the process of constructing an understanding of the past' (Urrichio 2005, 333). Accordingly, all 'history is situated, positioned and *for* something or someone' (Munslow 2007B, 41).

Of course these ideas have been widely understood for some time. Even Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington, noted that 'Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost; but no individual can recollect the order in which, or the exact moment at which, they occurred, which makes all the difference as to their value or importance' (Macaulay 2011, 612). Similarly, Squire and Jenkins state that 'There is no such thing as a neutral simulation; they all embody assumptions about the way the world works' (cited in Dillon 2008, 142) this applies just as equally to simulations on the page as those on the screen, after all 'simulation...is perhaps the best translation of the Greek mimesis' (Genette 1990, 15).

Postmodernism does not deny the existence of facts, we can be certain to all intents and purposes, for example, that the Battle of Waterloo happened in 1815. However, because the past is unrecoverable and these facts cannot speak for themselves, they are, as Rosenstone puts it, 'necessary (but not sufficient), for our understanding of the past' (2007, 592). Dates, times and the existence of events contain little inherent meaning. Accordingly, history is not made of facts but particular selections of fact arranged into narratives and in doing this we *create* and *decide* upon meaning. The narrative status of history is not really surprising, after all, 'The past as stories is part of all human

cultures, for the story seems a necessary tool for situating and understanding ourselves as human beings and societies' (Rosenstone 2007, 593). Thus postmodernism is not about the denial, falsification or deliberate misinterpretation of evidence (though its critics often assert this) merely the idea that history has:

> 'all the elements common to narrative per se; that is, it has to be troped and emplotted and sustained by argumentation, its articulation depends on textual poetics, rhetorical devices and figures, compositional strategies, intertextual readings, variable/contingent theories and methods and personal theses which are expressed by, and expressive of, the circumstances of the author. None of these things are 'found' in the past, but these are the conditional elements of any history.' (Jenkins 2008, 71)

My hope is that the epistemological stance from which this work is written is now clear. However, there are two more related points that must be explicitly made. Firstly, (though as noted this is by no means about the falsification or denial of evidence) this stance does render simplistic content analysis concerning historical accuracy rather less useful in most cases (Chapman 2012). All histories entail some kind of story/content decisions, as White puts it, 'Every mimetic text can be shown to have left something out of the description of its object or to have put something into it that is inessential to what some reader, with more or less authority, will regard as an adequate description' (White 1978, 3). Accordingly, as aforementioned, I do not believe this to currently be a particularly productive approach to games.

Secondly, though all history is narrative and involves some similar processes in creation, still we must remain aware of the notion that all forms are *different*, capable of different engagements with the past and exerting different pressures on the process of narrative construction. Not, however, necessarily better or worse. As Munslow writes of film, there are a 'different set of form(al) constraints to those of writing on a page but...there is less to this epistemic change than is imagined in the worst nightmares of reconstructionists...to change the medium is also to change the message. Referentiality remains' (2007A, 569). Despite this, forms are often placed into a hierarchy with the written history atop espousing 'The epistemological claim that only print can be sufficiently realist' (Munslow 2007A, 568). Such thinking is inherently flawed as it is quite clear that each form allows completely different engagements. For example,

beyond 'the confining walls of...words' is a world much more literally akin to our own, a 'world of colour, movement, sound, light, and life, a world on the screen that points towards, refers to, represents' (Rosenstone 2006, 1). And whilst it is not a real world,

> 'then again, neither is that other historical world, the one conjured up for us in the textbooks we endured in grammar and high school and university. . . . we take this to be history, but let us never forget that these are only words on the page, words that got there because of certain rules for finding evidence and producing more words of our own and accepting the notion that they tell us about what is important in the vanished land of the past.' (Rosenstone 2006, 1-2)

Thus, as Munslow notes, instead of worrying about how or why films or games get 'the' story wrong, 'we would be better off understanding that textual history is actually no better fixed (2007A, 569). If we separate the forms from the popular products that are commonly produced, we can see that written history has no more access to truth than games or film. Each form has different pressures, each has different approaches to the past and each offers something different and worthwhile. Rosenstone writes of the defensive posture that is often taken when trying to defend film in comparison to written history: 'It is time to end that defensive posture and to adopt a different way of looking at historical films, to suggest that such works have already been doing history, *if by the phrase 'doing history' we mean*, rather than engaging in that traditional discourse (which films clearly cannot do), *seriously attempting to make meaning of the past*' (2006, 37). I also subscribe to this opinion about the videogame form and thus like film,

> 'this visual form of historical thinking should not and cannot be judged by the criteria we apply to the history that is produced on the page. Essentially it exists as its own separate realm, one with its own set of rules and procedures for creating works with their own historical integrity, works which relate to, comment upon, and often challenge the world of written history.' (Rosenstone 2006, 37)

Videogames and film, 'like written history, utilizes traces of...[our] past', but their 'rules of engagements with them are structured by the demands of the medium and the practices it has evolved' (Rosenstone 2006, 161). And it is precisely this approach to

the notion of form that is used in this thesis to examine historical videogames and to explore their *rules of engagement*, which it seeks to begin to uncover.

The Great Game of History

The study which led to the creation of this thesis gained proper momentum in early 2010, when I first published an earlier version (a book chapter in a collected volume) of a few of the ideas contained herein.[1] However, in the past three years this research has grown considerably into what I feel is the best balance between an in-depth examination and comprehensive account of the videogame as a historical form. Furthermore, what is presented here is an analytical framework that allows simple examination of these games whilst remaining firmly situated within a historical perspective that nonetheless remains conscious of the demands and nature of game-play.

This said it is important to note that whilst these games certainly encourage their functions as histories, and these opportunities certainly exist in the text itself, it is also often quite possible to play them virtually ignoring the historical relevance of the action (to play instrumentally) and many players probably do so. Similarly, as a historian and games researcher my perspective on these games is likely to be framed in a particular way, nuanced, detailed, inquisitive, searching and thus, perhaps unlike many of the players of these games. This approach is still useful, indeed this is the only possible approach available to us for understanding any form or example of history but still we must remain aware of player subjectivities. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on making claims about the form rather than the players. Thus, again it is important to stress that the possibilities of the form are explored through the perspective of one player: me.

Given the epistemological perspective described above, which at points leads me to talk about the role and diegetic status of the historian's voice and presence in these history games, it would be somewhat hypocritical of me to remove my own voice from this thesis. As such the mixed use of the first-person is intentional. Mixed to disrupt and first-person to remind of my presence as a directing voice. In a further small effort to disrupt the form a little and to attempt to create a little of Hayden White's complexity

[1] Most notably, this is when I first briefly explored the idea of *Civilization* as a complex text and *Brothers in Arms* as reenactment, proposed the idea of the realist and conceptual simulation types and noted their links to particular epistemologies.

(see Chapter 9), I have also included one or two epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter. Some of these are included to poke fun and some are very serious and yet I think each either captures the essence of the discourse contained in each chapter or speaks to a particular issue. However, I have generally left out outlining my own interpretations as to their significance to encourage readers to actualize their involvement, as a small but fitting formal echo of the ideas important to this work.

What follows is not a 'pure' history thesis, nor is it a 'pure' game studies one. However, I think in its deep application of a perspective and theory from history to game studies work and indeed games themselves, this achieves something entirely new, something original, with surprisingly little precedent. Such an approach however, also means that sometimes in the process of blending the amassed theory of two disciplines, individual elements of each has had to be ignored in the effort to produce new considerations of both. Similarly, theory that works well for broader categories of games has often had to be purposely (and often painfully) put aside for the purposes of looking at *historical* videogames in particular and replaced with something of my own devising. Finally, such a study is needed for three important reasons. Firstly, because even more than most subjects for PhD investigation, the level of under-research of the topic is matched only by the significance and prevalence of the subject in popular culture. Secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, this study is necessary because:

> 'Historical games need to engage with the world around them more than other games. They address subjects, events and issues which are still discussed in a much broader context than just gaming...historical gaming...directly reflect[s] the ways history is presented in the world outside games, but this factor needs to be considered far more than it is at present, especially when historical games are used either as education, or as objects of critical study.' (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007, 210)

Lastly, research from this perspective is necessary because games must be considered using the wealth of available historical theory and yet also on their own terms.

> 'The power of the history on the screen emanates from the unique qualities of the medium, its abilities to communicate not just literally (as if any historical

> communication is entirely literal), and not just realistically (as if we can realistically define realism) but also, in Lerner's words, 'poetically and metaphorically'' (Rosenstone 2006, 35)

Games add another channel of potential meaning in that they can also communicate *ludically*, by carving out a unique role for their audiences quite unlike our other historical forms. Accordingly, this must be our first point of investigation and it is these ideas that we now move onto in the first chapter: 'Interacting with the Videogame as History.'

Chapter 1

Interacting with the Videogame as History

'To read fiction means to play a game by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world.'

-Eco 1994, 87

Before exploring what particular videogames offer as history I wish to propose a brief model of interaction that seeks to explain what occurs when we choose to explore history by playing games. Whilst some of our existing theory can be simply reapplied, there are of course key differences when dealing with videogame-based historical representations. Perhaps most important is that they adapt *their* presentation according to *our* decisions. This is because videogames are 'procedural', by which we mean the computers 'defining ability to execute a series of rules' (Murray 1997, 71). These 'procedural environments are appealing to us not just because they exhibit rule-generated behaviour but because we can induce the behavior', they are 'participatory' (Murray 1997, 74). These two qualities are generally what is meant by interaction. Consequently, player agency must be at the centre of any model we use to understand historical videogames. Agency is 'the feeling of empowerment that comes from being able to take actions in the world whose effects relate to the player's intention' (Mateas 2004, 21) but is also often used to refer to the opportunities for the player to do so, as structured by the game rules.

Of course historical narrative in any form is never truly passive. The narration of history is always 'a highly complex process of writerly meaning creation and reception-the reader in effect creating/re-creating the texts meaning as it is re-written in their own minds' (Munslow 2007B, 46). Subsequently, there is a second layer in historical videogames that can be understood as a mode of 'interaction'. However, when we speak of agency and interaction in the terms of the videogame we go quite beyond the relatively 'passive' mode of (orthodox) meaning creation involved in say, the reading of a book and into the realms of something more tangible: the *actualized* and *configurative* interactive mode of play.

This substantial increase in audience agency means that the exact form that the game will take is unknown until it is played, not only because of the player/reader's orthodox meaning negotiation but also because the actual text that is experienced is uncertain because it is dependent on game-play decisions. Indeed, for Caillois one of the defining principles of play is that it is '*uncertain*: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative' (Caillois 2001, 9). This naturally raises significant questions of exactly how the videogame functions as a historical form.

Game representations, unlike most other media, are not storied-objects that exist in linear configurations independent of the audiences that decide their exact nature through action. Consider for a moment the typical history book as an object independent of its narration. We can be fairly certain that this narrative will remain in the same structured state, with pages arranged sequentially, because it is normally constructed and received vertically. We would therefore expect each copy of the historical narrative within each book to be the same. However within the 'cover' of the historical videogame there are enough horizontal 'pages' to form multiple different, or even competing, narratives. Variations in the eventual formation of the text can therefore not only occur between players but even between instances of play. Accordingly, whenever we approach the analysis of a game we are met with 'a large problem: even when discussing one game, each instance of play is different. Combine this with the thousands of digital games, and the millions of players, and it is apparent that the number of individual instances of game play is unfathomably large' (Apperley 2010A, 7). The moment of play is thus hugely subjective and this has consequences for the traditionally held authority of narrative.

'History is the representation of change over time, and as a form of narrative it enables temporal creatures like us to create meaning' (Munslow 2007B, 16). Clearly, if videogames are producing and engaging with discourse about the past then at some level they are doing so through the familiar device of narrative. This naturally leads us to a tension between the uncertainty of videogames and the traditional understanding of historical narratives as generally linear accounts. Such tensions challenge many of our traditionally held ideas of history and the historian/audience relationship. As shall become apparent, these challenges are partly what makes the videogame a valuable historical form. However, this tension combined has also sometimes led to problematic

accusations of the videogames inability to be a suitable historical form that I have argued against elsewhere (Chapman 2013A). Similarly, agency makes historical games open to criticism on the basis of potential counterfactualism (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007, 204-205). As shall become apparent, counterfactualism and the loss of authorial authority do not necessarily indicate a lack of useful discourse and as the success of various popular counterfactual histories implies, audiences seem quite able to perceive these deviations.

Such criticisms also ignore the methods that developers employ to deal with these issues. For instance, games often reward what they consider to be historically factual actions and/or punish actions that conflict with this interpretation. Similarly, developers may use a historically *typical* (rather than specific) setting and characters or situate game-play in representations of large events where the broad trend could not be changed by a single historical agent. Furthermore, some games make no claims to rigorous chronology and/or embrace this anachronism as a game feature (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007, 205). Regardless, it is precisely the potential for the unpredicted to occur and the increase in agency that makes this new form exciting. And what form can truly claim to exert no pressure and produce no tension with history (which is anyway only an idea outside of the forms whereby it exists)?

This tension between narrative and play means that a theory which accounts for interacting with videogames as history must understand them as play objects *and* mimetic cultural artefacts and the overlap and inter-dependency of these categories. Thus, my proposed model of interaction with historical videogames attempts to account for all three of Salen and Zimmerman's schema of games: rules, play and culture (2004, 5). 'Salen and Zimmerman stress that these categories are inter-related and that the borders between them are permeable' (Carr 2007, 223) and an understanding of this is integral to approaching historical videogames in particular, whereby history (as far as it can be understood as a separate category) seems to float between and even bind, all three.

Active-reader theory has re-centred focus on the audiences of historical narratives and this must remain similarly so when considering games where (at least in good scholarly work) it meets an understanding of the role of the player as vitally important. Such a perspective naturally acknowledges 'the subjectivity of an individual user. This would

seem to be...the point at which the contexts of play (environmental and social) would become an issue, and the influence of the broadest schema - that of culture - would inevitably become a factor' (Carr 2007, 232). Without this basic acknowledgement it is impossible to approach the videogame as history because the 'player's own complex and culturally situated) subjectivity is a variable within the system through which the meaning of a game is produced' (Carr 2007, 232). Just as the historical narrative cannot truly be considered independent of its narration, particularly how this is situated (culture), so too 'Play is the schema of the experiential, and it involves the actualisation, interpretation and configuration of the game in real-time by users' (Carr 2007, 231). Thus the role of the player and their possible relation to *both* these processes is absolutely essential to any model that seeks to explain what it is we are doing when we interact with videogames as history.

Explaining Interaction

Whilst it is possible to analyze individual historical videogames on the basis of their content, this generally produces very limited, often non-transferable, results and tells us little of the workings of the form itself, particularly the process of narration (Chapman 2012). History relies on an understanding by the audience that the words of the book, images of the film and even the rules of the game, relate to something not contained within the text but *of* the world in which we live and *in* the past, where it is lost and yet culturally remembered. Subsequently, experiencing the 'past-*as*-history' (Munslow 2007B, 9) involves a process of narrative negotiation between author and audience: the act of reading (in its broadest sense). Reading 'is not about trying to set *the* meaning (*the* interpretation or *the* story of *the* past) of the author; rather the act of reading itself…becomes the centre of meaning creation' (Munslow 2007B, 44).

This might seem enough to account for historical videogames. However, 'the game critic should be concerned not only with the interpretation of linguistic signs....but also with the interpretation of *polyvalent doing*' (Galloway 2006, 105). Accordingly, videogames can be interacted with by polyvalent doing (selecting from multiple but finite *actions*) and polysemic reading (selecting from a huge array of possible *meanings*). If all histories, as narrative texts, are tied to the idea of reading and all games to play, then interacting with the videogame-*as*-history must involve two modes of interactivity: 'reading' and 'doing'.

Firstly, we must define what we mean by the *actualized* mode of interaction (doing). According to Aarseth (1997), videogames can be understood as 'cybertext'. Apperley explains this as 'the intricate feedback system that exists in certain types of texts, including but not limited to digital games, that are characterized by a "mechanical organization" and an "integrated" reader' (2010A, 11). Such a text must be actively configured by its audience, a role that Aarseth called 'ergodic' and defined as the 'non-trivial effort [that] is required to allow the reader to traverse the text' (1997, 1). This is the *configurative* aspect of the historical videogame that *necessitates* player action. This can be distinguished from our normal conception of audience interaction (orthodox meaning negotiation or 'reading') on the basis of its purely mechanistic aspect (Apperley 2010A, 11). Thus ergodic traversal refers to the 'physical, cognitive process of producing the digital game, rather than the reflexive process of negotiating a meaning' (Apperley 2010, 11). This has sometimes been taken to mean that the more familiar process of meaning negotiation, which is necessary to the videogames function as historical form, is always absent or irrelevant in its subordination to the ergodic, configurative form of interaction. As if the act of game-play necessarily and conclusively disturbs the player from ever being able to engage their critical faculties and excludes videogames from being able to function mimetically (for more on this discourse see Chapman 2013A). Such perspectives tend to be based on an absolute separateness between the modes of interaction. However,

> 'while in theory it is possible to split the ludic aspects of the game (those parts of the game - including rules, goals, chance, components, and winning or losing outcomes - that make it a game) from its representational aspects (the portrayal of the game world and its inhabitants), the emergence of the game, through play, involves a weaving together of these facets.' (Carr 2007, 225)

Whilst this is not always the case, the *possibility* for this is supported by Manovich's claim that when we engage with new media we regularly oscillate 'between illusionary segments and interactive segments' that force us to 'switch between different mental sets' (2001, 210). Similarly and perhaps more pertinently, Bogost 'argues that digital game players' [*sic*] migrate easily between the two systems of interactivity—the ergodic traversal and the orthodox negotiation of audience interactivity—to engage both their configurative and critical faculties in the production of meaning' (Apperley 2010A, 14).

Certainly it is the ability of players to do this, upon which much of the creation of historical meaning relies.

Accordingly, orthodox meaning negotiation (reading) is the mode of interaction that is used to interpret the wider cultural (in this case historical) meanings produced by the other mode of interaction: the configurative ergodic traversal (doing) of the player. As the results of the configurative process can only be interpreted within a historical context through the normal process of meaning negotiation, both modes of audience interaction are necessary to the reception of the videogame as history. However, this is not just a one-way process and to begin to describe how reading (orthodox meaning negotiation) can effect doing (configurative ergodic traversal) we must turn to Apperley's notion of counterplay.

Counterplay

Apperley uses this idea to explain some of the adaptive aspects of digital play that resist the compulsion of algorithmic structuring. Because games are disciplinary systems it is sometimes assumed that there is no room for adaptation as players are guided to particular outcomes. From such a perspective,

> 'choices, movements, actions and configurations have little meaning outside of the context of individual incidents of game-play; because they are permitted, allowed, and enabled through code….The game is a singularity, that may merely be unfolded in multiple ways designed in order to offer choice and interactivity, but because each choice is built into the game, it already exists as inert code that the player merely enacts.' (Apperley 2010A, 133-134)

This closed perspective is also used to justify the notion that the historical aspect is irrelevant aside the ergodic traversal (Galloway 2006, 85-106). Accepting this perspective means that,

> 'the analysis of play remains deliberately in an entirely self-contained domain governed by code. [Instead] Counterplay implies that to understand digital games we must move beyond the notion of the materiality of code—and a hermeneutic approach to digital game scholarship that conceptualizes digital games as clearly

> defined singular artifacts that may be examined and understand [*sic*] in isolation—in order to make visible the role of everyday life in shaping digital game play.' (Apperley 2010A, 134)

In a sense this controlling relationship is similar to that which traditional historical narratives attempt to establish with readers (Chapman 2013A). However, as shall become apparent, such relationships also often break down to some degree when these narratives are created in the playful space of the game. To an extent this is also true of algorithmic compulsion. Indeed, the distinction between the epistemological and algorithmic forms of compulsion is often lost in the historical videogame. Certainly the control/negotiation tension between player and both rules and fictive content (facilitated by each respective mode of interaction) can be meaningful. Yet, it is the exchanges between these modes and their respective tensions that are of particular interest. Apperley's counterplay, as well as allowing us to remain centred on the role of the player, allows us to begin to pick apart this complex relationship. Counterplay allows us to understand the possibility for playful resistance and adaptation that is core to the experiences offered by historical videogames. It is this tendency for counterplay which links and extends into the historical aspect, fusing it with the rules which many of videogames' possible functions as histories rely upon. The most relevant form of this digital counterplay, given this thesis' focus on historically meaningful play, is the idea of configurative resonance.

Resonance

Before approaching configurative resonance we must understand what role resonance plays more generally in player's engagements with historical games. 'The notion of resonance describes the outcomes of players' configurations that have a particular bearing on a local situation, or context' (Apperley 2010A, 134). This can literally be the location of play but also refers to the cultural and social context in which play is situated, namely through the player. So, resonance is the connection between the representation produced by the global game and the local context of the player (including their predilections, interpretations or reference to intertextual materials). The game, like and as 'the plaything - the doll that becomes a child, the broom that becomes a horse, the finger that becomes a pistol - forms the link between the pure subjectivity of the player and the concrete world that surrounds him' (Anchor 1978, 92). The

establishment of such resonance naturally relies on the *reading* (meaning negotiation) of the information of the videogame which establishes and validates its relation to a wider cultural context. When *resonance* is established the player can then *read* the configurations produced by their *doing* as relating to something other than only the game's rules and referring to something not entirely contained within the game itself. Therefore, resonance is both dependent upon and the stimulus to, the player's reading.

Thus, Apperley proposes that the experience of virtual play can establish resonance between 'the virtual (and global) world of the digital game and the real (and localized) culture of use' (2010A, 22). This supports the idea that players are able to produce/receive meaning by utilizing configuration *and* orthodox meaning negotiation. Apperley continues: 'The resonance may be established through the veracity of the games' simulation, or by way of a congruence of the experience portrayed in the game, and the lived experience of the player' (22). Congruencey in experience can simply mean the recognition of any number of human experiences and cultural themes (for example, love, power, death) and of course cultural identity markers (such as, nationality, ethnicity, gender). Similarly, veracity can also simply mean the maintenance of a recognisable representation of, or reference to, the world in which the player lives. However, in historical games, such a simulation may also display a further 'veracity' or 'congruency' to the assumed world of the past and thus by its alignment with familiar evidence or other historical narratives.

Accordingly, in historical videogames resonance can be established through its connection with the player's specifically *historical* understanding gleaned from their lived cultural experience, including their engagement with historiography in multiple forms. This is perhaps the most important element of the local context when we frame these games as histories. Sometimes this historical understanding can be as simple as a knowledge of the setting as historical and accordingly that the narrative being produced through play is a discourse about the past. Even this may be enough for a historical narrative to establish a useful resonance. However, many players will also bring more complex understandings to these games. What is important to this dynamic is that 'Some aspect of the game must be sufficiently 'real' to resonate in everyday life' (Apperley 2010A, 22). So, *historical resonance* is the recognition of the game as 'sufficiently real' (referential) in its relation to the past as it is understood by the player

and therefore, relating to a local context and constituting a shared history, according to the player's historical understanding.

The focus of mainstream videogames on well-known and culturally significant historical events (e.g. D-Day) is likely to produce configurations that players find resonant because they are 'able to recognize something from their own [cultural] life in the digital game' (Apperley 2010A, 22). Indeed, recognisable popular historiography resonates so readily with our cultural understanding that it is often used to give audiences an idea of the large-scale mythology of fantasy worlds (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007, 203). Similarly, history as a widespread and authoritarian cultural practice that tends to invoke reality because it is understood to relate to something which did once exist, obviously often has a resonant quality. Historical videogames typically have a wealth of historical referents, represented processes, artefacts and historical characters. Accordingly, resonance, which these games purposely try to cue, seems likely to often be on the basis of the intertextual relationship to the global historiography through the local site of the player's historical understanding and play. Naturally then, historical resonance is also dependent upon the link between a game's representation and the larger historical discourse.

The establishment of historical resonance is probably a complex and subjective process but it certainly relies on some kind of reading. The game is only understood to relate to an existing narrative and indeed the past itself, through the player's meaningful negotiation of the tropes and information produced by their configurative ergodic traversal. In this way the player may establish resonance with the game, or in other words a sense that the virtual/global relates to their local, lived cultural experience. However, if we are to fully understand the potential of the videogame as a historical form, we must explore the role of resonance as a two-way process of negotiation between the two modes of interaction. This necessitates the resonance produced through meaning negotiation feeding back into the actualized configurative interaction (reading affecting doing). This important dynamic can be explained by returning to Apperley's concept of configurative resonance.

Configurative Resonance/Dissonance

'Configurative resonance, or dissonance, involves the player deliberately configuring, and/or performing actions in the game—out of all the possible potential configurations and performances— in order to create specific resonances' (Apperley 2010A, 135). For example, Apperley describes a situation where a Venezuelan player will not give his avatar a red beret because it aligns with the symbols of a local political movement and he does not want trouble from other members of the internet café (135-136). Similarly, in an (admittedly anecdotal) example, recently when playing the open-world action-adventure game *Sleeping Dogs*, I found myself driving a considerable distance to replace the bloodstained and battered car I was driving before attending the wedding of another character. I found myself doing this despite being well versed in the game's rules and knowing this had no ludic advantage and that the NPCs (non-player characters) would take no notice of the state of my car. In this case I actively produced a particular configuration because I wanted to establish (or perhaps maintain) a particular resonance which, for me, turning up in my bloodstained car would have prevented or disrupted. Similarly, when playing FPS, I (and I suspect many other players) make an effort not to shoot allies even if the 'friendly fire' setting means it cannot do them harm and thus has no ludic significance. Simply because that action would not make diegetic sense for my character and so disrupts the maintenance of a particular type of resonance for me. In this way avatars can function like the masks of commedia dell'arte to prescribe the limits of resonant diegetic action for players (Jenkins 2004, 125).

Configurative resonance can then be a very important concept when we talk of meaning-making in games. Furthermore, the notion emphasizes that 'The fact that the inputs and outputs are all contained in the games' algorithm is of limited relevance if the subsequent production is able to make a meaningful connection, or disjunction, with a players' own experience of everyday life' (Apperley 2010A, 145). In the historical videogame this may entail the player making game-play decisions on the basis of their historical understanding, resonance and curiosity. For example, the possibility of configurative dissonance obviously has a great relevance when we talk of historical videogames like *Civilization* in which some of the potential gratification of play lies in the opportunities for counterfactual transgression.

Importantly, players configuring with the purpose of producing resonance/dissonance may or may not be in collusion with the games tactical objectives. Making configurative game-play decisions on the basis of resonance does not necessarily have to conflict with the rules and/or aims of the game. Indeed, as we shall see, games like *Civilization* allow room for this. However, this collusion does depend on the relationship between the games structure, historical representation and the nature of the historical resonance established through the player's historical understanding. Often, configurative resonance may be beneficial to aligning with the games win conditions, if these are constructed in reference to a particular historical discourse or narrative upon which the player's historical understanding is based. In such a case, the game will encourage the application of historical knowledge to create particular configurations, in alignment with both the systems logic and historical argument and thus rewarding players for doing so. For instance, Atkins highlights how *Civilization* rewards the player for their historical knowledge drawn from outside sources, making it 'possible to play the game intuitively and with little monitoring of the plusses and minuses that effect data' (2005, 20).

Sometimes, however, configurative resonance might involve making decisions to achieve extra-telic historical goals (inspired by extra-ludic narratives) not in alignment with the systems win conditions. Decisions may then be made to reconcile perceived dissonance (rather than merely maintain resonance) between the virtual/global and the local (and the negotiation with the global historiogaphy). This means resistance to the games natural goals and thus, arguments and involves challenging the system to see if particular aims and narratives can be achieved despite the broad ludic trend of opposition. For example, Apperley notes that players of *Europa Universalis II* will sometimes set each other historical challenges, such as only colonising the countries that were actually colonised by their chosen nation during the course of their play (Apperley 2007, 4). These challenges may also be counter-factual such as 'retaining control of Zanzibar if playing as Oman' (Apperely 2007, 4), in reality the colony was lost to the British Empire, but the joy of such a challenge is situated in its comparison to an understood historical discourse, it is only this that allows the thrill of 'what if' to be so gratifying and stimulating. The reconciliation of perceived dissonance is also commonly achieved by such communities of similarly minded players through 'modding', in other words altering the game's code itself.

We may also indulge in configurative resonance in simpler game-play moments as well by, for instance, roleplaying as a historical agent and trying to make decisions based on our interpretation of this character, or by making spatially explorative decisions in a simulation filled with historical curiosities such as architecture, objects and characters. These are easy examples, however, the possibilities for the expression of resonance through configuration (and thus the possibilities for the intentional production of particular historical experience/discourse) in digital game-play are hugely numerous and dependent on the variation in design structures as well as the subjectivity and cultural context of individual players. Again, much depends (as with all histories) on the player's previous knowledge but it is even possible that players may note historical information even if only through determining its difference to the resonant configuration that they prefer.

In moments of configurative resonance or dissonance 'the rhythm of play not only accommodates or harmonizes with everyday life, but also establishes a contextual significance that speaks to the players' experience of everyday life' (Apperley 2010A, 135). It is partially this that allows for games to offer divergent, emergent and experiential user-led experiences whilst still allowing for the production of narrative and an engagement with existing historical discourse. In this way, and this is key, sometimes when we interact with the historical videogame we can go beyond just negotiating the representational meaning of our strategic ludic actions in relation to our wider historical understanding, we are also potentially using these readings to influence our future game-play actions through a resonant exchange.

It is clear that resonance is important to understanding historical play as it can motivate player's configurative decisions to be cued by historical concerns as well as (or even despite) the intrinsic goals of the ludic system. The establishment of historical resonance is of course reliant on both modes of interaction, polysemic-reading/meaning negotiation and playful polyvalent-doing/configurative ergodic traversal. However, resonance is also key to the player's ability to mediate between modes and can therefore be understood in itself as a dual process of negotiation between the two forms of interaction and the virtual representation, player and context of play. Historical meaning production in the videogame is not just dependent on the reading *or* doing aspects of play but also on the interplays between these two forms of interaction, as negotiated by the establishment of resonance. These complementary and

overdeterminate tensions are core to the videogame as history, a form which supports actions which are simultaneously ludic and representational.

Table of Possible Configurative Responses to *Historical* Resonance

Historical Resonance*

Game/Global ----------Player/local

* Recognition by player of game as 'sufficiently real' and relating to a local context (shared history).

If the above *historical* resonance is established then these are the following ways I propose it can affect configuration:

1. If the player is satisfied with the resonant relationship they can seek to accentuate/maintain it, accepting the game's claims (and depending on game-structure, likely meeting its ludic demands), e.g. historical roleplay.

2. OR purposely create dissonance between the local and the global (active counter-history).

3. If the player finds elements of the games historical representation dissonant, they can seek to reconcile them with the(ir perception of the global historiography through the) local context. This may mean relinquishing auto-telic goals or even creating mods (digital-ludic revisionism).

4. OR they can explore and question these perceived limitations (even disputing the claims) of the games dissonant representation through particular testing configurations (perhaps transgressive play) including/OR

5. (Cued by the games inherently dissonant ludic structure) maintaining the dissonance between the local and the global (passive counter-history).

The above options are the possible purposeful configurative responses to the establishment of historical resonance between player and game that I suggest. However, the majority of players will probably, in the majority of game-play moments,

choose on the basis of strategy in accordance to the games ludic model and its challenges. For some players, however, this will not be the sole focus and the historical representation can even become privileged. Furthermore, even the most strategically focused player may sometimes make decisions based on a particular resonance. It also seems unlikely that players' relations to games will remain entirely static, even between moments of game-play.

Importantly, it seems that resonant decisions may be more likely to occur, even to particularly ludically minded players, if the game-play choice is insignificant or arbitrary in terms of its ludic consequences and yet still has a representational aspect or significance. This may also occur if multiple but equally valuable choices are available in games with multiple and complex affordances and customisation such as *Civilization* or in (a non-historical example) the *Bioshock* series. Lastly, as Carr notes, elements of the game may also be newly encountered and 'In such cases, the assessment of a variable might be informed by personal, extra-gamic connotations or associations' (Carr 2007, 228). This means that novice players may be more likely to configure on the basis of resonance as they may be unaware of the tactical significance of game-play decisions and thus have to choose on a different basis.

Even when players only engage strategically with a game this may still involve, at least to some degree, acknowledging, negotiating and exploring a historical representation through play (and exploring the games procedural model about the local). Often players may use the representation for clues about the ludic aspect (Juul 2005, 176) or even turn to historiography for help with the game (Taylor 2003, n.p.). This said, strategic players may rarely, if ever, purposely configure on the basis of this relation, though potentially dissonant/resonant (readable) relations will of course still be created through the encouragement of the games rules and challenges. For instance, *Civilization* encourages the establishment of dissonance with the (implied) local context, with counterfactual play being a natural part of the most efficient strategies as necessitated by the games rules and goals. By contrast, most often, confronting the challenges of *Brothers in Arms* in the ways the game encourages produces a resonance with the (implied) local context.

It is likely that there are many unforeseen spaces that exist between these options, and often the player will be negotiating with many different parts of a game at once and within multiple differing moments of game-play, as well as quite possibly instances of

play. This process is probably complex. However, as a way of understanding broad possibilities and of beginning to understand the negotiation of individual elements in game-play moments, I believe my proposed model to be useful for understanding the possible role and importance of resonance (and thus representation) in the configuration of historical videogames.

History as Configurative Practice

Configuration is not a *practice* (and it is certainly always this) limited to the digital text alone (Bogost 2006, 14). Accepting configuration as a practice which can perfectly feasibly be divorced from the digital forms of knowledge production and mediation, allows us to consider the production of history itself in these terms. When creating a historical narrative a historian makes story/content decisions by negotiating the huge (mostly pre-textualised) mass that is the evidence and historiography of the past. From this mass the historian 'chooses to invoke who *said* what, who *did* what, assumes there are mechanisms that will explain to us why they did it, what *agencies* and *structures* operate(d), what events were *significant* and which were not' (Munslow 2007B, 18). Thus, the historian constructively makes story/content decisions and configures a story space, 'the authored model of what, how, when, why and to whom things happened in the past, which the reader/consumer enters into when they read, view or 'experience' the past, constituted as history' (Munslow 2007B, 6), and eventually narrative, from what they determine to be units of evidence.

This is somewhat comparable to configuration in computer science terms which is broadly defined as the organisation of units 'according to their nature, number, and chief characteristics' ("computer configuration", *Wikipedia*). Of course where the construction of the historical videogame (and the study of history as a whole) differs from the logic driven variables of computer science is that the relative value of the units is *interpreted* and *decided* in a wholly more subjective process. Hence, the determination of the nature and characteristics of the references and thus the subsequent configuration of the story space, is determined by the historian according to their epistemological, aesthetic and ideological choices, as well as the raft of other decisions that we are by now, hopefully, familiar with. Nonetheless, this configuration of the story space can also be understood as a form of polyvalent doing because 'the story space clearly references a part of the once real world' (Munslow 2007B, 18) and is

made up of partially preformed elements (like evidence and other narratives) and yet is also clearly formed from a number of aesthetic and subjective interpretations and decisions. The configuration of the historical story-space, like the configuration of the game, is, arguably, polyvalent. The selection and interpretations of evidence and subsequent formations are densely multiple and yet they are still restricted because history, as a referential literature, is not fiction but fictive and historians still have an ethical duty to data and of course normally a desire to be taken seriously.[1]

Using evidence selection and time frames the historian configures the boundaries of the story from a much larger shared (global) cultural space filled with reference, opinion and narrative that is also negotiated through the historian's (local) understanding. Obviously this negotiation is also based on resonance (the, often subjective, determination of the 'sufficiently real') and in this sense configurative resonance is also at the heart of academic historical practice. This of course means that the production of history can be seen as both (referential) configurative traversal and a (partly-fictional) creative (aesthetic, ideological etc) narrative meaning negotiation. Thus history as a productive practice cannot only be seen as engaging the two modes of interactivity (configuration and meaning negotiation); it can even be proposed that in this there is also a tension between discipline and adaptation, with rules, formed from the evidence, epistemology and the whole raft of social and cultural pressures, constantly negotiating with the historian's creative and interpretative agency (Chapman 2013A).

This comparison made, we must still accept that the modern videogame's particular and typically reactive, structured, restrictive and demanding form of configurative interaction does have unique properties. However, it is still useful to the ideas discussed below to note that configuration as a practice is not in any way irreconcilable with (indeed it seems integral to) the historian's process. If configuration (the actualized aspect of interaction) is normally a practice that is limited to the historian at the point of production, leaving the audience agency only in terms of orthodox meaning negotiation, then what does this mean to videogame based histories which also necessitate players engaging in configurative ergodic traversal?

[1] This is why postmodernism does not justify and has 'nothing to do with, for example, 'telling lies about Hitler', which is entirely a matter of false data and spurious inferences' (Munslow 2007, 39).

The Player-Historian and the Digital Story Space

If history is a process of active configuration and videogames also involve a process of active configuration, it becomes apparent that historical videogames naturally entail a shift in the role of the audience (who become active players) from reception (an already unstable category) to production in a tangible, mechanical, sense. This leads to a deep tension between the authorial control of traditional historical narrative associated with (generally) linear narration and the naturally uncertain nature of games. So what is actually happening in terms of producing historical meaning/narrative when we play historical videogames?

Firstly, the configurative structure of the videogame inherently breeds multiplicity. When I make a decision in a videogame there are clearly at least two potential results and responsive consequences supporting my ability to do so. This means that the common videogame must be pre-programmed with huge numbers of procedural responses of varying relative value and consequence that, governed by super-sets of rules, respond to the inputs of players. In the historical videogame it is likely that the majority of these possible configurations, whilst supporting and resulting from play, also have the potential to be mimetically significant, constitute narrative structures and historically contextualise player actions. Thus the normal opportunities for meaning negotiation according to our traditional models of reception are amplified within the videogame as the final narrative configuration from which meaning can be drawn is created from a potentially huge array of possibilities. This emergent selection is from, what Aarseth would broadly call 'textons' (1997, 62) but what I, inspired by Barthes (1973, 13), more specifically (acknowledging the narrative status of history) refer to as 'lexia'.

Despite the claims of their more hyperbolic supporters, videogames are not completely free-play narrative devices and like all representational text there is a degree of control inherent to the process of reception. Even in *Civilization*, which features a vast array of multi-combinable lexia, Meier and the other developers have decided which can be interplayed, in what order and what the consequences of these combinations are. In short, establishing rules and win conditions (with concurrent representational outcomes) means that the ideological meaning that the developer-historian wants to infer can still be strongly produced despite being through multiple and variable narratives. However, the fact that the text relies on decision-making, means that there will always be an

inherent multiplicitousness to its narrative structure that is more uncommon in other forms and which *structures*, *necessitates* and *actualizes*, the player's role in narration.

Accordingly, whilst the videogame can still be firm in its particular narrative outcomes and configurations, we will always be presented with some alternatives and will be able to at least attempt these alternatives, even if these are met by the historian's algorithmic model with an outcome and rhetoric, of failure. Such a rhetoric may in fact only reinforce the expressed position of the developer but even in this case it is likely to provide a better understanding of the underlying logic and significance of particular elements of their argument.

This space for emergent narrative production (through challenge and uncertainty) is hugely important to discussions involving the nature of the videogame as a historical form and could very well prove to be the most important offer that the medium makes. This is so important because I propose that configuration in the ergodic text of the historical videogame, in narrative terms, amounts to the player being given access to *actualized configurative-production within the 'story space'* - 'the world of the once real past...as imagined (i.e., fictively constructed) by the historian and which the history consumer is invited to visit through the history' (Munslow 2007B, 18). This *actualized* story space role is normally the sole preserve of the historian/author. However, the player is free to share in authorship, to actively engage with and emergently configure the historical elements that fill the story space. How much player agency is available in this configurative-production is of course dependent on the structures of the particular game (the further detailing of which is the aim of this thesis), but this occurs in *all* historical videogames to a greater or lesser extent**.**

Games may indeed be action, but the concept of configurative resonance and the opportunities for the normal interpretive reader/writer meaning-making process that this in fact relies upon, allow us to see that our actions (if we choose interpret them thus) are also historical. Through play in this manner, historical narratives can be simultaneously emergently configured *and* received within the virtual space, which is an open digital manifestation of the traditional historian's story space. Of course this means that 'because play is instantiated only through players' actions, tensions arise over who exactly is the "author" of the game experience' (Squire 2006, 21).

'Game designers "write" the *parameters* for players' experience', simultaneously working as historians carving out a (hi)story space for the player to make meaning within and accordingly, 'the game experience as such is best described as an interaction between the game designer and player' (Squire 2006, 21). This means that there are of course limits to the player's agency and generally (as with most histories) they cannot change the aforementioned boundaries of the story space, introducing new evidence at will or extending the spatial or temporal scope of the game's simulation. This said, often tech savvy fans will modify (mod) their favourite games by rewriting an element of its code because, though the game produces a historical resonance, there are still elements within this broader trend that the player finds dissonant (see table). This can create a desire to reconcile these elements.

This tension between a resonant historical videogame and smaller dissonant elements is probably useful in that it could motivate a player to engage their critical faculties and to actualize this negotiation in their configuration if possible. In these moments engagement with the system becomes even more a process of historical discourse. However, for some players this normal process of configuration is not enough. The system may not be expressive enough to support their perspective and they may remain unsatisfied, turning instead to modding to ensure that the game aligns with what they consider to be historically accurate. Such an action changes the possible configurations of the game and thus, the story space itself. Though modding steps outside the boundaries of the programme, it is also often motivated by resonance (or rather the desire to create resonance from dissonance) just like the pursuit of extra-telic historical goals. In fact, the modder, may even introduce new sources and thus engage in the story/content decisions that are, even within the inclusive realm of the historical videogame, normally under the firm control of the developer-historian. Historical modding moves the player-audience even closer to the role of historian/producer as they breach the restrictions of the developer created story space itself, fusing its digital manifestation with a story space of his or her own design, filled with the evidence, causal links and narrative that they consider significant enough to configure from the larger cultural mass of history. It is for this reason that I propose we consider the historical modder as a kind of *popular digital-ludic revisionist* (Chapman 2013A, 6). Despite these modders, for the majority of players, configuration within a structurally finite virtual story space (as the developer has designed it) is normal.

The active story-space interventions of historical videogames mean that the audience plays a larger role in the process of narration; play within the story space means involvement in the construction of the narrative itself. The player is both narrator and narratee. It can be argued that there is a similar dynamic within all historical narratives as all involve writerly meaning creation and reception. However, within the historical videogame, because of the ergodic traversal it requires, this process is brought to the fore and becomes purposeful and physically *actualized* unlike any other common historical form. This huge increase in reader/player agency means the audience potentially having access to, for instance, emplotment, duration, frequency, order, introducing tropes and assigning primacy to particular narrative outcomes (goals) or pieces of evidence through their actions, making ethical and ideological choices, affecting agent intentionality, focalisation and a whole wealth of other narrative elements. Such a process can produce wildly divergent narratives within the same story/game space. Different game-structures allow agency in different ways and will assign primacy to different historical functions and characteristics of narrative. However, agency over narration as a feature of play within the virtual story space occurs in all historical videogames to some degree. In this particular mode of expression, the moment of reception is simultaneously a moment of actualized production and a new space of meaning production, the story-play-space, is established.

The Videogame-*as*-History

My perspective, by noting the familiar narrative status of the historical videogame, is not meant to reduce the achievements or unique nature of the form in any way, nor ignore the 'doing' aspect of playful history. In fact, the opposite is my intent; to outline how the traditional narrative dynamic of history is affected by the actualized agency the medium demands. And by the reinvestigation and rethinking of history as narrative in production, reception and research, such agency entails.

As we shall see, some of these games question our preconceived notions of 'proper' history, and easily involve a popular audience perhaps bored with the more strictly formalised experiences on offer from entrenched forms. By comparison, the videogame form irresistibly structures audience participation through its configurative process that partially determines the narrative we are presented with. In this way the form can create opportunities for the more familiar interaction of meaning negotiation to occur in a way

that encourages playful, irreverent exploration of meaning that other more traditional modes can achieve, but are perhaps not so intrinsically suited to.

As shall become apparent, even the inflexible empirical historical narrative can be made to more heavily emphasize the fluid nature of meaning creation. Furthermore, the tensions of the historical videogame between compulsion/production and adaption/reception can also create feedback loops of historical worth. Not only can the player explore the meaning of the text using their usual critical negotiation but (through configurative resonance) this can also be inter*played* with their game-play decisions and can result in multiple possible configurations being 'tested' against the games overall ludic-narrative model. Historical games often allow us to refute, agree or more importantly, experiment, through our inputs.

Such resonantly motivated actions will, meet an immediate response from the text (the historian). Consequently, even punishment can have the valuable effect of showing us the underlying logic of the game's irrefutable (at least through action) historical claims, giving clarity to the developer-historian's expressed argument and the limits of the system. Given that we retain conventional meaning negotiation, perhaps this allows for greater insight into the representation itself. Certainly when we play we can test various configurations (narratives) and accordingly meanings, within and against, the rules that create the fictive world of the game. This allows for the emergent creation of historical discourse. The historian's assumptions about the past are outlined and experienced by the player within a rules-based story space that allows us to test its limits through action. Subsequently, 'Simulations, because they are designed to be tried over and over again, give the interactor a vehicle to test the range of possibilities about how a decision at one point in time could affect a wide range of possible outcomes in the future' (Taylor 2003, n.p.), at least according to the developer-historian's particular representation. Accordingly, it is possible that though the meaning-making dynamic is (like in literature) dependent on, amongst other things, the resonance/dissonance with the local context, perhaps games allow us to gain greater insight into the potential consequences that our interpretations have (within a given narrative) and thus perhaps give us a further chance to re-evaluate the meanings we infer.

This multiplicity and feedback means that it is tempting to assert that 'because of play, interactivity and agency, the 'reading position' of the player is more multiple and

contesting, more critical and assertive, than that offered to viewers, gazers or readers' (Carr 2007, 232). However, as Carr herself notes, this is extremely difficult to prove and whilst a seemingly logical possibility, conclusively outlining this without empirical data means making assumptions about the subjective player and local context. Furthermore, as discussed later, the epistemological implications of this process of learning to play are far from simple. What is certain is that what is at play in any historical videogame is 'a dynamic model that responds to the reader in a very immediate, tangible way' (Taylor 2003, n.p.). Our game-play actions are physical and have meaning in this very real sense, however, in the historical videogame our choices may also have meaning according to a wider representational context and thus have the possibility to engage with our 'realities'. Furthermore, in the videogame we can often feed resonances established through this process back into the system as inputs to receive further authorial responses.

Accordingly, game-play (configurative ergodic traversal/doing) produces representations, the representative meanings of which are negotiated (orthodox meaning negotiation/reading). This may establish a resonance with the player's historical understanding and (as configurative resonance) feed back into productive game-play and as part of a dynamic discursive historical feedback loop, create more configurations to be read. Of course configurative resonance is not necessary for us to benefit from a historical game. Often a player can learn about history and experience the arguments the game makes through only following its directions for good strategic play. In this case only the most basic level of historical resonance is required (the understanding of the game as relating to a shared history) to establish the one-way resonant relationship (configuration to reading). As shall become apparent, this is the case with much of what the *Brother in Arms* series offers. However it is also worth noting that often more complex historical play does rely on historical resonance feeding back into configuration as well.

Like other forms, the videogame brings us no nearer to recovering the past, though it often gives the seductive impression of doing so. However, it can allow us to explore particular representations of the past through an engagement with actual playful processes, as well as more traditional modes of representation. This leads to a potentially rich space depending on the particular rhythms of play, even between game-play moments or instances of play, as well as the localized cultural context in which

play is situated through the player. And, in which the developer-historian's causal nexus, upon which the videogame based historical narrative rests, sits at the fingertips of the player entwined as procedural processes that produce emergent narrative representations of the past through interaction.

It should be noted, however, that laying this theory of dual and complimentary interaction (reading and doing), out on the page gives a false impression as to the act of historical play. In that moment, at its best, the distinctiveness between the two modes is lost. What I am proposing, is that an ontological collapse between the configurative ergodic traversal of the videogame and the traditional negotiation of historical narrative meaning is *possible* to establish, as what the player experiences becomes in the moment of play, singularly history, albeit a history that is dependent on being both ludic and narratorial.[2] Games can also entail an ontological dissonance in the separate-ness of the roles of historian and audience as the player takes an actualized role in the story space. In doing so, they become junior partner in the authoring of their own experience. There are obvious similarities in this dually interactive process of historical game-play to the configurative and negotiated production (within an epistemological, methodological and ethical rule set) of historical story spaces discussed earlier. These similarities, the configurative tension between reference and representation, player-historian and historian/game, are no accident and this well emphasizes the shift in the onus of creation that the agency inherent to the videogame entails.

At its best, when we are playing the right historical videogame, in the right way, we are not just receiving a mimetic representation or slavishly performing the actions of a game, we are simultaneously 'doing' history *and* reading it, blurring the boundaries between production and reception. In the videogame the player/reader's, already effective, role in the construction of historical meaning and entry into the story space is *accentuated*, *necessitated* and *actualized* and in this at least, it is quite unlike any of our other forms. It is for this reason that I propose we understand the narrative of historical videogames as produced through an *active historical discourse* between player and developer-historian and that we must thus explore narrative as it is experienced and created during play/narration. In this way the negotiation (reading) and configuration (doing) of both player and historian within a shared story-play-space produces the

[2] Of course it is also possible that what the player experiences is just game-play devoid of any historical significance.

eventual narrative. Such a space has the potential to be both historical and playful and it is for this reason that I believe when we play a historical videogame we are often actually playfully establishing a new historical space between developer-historian and player (and of course machine): the (hi)story-play-space.

Whilst the ambiguity of the moment of play means that this will not be the experience of every player, for the videogame to function as a history, as obviously for some it does, then the player must engage simultaneously and to some degree over-determinately, in both forms of interaction: configurative ergodic traversal and orthodox meaning negotiation. As we have seen, whilst reading always affects meaning, in the videogame this is a far more complex process because of its dependence on a narrative which is continually emergently rearranged within an open, expressive and emergent story space. Accordingly, narrative and narration, configuration and meaning negotiation, are constantly in shift through a playful process. Like any historical text, games invites us into their mimetic space but in the (hi)story-play-space the narrative is only partially finished, awaiting our active narration in an even more tangible (actualized) sense than critical theory would normally imply.

Control and Conclusion

'Counterplay suggests that whatever games may do to us, this issue is inseparable from what we do to them' (Apperley 2010A, 8). We can just as easily make this statement about history itself, however, certainly in the videogame form this dynamic becomes even more apparent.

As we have explored, games are indeed systems of compulsion but there is always a playful adaptive element and the possibility for complex exchanges of meaning. As noted, key to this is the concept of resonance which not only relates both the local (player and context of play) and global (game and wider historiography) but also allows for the exchanges between the modes of interactivity. Understanding this allows us to see that, 'Digital game play, necessarily involves a creative margin. This space is established through the rules of the game, and the coded limits of the gamespace, but within these established boundaries it has no other limitations' (Apperley 2010A, 144). As we have explored here, choices within such a space can be inquisitive, playful, expressive, personal and meaningful and can be made on a variety of basis. The

existence of this playful margin has obvious 'consequences for arguments that position digital games as so thoroughly imbricated in the control society that they can neither provide "meaningful" choices, or are able to operate on the level of critique' (Apperley 2010A, 140) and thus are unable to work as history. An understanding of the model I propose here (of feedback between the interactive modes in the creation of historical meaning through play) allows an understanding of the creative margin as potentially expressive of wider concerns than just play as an intrinsic activity or the implicit logic of the system. Play can and is, determined by, situated in, and even affects, larger cultural systems. The fact that we have the ability to configuratively create resonance or dissonance rejects the notions of absolute compulsion within the videogame whilst emphasizing its capabilities as a new form of historical representation.

This adaptive aspect and possibility for counterplay is further compounded when we consider the agency inherent to orthodox meaning negotiation and the possibility for this to feed back into configuration in a two-way relation mediated by resonance. This creative margin, can therefore, in the terms of the historical videogame be understood as the player-permeable virtual developer-historian's story space and the transformation of this into the (hi)story-play-space. Each historical game is a potential (hi)story-play-space, however, the player's entry into this space will have vastly different opportunities depending on how this entry is formed, framed and constricted. It is how these story-space boundaries and structures are combined with the inherent agency discussed here, that determines the particular opportunities and potential functions (perhaps even core functionality) offered by a historical game. Additionally, in return 'The burden of history weighs heavily upon both the construction of the subject-player and the environment that defines and constrains the player's possibilities' (Urrichio 2005, 334). The exploration of these different coded limitations and structures which produce and utilize different creative margins, representational aesthetics and consequent affordances is exactly what will be explored in the remainder of this thesis, starting with simulation styles and their relation to epistemology.

Chapter 2
Epistemology and Simulation

'The code determines the rules of the game – the way it operates. And if the rules promote a particular way of looking at the world – if they make an argument in code for a particular worldview....then we need to understand which rules, *which games*, best embody the historical epistemologies we wish to teach.'

- Kee and Graham forthcoming, 5

When we first start a historical videogame, whether we acknowledge it consciously or not, the first thing we are struck by is its simulation style. Will the game try to make us feel like we witness the past or will it simply attempt to enable us to understand and participate in its argument *about* the past? Even before this, likely when making decisions about whether or not to purchase the game, it will have already started to cue us through its marketing material, previews, reviews, box-art and blurb, into understanding its style of representation, its claimed relationship to the past, its epistemology.

Other scholars have hinted at the possibility for broad divisions in historical videogames. Macallum-Stewart and Parsler write of two significant ways in which the games industry has dealt with the tensions between a history of linearity in design and the increasing need for historical complexity (2007, 204). Some games, they write, deal with these issues by limiting 'historical scope... [and] focus on very specific battles, units or moments of history, in order to avoid complex retellings of history', whilst others deal with these issues by 'deliberately exploiting the idea of counterfactualism in history games' (205). This is an important start to thinking about different types of engagements with history by games and does indeed apply to *Brother in Arms* in the first instance (as MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler note) and *Civilization* in the second. Similarly, Urrichio also gives us an excellent start in his seminal piece where he notes that,

> 'One sort, such as the 1967 Grand Prix Legends game or the Battle of the Bulge, is specific in the sense that it deals with a particular historical event—a race, a battle—allowing the player to engage in a speculative or ''what if'' encounter

> with a particular past. In these games, efforts are usually taken to maximize the accuracy of historical detail, allowing the setting and conditions to constrain and shape game play. At the other extreme are games that deal with historical process in a somewhat abstracted or structural manner.' (Urrichio 2005, 328)

Whilst Urrichio's categories are useful as a starting point they are mainly concerned with historical specificity and scope and do not explicitly deal with the structures at the heart of the form which enable such interactions with the past-*as*-history. Furthermore, Urrichio's division (understandably given the more limited scope of his study) is concerned with a few overall game-structures and conflates multiple structural categories and thus somewhat lacks nuance. Such conflation becomes problematic when faced with new combinative game-structures that fall between or even completely outside such divisions. Accordingly what is needed is a division that accounts for the broad division of styles of historical representation whilst sufficiently accounting for the possibility of these being combined in different ways with different structures across the broad range of historical videogames.

After playing many historical videogames over a number of years, I propose two broad categories of historical simulation: 'realist' and 'conceptual'. The games I have chosen for analysis (*BiA* and *Civilization*) exemplify each of these categories respectively. Though there are typically many structures at play in the modern historical videogame (the core few of which will be examined within these pages) it is often commonly held that, 'graphics are probably the most important way in which [video]games project worlds' (Juul 2005, 134). Consequently it is on this component that much of the initial delineation between my simulation types rests. However, as shall become apparent over the course of this chapter, the significance of graphics is often in its subordination to other structures and graphics are by no means the sole way that games function as historical simulations. Though all of the core structures described within these pages are important in the historical possibilities offered by particular game-structures, it is the simulation category which ties the framework together.

The categories generally represent the central rhetoric of the game's meaning production and deal in the balance and dynamics of the triangular relationship between the audio-visual, ludic and the past which the games represent. Accordingly, the categories are then perhaps best understood as stylistic variations in the virtual

aesthetics of historical description, that attempt representation in ways that can usefully be understood (particularly for the purposes of ascertaining a particular games historical function) as distinct. Naturally these categories also tend to carry particular epistemological inferences that are also discussed below.

Realist Historical Simulations

Examples include: *Brothers in Arms* (series), *IL-2 Sturmovik,* (series), *Call of Duty* (early series), *LA Noire*, *Red Orchestra* (series), *Medal of Honor* (early series), *Red Dead Redemption*, *Mafia* (series), *Grand Prix Legends*.

When we speak of a 'realist' simulation we do not refer to notions such as the truthfulness or veracity of its narrative. Instead we are referring to the *style* of the game-based representation rather than the content of the history. Such simulations are instead characterised in a number of ways. For example,

- **Realist historical simulations are most obviously characterised by a 'realistic' audio-visual style.**

By this we mean that the aim is to construct environments, objects, events and characters that show a high degree of audio-visual fidelity to the physical evidence of the past and the everyday world we live in, that are convincing and which aid the audience in their suspension of disbelief. The idea behind realist historical simulations is that the contained events should look close (or perhaps more accurately convince the audience that they look close) to how they would have looked to the original agents of the past as far as possible. In 2002 the best example of the realist mode in a historical FPS would probably have been *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, a game that's realist achievements have been far surpassed in the decade since. Nevertheless the game is realist because of its intent, claims and its stylistic approach to representation and the past. It is upon this which the realist category rests rather than the actual fidelity of the game's representation to reality (as troubling a category as this is).

Nevertheless, we can say that within the realist simulation the audio/visual elements feature little overt metaphorization and are represented in familiar visual codes. The realist simulation is concerned with producing a representation of the past as direct

human experience. Conversely, whilst such simulations are partially designed according to the appearances suggested by historical evidence,

- **This is also done by using stylistic techniques for visual 'realism' drawn from a long cultural history of representation particularly the familiar audio-visual codes of Western cinematic realism.**

Perhaps the best example of this is the projected illusion of 3D space that we accept almost without thinking because of

> 'culturally established pictorial conventions of spatial representation (such as perspective) established centuries ago for static images. One is not navigating space, but projecting, in the imagination, the implications of manipulating an interactive image medium in a way that will generate a presumed logical next step in a stream of images that represent a space perspectivally from a sequence of points of view.' (Penny 2006, 77)

Whilst cinema (despite naturalistic cinematography such as 'shaky cam') struggles with the sense of presence that games as procedural texts find easy, games' dependence on graphics means that their realist representations are incredibly dependent on good design and technology. For example the animated (rather than acted) and drawn (rather than filmed) characters of *BiA* at best lack impact or create a distance between themselves and the player and at worst trigger an 'uncanny valley' (Masahiro 2012) response. Accordingly, exchanges sometimes lack the impact of cinema. Despite significant differences such as these, the desire to create believable fictive worlds and the sharing of a great deal of techniques to do so means that cinematic realism is a good starting point to understand the approach to history of the realist simulation.

- **The realist simulation will also feature 'realistic' behaviours in terms of the aesthetic physics and the ludic values of objects and characters with which we can interact, which, as far as possible, work as direct and clear representations of the real properties and systems of the world we live in (and therefore the assumed world of the past).**

Nonetheless, such simulations are still representations and thus are incredibly restrictive. For example, though expert game players used to realist simulation tropes will likely immediately perceive what object and environment behaviours are possible and thus present in the historical simulation, often novice players will not (Linderoth and Bennerstedt 2007). Thus the logic of 'reality' is not sufficient for the simulated (mimetic) and thus limited historical environment of games like *BiA*, despite the use of the realist *style*. After all, the purpose of a game or film, however realist in its approach, is not to accurately reflect reality but to represent it as it can be represented within the chosen form.

Accordingly, 'In the game design process, the game designer must select which aspects of the fictional world to actually implement in the game rules' (Juul 2005, 163), a form of story/content decisions and emplotment that is perhaps unique to the game form. Designing objects that behave believably and are virtual (i.e. simulative *and* interactive), not merely fictional (or fictive), creates increasing levels of complexity in a games design. More interactive environments requires the implementation of further inter-layered rule sets to control the various reactions of the game's elements, not only in relation to each other, but also to the more unpredictable (emergent) actions of the player and this, given commercial pressures, can require significant resources. As a result,

- **An inverse relationship between the realist detail and fidelity of a simulation and the scope of its historical representation is normally observable**.

This means that realist simulations tend to focus on small groups or individuals. This is certainly the case with the *BiA* series which has a very narrow focus on WW2 combat. The games only focus on the experiences of a small number of lower ranked soldiers on the frontline, not the causes, grand strategies and political complexities of the war, nor the home front. In its game-play aspect and environments *BiA* focuses only on (mainly infantry) combat (largely eschewing even the time between engagements) but in this aspect it does present a strong representation. Though these restrictions on focus can obviously be very problematic there is also an argument to be made that the restrictive nature of the realist simulation and the concurrent focus on the experience of singular agents, particularly those that could not influence the broad trend of events, can be seen

as a turn toward 'history from below'. Regardless, these restrictions are made necessary given the typically rich audio-visual representations and this also results in perhaps the most important characteristics of realist simulation.

- **The aesthetics of historical description mostly operate through the audio-visual aspect whereby most of the data is found and the historical representation constructed.**

- **Thus, the realist simulation works by *showing* us the past (or at least claiming to).**

In actual fact what we are presented with is merely a representation constructed in the *realist style*, though, importantly, one that undoubtedly shares some perceptual information with the past.

Benefits of the Realist Simulation

- **Such simulations are relatively easy to interpret and negotiate with.**

The realist style of simulations like *BiA* means that the link between the representation and the represented is easily established to an audience. For example, when we see German soldiers in the game it requires little negotiation to link this to the historical agents that are represented by this (and thus the larger historical discourse that the game engages). Of course, this requires a level of engagement with the larger historical meta-discourse but even if the player did not understand the historical significance of the characters, the audio-visual-ludic fidelity would enable them to understand, that these are armed men in uniforms who are enemy soldiers opposed to the American soldiers who the player fights as. Additionally, this ease of interpretation is also partially enabled because realist games (though they have also developed their own codes) still work through 'iconic signs' that 'reproduce the conditions of perception in the receiver' (Eco cited in Hall 2002, 305). Because these 'perceptual codes are so widely distributed, denotative visual signs probably give rise to less 'misunderstandings'' (Hall 2002, 305). Such ease of visual interpretation can be vitally important to a game's function, as shall become apparent. This of course also means that realist simulations,

- **Can easily engage with existing realist visual discourses and tropes from, for instance, film or television.**

Exchanges of this sort are not difficult to find. However perhaps most interesting in this regard is Steven Spielberg's development of *Medal of Honor*. For this game Spielberg decided to use the same visual style as *Saving Private Ryan* which ensured the film looked like 'color footage from the 1940s rather than the Technicolor epics of old Hollywood' (Rath 2012, n.p.). This was an effort to reject Hollywood's glamorised representations of WW2. However, as Rath continues to point out, this style has since become the visual style of authenticity within the entire shooter genre.

Naturally the creation of *BiA* as a realist historical virtual environment entails creating thousands of virtual replicas of the physical evidence of the past. Similarly, environments in *BiA* are heavily based on historically-contemporary photographs of the battle sites. Whilst this obviously entails (given the focus of the game) creating uniforms, weapons, vehicles, character models and architecture, really this is just the beginning. Every building must be filled with historically accurate or typical, everyday objects such as tables, crockery, books, chairs, paintings, wallpaper and clocks. So too, the outside environments must also feature historically appropriate constructs such as fencing, flora, agricultural tools and vehicles, roads, billboards, lampposts, animals, bicycles, weather and lighting.

Simply, a daunting list of referential objects must populate the game space to maintain the coherency of the fictive world of a realist simulation (see figure 2.1). Thus, even before we consider the pre-scripted (framing) narrative, cut-scenes and dialogue, extra-ludic documents, photographs and videos and the ludic structures it is apparent that realist simulations necessarily have,

- **Extremely heavy and detailed visual data loads.**

Indeed, as Rosenstone notes of film, 'One does not need to be an expert to discover this - all one need do is attempt to render into words everything that might appear in a single shot from a movie' (1995, 28).

Figure 2.1 - A typical room of *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* (Playstationwallpapers.com)

- **Thus realist games, like film, possess 'a plenitude of visual details, an excessive particularity compared to the verbal [or written] version, a plenitude aptly called by certain aestheticians visual "over-specification" (*uberstimmtheit*).'** (Chatman 1980, 126)

This over-specification means that the realist simulation can contain a data load that is not only comparable to literary history but that has a focus and density quite beyond that which it is easily possible to convey in words. This answers criticisms often aimed at visual forms of history (particularly film) which tend to revolve around low information loads. As shall become apparent this visual particularity is absolutely key to the game's most important historical functions. This over-specification is what allows the meaning-making aesthetics of historical description to function mainly in the audio-visual component. Whilst this renders videogames similar in function to conventional historical film,

- **In the videogame this over-specification is compounded by the player's spatial agency (the avatar's placement within the space), control over the virtual gaze (camera) and the lessened pressure from the narrative component (in comparison to historical film).**

This gives the player particular freedom to examine the historical environment and objects in three dimensions rather than viewing historical objects from a fixed perspective as with film. Similarly, player-agency means that the realist videogame neatly sidesteps the criticism that is levelled at this over-specification in film, namely that we cannot appreciate many of these plenteous details as 'pressure from the narrative component is too great. Events move too fast' (Chatman 1980, 126). In videogames such as *BiA*, the situation is partly reversed and the player can exert pressure on the progression and compression of the narrative emergently. Once ludic pressures are dealt with, in *BiA* at least, the player is often free to investigate the now cleared and safe historical space before moving onward. Furthermore, during the length of game-play (the average FPS is 6-12 hours) the player is likely to spend longer with and more frequently encounter a given type of space (e.g. rural Normandy) than we would expect of the viewer of a film. Each of these factors increases the opportunities for investigation of the available historical visual data of *BiA*, than one would comparably expect from a similar, yet filmic, narrative.

- **This allows the realist simulation to have some limited qualities of a museum (which also often features simulated evidence).**

Indeed as Taylor notes, whilst museums 'have their limits as historical representations...they have the ability to give some texture to the past in ways a written text often cannot. Gaming technology is already integrating many of these emerging multimedia elements' (2003, n.p.). In fact, games even go beyond this.

- **The demands of diegetic realism add another layer of data as the environments in which the virtual replicas of historical evidence are situated must be coherent to the evidence, as should the objects' inclusion and arrangement, what I term 'spatio-realist emplotment'**.
- **This makes realist simulations akin to 'living history' sites, non-digital realist historical simulations where we can also often interact with historical objects and simulated characters.**

This quality of spatio-realist emplotment:

> 'provides a sense of how common objects appeared when they were part of people's lives and in daily use. Period clothing confines, emphasizes, and expresses the body at rest and in motion. Tools, utensils, weapons, furniture are not items on display, but objects that people use and misuse, objects that can help to define livelihoods, professions, identities and destinies.' (Rosenstone 2006, 47)

Whilst the aesthetics of historical description are obviously mainly audio-visual in a realist simulation like *BiA*, the ludic layer is still important. The benefits of interaction are explored further later but it is useful to note two aspects of this at this point: *BiA* goes beyond film in allowing us to examine realist historical objects and environments at our own pace, deciding our own visual perspective *and* often allowing us further interactions to better understand the available historical information. Secondly, the ludic layer, the realistic behaviours and interactions ascribed to objects and environment of the game and the rules governing these, create the realist (aspect of) simulation in combination with its audio-visual fidelity. Within *BiA* (as in any historical game) the aesthetics of historical description function at both an audio-visual *and* ludic level, though it is difficult to deny that the focus here is on the former aspect. Accordingly, though it can be useful to talk of rules and fiction (or the fictive) as separate elements, these categories overlap and game-play (and representation) often involves the weaving together of these facets.

Conceptual Historical Simulations

Examples include**:** *Civilization* (series), *Making History* (series), *Europa Universalis* (series), *Victoria* (series), *Memoir 44 Online, Crusader Kings* (series), *Freeciv, Legion*.

The second category of simulation is the 'conceptual'. These simulations can be characterised in a number of ways.

- **Much less visually 'literal' simulation featuring varying degrees of abstraction in the characteristically simple visual (and audio) cues which are included.**

These cues are normally only present to indicate what historical existents the ludic rhetoric refers to. For example, the tiled map of *Civilization*, though recognisable as a landscape, features sharp terrain transitions (for example, a single mountain may be used to depict a range and a small group of trees a forest and so on, see figure 2.2). Scale also has little meaning for the buildings and units that occupy the map (see figure 2.2), for which they are far too large and are all of a similar size (e.g. an infantry man stands as tall as a tank). These cartoonish units, are very basically animated and do have limited audio samples linked to their actions but they are still perhaps best understood as pieces we would expect to find in a board game (such as *Risk*).

Figure 2.2 - Screenshot from *Civilization IV* (Firaxis fansite pack)

Civilization uses such basic historical signifiers throughout, often in the form of words (i.e. what the referent is called and its historical and game-play context given in the game's *Civilopedia*) but also in small pictures, symbols and/or pieces. All of these simple signifiers work to establish a link to the player's historical and/or cultural understanding and the historical concepts/existents, that they are often likely to be somewhat familiar with (e.g. pottery, cavalry or maths). The game does initially expect a level of interpretation (and basic historical understanding) on the part of the player to

establish the signified, at least until the player begins to play and the game begins its true explanation. Thus conceptual simulations have a much 'thicker' layer of metaphorization than the realist simulation. Accordingly, in the conceptual simulation,

- **There is little to be learnt from direct observation of the appearance and aesthetic behaviours of objects, environments and characters.**
- **Instead the representation is built using ludic metonym which can be understood as the rules-based behaviours and values which the various historical elements are ascribed and the affordances, pressures and challenges that these entail.[1]**

Thus the historical object or concept itself is often not seen at all (nor its physical use or discovery) or it is represented through basic visual signifiers. However, its ludic traits, the changes it makes to or use it has within the rules of the game, such as the particular advantages it grants to the player's civilizations, are often very noticeable indeed. For example, when we research horseback riding, which is represented only by a picture of a horse, the significance of the horse in human history is mainly made apparent by the affect that this has on the possibilities afforded the civilization (and of course, therefore, the player), the changes that occur in the game state and the rules which our agency influences.

With this research complete, we can now train cavalry and often 'discovering' such technologies will allow the research of new ones, explaining the links between different cultural and technological developments according to the game's representation. Similarly, (in *Civilization IV* at least) to even domesticate the horse we must first develop animal husbandry and to improve it we must develop our civilization agriculturally until we can take advantages of pastures. When we first train cavalry and use them in battle, we begin to understand the advantages that such developments might have had, despite the actual unit's audio-visual simplicity, because the fact that cavalry tended to be more effective against infantry and able to move further distances quicker,

[1] These rules are metonymic because they stand in for the original mode of information or evidence and the absent past. Remaining connected to historical theory I use my concept of ludic metonym. Whilst Bogost's 'procedural rhetoric' (2007, 28-29) could be used, for historical games it is slightly problematic as it does not sufficiently account for the interplay, necessity and nature of other modes of representation , the role of the player (Sicart 2011) or the complexities of the distinction between what is possible and what is rewarded.

is reflected in the rules. Throughout the game this development will combine with new technologies to allow the development of new units, e.g. if I also develop the wheel I can combine this with my horse research developments and create chariots. In turn, utilizing these will show me their advantages or disadvantages in historical warfare (according to the game's representation) depending on my opponents' development, so, for instance, the development of pikemen will obsolete cavalry fairly quickly or severely restrict their combat effectiveness. *Civilization* is filled with hundreds of such historical referents and thus thousands of meaningful ludic interplays such as this.

The key point here is that, typically for the conceptual simulation, the vast majority of the historical information to do with our domestication of the horse has been contained in the ludic aspect of the simulation with only the simplest of audio-visual referents to cue our understanding. Although this audio-visual aspect is important (at the very least it cues us into establishing what is being referred to) the vast majority of the meaning here is made by the game's ludic aspect which operates across multiple semiotic channels. Each historical referent is given particular ludic traits and it is simultaneously these that the player must recognise (perceive) to play (well) *and* these that can create historical meaning, functioning as the aesthetics of historical description. Here rules must be doubly negotiated, functioning as representations of the past, making-meanings by pressuring us, constraining us, enabling us, responding to us. Thus these ludic structures in videogames are functioning metonymically, fulfilling the same role and yet working quite differently, than the words of the history book. Consequently,

- **Though various historical referents may not be well (or at all) represented audio-visually they are still represented through the effects and changes that they have on the game environment and the player.**

This means that unlike the realist simulation we may not always immediately recognise precisely what is being simulated in the conceptual simulation and we are likely to have to take action to discover this. [2] This visual abstraction and focus on ludic metonym means that most importantly the conceptual style of game-based historical representation is characterised by simulations where:

[2] Though we may be prompted by box-art, advertisements or cutscenes that function in the realist mode.

- **The aesthetics of historical description mostly operate through the ludic aspect (rules and action) whereby most of the data is found and the historical representation is constructed.**
- **Thus, conceptual simulations attempt to *tell* us about the past without purporting to *show* it 'as it was'.**

Benefits of the Conceptual Simulation

Though the visual abstraction means that the audio-visual data loads of such simulations are relatively light, conceptual simulations:

- **Can easily contain heavy and complex ludic information loads.**

Precisely because they relinquish the obsession with audio-visual realism, conceptual simulations can include large amounts of historical referents and concepts through simple imagery and text. Such simulations often feature significant proportions of virtual 'objects' (perhaps better understood as game state altering historical referents/concepts) and a concurrent complexity of interaction. This is certainly the case with *Civilization* which probably has a comparable information load to *BiA* though communicated mainly in its ludic aspect rather than the visual.

- **This abstract style also enables these types of simulations to explore ideas and create arguments about historical processes, systems and action often very well.**

Similarly, relinquishing the demands of a realist style means that:

- **Conceptual simulations are free to abstract to a macro scope that no human agent could possibly experience but at which historical narratives (particularly in the form of books) traditionally operate.**

This is made possible because such games do not lay claim to allowing players to see the events of the past as they must have appeared to the agents involved (a claim implicit in most realist simulations). This freeing of the developer-historian from the

concerns of realist spatial, visual, audio (or in the case of *Civilization*, even temporal) construction allow the conceptual simulation to function much more like the 'factual' history book, relinquishing realism and allowing the structure to be based on the historian's ascribed meanings rather than the concerns of realism, such as spatial or even linear chronological, relations.

- **These features mean that conceptual simulations are able to operate at the level of traditional historical discourse relatively easily.**

This difference between the diegetic levels (from the overtly dramatic to the conventionally historical) in the simulation types is of course indicated by the lack of an attempt for conceptual audio-visual elements to feature diegetic explanations coherent to the fictional world of the game. For example, 'in game genres such as First Person Shooters (FPS), players enter a mode of immediacy where the medium is transparent, meaning players are able to look through the screen. In the case of *The WarChiefs*, and the RTS genre overall, there is an emphasis on hypermediation, or an awareness of the medium, as the player is constantly looking at the screen and its interface to negotiate the gameplay' (Dillon 2008, 131). I would argue that this is in fact the case in any conceptual simulation. Indeed they are likely to be littered with conceptual elements, such as on-screen buttons, because the interference these cause in the fictive world is unimportant at the level of historical discourse, particularly next to the game-play complexity and thus ludic arguments about the past they enable and represent respectively. Of course there is an argument to be made that because history is always a partly fictionalized diegetic pursuit, our perception of movement between diegetic levels is really based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of historical narrative construction. Thus, perhaps this movement is best understood as the move from the attempt to hide the role of the historian (in this case both the developer and the player) that we see in the realist simulation. Nonetheless, this move to the more (within the practice of history) traditional level of discourse allows a number of things. Operating at the level of discourse of traditional conventional history, conceptual simulations are:

1. **Free to skip through time and space at the developer-historian's (or sometimes the player's) will.**

Anachronism is often a necessary feature of discourse, just as it is in most history books, in which historians commonly make comparisons through time by using analepsis and prolepsis and make other choices about order, frequency and duration (Munslow 2007B, 51-59). As this indicates, in both the conventional history book and the conceptual simulation,

2. **Historical elements can be included and arranged (emplotted) on the basis of their relative historical values (according to the argument the developer-historian is trying to make) rather than the demands of realism.**

Relinquishing the almost slavish obsession with realism that the realist simulation entails allows the game's historical elements to be included and arranged (i.e. story/content and emplotment decisions) on the basis of their relative historical values (the meanings that the historian ascribes in their relation to each other and the narrative of civilization which the games create). Thus the past is represented as the historian sees it and wishes to explain it rather than as it was assumed to be seen by the agents that lived there (which is of course impossible anyway). This conceptual style also means games like *Civilization* are,

3. **Able to deal with concepts, theories and processes that do not have a tangible physical presence (to imitate) much more easily than the realist simulation.**

All this means that in comparison to the realist simulation, generally the conceptual simulation is:

4. **Able to make more complex and far reaching arguments.**

Civilization may not create 'evocations of the past through powerful images, colorful characters, and moving words' (Rosenstone 1988, 1174) like some cinema or realist simulations like *BiA*. However, the conceptual style, concurrent ability to operate at a more conventional level of historical discourse and thus, vaster possibilities for ludic complexity and interaction, entail a multiplicity that reintroduces some of the complexities of causation. For now it is enough to say that the freedom that *Civilization*'s conceptual simulation affords the developer-historian, allows them to

introduce multiple, inter-related, intangible (by which I mean conceptual or theoretical rather than physical) and often complex, historical ideas and in short, produces a 'thickness' of discourse that we would more often associate with the history book, than that of the screen.

- **Conceptual simulations not only avoid the criticism often levelled at film on the basis of the form's information load, but also and perhaps more importantly, neatly sidestep classic criticisms of visual history as having 'discursive weakness'** (Jarvie 1978, 378)**.**
- **Conceptual simulations communicate through the natural language of the videogame (ludic metonym).**

This movement to the diegetic level of conventional historiography also allows conceptual simulations to:

- **Focus more on arguments and theories about the past than a simple recounting of its events.**
- **Thus, relinquishing the demands of realism allows the conceptual simulation to work *similarly* to most contemporary history books by creating representation through discourse rather than a simple (apparent) re-telling.**

Category 'Crossover'

When thinking about historical videogames these sorts of categories are very useful, however, I do not wish to emphasize too strongly that the distinction between the realist and conceptual categories for representing the past in videogames is in anyway absolute. Rather, these categories are supposed to function as the extreme ends of a spectrum and as such many historical games fall between these simulation types.[3]

[3] Many real-time strategy games mix conceptual and realist elements. Games in the *Total War* series switch between purely conceptual play and real-time strategy with realist elements. *Sid Meier's Pirates!* also oscillates in this way. *Assassin's Creed*, though mostly realist, mixes two distinct levels of fictional diegesis by way of a science fiction story and so seeks to justify its own inclusion of a number of conceptual elements.

However, the aim here has been that by mapping out the boundaries the space between them becomes somewhat clearer.

'Realism' is of course not actually the process of reconstructing reality, but in creating the impression of such using the accepted conventions for doing so, developed in other, older, forms and as such doing so is still, as a mimetic practice, a process of creative abstraction. Even beyond this obvious ontological discrepancy, we find that conceptual elements are a necessary part of the design of even realist game simulations (due to the demands of game-play) and of course even *Civilization*'s simple animations and military figures show that, to some degree, the reverse is also true.

In a realist simulation like *BiA* the conceptual abstractions that creep into the audio-visual interface are distinguishable as such because of their obviously extra-diegetic status. The most obvious example of this in *BiA* is the 'heads-up display' (HUD) that consists of abstract visual features that are arranged around the edge of the screen so as to appear overlaid on the camera perspective, i.e. the avatar/player's gaze. Such elements are included to supplement the loss of the perceptual information available to the original historical agent that the game cannot hope to imitate in a realist style. For example, because in comparison to the original historical agent players miss senses, such as proprioception, that would aid in the aiming of the gun barrel towards a target, they must instead have a crosshair. Similarly, players cannot easily judge the direction or proximity of incoming gun fire (though with a surround sound system, audio can help in both these regards). Accordingly, the HUD in *BiA* includes a red filter and blurring or blood at the edges of the screen if the player is very close to being hit by incoming fire, which increasingly saturates the screen becoming more opaque as the danger increases or if the player is actually hit. In earlier entries into the series, by favouring particular edges of the screen, these also indicated the direction of incoming fire. Similarly, because players cannot feel the pain, impact and severity of injuries another conceptual element, the 'health bar', shows how injured the avatar is.

Other staple FPS extra-diegetic abstract visual features that *BiA* utilizes to supplement 'missing' perceptual information, include an ammo counter which indicates how many bullets remain, necessitated because the player cannot check their pockets or webbing or feel the weight of the ammunition as the real soldier would. Also, a compass, in itself not a particularly abstract visual element except that it tends to be permanently situated

at the top (or in later games in the series, bottom left) of the player's perspective. Furthermore, this compass also often automatically indicates the direction in which game objectives can be found. Similarly, these objectives also often appear as conceptual elements in the form written instructions on screen, as well as often being introduced intra-diegetically through dialogue.

Whilst this point about crossover may seem to weaken these categories of analysis, they are not intended to be completely mutually exclusive. Indeed, often fruitful and interesting work can be done on interfaces and simulations that combine these elements in new and innovative ways and thus lie between the extremes of the spectrum well represented by *Civilization* and *BiA*. Instead, these analytical categories are intended to give us terminology and provide aid in defining the dominant mode of a particular historical videogame's simulation, giving us valuable information as to the videogame's function as historical text and epistemological claims as to how it renders (quite literally) history and the relation of this to the past.

Epistemological Approaches

Despite the change to the digital-ludic form of historical representation the key assumptions about and methodologies of history have seemingly remained largely intact. It is worth noting that these epistemologies are probably implemented somewhat unconsciously through the borrowing of cultural codes and styles of historical representation. So for instance if a developer creates a game and searches for what he deems an 'authentic' visual style according to his existing historical understanding, he may eventually decide that he is inspired in this regard by *Saving Private Ryan*. In this case the game would probably also take on the film's particular epistemological approach, the claimed relationship between, historian, player, history and the past. Epistemologies are culturally reproduced as ways to engage with the past. Whether 'unconscious manifestations of cultural claims' (Poblocki 2002, 164) or not, every historical representation contains an implicit epistemological approach to the past.

This brings us to a core issue in regards to both simulation types: we are always facing the question of whether a videogame's mechanics and simulation style determine its particular engagement with the past or whether the developer's vision of history determines the mechanics and simulation style. In reality this is probably a process of

gradual exchange as choices of the developer as a historian determine some of the exact nature of the form and the form in return exerts pressures and moulds the developer-historian's choices for the past. Because most often we cannot really know the answer to these questions we must fall back on the idea that the relationship between epistemology and simulation in historical videogames is likely to most often be one of complex overdeterminacy.

Whilst the 'reconstructionist' and 'constructionist' (Munslow 1997) approaches may not be exclusive to particular simulation types, there is certainly a relationship, or perhaps more accurately a natural alignment. Certain simulation types lean toward making particular epistemological claims and particular epistemological approaches to the past are intrinsically suited to being represented in particular ways. Hence,

- **The realist simulation can be understood as emphasizing a reconstructionist approach to history.**
- **The conceptual simulation can be understood as emphasizing a constructionist approach to history.**

Reconstructionist History

- **Reconstructionist history: 'reconstructionist historians believe that they gain true knowledge through the primacy of referentiality and delivering its inherent story as *the* true narrative.'** (Munslow 2007B, 11)

Such an approach is implicit in the realist simulation which is likely to seek to immerse an unquestioning viewer into its authoritative fictive representation and both seeks and claims to *show* us the past 'as it was'. We can see this emphasis on the capturing of *the* story in the promotional material surrounding games like *BiA*. For example, advertisements surrounding *Road to Hill 30* (the first game in the series) told players they could 'Experience *the* uncensored story of the Normandy invasion' and 'real soldiers, authentic battlefields, true combat' (my emphasis).[4] Similarly, the box-art of *Road to Hill 30* invites players to enter its 'digitally accurate reproduction of Normandy…[and]…the chaos of D-Day June 1944.' Thus the simulation's

[4] The official promotional website is no longer available. However, these quotes are still used for sales purposes on the internet.

epistemological claims infuse the language here; somehow out of this admitted chaos comes the clarity of reproduction that goes beyond the implied failings of older methods and is 'digitally accurate'. This is supported by the demonstration (available in the first game's extras) given by the President of Gearbox Software, Randy Pitchford, at the 2004 Electronic Entertainment Expo during which Pitchford says of the game 'This is Normandy in 1944. This is what it actually looked like' (cited in Rejack 2007, 419).

- **'Reconstructionists maintain that history exists independently of the historian and that discovering the past is an objective process, uncontaminated by ideology.'** (Booth 2005, 9)

Accordingly, the historian's role in meaning-creation is interpreted as minimal and is reduced to little more than mediating the (recoverable) past, little altering or shaping it, merely referentially reporting it to the present (reconstructing the past). As already discussed above, we can see this hiding of the historian's role and voice in the convincing fictive worlds of realist simulations such as *BiA*. This is perhaps unsurprising given that 'It is "the absence of any signs of the author in the text" (Kansteiner, 1993, 275) that helps to give the reader of an historical narrative the sense that what they are reading is fact rather than fiction' (Parkes 2009, 122). This is also supported in the carefully chosen comparisons of game environments with primary sources (see figure 2.3) which hint at the implicit claim that the developer-historian's role is no more than the careful reproduction (rather than creative construction and interpretation) of the seemingly recoverable past. This is further reinforced by the *Ubisoft* website which proclaims of the game, 'Unprecedented authenticity: Historically accurate and detailed battlefields, events and equipment re-created from Army Signal Corps photos, aerial reconnaissance imagery and eyewitness accounts.'

- **Reconstructionist histories (and thus realist simulations which inevitably carry these types of claims) tend to have popular appeal because they are authoritarian, immersive and accessible because of their non-reflexive (*the* story) and non-theoretical nature which normally includes the removal of complex thematic considerations such as cultural, political or social processes and theory, preferring instead to concentrate on 'reporting' on specific historical characters and events.**

Figure 2.3 - Promotional material for *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* (IGN.com)

Accordingly, **'**the reconstructionist approach has become the culturally acceptable way of producing past reality' (Munslow 2007B, 12). However, these realist-reconstructionist simulations are problematic as naturally they also struggle with presenting alternatives, multiple arguments or uncertainty, key aspects of historical discourse, because they lose coherency as *the* story, *the* truth. Subsequently, just as any reconstructionist history seeks to control its audience's role in meaning-making, so too the realist simulation often seeks to assert authority by overtly restricting the agency of the player to prevent them emergently making the fictive world incoherent and thus breaking the simulations authoritative 'illusion of pastness'. Thus the epistemological algorithm becomes transcoded into a digital-ludic algorithm (Chapman 2013A).

- **Reconstructionist histories carry an inherent 'effect of reality'** (Barthes 1989, 141) **and subsume their own status as *representation*.**

As should be clear, this is the very aim of the realist simulation and so there is a firm argument for the realist simulation to be understood as a virtual manifestation of a reconstructionist story-space. However, this 'effect of reality' should not be mistaken for the hyperbolic claims (for instance surrounding the concept of immersion) that are often made about games and which tend to be based upon a woefully reductionist description of the current experience of playing a videogame. Though this effect

undoubtedly fuels such claims, this is not form-specific and instead refers to the textual device found in all history (though particularly problematically in empirical-analytical representationalist history), as well as in any film or literature that invokes 'reality' (as opposed to representation) in an unproblematic, non-reflexive way and with an authoritarian tone.

Therefore, despite the numerous advantages of this simulation style discussed above because the realist simulation has a natural inclination towards functioning as a reconstructionist history it can create a sense of undue legitimacy in terms of the relationship between the represented and the representation which, unacknowledged as such, finds 'truth' or 'reality' as its ontological substitute. The obsession with presenting *the* story of the past and the authority of the realist fictive world tends to leave little room for self-reflection, relativity or multiplicity and heavily reinforces its own legitimacy. For these reasons, the reconstructionist approach is often regarded as rather outdated. Furthermore, as Rejack notes, this epistemological effect of reality is also manifest in *BiA* in the 'reality effect' (Black 2002) which 'has been produced by film culture, which asserts that visual documentation is tantamount to reality' (Rejack 2007, endnote 2). This reality effect does not seem to even be disturbed by the move to CGI as Rejack notes, 'the legitimacy offered by CGI technology arises out of the ability of recorded media to produce a reality effect—if we see it, it must be real' (2007, endnote 2).

This reconstructionist leaning means that the realist simulation is potentially problematic and yet its ability to create immersive and engaging historical worlds, full of compelling colour, movement and drama also has important potential, as does its benefits discussed earlier (such as its information load). [5] As shall become apparent, the opportunities for players that the game creates for engaging with the past-*as*-history, relies heavily on, at the very least, the visual fidelity of the realist simulation style. This tension is seemingly somewhat irresolvable. However, though there are currently no examples of this, attempts could definitely be made to combat the inherent reconstructionist claims of the realist simulation style in other structures (particularly through narrative). It is possibilities such as these that highlight why we must consider

[5] Immersion is *not* invoked as a special property of videogames or unhelpfully conflated with flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1988) and is used in the sense that we find a fictive historical world believable and/or engaging.

the meaning-making structures in historical videogames separately as far as possible. It is also these possibilities which prevent me from stating conclusively that the realist *simulation* must *necessarily* result in a reconstructionist historical *game* despite its predilection to this epistemology. Nonetheless, though we must to some degree accept that games like *BiA* must engage the player using this realist style to function to full effect, we should be cautious as it can also simultaneously give the sense that whatever meaning is mediated (and negotiated) through the simulation has a level of authenticity that troublingly ignores the relationship between the past and history.

Constructionist History

- **'Like reconstructionists, constructionists believe that empirical evidence provides the ultimate source of knowledge about the past. In this sense reconstructionism and constructionism are evidence-based, objectivist-inspired models in which historians aspire to build accurate, independent and truthful reconstructions of the past'** (Booth 2005, 10).

This is certainly the case in Civilization. Though the game is not visually convincing it is still authoritarian in the strong ludic arguments and the mostly unquestionable theoretical logics that underpin it. Thus, 'Where these models diverge is with respect to acceptance of *a priori* knowledge, particularly theory' (Booth 2005, 10).

- **'Constructionists go beyond what happened in order ask how and why things happened as they did. They tend to study collective behavior and are willing to hazard generalizations.'** (Guttmann 2005, 396)

This makes significant connection with conceptual simulations such as *Civilization*. Firstly, 'identifying historical patterns invariably involves some form of abstract thinking and connections to theoretical explanations and interpretations' (Booth 2005, 10). Representing such thinking therefore requires a move away from the demands of realism to an abstraction such as the words of the history book or the simplistic visuals and ludic metonym of the conceptual simulation. Secondly, enabled by the conceptual approach, the game takes a large historical focus and (as discussed in Chapter 7) certainly deals in collective behaviour and action. The focus on ludic aesthetics enables the operation at the more conventional level of historical discourse and the discursive

complexity that this allows means the game must explicitly deal in issues of causality. To create complex far reaching ludic systems in a historical game one must ask 'why?' of the past and of course simultaneously in return, to ask these sorts of questions of the past in the videogame form one must deal in ludic complexity. Accordingly, there is an exchange at play here. Certainly, the move toward the discursive level and complexity that the conceptual simulation entails, allows *Civilization* to function as a:

- **'constructionist story space....a rich intellectual as well as a referential environment in which social theory and concept are freely used to assemble the past.'** (Munslow 2007B, 18)

Such theories are (as White here notes of Marxist theories) an attempt to 'uncover the "plot" of the whole human drama which renders its surface phenomena not only retrospectively understandable but prospectively meaningful as well' (White 1990, 142). It is this concern with causal complexity and its theoretical underpinnings that makes *Civilization* a text that engenders a relatively large amount of academic interest. Unlike the realist-reconstructionist text, *Civilization* offers far more than a recounting (the *what*) of events and offers a thematic explanation of the past (the *why*).

Because, as the argument goes, the purpose of theory is that it 'brings to the fore interrelations between the components of human experiences at given times and in so doing enriches historical accounts' (Booth 2005, 10) the temporal, spatial and other representational, possibilities offered by the discursive level of the conceptual simulation are vital to engaging theoretically with the past in the videogame (similarly the constructionist approach is a natural result of taking full advantage of such possibilities). Hence, conceptual simulation naturally leads to a constructionist engagement with history (and vice-versa) as the aims of this epistemological approach play to the simulation style's strengths. The conceptual simulation's ability to: work at a discursive level beyond human experience; emplot on the basis of relative historical values rather than the demands of realism; represent what cannot be easily represented visually; jump through time and space; and thus produce a ludic and thus, causal complexity whilst relinquishing little authority, makes this a rather natural fit. Indeed, it is difficult to see how else constructionist history could easily be produced in the videogame form.

Accordingly, *Civilization* is quite unlike reconstructionist histories and the reconstructionist *BiA* (which entirely ignores large scale trends, events and any theoretical underpinnings, even political or social) whereby history consists of 'stories of lives, combinations of individual lives or happenings, all seemingly individual and unrepeatable' (Postan 1971, 62). Instead in *Civilization* the stories of the past are infinitely repeatable generalisations of collective action, at least in the sense that they are always governed by the same apparent theoretical logics of history which underpin the ludic model. Whilst such questions and theory are often seen as speculation by more conservative reconstructionists, that 'infuses predestined meaning' (Elton 1991, 15) into history, theory is the lifeblood of constructionist-conceptual simulations like *Civilization* (even if this is sometimes popular theory and/or simplistic). Creating a complex set of rules in a historical game entails creating a web of theories about how the past works and this is inevitably at least partially drawn from the overarching theoretical logics we apply to history every day, after all such logics are only *rules for* the past.

This also relates to a simple methodological point, Constructionists claim the fundamentality of theory to understanding the past because it is a critical tool that 'provides frameworks and principles for selecting evidence and thus steers practitioners away from contradictions in their explanations' (Booth 2005, 10). As we shall see, theory *as* rules for both history and historical play is vital in *Civilization* to allow players narrative freedom whilst still producing coherent arguments about the past. Whilst the narratives of *Civilization* may often be different, the governing logics are almost never contradictory no matter who plays. The theory based frameworks that govern the playful story-space, maintain authority and yet allow a specific narrative freedom are vital to the offers that the game makes for engaging with history.

Subsequently, as both a conceptual-constructionist historical game *Civilization* is,

- **'a richly referential milieu but one in which theory and abstraction are used to invoke or summon up 'what it all means'.'** (Munslow 2010, 156)

Because the conceptual simulation type allows for constructionist social and cultural theory to be represented not only audio-visually but as complex interactive *processes,* it is therefore, much more free to 'encourage players to think in terms of relationships, not

isolated events or facts' (Gee 2005, 3) and thus perhaps (though really further research is needed to support claims about relative clarity) to 'see clearly how each piece of information we are given and each skill we are learning (and doing) is inter-connected to everything else we are learning and doing' (Gee 2004, 66). Accordingly, though again this alignment does not necessarily result in a constructionist *game* (we must account for other structures) this epistemological-simulation relationship does makes it relatively easy to see how the constructionist story space and conceptual simulation could easily be overdeterminate. Certainly this alignment is important in understanding the role that *Civilization* occupies as a history.

The constructionist approach:

- **Does at least acknowledge 'the intellectual commitments of the author-historian to their particular story space vision *for* the past.'** (Munslow 2007B, 18)

And whether intentionally or not, this is apparent in the title: *Sid Meier's Civilization.* However, whilst the conceptual-constructionist game-based history is obviously often a more complex story-space than its realist counterparts, similarly to the reconstructionist approach:

- **It remains authoritarian, largely unreflexive and upholds a firm emphasis on the recoverability of the past based on a similar attitude toward evidence.**

Thus though it relinquishes realism in the dramatic or overtly diegetic mode, really this is of course only in the visual sense and in doing so it runs the risk of creating a convincing fallacy with its own problematic authority, such as a documentary might establish over a historical film whilst maintaining the same relationship with evidence/the past.

- **Subsequently, despite being a rich discursive space the constructionist history still problematically does not really address issues surrounding the subjective nature of *representation*.**

Accordingly, conceptual-constructionist simulations still operate through an authoritarian 'reality effect' even if this is less immediately apparent (and thus potentially more problematic) subsumed in the ludic aesthetics of historical description. Whilst Civilization's claims to the past are less obvious and become revealed through play, its model is still dominated by a strong unflinching ideology and causal logic that remains relatively unquestioned.

Deconstructionist History

It is important to briefly note at this point that there is a third possible epistemological approach; the deconstructionist approach. This approach acknowledges the questions about history raised by postmodernism.

- **Deconstructionist historians: 'First and foremost...will be concerned with the way in which historians can create [history]...also why, for what purposes...for whom and, most importantly, how they can change it to meet the demands of different modes of expression.'** (Munslow 2007B, 18-19)
- **There will an acknowledgement and exploration of the history as 'what it is- an invention, a tool for doing things with the past that impacts back upon how we think about it and what we want out of it.'** (Munslow 2007B, 18-19)

Unsurprisingly, deconstructionist historians accept that past events are explained and acquire their meaning as much by their interpretation and representation by the historian as by the evidence.

- **In short, deconstructionist histories still operate through representing the past but constantly self-reflexively question representation as a category for 'knowing'.**
- **Because of the obvious intellectual challenges of doing this and the loss of authority, deconstructionist histories are (even within academia) relatively rare.**

Nonetheless, even within popular culture there are examples we can draw upon. Perhaps the best is Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003).

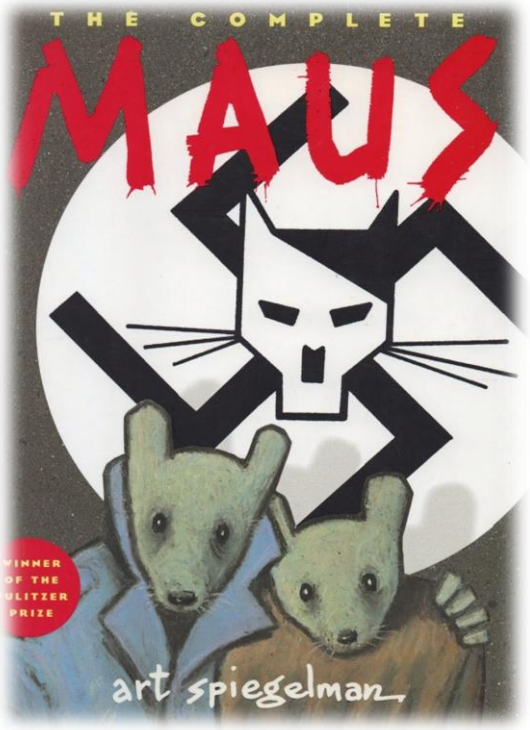

Figure 2.4 - The cover of the collected volume of Maus (Sainsburyebooks.co.uk)

This lauded graphic novel (the first to win a Pulitzer Prize) is a tale of Holocaust survivor Vladek, Spiegelman's father . The novel tells not only a story of Vladek's experiences during World War 2 but also Spiegelman's own story of writing *Maus*. In this way the author details and questions his own experience, disempowers the representation, regularly breaks the fourth wall, questions his own interpretation, and poses unanswerable questions to the reader. The book is often harrowingly honest and deeply personal and constantly questions its own validity, value and status as a representation.

Perhaps the most well-known thing about *Maus* is that various ethnicities and nationalities are portrayed as different animals (see figure 2.5). For example this includes depictions of Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Americans as dogs, French as frogs, British as fish and the Roma (gypsies) as moths. Though these metaphors are complex and multi-faceted they obviously reference Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda (e.g. *The Eternal Jew*), as well as the history of racist cartoon images elsewhere (such as America). This use of animals can also be interpreted as indicating how naturalised these divisions became in German society but also emphasizing how ridiculous

partitioning people in this way actually was. Perhaps most importantly these metaphors are unstable and gradually lose effectiveness and power and we see Spiegelman struggle with writing them (particularly his French wife who converts to Judaism and a Jewish-German ex-soldier) within the pages of *Maus* itself.

Figure 2.5 - A page from *Maus* that shows pigs (Poles), mice (Jews) and cats (Germans) (http://graphicnovel.umwblogs.org)

As Spiegelman notes in later interviews the 'metaphors...are meant to self-destruct in my book - and I think they do self-destruct' (Bolhafner 1991, n.p.). This, combined with a number of other techniques that Spiegelman uses to indicate the problems of representation, history, intepretation and memory (such as abstraction, conflicting sources or the obscuring of parts of the images with objects or speech balloons) is what makes *Maus* such an excellent postmodernist deconstructionist history.[6] In these ways the representation is constantly questioned and is supposed to gradually disassemble.

[6] Unlike constructionist history *Maus* uses abstraction to indicate the impossibility of historical realism rather than a technique to get at the 'real' truth of the past.

- **There do not seem to be any examples of historical videogames *produced* using a deconstructionist epistemological approach.**

Given the obvious challenges that such an approach indicates this is perhaps unsurprising. However, as discussed later, there is significant contact with these deconstructionist ideas, both in the pressures that the very nature of the form itself exerts and in the exact structuring of particular games (such as the often contradictory *Civilization*). Despite this, at this point we must note that despite the move into a new medium, history is being *produced*, at least in terms of epistemology, in largely the same problematic ways as in older mediums.

Conclusion

Both the reconstructionist and constructionist approaches occlude any discussion of form and rest on the assumption that there is a direct correspondence between reference and representation. The rhetorics of historical videogames often, like those in conventional histories and the 'rhetorics in [other] commercial games - the most successful of which easily sell millions of copies – trade[s] forthrightness for authority. And that authority can occlude the ideological frames that such commercial games operationalize' (Bogost 2007, 113). This authoritarian tone can result in histories becoming fixed and innate within popular culture, complete with narratorial decisions presented to an audience often unaware of them.

As already touched upon in the previous chapter, the very nature of the videogame form has consequences for this authoritarian aspect which will become apparent. However, it is clear that these epistemologies are still linked to particular forms of simulation, extreme examples of which have been described here (both in terms of their characteristics and their benefits) in the categories of realist and conceptual that I propose. Whilst *BiA*' operation as a historical text relies on a more literal (audio-visual) aestheticism, *Civilization*'s aesthetics of historical description lie mainly in its ludic structures. However, it is useful to note that each of these categories of aestheticism exists in each game and both are integral to producing historical meaning and the strengthening of one aspect is, in both cases, dependent on the operation of the 'opposing' category (to which it can give new meaning).

The way each game approaches representing the past has definite implications for their relative possible historical functions and each of the aspects that I have described here is pertinent to these functions. Accordingly, we can begin to see that the realist simulation (*BiA*) could have quite different possibilities than the conceptual (*Civilization*), though both are what we would term historical videogames. In following different simulative and epistemological approaches to the past, each game allows the creation of particular meanings and the exploration of particular discourse about the past (i.e. each has a particular historical function) that would be difficult to create in the other. However, this is only half the story and the particular engagements with history that each game offers is dependent on a number of other structures which can be combined with the simulation type in different ways. Thus for this reason, to better understand what historical videogames are capable of and to produce a framework that withstands reapplication, it is these other core structural categories which we must now consider.

Chapter 3

Time

'Time is a game played beautifully by children.'

-Heraclitus 2003, 51

Space and time are obviously core concepts to both history and to games. Naturally, these are extremely useful categories of analysis when looking at the videogame as a historical form. At their most basic these categories can be understood as heavily related to the simulation types previously discussed. Accordingly, whilst it is perfectly possible to, for instance, have a realist simulation with turn-based combat, the combinations of structures in the two games chosen as examples here, tend to cleave closest to the ideals embodied by each simulation type and epistemological approach. Nonetheless it is useful to delineate these as separate categories so we can reapply the conclusions of the effects of particular structures on historical representation and player action to other game-structures if we so wish.

Though much could be said about the relation between time and historical videogames, the focus here is on the role of the particular chosen temporal relations in structuring players' experiences of the historical representations. It is my hope, that much of the further questions this raises are answered in other chapters. Nonetheless this is a complex topic and there is clearly room for further work to be done beyond the topics briefer role in the analytical framework and game analyses presented herein.

Player-Game/Representation-Past: Temporal Relationships

Time in *Brothers in Arms*

In a game like *Total War: Shogun 2*, which features both conceptual and realist sections, the swap to the realist mode for battle means a change from a turn-based (where a single turn, the real length of which is decided by the player, can span fictive *months*) temporal structure to a 1:1 relation between fictive (i.e. historical narrative) time and play time.[1] This is the norm for game-play in *BiA* where the length of our play during a battle is the length of the represented time of the battle. So if we fight for five

[1] These categories are based on Juul's (2005, 141-156).

minutes then we are to assume that five minutes of fictive (i.e. historical) time has passed. This is the most obvious and basic meaning of a 'real-time' relationship as deployed here, an alignment between the time of the player and the depicted time which the avatars 'experience' (i.e. of the fictive world). In part, this 1:1 temporal relationship is constructed and enabled by the relation between the actions of the player and the subsequent representative or virtual 'actions' of the avatar or changes in the game state. So, in *BiA*, when I pull the controller trigger I expect my avatar's gun to fire without any (perceptible) delay. I expect my control of the character to be in what, for all intents and purposes, seems like 'real time' i.e. 1:1. A real-time relationship in a realist simulation (somewhat conversely) is unlikely to mean that this temporal procedural relationship between input and response remains consistent, because the responses should be context-specific, as dictated by the representation. So, if I shoot a German soldier he should react to the 'bullet' immediately, *unless* I am at long range whereby I would expect this to take longer, because the game attempts a 'real time' representation and the physics must reflect this. Simply, a major part of the realist simulation of *BiA* lies in the fact that when I take an action its result, unless another realist rule takes precedent, is immediately represented in the simulation. This creates a sense of 'real time' according to the 1:1 scale, by which the rest of the fictive game world and its inhabitants abide.

Realist simulations like *BiA* tend to create a sense of agency partially through the directness of their controls. The key point in terms of player action is that there is always a sense of immediacy between input and resultant action, the player feels like their actions are represented as they occur and this can (potentially problematically) help the player *feel* that they are experiencing digital history as the past was experienced by the agents the game attempts to represent. As Murray argues 'the most compelling aspect of the fighting game is the tight visceral match between the game controller and the screen action. A palpable click on the mouse or joystick results in an explosion. It requires very little imaginative effort to enter such a world because the sense of agency is so direct' (Murray 1997, 146).

This immediate response relationship (player action - avatar action - environment response) enables the game to maintain a structural similarity (note, this is a *similarity*, not an actual *reality* relationship) to the historical environment upon which the game is based, and importantly, this is maintained as far as possible *throughout* play. This

means events often producing audio-visual information that we assume to be coherent with the environment of the past in a 'real-time' way that we assume to be coherent with the agent-environment relationship of the past. Specifically, the game seems to react to the represented performatory actions of the avatar (which we initiate), in ways which at least seem coherent. So for instance the player presses a button, the avatar fires and the environment responds to the *represented* action appropriately (e.g. woodchips may fly off surfaces or enemies may die). Thus the game reacts to the player's 'presence' and actions but mostly by producing information that is fictively coherent with the avatar's represented action. The importance of this distinction will become apparent in later chapters, however, for now it is enough to say that the game environment reacts to our actions in a way that it is believable given the representation but importantly here, in a way that is consistent and immediate.

This real-time relationship also allows the game to construct particular types of challenge that are hugely important to the game's representation. As Atkins notes, 'the imperative to act 'in time', as well as in space, is an established weapon in the designers' armoury of challenges, often providing an adrenaline-fuelled reminder of the material body of the player' (Atkins 2007, 242). It is the real-time relationship (as well as the programmed capabilities of enemies which also act 'in time') which places pressure on the player and forces them to reactively make decisions. These kinds of challenges are at the core of *BiA* representation, perhaps unsurprisingly given its focus on war. More specifically, in this way the game is even able to represent some of the temporal pressures on action that the agent would have experienced, albeit in an extremely limited way. Subsequently, many of the arguments the game makes through its challenges, about the stresses and skills of command and warfare, rely on this particular structural decision.

Of course what these issues surrounding the real time relation in *BiA* implies is that in the historical videogame there is also a third category of time: the past. As such, of course the ideal ratio for a reconstructionist-realist simulation (or at least that which it would wish to convince us of) would be 1 (play time): 1 (fictive/narrative time): 1 (past time). Consideration of the latter category is actually often rather irrelevant, at least at the local level of the agent, because the only way we can know the past is *as* history. Thus we can only hope to read the more obvious and generally large-scale collapses in temporalities which are understandable through definitive dates and times. Even if we

are to leave these concerns aside for the moment, we must countenance the idea that such an ideal real-time relationship can probably rarely be maintained for any length of time within an historical narrative.

In *BiA* and most WW2 FPS, the claim as to this 1:1:1 relationship continues until play is intersected by the prewritten narrative (usually in the form of cutscenes or extra-diegetic documentary style montages) in which we are informed, through the normal conventions that we regularly accept from cinema, of the passing of time and often space, between 'scenes'. Were the entirety of *BiA* one continuous battle, this break in the temporal relationship could perhaps (dependent on player action) be avoided. However, aligning with a particular emplotted story and/or chronology of the specific (long-term) events of the past in combination with the experience of an agent in an unpredictable though typical and likely oft repeated scenario (such as combat), means that time must be made flexible and become negotiated more traditionally through the narrative techniques with which we are familiar from other forms. Thus in *BiA* the 1:1:1 relationship is still never truly stable because the game sometimes chooses specific rather than typical events (for example the various battles surrounding Carentan immediately after D-Day) and this tends to mean the presence of a strong prewritten (framing) narrative and the breaking of the overall narrative into various scenes. Naturally, there are also large-scale historical narratives that cannot be feasibly reported in the first person mode of the game.

Of course this emphasis on narrative time is what allows the developer-historian to concentrate on the events that he considers significant in the creation of the virtual story-space (story/content decisions). This temporal instability also nicely highlights the constructed nature of the 'realist' category, despite its implicit claims to fidelity. In short, this instability is because the game is a historical narrative and though it tries to subsume this aspect beneath its realist veneer, like all narratives, decisions have been made as to the inclusion, emplotment, frequency, repetition, order and duration of the events with which the game deals.

To truly assert that a 1:1:1 relationship is occurring in any historical game is generally extremely problematic. For example, if we know that a particular battle lasted a certain amount of time this could theoretically be represented in a game and so we could know that the real time of the event matched both that of the fictive game 'scene' and the play

time and so could posit that a true 1:1:1 relationship was occurring at the most basic level. However, even this would be very limited as each event that occurred within the start to finish of the battle would also have to occur at exactly the same time as dictated by evidence. Of course deciding the amount of detail one would go into in prescribing action (e.g. by unit or by soldier, by minute or every ten seconds?) would in itself amount to a necessary temporal story/content decision. Regardless, whilst, given enough data, such a 1:1:1 relationship may be possible in a film, this would not be possible, or at least extremely difficult, in a game. This is because ensuring that the player did everything at the correct time would eradicate agency (given that in games not only developer-historians but also players, often have to make decisions that affect temporal narrative features such as emplotment, frequency, repetition, order and duration) and this would likely prevent the text being a game at all.

Nonetheless, often the most unique and perhaps even meaningful, moments are when we as player's *feel* that the game falls into a 1:1:1 projection. The real-time relationship does allow us to imagine (but rarely truly know) that our relationship with the time of the past is fairly close in some instances. This is perhaps unsurprising, after all, both player and historical agent exist(ed) in the same temporal reality. Furthermore, this is negotiated by the game's fictive time that tightly matches the player's actions, increasing the (assumed) similarities in perceptual information. This relationship, as we shall see, allows a particular coherency that enables the game to offer its particular historical experience and one which is always somewhat dependent on the assumption that time for the player engaged with the historical environment of the game is somewhat equivalent to that for the historical agent, at least in the most basic sense.

For example, the match between when I press the button and the in-game gun fires and the time it takes from this shot for me to see the results of the bullet impact are probably equivalent to that which the agent experienced, at least in any significant sense. Again, importantly, the game is maintaining some similarities in the temporality of some of the perceptual information it offers to the player, to that which the historical environment originally offered to the historical agent. Still, only in certain, small game-play instances can we even theorise that *BiA* potentially aligns into a 1:1:1 relationship between player, representation and past. As a complete history it has the normal narrative relationship with the past we would expect.

Subsequently, whilst a true 1:1:1 relationship would be very difficult (if not impossible) to sustain in a game's historical narrative, it is still a meaningful possibility in an extremely local sense whereby the historical event or moment is typical and/or focused on the experience of the environment rather than the retelling of the experience of a specific historical agent. Such moments can be understood as an invocation of the notion of the ideal type of event, 'When we construct an ideal type, whether purely of a person's character or of a course of action, we are not thinking of the particular experience or characteristics of the individual in question, but rather of giving an interpretation in terms of typical patterns of events which could occur "again and again" in the lives of different individuals' (Outhwaite 1975, 91-92).

Consequently, we can say that it is perhaps possible to establish a relationship that we can pragmatically assign as virtually 1:1:1 in specific game-play moments. Certainly there is often the opportunity for a believable or convincing equivalence, which maintains the realist mode and the benefits (and problems) of such an approach. Whilst we cannot always know that the relationship is truly always real, we can say that it attempts to feel so and that when it overtly contravenes this relationship it tends to do so using the narrative tropes of realist cinema. Fictive time always negotiates the relationship between the time of the player and of the past. Consequently, given these considerations, perhaps such a temporal relationship is more accurately described as realist-time rather than real-time.

Nevertheless, these localised game-play instances when we can, with a commonsense logic, note that the game probably (though not definitely, it is still mimetic) does fall into a 1:1:1 projection are some of the most important to the game's functions as a history. Time in *BiA* is important because the particular design decision of real-time affords particular interactions for the player, in terms of game-play, historical information and most importantly, historical challenges. This real(ist)-time relationship, however elusive, is core to maintaining a coherent fictive world which offers some similar limited perceptual information to the original historical environment.

Despite the obvious problems with the third category of time and the epistemological concerns with its immersive qualities, what is clear is that the (mostly) real-time relationship between the player and the fictive representation (1:1) and sometimes also

the past, has particular advantages in constructing digital representations. This is in terms of immersive audio-visual simulation and its specific role in the challenges of and as a pressure on, play. In these ways the real time structure gives a sense that:

> 'People act in time. A good narrative can convey some sense of the ways in which environment, the press of time, and the uncertainly of outcomes affected decisions. Computer simulations are excellent at this. In recent years computer games have become increasingly "real-time"...rather than "turn based." More than any historical work, these games make the player reflect on what it means to understand time's role in historical action.' (Taylor 2003, n.p.)

One of the key distinctions between realist historical games such as *BiA, IL-2 Sturmovik* or even *Shogun* and games like *Civilization,* is time. Taylor's broader point about the potential of real-time structures is well made, though he probably goes too far in claiming that these games make players 'reflect' more than 'any historical work'. This said, games like *BiA* certainly do carry implicit arguments about the role of time in past action, particularly in decision-making and players must indeed constantly negotiate time as a resource to play these games. However, though these historical arguments clearly exist in the text, whether this understanding is transferred to a historical, rather than purely ludic, understanding as Taylor claims, is obviously questionable and needs further research. Taylor's dismissal of alternative temporal structures as somehow inferior is also too rash. Unfortunately this is all too common in research on digital games, which sometimes has a tendency to ignore the potential of other forms of games (such as board games and those digital games based on them) in favour of a narrative of harmonious technological and representational progression. Such a rejection is akin to dismissing the words of the book because they do not function in the real-time of cinema. Of course, in reality each historical form is valuable precisely because it offers something different to the others. Similarly, though the turn-based temporal structure of *Civilization* certainly entails different interactions both in pure ludic and in historical terms, dismissing this temporal structure as merely 'less than' real-time is far too simplistic.

Time in *Civilization*

The turn-based structure in *Civilization* is combined with a number of design and narrative decisions such as the game's scope and concurrent time ratios, e.g. the length of a turn in the game's representation of years. This means that play time (that of the player) bears little real-time relation to either the fictive historical (narrative) time or the time of the past that is depicted. Indeed, in terms of the latter, how could it when *Civilization* depicts so many years of human history? Nonetheless, though this cannot really be represented in the game-play itself, *Civilization* does constantly reference its relation to past time by quantifying this in years and showing the variable relation (according to period) of this to turns. Whilst the game's player-led turns and potential for anachronistic emplotment, makes this largely meaningless in temporal terms, this noting of the years does potentially increase the fun for players engaging with the counter-historical aspect by making the game's relation to and irreverence for established narratives clear.

This turn-based approach also means that *Civilization* is temporally segmented. 'Temporal segmentation' refers to 'limiting, synchronizing, and/or coordinating player activity over time' (Zagal, Fernandez-Vara and Mateas 2008, 178). This can be done in two distinct ways, temporal co-ordination and/or temporal resource. Within a temporal co-ordination game-play segmentation system, not only will the player's actions be regulated but also their occurrence over time. The most common form of this is in turn-taking games such as chess or draughts. This has the effect of 'forcing the players to co-ordinate their actions so that individual players cannot simultaneously affect the state of the game' (2008, 178).

Temporal co-ordination as a game-play management structure in historical videogames is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the duration, frequency and order of the narratorial voice's focus on events and existents, is a key element of historical narrative that the historian decides when constructing it. The temporal co-ordination structure has the ability to allow players to disrupt this in reception in ways not available to audiences in other forms (or even other games). Some of these ways are immediately obvious, for example, duration may be longer than the developer-historian intended as there is no limit to the turn time that a player may take and even the extent of the available decisions to be made is dependent on their previous actions. Thus, this temporal structure, by attempting to manage the game-play experience through time,

paradoxically entails handing over some temporal agency and particular narrative elements to the player without the developer-historian being able to guide them through the use of temporal pressure.

This also means that the relationship between play time and fictive time is much less clear in *Civilization.* As aforementioned, because the game is turn-based, play time is really decided by the player who is not faced with challenges in which success depends on the speed of their reactions. This is quite unlike *BiA* whereby many of the challenges must be dealt with immediately. For example, turning a corner and meeting a member of the Wehrmacht requires a quick shooting action. Some game-play decisions, such as deciding on squad movements to flank the enemy, are more tactical and require the player to consider and make conscious tactical decisions rather than merely react. Yet even these less obviously performatory challenges are still under the duress of real time in the sense that they must be made according to the movements and actions of enemies and the changing threat and game state that this entails. As aforementioned, this of course has its own benefits and such pressures allow for particular representations to be created in videogame form. However, so too does the temporal structure of *Civilization*. Whilst in *Civilization* success still depends on making good strategic choices (including sometimes deciding not to act at all, very little or skip a turn), how long these decisions take to make is completely in the player's hands. When the player does make a decision about what should happen then the game will carry it out, it requires no more (or relatively little) performatory input from the player after this point.

Moving units and combat in *Civilization* is done immediately within a turn and this is admittedly closer to a 'real time' relation to the player but certainly not to the past that the game tries to represent and is ultimately insignificant (except for how easily it allows conceptual-constructionist arguments to be made). However, for the most part the player will not experience the results of their decisions and actions about technology, urban and landscape development, resource management, ideology and unit training and subsequently how these change the game state, for many turns. This can mean (depending on the player) a considerable amount of play time. This lengthening of time before the game responds with the desired outcome of the player's action, rather than merely acknowledging that the player's decision has been made through the game's menu systems, is meaningful. In delaying the represented outcome and concurrent affordances, an argument about the amount of time and work (as well as the

other resources that are represented and must be spent) that a society, person or group would have invested (according to the developer-historian's model), in order to discover, build or research whatever historical referent the player has chosen, is included. This is quantified in 'turns' (e.g. 100 turns to build a city) and is relative to the resources and developed technologies (affordances) that the player's civilization already has. Kee (using Aarseth's typology) notes the mimetic quality of this temporal structure by comparing Meier's text to *Caesar IV* in which a 'brand-new Coliseum can instantly be placed within a city (time is "Arbitrary"), whereas in *Civilization IV* time is "Mimetic" (imitated), so it takes a number of turns, reflecting something of the actual cost in time, to build a Coliseum' (Kee and Graham forthcoming, 7). In this way the turn system functions as a representation of the nature and complexity of each historical element, object, concept or process, its relation to existing societal and cultural infrastructures and more broadly makes arguments about the relationship between time, resources, technology, the concept of progression (or 'civilization') and ultimately power, in an easily understandable way: through the 'felt' pressures of ludic metonym.

The 'number of turns' system is also used to represent these historical developments because the agency that the player has over the progression of the game means it cannot be represented in play time (i.e. the hours and minutes that the player experiences). This would be so even with an extreme ratio, as it is not quantifiable in production because the progression of the game and the play time that passes are never incontrovertibly linked and are dependent on the player, who controls the relationship. What we can say, however, is that fictive time in *Civilization* always passes much quicker than play (or past) time because of the game's grand scale (i.e. the vast majority of human or perhaps western, history).

Time still has an important role to play in *Civilization* and its representation of the past, but as a conceptual simulation this is not by purporting to 'show' time as an experience in itself, or rather, not through a 'realist time' relationship with the past or player. Whilst the game has no delay in beginning and recognising our commands, the relation between play time and fictive time (and past time), features a deliberate and perceptible distortion. This is perhaps unsurprising given that 'one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme' (Metz 1974, 18). Firstly, this is obviously to allow the game and player to engage with many years of human history (which in turn distorts the real time of the past). By distorting and quantifying

this representation of fictive time through the turn system rather than solely the lived experience of the player, as described in Chapter 2, the game is free to make meaningful arguments by utilizing the temporal tone of traditional historical narrative. This discursive shift is also echoed in *Civilization*'s relation to other forms of games, as Eskelinen notes, 'turn-based strategy games such as *Civilization* seem to favor *causal relations over temporal ones* to create event structures that have remarkable similarities to complex board games' (Eskelinen 2004, 40).

Secondly, this is also valuable precisely because it more obviously highlights (as well as more effectively utilizes) the change from real time to narrative time that history always necessitates. The necessary quantification of the game's research or building processes into definitive numbers of turns also makes for (with the other similarly quantified resources such as building materials) a very easily readable and understandable rhetoric about the relative complexity, importance and cost of particular developments, a core aspect of the game's historical argument.

Civilization does not offer realist temporal relationships like *BiA*. The ratio between play and fictive time depends on the player's subjectivity but it will never approach a 1:1 relationship, mechanistically (turn-based) or in terms of representation (each turn is many fictional years). Additionally, because the game does not report in the same realist tense as *BiA* and operates through a more traditional historical narrative discursive tone and representation, the relationship between fictive time and past time, like in most historical narratives, will never align, even in the smallest moments of play. Instead the relationship between past and fictive time in *Civilization* is discursive, in line with the typically conceptual tone. This is not only apparent in the turn-based structure but also in the freedom allowed players in choosing elements from throughout human history, often at will, a freedom which in itself constitutes a temporal narrative structuring. This temporal fluidity, typical to historical narrative, enables meaning to be made that spans and interconnects vast swathes of past time at the historian's (or even player's) will.

This temporal co-ordination structure also has one other significant facet in the particular interactions it allows and encourages. As series creator Sid Meier notes, 'Time is a critical element in games, and one of the characteristics of *Civilization* is you have as much time as you want to think about things' (Crair 2011, 2). In this way the

loss of control over temporal narrative features by the developer can be seen to have a further positive aspect, as the temporal imperative as to how we negotiate the discourse of the text becomes more akin to that of the book than the film. We have time to navigate *Civilization's* extensive menu-like interface and this allows us to receive as much or little of the historical data as we wish, as well as taking time to understand the game and the possible consequences and meanings of our decisions before (or after) we make them. Accordingly, the pressure from the narrative component is further reduced in comparison to the realist-simulation reliant on the tropes and style of mainstream Hollywood historical film and the player is instead given time and indeed even encouraged, to consider.

This lack of intrinsic temporal pressure is crucial to the games, perhaps most important, function because it allows the game to work as an exploratory challenge and also because it allows for a number of the player's influences on narration. However, for now it is enough to note that such segmentation can create distance from the representation and certainly more opportunities for reflection and perhaps therefore, more consciously critical play.

At the very least, such a dynamic encourages greater understanding as the player is allowed the time (and yet is still likely motivated by goals) to understand the simulation and its rules. 'The turn-based structure lent *Civilization* an intellectual flavor, as players crafted long-term strategies rather than thumb-jamming in response to whatever appeared on screen' (Crair 2011, 2). This is Meier's aim: 'I want the player to be living in the future of the game, to be thinking what's going to happen next...The game is really happening in their head, as opposed to on the screen' (Crair 2011, 2). As well as emphasizing the interplays between the modes of interactivity this also outlines how the game is primed to encourage players to think in terms of temporalities and allows them the structured story-space to do so. A space where they can consider possible futures and learn both of and from, the possibility of alternate pasts and futures, in terms of their own play and in terms of history. This sort of analeptic and proleptic consideration when engaged with the game's historical representation is a core aspect of the historian's and ideal active reader's role. Opportunities for and encouragement of this sort of consideration, is integral to what the game affords players in terms of interacting with history and thus its potential functions as a historical text.

In a turn-based game like *Civilization* we may then be more likely to indulge in historical musing. This is precisely because, in combination with the fact that we have so many small decisions to make that one is rarely likely to unalterably alter the whole, the relaxed temporal ludic pressure creates more opportunities for us to indulge our creative curiosity. This allows for us to perhaps explore and play on the basis of historical resonance, rather than always being concerned with strategy and victory. A game of *Civilization* is so long and ludic pressures tend to build so gradually that we are given a greater creative margin, even if we only consider this in temporal terms, in which to concentrate and explore the game's representation and arguments. In such a game there are much greater opportunities to consider and to indulge in, configurative resonance. Of course what this temporal structure amounts to is, again, helping enable the discursive tone and interactions of the game and consequently the audience to become empowered to mould and skip through time (and space) to better produce particular meanings.

The relinquishing of these concerns (namely the cinematic-realist temporal narrative structure) and the swap to a more overtly conventional fictive - past time (narrative) relationship is a key aspect of the game's discursive simulation, both in terms of the freedom it gives the developer-historian to write particular arguments about the various historical elements and in terms of the player's engagement. The latter is enabled not only by the playful discourse, with the player being free to (often anachronistically) skip through time, but also through the long-periods that are represented (in-turn enabled by the game's more fluid temporal ratios), the macro discourses and themes this allows and perhaps most importantly in the time for thoughtful and careful reflection and decision making that the turn-based structure allows the player. In this way the particular temporal relationship gives the player better control over not only narration but also the formation of the narrative itself. This lack of pressure is integral to allowing the players to engage in the more important discursive moments of which the system is at its best capable of.

Tense

In a sense when we look at these temporal relationships we are examining a series of time related narrative features and most of these (order, duration, frequency etc.) are mostly relevant in their swap to a more audience-centric control. However one of these

concepts is worth considering separately, because it is necessarily tied to the functioning of videogames as a historical form: tense. For example, *Civilization*'s historical irreverence is linked to its fluid tense. Whilst the game's discursive movements through time and space, as in the traditional historical narrative, would indicate a firm past tense, the game must also, to some degree, present its virtual events in the present tense. Indeed, how can any game not? 'On the personal computer or console, history has always been presented as live event, has always been marked with a sense of urgency as it unfolds through play, and has never been a static text in which the player can make no meaningful intervention' (Atkins 2005, 6).

This said, *Civilization* also confusingly maintains a firm sense of 'past-ness'. Firstly, this is through the game's obvious changes from the game-play present to a more traditional narrative past tense when we, for instance, look something up in the *Civilopedia*. Secondly, the lack of a sense of the lived (historical) experience and the use of the discursive conceptual-constructionist style cannot help but establish a more distant and traditional historical temporal tone, most likely of past tense. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, if the game is being played as a history at all (historical resonance has been established), which is after all the only reason to be concerned with tense at all, then play is likely at some point, even if only initially, to occur in a state of 'knowing' past tense. This is because much of the game's joy as a historical text is in the allowance and indeed, encouragement, of the player to create dissonance between what *has* happened (as the player understands it) and what during game-play *could* happen (and in turn what could have happened). Similarly, the effort to create resonance by introducing extra-ludic historical goals is on the same basis of a relation of what *did* happen and what *could* (have) happen(ed). Therefore it is the tension between the game's discourse about the past and the player's intervention in the present that is both supported by and creates this 'knowingness', a past tense infused with an irony perhaps best described as postmodern. 'Self-conscious playing (ludic history) with the **timing** of the text to defamiliarise the reception of the past is always permissible and is to be encouraged' (Munslow 2007B, 108). In this 'knowingness' (as well as the actualization of the player's role in the other overtly temporal narrative elements and other narrative structures discussed later) *Civilization,* it can be argued, achieves this playful defamiliarisation.

By contrast, *BiA* has a strong sense of the present tense, unsurprising given the stylistic focus on presenting conceptions of the past to the player as it is claimed to have been lived. The realist-time relationship is obviously a core component of this present-tense representation, allowing the player to play as a historical agent and a 'living' part of the fictive world in terms of the immediate and satisfying responses to our actions. The very aim of *BiA'* epistemological and simulative stance is to convince us of the reality of its representation through the 'realness' of the lived game-play moment.

This said, the tense does occasionally shift. Firstly, by looking at the extra-ludic elements, such as the secondary sources in the menu, there is a change in tense to the consciously historical. In the later *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* an effort is made to keep this extra information diegetic by presenting it as 'recon reports'. This obviously also involves the maintenance of a present tense representation. Secondly, the frequently used framing narrative cut scenes are, strictly speaking, presented in the present tense. However, because we step outside our character and we are no longer an active member of the *emergent* historical world during these scenes, it can be argued that they encourage a more conscious acknowledgment of the true temporal arrangement at play in the game's representation. Furthermore the game's frequent use of analepsis and prolepsis in Baker's and Hartsock's narratives also muddles this relationship somewhat. However, because this occurs as an intra-diegetic past tense, we can still play in the present tense and because we, as audiences, are well trained in these tropes from cinema, it is perhaps less consciously jarring. Despite these slight distortions, always in the realist-time game-play moments we are fully, often exhilaratingly and somewhat conversely, immersed in a paradoxically present tense historical experience.[2]

The game's operation in the present tense and with a realist-time structure encourages players to play reactively rather than consciously historically. Though *BiA* is structured towards encouraging actions that are assumed to resonate with our understanding of the past, we do not need to remain particularly conscious of it, in fact the game encourages us to momentarily forget this relationship. This begins to hint at the notion that, perhaps surprisingly given the dramatic tone of the game, in *BiA* opportunities for interacting

[2] Of course this can never be truly ontologically distinct in any history we have established historical resonance with, as this entails the maintenance (however slight) of an understanding of the games relation to the past.

with history are often much more mechanistic than traditionally discursive. Such a present tense whilst having obvious benefits, also involves a loss, particularly of some of the narrative tropes we normally use to talk about the past without subsuming its 'pastness'.

Conclusion

Being so heavily linked to simulation type, it is possible to delineate time as a somewhat minor category of analysis. However it is still an important category for understanding historical videogames and it is necessary to have some conception of this basic relationship before we can properly explore, space, narrative or affordances. Here I have proposed we understand time in historical games as a relationship between player-game/representation-past. As such I have proposed the categories of play time (the time of the player) – fictive time (the narrative time of the game) - past time (the timeline of events in the past as they occurred or are understood from evidence). Investigating the relationship between these categories is important to understanding both how a game structures opportunities for the player to interact with it as a history but also how a game engages with the past, its style of discourse.

It is also worth noting as an aside that in discussing realist temporal relationships we have also begun to think about the relation between player actions - avatar actions - historical agent actions. This is a core concern to later arguments concerning *BiA*, however it is enough to say that the tight and often visceral temporal match discussed here is not indicative of further unproblematic realist relations in regard to interaction. The problems that must later be unpacked can be simply summarised here by noting that jumping is very little like pressing the button of a controller.

Returning to the issue at hand, there is much more to be said about the role of time in historical videogames, for example, exactly which temporal features of narrative (for example, order, duration and frequency) are shifted to the player's hands in particular game-structures. To do so however, is to begin to speak of narrative, a crucially important category in analysing the videogame as a historical form. However in turn, to do this we must first discuss the role that virtual space plays in the game-play and narrative of historical videogames and it is this that we turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Space

'...it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand.'
-Foucault 1984, 246

Virtual representations of space have often been non-reflexively interpreted using a dualistic approach that outlines virtual landscapes and sites as separate and even equal spaces to the everyday space in which we live. This is problematic (Qvortrup 2002, 14) and has perhaps been fed by the fascination, fears and concerns about the virtual (half-real) which has permeated Western culture for centuries. From Plato's Cave (1941, 514a-520a) and folk tales that speak of entrancing dream worlds, to the 'feelies' of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and the simulated worlds of *The Matrix* and *Inception*, the fascination with seductive 'other spaces' is clear.

Many games do communicate an idea of space to the player. However, it is difficult to deny that books, films and paintings also regularly and effectively convey this sense. Arguably, the only real difference with the representation of space in games is that we have some say in the presentation and parts of the representations we experience because they react to our movements. This sense of space however, is certainly sufficient for us to be able to talk in terms of the meanings of the spatial representations of the fictive worlds with which historical films, games and books present us. Furthermore, virtual space structures game-play. Accordingly, spatial metaphors and comparisons can be useful for understanding meaning-making and challenge in historical videogames but this should not be mistaken for any kind of dualist claim. Whilst we must temper our understandings, this does nothing to reduce the idea that spatial representations tend to be a powerful part of the narratives produced in many forms. Thus, transposing a set of game mechanics to a new virtual space, may affect game-play. However, this may also alter the interpretation of the actions and events that

transpire 'within' it.[1] The potential for this overlap, considering the interactive model already proposed, should by now be obvious.

Historical narratives can be understood as attempts to harness both time and space into an assimilable form. The events of the past unfolded in spaces somewhat like our own and though these exact spaces are lost, it is hard to see how we can produce referential history without some attempt to represent and acknowledge them. 'Historians in particular should consider it impossible to teach without explicit, sustained and sophisticated reference to space and place' (Mostern 2010, n.p.). Mostern continues, 'At least in principle, historians also recognize that history unfolds through space...[however] it is fair to say that we have found it more cumbersome, and perhaps less important, to trace spatial relations than to trace temporal relations' (n.p.). With the age of dominant theories of cultural exceptionalism now (hopefully) over in historiography and the turn to more palatable notions such as environmental determinism, as well as of course the influence that digital technologies is now offering the humanities (such as geographic information systems), the serious inclusion of space in history is more pertinent than ever.

Luckily, historical videogames cannot help but include conceptions of space as an integral part of their representations. 'The defining element in computer games is spatiality. Computer games are essentially concerned with spatial representation and negotiation' (Aarseth 2007, 154). The vast majority of game-play (digital or otherwise) is about spatial relations in some regard. In the videogame this also means negotiating real space in response to, and to gain particular responses from, screen-based spatial representations. Accordingly virtual 'space', is firstly included because it is a large part of the challenge and experiences on offer from modern videogames. Learning to negotiate the challenges of these represented spaces in the performatory and/or exploratory sense is an integral part of play. In videogames we not only experience representations of space we also actively negotiate with them. Secondly, in historical videogames, these spaces must also be constructed diegetically at some level if the attempt is to be made to provide satisfying 'arenas' in terms of narrative, drama and historical representation as well as game-play. Historical videogames have to include

[1] For example, *Half Life 2: Deathmatch* modification *1378km* caused controversy by using the border between East and West Germany as its setting.

representations of the significance and meaning of spaces of the past if not representations of the spaces themselves. The space integral to the game's play must also become a meaningful part of its narrative which includes the representation (of past spaces) and (as explored below) even bridges these aspects. Consequently, 'space is a special issue between rules and fiction' (Juul 2005, 188). This makes it integral to understanding videogames as history and a structure that can lead to some interesting tensions and resolutions between content and form.

Whilst the current sophistication of virtual historical spaces is perhaps questionable and certainly variable between products, nonetheless, history in the videogame form always makes 'explicit' and 'sustained' reference to space and place. Representation of space, as an intrinsic facet, is one of the representational languages modern videogames can comfortably speak. The form necessitates the developer-historian's inclusion of some sort of tracing of spatial as well as temporal relations. Tolstoy strained at the suitability of literature as a form to represent space in the sweeping panoramic descriptions of battles in his historical narrative *War and Peace* (1993) hinting at the possibilities that cinema would eventually introduce (Murray 1997, 29). Perhaps, historians too have only really stumbled in reference to spatial relations because of the insistence on a hierarchy of forms with written history considered the only appropriate avenue for 'proper' history. Films are obviously less innately troubled by formal limitations in terms of space, even more so the modern videogame which cannot help but deal in representations of space. 'Games fit within a much older tradition of spatial stories, which have often taken the form of hero's odysseys, quest myths, or travel narratives.... These writers seem constantly to be pushing against the limits of what can be accomplished in a printed text' (Jenkins 2004, 122). It is this idea of the space of games as a narrative gaming space, as they must necessarily be when the videogame works as history, which this chapter will use. In doing so I explore how fictive historical worlds are cued and produced by developer-historians and players by using space as both rules and fiction. Thus, modern videogames, to use the terminology of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll 2008) as appropriated by *The Matrix*, do not allow us to fall down 'rabbit holes' as is sometimes claimed and yet neither do they restrict us just to peering at them. Instead these games invite us to peer 'into' rabbit holes and playfully rummage through what has been placed inside.

‘The History Beyond the Frame’

Somewhat ironically, perhaps the best way to start thinking about the role of representations of space in historical videogames is to think about off-screen space. For the sake of brevity and structure I have summarised some of these arguments below from a recently given paper on the subject (Chapman 2013B). However a deeper exploration of these same ideas can also be found in two more expansive book chapters on the topic (Chapman forthcoming 2013; forthcoming 2014).

Space is both a historical and ludic issue in historical videogames. Virtual space constructs representations and functions as a tangible narrative structure but it is also integral to challenge and game-play.

> ‘Generally, the 3D model, perspective, visual scope, allowed movements and broad spatial format of *Brothers in Arms* means players are supposed to feel as though they are on a journey travelling through a world as a member of it [see figure 4.2]. Conversely in *Civilization* these design structures are supposed to make players feel as though they look down upon a world and command elements of it [see figure 4.1].’ (Chapman 2013B)

Off-screen space is about more than just level design or the game as an object and the ‘space of videogames is a conceptual one, constructed in the player’s mind as he manipulates the representational system that comprises a particular game’ (Bogost 2007A, 306). This reminds us to be wary of dualist notions of space and highlights the importance of the exchanges between the modes of interactivity (orthodox meaning negotiation and configurative ergodic traversal) in historical videogames. This process of construction is important both in terms of constructing the fictive world and tactical ludic considerations. This also indicates that often there is ‘an implied representation of space that is not contained on the screen and yet is not a part of the real space of the player either: Off-screen space’ (Chapman 2013B). The most comprehensive account of off-screen space in videogames can be found in Wolf’s (1997) taxonomy. By developing these ideas further I have proposed that in historical videogames the ‘suggestion of ‘off-screen’ game space affords us structured imagining of fictional spaces beyond, though related, to what is contained on the screen’ and that ‘in many games it is common for virtual space to move between on- and off-screen’ (Chapman 2013B).

Figure 4.1 – Game-play in *Civilization V* (civilization5.com)

Accordingly, I propose that spatial historical representations in modern videogames work not only through level design but also in accordance with the Japanese concept of 'ma'. As author Lian Hearn explains, this can be understood as, 'the space between that enables perception to occur' (2008, n.p.). Subsequently, 'Off-screen spaces are a form of 'ma' that developers use to cue players into constructing vast and detailed worlds that cannot possibly be represented' (Chapman 2013B). However, 'They are also important rules that work to create challenges that contain implicit arguments about the historical experiences and/or processes they aim to represent' (Chapman 2013B). This means that the relationships 'between spaces that we, as players in a given moment experience and those we are aware of or imagine but do not in a given moment (or perhaps any moment) actually directly visually perceive is important to understanding historical representation in this form' (Chapman 2013B).

Brothers in Arms is a realist-reconstructionist game space that owes a debt to 'cinematic realism' so a first-person perspective is a natural choice.[2] Whilst players are allowed 'an unbroken exploration of space, allowing them to pan, tilt, track and dolly through the space' (Wolf 1997, 20) their field of view is restricted, their avatar is rooted to the virtual floor and the draw distance imitates the limitations of the human eye. Consequently, in first-person historical games 'players must learn to negotiate their

[2] It is useful to note here that player camera perspective is the rough equivalent of focalisation (first-person is internal focalisation and god perspective is zero focalisation).

perspective on the game space as well as the often complex first person controls' (Chapman 2013B). It is also useful to note that *BiA* is linear and players travel through a broad 'corridor' of space, normally uni-directionally. Each player will take roughly the same path and encounter the same spaces in a broadly particular order.[3]

The restrictions of the first-person perspective mean that players can't see the whole of the game space at any one time and 'most of the virtual representation of space tends to be off-screen in any given game-play moment' (Chapman 2013B). Obviously, the purpose of this is to give a degree of perceptual similarity between the information available to the historical agent and that of the player, increasing the believability of the game's realist simulation. However, this also 'serves an action-led representative function as it works as an *information rule* that means without player action much information about the environment is unavailable (Chapman 2013B). This means that implicit to this first person perspective is an 'exploratory challenge' (Linderoth 2011, 10) that aims to represent some of the challenges that faced the historical agent. In this way, despite the differences in actions between player and soldier, the importance of the perception and usage of space in combat is made clear and a particular representation of frontline WW2 warfare is constructed.

Figure 4.2 – Game-play in *Brothers in Arms : Hell's Highway* (pcgameshardware.com)

[3] The game uses spatial segmentation so spaces are broken into sublocations (Zagal et al 2008, 178).

Of course, off-screen space is also created by terrain, characters and objects that block visual information. This forces us to use our fire teams to extend our spatial awareness. Furthermore, 'remaining in off-screen space (according to the enemy's implied line of sight) protects us, and they are protected from our gunfire by remaining off-screen' (Chapman 2013B). As such, 'The lessons about WW2 tactics that *BiA* offers are highly dependent on off-screen space' (Chapman 2013B). For example, in game terms, flanking can be understood as attempting to uncover off-screen space. Similarly, the arguments surrounding the importance of technology in warfare and the role of particular weapons relies on off screen space. For instance, bazookas and grenades can be understood in game terms as tools to negotiate the protection of off screen space and the destructible cover system mechanic of *Hell's Highway* is a process of allowing the player to reveal these spaces with little movement. Similarly, despite the game constructing these off-screen spaces as sources of anxiety, it will often nonetheless force players to make decisions about them with little information. This emphasises some of the exploratory challenges of command, arguing that information about space was an important tactical resource. However, it also argues that 'despite the various knowledge tools (map and compass), even in relatively modern combat, information for officers was often still reliant upon and also limited by, the natural restrictions of embodied human perception' (Chapman 2013B). 'Each of these considerations takes off-screen space as a core resource and/or challenge and each in doing so makes particular ludic arguments about the challenges of WW2 combat (Chapman 2013B).' Accordingly, in all of these ways *BiA* uses off-screen space to emphasize that 'War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty' (Von Clausewitz 1976, 101).

BiA also makes significant efforts to imply off-screen space beyond the player-avatar's allowed movement and/or sight (see figure 4.5). Using, for example, bullet flight paths, significant draw distances in combination with environmental detail and events such as planes flying overhead or distant noises. This is perhaps unsurprising given that **'**Both mental modelling and cognitive mapping show how the interpretation of a game relies as much or more on what the simulation excludes or leaves ambiguous that [*sic*] on what it includes' **(**Bogost 2006, 105). Accordingly, this suggested off-screen space is used to 'cue us into imagining the historical spaces that the developer-historian could

not really include representations of and yet in which they want us to situate the events of the game' (Chapman 2013B).

Subsequently, we have the space within the boundaries in which we can move, the space we can see beyond but which remains inaccessible and finally the space which, though we cannot actually see, cued by the game's representation, we imagine exists beyond the representations of the screen. All of these 'spaces' are important to the construction of a full fictive (historical) world. Of course such imagining is important in a game like *BiA* with a heavy emphasis on diegesis but also because this 'takes some steps towards situating the local events, both geographically and in terms of their relation to the larger world and historical discourses that we know or accept' (Chapman 2013B). The assumed existence of this space helps create a sense of drama and combats the game's narrow historical focus by allowing the events of the game to be represented as part of a wider conflict. 'This cued superset of off-screen fictive space is important because it helps to suture the events of the game into the wider historical narrative' (Chapman 2013B). Furthermore, such suggested spaces also help to,

> **'**create a sense in the player of their (and individual WW2 units) relatively small role in the large-scale conflicts that were fought [and] this combined with *BiA* restriction to fairly minor and historically typical characters and scenarios, helps to combat the 'great man' (Carlyle 2010) rhetoric which can often creep into other WW2 games through the wish to empower players both in form and in content.' (Chapman 2013B)

Such a structure also helps to reinforce the idea, which we shall see is integral to the game's narrative structure, that the player is a small part in a broader trend of events that they cannot change. 'For the most part the player's aim, as at a basic level it was for soldiers, is not to engage morally or politically with the larger context of the war but only to fight to survive (and move forward)' (Chapman 2013B).

Off-screen space in *BiA* and most other FPS historical videogames 'works as both an information rule vital to the game's representation (and particularly its lessons about WW2 combat tactics) and has a vital role in constructing the wider fictive historical world' (Chapman 2013B). Accordingly, 'historical representation of (particularly combat focused) FPS realist simulations like *BiA* are almost as dependent on the off-

screen spaces that are *not* shown in a (or indeed perhaps any) game-play moment as those that are' (Chapman 2013B). By comparison, *Civilization* 'prioritises agency and discursive complexity over giving a particularly credible visual representation of space' (Chapman 2013B) and operates through a top-down (god) view. 'Perhaps unsurprisingly given its conceptual simulation style, *Civilization* uses the most familiar technique for conceptualising space in ways beyond human experience and presents its digital representation of space as a [raised relief] map' (Chapman 2013B). Unlike *BiA*, *Civilization's* space is open and singular and playing involves navigating a fixed space for the entire duration of a play-through. This means that there is perhaps less to say about the off-screen space of *Civilization* but it does still make some important contacts with the notion.

Though in *Civilization* our top-down perspective means that there is very little informational challenge caused by terrain, the camera view of *Civilization* (which allows only a portion of the map to be viewed in detail at once) does operate as a present, but not particularly challenging, information rule. Though *Civilization*'s turn-based structure almost completely negates this it is worth noting because in a real-time strategy game this would work as an explicit form of challenge. *Civilization* is not, however, completely free of such challenges and the second information rule which uses off-screen space is the 'fog of war' mechanic (see figure 4.3). Just as in *BiA*, this emphasises that 'war is the realm of uncertainty' and in fact this quote is widely credited as the source of the phrase 'fog of war'. In *Civilization* 'the power of spatial and environmental information is emphasised as crucial to historical, particularly military, endeavour and the fog of war mechanic is core to such arguments' (Chapman 2013B). In this way off-screen space is an important part of the game's wider arguments about space, exploration, ownership and dominance. 'By challenging the player to negotiate with this 'fog', *Civilization* make specific arguments about the historical importance of exploring, understanding and conceptualising space whether off-screen, off-map or simply undiscovered' (Chapman 2013B). Furthermore, because off-screen spaces must be negotiated through units and technology the 'fog of war' is important as a pressure to lead players into the game's other arguments about affordances.

Though in earlier games when the camera reached the end of the map it would simply stop, later games moved to a boundless, globe-like model (see figure 4.4) that Wolf

would classify as a 'finite but unbounded space' (Wolf 1997, 14). This is a significant change in the inferred scope of the historical representation. 'Players of the earlier *Civilization* games could be forgiven for assuming that the game represented just a portion of human history, with a possibility for other narratives and paths to progression to simultaneously exist in the space beyond' (Chapman 2013B). Such interpretations are much less readily available to players of today's versions and the game suggests that its perspective on human history is all encompassing: the history of the world. Here it is the very lack of off-screen space that actually makes the argument, creating the sense of completeness, 'an epistemological echo of the printed text with which the empirical-analytical approach has long been associated and drawn its own authority from' (Chapman 2013B).

Figure 4.3 - Screenshot of the fog of war in *Civilization IV*. Here the darkest areas are those we have not explored with any units and the slightly lighter though still shaded areas are those we have explored but in which we don't currently have any units or cities.

Whilst the map is unbounded on the East-West axis it remains bound on the North-South and this 'echoes the game's concentration on a dichotomous history of the world as a series of East-West movements' (Chapman 2013B). Of course this is not likely to be the reason for this mechanic and players can still move along a north-south axis. However, the emphasis and greater degree and convenience of movement horizontally cannot help but add to what is already apparent in the game's rules and content. 'The

intrinsic focus on those aspects of history that *Civilization* highlights as significant in progression and domination are nearly all features of a particularly western-centric narrative and more specifically focused on the type of historical processes and conflicts that were done *by* the west *to* the east' (Chapman 2013B). This is hardly revelatory, however, 'what is interesting in this context is that, whether intentionally or not, the mechanic has eventually grown to support the message' (Chapman 2013B). A more favourable view of this East-West spatial dynamic would highlight that it also invokes the environmental determinist arguments of Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* (1997), which much of the wider arguments of *Civilization* also align with.

Figure 4.4 - Screenshot of *Civilization IV*'s unbound x-axis. Here the white rectangle on the mini-map indicates the player's camera moving across the western edge of the map and emerging on the Eastern.

The trade-off for the game's large scale spatial representations is the sacrifice of detail. This means that there are many implied off-screen spaces that are too small to see or blocked by the roofs of buildings, but the inference is that they existed in the spaces which the game refers to. Similarly, the menus hint at concepts and technologies that have particular reference to space for many of us. However, the abstract nature of *Civilization* cannot really do visual justice to notions such as the relationship between architecture and state power. Accordingly, 'many of these spaces hinted at by the

game's historical representation cannot be represented except in the simplest possible terms and yet they are implied as existing somewhere in our civilization and *within the historical discourse of play*' (Chapman 2013B). This is supplemented, 'not through players assuming a super-set of fictional world space as in games like *BiA* but instead a series of sub-sets. In Meier's text players fill in the minutiae that the broad strokes on the giant canvas of *Civilization* cannot help but miss' (Chapman 2013B).

Off-screen space plays an important role in representing the past both through the suggestion of its existence and the construction of fictive spaces but also through its role as a ludic pressure and resource. In terms of space (at the very least) the historical representations of videogames are made up of more than that which the developer actually constructs. Thus, 'History in the videogame form is also made up off that which developer-historians hint at, cue us to construct, downright exclude or make sometimes unavailable, digital 'ma', the spaces in between that enable perception to occur' (Chapman 2013B).

Space as Power

Realist-reconstructionist approach to simulation tends to mean 3D linear spatial-structures, realist temporal relationships, first-person (or third-person) perspectives and thus, complex spatial controls. Subsequently, navigating virtual space in *BiA* is not just a matter of understanding it but also being able to perform 'within' it. This not the case in *Civilization* where virtual space (as a ludic pressure and resource) requires strategy but the movements the player must make are relatively easy and under no temporal pressure. Despite these differences there are also some similarities in the significance that space has in each game's historical argument. Indeed, 'The core narratives behind many games center around the struggle to explore, map, and master contested spaces' (Jenkins 2004, 122). This is unsurprising given that most games (e.g. board games and sports) are not only obviously played in space but also explicitly use space as a competitive resource. This means historical videogames answer Mostern's aforementioned calls but also that past-space tends to be dealt with specifically as it relates to conflict and power.

This dynamic is obvious in *BiA* which uses both spatial and challenge segmentation (Zagal et al 2008, 178). Space becomes a reward for the completion of challenges and

BiA focuses on the frontline experience of WW2 combat, which at its most basic was about the taking of land and driving back of enemies, moving the frontline gradually forward. As noted, 'the topography...not only cues the player into imagining...it also provides cover and hides information' (Juul 2005, 188). The construction of the game space determines 'choke points, which points are easily defended or very vulnerable, and more generally which strategies will work for either side on this map' (Juul 2005, 188-189). Consequently, space is a vital part of the local challenges that necessitate particular player actions and is a vital part of the representation of WW2 combat, which the game shows a relatively good degree of competence in.

Whilst in each game this manifests through very different game-play, the possession of space is a strong theme in both. This is perhaps more problematic in *Civilization* because it posits itself as a broader history of civilisation and yet often privileges the combative aspects of this because it is also a game. The concentration on spatial domination that this entails has also led to accusations that *Civilization* is not so much the history of civilisation as the history of Western colonialism (Lammes 2003; Poblocki 2002). However, there are also some negotiations with the virtual space in the game-play that do more than only echo familiar and problematic jingoistic meta-narratives.

For example, even beyond the demands of military strategy, we are constantly aware of the terrain, for the barriers to exploration it may entail (which must often be overcome through the development of technology) and the resources it provides. Mostern notes a positive example of spatial history:

> 'a 1959 classroom exercise in which history students marked a blank United States map, including only river systems and lakes, with the locations where they expected cities, railroads and highways to arise. They discussed their reasoning, and finally compared their hypotheses with a map that included the actual historical information.' (2010, n.p.)

This is a very similar exercise to learning the basic historical information about the geographical resources of *Civilization* that we are forced to understand if we are to become skilled at the game and have thriving civilizations. Subsequently, *Civilization*

also answers Mostern's call for an emphasis on 'the relationship between natural resources and settlement patterns' (2010, n.p.).

Whilst there may be an advantage to having this information intrinsic to the tasks of game-play, *Civilization*, unlike the lesson, normally lacks the post-action comparative meta-discourse (excluding historiography or online communities) that seeks to ensure the transfer of knowledge. Nonetheless, these arguments about space are contained within the game (allowed by the conceptual simulation style and concurrent larger thematic frameworks) and in some ways the process of negotiating the map of *Civilization* works similarly to the example lesson above. Through various game-play mechanics, virtual space in *Civilization* is used to make simple attempts to explain 'spatial variation [which] helps to explain the range of human lifeways, the capacity of peoples, goods and ideas to move from place to place, the terms by which peoples have encountered one another, and how rulers governed populations' (Mostern 2010, n.p.).

For instance, in the default mode the maps are randomly generated (though sometimes around themes such as Pangaea, oasis or Ice Age). Importantly, all players are placed randomly within these at the beginning of each game and must choose the locations of their cities carefully. These random maps deny players the opportunity to apply some outside geographical information. However, it also emphasises (through multiple play-throughs) the arbitrary nature of the particular advantages that some cultures have enjoyed. This does also mean that the game is open to the same critique that Mostern aims at Fernandez-Armesto's *The World: A History* (2007) in that 'it celebrate[s] interconnection without historicizing it or locating its elements within a corporeal geospatial world' (2010, n.p.). However, the random generation and concentration on resources also serves as a good example of *Civilization*'s contact with the ideas of environmental determinism, in particular its concentration on 'the ways that geographic location and access to natural resources shapes the power relations between nation-states' (Squire and Jenkins 2003, 18). Examples such as these show that perhaps there is an argument to be made that *Civilization*'s natural concentration on space in its game-play does not simply reinforce Western notions of power but also the Diamond-esque (1997) idea that 'world history—the narrative of how and why the world's peoples have encountered one another and with what consequences—must be conceptualized as an essentially geographical specialization' (Mostern 2010, n.p.). Interestingly, Mostern also concludes that the kind of spatial thinking that she advocates teaches students to

'understand that there are many simultaneous worlds at any time, that multiple histories therefore coexist as well, and that as a result there is no single and linear path of progress' (2010, n.p.). As we continue to examine the role of space and/as narrative in *Civilization* it will become apparent that this is a game that often emphasises this idea of multiplicity.

There may be too much of an emphasis on understanding space as it relates to power and expansion because of the intrinsically competitive nature of games. However, even beyond this, these historical videogames, in their tensions between form and narrative content, serve as an excellent example of the need for and yet problems of history as a narrative (and thus time-led) construct simultaneously needing to harness conceptions of space. Regardless, space is an important part of the history that games *are* able to easily represent. This is evident in *BiA'* competitive challenges and the historical experience and arguments that it offers. Whilst *Civilization* takes a more conceptual take on the theme of space, it is one that engages, albeit simply, with important notions in contemporary historical discourse. I would agree with Mostern that these types of historical insights are worth encouraging, particularly in popular texts such as these. However, I would also add that it seems that maybe games *like* and *as* 'geography, with its *visual*, *tangible* and *ludic* quality… [are]…an excellent way to get there' (Mostern 2010, n.p., my emphasis).

Space as 'Narrative Architecture'

We have explored virtual space or its suggestion, as a significant structure that creates representation through its role as a historically thematic resource and pressure in game-play and as a factor in the construction of a larger fictive world. Yet, what about the direct representative functions of virtual space? In all these depicted historical spaces there are embedded narrative components. Clearly, this is more immediately evident in the realist simulation. However, because a historical narrative does not *have* to be diegetic in exactly the same way as we would expect a mainstream drama to be, this also occurs in *Civilization*, most obviously in the resources and pressures the conceptual landscape provides. *Civilization*'s space is used to create narratives of broad historical themes, processes and their interplays. Conversely, *BiA* attempts to convince us it is not in fact a narrative but a space and is therefore something more akin to the past. The

spaces of these games are major elements in the virtual manifestation of the developer-historian's story-space that await narration, partially through player movements.

As already touched upon, the virtual spaces of historical videogames are 'a means to achieve a more complex task: the generation of fictional worlds in the player's imagination that grow from a comprehension of the 3D representations' (Nitsche 2008, 2). Again this emphasizes the importance of the exchanges between the two modes of interaction. So too, the fact that, 'In games, players are forced to act upon…mental maps, to literally test them against the game world itself…The heavy-handed exposition that opens many games serves a useful function in orienting spectators to the core premises so that they are less likely to make stupid and costly errors as they first enter into the game world' (Jenkins 2004, 126).

Game spaces seek to cue players into understanding their nature beyond (though related) to that which players are immediately presented with. Such a dynamic can serve both ludic and representational purposes and often these are one and the same. Matteas, sees this manipulation of player expectation as achieved through a game's 'proto-plot' (2004, 26). This is partially achieved by the NPC inhabitants of the virtual space but is also prompted through the environment itself. For example, 'the creepy industrial mazes' (Matteas 2004, 26) of *Quake* not only work as engaging representations, but also cue the player into realising what the allowed actions and challenges (affordances) of the game are likely to be. These mazes use the established spatial tropes of first-person shooters, however, this is clearly combined with the tropes of the Hollywood horror movie. The aim here is to cue us, through both sets of these familiar tropes, into understanding that the NPC's are likely to be scary and aggressive, we should move forward but cautiously and that game-play is likely to be highly combative. Game-play makes negotiating the game's virtual representations of space a real concern and forces us to engage with these environments full of 'evocative narrative elements' (Nitsche 2008, 3). These are used to cue us into comprehending the game world as both a ludic and fictional space where certain events may happen and have already happened. Subsequently, the beginning of narrative becomes apparent in the exchanges between our orthodox meaning negotiation and configurative ergodic traversal in the consideration of space.

The often dual (both fictional and ludic) nature of these evocative narrative elements becomes apparent if we return to a historical example. Say we happen upon a deserted Normandy village in *BiA* with bullet holes in the scenery, holes from explosives in the walls, vehicles on fire and corpses strewn on the ground. This 'staged area' (Carson 2000, 2) may add to our understanding of the narrative of D-Day which the game presents but also cue us into being wary because battle has recently been fought and there may be enemies nearby. Our understanding of the larger arguments of the historical space and also how it may affect us on the smaller game-play level (which also creates the larger arguments) is prompted through the same mise-en-scène. Our actions produce a fictively charged configuration to negotiate, this meaning negotiation feeds back into tactical configuration and presents us with more configurations to read. This interplay between the modes of interactivity goes beyond the sometimes simplistic divides made between rules and fiction and the issue of space is a good example of how through game-play, in the best moments of the historical videogame, these seemingly divided elements can become weaved. These evocative narrative elements 'do not contain a story themselves but trigger important parts of the narrative process in the player. These processes can lead to the generation of a form of narrative' (Nitsche 2008, 3).

As Jenkins notes, this is part of what Don Carson, a show designer who works for Walt Disney Imagineering, calls 'environmental storytelling' (Carson 2000) and is used to build the similarly simulative worlds of Disney's theme parks. Modern videogames (and thus historical videogames) make use of all 'of the major facets of theme park creation – spatial narrative, experience design, "illusion of authenticity" and immersion' (Pearce 2007, 201). In the conceptual simulation the relinquishing of realist demands and more discursive use of space may seem to mean that immersion and the illusion of authenticity are much less important and in purely dramatic terms this is true. However, in reality these are just substituted with similar techniques for producing the illusion of authenticity that we find in more conventional historical narratives. *Civilization* attempts to immerse the player into the authoritative authenticity of its spatial arguments *about* the past rather than spatial representation *of* the past.

In the simulated environments of Disneyland 'the story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through. In many respects, it is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell'

(Carson 2000, 1). A similar dynamic is apparent in the realist historical simulation. Carson continues, 'Armed only with their own knowledge of the world, and those visions collected from movies and books, the audience is ripe to be dropped into your adventure. The trick is to play on those memories and expectations to heighten the thrill of venturing into your created universe' (1). Like Disneyland, the spaces of historical videogames play on the assumed knowledge of an implied participant because the establishment of historical resonance even at its most basic is facilitated through assumptions about the player's historical understanding. Historical videogames rely on establishing a link to existing historical discourses in this way and the space that is constructed is likely to be a major way of producing the kind of tropes that are likely to do so.

Even the conceptual simulation's historical space must feel 'sufficiently real' to establish resonance, though this will probably be achieved by its importance as a rule within the system rather than the visual fidelity of its representation. The spaces of such games must use recognisable audio-visual tropes to make this representational link apparent but true audio-visual realism is not really the issue here. What matters is that 'every texture you use, every sound you play, every turn in the road should reinforce the concept' (Carson 2000, 2). Jenkins adds, 'any contradictory element may shatter the sense of immersion into this narrative universe' (Jenkins 2004, 123). This applies whether the game takes the concept of historical (cinematic) realism or multiple concepts weaved into a discourse system, as the core of its simulation style, affordances and epistemological approach. Of course this coherency is what matters to the developer-historian but when we consider these ideas from a postmodernist perspective we could also conclude that an absolute alignment between space and thematic concept, with its pleasing and persuasive authority, also brings a raft of problems depending on what role we wish these games to play as histories.

Clearly, the representation and usage of virtual space is a significant portion of where the historical narrative in these games is produced, resides, and is negotiated and configured by players. In acknowledging this we are starting to explore one of the most important ideas in this chapter: space is both a source and reflection of historical narrative in historical videogames. In both *BiA* and *Civilization* spatial story-telling manifests through 'evok[ing] pre-existing narrative associations....[and] providing a staging ground where narrative events are enacted' (Jenkins 2004, 123). In terms of

history, this means evoking a player's historical understanding, invoking the larger historical discourse (establishing historical resonance) and, providing a *challenging* 'space' for players to exercise their agency. Furthermore, in each game, spatial storytelling is used to 'embed narrative [and ludic] information within their mise-en-scene...[and]...provide resources for emergent narratives' (Jenkins 2004, 123).

These latter two techniques for spatial stories are often in tension and rarely deployed equally. This is somewhat symptomatic of the inherent tension between traditional narrative formats and the audience agency inherent to games. It is these particular uses of space that begin to clue us into the larger narrative structures at play in a historical videogame. Particularly in terms of emplotment and the relation of player and developer to the role of historian in the virtual space, which is after all the story-space made (half-)real. Thus, in *BiA* the role of space in historical story-telling is more heavily oriented towards embedding information, with an emphasis on players negotiating a largely fixed space/historical narrative. By comparison, in *Civilization* the emphasis is on virtual space as a resource in and from, which to craft emergent historical narratives. Space is important to narrative in each but the process of narration differs dramatically. Initially, this is best explored using familiar everyday narrative architecture (or perhaps rather the narratives embedded within our everyday architecture) as metaphors.

BiA and Gardens

The narrative-structuring qualities of the virtual space of *BiA* is perhaps most explainable as a sort of garden.

> 'Gardens can be seen as an organized sequence of staged situations. The designer has created a condition where the protagonist is taken along paths through sceneries and settings to please and surprise. Gardens are experienced spatially which ultimately means we can walk around in them. It is a three-dimensional frame that although it does not offer a strict linear narrative (telling that...) has a narrating expression (telling about...).' (Lamm 2002, 216)

This description echoes the experience of negotiating the virtual spaces of *BiA* and many of today's other progressive, spatially segmented realist games.[4] Like the garden, because we have local spatial agency (at the very least) the game can never be a completely linear experience, nonetheless, the spatial structures are arranged to broadly inhibit us and we can always sense the hand of the designer guiding the broader spatial choices we make. Thus, we are guided through a form of spatial narrative, a series of 'staged situations' that are very particularly sequenced as a narrative experience and thus necessitate the restrictions on our spatial agency. 'In either case there is no random collection of elements that combined gives an expression but rather a meticulously arranged composition with carefully planned sequences of elements with particular meaning' (Lamm 2002, 215). However, whilst gardens 'are narrative because they are telling the story of ideal place' (Lamm 2002, 216) the space of *BiA* is narrative because it is telling a story of past places.

The 'gardens' of *BiA* (which are often actually depictions of Normandy gardens) are fairly tightly defined. In larger gardens in reality, say for instance those of a manor house, we would expect to encounter further agency in structures such as branching paths. However, in *BiA* our path is defined, we must experience every larger sub-set of space to move forward. We cannot miss one space in favour of another except at the local level, for example, choosing not to enter a house but to instead go round the side. This is partly because the demands of realist simulation mean that resources are limited but also to prevent the player creating fictional incoherency. Lastly, this ensures that the player is confronted with all of the spatial elements and events that the developer wishes them to experience as they spatially narrate the narrative which the developer has fixed into their path. Such an environment reinforces the reconstructionist epistemology of the realist approach. If the game is presenting *the* story, any spatial deviation from its larger narrative pattern would detract from this authority, would not make sense and cannot occur. These limits on and directing of player movement allows for the creation of a linear narrative framework, whilst still allowing game-play and a sense of agency at the local level.

It is this linear spatial arrangement that allows *BiA* to take advantage of a long and effective history of narrative conventions to engage in compellingly dramatic spatial

[4] Similarly, in both cases, the space has 'no strict practical purpose and its design and layout derives form [*sic*] a different point than that of organizing functionality' (Lamm 2002, 216).

story-telling, 'limiting and directing the movement of the player character is essential to the creation of pleasurable effects such as fear and suspense' (Krzywinska 2006, 79). Specifically, this, in combination with the realist simulation, allows developers to retain enough control to tap into the wealth of ways for making arguments and stories about the past that have been developed within historical cinema. However, because in addition to this we retain a satisfying real-time local spatial agency, historical games like *BiA* perhaps also tap into the seemingly 'deep need in contemporary mass culture – particularly in the United States – for a human-scale, pedestrian experience of immersion in a three-dimensional narrative' (Pearce 2007, 201). Certainly this spatial structuring allows the developer to guide the player's movement and in doing so also (though more subtly) guide their negotiation of the game's structured historical narrative.

Civilization and Cities

Of course this garden metaphor, in terms of a sequenced space, only works for *BiA*, with its linear levels experienced from a first-person perspective in 'realist-time'. *Civilization'*s open map is different and its function in narrative is similarly so, as it purposely opens up space for a range of player-led inscriptions. Whilst the linear garden map has advantages, it also deliberately creates strict limits on what can occur and in what order, after all a reconstructionist authority is intrinsic to the space. As Jenkins also notes, urban planner Kevin Lynch states that 'a landscape whose every rock tells a story may make difficult the creation of fresh stories' (Lynch 1960, 6). Thus conversely, perhaps historian-developers that wish to make histories of a particular sort, like urban planners, 'should not attempt to totally predetermine the uses and meanings of the spaces they create' (Jenkins 2004, 129). *Civilization* is this sort of history. Since metonymic ludic discourse is the stylistic focus for meaning-making in the conceptual simulation and since narrative is the root of historical discourse, the game must make allowances for narrative emergence. In the conceptual simulation, players must be allowed to meaningfully experiment, to pose alternatives and question the possible outcome of the various systems and their actions. In terms of the historical aspect and in short, players of these games need to be able to create stories and space is one of the structures that both allows and constrains this in particular ways.

Space is a good first indicator to us, as historians analytically approaching historical games, as to the narrative structures and thus possible historical functions of particular historical videogames. Specifically, the vast map-like spaces of games like *Civilization*, initially mostly empty of human history, should lead us to the understanding that this is not only a map but a page which players can spatially inscribe. For example, 'In Peter Molyneux's *Black and White*, the player's ethical choices within the game leave traces on the landscape or reconfigure the physical appearances of their characters. Here, we might read narrative consequences off mise-en-scene the same way we read Dorian Grey's debauchery off of his portrait' (Jenkins 2004, 127).

A similar dynamic is at play in *Civilization* whereby the main ludic and thus, narrative purpose of space is for us to harness it, own it and change it. Whereas *BiA* is the garden through which we walk experiencing an embedded narrative, the simple map of *Civilization* is a virtual blank canvas, an empty page that invites our action to alter it through historical play. What could be more symbolic (within traditional narratives) of a blank space awaiting inscription through human intervention than the natural geography which we encounter? [5] After all, the departure from nature (which is made troublingly clear-cut in such narratives) is often seen as the first step on the road to 'civilisation'. Thus if the space of *BiA* is a formal garden which we traverse experiencing the implicit narrative expressions, then *Civilization* is a patch of unkempt grassland containing the basic resources for a garden but awaiting a gardener to formalise and decide its exact narrative expression with the various tools for action that the game provides. In *Civilization* we are not so much narrative travellers in virtual space as we are authors of it.

Accordingly, virtual space in *Civilization* is perhaps best compared to a city. 'Cities themselves also have a rich, emergent folk narrative of their own – a messy, unplanned story of ad-hoc expansion, a stark contrast to the highly controlled schema of narrative spaces (Mumford 1961, Brand 1994)' (Pearce 2007, 200). The most obvious interpretation of this more organic spatial narrative is historical; the city landscape documents the changes that have been made to it over time with architectural features from various periods side by side. Like a city, the resulting space of a game of *Civilization* is messy because it is made up of the influence of multiple competing factions without a unified focus and vision and decisions about its landscape are made

[5] Unfortunately this also invokes the colonialist notion of terra nullius (Douglas 2002).

in reaction to both the landscape and its other 'inhabitants'. Like the city, the game space is partially unplanned because the developer cannot fully control the outcome and the options are complex enough for multiple emergent narratives to be produced. Furthermore, the less expertise we have with the system (which is presumably tuned to optimal strategies) the more this rings true. Like the city, our moulding of the game space is always expansive because this is a core tenet of the game's rules that is made clear from the very beginning. Finally, like the city, the narrative expression of the space of *Civilization* cannot help but be historical, though whether this is interpreted as the production of a history, the history of a historical discourse or simply the history of the play of a game (or all three) is again where we meet the subjectivity of individual players and the dependence of the establishment of a historical resonance. Nonetheless, through this dynamic the game often presents a good representation of the nature of human, particularly urban, expansion and indeed history more generally: a series of decisions made with the challenge of the moment in mind and producing a narrative expression (at least seemingly) only coherent in that it is a historical account of some of the decisions that have been made. The space of *Civilization* is both a visual record and component of the historical narratives that the player is invited to create through play, inscribing simple narrative expressions upon the map to lie alongside and within that which is pre-inscribed by the developer. It would require familiarity and exploratory expertise for this narrative to be re-told through a reading. Nonetheless, as with most videogame narrative, the main point is not in the promise of a retelling (that will probably never take place) but in the process of discursive writing.

Space as Story Space

Clearly representations of space serve a number of important ludic and fictive functions in historical videogames. Furthermore, space is often the bridge between these elements and the exchanges between the two modes of interactivity that occur when games are experienced as history. These exchanges between play and representation, rules and fiction, are apparent in the role of space as a resource for determining and reflecting the player's role in narration. Space indicates and structures the nature of the historical story-space that we are entering into when we play a particular historical videogame.

Firstly, there is the obvious relationship between the story/content decisions that determine the boundaries of the story-space and the boundaries of the game space (see

figure 4.5). The geographic and historical limitations of *BiA* are both manifest in its often jarring spatial boundaries (hedges, fences, vehicles etc). The wider complex historical narrative that the game is drawn from is only hinted at through the off-screen space and only enough to broadly and simply contextualise our actions. Thus, everything that is not directly and immediately relevant to the game's focus on the frontline combat experience falls outside both the game and story space. As Aarseth notes, 'the topology of even the most "open" computer generated landscapes makes them quite different from real space, and controlled in ways that are not inherent in the original physical objects they are meant to represent' (Aarseth 2007, 47). This is because in truth, and this is a key point, these are not historical spaces but narrative representations which we can navigate or create using physical action. They are only really spatial in their reference and in the ludic resources and pressures that they entail. Of course games also 'rely on their deviation from reality in order to make the illusion [of space] playable' (Aarseth 2007, 47), but it is also precisely this that begins to structure and define their role as historical narratives.

Figure 4.5 – The different boundaries of play in *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* (Gamespot.com).

Secondly, the two broader spatial structures that have been discussed here (linear and open) constitute a form of narrative emplotment. Obviously the relative emplotment of objects within the space at a local level has a deep relevance to the representation and as previously discussed, the local spatio-realist emplotment of *BiA* says very different things than the lack of this in *Civilization*. However, what I refer to in particular here is

the macro spatial structures, the level design that has a more obvious relationship with larger narrative structures than local mise-en-scène.

> 'The spatial sequencing of elements can be regarded as equivalent to a time structure in narrative. As Michael Heim claims "space from the standpoint of the "system participant" has a temporal framework"....The garden space is laid out in a very specific way that organizes and relates the different places and installations. The path through the garden guides the way it is intended to be experienced.' (Lamm 2002, 216)

Thus when we progress through the linear space of *BiA* we are experiencing the emplotment of a historical narrative and because emplotment determines the significance of events in their (normally temporal) relation to each other, the space of the game is the developer exerting control over player and simultaneously space and time in narrative form. Thus, like all histories, the game is an attempt to harness human experience (which is spatio-temporal) within narrative. Additionally, if narrative can be understood as the harnessing of time and (within games) 'space' is a narrative expression, then the relationship between space and time in historical videogames is perhaps even clearer than in other narrative forms.

Though this can never be fully achieved because of the player's still significant local spatial agency, what is noticeable is the developers attempt, whether intentional or not, to occupy or maintain the traditional role of the historian in the construction of narratives about the past in a form which questions and therefore produces tension with this dynamic (which is already often perceived as unstable). This control does not just mean emplotment. However, through using this particular structure in addition to others, the developer retains some control over other temporal elements of the narrative. Though again this is, arguably, not at the level of the traditional empirical-analytical authorial role, still the attempt is made to exert influence over the narration and configuration of temporal elements such as duration, frequency and repetition by using the game space.[6] An author of a traditional history (or any) book retains good control over when audiences are exposed to particular bits of information and narrative elements, but this is much more difficult for a developer-historian. However, this can be somewhat remedied, allowing the developer to 'regain' some control over narration,

[6] For example, see Jenkins (2004, 126) on 'redundancy'.

by distributing the information throughout the space of the game. There is some irony that the loss of traditional control is partially returned through the use of something as new as videogame representations of space. The anxiety over the loss of authority in comparison to more traditional forms of history often creates these sorts of tensions in historical videogames.

If the space of *BiA* espouses a relatively strict emplotment, then the open space of *Civilization* hints at the opposite and as noted, we do not experience a narrative space quite so fully pre-written. Instead, we and the other players decide the narrative that the space will help express throughout and at the end of game-play. As one would expect, there is relatively little of the developer's emplotment to be found in the game's representation of space. However, this emplotment is by no means entirely absent (it can never be thus and still be a historical videogame) but it exists far more meaningfully in the game's rules (e.g. 'fog of war', time segmentation, causal relations, rules of resource management) than its space and finds a visual representation in menus (like the tech-tree) rather than virtual landscapes. Still, as the map space, and the existence of the emplotment in an almost purely ludic capacity indicates and structures, there is far less developer control over the historical narrative of a game of *Civilization* than we would expect from a linear realist-reconstructionist text such as *BiA*.

Accordingly, we can see the manifestations of each game's simulation and epistemological standpoint in the very way that their spaces are structured. Though it is perfectly possible to create open world realist historical videogames (e.g. *Assassin's Creed*, *Red Dead Redemption)* the desire to maintain a clear and firm emplotment (and consequently the more overt aim of telling *the* story) in the realist-reconstructionist simulation does find a natural and easy ally in the linear game space, which by its nature excludes narrative alternatives or significant interventions. Thus the steadfast and focused march of the typical reconstructionist approach is reflected and constructed in the lie of the virtual landscape itself. The player must progress forward in the tightly controlled experience that, like all staunchly reconstructionist empirical-analytical experiences, seeks to stop the player/reader from turning (both conceptually and ludically) around and from following alternate routes. Subsequently, the game's spatial depiction of Normandy (e.g. linear and spatio-realist) is also a kind of visual epistemological map. So too the thematically-complex discursive constructionist approach is reflected in *Civilization's* game map which is not concerned with

representing real spaces as much as creating room for conceptual ones, instead using more complex and variable systems (mostly in the forms of menus) to provide a form of thematic and causal emplotment.

These spaces both indicate, manifest and structure our expected role and the tensions of authorial control in, the (hi)story-play-space, as do the epistemologies and simulations with which they are often overdeterminate. However, it is far from the only structural element that does so. Our role in the story-as-game space is also determined by the actions we are afforded (wider rules) and also by our own capability in terms of our historical understanding, critical ability and ludic skills. Yet, often one of the first indicators to us as to the basic nature of the historical story space is the historical videogame's representation of space, which rapidly becomes apparent as we begin to play.

Evidently there is a natural harmony in this alignment between historical narrative and virtual space. This is evident in that 'Stories can plot events into lines, create hierarchies, unite beginnings and ends to form circles, or tie knots and design labyrinths' (Potteiger and Purinton 1998, 7). This relationship between space and narrative is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the modern digital game where the spatial arrangements of narrative often become manifest as perceivable virtual spaces, with the spatial arrangement both playing a part in producing a narrative and echoing that which is produced by the greater whole. This is certainly evident in game likes *BiA* with its harmonious spatial, narrative and epistemological structures. Perhaps the most obvious example of this relationship between space and time/narrative is in the use of analepsis or prolepsis whereby the player-character is wholly transported, both figuratively in the temporal narrative change and in the literal (or rather virtual) movement to a new space. Similarly as Fogu notes, *Civilization* 'literally transforms *time into space*...The narrative input to transform "place into space," as Ted Friedman puts it, is...there from the beginning to make sure the story of *Civilization* is understood as a "spatial story," the "drama of a map changing in time"' (2009, 121).

These are excellent examples of how in historical videogames, space and time each cues, confirms and echoes the other, with narrative space serving as, not only the bridge between, but the core representative of each, category of human experience. Thus, whilst this plotting of stories into shapes can obviously be done with words, in the

historical videogame it can also be done by creating more tangible spatial narrative structures (or leaving a conceptual space for them to be formed). Virtual space is the first of a range of structures (in the sense that it is the setting within which other structures are normally situated) that allows our interaction with narrative to become physically actualized. In this sense, particularly its obvious role in the basic emplotment decisions described here, virtual space is a core structure in the manifestation of the story space as a (hi)story-play-space. By doing so 'through landscape the temporal dimension of narrative becomes visible, and space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and *history*' (Bahktin 1981, 84).

Conclusion

Space is an integral part of historical representation in videogames. As described, virtual representations of space, even apart from their obvious historical data load, are deeply important to both the challenges (as both resource and pressure) and narratives that together produce history in the videogame form. The virtual space of such games is a core structure and an indicator of the notion that the digital game is a shared playful imitation of the developer-historian's story-space, normally the sole realm of the author and yet into which we are invited when we play historical videogames. Space is also a key issue in structuring and cueing us as players into understanding, under what terms we do so. By determining our game movements these spaces also begin to structure our narrative movements and agency. Such spaces are filled with the visual manifestations of the historian's decisions about the story-space, including those about what is left to us to configure. Accordingly, when we play in the linear reconstructionist-realist space of *BiA* it is quickly made clear to us that we cannot alter the broader narrative path whereas the constructionist-conceptual open space of *Civilization* suggests high degrees of narrative agency. Space is an indicator and structural component of the narrative tensions which are some of the most unique and interesting aspects of historical videogames; tensions between production/reception and player/developer and the relation of each to the role of historian.

Because videogames, by their very nature, can rarely discount space as an aspect of historical representation and because narrative is a feature, if not the nature, of history, in such games, historical spaces must become narrative containing story-spaces only to then simultaneously become digitalised virtual spaces. The (his)story-play-space is

formed from both virtual (half-real) aspects. Historical games do not just include space as part of their historical representation, it is a lifeblood aspect, a langue which works across rules and fiction and enables representations (including, though not limited to, spaces) of the past in videogame form. Examining space allows us to start to explore some of the deepest issues surrounding the videogame as history.

Nonetheless, as expansive as these virtual representations may seem they are only ever a part of the larger (his)story-play-space. There is still much more to be said about rules: how they challenge us to learn and how they apply to our narrative construction. Subsequently, there is much more to be said about narrative that cannot be said in purely spatial terms. As such, the next two chapters will be dedicated to narrative. Firstly, this is because of the importance of a notion of narrative to history (even in games) and secondly, because to begin to fully explore such notions there is the need for a basic model of game-based historical narrative to be outlined and a number of issues explored. The next chapter proposes such a model whilst Chapter 6 takes these ideas and applies them to both *BiA* and *Civilization.*

Chapter 5

Narrative in Games

'A narrative is like a room on whose walls a number of false doors have been painted; while within the narrative, we have many apparent choices of exit, but when the author leads us to one particular door, we know it is the right one because it opens.'

-Updike 2009

It should by now be clear that narrative and space are heavily linked and in the videogame this link is generally explicit. Sometimes these narrative mazes are manifest as virtual space that may be difficult to negotiate and focused on spatial performativity (as in *Brothers in Arms*). In other cases narrative complexities are manifested 'spatially' through complex menu systems though experienced in relatively simple virtual representations of space (as in *Civilization*). However, in neither spatial structure is narrative *movement* completely free.

It is the presence of such tensions and the obvious spatial aspect (of both games and narrative) that leads Henry Jenkins to claim that we should think of 'game designers less as storytellers than as narrative architects' (Jenkins 2004, 129) who create experiential structures in which narrative can be playfully encountered and negotiated. As has become increasingly apparent, both time and space are hugely important factors in understanding games as history (narrative). Firstly, the produced narrative is an attempt to harness the time and space of the past in an assimilable form. Secondly, as game-play constructions and mechanics, each category produces, structures and determines the role of players in the historical narrative that results from play. Spatial agency in games is a huge part of developing emergent narratives but these are not the only choices that we as players are confronted by, nor the only way to determine narrative structure—far from it! Subsequently, both space and time are also part of a larger narrative issue: opportunities for action. Thus, the interesting question, which is essentially the focus of this chapter, departs from the more book-form focused 'what does the narrative *say* to us?' and moves towards 'what can we *do* to it?'

Admittedly, historical games are a confusing mix of both mimesis and diegesis. We tend to experience games fictional events in the present tense. However, we form a

diegesis through play and of course the game may also have diegesis in the form of stories we are told about the past of the mimetic world it shows us. We experience and partake in a mimetic construct (a simulation) but in doing so we decide/reveal a narrative about the past. Thus we leave the game as we might the film, with a fully formed narrative, the meaning of which we have negotiated or interpreted. However, unlike the film we leave with the memory of our configurative actions and an acknowledgement of our role in the narrative that was created.

Accepting this using the classical model of mimesis/diegesis means that the narrativity of games 'hinges on the virtual diegetic narrativity of a retelling that may never take place' (Ryan 2001, n.p.). Though, as Ryan writes, '(re)tellability is a function of the particular nature of the generated events' (2006, 193), so the richer the representational aspects the more likely the events of specific game-play are to be able to be retold. Whilst this acknowledges the importance of the generated events to this narrative, it does not seem sufficient to describe the narrative experience *during* the playing of a game and seems to move too much towards the player's potential role in passive retrospection. Indeed, Ryan stops just short of arguing this when she states that 'the greater our urge to tell stories about games, the stronger the suggestion that we *experienced the game narratively*' (2006 193). Therefore, retelling, though doubtless indicative of the possibility of *narrativity*, is not sufficient to explore the narrative experience of active and playful *narration*, which in the case of the videogame must often occur before the formation of the story which is to be retold. Hinging the videogame's status as historical *narrative* (which theory indicates it must be) solely on a function that is beyond its present-tense experience as played and indeed which is uncertain to take place, is problematic.[1] Nevertheless, if we use the classical idea of diegesis (as telling) we cannot help but reach this contrarian conclusion. And yet, as argued within these pages, the unique essence of videogame history is not in the promise of retellability (though a meta-discourse can be historically useful) but in the process of discursive and playful writing itself.

Klevjer (2002) resolves this somewhat paradoxical interpretation of videogame narrativity by turning to Genette's (1980) narratological interpretation of diegesis as a fictional world, created by discourse. 'This *diegesis* is not a method of presentation, but

[1] Sometimes diegetic retellings do occur however and fan forums for historical strategy games often maintain sections for this (Apperley 2007).

a level in discourse. Narration, as a mode of discourse, is the act of creating this *diegesis*. This narration may be a patchwork of dramatic and diegetic methods of presentation' (Klevjer 2002, 198). Such an understanding aligns with my proposed understanding of the narrative of historical videogames as an *active* historical *discourse* between player and developer-historian and allows us to explore narrative as it is experienced and created during play/narration. Klevjer explains that part of the problem of using more traditional narrative models is that they are firmly located in the perspective of the spectator. Whilst in games we are often this, we are also a participant. Thus, it is more appropriate to explore the experience of narrative from the viewpoint of an actor.

> 'As an actor in a play, *enacting* the events, your way of relating to the narrative would be very different. Also, a play may only be scripted on a general level, so that you would have to improvise the details. But still, as long as there is some kind of script limiting the range of events, the dramatic narrative would be a part of a narrative situation, establishing a *diegesis* in which certain events may take place. Actors do indeed act, do configure mimetic events, but they also interpret the symbolic action of an *implied author*.' (Klevjer 2002, 198)

This is a very useful metaphor to understand narrative in historical videogames. We return to the idea of a narrative experience even *during* play. We also return to a focus on the tension between the prewritten and the actively configured and interpreted ('reading' and 'doing'). The room for improvisation depends on the controlling structures of the particular game which facilitate the narrative voice that we can understand as the implied author, the 'script'- for example, use of space, objects, temporal pressures, pre-scripted events, affordances and focalisation. In the videogame it could even be proposed that this bleeds from the more tenuous implied authorial role to an implied directorial role through the use of tangible, procedural and quantifiable rules which allow, restrict, punish and reward us in lieu of the developer-historian's actual presence. Such an understanding of diegesis allows us to account for its shared creation through an active process of narration within the (hi)story-play-space whereby players simultaneously interpret *and* act upon the voice of the implied author. We return to a focus on the agency we can deploy in the creation of this diegesis as core to the function of the particular game as historical text. Accordingly a game-based historical narrative is indeed a patchwork made up of two parts: the voice of the implied

author, the diegetic script through which we are 'told' and our own framed and yet chosen, dramatic ludic performance. The former can be simply understood as the 'framed narrative' and the latter as the 'ludonarrative' and each is fused to create the historical narrative.

Framed Narrative and Ludonarrative

The idea of the 'frame', 'framing' or 'framed' narrative is a literary concept whereby a first narrative layer is presented to contextualise and guide audiences into a, normally more pronounced, second narrative layer. The term seems to be first used in opposition to ludonarrative and in reference to games by writer Tom Bissell (2010, 37). Bissell notes that the most obvious incarnation of framed narrative is cutscenes or cinematics because they 'take control away from the gamer' (2010, 37). There are also a number of other ways in which framed narrative manifests, such as pre-scripted events or set-pieces. However, perhaps chief amongst these, are the framing goals that games require players to achieve and which are often explained and introduced through cutscenes and tend to signify the beginning and end of a narrative and play section. These goals frame the ludonarrative by offering a broad emplotment and thus, narrative direction, defining and serving as narrative outcomes, noting which are desirable and functioning as a doorway to the next narrative space (or a climactic narrative endpoint).

Using Bissell's example, if in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* the framed narrative is the requirement 'for you and a computer-controlled character partner to crawl and sneak your way through the irradiated farmlands of Chernobyl in order to assassinate an arms dealer. The ludonarrative, meanwhile, is the actual (and, as it happens, pretty thrilling) process of getting there' (2010, 37). In the former we are subject to almost absolute authorial authority, the sequence of events is heavily emplotted and is not dependent on the actions of game-play beyond our ability to get to this point and beyond in the fixed game narrative. Conversely, the formation of the latter is an active collaboration between developer and player. Simply put, framing narratives are the traditional narrative type and ludonarratives are the new actualized, uncertain, audience-led element. Thus, 'one is fixed, the other is fluid and yet they are intended, however notionally, to work together' (Bissell 2010, 37).

Framed narrative can therefore be understood as fixed *narrative fragments* that emplot and structure the broader events of the game's narrative. The emergently produced ludonarrative, formed by the player, fills the undecided gaps between these framed narrative emploting beginning and endpoints. In a sense, if we return to the concept of 'ma' the ludonarrative is the 'space between' that allows game-play (and therefore emergent narrative production) to occur. The amount to which the ludonarrative is privileged is also the amount to which the historical narrative can be configured (rather than only read). Accordingly, each narrative type also, arguably, privileges a particular mode of interactivity in its offerings as history. Understanding the relationship between the framing and ludonarrative is key to understanding the actualized role and agency of the player in the (hi)story-play-space. Furthermore, the use of the theory allows us to see beyond the simple binary distinction between rules and fiction at which much work on representation in games stumbles.

The framed narrative term is perhaps a little of a misnomer given that more often when we talk of this in games as a controlling emplotment, we are really talking about *story* rather than *narrative*, the latter of which (if we, for the moment, leave aside cutscenes) is also determined in narration. Though admittedly this is through negotiation with a number of controls that maintain the story structure, in the historical videogame much of the narrative remains undetermined until play. Subsequently, when we speak of fixed and ordered plot points or framing elements we are normally actually referring to the story. It is only by recognizing this simple difference that we can really talk about the player's active involvement in the story-space in emplotment. Nonetheless, because in reality modern videogames are not simple texts and include many extra-ludic elements such as cutscenes, documents, trailers and box-art, the term 'framing narrative' carries a nuance that a mere story/narrative divide ignores. Still, the reader should be aware of the deep 'story' inference that the term carries.

Acknowledging this alignment between framing narrative and story allows us to briefly use the terms of the Russian formalists to understand common ludonarrative/framing narrative interplays. The framing narrative tends to function synonymously with the *fabula* (what is in the story and the chronological order it occurs) and the *sjuzhet* (how it is told) is unsurprisingly often dependent on the ludonarrative. When a pre-determined *fabula* is concretely manifest as a fixed framed narrative, as in the *BiA* games, it is normally in the effort to create a more traditional historical narrative and to maintain an

authorial authority and control, normally on an empirical-analytical epistemological basis.[2] However, in some videogames the *sjuhzet*, as it exists in the ludonarrative, can actually significantly pervade the *fabula*, selecting what elements of the story are included and even the chronological order of the events of the story, sometimes without the player even being aware of alternatives. This is not really the case in the two historical videogames examined here (both of which occupy more extreme ends of the narrative spectrum) but it is worthy of inclusion because of its relevance to the effort within these pages to create an analytical framework as well as analyses. Examples of this narrative structure can be found in branching narrative games such as *Mass Effect* (series) or *Jade Empire*. Similarly this is often the case in free-roaming games such as *Assassin's Creed* (series), *The Saboteur, Red Dead Redemption* and of course the seminal *Grand Theft Auto* series.[3] In such texts the framed narrative or story fragments are often sensibly combinable in any order and each may affect the inclusion of future fragments (including the climactic narrative outcome). Such narrative formations perhaps stray closest to the traditional idea of the 'hypertext'. When the ludonarrative (as *sjuzhet*) affects the framing narrative (as *fabula)* this has severe implications for the determination of emplotment and what from the story-space is actually included in the narrative and so in essence constitutes a form of retrospective story/content decision making. Accordingly, the ludo-framing narrative relationship (as aptly demonstrated in this particular narrative formation) is significant in reference to historical videogames because 'the meaning of the past does not lie in the absolute significance of a single event but how that event is fitted into an appropriate story narrative' (Munslow 2007B, 38).

Ludonarrative: Framing Controls, Lexia and Agency

Whilst the ludonarrative is spun emergently from the decisions of the player it is far from completely freeform and it is still a collaborative enterprise with the developer-historian. Subsequently, I propose that we understand the elements other than player action that structure this narrative type as two distinct elements. Firstly, the 'lexia',

[2] The *sjuzhet* is still a part of the framed narrative in *Brothers in Arms* because the cutscenes make frequent use of analepsis and prolepsis, however, the player-led aspect of the *sjuzhet* cannot alter the *fabula* itself.

[3] Some games also utilize *sjuzhet* puzzles (what Ryan 2001 terms a 'jigsaw' narrative arrangement). Here narrative fragments can be experienced in any order without disturbing the *fabula*, which the player must re-piece from the jumbled *sjuzhet* they choose and thus the framing narrative and *fabula* are not necessarily contiguous. For example, see *Halo 3: ODST*.

which the player is invited to arrange into particular combinations to produce emergent narrative and secondly, what I term the 'framing controls', through which the developer determines these combinations and the possible actions involved in doing so. The framing controls prevent the ludonarrative from becoming completely incoherent (which is particularly pertinent in a historical videogame which is after all still referential) and also prevent the generated events becoming non-complicit with the more distinct elements of the framing narrative.

Of course most of these 'controls' are firstly game-play structures and the ways of preventing narrative incoherence have been generated in response to these (rather than the reverse). Still, the framing controls are the extension of the framing narrative into the ludonarrative and are the negotiation between the layering of these narrative types. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is spatial structuring which, as previously discussed, has a role in emplotment and narrative structure. Space can obviously play a significant role in controlling our experience along a larger narrative arc. However, as demonstrated in the significant local spatial agency and challenges of *BiA* and the agency inherent to the spatial inscription of *Civilization*, space also plays a major role in the player-led construction of the ludonarrative. We may be broadly controlled by spatial structures but the actual process of 'getting there' within them is determined by us and thus the spatial narrative rests on player exploration as much as it does player directing. Often a good majority of the space can therefore be seen as framing narrative, immoveable and unchangeable, the limitations of the story-space, and yet so much of it defines our interactions and what we are afforded that it cannot be seen as entirely divorced from the ludonarrative either. For this reason, space can be seen as a bridge between the narrative types. For example, linear spatial structures such as in *BiA*, serve as the perpetuation and manifestation of a cohesive and singular framing narrative. However it can also (even simultaneously) serve as a facet of the ludonarrative: as a manifest record of player choice, as in *Civilization* or in the destructible terrain of *BiA*; as a structure that enables spatial narratives to be created in particular ways; or as a significant element in the challenges that are significant in this emergent creation.

Space is clearly a primary framing control that reflects the complexities of the interplays between the framed narrative and the ludonarrative. However, it is far from the only one and focalisation/perspective, time, rules governing the use and attributes of lexia,

controls on game resources, rules governing possible player/avatar actions, contextual dialogue, challenges, as well as, significantly, the behaviour and measured positioning and introduction of NPCs, can all be seen as framing controls. We can add this list, drawn from the structures which are focused on in the pages of this thesis, to the wealth of controls that are deployed in any typical modern videogame. In doing so it becomes quickly clear that there are a number of ways to ensure the likelihood of particular narrative structures being built within the (his)story-play-space that yet remains partially open, awaiting player intervention.

Framing controls are at once a part of both the framing narrative and the ludonarrative. The developer-historian writes an implied narrative into the reactions and interactions that the world allows, governed by the chosen and referential rules. It is this, along with the audio-visual aspect, that becomes his metonym and tropes, this that he uses to explain the past and its relation to us (both as player and avatar) and this that he uses to create a role for us in the story-space whilst retaining the capability to structure narrative outcomes and thus make particular arguments through the system. Accordingly, though the presence of some framing narrative is normally necessitated (we must at least have objectives if the system is to be a game and these must be communicated in some way), by using framing controls it is perfectly feasible for a developer to maintain a strong story influence without using numerous larger framing narrative preformed fragments and exposition such as cutscenes, pre-scripted events or lengthy dialogue exchanges with limited ontological agency. It is for this reason that 'Many designers have come to see games as vehicles for player expression, thinking of game design as choreographing the rules, representations, and roles for players, in other words the contexts, in which players can generate meaning (LeBlanc 2005)' (Squire 2006, 21). Such a perspective focuses on the role of the ludonarrative in the stories that are told through play.

The other significant elements in the construction of the ludonarrative are the lexia. In a historical videogame lexia are combinable referential ludic representations of historical agents, objects, social structures, architecture, processes, actions and concepts. Each is essentially something that affords particular actions in relation to a particular historical representation. In the model of narrative proposed here, the ludonarrative at the local level is made of lexia that the player combines in particular ways. The framing controls govern the (referential) usage of the lexia and, amongst other things, try to ensure that

these combinations maintain some kind of coherency to established narratives and evidence. For example, guns in *BiA* afford us the action of gunfire, likely to be a key element in the ludonarratives we produce in the game. However we cannot fire a gun in *BiA* unless we first 'pick it up' (i.e. move our avatar nearby and press the X button).

Typically, in the modern videogame there are vast amounts of lexia, many of which are of equal ludic value or can be supplemented with player skill. For instance, in the *Bioshock* series, often praised for its expressive combat system, we have multiple weapons and multiple 'plasmids' (special powers such as telekinesis or the ability to fire electricity from our avatars hand). Each of these constitutes a combat lexia and these are fairly well balanced. Furthermore, ammo for our weapons is limited and we must supplement this with purchases. Similarly, so too are plasmids and the chemicals needed to fuel them. This means that players are not expected to use all of these lexia in each incidence of combat or even throughout the entire game. Naturally each player that comes away from *Bioshock* will have used different weapons and plasmid (lexia) combinations to the *exclusion* of others. Thus the system supports multiple different ludonarratives of combat according to each player's choices, each of which still enables the player to progress through the game (though of course each still requires a baseline skill level). As such, the presence of a lexia as a narratively significant (selected) element is by no means guaranteed and many may remain as no more than part of the historical environment, being lexia only in our spatial experience of them or merely as a considered option.

Whilst these combat ludonarratives of *Bioshock* are perhaps not particularly meaningful in a representational sense, in a historical combat game they may be because exploring how combat occurred in the past is generally regarded as a worthwhile line of inquiry (i.e. military history). Therefore in *BiA*, and other games with similar structures, producing multiple ludonarratives using different combinations of lexia, for example using the same weapons against different enemies, or different weapons against the same enemies, allows us to explore the relative value of these lexia as ascribed by the developer-historian. Accordingly, it is the potential for emergent recombination through action that allows players to properly explore what the arguments made about each historical referent (and indeed even their combinative rhetoric) are and as a result explore the game as a historical representation.

Lexia are always player-effectible elements of the historical representation. However they can be virtually manifested in a number of ways. This can be as complex as the detailed interactive 3D objects of *BiA* (for example a tank, or an orderable team-member) or as simple as the menu options of *Civilization* (for example, choosing to research bronze-working on the tech-tree). The lexia do not affect the formation of the ludonarrative only by their mere inclusion but by the changes they bring to the game state, both positive and negative, or which they afford the player to make by their 'acquiring' of them. As follows, these are not fixed representational elements but must be contextualised in player-action and in their relation to the other lexia of the ludonarrative. Firing a gun into a fence produces a very different meaning than firing it at a more meaningful lexia (like a German soldier). Lexia, through their emergent use in play affect the representation itself, they are not just parts of it in the simple aesthetic sense.

Lexia are of course like every other historical construction, referential, interpreted, creatively decided and newly created representations. However, they also have another layer of meaning in their creation: how they can be used in terms of their relation to an active player and to the other lexia. This is done through the raft of normal decisions that a historian makes about the meaning of the past and how it will function in a larger narrative representation to produce meaning, in relation to the tropes and requirements of game-play. Lexia are these normal decisions given life as functioning, in the actualized sense, narrative units for (re)configuration. This allows for flexible, complex and reactive representations that can support multiple and usefully comparable possible narratives to negotiate and explore the arguments of the developer-historian and historical data. Of course in a sense the narrative fragments of the framing narrative are also lexia in that they are units involved in the construction of the narrative of the game. However I think that there is a useful difference between on the one hand the *lexia* as I interpret them, as basic *narratively charged units* with particular properties that depend on player action to combine them with other lexia to produce narrative and on the other *framing narrative fragments* as discrete, directing, self contained and usually contextually non-specific, pre-scripted, fully formed sections of *narrative*. This is akin to the difference between an actor's use of a prop, gesture or line (lexia) and being subject to a scripted sequence of events (narrative fragments).

Perhaps the best way to describe this theoretical distinction, which in practice becomes blurred in narrative structures whereby the ludonarrative significantly affects the framing narrative, is through examples. For instance, in *BiA* the architecture and objects of the environment, the characters (such as our team members), the weapons and the enemies are all lexia which through our narratively charged play we (often unconsciously) combine in particular ways and produce particular historical narratives. If, for instance, we are given the goal of going to receive orders from a nearby non-controllable Lieutenant and we must stand within earshot of him and listen to his speech about our situation and next objective before we can progress (otherwise, for instance, the speech will reset) then we receive a narrative fragment. We still experience some agency but without receiving the fully formed and unchangeable narrative fragment of his speech we reach a narrative dead end. To return to the door analogy, narrative fragments are thus joining doors and corridors and in and of themselves constitute pathways. These are the entrances and the exits, which link the maze-like conceptual (or often virtual) spaces filled with the smaller and multiple doors of lexia which must be combined to create a narrative pathway. By comparison, the contextual dialogue of our soldiers under fire is lexia because in the first place they are self-contained units (able to be recombined according to our actions) and because we can simply choose another lexia, in this case by moving out of earshot, without halting our narrative progression. When the ludonarrative can significantly affect the framed narrative we may well be able to affect order, or even choose between exits and entrances (narrative fragments). We may even be able to avoid some entirely, but always we will eventually encounter another which will structure the narrative in particular directions and by functioning as a section of corridor-like narrative will lead us to particular ludonarrative spaces filled with the multiple smaller doorways, and thus possible pathways, of lexia.

Returning to the example of *BiA*, some of these lexia will be more under our control than others, dependent on the framing controls designed to make particular ludonarrative outcomes more likely than others. So, for instance, whilst a bazooka on the ground awaits our intervention to change the game state, an enemy tank can act independently of us. Though of course what we do to the tank during play (which lexia we combine it with) determines the structure and outcomes of the historical ludonarrative. Similarly in *Civilization* we will encounter effectible enemy units and furthermore enemies will develop cities and technologies which alter the ludonarrative. However, the vast majority of the lexia in *Civilization* are not complex virtual objects

but menu options which represent particular historical existents or concepts and do so by altering the game state and thus narrative of play. The game's technology-tree, the map of technologies, their effects and some of their possible combinations, is perhaps the best visual example of the ways in which lexia combine, even creating access to further lexia for the construction of the ludonarrative. In summary, in all games the ludonarrative is formed from a mass of possible lexia (combinable referential ludic representations) chosen by the player within the confines of the possible combinations determined by the framing controls, to produce particular configurations.

Game-Narrative Categories

Emplotment and story/content decisions are more difficult concepts when the story-space is in some way open. However, the arrangement of it, the formalisation of the elements in strict ludic structures in production, is hugely important to the function of a game as a historical text in reception. We must therefore categorise the different overall game-narrative structures (the ludonarrative/framed narrative combinations, balance and interplays) if we are to understand what can be *created* and/or *discovered* through play. Ryan proposes the split of exploratory and ontological. These categories initially seem to describe the privileging of the framing narrative or ludonarrative, with the former being found in the exploratory mode of narrativity, a form of interactivity whereby 'the user is free to move around the database, but this activity does not make history nor does it alter the plot' (Ryan 2001, n.p.). By comparison, the latter narrative type is found in the ontological mode 'the user has no impact on the destiny of the virtual world. In the ontological mode, by contrast, the decisions of the user send the history of the virtual world on different forking paths' (n.p.).

Whilst this initially seems a useful division, Ryan does not focus on games specifically and instead focuses on the role of narrative in digital media and therefore does not see the framing and ludonarratives as, at least theoretically, separable entities. This means that the inclusion of any form of ludonarrative, which must manifest in some way because (narrative) uncertainty is a quality of games, renders all the texts that allow this as constituting the ontological mode of narrative interaction. This is not necessarily incorrect but, particularly given the focus of this study, it is not especially useful either as it collapses the vast majority of modern videogames into one category. In doing so, the category then lacks the nuance to sufficiently determine how this ontological

involvement of audiences is managed through a number of different narrative structures and balances. For this reason, I propose the more detailed and game-specific categories of deterministic story structure, open story structure and open-ontological story structure.[4] These can more precisely be used within Ryan's broader ontological category to specifically describe the relative relationships of the framing narrative, ludonarrative and thus player, to the overall game-narrative.

In the deterministic story structure the framing narrative is privileged in the construction of the overall game narrative. Consequently, the vast amount of the (particularly larger) narrative decisions (such as emplotment and story/content) remain closed to the player. The story is a linear sequence with fixed emplotment that must be experienced as such and we must surrender our narrative agency to progress. The immediate local, normally spatial and combative, ludonarrative allow smaller decisions of this kind. For instance, I can choose not to visit the inside of a building, excluding it from the story (but not the (his)story-play-space) as anything more than a suggested existent. However, any decisions of this kind made during the ludonarrative do not significantly alter the broader narrative trajectory and structure which remains closed and in which the player cannot make significant interventions. This is replaced with the framing narrative which makes regular interventions into the ludonarrative and provides 'conditions that given them, nothing else can happen' ("determinism", *Wikipedia*) as well as serving as the immutable consequence of these conditions. This is normally in the form of regular goals (which must be completed), cutscenes, spatial directing and pre-scripted events. Players are forced toward and through regular narrative fragment (and often literal linear) corridors if the story is to continue. The aims which are explained by and direct players towards, these 'corridors' are in themselves narrative fragments in the sense that they consistently frame the events, direction and the conceptual spaces of the ludonarrative in particular ways. Framing controls and historical focus will tend to be tight, with solutions to the game's challenges likely to be more limited and lexia (and actions surrounding these) likely to be similarly few but still with a good degree of, (often spatial) expression in player performance with these limited lexia. Subsequently, players can still form different ludonarratives at the local level amongst the framing controls. Yet, (beyond spatial agency) these are likely to show lesser variation between players. Additionally, player intervention into the strong framed narrative, which

[4] I label these story structures because they relate to decisions that normally occur in production. However, the game *narrative* will eventually be actively produced through these structures.

dominates the narrative of the game, consists of no more than progressing or halting (normally represented by narratives of survival or death respectively). The deterministic story structure emphasises narrative *discovery* over narrative *creation* and is often also characterised by (often unresolved) tension between the linear narrative, strict emplotment and natural agency of the game. In essence the deterministic story structure can be characterised as a 'narratively organised system for playing' (Ryan 2006, 200). This is by far the most numerous story-structure in modern historical games and examples are found in many different game-structures including, *Call of Duty* (series), *Medal of Honor* (series), *Birds of Steel*, *IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey*, *Age of Empires III*, *Company of Heroes* and of course *Brothers in Arms* (series).

By comparison, the open-ontological story structure features a very weak framing narrative and thus dramatically privileges the ludonarrative in the construction of the overall game-narrative. Emplotment in such games is fluid and uncertain and so too are story/content decisions (though again these elements remain as a part of the larger (his)story-play-space) and players will regularly be confronted with decisions of this type. Narrative agency is therefore vast and the majority of the significant narrative structures (again, what is included and how) are therefore available for players to make through combining lexia in particular configurations. In these games framing narrative normally only intervenes during play in the form of goals and these are also likely to be few, implied (rather than explicit) and broad, leaving creative room for the player. Other than this the framing narrative is likely only to provide a narrative fragment corridor which leads into play and a few which describe narrative outcomes (types of win or loss). The framing narrative is therefore likely only to 'book-end' the ludonarrative which continues uninterrupted as the major source of narrative production. Developer narrative influence in such games is limited to the use of framing controls which are likely to be complex and particularly focus on the relative ludic (and thus historical) value of lexia and their possible combinations. Furthermore, some of these framing controls are likely to be partially open and adjustable by players (for example, players may be given options about the environment, resources, goals and fog of war). The open-ontological story structure, with its necessary mass (as it must be to sustain interesting narrative play) of lexia is therefore filled with narrative possibilities and emphasizes vast multiplicity. Accordingly, players 'have a great deal of constructive freedom in improvising the story and multiple ways of accomplishing their goals' (Murray 1997, 151) and the open-ontological structure can be seen as focusing

much more exclusively on 'emergent narratives' (Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 383). Whilst of course, as noted above, all games constitute ontological narrative structures to some degree, this particular category emphasises, highlights and exaggerates the player's role in narrative, taking the ontological interaction as its core essence, centring the ludonarrative as the main site for long-term narrative production. Games of this type focus on the player's emergent role in narrative production and they emphasise narrative *creation* over narrative *discovery*. In summary, the open-ontological story structure *can* be seen as a 'ludically organised system for storytelling' (Ryan 2006, 200). Examples of this rarer structure include *Making History* (series), *SimCity* (series), *The Sims* (series), *Europa Universalis* (series), *Crusader Kings*(series) and *Civilization* (series).

Between these two extremes there is clearly space for a number of hybrid story structures. The vast majority, if not all, of these can currently be included under the category of open story structure. Whilst I will not describe this at length, as neither of the games which I analyse within these pages constitutes this structure, I include this for the sake of beginning to produce a coherent and reusable analytical framework. Open story structure games still have a strong framing narrative presence which regularly intersects game-play, however through the actions of the ludonarrative the player can affect particular pieces of the framing narrative, whilst still being subject to the general narrative trend. This category accounts for the interesting relationships between *fabula*, *szjuhet* and player-agency touched upon earlier. Players of open story structure games can therefore make strong intercessions into emplotment and story/content. Thus players may be able to choose between narrative fragments -both in terms of dialogue exchanges and full mission sections- and ludonarrative spaces (story/content decisions) such as in branching narrative games. This may also include alternate endings (emplotment) decisions. Similarly players may be able to skip or include whole sections of framing narrative such as in games with optional side missions. Players may also be able to make decisions about the order of the narrative fragments (and contiguous ludonarrative spaces) such as in open-world adventure games (we also tend to find this in games with side missions). Such games are appealing because we retain agency whilst still being subject to an often large, heavily dramatised and rich narrative representation. In this story structure whilst we must still surrender our agency we are given choices as to what we surrender it to, decisions we make on the basis of the clues found in other narrative fragments. Whilst these games do not contain the vast array of

narrative possibilities of the ontological structure, they do allow for the crafting of multiple larger narratives from the different narrative fragments and allow for the skills of professional writers to be deployed without us entirely losing our actualized role in the larger story space. Such games balance both the *creation* and *discovery* of narrative and examples include *Mass Effect* (series) and *Jade Empire* (branching and side missions- story/content and order/emplotment decisions); *Assassin's Creed* (series) and *The Saboteur* (mainly order decisions); *Grand Theft Auto* (series) and *Choice of Broadsides* (order, story/content and emplotment decisions).

Conclusion

Here I have attempted to explore the notion of games-based narrative which is so intrinsic to any understanding of representation, particularly history, in this form. I have firstly achieved this by proposing a simple model of game-based narrativity. This outlines how, due to games featuring actualized audience agency, and thus a more complex relation to mimesis and diegesis, it is useful to divide the narratives of games into framed narrative and ludonarrative. I have also explained the nature of these categories that I propose and the various sub-constructs that I believe allow their function. Perhaps most significant amongst these concepts and terms that I propose are, the *narrative fragments* of the framed narrative, the *lexia* which make up the specifically game-based elements of the ludonnarrative and finally *framing controls* that negotiate between the framed and ludonarratives. Secondly, I have explored narrative in games by proposing a simple taxonomic trinity of overall game-narratives, each of which describes a particular form of balance and interplay between the ludonarrative and framing narrative and the framing controls which exist between. The aim here has been to allow us to talk about the narrative of games in concrete terms and yet still account for the shared authorship characteristic of narratives in this form. Of course such models do not only allow us to explore and categorise the narratives structures of historical videogames but they are also in and of themselves not fully explained until they are analytically applied to examples. Accordingly, the next chapter will describe how these game-narrative categories and the various structural concepts that I propose apply to *BiA* and *Civilization.* This does not only allow us to understand the examples themselves (and thus by extension similar game-structures) but also allows us to further explore the model of narrativity I propose here and of course more generally the role of narrative in historical videogames.

Chapter 6

Narrative in *Brothers in Arms* and *Civilization*

'In *Civilization*, the player dreamed up an entirely new world every time he played, as he experimented with different strategies.'

-Crair 2011, 2

'Okay, so I understand that this game was designed to follow actual WWII events and battles. The team made great efforts to be historically accurate and provide a dialog. However, does anyone else find the narrative a bit too...poetic?'

-Comment by user HolyNameBari on *Gamefaqs.com* messageboard, '*Brothers in Arms*: Narrative Storyline' thread October 15, 2009

Narrative in *Brothers in Arms*

In the deterministic story structure found in *BiA*, the player is free to create micro-narratives in the local game-play space but cannot alter the broader narrative which is made up of a dominant and unflinching framed narrative. Particular objectives must be achieved in a particular order to enable progression through the game and game-play is interspersed with sequential cut-scenes and pre-scripted events (mostly ambushes). In addition to these events, the main framing control is space. This also tends to be broken up using cutscenes and allows for the framing narrative to explain the diegetic movements in time and space which rupture the otherwise continuous emplotted game-play space.

Goals and objectives are regularly introduced to direct the player forwards in the narrative and toward particular outcomes. These tend to be introduced on the micro-level as explicitly outlined logical reactions (seeming internal character decisions) to pre-scripted events, obvious challenges which must be surmounted in accordance with the broader logics of the game, or as narrative fragments of dialogue, normally from superior officers (for example, 'kill the enemy machine-gunner'). These are the smaller points of emplotment. On the macro level we have objectives that frame the larger narrative and game spaces, which also tend to be introduced by the framing narrative, (normally in the form of cutscenes but also through fragments in the form of dialogue, film or text). These will often tie into the larger historical narrative in which play is

situated (e.g. survive the Battle of Carentan) and ‘As the player navigates the game space of the individual level, particular historical narrative events occur (e.g., the Battle of Stalingrad) concomitantly with the construction of a personal narrative of the player's individual experience negotiating the level’ (Gish 2010, 171).

Accordingly, our story space manipulation is limited to actions at the local level. This ludonarrative is constructed from a limited set of significantly interactive lexia, unsurprising given the game’s story structure and simulation style. However, we are also faced with a huge mass of aesthetic lexia - having little interactive purpose other than to be observed, for example, books on the shelves of a room. Possible combinations of the significantly interactive lexia are fairly limited and framing controls are tight. Many combinations (for example, pick up ammo, reload gun with ammo, shoot enemy) are likely to be repeated often throughout play and the ways in which players achieve their goals are likely to feature many similarities. Nonetheless there are enough different lexia (weapons, architecture, locations, enemies and hence, possible tactics) for a number of ludonarrative variations to produce the same narrative outcomes. Perhaps the most significant aspect in the emergent construction of these narratives, apart from its intrinsic uncertainty (victory is never assured) is the spatial agency. This naturally determines the vast majority of the lexia and thus historical data, we experience aesthetically. This spatial agency is achieved through fairly complex controls and actions for movement. These realist-time movements are many, precise and often complex and when the ability of the player is compounded with the direction of the fire teams, the uncertainty and emergent potential of the tactical ludonarrative becomes clear.

Tom Bissell writes about action series *Gears of War*, ‘The real story of the game grows out of its combat, as virtually every *Gears* encounter has been designed to take place in environments that allows multiple “stories” to dynamically emerge. While the framed story of *Gears* creates an attachment to the characters, the combat is what keeps you playing’ (2011B, 40). The same can be said of *BiA*. Of course in *BiA* this is further emphasized with the layer of complexity introduced by the squad tactics that the challenges require and the ability to command our team allows. Similarly the first-person camera perspective adds to the challenges of the game and the particular ways in which the ludonarrative is constructed (i.e. the lexia that can be perceived at once and in which ways, the ‘camera shots’ the player uses). It is therefore through the relative

spatial complexity on offer where the greatest variation in possible ludonarratives can occur and in fact it is this ability to write these spatial stories in reaction to challenging lexia (enemies and environmental challenges), whereby much of the game's historical function lies.

BiA' relatively simple framing controls and lexia are combined with the possibility of complex, though particular, spatial actions. This allows a coherent realist historical representation to be maintained which does not become easily dissonant with the sources it is based on, even in game-play. And yet, all the while providing a gratifying creative margin for players to learn to deal with game challenges (that make arguments about WW2 combat) and in which to create emergent-enough interventions into the story space to be satisfying. Thus, *BiA* maintains a reconstructionist-realist approach whilst allowing for player agency in the construction of its arguments. Only by, normally inadvertently, constructing realist-time and reactive historical ludonarratives of failure, can we realise what the game argues leads (and thus, led) to success. In this way, in conjunction with the framing controls and lexia provided by the developer, we create micro-narratives about the nature of WW2 combat and are gradually led through the discovery of an experiential historical discourse. This is at the core of the game's function as history. Accordingly, the tight framing controls and limited lexia, which ensure the possible ludonarratives trend toward particular referential narrative outcomes, are vital. Limiting the number of possible producible ludonarratives through the interactive lexia is not necessarily problematic as it makes strong systemic arguments about the effectiveness of particular combat tactics and the role of particular lexia. Similarly, the inherent repetition not only maintains the game's referentiality but allows the perfection of particular skills and reinforces the game's arguments to the player. Repetition is a common technique in historical narratives in more conventional forms, where often significant events, processes, themes and motifs, are repeated for effect.

Although players cannot alter the linear arrangement or outcome of scenes/segments in *BiA*, they can alter the specific events of these scenes. Whilst encounters are predetermined in their nature, order and prevalence (frequency), the specifics of these encounters (such as duration and the individual player movements and actions that make them up and deal with them) are also primarily determined by player actions, within the prescribed systems of opportunity. For example if the game introduces a

tank, narrative outcomes are generally within the range of succumbing to the challenge that the tank entails ('death' and losing) or destroying the tank and progressing past it (victory). However, the way we deal with the tank, the localised micro-narrative, is up to us within the confines of the system. We can shoot it ourselves with a bazooka, command a bazooka team to manoeuvre into a flanking position and then destroy it, seek to distract the tank with one team and move close enough to use grenades on the crew (see figure 6.1), try to move past it, or, given the presence of the allied tank lexia, order our own armour to deal with it (as well as, I suspect, other tactics which I have not discovered).

Each of these sequences is likely to be a familiar ludonarrative to long-term players of *BiA* and given the heavy focus on combat, each is fairly 'mechanistic' in nature. However, this action and systems focus does nothing to detract from the relative historical arguments the possible ludonarratives make in relation to each other. Accordingly, most of the time in *BiA* the produced narrative is less historically meaningful than our reactions to the immediate stimulus and challenges that lead to us learning particular things about the system (and thus potentially the past). The ludonarrative is mainly significant in the agency its potential implies, its role in constructing developer arguments and as a player reflection on play. However, this said, despite the narrow historical focus and mechanistic nature of the interactive lexia systems there is still the possibility for the emergent creation of more dramatic and meaningful ludonarratives too.

Figure 6.1 – Using grenades to destroy a tank in *Road to Hill 30* (Gamespy.com)

For example, one of the ludonarratives from my play: I was surrounded by the enemy and running low on ammo. My other fire team was suppressed by enemy fire. My experience with the game meant I knew that I was very close to death (losing) and that I had to do something. In a last ditch attempt, I made the drastic decision to assault the

enemy ahead, doing so would block the line of sight from the enemy squad on our left. I ordered my team to charge using grenades and the last of the ammo for our assault weapons. I ran out ahead and a split second later my team was following. Despite the incoming fire we made it to the enemy position with only one casualty. After short and vicious close quarters fighting the position was ours and we turned our attention to the other enemy squad who, now outmanoeuvred, quickly fell. My desperate decision to charge had paid off and I managed to save both my squads.

This example is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the potential for the creation of multiple, albeit similar, narratives. If the series of mistakes that led to this challenging situation (poor spatial strategy and movement, overuse of suppressing fire, indecision) hadn't occurred, then the scenario may have been very different. Likewise, if I had dealt with it differently or if the enemy had a couple more soldiers or had shot better. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this is notable because of the obviously heroic tone of the produced ludonarrative, a desperate assault that succeeds against the odds, and thus the dramatic nature of the emergent events. Such a narrative obviously taps into the larger historical discourse and though events of this type were in reality obviously quite unusual (which is of course what makes them remarkable), somewhat unsurprisingly, tales of desperate heroism have been privileged in cultural memory and reproduced in popular culture. Indeed this type of narrative event is a significant presence in the vast majority of War films. For example this desperate defence/assault trope is found in varying forms in *Saving Private Ryan*, *Stalingrad*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Enemy at the Gate*, *Platoon*, *Zulu* and *We Were Soldiers*. Similarly, even the macro historical narratives we privilege from World War 2 such as the Battle of the Bulge, the Battle of Britain and the evacuation at Dunkirk are infused with this kind of rhetoric and in Britain at least, even D-Day itself can be considered a story of a desperate last-ditch assault.

What is intriguing in this specific example from *BiA* is that the system was just as capable of producing a ludonarrative that would have seen me and my squad becoming completely outflanked and killed. This would also lead to the death of the other fire team who would be completely outgunned, or so the player is left to assume. In fact this is a ludonarrative we are likely to create/experience many times during play. Similarly, charging to one's death is also a narrative that is likely to become familiar to players who regularly use this tactic in anything but the easiest difficulty setting. In

these cases the system balances against a positive outcome and yet it is still possible for it to occur given the right actions, timing, circumscribing framing controls and probably a degree of luck. In this way the system can not only support different ludonarratives of combat but in doing so it can also even produce arguments about the likelihood of particular outcomes given particular scenarios, tactics and decisions. Players, likely to experience both ludonarratives during the course of play, may therefore realise the arguments the game makes for the relative potential of each of these outcomes in the original setting. For example, it is made very clear that charging is a bad tactic except in the most desperate or surest, of circumstances.

There is of course an argument to be made that (though better than its contemporaries) these heroic actions pay off more in the game series than the evidence would suggest they did in real life (except perhaps in the stricter *Earned in Blood*). This is of course partially because of the desire to empower and excite players. However, it also taps into other popular depictions of WW2 frontline combat and serves as a reminder of how our cultural memory and history is predicated towards discussing historical subjects in predefined emplotments and tropes (particularly heroism/romance and/or tragedy). It is often in these moments, when the ludonarratives we create echo the stories and tropes with which we are already familiar, that play seems to become most narratively meaningful. *Max Payne 3* overtly notes the resonant satisfaction of reproducing tropes of this kind. When a player completes an action that echoes the types of sequences seen in, for example, Hong Kong action films (such as dodging bullets followed by a slow motion dive with two pistols and deadly effect) they are greeted with the award 'like in the movies'. In these moments in historical videogames we find ourselves engaging with particular resonances, not only through tapping into the larger historical discourse but by actually *(re)performing* it.

The *BiA* series can be accused of being carefully skewed towards the production of particular ludonarratives that reproduce popular historical tropes and this is particularly troubling in *Hell's Highway* where individual heroism, rather than careful use of the fire teams, becomes a far more available tactic. However, it cannot really be accused of under representing death, at least in frequency if not impact. This invoking of death as a premature end to the narrative (which is made clear) is the only consequential impact our ludonarrative can make on the progression of the framing narrative. However, it is debatable whether players really ever see this as a narrative outcome in itself or just a

misstep, a temporary disruption of the supposed flow of events and certainly reloading and checkpoints seem to encourage the latter interpretation. For this reason, though death is a constant presence in the ludonarratives of historical games of this kind, it is debatable whether this has any real power other than communicating that death was a real possibility and punishing tactics that the game argues were ineffective by treating the player's time and effort as a resource.

Obviously there is a clear relationship between the reconstructionist epistemology (given its focus on *the* story and thus linear sequences of events) and the deterministic story structure, and, as noted previously, this is also reflected spatially. Similarly, the realist style, in which the aim to show the past 'as it was' makes narrative inconsistencies perhaps more likely and certainly more jarring, makes the use of a strong framing narrative an understandably attractive design decision. Whilst this means that some of the agency that is the unique quality of the videogame form is lost to more traditional epistemological and narrative structures, the inclusion of a strong framing presence also means the necessary existence of dependent though theoretically separable narrative layers. In *BiA* and, as Gish notes, the WW2 games of the *Call of Duty* series, this means that 'World War II is contextualized and conceptualized in triplicate' (Gish 2010, 172).

The first narrative layer is 'that of the Second World War in its totality, an occurrence that is portrayed as a closed event only during the opening cinematics of the individual games' (Gish 2010, 170). This layer in *Call of Duty* tends to briefly relinquish the immersive dramatic realist tone and perspective/focalisation in favour of the more discursive tone of the traditional historian. This is often done through a documentary format with photographs, video and narration reminiscent of series such as *The World at War* and establishes the game's relation to a larger historical discourse (and thus aims to establish a historical resonance with the player). This narrative layer tends not to occur as explicitly in *BiA* but instead is established, through marketing (trailers, demos, advertisements, box-art), extras (in-game film, photographs, documents and also limited edition bonus postcards and DVD) and by framing game events within significant dates. Despite this, the game makes clear and constant efforts to anchor itself in the larger popular historical narrative layer through use of sources and intertextual references. This layer, by depicting the war as a closed event, establishes the reconstructionist authority through which even the other layers produce particular representations. Thus

the pure framing larger historical narrative is depicted as closed both in game terms (we cannot affect it) and historical terms (with a rigid empirical epistemology).

The second layer occurs mainly in the cutscenes, though also through framing controls, particularly dialogue and pre-scripted events. This, 'simultaneously provide[s] the player with a spatio-temporal localization for the coming military encounter, and a personalization of the conflict's stakes and meanings' (Gish 2010, 170). It is through this (mostly) framing narrative layer that Baker's (or in *Earned in Blood*, Hartsock's) narration is enabled and the vast majority of the exposition and characterisation occurs.

> 'Each successive chapter begins with the name of the mission and the date projected onto a dark screen, over which Baker's voice narrates. Through this device we learn bits and pieces of Baker's past...the advice that Baker's father (a veteran of World War I) gave him before departing for France. After Baker's narration, each chapter begins with a brief scene in which the members of the squad discuss what has been happening, their lives at home, their feelings about Germans, and so on. All of these elements contribute to the game's narrative and increase the potential for the player to engage with the history being explored.' (Rejack 2007, 415)

Given *BiA*' concentration on interpersonal relationships under the stresses of combat, this layer is important to both the narrative and tone of the game. It is mostly through this layer that we know how the characters feel about the game-play events that take place. In *Hell's Highway* this layer is also used to relate the character's personal histories from the previous games. This layer also 'shuttles the player from the grand narrative of World War II to the individual narrative of personal player experience, buffering this transition through appeals to on-the-ground realism and individuated, personalized knowledge of wartime' (Gish 2010, 171). As follows, this also locates the personalized accounts that form the majority of the framing narrative in the larger discourse of WW2. Though it also remains almost entirely closed, this second layer is important in its attempts to provide a localised and emotive dramatic context to the events of game-play. Thus this layer is particularly significant precisely because it bridges 'the historical, spatial, and perspectival gap between each game's foundational grand narrative of war and the first-person, interactive, personalized experience of actual game play' (Gish 2010, 170-171) which constitutes the final, open, narrative

layer. Naturally, as the first two layers are communicated through the realist-reconstructionist framing narrative 'They stress a linearity that leaves little room for interpretation. No matter what actions are performed during game play, the foundational narrative history of World War II and the localized, personalized narratives of the games' cut scenes remain unchanged' (Gish 2010, 172).

Such narrative layering seems to offer some potential benefits. Firstly, this layering is necessitated not so much by the game's approach to the past in itself but by the tensions between the traditional forms, their entwined epistemological practices and perspectives and the newer playful one. The developer's desire for the game to remain traditionally reconstructionist, or at the very least empirical-analytical, cannot help but lead to the layering of narrative, as a remedy to agency, which cannot help but create tension. However, these tensions can also be read as working against the epistemological intent. 'Even if the multiple layered histories operative within any specific *Call of Duty* [or *BiA*] videogame may, on their own, be understood as reductive and jingoistic, the design act of layering such histories blatantly exposes the multiple narratives present within the construction of history' (Gish 2010, 176). Somewhat ironically the very effort to reconcile the pressures of the form with the traditional epistemology through the use of larger necessarily non-ludic narrative layers, whilst retaining a good deal of authority, cannot help but also create a somewhat contradictory multiplicity. Similarly, 'Through the narrative historical layering evident within the individual games, one is reminded that international warfare is always a highly personal experience' (Gish 2010, 172). This leads Gish to claim that historical videogames like *Call of Duty*, 'simultaneously plays with and problematizes both totalizing nationalist histories and the personal experiences within such histories. As such, the series forcefully emphasizes the diverse approaches that exist in both the telling of, and the playing of, historical conflict' (2010 173). Certainly, this layering makes this reading possible but whether this is really powerful enough to totally subsume the strong epistemological emphasis, subsequent claims, simulation style and linearity, is debatable.

Certainly, the deterministic structure and narrative layering does enable developers to deal with issues and plot points that would be more difficult to include in the narrowly focused game-play moment. This may be because of either issues surrounding exposition in relation to agency and internal focalization, technical limitations, or because of the narrow focus of the game mechanics. For example, the swap to external

framing narrative allows us to see Baker's reactions and dialogue. Similarly, the swap to these film-like perspectives allows the game to deal in ambiguity, something that, as Rosenstone notes (2006 43-44), dramatic forms like film find easy, whilst written history struggles with. Obviously the primary benefit of the strong framing narrative is the ability for detailed and dramatic stories to be told and convincing fictional worlds created through deeper contextualisation.[1] This also means that narrative techniques that rely on definitive emplotments which create fear, suspense and more complex exposition are still easily available to the developer-historian in the construction of meaning.

Secondly, this narrative structure also allows the video game to continue to easily engage with and reuse the tropes established by other visual media. For example, the narrative can cut through time and space and still avoid the overt diegetic dissonance that doing so in the realist simulation entails. The dramatic contextualisation of our game-play which this linear narrative structure allows also attempts to motivate us to engage in the orthodox mode of interactivity and thus engage with the game's representation beyond its rules (i.e. the game affords, structures and encourages, imagining). Naturally this strong framing narrative and the contextualisation it provides is also useful in establishing a historical resonance between the local experience of the player and the global context of the game's events. There is also some evidence (Pinchbeck 2008) that strong story games have more effect on player recall of game events and characters (players often failed to remember names but remembered motives). Furthermore, players of the strong story game also recalled using the homodiegetic (rather than technical or mechanistic) context and language. Thus 'a strong plot may not only act as a reward scheme but aid in orientation and postexperience affect' (Pinchbeck 2008, 6). The importance of these implications if games are to be used as particular types of history cannot be understated.

The emphasis on framing narrative, as well as the relatively narrow focus of the ludonarrative, also allows a greater alignment to larger historical narratives. Given the special cultural significance often assigned to the narrative of WW2 as closed, it is easy to see why Gearbox used this narrative structure. *BiA* relies on its dramatic pre-written narrative and the realism of its simulated fictive world to maintain narrative interest,

[1] Though poor quality framing narrative in comparison to the opportunities of the ludonarrative can also have the opposite effect (Bissell 2011A).

rather than the continual introduction of new lexia and deep narrative agency (such as we find in *Civilization*). Lastly, by including the strong framing narrative as a linear tension with the agency of play and thus using multiple modes to construct the overall narrative, it can also be argued that *BiA* effectively utilizes the potential benefits of Jenkins notion of 'transmedia' (2006, 20-21) whereby, 'stories can be told across media in such a way as to take advantage of what each medium does best' (Davidson 2008, 14).

Of course, such a strong framing narrative can also be problematic. Whilst meaning that our journey can be carefully scripted and indeed often, 'As I move forward, I feel a sense of powerfulness, of significant action, that is tied to my pleasure in the unfolding story...However, there is a drawback to the maze orientation: it moves the interactor toward a single solution, toward finding the one way out' (Murray 1997, 132).[2] Firstly, despite the narrative layering and the different perspectives this is able to suggest, the core epistemology is clear. This reconstructionist approach and the story structure it entails emphasizes the singularity of historical events and interpretations. As such *BiA*, like most popular history, tends towards compressing 'the past into a closed world by telling a single, linear story with, essentially, a single interpretation. Such a narrative strategy obviously denies historical alternatives, does away with complexities of motivation or causation, and banishes all subtlety from the world of history' (Rosenstone 1995, 22). This is further compounded by the necessity for the realist simulation to provide fictive continuity and to exclude the obvious presence of a historian, which makes the opportunity to include counterfactuals and alternatives even more difficult. Alternatives which, given the game's temporal and performative pressures, players would be unlikely to have the opportunity to muse upon anyway.

Secondly, as Bissell notes 'in work with any degree of genre loyalty- this would include the vast majority of video games- the more explicit the story becomes, the more silly it will suddenly seem' (2010, 41). There is certainly evidence of genre affiliation in a number of historical films, which often endlessly and mindlessly reuse tropes. And yet, where the demands of cinematic narrative (normally in an effort to be taken seriously) can result in heavy and overworked exposition, perhaps most notably in the 'swords and

[2] Though this conflates a number of my structural categories *Brothers in Arms* does have similarities to Murray's maze story type (1997, 130).

sandals' epics and WW2 films, from which the framing narrative of *BiA* borrows.[3] Silliness is by no means antithetical to history, indeed irreverence is often at the core of critical reflection. However, in a *game*, particularly one like *BiA*, it is merely likely to result in the player ignoring the historical context completely in favour of the ludic and therefore removes the potential for the framing narrative to facilitate interest in the historical aspect. Whilst it is arguable whether *BiA* really goes this far, what is certain is that over the series life it has moved further from its more serious initial tone to a more commercial and generic one. This draws it further from the alleged source material of *Band of Brothers*, a series perhaps most notable for its often blatant rejection of some of the tropes of WW2 frontline drama developed in Hollywood. This rejection, when unexpected, can in itself often be a powerful dramatic technique.

Thirdly, by comparison, it is certainly arguable that a lack of framing narrative in a realist game could actually serve to increase the immersive believability of the game's fictional world, simply because both the player's play and the fiction exist in one ludonarrative layer and there is no need for a regular, potentially disruptive, transference of the player's reading mode between layers. These layers also often feature a disparity, most mechanistically notable in agency, perception, graphical-quality, voice and focalisation but also sometimes in tone, ideology and ethical and moral implications. In more extreme cases this can even lead to what respected games designer Clint Hocking refers to as 'ludonarrative dissonance', when a game suffers 'from a powerful dissonance between what it is about as a game, and what it is about as a story' (2007, n.p.). Whilst *BiA* largely manages to avoid conflicts of this type (which when serious can be to the significant detriment of a game's representation) it does occasionally happen. For instance, the narratives of each game mostly revolve around the rejection of ideals of glory and instead tend to focus more on the horror, loss and sadness of war. However, in *Hell's Highway*, when the player successfully completes a headshot, or blows up a group of enemies with grenades or bazookas, the camera goes into slow motion and zooms in, breaking first-person perspective/internal focalisation to enable players to see the gory effects of their actions. In these moments of glorified violence the ludonarrative becomes jarringly and significantly dissonant with the ethical rhetoric of the framing narrative. This is not to say that handled correctly the rupture between multiple narrative layers could not be very effective and often dissonant intervention

[3] My objection to this is on the grounds of endless repetition of soothing and reaffirming narratives of cultural hegemony (which obfuscate reimaginings) rather than accuracy.

into dramatic diegesis is, in terms of inspiring reflection, positive.[4] One can see how the inherent disruption in the transfer between layers could also be embraced in a more imaginative way to induce a more conscious self-reflection in future realist (though perhaps not reconstructionist) historical videogames.

In summary, such a narrative arrangement allows the production of developer controlled linear narrative despite the presence of a ludonarrative. This (along with tight framing controls and narrow focus in the ludonarrative) allows the developer to have a strong influence over the produced historical narrative and places an emphasis on discovery. Certainly it is hard to see how a realist simulation such as *BiA* could create such an exciting, easily immersive, relatively well-written and cinematic, popular depiction of the experience of WW2, without spatial and narrative arrangement of this sort. However this narrative structuring also produces tensions, not the least of which is its reflection of problematic singular traditional epistemologies. Whilst the framing narrative, particularly in the form of the game's cut-scenes, is deeply important to contextualise the game-play and to develop the narrative beyond the remit of combat, most of the historical meaning of the game still lies in the challenges we face, actions we take subject to framing controls and the lexia we both configure and experience during game-play and thus the creation of a ludonarrative. It is the opportunity to 'exist', react and act in a narratively charged world, rather than the conscious production of emergent narrative, which is core to the function of *BiA*. However it is also often in the re-suturing of these events into a narrative framework, as the framing narrative demands, that the story of the player's interaction, through the heavily dramatised linear narrative (second narrative layer) becomes sometimes satisfyingly and affectingly related to the larger historical discourse. Thus this deep fictive and narrative context and interplay has a potentially important role in the videogame's primary functions as historical text.

Narrative in *Civilization*

Civilization's open-ontological story structure and its subsequent focus on the production of historical narrative through ludonarrative, can be seen as in direct

[4]For example, *Band of Brothers* interviews with veterans are shocking changes between layers.

opposition to the more formal and traditional deterministic structure of *BiA*. Subsequently, much of the relative qualities of such a structure have been discussed previously by-proxy. Nonetheless, there is still a little more to be said about *Civilization*. Unsurprisingly, *Civilization* focuses on the role of the player and, other than the actions of competing civilizations, there are relatively few historical elements entered into the narrative without the affirmation of the player. These decisions are ontological in the 'sense that they determine which possible world, and consequently which story will develop from the situation in which the choice presents itself' (Ryan 2001, n.p.). As aforementioned, there is therefore a strong spatial aspect to this storytelling and the vast majority of the game's precise narrative arc is determined emergently.

Accordingly, *Civilization* emphasises the player's role in the construction of history and allows for the construction of a variety of different ludonarratives, focused within a broad trend through the framing controls, particularly the rules governing the value and combinations of the game's huge mass of historical lexia. Therefore, 'every time you finish a game, you've made your own story....waves of attacks from different directions, multiple enemy tribes, spells and altered geography really give the player dramatic tools to create their own story' (Steenberg 2010, 12). Whilst Steenberg makes his point about strategy game *Populous*, much of this (with the exception of spells) also applies to *Civilization*, which similarly emphasises emergence whilst still providing enough structure to ensure that the produced narrative can be satisfying, coherent and in the case of Meier's text, still hold a discursive relation to history.

The types of narratives which we are likely to build are however fixed at a particular historical scope and focus, due to the large scale processes and thematic accounts that the game, as a conceptual-constructionist simulation both enables and requires. Similarly, the ability to stand outside the game's events at the discursive level familiar from more traditional forms of history means the game allows stories about the past to be painted in broad strokes rather than in the specifics and detail which the realist simulation excels at. Subsequently, these produced ludonarratives 'do not consist of interpersonal relations, but of the sequence of transformations that affect a micro-environment' (Ryan 2001, n.p.). Naturally, this has a particular rhetorical locus. This also has potential advantages and disadvantages depending on a number of factors but particularly (given the story structure) the audience and context of play. What is

certain, however, is that the ability to decide the destiny of entire historically charged scenarios and developments, alongside (and weaved with) the game's competitive element, is at the heart of the fun to be had playing with the past in *Civilization*. It often becomes rapidly clear that *Civilization* is not only a game but simultaneously a ludically organised system for historical storytelling. As such it follows that the game realises one of the most extreme of actualized player entries into the story space and most firmly rejects the traditional models of communication drawn from history books.

The game asks us to make decisions within this structured story space about a huge variation in types (both in the historical and ludic sense) of lexia. Thus we are faced with decisions surrounding, industry, technology/research, urban and agricultural development, economy/trade, culture, religion, politics, diplomacy, military infrastructure and strategy, and ideology. Indeed, these are the broad constructionist themes around which *Civilization*'s simulation is based (particularly in the later games). This means that just as *Civilization IV*'s system supports the creation of a highly militarised despotic society with a police state, which sustains itself through conquest, slavery and a perpetual draft, so too can it support a non-aggressive highly culturally and technologically developed civilization that has universal suffrage, numerous cultural and technological developments and investments, free speech, emancipation, a free market and free religion. Additionally, even beyond the nation-state level each city has numerous decisions about its development to be made.

Whilst the focus is on a vast amount of combinable lexia rather than narrative fragments, this is not to say that the story space is not framed in any way whatsoever. It is true that the vast increase in player agency means that any strong framing narrative would likely become incoherent relatively quickly, even in the more forgiving conceptual simulation style. Still, play must be framed by goals, which also function as narrative outcomes, for the text to constitute a game and arguably, a history. Consequently, the events of *Civilization* are 'bookended' by distinct narrative fragments that have become increasingly sophisticated over the series' lifespan. The introduction animation (*Civilization IV*), despite using a dramatic inter-diegetic tone that the simulation has trouble maintaining, sutures the forthcoming events of the game into a grand historical narrative (and epistemological tradition) and depicts the formation of the earth and the gradual evolution of man. This is the only fixed narrative fragment in the game and, along with the menu aesthetics and promotional trailer, cues players into

the historical context and seeks to establish a historical resonance (a shared relation to a collective past). This also introduces the overarching framing goal ('To build a legacy that would stand the test of time. A civilization') and also the themes which the ludic framing controls will ensure are always a part of discursive play: progression (a specific cultural metanarrative of civilisation), expansion and ultimately, power. It is around these themes that every ludonarrative will be built and these are therefore core tenets of the arguments that *Civilization* makes as a history.

At the other end of the ludonarrative the player is met with one of a number of narrative fragments which concludes the narrative according to the game's events. If players lose they are merely told they are defeated and it is thusly inferred that history continues without them, leaving their civilization as little more than a footnote. However, if they win, the historical narrative is seen to end, which in itself carries a sort of Fukuyama (1992) argument about cultural homogeneity and civilisation. At this narrative end the player experiences one of a number of different cutscenes according to the ludonarrative and thus victory, they have produced. Though these have changed throughout the series life, the main victory outcomes and concurrent concluding narrative fragments in the most recent game, *Civilization V*, are domination (controlling the capital city of each other civilization); cultural (implementing a number of progressive social policies and eventually building the 'utopia project'); science (winning the space race by sending the first craft to Alpha Centauri) and diplomatic (founding the United Nations and being democratically voted as World Leader). Each gives a narrative context to the end of the game and naturalises and affirms the systems arguments about player action and the past. Naturally, each of these outcomes is a rather different narrative climax and is determined by the constructed ludonarrative.

The player may also decide not to have their play finally 'bookended' by the framing narrative at all, allowing game-play to continue past this point and ignore this narrative goal.[5] If players choose to do this then the framing narrative outcome and the goal that drove them towards it is removed and play continues. Players must then replace these in-built goals with their own. For example they might seek to imitate the achievements of an existing 'civilization', to build all the wonders in the game, to discover all the technologies, to see how long their civilization can survive, theorise about the future by playing into it, to create a civilization that they consider ethical, to create a world they

[5] Indeed, there have been recent reports of a ten-year-long game of *Civilization II* (Jordison 2012).

would want to live in, to create ironic situations - such as a democratic and diplomatic Mongol Empire-, to discover all of the game world, to peacefully create a culturally homogenous world or, any number of other creative and extra-telic goals. Basically players are free to explore any goal which seems possible given the allowed actions of the system and which creates some sort of resonance, dissonance, or sense of challenge for them.

Even this incredibly limited framing narrative is subject to player action, with multiple possible endings determined by the events of the ludonarrative, if indeed the player allows this to limit their play at all. Nonetheless, despite this lack of predetermination in the specific narrative produced through play, there are still a number of further framing controls that allow the system to regularly produce coherent narrative arguments, both with its referential basis and between individual instances of play. The most obvious of these is of course the rules which limit, focus and structure decision making and the initial story/content decisions about what will even be present in the virtual manifestation of the story space. *Civilization* enforces its broad emplotment through 'temporal' rather than spatial framing controls and the inevitable turn sequence (as well as of course the actions of other civilizations) drives events forward. Similarly, as already noted, there are fictive temporal limits on unit actions, building and research, for example, it might take seven turns and 175 game years to research bronze working. These limits function as a key part of the game's historical meaning but also seek to control game-play and the production of particular ludonarratives. Similarly, the game's resources work to structure game-play and limit the ludonarratives of power and yet also are a key element in the game's rhetoric. Thus we are still subject to framing pressures that are intended to drive the events forwards and towards a game-play and narrative conclusion. Perhaps the best example of this is the 'technology tree' (see figure 6.2).

This is a tree diagram of technologies that can be researched by the player's civilization during the game. Incidentally the tech-tree is probably the best example of what constitutes lexia and how their interrelations can work, because some of this is distinctly laid out in a visual map. The tree shows which technologies are required to unlock

particular technologies and what research opportunities this may lead to in the future.[6] Whilst we are free to choose what we research (and consequently what we include in our ludonarrative) this is governed by a number of causal links and thus a broad linearity. Somewhat unsurprisingly, as both a conceptual-constructionist history and a game, *Civilization* privileges causality in this way as its primary framing control. There is therefore a loose *fabula* that maintains a degree of referentiality and underpins the construction of the, nonetheless emergent, ludonarrative. This enables the game to produce particular arguments according to the ideology and epistemology that constitutes the foundation of its historical representation.

Figure 6.2 - A screenshot of a small portion of the technology tree in *Civilization IV*.

> 'In this key respect, critics rightly charge that no matter the playfulness and sense of freedom experienced by its players, *SMC* contains an indisputable ideological kernel, which identifies it as a quintessentially Western-American creation. It projects an image of the civilizing process characterized by technological determinism and progress.' (Fogu 2009, 117)

Whilst this is certainly ideologically problematic, it is also somewhat inevitable and simply aligns the game with much of the larger historical discourse, as well as its peers

[6] This rapidly becomes more complex. For instance, developing an attack submarine requires rocketry, radio, combustion and uranium. However even combustion requires at *least* ten other technologies in *Civilization IV*.

in other forms. After all, a defining feature of a history is that it presents constructed meaning as well as being a mass of evidence. Accordingly the agency of our ludonarrative is in a constant testing and discursive relationship with the framing controls whose rhetorical function negotiates with our own subjectivity and play. However, even beyond the more obvious agency we deploy, meaning is no more fixed in this than any other history and it is easy to see how different players could interpret the produced ludonarratives in different ways. This is compounded by the dual and often contradictory nature of the modern historical videogame. For instance, a win by the nuclear annihilation of other cultures may be read as a pure victory (romance) for the player and/or a sad historical indictment of the nature and costs of the civilising process (tragedy). Likewise, if the produced ludonarratives deviation from the larger historical discourse becomes the primary frame of interpretation (as is likely to often occur) then such a narrative could also be viewed as a satire.

Despite these framing controls, much of the experience of playing *Civilization* is based firmly on the historical agency which it grants players. As Fogu notes,

> '*SMC*'s main claim to fame is its high number, and very complex system, of variables...These variables characterize the economic and political systems one can develop and combine, the cultural wonders and great scientists one can choose to pursue or emulate, which, as a whole, account for the sense of non-linear, unlimited options (inexperienced) players have at their disposal.' (2009, 117)

These narratively charged variables (lexia) emphasise and necessitate the player's role in the story space and remain narratively inert without player arrangement of them in specific (framed) patterns to reveal or create meaning. This is because, unlike in *BiA*, we are constantly confronted with new lexia, the vast majority of which are not merely aesthetic and thus require some kind of decision making. These decisions begin to unpick the tangled web of interrelations that surround each lexia to understand the effect each has on the game state and so by extension what arguments the game makes about the historical existent which the lexia references. Many of these arguments taken alone are simplistic yet it is in the larger relations that they build, their possible ludonarrative recombinations, in which much of *Civilization*'s value lies. Thus the open-ontological story structure above all means a lexic complexity and narrative multiplicity.

Historical videogames that feature such ontological narrative interaction obviously have some alignment with the constructionist approach. As the developer-historian forms the network of lexia and (importantly) their inter-relating processes, they also naturally design a web of various intellectual responsibilities and thematic elements. *Civilization* is an excellent example of the open story space made virtually manifest because possible decisions and pre-scripted emplotments and causal relations are visually palpable in the game's vast menus. Furthermore the conceptual virtual spaces dual role as an active (hi)story space is not overtly subsumed beneath an immersive diegetic layer but instead lies perceivable, abstracted from the historical referent but not from their role in the narrative discourses producible from play.

This ability to relinquish control and embrace an almost purely ontological narrative formation, many would argue, is truly embracing the game as a historical form. And yet, in comparison to much popular history, *Civilization* still manages to make, strong and even intellectually weighty, arguments in the framing rules which structure player interventions and assure the text does not become historically meaningless and lose narrative and intellectual coherency. This has placed Meier as one of the most respected games designers in the world (Crair 2011). Similarly, other designers that occupy a pantheon position alongside Meier such as Peter Molyneux (*Black and White*, *Populous*, *Fable*) and Will Wright (*The Sims*, *Spore*) are known for the same kind of simultaneous and often seemingly contradictory emphasis on both rhetoric *and* emergence (and therefore, ludonarrative).

The allowances of *Civilization*'s conceptual simulation type, spatial agency, perspective and temporal structure means that it can operate through a historical discursive tone efficiently (for example, we can indulge in anachronism far less jarringly). However, this discursive aspect is only truly possible by the focus on shared narrative. This means that not only is there always a constant back and forth, a palpable and tangible relationship between the player, their probing inputs and the system which procedurally responds in the developer-historian's absence, but that this can be historically meaningful, include multiple processes and systems, be interesting, far reaching in scope, and perhaps most importantly, creative. Of course perhaps the most important aspect of this vast narrative agency is that the player is given the opportunity to playfully rewrite history and in doing so to see what, according to the game's

arguments, the significant elements are/were in producing particular outcomes. This means that the system of course has a natural predilection towards counterfactual history, indeed the game revels in this, but this is not to the detriment of its historical arguments which (like most academic histories) are based on more than merely chronological fidelity. Indeed, allowing the player to introduce particular lexia in ways which disrupt their arrangement in the larger historical narratives which the game references, allows players to see what values they are ascribed according to the developer-historian. And this is independent of the other processes or existents we would normally expect these lexia to interact with. Conversely, precisely through this disruption and dissonance, the arguments of the developer as for the causal effects of these lexia in the larger narratives, from which they are drawn from in the first place, can become startlingly apparent. It is also worth noting that the obvious predilection for counterfactual history should not be taken to mean that the system (and others of its narrative type, such as *Making History*) does not have enough flexibility to argue and experiment with more referential narratives also. Indeed the effort to produce these, to see if the possibility for these narratives exists in the system, is often the basis for shared extra-telic goals and mods between enthusiasts (Apperley 2007; forthcoming 2013).

Of course, no matter its flexibility, *Civilization* still encourages us to think in particular ways and makes many of its arguments by punishing us if we make decisions that do not align with its underlying logics. Producing these ludonarratives of failure are as important as those of success because they contain no less causal explanation and often lead us to understand the game's representation (differentiate information about lexia) more effectively. This said, despite this victory/failure dynamic, *Civilization*'s open-ontological structure allows a referential and yet emergent, story space 'where players choose their own goals and actions in a world teeming with narrative possibilities' (Ryan 2006, 201). Though the game does have overarching goals, the vast amount of decisions, pace of play and the creative margin means that there is enough space for players to follow their own, regardless of the general trend of the system. Thus through this complexity and choice *Civilization* offers 'the possibility of departing at any time from the tyranny of competitive play to engage in an exploration of the limits and possibilities of the underlying game model' (Atkins 2005, 16). Indeed, I would argue that a level of creative freedom for the production of resonant configurations (whether in line with the game's goals or not) is a prime characteristic of such a narrative

structure and indeed, game-structure. Accordingly, 'A player of *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* may make decisions from the very beginning of the game based on a desire to achieve certain short-term (the building of certain wonders) or long-term outcomes (obtaining victory through unusual and difficult conditions, like the economic or diplomatic victory)' (Apperley 2010B, 15-16). As aforementioned, players (particularly novices) will be confronted with regular decisions whereby either option is, at the very least seemingly, of equal ludic value. This combined with the long-term and flexible structure of play allows players to fairly regularly make configurative decisions on the basis of resonance, safe in the knowledge that this will rarely completely prevent them from achieving autotelic goals. Thus, enabled by its ludonarrative focus, complexity of lexia and the necessary creative margin this entails, *Civilization*'s players have much freedom in how they achieve both auto-telic and extra-telic goals.

However, 'it is also necessary to highlight that these 'readings' of cybertexts are based on the ergodic choices that players have available to them' (Apperley 2010B, 16) and it is also quite possible that players may wish to do things motivated by historical resonance/dissonance that are simply not supportable within the system. Indeed, it is only through the mass of historically charged, carefully considered and well structured relationships between the lexia and framing controls that the game can function in this way at all. Due to these multiple ways to achieve multiple goals, it is at least possible for players to resist the simple framing binary of 'win or lose' and interrogate the path to this and other outcomes. The game's effectiveness as a *historical narrative* is not therefore necessarily hinged on a win/loss dynamic and even when losing we get to build something and make significant decisions. Indeed for a competitive game, *Civilization*, at least in its more recent incarnations, features relatively few goals and these are, arguably, never made completely explicit. For example, whilst there are victory (and loss) conditions that result in particular narrative outcomes, there is nothing that informs players as to the particularities of these goals unless they specifically look for them and the introduction animation (*Civilization IV*) merely tells us to 'build a civilization to stand the test of time.'

Additionally, as described, we are also free to relinquish victory conditions altogether. This creates a potentially unending experimental historical playground. This further indicates that the competitive aspect is far from the only purpose of the game.

Combined with the agency on offer this means *Civilization* has, somewhat uncharacteristically for a modern videogame, a high level of *paidia*. This category is drawn from Caillois (who in turn drew from Plato) and is normally invoked in conjunction with *ludus* (2001, 13). The latter can best be characterised as the formal element of a game whereby winning and losing are very important and the conditions for this are clearly designed. *BiA* is very clearly focused on this aspect, indeed this is important to the pressures that support its primary historical functions. The rules of ludus focused games are balanced, strict and players are constantly subject to them. Paidia, by contrast, indicates 'diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety...frolicsome and impulsive exuberance' (Caillois 2001, 13) a type of 'free-play', often without particular purpose and characterised by creative freedom and player expression. For example, if we imagine a boy throwing stones into a lake. The boy throws the stone in all different ways, backwards, forwards, overhead, low, high and indulges in a form of paidia. Then along comes another boy and challenges the first to a stone throwing competition. The boys will see who can throw the furthest, by throwing the stones over-arm. Thus the playful activity becomes infused with the ludus element of play.

'It is perhaps the major contribution of the computer to human entertainment to have allowed a combination of *ludus* and *paidia* within the same game environment—a combination that Caillois thought impossible' (Ryan 2006, 198). The majority of modern mainstream videogames can be classified as both *agon* (competitive) and *mimicry* (make believe). Indeed, clearly *Civilization* is both. What relation does this have to the notion of paidia and *Civilization* as a history? Well, it is not difficult to see how the activity of pretending to be someone or something, playing with something fictional or experimenting with fiction itself, can be characterised as playful. However, these activities do not have what we would normally consider to be win or loss conditions. We may judge ourselves as better or worse at these activities (and so may others) but these are more subjective considerations than we would normally expect from the explicit and clear conditions of an agon game. As such, mimicry always involves some kind of paidia (though paidia does not have to be mimicry, consider again the boy throwing stones). As Ryan notes,

> 'paidia is represented by all the games that are played for the sake of an imaginative experience: children's games of make-believe, playground activities,

> the use of toys, the transgression of social rules that takes place during the carnival, and within video games, by the so-called "simulation games" (*SimCity*, *Civilization*, *The Sims*) in which players manage a complex system and observe its behavior, rather than trying to pass levels or to beat opponents.' (2005, 198)

By limiting the competitive aspect and utilizing an open story structure *Civilization* creates a gap that allows and encourages paidiac play, including, though not limited to, the type of resonant mimicry play (*for the sake of an imaginative experience*) that the game's function as a history relies upon. Whenever we remove a good portion of the ludus element in *Civilization* by ignoring or removing the game's intrinsic goals, whenever we engage in configurative resonance, we embrace this aspect most fully.

Whilst such play can certainly be conducted on the basis of the freedom to tinker with the game's rules purely mechanistically or to replace the auto-telic goals with goals that are simply more difficult, still it does seem that the paidia play on offer particularly lends itself to the game's mimicry (historical) aspect in at least some small way. Certainly a system such as *Civilization* that, relatively speaking, deemphasizes the importance of competition and does not regularly introduce goals (and does not feature performative temporal pressure) allows and encourages experimentation by players who 'play the game according to their own predilections and skill levels without being restricted by highly structured performance requirements' (Apperley 2010B, 20). Similarly, the vacuum that this lack of direction creates could encourage players to create their own short or long term goals, though this may also frustrate more seasoned (and likely, competitive) videogame players. As Apperley points out, games with high degrees of paidia can be played for long or short periods because of their flexible outcomes and the fact that the satisfaction of play does not build only to a particular outcome but is also found in the expressive nature of play itself. Thus, in *Civilization* the satisfaction can easily lie in the building of particular experimental, creative and *mimetic* historical ludonarratives ('the make believe') as much as it does winning according to the game's intrinsic goals.

Certainly this seems to be the case if we look at the aforementioned player communities who do relinquish these types of historical games' intrinsic goals and, enabled by these game-structures, replace them with new historically referent ones. Similarly, for those players where *Civilization*'s allowance for them to tell historical stories and experiment

with a historical system is more important than who wins or loses, the ludus layer has given way to the paidia. It is this spirit of paidia that permeates *Civilization* as a history, its irreverence, its encouragement of player creativity, expression and experimentation and its playful narrative multiplicity. Obviously there is a clear link to narrative here, just as paidia entails the opening of the story structure, ludus demands its proportionate closing down. And yet, even in the open-ontological story structure, the ludus layer always remains a presence, not only because of the necessity for some framing controls/rules to structure our interaction but because of the hovering layer of reference and epistemology, the rules/framing controls within which history is always played.

Civilization makes little effort to convince us that we are part of or witness to a convincing world, but instead are an active observant of a discourse framed as a historical space. As such, there is little dissonance between the diegetic levels of the ludonarrative (the extra diegetic level of the game as played and the fictive context of the game as history). This conceptual style combined with the lack of strong framing narrative means that *Civilization* is unlikely to produce particularly significant ludonarrative dissonance. This is because 'the range of possible developments at any given point depends only on the current state of the fictional world....In a classical narrative, by contrast, the possible futures are determined by the entire past history of the fictional world, and it is much more difficult to create a choice of actions that remain consistent with the past' (Ryan 2001, n.p.). This is further compounded by and somewhat explains, *Civilization*'s irreverence for linear history.

Beyond the effects discussed above, there are also a number of other benefits to the game's chosen narrative structure. Firstly, obviously the game emphasises multiplicity and questions the nature of the past as fixed and linear. 'This has the benefit of allowing the reader/player to experience [a direct virtual experience that simultaneously alters and represents] the fluidity of the process of meaning creation, contrary to strictly structured communication models' (Chapman 2010, 470). Subsequently and secondly, *Civilization* emphasises the nature of history as an active discourse rather than immutable texts. Thirdly, the often bewildering array of lexia that are necessary in such a narrative structure means that the game is capable of making a number of small arguments (as well as larger systemic ones) and is capable of doing so in different ways according to the different ways each is combined, '"the hypertextuality of digital texts allows for a multiplicity of semantic connections among data," and hence the

opportunity to "move toward more complex forms of analysis"' (Ayers cited in Fogu 2009, 107). Whilst it is debatable whether this is truly achieved in *Civilization*, there is certainly an often surprising contextual nuance to some of the game's arguments and in this way the game actualizes some relatively complex thematic discourse. Fourthly, this vast ludonarrative choice also allows players to concentrate on the elements of the past that interest them, whether cultural, economic, military or scientific/technological and the game's various victory conditions reflect more unified narratives of these themes and concerns. History is always relevant in *Civilization* because the audience chooses some of its component parts. Fifthly, the very inviting presence of agency itself can be seen as a benefit. Ironically, as Murray also notes, the feeling of agency that such narratives allow is best described within literature by the experimental author Calvino; 'I feel the thrill of a beginning that can be followed by multiple developments, inexhaustibly' (1988, 177). Despite this, 'to truly capture such cascading permutations, one would need a computer' (Murray 1997, 38) and so *Civilization* offers something difficult to find in other forms and which makes it an extremely inviting, exciting and accessible popular history. Lastly, this narrative agency forces the player to take an active role in narrative construction, the process of which, in the conceptual simulation of *Civilization*, is not subsumed beneath an immersive dramatic diegetic veneer.

The open-ontological structure of course also has weaknesses. Firstly, the very feeling of agency (at least initially) can also hide the prescribing structures that allow the game's ideological basis to still be strongly produced. Also, the feeling of playing an actualized role in a simulation can give the impression of objectivity despite the game's historical and thus mimetic narrative layer. Like 'indigenous media such as storytelling', the game has an emphasis on 'experiencing the story in a collective space without expression of authorial ownership over knowledge' (Dillon 2008, 131). This is good in the sense that the discursive nature of history is emphasised but yet problematic because 'The storyteller employs methods of [in this case ludic] immersion so that the listener is not listening to the storyteller, but rather experiencing the knowledge inherent in the story' (Dillon 2008, 131) and in doing so *Civilization* could also be accused of hiding its epistemological basis, historian's voice and therefore authorial authority.

Secondly, the open-ontological structure (which in this case encourages a passive counter-history) obviously makes the construction of specific narratives extremely difficult and so links to the larger historical discourse must be thematic and procedural

rather than comprised of particular retellings. I would argue that this is often more of a strength than a weakness. However, as it also comprises a particular loss of something often taken as intrinsic to history it is worth including here. It is actually this inability for the system to intrinsically produce these larger narrative retellings that can make moments when players manage to emergently produce them so gratifying and resonant. Thirdly, and this links to the previous point, because narrative cannot be tightly pre-scripted, dramatic pacing and linear narrative techniques are extremely difficult to implement. This has led some to argue, as Warren Spector (designer of *Deus Ex*) does, that emergent narrative 'ends up with a relative lack of direction and emotional resonance' (McNamara 2004). Of course it could also still be argued that it is entirely possible for this emotional resonance to spring from particular exciting and unforeseen game-play moments instead. Lastly, though in terms of constructing thematic and process/system focused arguments this narrative type has exciting potential, it could also be argued that it makes the relatively simple task of passing on fairly basic data more complex than is necessary. This is perhaps the prime reason that calls for games like *Civilization* to be unthinkingly included in educational curriculums and to take the place of the often more efficient pedagogy's already in place, should be treated with extreme caution.

Civilization's use of an open-ontological story-structure means that the game can only produce ludo-historical narratives. This insistence on emergence and multiplicity also means that *Civilization* is designed to be played repeatedly, rather than 'completed'. Juul calls this an 'incoherent world game' whereby players typically play in 'a number of ontologically unconnected worlds' (2005 166-167). Here, 'the space in which the game is played becomes larger than the space of the world in which it is played. The entire game becomes a superset of world space, and a series of fictional world spaces....are created and deleted during the course of the game' (Juul 2005, 167).[7] Furthermore, Ryan claims, 'Just as we can work for a time on a puzzle, leave it, and come back to it later, readers of hypertext do not start a new story from scratch every time they open the program, but rather construe a mental representation over many sessions, completing or amending the picture put together so far' (Ryan 2001, n.p.).

If this is indeed the case, though these fictive worlds are indeed ontologically distinct, a super-set of narrative -the player's historical understanding of the game- will be built

[7] Of course reloading means that even linear games have a spiral-like quality (Myers 2005, 1).

through the repeated ludonarratives that begin to interrogate the logic and arguments of the system beyond the experiences of a single game. Accordingly, we must at least consider the argument that, though there also is the potential for much more than this, there is also a developer-led historical narrative here. However, this is not discovered as in a linear text (nor is it a linear narrative) but through multiple play-throughs that allow us to hone our understanding of the game's model of history to better express our agency or simply to win. In these ways we gain an understanding of the game's historical representation by constantly testing, probing, replaying and simultaneously *rereading*. Perhaps this can lead players to a more nuanced understanding of a complex (in scope and multiplicity) representation, than is likely to be possible with a simple strong framing narrative. However, because these arguments are fully embedded in the game's complex 'procedures and requires the writing and re-writing or play and replay of its audience to be truly explored' (Chapman 2010, 470) the game also requires a particular level of commitment. Repetition can in itself of course be beneficial when trying to communicate information or make a strong point and it is a common technique in historical narrative. However, in the case of a game, where it is combined with the learning of tasks, this can also be problematic, as discussed in the final chapter.

Through this process of replay we begin to learn the arguments of the system that though open, remains structured through the use of framing controls. These sub-sets of ludonarrative agency and yet super-set of fixed arguments, epistemology and ideology creates an interesting tension which will be explored further in Chapter 9. For now it is enough to say that it is precisely this narrative tension that allows the game to emphasise historical discourse, a practice already present in any narrative but which Civilization actualizes in concrete action. It is precisely *Civilization*'s embracing of the medium's inability to maintain the structure and authority of the linear historical narrative that allows it to blur the line between production and reception so effectively. After all, the historian's process is far from linear or vertical and neither is the process of discourse through which these ideas are developed in the wider historiography.

Dillon notes how, despite being nominally about the indigenous experience of the American Revolution, *Age of Empires III: The Warchiefs* uses a remarkably restrictive narrative format (deterministic story structure) with its linear pattern of 'conflict, tension, and resolution' (2008, 137). A single competitive narrative of *Civilization* may display a similar alignment. However, perhaps there still an argument to be made here.

A game like *Civilization*, not only relinquishes linearity and chronological reference in the irreverent ludonarratives that are made, it also allows a gradual weaving of multiplicitous narratives into a super-set of narrative historical representation through multiple play-throughs. Accordingly, perhaps the form of historical knowledge production in *Civilization* really does hold some similarity to a type of indigenous storytelling whereby 'Stories are often short but relate to a network of knowledge so that it is uncertain where one story ends and another begins. The central focus of each story is a happening and its effects on the people, the land, and the culture' (Dillon 2008, 137).

Certainly, the distinction between play and story in *Civilization* is often much more ontologically unclear than in *BiA*. This narrative construction is emphasised in the game's embracing of its narrative potential evident in its claims to allow the rewriting of history: 'history as you know it, is history' (*Civilization IV*, back cover). This is further compounded by the conceptual (and thus discursive) styling, lack of temporal pressure, spatial structure, vast opportunities for configurative resonance, extra-telic goals and obvious focus on playful counterfactual narratives. Thus, it can be argued that the ludonarrative of *Civilization* is probably produced more consciously than in *BiA* reactive and urgent game-play. Finally, *Civilization* and historical videogames with similar narrative structures emphasise that 'A game does not need to tell stories that would provide suitable literary material to immerse a player in the fate of its fiction world, because the thrill of being in a world, of acting in it and controlling its history, makes up for the intellectual challenge, the subtlety of plot, and the complexity of characterization that the best of literature has to offer' (Ryan 2006, 195).[8]

Conclusion

It is clear that both *BiA* and *Civilization* offer very different narrative engagements with both players and history. Each has benefits and weaknesses and this often involves one narrative type losing the relative advantages of the other. Whilst the deterministic story structure emphasizes reactive *discovery* the open-ontological story structure emphasises *discourse*. Whilst the former offers us a sense of physical freedom to reactively and emergently write ludonarratives of challenge and skill within a fairly closed system and

[8] Ryan perhaps oversells videogames a little but her broader point is well made.

to experience moments of pre-scripted drama, the latter allows more possibilities and more thoughtful and considered discursive narrative play, though also in relation to (different and more optional) pressures and challenge.

Clearly, narrative is an important notion to understanding historical videogames and exploring narrative in the depth used here allows us to begin to understand precisely what games may be capable of as histories. This analysis has also been important because it further prevents us from conceiving of the historical videogame as a homogenous form. Discussing narrative in historical videogames inevitably moves us deeper into considering what is allowed and possible in games and so we start to talk more explicitly about game-play alongside history. This said, though narrative is important in these games, there is clearly something hugely important that we have touched upon but left explicitly unsaid (particularly in examining the narrative of *BiA*).

Games are also systems of playful action and though we cannot even begin to consider narrative without talking about these issues (and vice versa), still these affordances must be considered on their own terms to reveal exactly what each game-structure offers players as a playful history. Whilst historical theory can provide a lot of answers when looking at historical videogames, using only traditional methods also risks reducing these games to nothing more than poor facsimiles of our other forms. Such a closed perspective ignores the unique aspect of this new form of historical expression and the precise reason why it is so popular in the first place: game-play. Here we reach the edge of the capabilities of historical theory and must therefore add to this knowledge further new theories and methodologies. For this analytical task, ecological psychology and the concept of affordances are extremely useful, if not the best way, to approach historical videogames. This approach allows us to situate these games as objects of action and game-play alongside our understanding of them as historical narratives and it is this kind of analysis that we now turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Affording History

'The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or for ill. The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.'

-Gibson 1986, 127

In fully turning to the examination of historical videogames as texts of challenge, skill and action we also move beyond the analysis of the individual structures that produce game-based historical representations in particular ways and which support and encourage particular kind of player interactions. Instead we return to a more holistic viewpoint and examine what the most significant opportunities for interacting with representations of the past these categories create when fully combined as game-structures. The ecological approach allows us to do precisely this and provides a broader theory of action to understand how historical videogames seek to explore past action by offering opportunities for present action. Naturally we can frame affordances in many ways and game-play typically affords many things (for example, social affordances such as laughing together). However, here the analysis is framed to examine precisely what these games afford players as histories.

The Ecological Approach

The ecological approach is formed from the ideas of Gibson (1986) and has been developed in its application to games by Linderoth (2007; 2011; 2012B). This framework, 'address[es] the reciprocal relation between humans (as well as other animals…) and the environment... [which] *offers* the individual different ways of acting. These offers are called affordances and…are relative to an organism (relative between species as well as between individuals)' (Linderoth 2011, 4). This framework is also beneficial because it can be applied equally to any game, digital or not. In the case of videogames we can understand the controller (or mouse), software and screen as things

which are part of the environment of the player and afford particular ludic (gaming) actions.

Linderoth continues, 'Although many basic affordances are of such nature that they can be acted upon by a majority of the animals in a species, there are individual differences' (4). Thus affordances are based on a number of factors, including training and 'Humans, at least, must learn to use affordances' (Gibson and Pick 2000, 16). Skill can be broken down into the capability to *recognize/perceive* particular affordances and the capability to *utilize/realize* them. Accordingly, as Linderoth continues to explain, some affordances can only be *utilized* by experts even if they can be *perceived* by others who do not have the skill to act upon them. Similarly, experts may be able to *perceive* affordances that non-experts cannot recognise. For these reasons, actions can be broadly broken into exploratory (what you can perceive) and performatory (what you can do) (Reed 1996, 80-82). 'The *exploratory* aspect of actions is to yield knowledge about the affordances of the specific situation. The *performatory* aspect of action is about realizing [utilizing] affordances that are already discovered' (Gibson and Pick 2000, 21).

It is also, therefore, important to note that some actions will change the affordances of a situation allowing new ones to emerge, 'Thus, the environment can be said to have affordances for gaining other affordances. We do not only adapt the environment [often through the use of tools], we also reveal information about affordances through action' (Linderoth 2011, 6). It is therefore possible, to *develop* expertise in particular affordances through a process of differentiation, by 'becoming attuned to our environment, being able to make finer distinctions' (Linderoth 2011, 5) in the available information. In the ecological approach, the eye is not a camera as much as a search engine, constantly searching to differentiate information that is useful from that which is not, in determining the actions our environment affords us. Naturally, this is part of the process of learning to play a game.

Affordances in Historical Videogames

Historical videogames afford players particular actions. Firstly, this is in the most mundane sense, the hardware/control pad allows particular actions. For example, buttons afford pressing and screens afford picture viewing. Secondly, more specifically

and most relevantly in a historical context, the game affords the player (normally through an avatar) particular actions in affecting a historical game world and the screen will produce particular (normally audio-visual) perceptual information in response to the actions of players. This is naturally an extremely important part of how videogames produce historical representations. Such games also offer opportunities for interacting with history (which can be understood as a larger cultural or social affordance) through the immediate game-play actions they afford. In videogames these affordances are determined by developers with a desire to create fun-to-play products, by the limitations of the commonly available technology and also the pressures and conventions of the videogame form as it has developed. However, in historical videogames, these affordances are also likely to be determined by their reference to something that though now inaccessible once existed (the past), by historical evidence and the developer-historian's interpretation, epistemological approach and story/content decisions. Thus, whilst fun may be a primary determiner of the affordances that make up the game, the desire to create believable historical representations is also important, otherwise the games risk producing a dissonance between their fictive and ludic aspects.[1] Accordingly, in *Brothers in Arms* we are afforded actions that represent our avatar running, jumping and crouching but not floating or flying. Similarly, in *Civilization* though we do not have a fictional representative and can move the camera as if floating above the map, the actions of the historical agents depicted within (and consequently, the affordances of the player) are in some way determined referentially. So for instance, cavalry can move further, faster than infantry but cannot cross deep water, whereas ships can. Therefore, importantly, the actions afforded to players often represent intrinsic physical capabilities, training and skills of a particular historical agent or group of agents (in relation to a given environment) and how these capabilities are/were extended by various tools. In this way, the affordances of historical videogames make particular arguments about the past and afford particular opportunities for historical meaning-making and discovery to players.

However, it should be noted that historical videogames very rarely teach us to utilize the performatory actions that the represented agent/avatar appears to realize, because of the vast degree of abstraction between this and the actual game-play action of the player (in

[1] Gibson notes that 'There is no such thing as a literal re-presentation of an earlier optic array' (1986, 279). However, it is not necessary to relinquish the word when using a postmodernist perspective whereby the term is always used to imply a subjective and constructed relationship.

line with current common game-play technologies). For example, the historical game *Assassin's Creed* features an avatar that is an excellent climber. However, the player controls this by only moving a thumbstick and pressing buttons. We could perhaps make the argument that the game can teach us to perceive what buildings afford climbing and what architectural features provide the best path to do so (the exploratory aspect of the affordance). However, we cannot claim that the game teaches us the bodily skills and strength necessary to actually climb and to utilize these perceived affordances (the performatory aspect).[2] Similarly, by watching a representation of another person utilizing an affordance it is possible, given certain conditions, that we may be able learn of the existence of this affordance.[3] However, this does not necessarily teach us to utilize it.

This loss of the performatory aspect may also be further compounded by allowances made for game-play to remain fun. Often this is because the player may simply not be able to utilize or perceive the same affordances as the represented agent due to lacking ability or training. For instance, in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* the portrayal of Batman as the 'world's greatest detective' is problematic because the designer cannot expect the player to be have the same expert level of differentiation. Accordingly, though this ability is mostly concerned with the exploratory aspect of action, the player must be given 'bat-vision' (that Batman as a character is not known to possess) which highlights what information contained within the environment (clues) is pertinent to affording the solving of crimes. Whilst of course we cannot assume that no player would be able to succeed without this tool, it is important to remember that each videogame is made for an 'implied player' and it is assumed that the majority of players will either not have this skill, not be able to obtain it, or that this would not be an aspect of play gamers would find fun. This, despite better representing Batman (and thus affording better role-playing), also denies the player the opportunity to learn these affordances. This is important in historical games, as it should be remembered that representation will always be compromised by design pressures such as this, including how economical it is for developers to represent possible affordances of the past effectively.

[2] It may even lead us to misread possible affordances.
[3] Gibson hints at this possibility when discussing educational film (1986, 295) and 'Depiction by Film', where he states that film aims 'to produce in the viewer the awareness of a train of events, and of the causal structure of these events' (Gibson 1986, 301).

Despite the loss of the performatory aspect of the historical actions which some games attempt to simulate, we can still potentially learn what actions, according to the game's historical representation, were afforded particular historical agents (or groups) and why these actions were useful or necessary, by what is afforded us as players. Importantly, we can even become attuned to and learn to differentiate information in ways that are similar to historical agents.

Brothers in Arms

Given the realist simulation's plentiful audio-visual data the most obvious affordance of avatar movement (and therefore, camera control) in the game space, which allows us to explore and inspect this data is important. This also allows us to actively seek new information (exploratory agency) and accordingly, opens up new affordances and is a key part of the game's challenge. As noted, what is afforded in terms of this movement seeks to represent the affordances of the historical agent (WW2 soldier). Similarly, the first-person camera perspective seeks to restrict the visual information available to the player and thus represent the perception of the original agent. Accordingly, 'The field of view of the camera is analogous to the combined field of view of the eyes in the head in the sense that both fields are bound by occluding edges' (Gibson 1986, 297). Gibson argues that 'Films for training and education can profit by having the camera occupy the point of observation of the learner' (1986, 298), it does not take too much of a leap of logic to assume that this is the case for games also.

Of course, the other most obvious game world action that is afforded players is shooting. Firstly, even in this basic core mechanic there is historical information to be gleaned. By affording the player/avatar this action, the game makes the argument that tools (firearms) enabled the effective killing of enemies at distance and were the key component of WW2 warfare. However, what does the actual affordance convey beyond this basic information? *BiA* produces information, in the form of light from the luminous screen, that is structurally similar to the information that reached the soldier in the original context and specified a gun, tank or enemy soldier. Furthermore, the game seeks to *maintain* this similarity so, for example, both actions (firing as a gamer and as a soldier) produce structurally *similar* (though only in a very basic sense) visual information. This means that the gamer and the WW2 soldier have part of their visual field in common. The gamer is not confronted with the same 'performatory

challenges'[4] of using a gun as the soldier was because of the hugely different actions they take (using a thumbstick and buttons). However, if we are to shoot effectively, we are confronted with *some* similar 'exploratory challenges'.[5] Thus, learning to be effective in combat in the game entails learning to differentiate some *similar* (mainly visual) information to the historical agent upon which the representation is based.

The player must learn to differentiate *some similar* perceptual information to the WW2 soldier if they are to learn:

1. To perceive a viable and tactically sound shot (e.g. no cover in the way, within range).

2. The need (and when) to compensate for distance, movement and the flight time of 'bullets' (e.g. 'leading' a target, increased bullet-spread over distance).

3. When the environment best affords reloading or movement (e.g. perceiving potential threats).

4. To perceive the affordances of terrain, particularly cover (especially given the destructible cover mechanic in *Hell's Highway*) and concurrent lines of sight (extremely important for tactical movement, particularly flanking).

5. To distinguish between enemies and allies.[6]

6. To recognize particular enemies and what each affords (environmental pressures).[7]

7. To perceive the appropriateness and necessity of each of the depicted historical weapons (tools) when faced with particular enemies.

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[4] Where the difficulty lies in the performing (utilizing) of an affordance (e.g. pole vault, hurdling) (Linderoth 2011, 10).

[5] 'Where it is a challenge for the assumed player to know what action to take but executing the action is more or less trivial' (e.g. *Monopoly*, chess) (Linderoth 2011, 10).

[6] *BiA*' authentic difficulty removes perceptual aids (such as suppression indicators – see figure 4.5). This reflects combat problems commonly held as the origin of heraldry. Indeed, Medieval RPG *Mount and Blade* also captures this by turning off perceptual aids on higher difficulties and forcing reliance on historically contemporary aids like heraldry.

[7] Of course in the past it has also been useful to easily distinguish between allies (as the Late-Roman shield designs of the *Notitia Dignitatum* indicate). The loss of unit indicators in *BiA*' authentic mode reflects this historical challenge.

The soldier and the gamer pick up information that specifies very different affordances respectively. And yet, for both there is the necessity to differentiate some similar information in relation to these different affordances because (as the game is referential) the exploratory challenges involved in both scenarios are similar and some of the visual information is shared. Accordingly, in instances where some of the distinctions in perceptual information involved in game-play actions and the represented historical actions (and to some degree those of the agent) align, the game can function as a form of re-enactment.

'Critically, games require players to learn to read the game space under what Dewey might call "the threat of extinction." The game is quite literally over for the player who fails to "read"' (Squire 2006, 22). These similar skills of perception are all made *necessary* to attain by the inherently challenging nature of *BiA* as an historical *videogame* and the referential represented environmental pressures this entails (e.g. enemies that shoot and flank us, allies we must not shoot, technology such as tanks and machine guns). Importantly, the player is *forced* to act in historically meaningful ways to be successful, i.e. to win the game. Players must learn to perceive the information that the game argues was important to the systems and processes it represents and which it argues resemble the initial context of information.

Competitive games are suited to representation of this kind because of their similarities to warfare (Huizinga 1955, 90). However, even beyond the abstraction of performatory action, there are significant simulation gaps. For instance, games are inherently fair and so players will always have the appropriate tools available in the environment to deal with pressures (for example when confronted with a tank there will always be a bazooka nearby). Real WW2 combat, being reliant on a whole raft of other historical industrial and logistical structures was not always fair. Furthermore, failure to attune to the affordances that enable us to deal with these pressures have vastly different consequences (loss of game or life) and the game is therefore perhaps closer to the training ground of WW2 troops which was also, in a sense, virtual (half-real). Finally, like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, some allowances are made. For example, the player rather than being expected to *perceive* whether enemies are suppressed or how much fire they are likely to take until they are (and thus what they afford) the player is equipped with a symbol which gradually changes. This (and a few other compromises) are however, optional and can be fully switched off or simply not used.

Nonetheless, by playing games like *BiA* we can learn to differentiate some of the information and thus even *perceive* some of the affordances, that were useful to the WW2 soldier, despite the fact we cannot learn how to *utilize* these historical actions. Additionally, as noted earlier, there is still historical audio-visual data and exploratory information to be gained from watching other characters (or in 3rd person, our avatar) engage in performatory actions. However, all this relies on a particular fidelity (invariance) in the visual evidence the game presents. Furthermore, this re-enactment of combat actions can only function in terms of the exploratory aspect of historical action and the performatory aspect is lost, producing a dissonance between the agent and player.

Consequently, perhaps *BiA*' most historically meaningful affordance is allowing players to tactically command two fire teams. This adds a new level of historical information, and thus discourse, to the ludic metonym of the game compared to its competitors. Progression without mastering this skill is unlikely and so the player is forced to learn strategy in relation to the 'Four Fs' (see figure 7.1) which formed the basis of fire-fights of this era (and today). Naturally, the game can only effectively represent the tactical aspect of command rather than the logistical and humanistic aspects of leadership. However, this game mechanic is particularly interesting as a historical representation because it does not suffer as much from the abstraction of the performatory aspect. This is because both the mechanic and the original historical action are *exploratory challenges* (see footnote 21).

Thus, for the player in the game, as for the commander in WW2, the difficulty does not lie in the giving of the commands but in knowing which commands to give. Though a few environmental pressures are removed, such as noise, distance and radio fix, for the most part, the change of the performatory aspect from the voice to the game-pad as the means of command does not overtly affect the representation in terms of its allowing the player to understand *some* of the important challenges of WW2 command. Importantly, it is when representing these kinds of *exploratory challenges* that the videogame seems to produce the least amount of dissonance and therefore this which the form currently seems suited to.

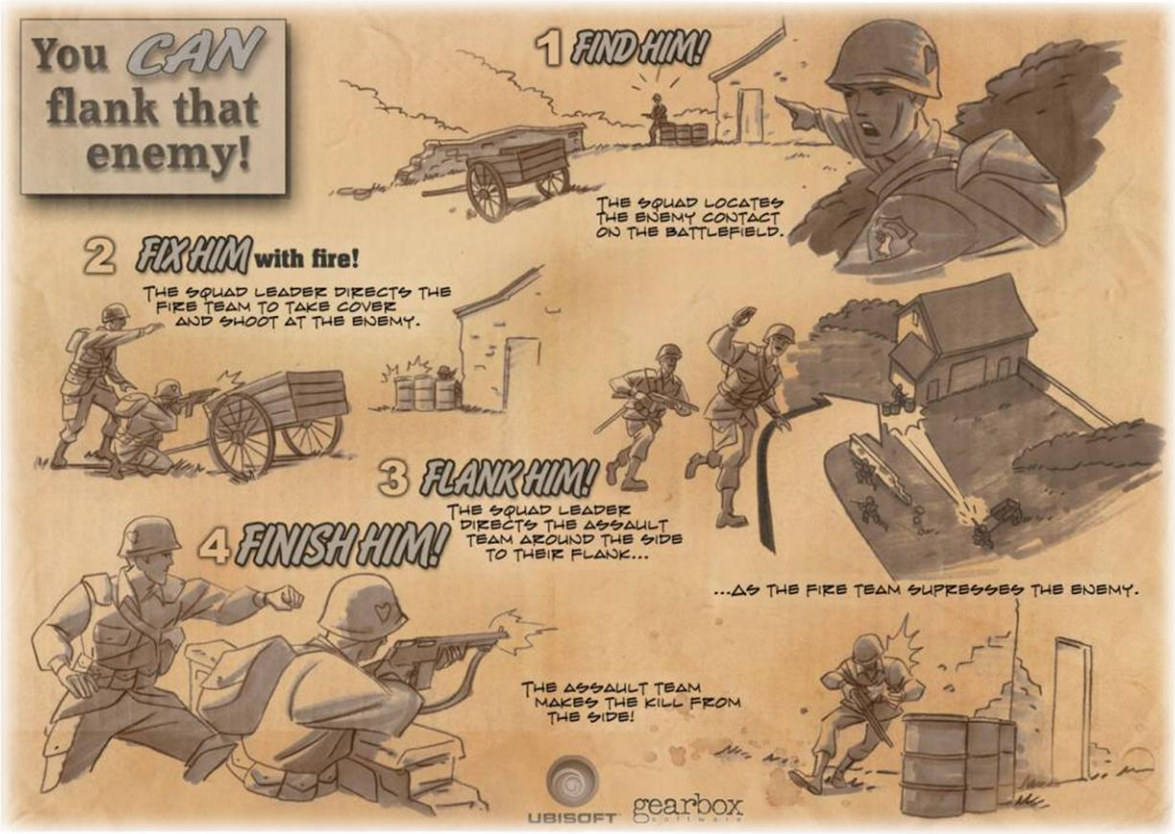

Figure 7.1 - The importance of the Four F's, both to game-play and historical combat, is made immediately clear by this poster bundled with *Road to Hill 30* (Image from GameReplays.org)

Clearly, games like *BiA* can challenge us to learn to differentiate (mostly basic) historically useful information from our perceptual field which (due to the game's realist simulation - a game world that structures information that has some of the invariant properties of the original historical environment) shares *some* information with the perceptual field of the historical agent. Importantly, the game tries to *maintain* this similarity in perceptual fields despite player actions. This is partially achieved by the dramatic narrowing of the margin of possible actions (through the various forms of framing already discussed) which normally limits players to performing actions that have some historical validity. It should be noted, however, that this restriction on possible actions also produces a dissonance as the process of differentiation of valid information is easier when we only have to look at information relevant to a smaller number of affordances. Nonetheless basic historical information can effectively be communicated by forcing the player to differentiate relevant information in relation to particular referential exploratory challenges. This allows games such as *BiA* as a historical 'body-based discourse' (Agnew 2004, 330) to afford re-enactment. Whilst this has been proposed before (Rejack 2007), the ecological approach allows us to

understand this in much firmer terms, greater detail and furthermore, allows us to comparatively reflect anew on traditional re-enactment as well.

Civilization

Civilization makes two significant connections with the ecological approach. Firstly, the game, through the actions it affords players, makes a number of ecological arguments that seem to function as an example of Reed's proposition that 'ecological psychology also makes important contact with the discipline of history. The basic material of history is our human ability to transform ourselves collectively, itself a function of our incessant collective efforts after meaning and value' (1996, 188). Secondly, by using the ecological approach to analyse *Civilization* we can see that it affords the player actions in relation to the practice of historians. What Munslow, drawing from Dening, refers to as 'historying' (Munslow 2010, 8).

Ecological Arguments

Civilization is a history of human affordances, particularly those that the game (from a particular ideological perspective) posits as integral to the concept of 'civilization'. Players' historical identity is more complex than in *BiA* as they do not have a direct avatar representative in the game space. Instead of gaining the affordances of a particular represented historical agent, the player instead explores the affordances of a represented historical collective, essentially, a group of organisms that, in relation to the environment, can be viewed (in a rather Hobbesian way) as a collective organism with *shared affordances*. This possibility is seemingly supported by Gibson who states that a post box 'affords letter mailing to a letter writing human in a community with a postal system' (Gibson 1986, 139). Thus, Gibson opens the idea of affordances beyond the organism as an individual. Though the affordance of posting itself is available to the individual, it is only meaningful as communication because it is part of a shared system of affordances by the collective. *BiA* (particularly *Earned in Blood*) makes this argument about WW2 combat through its team command mechanic which in a (seemingly) collaborate effort opens up new affordances unavailable to the individual (player/avatar/agent). *Civilization* makes a similar argument: often the sharing of particular technologies or knowledge throughout a collective organism opens up new affordances not available to the individual. Whilst agriculture affords an individual the

opportunity to survive efficiently within their environment, it affords an entire civilisation population growth and urbanisation. *Civilization* makes many arguments of the latter type and thus deals in what I term 'macro-affordances'. *Civilization* also demonstrates that sharing these newly realized affordances can occur rapidly and efficiently within human groups because this knowledge can be *mediated*. The game demonstrates the role of social and cultural structures and institutions in extending the availability of these affordances within a given society. For example, a barrack affords the training of veteran troops. The institution functions as a knowledge tool that rapidly reveals new affordances.

Similarly, there are systemic changes brought about by the occasional occurrence of 'great persons' who are defined by the game as such precisely by their ability to transform the affordances of the entire collective. This can be seen as an argument for Carlyle's (2010) great man theory. However the fact that these great persons (or rather their effects) are only afforded players whose civilization meets certain criteria also seems to indicate that the game accounts for Spencer's famous criticism (1896, 30-31) of said theory by showing great persons as a product of and dependent on, the affordances of the collective in which they occur. The game also echoes this debate in what it affords the player. Accordingly, the historical videogame, because it naturally implicates an 'interactivity dilemma, that is the question how much and which parts of the game can be influenced by players, and, conversely, which ones cannot, resembles greatly the heated nineteenth century debate on the relation between free will and necessity in history' (Poblocki 2002, 167). Poblocki also notes (167) that Meier (and indeed *Civilization* itself) support Plekhanov's assumption that 'influential individuals can change the individual features of events and some of their particular consequences, but they cannot change their general trend(…) they are themselves the product of this trend' (Ferguson 1998, 41). In this way both form and historical content are linked and the game cannot help but emphasise that 'The force behind many of the [collective] transformations comes from the tension between individuals discovering facts about their relationship to their environment and culturally selected patterns of properties' (Reed 1996, 188). The ecological approach allows us to bridge an understanding of these different affordances (the represented historical and game-play) which nonetheless are connected through the tensions of discipline and adaptation and see that in *Civilization* (as well as most other games, including the restrictive *BiA*) the power of the individual is explored in tangible ecological terms through action. In all these ways, by

focusing on the transformation of affordances in its game-play, *Civilization* makes a number of basic arguments about the relation of the individual to the collective and particularly about the nature of cultural diffusion (Kee and Graham forthcoming; Rogers 2003).

Approaching *Civilization* from an ecological perspective can also allow us to reflect upon how we construct particular historical identities for collectives, in the terms of their *shared altered relations* to the environment. For instance, in popular history at least (and in *Civilization*) the Celts tend to be grouped together as one culture because of their similar languages and iron working. But in reality these were many different cultural groups (e.g. the Insular Celts, Gauls, Celtiberians, Galatians) with often distinct cultural practices. Within the game, some affordances are characterized as intrinsic to the civilization and are given to the player as bonuses. For instance, in *Civilization V*, the Americans have a bonus called 'Manifest Destiny' (all land military units have +1 sight and there is a discount when purchasing tiles). *Civilization* accordingly makes an argument for the intrinsic affordances of particular cultures through what is afforded the player that chooses them. These civilization-specific affordances granted to players can be seen as an argument for culture being the most important factor in determining a collective's capabilities. However, conversely, the broader trend of the game's rules make an argument, like Diamond (1997), about how the environment is the defining feature in what is afforded particular collectives, particularly in terms of resources, movement and strategy. Therefore, *Civilization*, also argues for an understanding of historical affordances as determined environmentally, by what the game environment affords the player. Thus the game puts forward two arguments about the nature and origins of collective affordances. However, it appears from work by Squire (2006) that the second tends to be more widely recognized by students (and thus, perhaps all players). This second argument does not only make a strong historical and politically relevant point but actually supports the ecological perspective itself by highlighting how what is afforded an organism is always dependent on the nature of, and its relation to, its environment.

We can see that the game makes ecological arguments by what it affords the player as a unified collective. Also, importantly, the game represents the sources (social groups, institutions, individuals, sub-collectives and technologies) which it depicts as enabling these affordances. By doing so the game also argues the importance of the division of

labour (whereby skill does not have to be distributed evenly) in the development of collective affordances. For example, though fighting with swords may benefit a whole collective, blacksmiths and warriors may be different roles performed by different people. *Civilization* manifests this in its many different unit types. Specialization and mediation such as this allowed the attaining of affordances that would be a huge task (or more likely impossible) for a single agent to achieve. *Civilization* emphasises this and accordingly, the importance of understanding *collective action*, in terms of the larger movements of history.

Civilization's core argument about history rests on the idea that the ability to not only *utilize* but *transform* affordances (particularly through technology) was the key variable in the progression (or not) of civilizations. Perhaps the most obvious example of this focus is the technology tree (figure 6.2). The tech tree is an excellent representational tool in this context because it takes as its very basis and superbly demonstrates, how certain affordances afford the discovery of others, how new affordances make old ones obsolete and how the relationship between the organism and environment is rarely stable and therefore dependent (for humans at least) on technology and the adaptive discovery of new affordances. This is made particularly important because the environment is also made up of enemy civilizations whose affordances are also constantly adapting. Through play, the tech tree (as well as the various religious, political and ideological 'trees') serves as more than just a visual map and becomes a procedural map of the links between particular tools, knowledge and most importantly, *collective action*, in the game's history of human civilization(s). Accordingly, the tech tree is a core aspect of the game's ecological arguments.

Because of these types of arguments the games make significant contact with Reed's aforementioned ideas about the possible contact between history and ecological psychology. This, combined with the intrinsic focus (as a game) on action, which includes taking as its primary focus of discourse 'affordances', *Civilization* (and other games like it) could even be interpreted as a new approach to the past: 'ecological history'. Such games link technology, knowledge, progression, dominance and power, through an understanding of these themes in terms of what they afford(ed). What is unique is that they do so in a form that uses an, arguably, naturalised descriptive rhetoric of historical action by affording the player (as a civilization) actions within a challenging interactive experience. Again this is done within an environment with

sufficient pressure to encourage us to learn the significance of what particular elements afford if we are to win. Similarly to *BiA'* team command mechanic, often in *Civilization* the abstraction of performatory action becomes less important because the game does not try to represent the historical actions of singular agents but collectives; there is therefore, often no direct equivalent for the player actions to abstract from.

Affording Historying

Perhaps more important than the game's interesting arguments about past affordances is the second layer of player affordances. *Civilization* also functions as a knowledge tool that extends the affordances of the player by giving them *some* of the affordances of the *academic historian.* Again, this only really works because being a historian is an exploratory challenge rather than a performatory one (though I'm sure many tired historians might disagree).

From a historical perspective, as aforementioned, *Civilization* allows the player actualized (i.e. beyond interpretation) agency within the developer-historian's virtual story space. This is a space made up of selected evidence, arguments that are found convincing, interpretation, theory, understandings of causation, epistemological assumptions, biases, preferences, resonances and what is imagined. Consequently, this is essentially linked to the historian's historical understanding and knowledge, which can often take years to develop. As has become apparent, in *Civilization*, the player is given a *structured* representational environment (a virtual story space) within the bounds of which, they are free to rearrange and configure various elements. This is structured in that much of the groundwork is already done and the boundaries of the story space established. Therefore, the player is equipped with the knowledge tools of underlying theory work, methodology, pre-selected evidence, ideology, epistemology and a theory and network of causal relationships (perhaps best indicated by the tech tree). Many of these tools and choices are commonly the reserve of those who are experts in differentiating this information: historians. Accordingly, *Civilization* works as a system that affords players opportunities for playfully writing historical narratives, basic historical inquiry and 'counter histories' and thus, *limited* engagement in the expert practice of the historian. Consequently, there is a move from receiving history to historying.

Expanding upon these ideas allows us to see *Civilization* as a simulated explorative-discourse system. In such a system there is information to be gained but we can also negotiate and question the limits of the game's representation more actively than with a similar discourse in a book through the game-play actions we, as both the player and the represented collective, are afforded. For instance, let us look at the last of these practices (counter-history). Counter-history is a useful form of inquiry that seeks new understanding by examining the simulation gap between the past as we understand it and a 'what if?' scenario. Historians, in fact, do this all the time, it is a natural part of constructing an historical narrative (e.g. an idea of what did happen is always constructed in opposition to an idea of what did not happen).[8] Sometimes these thought processes even become full and valuable narratives. When a historian considers a counterfactual scenario, they construct it against their existing knowledge of what did happen but also against their understanding of the variables that could affect such a scenario according to their historical understanding and therefore form a story space. *Civilization* (and other games with similar structures) provides a system whereby these variables and their causal links are already accounted for and yet in which multiple stories can be told by players.

Though this is in an admittedly limited capacity, *Civilization* does allow practices like counter-history(ing) to become available without the player spending the years it would normally take to train these affordances to competency by accruing knowledge of evidence, methodology and theory.[9] In these ways *Civilization* can function as a knowledge tool, extending the player some of the affordances of discourse that are normally the reserve of the historian. It does this by providing a structured causal network of selected and interpreted evidence, thus creating a shared virtual story space that still allows the player to playfully configure historical narratives and counterfactual scenarios.

Conclusion

The ecological approach can enable us to see quite beyond simpler binary distinctions such as rules/fiction, history/games and narrative/play to look at action as a category at

[8] Indeed 'the argument that anyone who writes about history is doing so in a counterfactual manner...is a strong one' (MacCallum-Stewart & Parsler 2007, 205).
[9] The idea of *Civilization* allowing popular access to counterhistory seems to be first noted by Atkins (2005).

the core of both games and history, in the latter case both in terms of past action and present practice. Accordingly, the ecological approach gives us a solid theory of action with which to analyse historical videogames because it allows us to explore history in the terms of the action through which the game cannot help but operate. In return, the approach allows us to see what particular titles afford both as games and histories. Naturally, therefore, the ecological approach emphasizes that meaningful historical representations can be produced and received in experiential forms like videogames.

The analysis here using the ecological approach has allowed us to firstly explore how historical videogames produce meaning within a compelling ludic framework that challenges players to differentiate historical information as it relates to particular actions (sometimes constituting reenactment). Secondly how games as action led texts are well suited to making ecological arguments about the past, can represent macro-affordances as systems of collective action and (due, partly to the focus on fairness) easily make arguments that focus on environmental factors and the transformation of affordances through technology or tools. Lastly, the ecological approach shows how the videogame (perhaps uniquely) can extend the affordances of players and afford them some of the discursive practice (actions) of the historian. Each of these aspects is dependent upon particular game-structures though they are similar in that in each there is the presentation of opportunities for players to take historically meaningful action.

It should be apparent how each structural category (simulation and epistemology; time; space; narrative) examined thus far contributes to creating the overall game-structures of *BiA* and *Civilization* and thus what they afford players as histories. However, for the sake of completeness it is useful to briefly reiterate some of the most obvious and important structural relations that have been previously detailed. Before doing so, it is useful to note that the ecological approach can also help us understand the difference between the realist and conceptual simulation. The conceptual, unlike the realist, is not focused mainly on shared visual information that attempts to imitate that which would have been available to the actual historical agent and instead utilizes the ready semiotics of thematic historical discourse as well as a newer ludic historical aestheticism.

In the case of *Civilization* the conceptual simulation allows the abstraction, discursive tone and the scope, necessary to engage in the practice of the historian. Naturally, this is met with the ability to move freely through both time and space and the lack of

temporal pressure which enables players to explore, consider options (and reinforces the discursive tone) and allows the game to function as an exploratory challenge (like being a historian). This conceptual approach combined with the game's chosen perspective and focalisation allows for less tangible concepts such as economy or culture which cannot be properly perceived in terms of affordance at the level of the individual (at least in the terms of a historically influential variable trend) to be dealt with (like the metonymic abstracted words of book-based histories), and necessitates an understanding of collective affordances. The game's focalisation also allows the player to 'stand without' the game world as the historian and further reinforces the game's tone, as well as the spatial agency reinforcing the necessary scope for such play to be meaningful. Similarly the constructionist epistemology responsible for such a simulation type allows the game to deal in a number of thematic issues necessary to create an interesting discursive causal system and allows the complexity and yet flexibility for players to play with larger-scale narrative variables. Naturally the game's open-ontological story structure is at the core of affording players some of the narrative affordances of the historian whilst retaining a broader set of goals.

By comparison *BiA*' reconstructionist approach and concurrent realist simulation is important firstly because it entails data and thus the context to allow good reenactment. It is this realist simulation and its visual fidelity and overspecification, combined of course with the first-person camera (internal focalisation) which allows for assumed similarities in the perceptual field between player and historical agent to occur. This focalisation also functions as a form of pressure integral to the game's challenges which necessitates the negotiation of similar information. In fact we can understand the realist simulation in ecological terms as creating culturally accepted and understood invariants in the ambient optic array that directly (within the same mode) signify reality. Accordingly, the realist simulation also entails a narrowing of the respective modes of information (unlike the discursive *Civilization* with its many menus and text entries). Similarly, the game's maintenance of this shared visual information is only possible because of the realist-time relationship and this is also an integral temporal pressure (which is always performatory) applied to the game's challenges and thus the learning of historical information. The game's complex spatial agency is also integral to the exploratory challenges of command as well as the performatory challenges of information gathering and terrain negotiation (which of course still contain information). Linear space is used to focus the player's negotiation of particular

challenges, maintain the similarities in perceptual information (whilst of course conversely also sacrificing some of this in the lack of agency), and to provide a structured environment with tightly controlled challenges and dramatic scripting (which afford imagining). This also often forces the player into taking historically relevant and useful action. The linear narrative is of course intrinsically linked to this but of course also allows the strong presence of a framing narrative which contextualises and structures the restricted re-enactment actions, partially through characterisation and a linking to the larger historical discourse.

From the perspective of the ecological approach we can see that games can represent past actions through present ones. Furthermore, it can even be argued that this is perhaps the most natural form of rhetoric to describe past action. Firstly, in that functioning as a visual form the 'image makers can arouse in us an awareness of what they have seen, of what they have noticed, what they recall, expect, or imagine, and they do so *without converting the information into a different mode*' (Gibson 1986, 262). Secondly, by also allowing action a second layer of information is created and audiences are afforded actively testing some of what they perceive against the arguments of the developer-historian, as communicated by the affordances of the system. Lastly, using (even different) actions to represent action infers a somewhat lesser degree of abstraction than using spoken or written language. This means that the video game as a form may be better suited to some kinds of historical representation than written history (and of course vice versa). It could then well be that videogames will provide new and interesting ways to explore our relationship with the past and that the Gibsonian approach will prove crucial to both understanding and perhaps even creating, these games that represent the past. Using this approach as part of the basic framework I have applied here we can approach historical videogames as texts of action, skill and challenge and simultaneously systems of representation, exploring how these representations are constructed audio-visually and importantly, *ludically*.

This approach provides us with the final piece of the jigsaw to allow us to see exactly what opportunities for interacting with history the various structural categories create when considered as a combinative game-structure. Here we have come upon what seems to be each game's primary historical affordance; the focus of its offers to players to engage with the past-as-history. *BiA* can be understood as a form of digital-ludic re-enactment and *Civilization* as a knowledge tool that affords players 'historying'; a

simulated explorative-discourse system. As with all studies of this kind, the conclusions reached here about these game-structures (which are shared with so many historical games), are just a beginning. And though such studies will go well beyond the remit of this thesis we can begin to look at the most important and pressing of these further questions. Each game makes significant contact with discourses, practices and theory that already exists and in which it is useful to contextualise historical videogames, in the hope of gaining a greater understanding of this new and exciting historical form. Accordingly, the following two chapters will be dedicated to one game-structure each. The first will examine *Civilization*'s relation to counterhistory and postmodernism and the second, *BiA*' relation to traditional historical reenactment practices and theory.

Chapter 8

Brothers in Arms and Reenactment

'Historical Re-creation, he thought glumly....Only we do it with people dressing up and running around with blunt weapons, and people selling hot dogs, and the girls all miserable because they can only dress up as wenches, wenching being the only job available to women in the olden days.'

-Pratchett 2006, 375

In the last chapter I described how by *maintaining* an interactive environment with some similar perceptual information to the original historical environment and providing referential environmental challenges, *Brothers in Arms* encourages the player to utilize exploratory actions and perceive representative in-game features (and the appropriateness of their deployment in a given context). The player's perception thus differentiates information in similar ways to the historical agent and the game can therefore function as reenactment.

Whilst in and of themselves these conclusions are useful, there is more to be explored by contextualizing these ideas about ecological psychology and digital games within the rich traditions of historical practices and the established debates, frameworks and theory that enables us to talk about them in particular ways. It is my hope, to provide a beginning point rather than a clean conclusion in a sense that not all of the theoretical (particularly epistemological) tensions that arise can, or should be, resolved here. This is likely to be a rich vein of future investigation, certainly for myself but I also hope, in the humblest sense, for others too.

Perhaps the best place to start such a discussion is by defining re-enactment itself, an inclusive term and practice as broad and far reaching as it is divisive. Reenactment can be understood as 'The quest for immediacy, the search for a past which is palpably and visibly present' (Samuel 1994, 175), 'The action of reinscribing the past through a particularised set of bodily actions – a reperformance, or reanimation' and the blending of the 'experience of the historical artefact such as is experienced in museums with individual revelation' (De Groot 2009, 103). The term is most commonly understood to

refer to the numerable groups who dedicate their spare time to dressing up in period clothing and re-enacting, mainly battles, but also many other types of historical activity.

This type of re-enactment (see figure 8.1) is what I will refer to as 'traditional reenactment', a fitting title given the long and rich history of the practice (Hart 2007, 105- 106). The reenactment found in videogames is differentiated from this by use of the term 'digital-ludic reenactment'.

Figure 8.1 - Though, as pictured above, here we are mainly concerned with WW2 reenactment, much of what is discussed here also applies to the huge variety of periods that are reenacted (Wikimedia Commons and users Cezary P & MatthiasKabel).

Whilst it is useful to be able to talk about types of reenactment in clear terms, especially given the often different cultural and environmental context of each practice, these are far from the only forms or modes of re-enactment. In fact, the term is used to describe many and hugely variable customs and creations within, between and even completely outside my working categories. From 'theatrical and "living history" performances to museum exhibits, television, film, travelogues, and historiography' (Agnew 2004, 327), 'technical reconstructions and 'nostalgia' toys (e.g. tin figures, dioramas and architectural models) to literature... photography, video games....pageants, parades and, reenactment's most ubiquitous instantiation, social and cyber groups devoted to historical performance' (Agnew 2007, 300). Add to this list other related practices, such as pilgrimages, and it becomes clear that whatever re-enactment is or is not and does or does not, it 'is widespread through culture, from memorial walks through to the use of medieval instruments' (De Groot 2009, 103).

Perhaps chiefly and certainly most obvious, amongst the many benefits that are often proposed of reenactment is that it offers exciting and enticing engagements with history. After all, even as historians, can many of us really deny that the discourse of academic history (as well as often its cautious forays into popular history) can be dry, 'dusty' and impenetrable? Reenactment can be as exciting and filled with life as the pages of the history book can be dull and lifeless and thus is at the very least, a good way to garner popular interest. I would also add that it is possible that even the most traditional and severe professional historian can perhaps learn something from the practice. If not of the actual past, then perhaps just of the need to reinscribe history with the sense of activity and play that after all was likely often present in the original actions and context anyway.

This popular appeal and relative accessibility also has political significance and it is often argued that this type of engagement, this '"history from below" provides an important public service and gives voice to hitherto marginalized positions as well as economic ones—gore, adventure, and personal transformation sell' (Agnew 2004, 327-328). *BiA* can be interpreted as furthering this position. Firstly, it is definitely a popular text (and also deals in gore, adventure and personal transformation). Secondly, it presents the experiences of a single agent, and thirdly, the chosen social identity of this agent is low, subject to the larger movements of history rather than determining them, something that is echoed in the relationship between player and game. Thus whilst the

‘the indisputable public appeal of such reenactments raise pressing questions about the broader significance of reenactment’s place within the history industry, the academy, and society at large’ (Agnew 2004, 329), these questions become writ large anew in the extremely popular, commercial and virtually academically ignored, sector of historical videogames.

It is even possible that reenactment can offer genuinely insightful engagements with history, perhaps even the past. Agnew has argued ‘that reenactment potentially offers a kind of historical knowledge distinct from the knowledge gained through traditional historical research’ (cited in Rejack 2007, 412). The grounding of this belief is on the basis of reenactment’s functioning as ‘a body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience’ (Agnew 2004, 329). Thus, ‘The primary difference between reenactment and reading says Steven Ambrose...historian of World War II, is that the former offers a bodily experience from which one may gain historical insight, whereas history writing offers an intellectual engagement not rooted in the body’ (Rejack 2007, 412). Naturally, such arguments contain distinct inferences about the role of the overtly physical, both in terms of evidence (with a focus on objects) and in action. Subsequently we must countenance the argument that whilst further possibilities certainly potentially exist, reenactment’s ‘proper domain is the technical—bridge building, celestial navigation, or ship fothering (repairing the hull with a sail), for example—problems that can be solved by testing....Its mode is agglomerative—discrete pieces of information are gleaned and corroborated through firsthand experience’ (Agnew 2004, 330). This is central to my argument and certainly the ideas about *BiA* discussed so far seem to support such a notion. Core ideas raised by applying the ecological approach to the digital-ludic form, such as the maintenance of environments with similar perceptual information, also seems to support traditional re-enactment as a historically useful practice. However, even this more technically, process, physical and object focused engagement must be properly interrogated.

Nonetheless, it would be foolish to completely ignore the possibility of empathy and critical reflection being a useful factor in this kind of engagement. This, ties into discourse not only in history but also around the discussion about videogames as a form for representation, which in turn often revolves around issues surrounding historical games. As such, we find anecdotal evidence for the qualities of these games, often from

the most unlikely of sources. For example, former British Army Captain Patrick Hennessey says about war videogames, 'Historically accurate games are in fact also helping to educate those playing them. I know soldiers who learned more about the second world war [*sic*] from playing games than they did at school and this caused them to think about that conflict, and by extension their own jobs, in a different and healthy way' (Hennessey and Sicart 2010).

This is an interesting quote because it at once supports the idea that the game, through reenactment, allows a kind of empathic and critical historical reflection and yet, outlining how this ultimately produced more realisations about 'the present self than the collective past' (Agnew 2004, 335). These less tangible considerations, whilst interesting, are different from the conclusions reached about the epistemologically firmer layer of reenactment described in the last chapter, which is based on shared similar information, referential challenges and concrete action and which is found in both games like *BiA* and in traditional reenactment. It is this (actualized) layer rather than the already widely discussed and divisive empathic layer of reenactment which will be focused on here. What follows is a comparison of exactly what the digital-ludic form of reenactment offers in comparison to traditional reenactment on this basis.

Comparing Traditional and Digital-Ludic Reenactment

The most obvious similarity between traditional and digital-ludic reenactment is the effort to create environments that feature as much shared perceptual information and affordances between original agents and modern participants as possible and which yet allow participants enough agency to learn about past actions through taking present ones. In *BiA*, and in traditional reenactment when everybody plays by the rules of the game (and it is certainly this), all other characters we meet are playing a similar role, being both in appearance and action, within the commonly accepted context of the history. Similarly, in each, we experience virtual recreations of the evidence of the past from which we can learn. 'In these settings, many tourists play with time frames and experiment with alternative realities; it is a good way to learn about the past. Visits to historic sites have a strong entertainment and playful quality' (Bruner 1994, 411). Similarly, both digital-ludic reenactment and traditional reenactment, especially in 'living history sites', are tied to a number of cultural constructs not intrinsic to the activity itself and thus each 'enact an ideology, recreate an origin myth, keep history

alive, attach tourists to a mythical collective consciousness, and commodify the past' (Bruner 1994, 411). Of course a major difference is that in the game based reenactment 'tourists' (audiences) are also reenactors.

Differences between the two types of re-enactment mainly revolve around the use and exclusion of particular aspects of perceptual information. In traditional WW2 re-enactment, we can feel the uniform on our skin and how it impedes our movements, smell gunpowder and the choking presence of smoke in the air and feel the weight of our weapons just like, we assume, the original agent did. These sensations are not available to the player, who also has extra sensory information such as the feel of the chair, the visual information beyond the screen and the sensation of using a control pad. The gamer can also receive historical perceptual information that remains unavailable to the traditional re-enactor. For instance, seeing the effects of weapons on the enemies and environment and much higher levels and fidelity of environmental detail (in terms of included visual objects/evidence). Some perceptual information, which we assume was experienced by the original agent, is present in some way in both forms of re-enactment, for example, the aforementioned physical evidence of the past and the noise of explosions. And yet, some key sensations cannot be represented by either, for example, fear of harm, death of comrades, guilt and the horror of real injuries – social and cultural affordances. Naturally, both forms of re-enactment are heavily sanitised.

The huge advantage of digital-ludic reenactment is its relative accessibility. Firstly this is in the sense that historical videogames are a much more central part of popular culture. Secondly, in traditional reenactment there are many logistical concerns, such as the acquiring of a shotgun and black powder licence to be able to fire a musket. Furthermore, learning to play most games is less time consuming than learning the practices of traditional reenactment. Thirdly, digital-ludic reenactment entails comparatively little cost compared to the often expensive equipment of traditional reenactment. Lastly, whilst it is relatively easy to go and watch traditional reenactment, participation often also requires significant investments in time and travel. By comparison, digital-ludic reenactors can fire up their console for half an hour's game-play with little effort.

Agency, Challenge and Uncertainty

BiA has an advantage in that it is both an *agon* and mimicry game, with a concurrent focus on the ludus aspect of play. This is compounded and produced by the game-structure (realist-time, spatial challenges, perspective/focalisation etc). This means that the game is inherently uncertain and there is a significant degree of pressure which forces us to respond to the game's challenges.

Consequently, whilst traditional reenactment is good at providing historical individual performatory challenges (the heaviness and unwieldiness of a gun for example), *BiA* can better provide historical exploratory challenges that affect the outcome of an entire series of reenacted historical events. The game's tactical elements particularly rely on this pressure and exploratory challenges. These aspects of the system can only be meaningful with competition and therefore, uncertainty of outcome. The challenges of traditional reenactment are not normally as systemically tactically complex and are generally limited to challenges of group coordination and individual strength and endurance. For the digital-ludic reenactor war becomes centrally about competition, performance, victory and loss whilst for the traditional reenactor war runs the risk of becoming about 'looking good' (Hart 2007, 103). Nonetheless, in both the experience of war is also dominated by an appeal to chaotic sensations (such as noise and smoke) and experiencing certain challenges brought about by partially recreating historical environments.

Due to its agon nature and combinative game-structure, *BiA* presents structured opportunities for players to face referential exploratory challenges and in doing so forces them to differentiate historically relevant information. Here there is a pressure to perform in historically useful ways other than simply a desire to understand agents of the past or please other participants. The tactical exploratory challenges of combat are better represented in the competitive game and are at the core of the necessity for players to engage with the historical information contained therein. This is perhaps the most distinct advantage that digital-ludic re-enactment has over traditional but of course each has strengths and weaknesses.

Uncertainty is important beyond this and the possibility of failure and negative outcomes often contains arguments key to the game's representation. For example, charging across open ground towards a machine gun emplacement will rarely, if ever,

result in victory. Though the severity of these systems depends on the difficulty which players choose, participants are continually and consistently met with constant feedback and explanations about the 'authenticity' of particular behaviours and actions. Whilst this concern with authentic behaviour also dominates discourses surrounding traditional reenactment, this is not nearly as coherent, decisive and continually responsive (i.e. procedural).

Whilst the outcome of a game is uncertain, the 'scripted' battles of traditional reenactment are generally understood to be 'reenactment in the strictest sense; the battles are planned out beforehand so that the companies and regiments make the same actions that were taken in the original battles' ("Historical Reenactment", *Wikipedia*). This lack of choice and room for alternative action undoubtedly removes a layer of tactical challenge and reflection, however, 'reenacting authentically...invokes the genuine narrative, the historically documented progress of events as sanctioned by authority' (Hart 2007, 120). Furthermore, the very act of watching the traditional reenactment, 'enfranchises the audience...The audience's gaze empowers them (and their ability to walk or look away extends this) and gives them a certain interpretative authority' (De Groot 2006, 394). Similarly, in traditional reenactment, history is often usefully presented as 'lived experience, something messy and dirty and painful—not the airbrushed computer generated narrative sweep of *A History of Britain*. But it still presents history as a 'fixed' thing, as something inflexible' (De Groot 2006, 403). This becomes even more problematic when the reenactment concerns warfare.

> 'Reconstruction of the "official" kind is interested in presenting a sanitised, closed version of warfare, of avoiding the unpresentability of war. Re-enactment of the past—discovery, presentation and categorisation of any text and narrative—is concerned with avoiding the fragmentary process of war and with demonstrating the ongoing value of rationality and completeness.' (De Groot 2006, 396)

The uncertainty of game-play instances mean that local narrative outcomes are uncertain, and this harnesses some of the unpredictability and causality that is inherent to this fragmentary process. This rejects some of the intrinsic positivism of such reenactment and yet still in the deterministic narrative structure of *BiA*, like in traditional reenactment, the larger narrative is fixed and linear, with player choice beyond tactics amounting to no more than failure or victory/progression. Furthermore,

the latter outcome is infused with such a normative tone by the pressures of the form and the cultural conventions of American WW2 narratives that the former, in opposition, becomes infused with a deep sense that this is not how things are *supposed* to be.[1] Though offering an immediate narrative agency in the local spatial and tactical sense, digital-ludic re-enactment cannot currently shake free from the closed representations of traditional re-enactment.

BiA, like other popular reenactments with a ludic element (such as television reenactment shows) is flawed in that it presents 'history as something with rules that could not be broken. The subject undergoing history is not permitted to dissent or interrogate their chosen role' (De Groot 2006, 403-404). The limiting interface, narrow rule-set and unbreakable (rather than social) rules of the videogame compound this. We are free to make some significant ontological interventions in the configuration of local events but our possible actions to do so are limited. We cannot make meaning though the same sense of personal choice and opportunity for innovation as in traditional reenactment or that which we must assume was experienced by the original agent. Whether in the scripted battles of traditional reenactment or in the fixed framing narrative, ideologically charged ludonarrative outcomes, rules and limited actions of *BiA*, events are grounded in a reconstructionist epistemology. Whilst 're-enactment history seems enfranchising…it also presents an inflexible positivism and an oppressive subjectification-wars are still won by the same people, and the good soldier [and thus player] is he who unquestioning obeys the orders of history' (De Groot 2006, 396). Nonetheless, with the mere presence of its localized ludonarrative uncertainties, regardless of the normative values to respective outcomes that these indicate, *BiA* does go some small way towards answering De Groot's further criticisms. It is true that the larger narrative of war remains innate and combat is still 'turned into narrative' (396) with preferable and positioned outcomes. However, *BiA*' combat can also never exist as a purely 'linear story' and with its challenging, emergent and competitive nature, unlike that found in traditional reenactment, it remains a 'complex development' (396). In each form we follow a partially pre-written narrative of events and yet in both we also experience differing personal agency and the chance to spin experiential historical narratives (filled with different limited choices and challenges) within a predefined rule

[1] The same sense can infuse traditional reenactment. For instance, one reenactor describes 'waiting in formation for our cue to go out and die for the crowd like a bunch of "good krauts"' (Thompson 2004, 111).

set. Such conclusions are also useful because they indicate that in either form, what reenactment participants and audiences experience is not, and can never be, reconstruction as claimed, but is in fact limited and limiting, simulation.

The Focus on War

This simulation status is apparent if we consider a further problem. *BiA* and similar historical videogames are comparable to traditional reenactment in that they focus, almost exclusively, on warfare. Whilst sometimes living history sites deal with the experience of everyday life, mostly reenactment is concerned with warfare. Even the elements outside of combat itself that are reenacted tend to have a supporting role in warfare. Partly, this is to do with the history of reenactment itself having had a natural role in military institutions as both training and memorialisation (Hart 2007, 105-106) which still continues today (Wells 2012). However, this is obviously also because combat is exciting, emotive, visceral, accorded great historical causal significance and taps into a number of cultural narratives important to our national identities. This said, even in the representation of warfare, both forms of reenactment are extremely limited. Videogames cannot really represent war 'Unless players have run 20km before starting the game, are tired and thirsty.....combat is 90% boredom and just 9% smoke and noise' (Hennessey and Sicart 2010). Similarly, Colonel Antal (historical advisor for *BiA*) notes this same issue, 'most of infantry combat in WWII was walking, waiting and preparing. If you were to have the player walk for 20 miles in a game, in real time (4 kilometres per hour) you wouldn't have a game...Some sacrifices have to be made in any form of entertainment in order to keep the interest of the participant' (Chapman 2008, appendix I). Similarly, if traditional reenactment were to always engage in these practices it is unlikely it would appeal to as many participants or observers.

While both forms focus on fighting, traditional reenactors can still experience some of the surrounding practices of warfare because reenactments can run multiple days and their lives are still governed by real pressures. Thus, many reenactors choose to perform these practices as reenactment, living in historically contemporary tents, eating authentic (and even seasonal and locally sourced foods) and limiting themselves to only the entertainment available to the original soldiers. Even more extreme, many hardcore reenactors ('progressives'), often more concerned with the personal historical value of

the experience than the spectacle for audiences, now 'prefer long marches through the countryside in authentically minimal gear to reenacted battles' (Hart 2007, 112).

This level of commitment is, however, rare in traditional reenactment and unheard of in digital-ludic and in both the majority of the practices and constructs, whether social, cultural or logistical, that would have surrounded combat are simply absent. This has the effect of reenacting war as an almost exclusively male experience. Many of the civilian and thus female, roles in the socio-historic context become ignored. This is also true in *BiA* where women are portrayed as no more than victims. There are however signs of change. Hart notes how in recent American Civil War re-enactments 'Off the field of combat women take the lead, as they did during the Civil War, in goodwill social organizations ...[which]...have all been resurrected by female civilian reenactors' (Hart 2007, 109). One can imagine how these roles could be implemented in digital-ludic reenactment, particularly in an open-world game.

The depoliticising of warfare that the removal of the everyday realities of combat (and often the removal of the larger political context) entails is troubling. So too the fact that, 'Unlike conventional forms of academic historiography, which are to some extent constrained as well as held accountable by the socially and politically marginalized, reenactment is far more transgressive in its embrace of warfare and various other forms of violent subjugation' (Agnew 2004, 334). This is obviously often true of videogames, particularly given their potential status as 'neglected media', by which we mean they 'exhibit strong popular appeal and economic relevance, contrasted by a lack of cultural prestige and scientific coverage (Reichmuth and Werning 2006, 47). This embrasure in both forms is perhaps because 'the privileging of experience tends to sacrifice broader interpretative questions, investigating the self in place of the political' (Agnew 2004, 334). This is obviously relevant to games and there is often a lack of a larger politico-historical context, a pointed refusal to endanger sales by courting controversy or troubling players and the intrinsic qualities of action are (somewhat understandably) often privileged over the meanings ascribed to them. Perhaps this refusal to engage with the politics of violence in traditional reenactment is at least better than the simplistic Goldhagen-esque (1996) moral stances of most WW2 FPS (American soldiers were good, German soldiers were evil Nazis). Agnew's criticism of reenactment as apolitical, can at least be somewhat answered because body politics are intrinsic to so many of the basic acts of the practice. The mere act of wearing historical

clothes says something about historical social control of the body, as does movement in military formations. Whilst these discourses still exist in digital-ludic reenactment it would be foolish to argue that this has the same experiential insight that, for example, actually wearing a corset could have into historical gender.

Accordingly, analysis of digital-ludic reenactment must remain mindful of its connection to broader discourses and themes that have also surrounded the traditional practice. It is difficult to see more nuanced and politically conscious reenactment opportunities being created in the commercially driven games industry. However, making changes is, in a sense, much easier, as a single team can merely programme the changes that they wish to see. This last point is a huge advantage of digital-ludic reenactment, 'While there are drawbacks to gaming as a model of historical engagement, the most obvious benefit that games do offer...is the visual representation of past events and places' (Rejack 2007, 413).

The Benefits of Digital-Virtual Construction

This increased capacity for detail and large amounts of physical evidence, geography and architecture is important. It is precisely the claim that the 'accumulation of historical details adds up to something like an authentic recreation of the past, or, more precisely, allows participants and audiences in the present to feel that they have re-enacted the past' (Liebersohn 2007, 448) which is at the core of reenactment. Digital construction means that historical environments can be huge, filled with detail and many reenactment 'participants'. Comparatively, traditional groups 'are rarely capable of bringing together enough reenactors, especially cavalrymen, to even approximate the number of troops indicated by the historical sources' (Hart 2007, 108).

Similarly, issues with contemporary physical appearances can be a concern for traditional reenactors. For example, during Horwitz's battlefield walk/inspection one hardcore enthusiast noted of other reenactors, '"Poor cut. Wrong trouser color. And way too much blubber. The whole unit needs liposuction". Pointing out a Confederate Captain, Hodge opined, "A real Confederate would eventually have cut that hair to keep the lice under Control"' (cited in Hart 2007, 133). Similarly, the World War Axis Re-enactment Society (WARS) state on their website that 'Members will not be accepted with long hair, pony tails and full beards. This is due to WARS trying to portray

German soldiers of the period' (De Groot 2006, 395). In games, where the historical characters (player avatars or NPCs) can be designed, these questions of authenticity cease to be problematic. Thus, digital-ludic reenactment also sidesteps common tensions between contemporary political issues and the desire for authenticity and renders dissonances (such as women in the 101st Airbourne or mixed race Parliamentarian English Civil War regiments) irrelevant, whilst remaining inclusive and enfranchising, at least in terms of participation.

Whilst the ability to easily represent any historical character, object or environmental feature is useful for reenactment, the swap to the digital-virtual is not without price and much information is lost. The screen can never have the depth of real space, there is a loss of aspects of physical interaction (for example, weight, surface sensations) and visual information such as textures, cannot be completely recreated. Furthermore, virtual objects, because they had no existence in the actual past, can never be imbued with the same sense of historicity. As Benjamin notes of reproductions in comparison to original paintings, such objects are seen to lack an 'aura', that is 'its presence in time and space...the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity' (Benjamin 1968, 220) which drives so much of the discourse surrounding and enabling reenactment. And yet, 'what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object' (Benjamin 1968, 221). Such an affect may not necessarily be a negative occurrence. Whether such a thing is of use or not, the yearning by traditional reenactors for the aura invested in the historical artefact (as opposed to the reproduction) and the drive 'to *own* the authentic item -a thing imbued, in the context of Civil War [as well as WW1 and WW2] remembrance, with spiritual value- has created a cottage-industry feeding-frenzy' (Hart 2007, 118). Accordingly, the inability to include historical artefacts in digital-ludic reenactment also has a positive side in that it does not further fuel links between reenactment and consumerism which can cause problems like the illegal digging of archaeological sites and 'the potential for the acquisitive mores of consumer culture to interfere with an authentic appearance' (Hart 2007, 118).

Though the possibilities of virtual recreation are already vast, there are still a number of areas that are lacking. Perhaps most glaringly is the difficulty of representing the complexities of human behaviour. 'Whereas historical reenactment on the battlefield involves many other people, the virtual characters in *Brothers in Arms* fall short of being 'true to life', as the game's developers claim them to be' (Rejack 2007, 414).

This means some moments that 'should induce pathos simply because of the player's identification with the characters...falls short' (414). Rejack claims that *BiA*' appeals to history are an effort to replace this sympathetic identification. Whether this is the case or not, it is true that the series and other similar games cannot reproduce the social aspect that is central to traditional reenactment.

Social Aspect

BiA has a multiplayer mode which involves some sociality, however, this is focused on providing competitive play and is generally less detailed in its the fictive aspect. Furthermore, the intensely repetitious nature of multiplayer means that the representational aspect is probably quickly discarded by many players (see Chapter 10). Nonetheless, it is possible that this is dependent on the particular community for the game and the socio-historic context of its release, rather than its structure. For example, some players of *Battlefield 1942*:

> 'arrange themselves into regiments, communities, with the same fervour and attention to detail of the re-enactment community. Regiments practice weekly, talk tactics; there is a sense of involvement and ownership. Names include...'RuffNecks', 'Screaming Eagles'. These organisations are taken extremely seriously, and deploy tropes learned from the games and from the rhetoric of war films, again folding back into postmodern historical experience.' (De Groot 2006, 408)

These groups focus on winning and are not a subculture focused only on reenacting. However, as noted, these two aims may not necessarily be at odds. For example,

> 'The 'Screaming Eagles' website has this call to arms: "I feel that with a clear goal in the heat of combat, a well balanced platoon has a much higher chance of survival and victory than an enemy that has greater numbers yet is disorganized. For these are our two most important goals, even outweighing mission tasks. Survival and Victory.' (De Groot 2006, 408)

Despite this, online communities cannot fully recreate the complex social frameworks of traditional reenactment which are tied to the reenactment practices that surround

battles such as camping, drinking, eating and singing/playing musical instruments. Whether the loss of this social aspect is meaningful to the usefulness of reenactment is debatable, and certainly dependent on epistemological issues. However, it is difficult to see how the comparatively temporary scope (both in focus and span) of online reenactment can, 'simulate a [complex] collective experience' (Rejack 2007, 420) in the same way that traditional practices can. Where traditional reenactment can at least hope to represent some of the logistical aspects of large scale organisation and perhaps even, in its less combative moments, some of the humanistic aspects of leadership, digital-ludic reenactment cannot. In such communities knowledge is both shared and produced. Traditional reenactors 'begin as novices...undergo trials, acquire skills and experience, and are finally inducted into a community of dedicated reenactors' (Agnew 2004, 331).

Though it is tempting to claim that the 'human element' of history is lost with the social aspect, this depends on complex (and possibly rather shaky) cross-temporal and perhaps too universal, constructions. However, certainly collaborative improvisation is lost, as is the entire meta-discourse in which it exists. This is an important element, as Bruner notes of the New Salem living history site, 'What encourages the local production of meaning is the format of dialogic interaction between the interpreter and small groups of tourists who move from house to house…The interpreters...frequently depart from the official scripts and move off in their own directions. The tourists...bring their own concerns and interests to the interaction' (Bruner 1994, 410).

This is not to say that in-character engagements could not possibly be supported in *BiA* and *Earned in Blood* does contain a co-operative mode. In this (or multiplayer) it would be perfectly possible for a group of dedicated players to role-play, as some dedicated role-playing guilds do in *World of Warcraft* (Linderoth 2012). This would mean limiting in-game communication so that it made diegetic sense according to the player's historical understanding, with the aim of fully immersing themselves in the historical experience, as some traditional reenactors aim to achieve. However, as MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2008) suggest and Linderoth concludes, 'Even the players that want to be immersed have to struggle in order to gain this sensation....the way technology structures the game experience is a constant hindrance for role-playing' (2012, 17). This, combined with the fact that digital-ludic reenactment narrows possible

actions, means that the form is not as suited to this type of immersive collective experience as traditional reenactment.

In terms of meta-discourse, it is feasible that co-operative players might play and discuss the historical aspect whilst doing so. However, this is not likely to be the aim for many players, unlike traditional reenactment. As the single player game is likely to be the experience for most, discourse is mainly limited to after-the-fact discussions on message boards. Whilst this might have critical benefits of its own, as might the slower pace of written discourse, still, players are unable to react to each other's suggestions, comments and performances during the act of play itself, something which probably significantly enriches traditional reenactment. Furthermore, for most players, discussion will only be provided by engagement with popular historiography. Whilst this has benefits, a lack of actualized and reactive discussion also probably includes a loss.

For most players of *BiA* reenactment will not be a social experience and is instead limited to interaction with NPC characters. This does not, however, deny the reenactment function and is not without advantages in itself. The reliance on unbreakable digital game rules instead of social ones, allows the avoidance of some of the problems of traditional reenactment. For example, reactions by NPC's will nearly always be consistent and coherent with the overall vision of the simulation and there is no need for 'arguments that arise over who should 'take a hit'. Reenactors are generally reluctant to play dead. 'Nobody wants to drive three hours and spend the day lying on cowpies', said one reenactor' (Hart 2007, 110).

How useful this social aspect to reenactment is, is often unclear but it may be the case that future digital-ludic reenactment will see increasing opportunities for some of these types of interactions. Accordingly, games may yet further align with the discourses of traditional reenactment. Indeed, in some other areas this has already occurred.

Work, Play and Suffering

Work and play are words often used to describe the same practices merely performed under differing conditions or, to use Goffman's (1986) terminology, within different 'frames'. For example, it is feasible that for a professional player, football is framed as

work. Of course we associate games with fun and play. However, if we accept the definition of work as 'a physical or mental effort or activity directed towards the production or accomplishment of something' ("Work" 1987, 1724) it is difficult to deny that games often also contain something that could easily be described as a work element and this similarity has hardly gone unnoticed (Dubbels 2012; Pulsipher 2009).[2] In some games this is more obvious than others. For example, the *Football Manager* series essentially entails manipulating a statistical database. Some character skill improving tasks in RPGs like *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* are repetitious and unchallenging and obviously stray closer to work, leading Conway to note 'I wonder if I can distinguish in my own mind between play and labour in such instances' (2012, 29). Such observations lend themselves to an obvious Marxist critique and Stephenson argues that *Civilization II* 'tries to turn the player into a worker' and 'shows that leisure in a capitalist democracy is often organized along the same lines as work' (1999, n.p.). Conway (2012) frames the loss of the opportunity for meaningful winning and losing in many modern games as the culmination of the misappropriation of play as labour by capitalism. Similarly, both Galloway (2006) and De Peuter and Dyer-Witherford (2009) 'frame videogames and gaming culture as a sight of contestation, resistance and 'counter-mobilisation' by players against the game industry's ethos of 'play as work'' (Leorke 2012, 173).

Reenactment too, though obviously a playful mimicry activity, also has what we can describe as a work element. Agnew argues that this is one of the reasons why 'reenactment is fun. It indulges the twin passions of work and play, which are generally divorced from each other' (Agnew 2004, 327). This said, in both reenactment and videogames (and therefore digital-ludic reenactment) the leisure element is also apparent, not in the least because 'leisure is essentially a time for self-generated semiosis, a time to produce meanings of self and for the self that the world of work denies' (Conway 2012, 36).[3] Furthermore, De Groot describes traditional reenactment as culture, 'out of institutional bounds, in some ways ordered but also part of a leisuretime activity' (2006, 394) a description obviously also easily applied to the videogame, and subsequently, digital-ludic reenactment.

[2] The US Army promotes *America's Army* as work (Laskin 2013) and many 'gamification' projects mostly seem only to highlight the ludic elements of workplace activity.
[3] This is obvious in reenactment but also in game-play which is an activity that generates particular social roles (e.g. novice, player) for participants to negotiate their distance to (Goffman 1961).

Of course such easy comparisons between traditional reenactment, videogames/digital-ludic reenactment and the concept of work are possible because this work element springs from the particular combination of the ergodic traversal of some kind of challenging system and thus *non-trivial* (actualised) *effort* coupled with and motivated by, attachment to the outcome. In each of the practices there is something at stake. Of course normally in work this tends to be our livelihood or material gain and of course, the work element in reenactment and games does not relate to anything so severe. And yet, often we still care deeply about the outcome, the stake is this outcome, whether a connection with the past or simply 'winning', or as is sometimes the case in historical games, both. 'One puts in the hours and produces a product except in this case, the worker is paying for the privilege' (Stephenson 1999, n.p.). Both games and reenactment are made up of playful practices that contain a work element and this is part of what makes videogames a naturally suitable form for reenactment.

Even beyond our non-trivial efforts, we are so attached to these outcomes that we are often willing to endure mild forms of suffering to achieve them. Though reenactment is playful and often fun, there is also the sense that it is in the sometimes painful effort to overcome challenge through which revelation emerges. Reenactment:

> 'licenses dressing up, pretending and improvising, casting oneself as the protagonist of one's own research, and getting others to play along. Of course, it also calls for discomfort and enforced self-growth. But, like the cold nose atop the counterpane, which Melville says measures the warmth of the bed, the pain only sharpens the pleasure…. suffering also makes for a better story.' (Agnew 2004, 327)

These ideas about discomfort and enforced self-growth also have an obvious relation to games. As anyone that plays games or watches sport knows, these activities are not always what we would normally consider fun, they can be stressful, frustrating, scary, anger-inducing, upsetting and entail all sorts of mental or physical anguish.[4] As Wolfenstein writes, 'It is in large part the depth of frustration blended with the

[4] For example, Bissell describes zombie game *Dead Rising*: 'That does not sound like much fun, I know, and it wasn't much fun, truth be told. So what was it? Absorbing. Upsetting. Tense. Scary. Everything, in other words, a zombie game should be' (2011C). Similarly, Bill Clinton recently noted: 'Anybody that's ever been like me hooked on a video game knows, you got to have good simulation to keep yourself in a constant state of anxiety' (*The Daily Show*, September 29, 2012).

persistence that many gamers approach these moments with that has lead me to frame the experiences of playing a game like Super Meat Boy [a difficult platformer] as a form of self-inflicted suffering' (2012, 40). However, just as Agnew notes of reenactment, this suffering is also at the heart of the fun and often what leads us to believe that the sought outcome is valuable. As Conway puts it, **'**discomfort is a vital yet oft-overlooked attribute of playing games. Players need suffering, they need tension if they are to build towards the sheer cathartic *jouissance* (Barthes 1975) of winning' (2012, 29). Furthermore, 'the ontological and etymological meaning of Caillois' (2001) *agon*...[is] respectively, definitive and often painful' (Conway 2012, 40).

It seems that suffering (or at least the threat thereof), is a key aspect of satisfying challenge, and is core to the experience, whether in the physical challenges, discomforts and endurance of traditional reenactment or the ludic frustrations and pressures of digital game-play and thus, digital-ludic reenactment. Agnew, drawing from Burke (1998, 86), describes this as the 'sublime', 'Up close, they are objects that excite ideas of pain and danger, and from a certain distance, delight...What arises from such sublimity, however, is mastery: skills are acquired and manual tasks accomplished, fears and aversions overcome, and the body and mind brought into a state of regulation' (Agnew 2004, 330). Though the suffering of the digital-ludic form is often much slighter, in each case reenactment normally leads to mastery and, in theory at least, to some kind of historical revelation. Again, this propensity for and expectation of suffering in both reenactment and videogames is what makes videogames a suitable form for reenactment. However, this similarity is important because it also ties into a particular historiographical and epistemological discourse.

The concern with suffering in reenactment is in part a reaction to the fact that all reenactors are interpreters and are therefore, 'universally authorized to testify by the weight of their own experiences. This gives rise to competing interpretations but not a means of adjudicating between them' (Agnew 2004, 331). In the attempt to re-exert an historical authority 'extremity assumes paramount importance. As the intensification of experience, it creates a hierarchy of legitimacy: the most intense manifestation of suffering is most authorized to occupy the voice of history... and sets...[the reenactor] apart from the present' (Agnew 2004, 331). This is also echoed in the discourse surrounding historical games where there is a general sense that the more difficult a game is, the more it punishes its players and makes them suffer, the more authentic and

realistic the experience is. This is noticeably manifest in *BiA*' reviews. For example, one reviewer states that *BiA* is 'definitely a more realistic depiction of World War Two infantry combat than some other recent releases, and this is both a good and bad thing....Realism has its place to be sure, but the punishing difficulty and sluggish movement may deter FPS fans' (Kinloch Unknown). Similarly, *Gamespot*'s reviewer notes the lack of a crosshair in *BiA* makes it extremely difficult to shoot 'from the hip' and forces players to 'toggle the zoom' and use the iron sights on the gun. He adds, 'Your movement speed is also cut down to a fraction while aiming, so if you want to fire while on the move, you need to make a choice between movement speed and shot accuracy. This adds to the game's realism and feels less contrived compared to other games that simply expand your crosshair reticle as you run.' (Colayco 2005)

In both cases the reviewer assumes the link between difficulty, suffering and authenticity/realism. However, these assumptions also typically lack nuance. Whilst undoubtedly having no crosshair makes it more difficult to shoot from the hip whilst moving, so too does the player's lack of useful proprioception, perceptual information that was available to the historical agent. We cannot always assume that a movement towards more challenging game mechanics is necessarily a move towards authenticity. Difficulty cannot be used as a simple remedy for *performatory abstraction*. Likewise, in traditional reenactment, increasing challenge and suffering do not necessarily equate to authenticity as we cannot imitate the long-term social, cultural and physical pressures that would have prepared historical agents to deal with these challenges. Even the perception of these challenges and experiences by the reenactor or gamer as extraordinary, unusual and beyond what is normally expected, is problematic in comparison to the likely more normative perspective on the actions held by the original agent. For instance, 'does a reenactor's fear of the futtock shroud—a precipitous section of tall-ship rigging—correlate to the common fears of sailors?' (Agnew 2004, 331). Similarly, without the larger historical context the framing of such events can change dramatically.[5]

Accordingly, there is a need for each game-mechanic or reenactment practice to be examined on ecological terms. Some may still have value in terms of enriching a

[5] For example, Mattfeld (unknown) assumed her fear of falling and injury during dressage re-enacted the 17th Century experience, yet found that contemporary fear was more focused on the loss of social standing associated with falling.

representation merely by their fictive inclusion (story/content decisions). However, if this becomes conflated with the epistemological promises of direct experience that reenactment tends to entail it becomes problematic. Yet still, this idea of challenge and suffering has increasingly become synonymous with authenticity in gaming, as it has in traditional reenactment. Games, such as *Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad*, wishing to appeal to a demographic of hardcore historical gaming enthusiasts, have introduced a number of challenging new mechanics. For example, it is difficult for players to know how many bullets are left in a magazine, the first-person perspective is always maintained even in cover or tanks (unlike *Hell's Highway*) and wounds must be bandaged. Some of these changes may, with analysis, prove to introduce useful exploratory challenges similar to those faced by agents (for example, the cover system of *Red Orchestra 2* or the highly developed ballistic physics of *World War II Online: Battleground Europe*). However, many of the initial mechanics or sources that the game discards in favour of authenticity were initially implemented in FPS to supplement the loss of perceptual information the gamer, in comparison to the implied agent, experiences. Subsequently, these increases in difficulty and changes in mechanics, like those of *BiA*, will also introduce new dissonances, losses of perceptual information and abstractions that must be accounted for.

Regardless, in marketing, reviews, and discussion on message boards, it is clear that it is generally accepted that the increased difficulty of these games compared to its peers and thus the increased suffering of its hardcore players, is at the core of their authenticity and this remains largely unquestioned. [6] Indeed, in the *BiA* series the highest difficulty is named 'authentic'. Thus, in digital-ludic reenactment, as in traditional reenactment, the yearning for authenticity and authority has resulted in 'ever-higher production values for reenactment events and participants [being] subjected to increasingly dire situations in order to try to narrow the mimetic gap' (Agnew 2004, 332). And yet, in both, though particularly in digital-ludic reenactment, the 'authenticity' of these new challenges is complex and often highly questionable.

As Agnew notes, this embrasure of suffering is an attempt to reassert an authoritarian voice in a form which values personal experience. 'The greatest suffering not only

[6] Developers and publishers seem aware of this link. The *Ubisoft* website declares of *Earned in Blood* , 'More *challenging* and dynamic combat...take *authentic* military action to the next level' (my emphasis). Similarly, the official *Red Orchestra 2* website notes that 'the game will feature everything from quick, brutal firefights, through to more intricate and *challenging simulation* modes' (my emphasis).

makes for the most compelling story, but it also sets the reenactor above other reenactors within a homosocial community and sets him (less often her) apart from the present' (2004, 331). Indeed, this type of playful posturing is not unfamiliar in the videogame community either, with players regularly boasting about how 'hardcore' the games they play are, the difficulty levels at which they play or their registered play hours in a game. However, such changes are also an attempt for games developers to distinguish their games in a massive and homogeneous industry by claiming that they are the most difficult, offer the most 'hardcore' and thus realistic historical experience and that in doing so they offer the greatest historical insights.

In either form of historical reenactment, such suffering is bearable because it is virtual. Though the outcomes are important to participants, they do not actually normally matter to their long-term welfare. Similarly, the experience is voluntary and participants can end their reenactment at any time. Nonetheless, as traditional reenactment and the various reality television reenactment programs demonstrate, for whatever reason, participants are willing to undergo significant discomfort in the search for recognition, authority and/or authenticity. Furthermore, in these programs, suffering and confirmation of the difficulty of past lives is a popular narrative and De Groot notes how in *Surviving the Iron Age* it was the 'inability to withstand the privations of the past [which] put viewing figures through the roof' (De Groot 2006, 401). Such breaks between past and present are used in at least two ways in these televised re-enactments, 'In the first, and least psychologically satisfying, case, the program simply illustrates the hardship and impoverishment of life in ancient times, inviting sympathy for those condemned to live in the past, but contributing to a smug feeling of well-being at having the good fortune to enjoy supermarkets and hot baths' (Cook 2004, 493). In a sense, this is a break which games like *BiA* also seem to feed. These reconstructionist-realist games argue that they present the lived experience of historical war.[7] Consequently, they are torn between emphasising the realism of the violence of the past that they present and explaining to players how glad they should be that these acts are virtual, voluntary and safe. All the while, the game-play simultaneously presents to players the intrinsically adventurous, glorious and fun nature of these activities.

[7] For example *Ubisoft*'s website for *Hell's Highway* states: 'Step into the Boots of a Soldier**...**Live the Life of an Enlisted Man.'

Indeed, the very act of gaming tears between these ideas, representing and producing conflict and stress, making players suffer and yet only in the knowledge that for the player, unlike the agent, such experiences are voluntary and engaged with from the warm sofa of modernity. Because of this contradictory nature, the second of the break narratives that Cook identifies is perhaps most interesting. 'In the second scenario....there is an initial crisis in which participants break down before the *shock of the old*. This is followed by an extended period of acclimatization as they adjust to their changed way of life. It culminates in a final recognition that despite the manifold comforts of modernity, certain things of value have been lost' (2004, 493). Games like *BiA* cannot help but lean towards this narrative because of the bildungsroman layer of the game's fictive aspect and of course the echoing of this in the experience of the player who, initially put under stress (particularly given the difficulty increase in *BiA* compared to other popular WW2 FPS), through a gradual process, masters the historical environment and challenges. Indeed, even the climax of this narrative ties into the thematic contradictions and the break between the portrayed past and present also includes the perceived losses that Cook describes. 'Usually these are either the intimate pleasures of an organic community', perhaps a band of brothers, 'or the existential rewards of manual labor', perhaps honest, simple, frontline soldiering, 'or some combination of the two' (2004, 493). This narrative is particularly present in *BiA* emphasis on the special nature of the bonds formed in combat. The first game in the series stresses this theme (and contradiction) immediately and opens with a voiceover from Baker, 'My dad said something to me after the divorce. He said that every soldier has two families: those you raise and those you raise hell with. I've spent eight days here... eight days watching my men, my family, kill and be killed. Eight days wishing it would stop.'

As Cook notes, such comparisons are fraught with problems and are perhaps not that useful beyond wanting to know where in time one would prefer to live. However he also notes that these sorts of comparisons are an inevitable part of any reenactment, regardless of the structure of the activity. Furthermore, he notes how these breaks may be useful in stimulating questions and though inevitably this dialogue between past and present hangs 'an account of the past off the vagaries of the modern experience' this very process may also result in a denaturalisation of the present, 'a crucial preliminary to any critical social inquiry. If followed up with more rigorous forms of investigation, it can lead to significant insights into the present as well as the past' (2004, 493-494). It

is doubtful whether *BiA* really achieves this as effectively.[8] However, perhaps given the suffering/authenticity discourse and breaks, contradictions and sharp experiential comparisons, games can still inspire a form of relativism, what Spiro, in reference to good anthropological practice (which is of course linked to epistemological justifications of reenactment), refers to as the effort to 'make the familiar strange and the strange familiar' (1990, 48). Though, once again, as Cook hints at, this intrinsic effect of the act is in itself redundant unless combined with some kind meta-discourse, which, even in the form of popular historiography, may or may not be available or sought.

Whether academia decides this suffering/authenticity discourse has epistemological value or not, it is already entwined with common practices of reenactment. Certainly in the challenge-led digital-ludic form 'suffering' is vital to the historical experiences that can be offered. However, the link between authenticity and reenactor 'suffering' must be interrogated carefully in both traditional and digital-ludic reenactment; game by game, practice by practice and mechanic by mechanic. However, without question the spaces that this opens up 'between then and now is as interesting as the experiences of then—in fact, the notion of historical difference, or perhaps historical comparison, is crucial to the appeal' (De Groot 2006, 401).

Strong Dramatic Framing Narrative

'Re-enactment is not theatrical, oftentimes, and in this it achieves a status both outside the mainstream but unsullied by the cultural clichés of dramatic performance' (De Groot 2011, 590). This cannot be said of *BiA*. Though digital-ludic reenactment doesn't always feature a strong dramatic framing narrative, when included, particularly in cutscene format, it naturally elicits comparisons to historical film. It is the unusual interplay between this and the more obvious reenactment elements which is interesting.

In reenactment games with deterministic story structures, our historical game-play is contextualised through the surrounding framing narrative. This infuses the game world and characters with a sense of drama as well as providing a series of events that frame game-play. This context, the linking of the personal to the larger historical narrative, is

[8]For example, digital-ludic reenactment does not give 'prolonged exposure to a different way of life' (Cook 2004, 494).

more essential in digital-ludic reenactment as players (probably unlike traditional reenactors) may not have historiographical understanding to serve as a form of meta-discourse. The framing narrative, particularly when manifest as cutscenes, allows the game to utilize the techniques of historical cinema to supplement the potential void in audience understanding. For example, the game is free to use opening sequence tropes of Hollywood war films to immediately cue the player into particular understandings of the game's historical world, which will in turn contextualise and cue their reenactment experiences 'within' it.[9] Such sequences 'do not comprise a literal construction of the past, but are a kind of generic construction....where specifics speak for more general realities' (Rosenstone 2006, 42). Similarly, film and thus these cutscenes which follow its conventions, also allows the developer-historian to 'condense the doubts, the fears and decision[s]' (Rosenstone 2006, 43) of characters into brief moments. This, as well as the compression of multiple agents' experiences into single characters, replaces the research of personal accounts that traditional reenactors are more likely to conduct.

Just as the game-play re-enactment is reliant upon deeper contextualisation provided by the framing narrative (which connects individual events into a larger causal chain), so too is the reverse true.

> 'The historical film conveys its messages about the world by reenacting the past, and it is the idea of reenactment that provides its semantic ground...The plenary amplitude, the somatic intensity of the cinematic experience, especially the sense of rewitnessing the historical past, is a vivid reminder of the primacy of reenactment in the historical film.' (Burgoyne 2007, 552-553)

Accordingly, historical film can be characterised as reenactment, at once distinct and yet familiar in its processes of *embodying* the past through a form of identification. As Rosenstone notes, cinema can 'create the feeling that we are not watching events, but experiencing them' and films like *Glory* allow us 'to feel in our gut, particularly in its battle scenes, as if we have lived moments of the Civil War' (2006, 47). It is this same sense that *BiA*' cutscenes try to create. This framing narrative is not as effective as the best that Hollywood has to offer but the sense of witnessing is supported by actualized participation. Though currently the disjunction between these elements, as well as the

[9] For example, Rosenstone's description of the opening of *Glory*, e.g. heroic music, soldier's countryside camp, mail, sports and a voiceover (2006, 41), also describes the opening to *Hell's Highway*.

cinematic limitations of cutscenes, are often preventative, it is clear that the opportunity for interplays between these two forms of reenactment (within both one text and one narrative) could be interesting.

Like film, these cutscenes and the framing controls which script the narrative of play, 'personalizes, dramatizes and emotionalizes the past. It gives us history as triumph, anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering, and heroism' (Rosenstone 2006, 47). Even beyond this, *BiA'* game-structure can be seen to constitute an entry into Rosenstone's mainstream historical film category because it has a tendency to 'use the present tense, display a meticulous care in the reconstruction of surface detail, focus on individuals or small groups, privilege emotion, drama, and feeling…and be shaped by a narrative form which has a strong moral flavour' (Westwell 2007, 584). This empowers the game to capture audiences more easily by bringing relatable emotive history to life, and of course structures a fictive world within which reenactment can easily take place (not in the least by establishing a spatio-temporal proto-plot). However, it also entails a number of issues that are tied to the game's authoritarian epistemology and role in popular culture.

There is also the related point to be made that the WW2 events of the game, are made to stand for larger metanarratives and themes about brotherhood, politics, war, national identity, warrior-hood, morality and the deployment of righteous violence. In this way the player also engages in a sort of cultural reenactment that goes beyond the remit of (whilst remaining connected to) the past and into a larger and perhaps more problematic, constructed and contemporary domain. This is always an issue in any form of history but the populist approach, interactivity, reconstructionist epistemology and particularly the specific focus on WW2 – which is regularly used as 'a public interpretive template for a host of conflicts' (Finney 2002, 1) - means we should be aware of this potential cultural reenactment when we approach these historical videogame structures as historical reenactment. For instance, *BiA* can be seen to tie into a larger cultural and political discourse that legitimises American military action as well as working as propaganda for recruitment as part of the military-entertainment complex (Lenoir 2000). Of course academic history also frequently and almost inevitably, utilizes some or all of these types of ideological and emotional engagement.

Though precisely what affect this has on the process of interpellation is unclear, cutscenes do provide opportunities for players to consciously reflect on events, which occur within the cutscenes themselves and within previous game-play. This is compounded by the breaks in perspective (and thus, focalisation) that this entails. Furthermore, the framing narrative not only links the personal events of the digital-ludic reenactment to the level of the larger historical narrative but also to the humanistic level, allowing the characters of Baker's squad (who after all stand for the experiences of thousands of American troops) to be introduced and for the player to have some sense of who it is they will be playing as and with. Both levels relate to reenactment but particularly in the latter case this (as well as, arguably, the first-person perspective itself) is the beginning of the game's attempt to move into a mode of empathic knowing, where it is proposed that historical insights are gained through a sympathetic identification. This layer also attempts to justify why the agent and therefore the player, must act in certain (normally violent) ways (MacCallum-Stewart & Parsler 2007, 206) and thus seeks to not only supplement the historical context but also the reenactment experience itself, by suggesting an empathic mode of interpretation. In doing so, the framing narrative attempts to justify the game's own representation and internal logics.

Conclusion: Actualized Reenactment and the Future

It is clear that both *BiA* and traditional reenactment offer two layers of reenactment which can be divided on an ecological basis. The first, which has been dealt with here (and in the previous chapter), I term 'actualized reenactment'. This is concerned with objects, challenge, the body and universal perception and experience and thus is relatively objective. This layer is not heavily reliant on changing cultural and social affordances and is consequently more potentially cross-temporal. This is a simpler task and object-focused ecological reenactment based firmly in concrete physical processes and on the sharing of information between visual fields and most importantly (within the limits of common sense) is ecologically and epistemologically viable.

The second layer is the empathic which has not really been explored here simply because it entails identification with the agents of the past and an act of imagination (Collingwood 1994). Accordingly, this is based on cultural and social affordances that cannot be easily reproduced, is much more epistemologically unstable and does not fit within the ecological approach to action that has been used. Broadly speaking, whereas

empathic reenactment revolves around the questions of cultural difference and *meaning*, actualized reenactment revolves around the issue of physical and environmental similarity and *action.* Perhaps most importantly, the actualized layer is not necessarily reliant on 'pretending' or mimicry in anything but the most basic sense. Where the empathic form requires imagination, the actualized requires no more than a vague imagining of the objects and events as relating to a shared past (basic historical resonance). It would seem that the ecological approach and the ecologically sound practices that this outlines, such as actualized reenactment, instead of only focusing on 'internalist understanding of cultures and their differences....offers the possibility of genuine cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparisons' (Reed 1996, 188).

Nonetheless, even when dealing with actualized reenactment we must constantly temper the reenactment process with the knowledge that participants are subject to an autoptic authority.

> 'There is much danger in the assumption that because *we* experience these phenomena in certain ways, this is the experience of our predecessors. This danger of psychointellectual projection is of course universal in the historians' trade, with or without the context of reenactment, but the very intensity of experience associated with the latter can exacerbate the temptation to equate our responses with those of the people we study.' (Cook 2004, 492)

Being mindful of such effects and continually interrogating what can be considered as (almost) universal in terms of human affordances is important and we must remain critical of the limitations of actualized reenactment, which remains a simulative and partially subjective process. Regardless, clearly the actualized mode of reenactment offered by *BiA* and traditional reenactment has some potential.

This means that videogames and traditional reenactment, can offer something that other forms of history cannot and yet, are capable of maintaining the more empathic, dramatic layer as well. Due to their actualized aspect, which forces players to differentiate historical information to progress, these games can teach 'an amazing amount about World War II hardware' (Ferguson 2006) and even beyond this allow the reenactment of relatively complex action and processes, as *BiA*' tactical element aptly demonstrates. However, Ferguson is also right to note that in their game-play mechanics and thus

historical focus, these games are limited and it is clear that further changes could be made to enrich these offers. Still, for the moment at least, it is clear that even actualized reenactment as a heuristic technique, in line with (though less absolute than) Hempel's (1965) larger judgements about empathy, is probably more suited to *discovery* than justification (cited in Stueber 2002). Indeed, this is imbricated in the epistemological, representative, spatial, narrative and ludic, fabric of game-structures like *BiA*. Rejack also stops just short of this conclusion.

> 'Only after completing every chapter at every level of difficulty is one able to view all the extras for *Brothers in Arms*. Although it is possible to have no contextual historical knowledge of the game while playing it, the player's success is rewarded with the means for acquiring such knowledge. The structure of this movement...mirrors the narrative structure of the quest, or that of reenactment.' (2007, 416)

This focus on and structure of discovery is hardly troubling in a popular history and *BiA* contains a relatively significant data load, much of which is discoverable through a challenging and experiential, and thus exciting and engaging, form of reenactment. Furthermore, the very limitations of the digital-ludic reenactment found in games like *BiA* also, through various framing controls, structures the experience that it offers and reduces the choice to a few easily assimilable, historically useful, actions. This also makes it more accessible than traditional forms of reenactment, where agency can be overwhelming and can leave participants wondering as to what they should be doing and also often leaves them no useful basis to question the historical validity of certain actions. With the constant feedback of the challenging game system, this is not an issue in the digital-ludic mode. This, combined with the previously described logistical accessibility and affordability of digital-ludic reenactment, means that historical videogames can offer a structured form of reenactment to millions and therefore in this regard, at least, are a positive, if limited, force in popular history. This obviously has implications for public history and heritage. The opportunity for this kind of play forms a major part of the current potential of videogames as a historical form (as indicated by my research and analysis here). Games, (in this regard and as De Groot notes, in the very nature of the form), emphasize the role of reenactment as a cultural practice which 'offers enfranchisement, a complexity of historical interaction which is missing in much academic or 'official' history' (De Groot 2006, 395-396). Games celebrate and

exaggerate reenactments 'broad appeal, its implicit charge to democratize historical knowledge, and its capacity to find new and inventive modes of historical representation [which] suggest that it also has a contribution to make to academic historiography' (Agnew 2004, 335), and if this is the case, so too does the videogame form.

The traditional and digital-ludic forms of reenactment are similar in many regards. Each supports the actualized mode, each shares a basic methodology, surrounding discourses, a concern with learning about the past through challenge, particular ways of representing and an epistemological foundation. As Agnew notes, different forms of reenactment also tend to be linked 'by their combined use of different medial forms [certainly so with *BiA*] and the breakdown of traditionally distinct categories' (2004, 327), in this case most obviously that of historian/audience but also categories such as developer-historian, player/reenactor, and as a quick glance at the forums surrounding the playing of the games suggests, perhaps even player-reenactor/historical-adviser.

This said, there are also distinct differences between what can be offered by traditional renactment and what can be offered by game-structures like *BiA* (as discussed above). It is worth noting that for this reason it is not being suggested that digital-ludic reenactment replace traditional reenactment. Instead each should sit alongside the other to enrich popular historical discourse more fully in doing so. One can imagine the quality of an experience whereby participants could have a traditional reenactment experience (even something as simple as handling replicas or artefacts) and could then turn to the computer, taking their understanding of these objects and attempting to use their virtual counterparts within the game system. At the least, each experience would fill some of the sensory gaps in the other.

In the future it will be interesting to see whether the differences between traditional and digital-ludic reenactment (and how these relate to the experiences of historical agents) will become more or less pronounced. Certainly, *BiA* marks a change from many of the titles that went before it. Not only in its inclusion (story/content decisions) of tactical elements but also in its change from the individual narratives of heroism favoured by games such as *Medal of Honor* to a system that leaned more towards ludonarratives of success that revolve around actions and themes such as teamwork and measured tactics. Thus the historical reenactment and good challenges become more important than simply empowering players. Of course, there is also no reason why similar game-

structures to *BiA* could not be used to offer forms of reenactment that did not concentrate around gun-play or even violence at all, whilst still operating through the actualized mode described here. Similarly, whilst these games do not currently let us experience any of the exploratory challenges that faced soldiers outside of combat, there is no reason that with a more open spatial and narrative structure this could not be achieved. One can imagine a game where player-soldiers have to also travel and forage for food between battles; possibly even negotiate the other directly representable exploratory challenges likely to surround their lives (such as foraging, navigation, scouting or managing personal/collective logistics).

Whilst we can identify that this potential for discovery of information, skills and processes through reenactment exists, for an understanding of its depth and referentiality within each particular game, we have to engage in the type of analysis that has been proposed within this thesis. It is also important to remember that only the exploratory aspect of historical actions can currently be properly represented and the performatory aspect is abstracted. Perhaps then, the future of digital-ludic reenactment will be in its direct fusion with the practices of traditional reenactment. Technological developments such as motion control, augmented and/or the of use referential artefacts as controllers (for example, a converted M1 Garand replica), particularly combined with traditional re-enactments practices (such as wearing uniforms), could hold great potential in the future and could negate the need for the larger performatory abstractions. Indeed, simple examples of this already exist in the Royal Armouries in Leeds which has deactivated rifles and machine guns from both World Wars linked to shooting-range simulators. These machines, which also include haptic technology by using compressed air to simulate the kick from firing, communicate some of both the performatory and exploratory challenges involved in the use of these historical objects.

It is clear however that even currently opportunities for reenactment do exist in videogames and the ecological approach can help us to identify and understand these opportunities. Digital-ludic reenactment has potential for, at the very least, popular engagements with history through a process of reenactment. This potential has not gone unrecognised in popular discourse either. As Hennessey (2010) notes, ‘in every conflict, at every level of planning, someone tries to put themselves in the enemy's position and it's good for games to recognise this complexity.’ Furthermore it would be remiss not to note the simpler point that such games can infuse the past with a particular life it cannot know on the page or in the photograph.

> ‘These fictions are what involve us, through the unique, embodied quality of the film experience, in the possible and proximate realities of past events and situations. They are what help create in us the feeling that we are not just viewing history, but actually living through events in the past, experiencing (or so we think, at least momentarily) what others felt in times of war, revolution, and social, cultural, and political changes.’ (Rosenstone 2006, 39)

Using the ecological approach we can identify that these games go even beyond this, whilst maintaining the conventional advantages of this embodied quality, they offer an actualized mode of reenactment and thus force us towards ‘a bodily experience from which one may gain historical insight’ (Rejack 2007, 412). Given the popularity and accessibility of the digital-ludic form of reenactment, its potential benefits and the increases in this that may come with further advances in technology, I would support Cook in his assertion that ‘For the foreseeable future, reenactment is here to stay as a form of public history. Academic historians interested in communicating with a nonspecialist audience would be well served to see what can be done to make the genre as interesting, rich, and responsible as it can be’ (2004, 489). It may very well be that games provide the best way to do this and in doing so make significant interventions into how popular (at the very least) history, is created, experienced and received.

Chapter 9

Civilization, Counter-History and Postmodernism

'...civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it.'

-Huizinga 1955, 173

In the past, much work on *Civilization* has concentrated on its content and thus what it says about the past. This is often interesting, however, whilst content is often transient (even within the series) game-structures and conventions are frequently repeated. Accordingly, within this thesis I have tried to ask more form-focused questions, such as what engagements with the past does the game-structure allow and what offers does it make to players? Perhaps, more importantly, how does it make these offers? What structures are producing particular interactions and effects? What proposed functions does this seem to allow the game-structure to fulfil? These questions have, at the very least, begun to be explored. Chapter 1 described how the opening of the (hi)story space accentuates, structures, necessitates and actualizes the audiences role in narration and allows an explorative discursive relationship between the developer-historian and player. Throughout the thesis this idea has been developed in relation to particular structures, leading me to conclude in Chapter 7 that by providing a causal network of selected evidence, as well as a number of other substitutive structures, *Civilization* can function as a knowledge tool that extends the player some limited affordances of discourse that are normally the reserve of experts. Thus *Civilization* allows players to playfully configure historical narratives and scenarios. Accordingly, the developer-historian invites the audience to become player-historians and accessibly question, probe and build scenarios and narratives from within a story space in which much of the groundwork is already complete. There is therefore, a case to be made for *Civilization* being not so much a simulation of the past as a simulation of history(ing) itself. Certainly, at the very least, the game is an extremely explicit manifestation of the ideas surrounding the open (his)story-space discussed in Chapters 1, 5 and 6. We must ask a final question of *Civilization*, as asked of *Brothers in Arms* in the previous chapter. How can we situate this game-structure alongside and even within, our existing understandings of history? Perhaps the most obvious place to start exploring such a question is in *Civilization*'s potential for counterfactual history.

Civilization as Counterfactual History

There are a number of arguments for and against counterfactual history.[1] However here I will focus on counter-history specifically as it relates to *Civilization.* The presence of counterfactualism in a game-structure like *Civilization* is somewhat inevitable. Obviously, there is a high level of freedom in such a narrative structure. However, as described, the game also leans towards allowing this sort of historical play because of the discursive tone created by the conceptual-constructionist simulation, the spatial architecture and the lack of temporal pressure. The perspective and its affordances also move the player-author closer to the extra-diegetic voice and heterodiegetic presence typical of conventional histories. Multiplicity and relative freedom within the structured story space is at the core of *Civilization*'s historical play. This also means that counterfactualism is an inherent part of the game and likely, its attraction.

Counterfactual reasoning is part of our everyday lives, how else could we experience regret? As Ferguson notes, 'the business of imagining such counterfactuals is a vital part of the way in which we learn. Because decisions about the future are – usually – based upon weighing up the potential consequences of alternative courses of action, it makes sense to compare the actual outcomes of what we did in the past with the conceivable outcomes of what we might have done' (Ferguson 1998, 2). Subsequently, it is perfectly sensible that '...counterfactual reasoning is unavoidable in any field in which researchers want to draw cause-effect conclusions but cannot perform controlled experiments in which they randomly assign "subjects" to treatment conditions that differ only in the presence or absence of the hypothesized cause' (Tetlock and Belkin 1996, 6). Naturally, this is the case in history.

Games like *Civilization* are predisposed towards this kind of historical reasoning because they are uncertain and

[1] E.H. Carr labeled counter-history a 'parlour game' and 'red herring' (1961, 127-128) and E.P. Thompson called it 'Geschichtswissenschlopff, unhistorical shit' (1978, 300). Black (2008); Cowley (2001); Ferguson (1998) and Tucker (1999) are more complimentary.

> 'ask the gamer to conceptualise historical development as something which is predicated upon the possible outcomes of various decisions...and that there are various paths not taken; they have therefore been theorised as counterfactual, or at least presenting the possibility of different historical timelines (within the overarching move towards progress)' (De Groot 2009, 142).

Civilization gives players a structure that enables them to create meaningful counterfactual narratives and even to understand the causal logics that govern this. This is not to say that there cannot be factual instances or ludonarratives and even those crafted purely on the basis of strategy will be a mix (itself a formal echo of history's fictive nature). As noted earlier, there is also often the option to purposely create these mixes through configurative resonance. For example, I recently tried to create a counterfactual history in which the Mongol empire was created peacefully through culture. Despite this aim, I found myself researching horse-riding and seeking land with horses, even though this offered military advantages, because I feared my Mongol culture losing a meaningful identity without horsemanship. The ironic satisfaction of the narrative relied on both resonance and counterfactual dissonance. Whilst the configurations that *Civilization* allows may well be counterhistorical (run counter to established dominant narratives) or counterfactual (run counter to established sequences of evidence) they are never ahistorical. Everything in the game is linked through a particular historico-ludic logic that enables the understanding of a particular historical lexia through its causal relation to others – therefore *Civilization* is never truly chaotic.

Clearly, counterfactual scenarios can be more than ends unto themselves. Though their 'entertainment value is undeniable....their purpose is also to provoke' (Cowley 2003, xvii). For example, if we take Fogel's (1964) infamous counterfactual that explored the idea of 19th Century America without the railway. As Ferguson notes, the purpose of this exercise is not to imagine America without railways but to argue 'precisely why the railways were built' (1998, 18). It logically follows that 'To understand how it actually was, we therefore need to understand *how it actually wasn't* – but how to contemporaries it might have been' (Ferguson 1998, 87). Cowley agrees: 'There is no better understanding of what did happen in history than to contemplate what very well might have happened' (2003, xvii). The counterfactual is obviously a useful way to explore the meaning ascribed to the lexia in *Civilization*, both through chosen presence (player's story/content decisions) and meaningful absence, as in Fogel's narrative.

For example, creating an English civilization without gunpowder highlights the serious military disadvantage of such an absence and we would be unlikely to be able to imitate the imperialist expansion that was historical reality. Whenever we create a narrative in *Civilization* we receive the game's argument as to what this may have led to and much of what the game achieves is through (knowing and playful) counterfactualism. To get better at achieving our goals we are forced to take notice of these arguments and their foundational causal logic (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 11). Consequently, often we are counterfactual history*ing* without even consciously acknowledging it. Furthermore, much of the value of this relies only on our recognition of the lexia's relation to the larger popular historiography (basic historical resonance). *Civilization* struggles to provide timelines for its many historical lexia but it does demonstrate their meaning and interrelations according to its historical model. Accordingly, its anachronism does not stop it being historical – it is conceptual—furthermore, thematic discourse does not focus on linear narratives but on making meaningful connections across time and space. Alongside the game's discursive tone, this is a natural anachronism (as it is in the more traditional history text).

Game-structures like this are clearly capable of offering something (often counterfactually) historical and valued to their players and academics have lauded their possibilities as history. Popular and influential historian Niall Ferguson has been very outspoken, even going so far as to advise the inclusion of games in the UK history curriculum when working as a consultant (Vasagar 2010). His enthusiasm springs from his experiences playing *Making History* that made him, an expert in WW2 history, reconsider some of his long-held arguments and assumptions. 'The game...helped him think more clearly about history. "I found that my scenarios weren't as robust as I thought. And that's really exciting, because normally counterfactuals happen in my head," he says. "Now they can happen on the screen"' (Thompson 2007). Thompson believes that Ferguson realized something:

> 'that fans of war-strategy and civilization-building "god" games have realized for years: Games are a superb vehicle for thinking deeply about complex systems. After you've spent months pondering the intricacies of the weapons markets in *Eve Online*, or the mysteries of troop placement in *Company of Heroes*, you develop a Mandlebrotian appreciation of chaos dynamics.' (2007)

Similarly, within game studies it is easy to find support for game-structures that allow users to engage in playful history and usually at the core of this support is the possibility for counterfactualism (Apperley 2007; Apperley forthcoming 2013; Atkins 2005; Squire 2006; Taylor 2003). As Apperley summarises, 'Engaging in counterfactual imaginations through play creates the opportunity to re-examine the actual event, as it involves considering how that event may have otherwise occurred, or indeed what the world would be like had it not' forthcoming 2013, 10). And, 'If we think about history as the development of causal models of the past than [*sic*]...alternate history more generally, has considerable pedagogical value' Owens 2012A, n.p.).

It should by now be apparent why game-structures like *Civilization*'s work so well as counterfactual history. Furthermore, if 'History is merely the sum of millions of human decisions' (Cowley 2003, xvii) then there is a fitting alignment to the exploration of history through a form and system that so privileges audience decisions. There is also another simple benefit that games offer over traditional forms. Whilst the game-structure of Meier's text allows for some narrative freedom, it is also true that this multiplicity is met with repetition. Repetition is an extremely common characteristic of historical narrative in its literary form (Munslow 2007B, 57-58). However, in games like *Civilization*, players are 'memorably confronted with generalisations about historical real-life objects and their interrelationships, confronted with these not just once, in fact, but far more often than they would during the reading of non-ludic alternate history fictions' (Glitz 2010, 177). This could have pedagogical benefits but also risks asserting problematic authority, though perhaps this does a disservice to the gamer. Nonetheless,

> 'Simulations, because they are designed to be tried over and over again, give the interactor a vehicle to test the range of possibilities about how a decision at one point in time could affect a wide range of possible outcomes in the future. They demonstrate the law of unintended consequences and are great tools to convey these "Habits of the Historical Mind."' (Taylor 2003, n.p.)

Furthermore, *Civilization* allows players to save at any point and repeat a series of events with different choices, and is therefore capable of supporting an engagement with *self-reflexive* counter-*history*. For example, 'Sometimes, we can go back and

change things. Equally, most people will have been in a situation whereby no matter how many times they try different strategies from a save point, the result is the same. The difference really brings out what – in the limited universe created by the rules of the game – is 'inevitable' and what is not.' (Owens 2012B, n.p.)

Relatively small changes between game-structures produce very different opportunities for counterfactual interaction. For example, there are many mods (such as the popular WW2 mod) for *Civilization* that allow players to play with specific historical events. These tend to have slightly more specific narrative fragments, stricter (particularly spatial and AI) framing controls and sometimes uneven starting conditions because of course the Great Game of History is not always fair. As Ferguson notes, 'Today we live in a multipolar, multiplayer world. Some players are much better armed than others. In that sense, today's strategic problems are more like those of the World War II era' (2006). Unsurprisingly then, *Making History* is another example of this inclination toward higher narrative specificity. The emphasis moves from the balanced environmental determinism of *Civilization* to the influence of more traditional historico-political factors (it is virtually impossible to survive as Poland in the late 1930's). These decisions that tighten the story space (both in historical focus and player agency) can produce pleasing results and arguably, create opportunities for more productive or advanced counterfactual deviations. In a game like *Civilization*, players may quickly learn, for example, 'that it is prudent to build up one's economic capabilities before embarking on a war. But this is a universal truth, as valid for Julius Caesar as for Benito Mussolini' (Ferguson 2006). Unlike *Making History*, *Civilization* cannot tell 'you much about the specifics of 1939 to 1945' (Ferguson 2006).

This said, something is also lost in these tightened story spaces and the explicit countenance of universal 'truths' (themes) can also be useful. *Civilization* offers a scope and exploration of vast themes and historical referents that *Making History* cannot. Furthermore, it is possible that 'nonspecific simulations provoke a wider range of interrogations, encouraging a more abstract, theoretical [conceptual] engagement of historical process' (Urrichio 2005, 330).[2] Though this may make the game useless for a historian looking for specifics, for a popular audience a thematic, accessible and far-reaching historical game-structure may still be productive. *Civilization* is also more

[2] I do not really agree with the firm distinction between specific and non-specific which Urrichio and perhaps Ferguson, hint at. This is a question of degree and *Making History* is still an open-ontological story structure.

accessible in its game-play balance and the knowledge required for gratification through its historical reference. Most importantly, by the slight closing of the story space through framing controls required for the productive specificity of *Making History*, *Civilization* would lose some of the irreverence and playful narrative freedoms which are integral to its postmodern qualities.

In some of its counterfactual methodology *Civilization* matches up with the kind of counterfactualism we find elsewhere, particularly, Tetlock and Belkin's (1996) foremost requirement of 'consistency with theoretical and statistical generalizations- a preference that is quite widespread among researchers' (Glitz 2010, 170). Glitz continues, 'However crude, empirically unsupported, or even politically objectionable its concrete generalizations may be, their mathematical codification in the game [*Civilization*] as rules, concepts, and object-defining qualities does guarantee that every historical narrative constructed in and through the playing process is entirely consistent with them' (170). Indeed, consistency is a characteristic of videogames. Despite this, *Civilization* finds it more difficult to meet Ferguson's methodological requirement; 'We should consider as plausible or probable *only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered*' (1998, 86). As Glitz notes, *Civilization*'s temporal and thematic scope which extends beyond human agency and the foresight of contemporaries makes this impossible. It is also perhaps a little unfair to expect the same approaches in public and academic history and furthermore, across forms in which we may find the rules of engagement to be necessarily quite different. Certainly, the form raises new questions, for example, should this be the methodological standard for players, developers or both?

Ferguson does seem to have a sense of these problems. He states that 'the parallel pasts the game [*Making History*] conjures up have an undoubted intellectual value' and that the game is 'Challenging in its complexity and the depth of detail it offers, this is the nearest thing I've encountered to a historically credible computer game. Even experts will be forced to rethink their assumptions about the war' (Ferguson 2006). However, *Making History* cannot always meet Ferguson's methodological standard for counterfactual history either. Particularly given some of the radical and long-reaching scenarios and outcomes *Making History* can support, for which AI responses must be devised. This is even before we focus on player-historian interventions, and can we really prove that some of the choices that players face were really ever seriously

considered? Again we return to the issue of subjectivity and encounter the interesting notion that like so much else in historical games, counterfactual methodology is a shared responsibility between developer-historian and player-historian. Accordingly, we may have to rethink critiques which are drawn from the logic of other historical forms.

Furthermore, 'One could argue, of course, that counterfactual history is still too novel a sub-discipline to have arrived at a representative methodological consensus and...Ferguson's plausibility criterion for counterfactual histories is not universally agreed upon among their advocates' (Glitz 2010, 169). Given the relatively early stage of the methodology of counterfactual history and the videogame form, which seems the most likely fit for its most rapid and continued development, 'Assuming some major compromises on both sides, such objections allow us to envisage at least the possibility of a future convergence between the *Civilization* series and professional historiography' (Glitz 2010, 169). If not *Civilization*, then perhaps other similarly structured games.

Civilization's natural tension with individual agency could also easily undermine the significance of the collective organism (which in other structures it often highlights well) and the role of more organic and long-term societal and cultural trends. In doing so it runs the risk of falling into the trap that many counterfactual histories have, namely 'the assumption that it was the mistaken decisions of a few 'great men' which led to major crises' (Ferguson 1998, 13). Of course this also allows games to have an emphasis on turning points and to 'show that small accidents or split-second decisions are as likely to have major repercussions as large ones' (Cowley 2001, xii), how 'a single change can take a stable situation and sent it spiralling [*sic*] all to hell, or vice versa' (Thompson 2007). Players are likely to understand these things, at least theoretically, because this will be their initial experience.

The player is also central to an obvious critique of games like *Civilization*. Whilst the entire pedagogical value does not rest on this, much of *Civilization*'s counterfactual value relies on the formation of a 'simulation gap for the player to interrogate: the player learns by meditating on what is different in the game's representation of Egypt or Russia compared with the historical (and geographical) record' (Bogost 2007B, 255). However, in order to access this 'one must be aware of the basics of historical development, and have some knowledge of the broadest of historical brush strokes. To

be able to judge one's own achievements against historical achievements one has to know something of history, at least in vague terms' (Atkins 2005, 18). Knowledge of the existing historical narratives which are deviated from is more difficult to include in a game than in a book. Whilst the wide focus, basic themes and civilopedia go some way to remedying this, it is a valid criticism and places certain historiographical expectations upon the player. Seemingly, *Civilization*'s historical value is never entirely self-contained. Perhaps, Owen's argument about Scott-Card's book *Pastwatch* applies to *Civilization*, 'it is not a particularly good book for learning about the actual history of the Americas. It is however a great book for prompting us to play with, manipulate and explore the causal models of history that we carry with us' (Owens 2012B, n.p.). Indeed Owens also recognises this similarity stating that 'In the end, the reader is left with something that feels a bit like Card describing three different ways of playing a scenario in the game *Civilization*' (Owens 2012, n.p.).

Games also encourage different types of prevalent popular metadiscourse than have commonly surrounded the book form. For example, discursive online social structures, such as forums, messageboards and even mods themselves, have grown around games like *Civilization*, *Europa Universalis* and *Making History*. On these, players discuss authenticity, question the game's historical logic, set challenges and discuss (sometimes voting for) new or existing mods.[3] Games like *Civilization* encourage 'imaginative approaches to history by permitting and encouraging gameplay that is divergent from strict historic events' but also 'provides scope for players to articulate and explore their counterfactual imaginary...by encouraging reflection on historic rigor by providing a platform for dialogue around plausibility' (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 10).

Indeed, the popularity of these counterfactual historying games, the communities that surround them, the popularity of the alternate history trope in wider media, all hint at 'a wider shift in attitudes towards the historical past, of a desire for the possibility of intervention in historical narrative, a desire to ask the question 'what if?' in our engagement with history that demonstrates a continuing human fascination with what can be recovered and known about the past' (Atkins 2005, 21). Atkins uses the *Time Commanders* TV series as an example of this shift, which is no doubt partly due to the questioning of traditional epistemologies through postmodernism in the past few

[3] For example, members of 2K's forums recently discussed the ludic implementation of an Inuit civilization and regularly discuss *Civilization*'s historical representation.

decades.[4] This show supported a type of history that 'was freeform and improvisational' and created a sense that 'both players and audience had 'learned something' about the past, and that essentially 'counterfactual' exercise had some informative if not educational value' (Atkins 2005, 7). *Time Commanders* significance, as both Atkins and I have noted of *Civilization*, is that it allowed popular access to counterfactual historying.

This is of course the key point. Historian, Antony Beevor criticised Ferguson's desire to introduce counterfactual games to the British curriculum: 'Playing counterfactual? To be perfectly honest there's more than enough you need to learn about the basic structure before you start playing counterfactual' (Vasagar 2010). It is true that counterfactual history is always in danger of overwhelming its practitioner with its multiplicity. However, Beevor misunderstands the nature of the games he criticises which, precisely by substituting some of the knowledge and skills of historians, allow players to engage in a limited form of this practice. Reversing Kirschenbaum's description of William Siborne's infamous 19th Century model of the Battle of Waterloo, *Civilization* is more a model *for* than a model *of* history (2010, n.p.). Regardless of methodological problems and other, not inconsiderable, flaws, the significance of games like *Civilization* is that they offer counterfactual historying in an accessible, assimilable, structured and engaging way to the public. These games are enfranchising in a way that most popular history cannot be because they encourage their audience to produce and explore history as well as receive it. And it is my hope, as the communities surrounding the games suggest, that in doing so they give a certain confidence to players to discuss the past in counterfactual terms (whether ludically, verbally or written), and thus function as a platform for dialogue as Apperley suggests.

Civilization and Postmodernism

Despite the structure that prevents players becoming overwhelmed by counterfactualism, uncertainty is, still central to the function of games and consequently, *Civilization*. This has particular historical value. As historian Richard Lebow notes, 'After an event has taken place, people readjust their estimates of the probability of that happening....That makes history appear more pre-ordained than it

[4] *Time Commanders* allowed teams to refight historical battles using a computer simulation.

really is' (Honan 1998). This is understandable given that 'The solemnity of history assails us from the time we are schoolchildren' (Cowley 2003, xv) and the 'narrative format makes it feel inevitable' (Visconti 2011, n.p.). Accordingly, history becomes teleological and 'While the future is open to speculation and the consideration of plural possibilities, the past is homogenized; by focusing on the chain of events, a single path is forged that ignores branches of possibilities' (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 8). *Civilization* makes some interventions into particular teleological histories. The critical 'historian must....constantly put himself at a point in the past at which the known factors will seem to permit different outcomes' (Huizinga cited in Ferguson 1998, 1). *Civilization* (and games more generally) as intrinsically uncertain, force players to think in these terms and are suited to highlighting these considerations. Good players must embrace multiplicity and run alternate scenarios in their heads.

Accordingly, the game also has a form of self-reflexivity in the player's necessary consideration of alternatives. This alignment is because as Ferguson puts it, 'History is more like a game than it is a novel, because you don't know, when you're in it, what the end is going to be' (Vasagar 2010). Furthermore, *Civilization*'s particular game-structure emphasises narrative multiplicity and possibility, often confusingly so (particularly for novices). Even this is not always problematic as, 'When we think about historical events, we have 20/20 hindsight -- so we forget how confusing and uncertain they were at the time' (Thompson 2007). As such, games like Meier's are excellent for emphasising the unpredictable nature of the past because 'The past – like real-life chess, or indeed any other game – is different; it does not have a predetermined end....There is no plot, no inevitable 'perfect order'; only endings, since multiple events unfold simultaneously' (Ferguson 1998, 68). As a counterfactual history *game*, *Civilization* 'challenges the tendency of the multiple contingencies of the past being homogenized into a singularity in hindsight' (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 8) and allows us to recapture 'the chaotic nature of experience and see that there are no certain outcomes' (Ferguson quoted in Honan 1998). Though normally 'For historians, as the maxim goes, the dominos fall backward', counterfactual history and particularly games like *Civilization*, 'attempt to make them fall forward' (Cowley 2001, xiv).

Furthermore, 'Through play—and modding—players may change and transform the paradigm provided by the 'official' version of history. In this respect the game works to deconstruct teleological paradigms that declare events to be inevitable' (Apperley

forthcoming 2013, 10).[5] Through play we can challenge official histories and through modding we can even challenge the official history of the game. Subsequently, it is possible to use *Civilization* 'as a form of transgressive play, playing out fantasies of overturning established social orders' (Squire and Jenkins 2003, 14), through both its irreverence for historiographical convention and the possibility for resonant narratives of resistance. For example, Squire and Jenkins found that 'Several minority students were totally uninterested in playing the game until they realized that it was possible to win playing as an African or Native American civilization' (2003, 14).

Hence, at least superficially, *Civilization* (though some other games do this better) allows for the construction of cathartic narratives that disavow European dominance as normative. This kind of play may 'undermine the sense of fate that dominant groups adopt to justify their hegemony' (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 10) thus, 'demonstrating that received categories of structuring space are no more 'real' or proper than are the arbitrary lenses that we use to make sense of the past' (Warf cited in Apperley forthcoming 2013, 11). Precedents using counterfactualism to question history and its relationship to power can easily be found in pieces such as Churchill's (1961) clever counterfactual history of the Battle of Gettysburg.[6] Counterfactuals allow 'people to imagine a different world where strange and unfamiliar mappings and trajectories of time and space have been produced. This allows the 'what if' to challenge deeply held certainties, and opens the historical dynamics of power to question' (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 10). In *Civilization* some of these imaginings can also be actively configured. In these ways these game-structures emphasise the idea that 'An engagement with history may not enable us to anticipate the future, but it should make the past less predictable' (Thomas and Adams 1999, 9-10) and allow for more radical history(ing) in the public domain.

By exploring this potential for questioning dominant paradigms, playful irreverence for fact and authority, narrative multiplicity and challenging of history itself, we hint at *Civilization*'s postmodern qualities. The argument for *Civilization*'s status as a postmodernist history is strong and 'enthusiasts credit *SMC* with "rewriting" the very notion of "history" according to postmodernist or poststructuralist principles through

[5] Apperley talks of *Europa Universalis* but this also applies to *Civilization.*
[6] 'Churchill's vision of a world where the North won is as unbelievable as the version where the South won – it is utterly contingent and arbitrary: it's as if he is disavowing any theory or narrative of history' (Kelly 2011).

the composite utilization of self-reflexivity, irony, creative anachronism, counterfactuality, and so on' (Fogu 2009, 116). As Urrichio highlights, the parallel development of poststructuralist historiography and games is serendipitous, 'Together, these two practices coincide within what might broadly be considered the postmodern zeitgeist, giving both theory and form to a new way of organizing historical experience' (Urrichio 2005, 328).

If, as Urrichio claims, the crises of representation that constitute the postmodern turn can be summed up in Berkhofer's slogans of 'Question Reality' and 'Resist Authority' (1995, 3), then it is apparent that *Civilization* has a significant connection to this turn. This is evident in its counterfactual historying and ability (helped by balancing and environmental focus) to offer a questioning of some 'explanatory master narratives' (Urrichio 2005, 332). More significantly, *Civilization* emphasises these slogans in its narrative structuring which, emphasises multiplicity/uncertainty, irreverence for chronology and for *the* History borne of conventional forms. Furthermore, this structuring simultaneously invokes the 'death of the author' (Barthes 1967, n.p.) and questions strict communication models that emphasise the 'ontological distinction (the separate being-ness) of historian and narratee' (Munslow 2007B, 46). Hence, *Civilization* explicitly engages with core postmodernist issues such as 'the exploration of narrative convention and implication, or ways of enabling the subject to construct personal histories, or even the creation of speculative histories' (Urrichio 2005, 332).

In games like this, 'history in the Rankean sense of ''wie es eigentlich gewesen ist'' is subverted by an insistence on history as a multivalent process subject to many different possibilities, interpretations, and outcomes' (Urrichio 2005, 328). In the celebration of narrative multiplicity imbricated into such a structure and through 'the sheer exuberance of its playfulness with historical reference, and its lack of reverence for the past as static and fixed text' (Atkins 2005, 21), *Civilization* questions not only historical realities/narratives but also dominant and authoritative epistemologies. 'Games by definition subvert the project of consolidation and certainty associated with the former [empirical-analytical] brand of history' (Urrichio 2005, 333). I would add that it is in game-structures like *Civilization*'s where subversion becomes significant and the forms natural 'reflexive awareness of the construction of history' becomes most relevant 'to the notion of history as time-bound meaning situated in an ever-changing present' (Urrichio 2005, 333).

Civilization also bears resemblance to the calls for and examples of experimental history, that are the logical progression in postmodernist thinking. For example, Munslow (2010, 199) notes how Lindqvist's *A History of Bombing* (2001) eschews traditional narrative formations, utilizing a labyrinth of individual passages with only a number of initial suggested themes providing direction. Similarly, *Civilization*'s labyrinthine narrative structure invades and fractures the concept of authoritative linear narrative, and 'the tension between organisation and disorganisation permits the reader[/player] to make up their own history....the disturbance of form forces upon us the issue of flux, uncertainty' (Munslow 2010, 199).

Lukacs (2011, 143) writes that the future of history lies in the acknowledgement that history is revisionist. Certainly, it would seem that games manifest and highlight this. Firstly, they have produced a modding culture. This allows a game's model to be revised to better reflect the modder's historical expression, something difficult within other forms, especially given their entrenched cultural and economic roles. Elsewhere I have written that these modders should be understood as 'a new, albeit digital, wave of popular history revisionists' (Chapman 2013A, 6). Secondly, the mere opening of the story space invokes revisionist experimentation. 'For the multi-sceptical, ironic and subjectivity inspired historian, their story space is the location for – not surprisingly – multiple historical experiments and expressions' (Munslow 2010, 156). *Civilization* tangibly renders this and allows for the production of different experiments/expressions within the same story space and thus, also lends support to White's (1973) famous claims about emplotment.

Civilization further aligns with Munslow's (2010) idea of expressionist history(ing) because its histories 'are *individuated* creative acts that are always coming into and going out of being' (217-218), encouraging players to ask (as Munslow claims the future historian will) 'What shall I produce today...?' (218). *Civilization* is postmodernist because 'History thus turns into an event' (218). The narratives produced relinquish some authority precisely because they are fleeting and multiple. Once played they normally no longer exist as anything except perhaps a saved game which when played will likely vary from the original and consequently like 'future histories will never be replicas of each other. Hence there is no point in second

editions, only new performances' (218). *Civilization* not only tentatively moves towards Munslow's notion of expressionist history but does so in the popular domain.

Similarly, *Civilization* features similarities to more form-focused postmodernist categorisations. For example, the game meets Rosenstone's oppositional/innovative category of/for film in a number of ways. Firstly, as a conceptual simulation, *Civilization* tries to 'represent something about the events of the past without pretending to "show" those events accurately' (Rosenstone 1995, 40). Furthermore, it 'place[s] the masses at the centre of historical processes, refuse[s] the conventions of historical drama, dedramatize[s] history, problematize[s] 'reality effects', avoid[s] clear moral resolution and engage[s] in pastiche, parody and play with rhythm' (Westwell 2007, 585). Such histories are also characterised by their tendency to 'foreground their own construction; tell the past self-reflexively and from a multiplicity of viewpoints; forsake normal story development….utilize humour, parody, and absurdist as modes of presenting the past; refuse to insist on a coherent or single meaning of events; indulge in fragmentary or poetic knowledge' (Rosenstone 2006, 19). *Civilization*'s connection to most of this should now be obvious, but it is worth reiterating the effect of its dedramatising conceptual styling. 'In refusing to disguise its mechanics of operation *Civilization* foregrounds its status as a game and constantly reminds its players that they are engaged in play with a game' (Atkins 2005, 13).

Such a playful history's inclination for irony does nothing to disavow us of the notion of it as postmodernist. Irony is important because it 'is a double narrative strategy, 'both thesis and anti-thesis', that requires historians to deal with the fact of fabrication in historical writing. Ironic doubleness interferes with the truth-seeking effort of conventional history' Emarth 2012, n.p.). *Civilization* obviously allows players to produces ironic counterfactual configurations/emplotments (such as a small democratic-capitalist emancipated Mongol civilization under Genghis Khan winning a diplomatic victory through excellent relations with China). However, the very process of counterfactual historying has its own ironic quality, as Atkins notes of *Time Commanders*, 'Fun was being had, and there was a sense of that knowing irony so often labelled postmodern to the proceedings' (2005, 4). Indeed, if we accept Huizinga's statement at the beginning of this chapter then there is potentially reflexive irony in the very meeting of form and subject.

This is all such a natural fit because the postmodernist turn can be understood as a ludic one. Urrichio writes that the language that Himmelfarb (1980) notes now infuses historical writing, such as ‘‘‘invent,’’ ‘‘imagine,’’ ‘‘create’’ (not ‘‘re- create’’), and ‘‘construct’’ (not ‘‘reconstruct’’)’ (2005, 328), emphasises this playful nature. He continues, “This notion of play...also seems to share something very basic with historical computer games...Indeed, one could easily imagine these imperatives and modes of engagement as promotional descriptors for historical computer games’ (328-329). *Civilization* meets this with a heavy emphasis on paidia. Indeed, by further injecting popular history with paidia, ‘fun, turbulence, free improvisation, and fantasy’ (Motte 1995, 7), *Civilization* invokes the carnivalesque (Bahktin 1984), something deeply irreverent of authority, and which in historiographic terms can be understood as postmodern.[7] Finally, in this, but also its very presence, *Civilization* invokes the postmodern because it emphasises intervention into the conventions of appropriate forms and that ‘the absent past defies any aesthetic comprehension in a singular form of representation’ (Munslow 2010, 204).

Epistemological Tension

Despite this, due to its contradictions, we cannot simply mark *Civilization* as postmodern. Even in its playful aspect there is complexity, with the text offering both ludus and paidia and both ‘simulation-orientated play and more goal-orientated play’ (Carr 2007, 226). This reflects and creates other tensions. Such games do seem to closely ‘correlate to the demands for historical possibility. Their embeddedness in play and the controlling agency that they cede to the user seems to fulfil the claims for reflexivity and subjectivity so central to the new history’ (Urrichio 2005, 335-336). The opened story space (and possible relinquishing of autotelic goals) hints at a move beyond conventional historiography ‘And yet, it seems as though there are contradictions, sites of stubborn adherence to the historiographic status quo.....process oriented games, for all their seeming lack of constraint, can be built around organizing principles that reveal a structuralist understanding of historical process’ (Urrichio 2005, 336). This returns us to the idea that *Civilization* is a constructionist text. The game’s strict focus on underlying themes, theory and strict causal nexus mean it is ‘structured by unspoken historical principle (or better, ideology), rendering...[it] closer to

[7] Furthermore, Poblocki (2007, 171-172) notes that the player’s lease of power is carnivalesque.

structuralist notions of history' (Urrichio 2005, 328). Similarly, I have written elsewhere that *Civilization* can be partially understood as an empirical-analytical history (Chapman 2013A; Chapman forthcoming 2014). It may be that videogames like *Civilization* have a natural proclivity towards this kind of epistemology, at least in construction (particularly in the balancing of game-play), but this could also be due to their role in popular culture. Nonetheless, a 'number of educators and critics have raised valid concerns that what players learn from games is not the properties of complex systems but simple heuristics….The fear is that without access to the underlying model, students will fail to recognize simulation bias or the "hidden curriculum" of what is left out' (Squire 2006, 21). Similarly, 'authors have expressed similar concerns in relation to the invisible assumptions that underpin real-world governmental policy simulations' (Carr 2007, 225).

Like printed books (Ong 2002), computer simulations carry their own authority; each form exerts its own epistemological pressure. Furthermore, there may be certain narratives/emplotments/tropes that videogames more insistently produce and which may carry a particular epistemological seriousness with them. For example, 'it's hard to deny that whichever ending you finish *KOTOR* [*Knights of the Old Republic*] with, you've come to power and brought order to the galaxy. Light or Dark, you have reinforced a key part of a dominant ethic.' (Travis 2011, n.p.). Similarly, games like *Civilization* are contradictory because they 'suggest the chaos of history while inviting the player to inscribe order onto a world envisaged in a 3D map (in itself ideologically problematic)' (De Groot 2009, 142). Game-play is normally a move from chaos to the resolved game-play states and order. Certainly, algorithmic representation is reductionist transcoding and an attempt to homogenise the heterogeneous, but then so too is all history (Chapman 2013A, 14-15). Thus, whilst both the constructionist epistemology and the rules of the game are an attempt to harness the 'rulessness' (Cowley 2003 xvii) of the past and of play, this strict ordering is merely an attempt to allow 'us to savour the experience of reality in illusio – the only way in which reality can be captured' (Pihlainen 2008, 36).

History, like (and as) games, is an attempt to order chaos. This does not mean particular epistemological fixity in other forms and this may prove to be the same for games. For example, the recent horror film *Cabin in the Woods* questioned its own authority and its

audience's enjoyment even as it provided it.[8] Something similar in a history game could be very interesting. Indeed, this issue of authority/control is already being used in other genres. For example, critical hits *Spec Ops: The Line* and *Bioshock* both questioned player's willingness to perform particular represented actions and to find these enjoyable. Such techniques could also be used to question epistemological/ideological foundations in games like *Civilization*.

Nonetheless, though meaning is privileged over chronology within *Civilization*, outcomes are still governed by overarching metanarrative themes and incontrovertible causal logic. These express and are necessitated by the constructionist simulation and can result in strongly authoritarian claims, increasing the potential for the ludonarrative revealing of the mechanics and themes of representation to be mistook for the revealing of a quantifiable past. Though particular narratives cannot be guaranteed within the open story space, outcomes or arguments are heavily privileged. Accordingly, though *Civilization* parodies and questions history itself, it also often fails to question dominant historical narratives and therefore, remains ideologically closed (and conventional). Consequently, *Civilization* mostly fails to open the story space beyond structuralist themes (and design) and thus, to question the historical metanarrative of the western process of development as primary and inevitable.

The ideology itself does not contravene the game's postmodernist efforts, 'history and indeed representation is always, of necessity in some way ideological' (Pihlainen 2008, 31). The problem is the constructionist approach where relativism and the ideological basis of such an idea of history are partially subsumed beneath a veneer of truthful logic. This argues that though multiple things were possible in the past there are certain universal themes which will always occur and are/were inevitable. This, as noted, is a strength of the game but it can also be an epistemological and political weakness (Douglas 2002; Lammes 2003; Myers 2005). 'This history is not contingent in any way, but it is the history of the west...The United States is made the inheritor of all the human advancement and elevated to the position of the most perfect and most 'civilized' state of all' (Poblocki 2002, 166). Hence, there is a tension between the player's freedom and the familiar reassertion of the authoritative master narrative of cultural hegemony which is paralleled in the epistemological tension of the game-

[8] For example, after a violent act one character remarks "you get used to it" to which another character, also addressing the audience, replies, "yeah, but should you?"

structure. Arguably, this means, 'we can write anything we want as long as it is the master narrative of globalization' (Poblocki 2002, 175).

It would seem then that *Civilization* and other similar games 'emphasize totalizing conceptions of historical progression' (Gish 2010, 169) and lack the relativity and self-reflexivity to be considered *only* postmodernist. Due to this and the content/nature of many of these narrative progressions, causal relations and outcomes, which fail to occupy what was 'described by Lyotard as a posture of "incredulity towards meta-narratives"' (Urrichio 2005, 332), *Civilization* cannot be considered fully poststructuralist either – though the focus on the reader/player seems to suggest otherwise in both regards. This is a tension between playful -freedom/postmodernism and ludic control/epistemological authority.

These issues have hardly arisen with videogames or the particular structure of *Civilization*. Indeed, all texts can be understood as 'fundamentally facts of power, not democratic exchange, even though the speaker–hearer nexus is sometimes misleadingly made to exemplify a democratic equality and co-presence' (Salih 2003, 43). If this is true it is possible that 'the text's attempt to dissemble by seeming to be open democratically to anyone who might read it is also an act of bad faith' (Said 1983, 45). Whilst the opening of the story-space may genuinely help in the dynamics of power, it is also possible that the produced tension may be further problematic if this masks *Civilization*'s nature. This is possible, after all 'what Civilization promises is the ultimate interactivity...Yet, ultimate interactivity is a contradiction in terms – games are still about the interaction between the human and software, with one limiting the other' (Poblocki 2002, 167). For these reasons, 'the radicalization of hypertextual form evident in most games doesn't always map onto the critique offered by the community of poststructuralist historiographers' (Urrichio 2005, 335).

Clearly, however, *Civilization* contains deep tensions and there is also a significant connection to postmodernist ideas. *Civilization* seems to resist the authority of conventional historiography and its forms (enfranchising open story space, multiplicity, counterfactual history) whilst remaining authoritative in relation to its *own* story for the past, which is often based on remarkably conventional assumptions. Whilst the game deals with some issues of authority it still fails to fully raise 'issues of ideological interpellation and the 'subjection' of the reader' (Munslow 2010, 194). It seems that,

‘Virtual history, even if simulated in the ludic space constituted by historical computer games, seems to have a complicated relationship to the poststructuralist critique’ (Urrichio 2005, 335).

When we relinquish the goals of the system in *Civilization* (and/or refuse the developer’s narrative climax) and when we indulge configurative resonance, we often also deny some of the ideological and epistemological ends of the system. For instance, ‘What if the player...elects neither to strive slavishly after victory, nor to become "lost" in the game, but knowingly to be a Bad Subject? The power of the computer can be harnessed by the sceptical, dissident player’ (Stephenson 1999, n.p.). Stephenson explains how this could include, for example, using save points to run parallel versions of states. In this way, ‘players can refuse to follow the rulebook's logic of teleological thrust towards colonization, conquest and starship development in 2020 A. D. Instead, they can constantly explore alternative government types or differing foreign and domestic policies’ (n.p.).[9] Indeed, such freedoms are always somewhat available in the open and complex story-space in the ways already described. Furthermore, the more we understand the game’s model the more opportunities for resistance/expression we are capable of taking advantage of. ‘Understanding its rules and parameters not only allows play within that arbitrary framework, but importantly, also allows play *with* the ideologies that those frameworks represent’ (Apperley forthcoming 2013, 5). The dual mode of interactivity means we retain our normal meaning negotiation and can feed this back into the text through configuration and resist and/or expose the assumptions that underlie the model. This does not stop the text being constructionist history but it does allow us to explore its particular constructionist representation from many perspectives. Anyway, if there is a question surrounding ‘whether emphasizing epistemological uncertainty is really necessary anymore’ (Pihlainen 2008, 31), perhaps we can expect this sense to exist in the local cultural context of play.

Accordingly, maybe *Civilization*’s open story space, multiplicity and playful irreverence for both fact and conventional forms of historiography, are enough to further the agenda of postmodernist history. Even Hayden White emphasizes the need for compromise and nuance. White emphasises the postmodern quality of Oliver Stone’s *JFK* and yet the film is authoritative and ‘involves forceful narration and, as narrative, is obviously

[9] *Making History* offers even greater narrative freedoms by allowing us to swap between nation-states at any point and experience multiple viewpoints.

about reaching rather than avoiding closure' (Pihlainen 2008, 30). This drive towards closure is the nature of games also, however, in *Civilization* we have choice, we can ignore endings, choose new goals, choose alternate paths, replay with different outcomes, and control temporal narrative features (order, frequency etcetera) thus (particularly because of the turn-based play) relinquishing some of the narrative pressure of film. If White can forgive the epistemological contradictions of *JFK*, certainly we can do the same of *Civilization*, particularly given that, for White, *JFK*'s 'claim to being 'postmodern' lies firmly on the epistemological axis – in its 'playfulness' with *truth*' (Pihlainen 2008, 30-31). *Civilization* may be many things but it is not short of either historical playfulness or epistemological tension and it encourages players to actualize their engagement in this way.

Civilization has also featured increasingly complex and nuanced (and less ridged) representations over the series' lifespan.[10] Whilst in earlier incarnations the causal nexus was more fixed toward particular reproductions of cultural metanarratives, in more recent entries we are perfectly able to establish a free religious state that becomes a theocracy and to move from a democracy towards communism by way of liberalism and without explicit procedural penalty or a sense of going 'backwards'. This (enhanced by the introduction of civic choices) prevents these options becoming associated only with particular types of power and gives a sense that there are multiple ways to achieve civilization, which then becomes a more complex notion. Increased freedom and complexity promote relativism and a sense of 'topsy-turvy' (again the carnivelesque) in comparison to the dominant Western progressive narratives that often structure our understandings. In doing so, the game creates a space for post-structuralist questioning of these narratives and makes a move toward postmodernism.

It is also not really fair to laud such games for structuring opportunities for player historying and then criticise them because the epistemological and ideological structures, that allow them to offer useful historical alternatives cohesive with the broader theoretical foundations, are not to our liking. This authority seems a small price for vast enfranchisement. Consequently, whilst the ideological content of *Civilization* is interesting, it is also rather beside the point next to the offers of the new form and the game's particular structuring (the focus of this thesis). Similarly, though more reflexive

[10] For example, one of the game's designers describes the increasing complexity of the tech-tree in Glitz (2010, 167).

in a more open epistemology, the move towards order is not in itself problematic. Though this does not excuse us from epistemological responsibility, there is a common sense point in that 'There is no point in writing history if one is always striving to overcome its principal effect [instead attempting]...to show...the vagarious, 'unstructured' disorder [of the past], due to the energetic desires of men and movements struggling for expression' (Barzun cited in Ferguson 1998, 65). Accordingly as both De Groot (2009) and Johnson point to, perhaps the aim here is not about 'tolerating or aestheticizing chaos; it's about finding order and meaning in the world, and making decisions that help create that order' (Johnson 2005, 62). Accordingly, games may well be the best way to open up new questions about history itself because they 'allow a way of considering multiplicity while also imposing structure and order... and in the case of historical games a certain historiographical ambivalence' (De Groot 2009, 143). Given this, the necessity of such structural ordering to afford popular historying and the dangers of becoming locked into a kind of epistemological self-seriousness, the playful chaos of *Civilization*'s game-play is perhaps enough to offer some epistemological complexity. Importantly, whilst *Civilization* offers fewer opportunities for radical engagements with the past than actually being a historian (relinquishing the game-structures that afford such practice and control it) it certainly offers more than conventional usage of other historical forms.

Finally, these ideas indicate that *Civilization*'s epistemological tension may in itself be a postmodern quality. Just as 'Play emerges in the space between the constraint of detail and the exhilaration of improvisation' (Urrichio 2005, 330) so too does postmodernism, where it describes the playful space between convention, fact and creation. *Civilization*'s contradictions between, on the one hand, the rejection of sole authorial authority, use of multiplicity, playfulness, irreverence, parody and pastiche and on the other, its constructionist claims, controlling logics and adherence to metanarratives of cultural dominance, are a positive factor. Epistemological contradiction and confusion is often a form of self-reflection and is a firmly postmodernist technique, arguably, whether implemented intentionally or not. For example, 'Films making unsteady claims about their relation to history usually don't interest historians, but maybe they should. Not for the histories they tell, but for what they tell about history' (Engelen 2007, 561). Thus *Civilization*, like these films, 'does not (necessarily) create an understanding of the past but it does mirror the uncertainties at the core of current historiography and philosophy of history' (Engelen 2007, 561).

Certainly *Civilization* begins to question such notions as whose and what types of history*ing* is legitimate, enfranchisement, authority and the production/reception divide. The game's cultural ideologies become less problematic because it questions the power basis of history as a practice whilst still reiterating other cultural notions of power and in doing so these notions lose some of their own narrative power. That the game does not question its own vision for the past becomes less relevant in the face of its contradictions which question the nature of history itself.

In essence it is the unpredictable and playful human quality brought to the game by players that rescues *Civilization* from the problematic inferences of its epistemological contradictions and this is really the key point. Whilst the model may be built epistemologically conventionally, the very introduction of high-level agency means that this cannot maintain coherency in reception. Thus in such a dual text, which to all intents and purposes has two historians and where meaning cannot and 'does not reside in 'one place'' (Carr 2007, 234) we must arrive at the conclusion that '*SMC* embodies a postmodern vision of history in its operation and play, rather than in the texts or subtexts it produces, as its critics charge' (Fogu 2009, 119). Accordingly, like other playful historical practices (like reenactment), game-structures like *Civilization* have the potential to 'produce both conventional and radical results' (Burgoyne 2009, 8) and conversely, opens up *authoritative* history for active *participation*. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this *dual epistemology* in *production* and *reception* is that 'the intrinsic nature of the videogame as audience-led playful text means that the grip of empiricism in this medium may already place less demands over meaning than in other forms' (Chapman 2013A, 11).

Conclusion: *Civilization*, Complexity and Postmodernism

For White, 'the reader is no longer a passive creature, simply the recipient of the historians' authoritative messages. Nor is the reader to be ignored by the historian. Rather, the reader is active to such an extent that historical writing...needs to be reformulated to suit this new readership' (Pihlainen 2008, 23). Games like *Civilization* seem to be suitable vehicles for such a reformulation because in their actualization of the reader/player's role they align with what Pihlainen, drawing from White (1990; 1999), describes, as complexity. This means providing 'a way to 'present' the past, to

actualize it for the reader, in terms that are not merely epistemic but also experiential' (Pihlainen 2008, 32); something which is obviously a part of game-based history. Also that the resistance of inevitability or closure should be offered, 'Even at the cost of offering up confusion and discomfort in place of clarity and easily digestible narratives...comfort is not the goal' (37). As noted, uncertainty and even mild suffering, is important to game-play.

As has been explored, in *Civilization*'s structure this ludic uncertainty ultimately results in epistemological uncertainty. 'With the introduction of epistemological uncertainty to historical representation the reader is thus drawn into responsibility; the author (the historian hiding behind a veil of objectivity) is no longer sole authority but rather, authorship and responsibility are shared in the process of representation and interpretation' (Pihlainen 2008, 26). As such, *Civilization* is complex in a dual sense. Firstly, in the epistemological uncertainty of its contradictions, playful irreverence for fact and the questioning of traditional models of production/reception. Secondly and more importantly, it actualises shared authorship, meaning its complexity does not rely on conscious acknowledgement of this epistemological uncertainty. No matter what the audiences understanding of the game's *claims* to the past, *Civilization* is complex by creating 'a space where the text is not simply a given. Complexity transforms the text into a space for communication, in which readers' input is not only welcome but crucial' (32). Furthermore, the game further aligns with Pihlainen's notion of complexity because its narrative structure offers 'Repetition without closure, then; re-presentation with minimal narrative context or framing' (33). In 'Engaging with sufficiently complex and underdetermined representations, opinions are not simply assumed, they are formed. (Not found but invented . . .) And in this way, history is rescued, permitted to provide inspiration without denying responsibility' (33). Opinions here relate to choice, which for players is necessitated if their engagement with the text is to continue, 'complexity actualizes choice, choice, in turn, actualizing responsibility' (33). Furthermore, this perspective emphasises a view of the consumers of history 'as individuals who are engaged with the world and embrace and pursue beliefs and goals of their own, even when under the influence of a historical text' (23) and this is a notion that my proposed model of interaction emphasized in Chapter 1 and the relatively open nature of *Civilization* attempt to support.

Games like *Civilization* are perhaps currently the best (certainly the most prominent) manifestation of the complex text. 'The reader is thus emancipated, freed from all direction and, at the same time, forced to come up with his or her own interpretation (thus eschewing all forms of emancipatory rhetorics) – with confusion leading to indecision and then to action. Hence the efficacy lent to even historical representation in terms of experience' (Pihlainen 2008, 34). Whilst, the game cannot lay claim to providing *no* direction (I seriously doubt any history can) still it makes a significant connection with White and Pihlainen's ideas, perhaps more so and certainly more accessibly, than even the most progressive of history books.

Admittedly, 'the move White makes from epistemological scepticism to the espousal of social responsibility at the level of the individual (and hence in a new, uncompelled kind of way when contrasted with hegemonic histories) entails a leap of faith' (Pihlainen 2008, 35). This is also somewhat complicated by the perceived cultural role of games as something not to be taken seriously and the potentially trivialising dual meaning of any representation which enters the ludic frame (Linderoth and Chapman forthcoming). However, these cultural roles are of course subject to change and I suspect these tensions of meaning will actually become a narrative trope of historical games as they have in other games.[11] As aforementioned, unlike in the book, some form of responsibility is always present in the shared authorship of the historical videogame, particularly those like *Civilization*. However, even beyond this there is a stronger argument for the occurrence of social responsibility, carried out in an actualized way as befits the videogame form, by the communities of modders who revise the games and the veteran players who seek alternate historical goals. Regardless, of these issues (which also remain problematic in other forms of history) it is clear that in the very opening of the story space which is so characteristic of games, the quality *Civilization* so exaggerates and exemplifies, that games have significant contact with White's ideas and include a responsibility in the very production of the text. What's more is that they do so by taking an enfranchising and entertaining role in popular culture. 'For history to flourish....White seems to feel it also needs to entertain and not simply appeal to experience more directly, through complexity, for example' (Pihlainen 2008, 37). Games like *Civilization* seem to offer both.

[11] For example, in *Dishonored*, the happiest ending only occurs by using the restrictive and harder non-lethal combat methods.

Perhaps games like *Civilization* make a move even beyond the postmodern. Certainly in their opening of the story space they seem to move towards what philosopher Alan Kirby describes as 'pseudo-modernism' (2006). Similarly, *Civilization*'s inherent contradictory tensions between conventional and progressive history seems to meet Vermeulen and Van Den Akker's description of the post-postmodernist condition of 'metamodernism' which can be understood as 'oscillating between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony' (2010, 1). It would also seem that the tensions between games (at least as they are perceived) and the serious quality we normally associate with history as/or art which they (or perhaps 'we') nonetheless aspire to, also has a connection to this idea.

Whatever future connections between our epistemologies and this new form of history further research and time may make apparent, still we can at least say with confidence that currently game-structures like *Civilization*'s are making some movements towards the expressive, experimental, complex and progressive conceptions of the future of history which are perhaps best characterised as postmodern. Thus the questions (and hopefully some answers) raised here about the relationship between both formal and stylistic/epistemological advances are just the beginning of investigating the possibilities and necessities of a new form that may well revitalize (at the very least popular) history.

Perhaps *Civilization* is truly culturally relevant (and of so much academic interest) because in its postmodernist qualities it seems to constitute a formalist experiment with history and these are 'essential in recognising the complexities in engaging with the past' (Munslow 2010, 193). It does seem to at least offer, as Munslow suggests future histories should, 'the reader a disconcerting self-consciousness about the form given to the content of the past by deliberately disrupting, denaturalising or defamiliarising it' (2010, 194). This is most obvious in its inclusive form and dual epistemology but is perhaps also supported by his simple examples of how this formal disruption is often achieved by using 'typefaces and interventionist authorial commentaries' (Munslow 2010, 194), which in *Civilization*'s terms are its abstract interface and continually responsive rules, respectively.

Certainly the game is ‘an exemplary text that shows how the computer game has begun to renegotiate the relation between the individual playing subject and that amorphous pre-textualised mass of information that is the past’ (Atkins 2005, 3). And this, as well as its huge structural differences from *BiA* is why it has been used as one of the two texts for analysis within these pages. *Civilization* allows us to at least countenance the idea that given the extent to which videogames ‘offer a new means of reflecting upon the past, working through its possibilities, its alternatives, its ‘‘might-have-beens,’’ it would seem that they succeed where other forms of history fail’ (Urrichio 2005, 336).

This would certainly seem to be the case in terms of popular history and enfranchisement into the practice and debates of history is really the most significant benefit of game-structures like *Civilization*. Whilst acknowledging the creativity of various developer-historians, it is also perhaps unsurprising that this relative complexity and experimentation has occurred in the landscape of popular history. As Munslow notes ‘The professional pressures to undertake history in approved ways are considerable. The investment in history training is almost entirely directed towards professionally policed and governmentally sanctioned historical practices. And under the weight of this educational and governmental power, many experimental histories do not appear’ (2010, 199). This is obviously less of an issue in popular videogames, particularly if they can really be considered ‘neglected media’ (Reichmuth and Werning 2006, 47).

If, as Pihlainen writes, the ‘new’ history that postmodernism seems to lead us to can only ‘come into its own only once enough readers have not only internalized epistemological scepticism but also become fluent and grounded in forms of complex culture’ (Pihlainen 2008, 38), then games like *Civilization* may indeed prove to be significant. As Pihlainen notes, popular culture has not waited for academia to embrace some of the strategies that White advocates and thus perhaps she is not too forward to note that ‘we need to wake up to this change’ (2008, 38). Certainly she would seem to be justified in her argument that,

> ‘The problems with history’s engagement with the world today... reside in the all-too-meagre capacities attributed to readers by the rest of us, especially by historians who have the talent for engaging in experimental forms: If we are to rescue history from extinction ...we need to place faith in (and sometimes even to

> overestimate) the abilities of the readers of historical narratives as White does.' (2008, 37-38)

With the complexity manifest in game-structures like *Civilization*'s, re-centring on the reader is necessitated because their role is actualized and they are invited into shared authorship. Suddenly, 'the investigation of narrative communication – taking into account the context of reading as much as the context and theory of production' (Pihlainen 2008, 26), resonates anew when considering the historical videogame. Despite its suitability for these aims, we must also remain mindful of the potential pressures that the videogame form exerts, particularly on players. And in this regard, sophistication may not be the only potential problem in reception. As already explored, the dual nature of games means much rests on players at least acknowledging the historical component for the game to function as a history. However, even beyond this, in the process of learning to play there may be both problems and benefits and it is this that will be discussed in the next, short and final chapter.

This momentarily aside and returning to *Civilization*, which so well emphasises the inclusive power of games and the complex text, by inviting the player to become an actualized reader-historian in the open (hi)story-play-space. Both what the game's limited achievements begin to move us toward and why this is needed, can be summarised most eloquently in a final quote from Pihlainen,

> 'Historians are not the only ones required in the process of historical representation. Thus it seems reasonable that the methods employed by historians be updated to meet audience sensibilities – sensibilities that include, without question, an appreciation of 'irony' and a fair (however under-theorized) grasp of antifoundationalism. Isn't it time that these changes become accommodated for and accepted by the producers of history? In other words, isn't it time to meet the readers?' (2008, 38)

Chapter 10

Play and Deconstruction

'A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game.'

-Derrida 2004, 69

The focus of this thesis has been on examining the opportunities that these game-structures create for engaging with history rather than to make grand declarations about what gamers actually do with them. Nonetheless, at some level this occasionally carries an inference of an implied (or perhaps ideal) gamer. This is not really an issue in most regards; however, it is important to note that the consistency that this would seem to imply in engagement with such games is problematic. Factors such as, tiredness, changes in equipment or environment, enthusiasm (resonance) for the theme, understanding of the challenges and previous experience, all probably make a difference but cannot be reasonably be accounted for because of their subjective nature. We can, however, somewhat account for the process of learning to play as every (successful) gamer must learn to do this.

Though it may at first seem a strange idea, here I propose that this process is related to the epistemological ideas and issues that were first raised in Chapter 2. In that chapter I discussed the various epistemologies that are used to construct historical videogames concluding that there are few (if any) examples of historical videogames *produced* using a deconstructionist epistemological approach. This is true but does not sufficiently account for *reception*. Of course this also relates to the issues that were raised in the last chapter concerning the epistemological tensions of *Civilization*. Here I concluded that what was at work was a kind of dual epistemology working differently in production as to reception, becoming significant because of the actualization of the audiences role. This understanding leads us to consider the pressures that the form itself exerts on the process of meaning creation to see that in fact most, if not all, historical videogames touch upon deconstructionist ideas. Indeed this is imbricated into their very form and the ways they encourage us to interact with them.

This becomes apparent when we return to consideration of the ecological approach to games. Whilst, as demonstrated, this emphasizes that meaningful historical representations can be produced and received in experiential forms like videogames, it also sheds light on one more aspect of videogames as history which is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the form. As noted, games like *Civilization* and *Brothers in Arms* are both historical representations and games of skill and challenge. Accordingly, *developing* expertise in the particular affordances required to meet these challenges means a process of differentiation: 'becoming attuned to our environment, being able to make finer distinctions' (Linderoth 2011, 5). This means that expertise is partly developed by players gradually understanding which pieces of information in the game environment are useful and prioritising this information. 'Expert gamers and professional athletes have learned to differentiate among all the available information in a situation so that they perceive the affordances that are relevant in relation to the game they play and the specific game state' (Linderoth 2011, 7). This also then naturally infers gradually learning to ignore information that is irrelevant to the task. This ecological idea of expertise seems to be supported in other research as well. Perhaps most notably in Haider and Frensch's (1996; 1999) information reduction in skill acquisition hypothesis which proposes that 'people learn, with practice, to distinguish between task-relevant and task-redundant information and to limit their processing to task-relevant information' (1999, abstract).

Specifically, this means that the historical representation of a historical videogame is likely to become gradually ignored as players develop expertise in the game-play. These ideas surrounding information reduction and the fragility of representation in videogames are further supported in the work of other theorists, perhaps most notably in the work of Galloway (2006, 85-106) and Friedman (1999).[1] Historian Rob MacDougall well summarises these arguments in his blog when he writes, '*Civilization*'s game play erases its own historical content. Learning to play means learning to ignore all the stuff that makes it a game about history and not about, say, fighting aliens' (2007). Similarly, Juul, citing research on *Quake III* players by Retaux and Rouchier (2002), notes 'that with sustained playing of the same game, the player may become less interested in the representational/fictional level of the game and more focused on the rules of the game' (2005, 139). Ryan agrees, 'Narrativity performs an

[1] Galloway uses this idea to deny games like *Civilization* can be history. Both myself (2013A) and Apperley (2010A) have written the problems with this argument.

instrumental rather than a strictly aesthetic function: once the player is immersed in the game, the narrative theme may be backgrounded or temporarily forgotten' (2001, n.p.). Similarly, work by Myers has indicated that amongst many expert players, message board discussions tended to revolve around 'the relationships among in-game signifieds – without reference to or really any concern about their significance (or signification) outside the game context' (2005, 8). For these expert players 'argues Myers, the game's components and units only matter in terms of their ludic attributes' (Carr 2007, 227). Finally and comparably, Fogu notes of historical FPS how we might assume 'immersion in simulated historical action might suggest a strong intensification of presence, but all the evidence points to the contrary' (2009, 120). Indeed, Fogu explains cutscenes as an attempt to restablish the sense of '*enargeia*, the effect of presence related to the act of witnessing' (120) that it seems game-play fails to maintain. He demonstrates this effect by noting how in the Italian Civil War game *Il Rosso e Il Nero*, most players had played as the fascist side 'indicating that even in this case...identity is a function of game-playing (not vice versa), and that the traditional idea of history in video games is thoroughly de-referentialized and virtualized' (120). Whilst Fogu does not make this connection, it seems probable that this de-referentialisation is a gradual effect due to the reductionist process of learning to play.

This process of differentiation and information reduction can perhaps best be explained in simple examples. For instance, the following is taken from a preview of the popular WW2 strategy game *Company of Heroes 2*. 'Look at a map, exquisitely detailed and evocative as they are, and eventually it becomes lines of cover, soft and hard, directions of attack, pivots on which to place machine guns and mortars, wider tracks down which death may trundle in the shape of a tank' (Smith 2012). This nicely summarises the process of becoming attuned to the affordances of the game map, gradually differentiating the elements that have tactical significance from the other elements of the environmental representation that do not and which can therefore be ignored. Similarly, in an article for the *New Yorker*, Nicholson Baker, who had never played videogames before (or even held a control pad), reports on his experiences with them over a few months. Here, he describes his experience of one of the buildings of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*.

> 'I found many interesting things while exploring this house, not wanting, particularly, to get back into the action and be killed again...In the master bedroom

> were books on a bookshelf, including "The Jungle Book," a law treatise, and what appeared to be a biography of the Dutch painter Gerard van Honthorst...I went into a smaller bedroom. In it were seven or eight sleeping bags, unrolled, empty, and a lot of rollaway suitcases. Also a pinup of a clothed woman wielding a machine gun. There was something touching about this tableau of sleeping bags, since I knew that the soldiers who had slept there were now dead.' (2010)

This would probably be an atypical reaction to the environment for an expert player of *Call of Duty* who would be most likely to ignore these aspects of the representation and unlikely to consider their deeper possible representational meaning, simply because they do not afford anything (or very little), in relation to the game-play. Baker continues to wonder at the reusing of a number of props (such as clothes and food) from earlier levels set in different countries, 'What moral were they offering—that people were basically the same everywhere? That most of life was getting up in the morning, putting on your clothes, and eating basmati rice? That war, even for the soldier, was the aberration? Or were they just being thrifty, or playful?' (2010). In reality, the designers are probably aware that players will increasingly ignore such props as they continue through the game and play the repetitive multiplayer, making the creating of lots of unique props mostly redundant. This is precisely because players gradually become more expert at differentiating the visual information that is relevant to game-play.

Of course this example also indicates an important point; games can still produce meaningful representations that may, at least initially, be appreciated. It is just that these will probably gradually lose power over the course of a player's engagement with the game. Thus perhaps Glitz is right when he claims that the novice period is likely to at least last long enough for 'players to be memorably confronted with generalisations about historical real-life objects and their interrelationships, confronted with these not just once, in fact, but far more often than they would during the reading of non-ludic alternate history fictions' (2010, 177). Similarly, we must careful of claiming that this process of information reduction is fixed, innate or uninterruptable. Obviously, even the most expert player may, for instance, discover and become interested or moved, by some new resonance in the representation (or that they merely consider anew), particular moments in the narrative, or by encountering new game mechanics that disturb the process of learning. Similarly, players may remain affected by the framing

narrative or the intersections this has with the ludonarrative. Likewise, as aforementioned, sometimes decisions will be between ludic elements of a genuinely similar game-play value, rather than the appearance of such to the novice player who is unaware of these values and so must also choose by something other than tactics.

Whilst this differentiation and information reduction will always occur, the precise nature of the differentiated information will differ according to the aims of the particular player. We must consider the possibilities of, for example, configurative resonance, counterplay and remember the subjectivity of the player. Thus, some 'players may care more about the aesthetic or sentimental value of game choices than about the optimal way of playing the game' (Juul 2007, 193). Seemingly, examples of this are perhaps more common in players of historical videogames and some players find historical goals far more interesting than the autotelic goals of the game. Apperley (2007; forthcoming 2013)provides examples of this and also notes how players often share these historical challenges (that even run counter to the autotelic goals) or design mods to enhance the historical aspect as they see fit. Similarly, as Glitz notes 'At least since *Civilization IV*, even the most casual Google search yields enough online debates about the game's historiographical politics to counterbalance Myers's example' (2010, 176-177). Such players are still differentiating information but this relates to slightly different affordances and the historical representation is intrinsic to their goals. Accordingly, information that other purely tactical players may find extremely useful may constitute reduced and discarded information to these more historically minded players and of course vice versa. These players are still becoming experts, though in how to produce particular representational outcomes rather than how to win according to autotelic goals.

It is worth briefly noting at this point, though further research is required, that metadiscourse may prove to exert a significant influence on this process of becoming an expert and gradual information reduction. Sustained debate about a particular aspect of a game could reveal new affordances of the representation and may return or draw the player's attention to this when they return to the game. Even in the simplest sense we can understand the possibility of this effect.[2] For example, playing a zombie game after watching a good zombie film might refocus us on the game's representative aspect,

[2] Perhaps it is the desire to negate this desensitisation and reconfront the player with content that drives the borrowing from other forms.

allowing it to resonate anew. This is of course an anecdotal example, however, this effect of metadiscourse might explain the success that some educational games researchers such as Squire (2005) seem to have had in sustaining interest in the historical aspect of games like *Civilization* and so too the self-sustaining communities of historically minded players on the internet.

Returning to the main discourse, there are of course a number of different ways of approaching historical games, even for a single player. Individual players may swap between autotelic and extra-telic goals during or between sessions of play, have smaller short term extra-telic historical goals alongside the autotelic, or engage in many types of brief configurative resonance asides. It is also worth noting that this process will of course also differ slightly between game-structures. For example, as noted earlier the relative vastness and openness of *Civilization* make engagement with extra-telic goals far more likely than in *BiA*. The constant performative pressure of *BiA* may also make this process of differentiation occur relatively quickly, though this is perhaps balanced by the fact that the game is not explicitly designed to be played repeatedly as *Civilization* is. It is also worth noting that the presence of a realist simulation and framing narrative may influence this process and of course that the historical function (actualized reenactment) of *BiA* does not entirely rely on the direct acknowledgement of the historical representation beyond the most basic understanding that it relates to the past anyway.

Leaving aside particular game-structures, the various considerations that could impact on this process, as described above, mean that we must remember that, as mapped out in Chapter 1, playing a historical videogame can involve a series of relatively complex exchanges between the two modes of interactivity. In short, we cannot ignore the inconsistent nature of players, their varying motivations and the fluid nature of play. As Carr here notes after observing a player of *Civilization* at length,

> 'a proportion of his game-play does not involve the manipulation of components based purely on their meaning as determined by their ludic value. On the contrary, his gaming involves 'on-the-fly' interpretations that knit in-game and extra-gamic information together in a manner that is idiosyncratic, piecemeal and inconsistent (or playful, in other words).' (2007, 228)

Carr concludes that 'the meaning of *Civilization* - whatever it might be - is neither universal, nor static' (230).

This is an important point that must be considered and yet we must also return to acknowledge, as Carr also does, that 'The crucial issue is that the user's level of experience (which will alter as a consequence of play) will constitute the interpretive frame for that user' (2007, 230). Similarly, even Glitz, a relatively staunch opponent of Myers' conclusions, states that:

> 'as a consequence of both a basic ludic convention - namely that one tries to win a winnable game - and the extreme recursiveness which distinguishes computer game consumption from even the most frequently repeated fiction-reading experiences, expert players might indeed have learnt to neglect the 'real-world signifiers' of most in-game components during their ludic worldmaking' (2010, 176).

It is certainly difficult to deny that for most players a focus on the game's autotelic goals will probably occupy most of their time and that there will be some universality in becoming attuned to the affordances of these goals. Thus, often learning to play and particularly learning to play 'well', involves gradually learning to ignore large parts of the representation, sometimes, particularly when under pressure, for increasingly extended periods of time. Whilst swapping between the modes of interactivity is still possible, it becomes increasingly likely that as players become experts at achieving the game's intrinsic goals they will focus gradually less on the representational aspects of the game which have no bearing on this.

This general trend towards differentiation and thus information reduction in the process of developing expertise, means that (as aforementioned) just as Spiegelman's metaphors and representation gradually self-destruct (or rather self-deconstruct) in the deconstructionist history *Maus*, so inevitably too will historical representations received in the videogame form. In the process of learning to play skilfully, the historical metaphors become broken and narratives disempowered until all that potentially is left is play, expert, nuanced and sublimely ignorant of the representation which once held so much sway. Our use of the text for play destroys its use as a text and thus historical games deal in another kind of impermanence, a final deconstructionist note, if one were

even needed. Again we return to the notion of the dual epistemology. So whilst historical videogames may not currently be *produced* using a deconstructionist epistemology, this cannot help but occur to some degree in *narration/reception* because play is 'a deconstructive process' (Myers 2005, 12). As Caillois writes,

> 'without doubt, secrecy, mystery, and even travesty can be transformed into play activity, but it must be immediately pointed out that this transformation is necessarily to the detriment of the secret and mysterious, which play exposes, publishes and somehow *expends*. In a word, play tends to remove the very nature of the mysterious.' (2001, 4)

Due to agency, representations in videogames are already unstable and risk becoming incoherent at any time, they rely on the player not only interpreting their readable content 'correctly' but taking the right actions at the right times. However, as discussed here, most importantly they are unstable because they cannot maintain the same resonance between player and representation through the lifetime of a game's challenge (if the player is to continue). Accordingly, this process of gradual deconstruction means that through play the game-based history will always reveal itself for what Munslow noted earlier, it is ('an invention, a tool for doing things with the past'), gradually pointing towards its own status as representation. This loss of mimetic authority (particularly combined with what he would term the 'historicisation' inherent to such games) may even create what Brecht termed an 'alienation' or 'distancing' effect (1964, 91). This includes an acknowledgement of the produced nature of the representation as only a depiction made by certain conditions and structures. Such a distancing effect aims to prevent the audience (in this case the player) from losing themselves in the representation and characters and making them more consciously and constructively critical (Brecht 1964, 125). This may particularly be the case if there is a 'sweet spot' between complete ignorance of the fictive representation and immersion in it, that allows an acknowledgement of the role of underlying frameworks in producing the representation, before it fades into irrelevance completely.

Like in historical film, it is entirely possible that 'key scenes, sequences and images will still manage to convey a challenging sense of the past' (Westwell 2007, 584) and 'are capable of staying with the viewer long after the specific plots and resolutions have

disappeared' (Rosenstone 2006, 151). However, because of the process of learning to play, which involves differentiation and information reduction, most (if not all) historical videogames are therefore, to some degree, deconstructionist histories. Thus, videogames can be seen to function *well* as histories precisely because they eventually fail as fictions, cannot maintain coherent representation indefinitely and lose mimetic authority in reception/narration.

What is potentially created is a form of self-regulating history, free to use the power of drama, narrative and fictional immersion in the initial impact of play and yet a history in which through play, its nature as representation, and the ludic structures behind this, will eventually become apparent. The videogame cannot hold the tone of authority that has often come to troublingly determine academic and popular history because it is simply too playful. Whilst some discourse around games focuses on the way that games can be persuasive and their inherent ability to destroy their own representations is problematised, in the case of historical videogames at least, this destruction is somewhat desirable. For history, the often maligned tensions of games between rules, play and traditional fiction or representation, narrative and agency, are actually potentially productive because essentially these games challenge players to destroy, forget and thus *disempower*, their representations and rewards them for doing so.

Conclusion

‘Mr. Everyman is stronger than we are, and sooner or later we must adapt our knowledge to his necessities. Otherwise he will leave us to our own devices, leave us it may be to cultivate a species of dry professional arrogance growing out of the thin soil of antiquarian research... [which]...will be of little import except in so far as it is transmuted into common knowledge. The history that lies inert in unread books does no work in the world.’

-Becker 1932, 234-235

‘Video games are bad for you? That’s what they said about rock-n-roll.’

-Widely credited to Shigeru Miyamoto

Historical videogames, like most popular forms, are a kind of ‘cultural product [which] widens access to historical appreciation, and it therefore is notable that the pedagogy, epistemology and methodology of such activities have not been particularly analysed by historians’ (De Groot 2006, 392). This thesis has been an attempt to readdress some of this imbalance. It is probably not too much to say that this work is the most in-depth exploration of the nature and capabilities of the videogame as a historical form. Though research of this scale has been done on historical videogames before (Squire 2004 for example), this is almost invariably of a more narrow focus and from the perspective of educators. This has not been my objective. Instead, I have tried to look at the *form* as a historian and as a game studies scholar. I have also tried to look at these games in the context for which they were built. I have therefore considered their role as popular histories, rather than advocating or explaining their adaptation for use in formal educational settings.

Nor has the purpose been to argue that games *can* be history (though this has been reinforced) but to show *how* they function as histories. Furthermore, I have aimed to show exactly *what* offers videogames make as a historical form. This has been achieved through a relatively simple framework for analysing historical videogames, the outlining of which is an important purpose of this work. This is comprised of two proposed models for understanding interaction and narrative in historical videogames respectively, and five core structural categories for analysis: epistemology and

simulation; time; space; narrative; and affordances, each of which serves as a heading under which to situate a further set of sub-categories.

Analysis of two games series, *Brothers in Arms* and *Civilization*, has demonstrated the framework and explored the videogame as history. These games were chosen for their extreme differences, critical acclaim and their representation of a good majority of historical videogames. By breaking them down into structural categories I have revealed precisely how each structure contributes to the creation of representations, arguments and opportunities for historical action but have also been able to discuss each of these categories in its wider relation to the videogame historical form. This new approach also enables the framework and concurrent conclusions, to be easily reapplied to games which operate through different combinative structures. I hope that this demonstrates a practical approach to historical videogame analysis that concentrates on the elements that have a real role in meaning-making at both the level of production of the developer-historian and the level of playful reception of the player.

In Chapter 1, I proposed a model for understanding historical interaction with historical videogames. This accounted for action (playing/doing/configurative ergodic traversal) and the negotiation of historical representation by players (reading/orthodox meaning negotiaion), by using a dual model of interactivity. Complex exchanges between these modes were explained using the concepts of counterplay, resonance and configurative resonance and I described possible configurative responses to historical resonance. I also explained that history production is always a dually interactive configurative process. This culminated in the explanation of videogame history as allowing players an *accentuated*, *necessitated* and *actualized* role in the story space and thus access to configurative-production (authorship) through play. I argued that this opens the traditional historian's story space, which becomes a (hi)story-play-space.

In Chapter 2 I argued that the simulation style of historical videogames can broadly be broken into two categories: 'realist' and 'conceptual'. Subsequently I described the characteristics and relative benefits and weakness of each of these stylistic variations in historical representation in videogames (such as through which facet the aesthetics of historical description primarily operate). I also argued that these stylistic variations in simulation are deeply linked existing historical epistemologies and together begin to determine the possible engagements that a game can offer. Here I also described the

deconstructionist epistemology using *Maus* as an example and noting that this seems to have little relation to the *production* of historical videogames.

In Chapter 3 I argued that analysis of time in historical videogames must be a threefold concept that examines the relationship between player-game/representation-past, by using three sub-categories (play time, fictive time and past time). Using these sub-categories I analysed both series, exploring time as a resource, pressure/challenge, component of rhetoric and how time is represented as a historical concept. I also explained the problematic nature of real-time, instead introducing the concept of realist-time. I also argued that temporal segmentation means giving the player control over some temporal narrative elements. Furthermore, I explained how each temporal design choice determined the style of each game's discursive engagement with the past. I concluded by briefly talking about the role of tense in each game.

Chapter 4 started with a brief exploration of space in games and continued by considering the importance of off-screen space ('ma') to the fictive worlds, epistemological inferences and challenges of the example games. The chapter also explored virtual space and power and the videogame form's desirable propensity for including space in historical representation. I continued to explore the role of space as narrative architecture in each game's very different historical narratives. Subsequently, *BiA* was compared to a garden space and *Civilization* to a city space. The chapter concluded by considering the role of virtual space in structuring and reflecting the story space, and the relationship between these elements in terms of emplotment, story/content decisions, narrative and epistemology. This also examined the bridging of time, space and story.

Chapter 5 proposed a comprehensive model for understanding narrative in historical videogames. This started with a discussion of how narrative in games should be understood and introduced the concepts of ludonarrative and framing narrative. These sub-categories and their roles were considerably developed. Here I also introduced my concepts of narrative fragments, lexia and framing controls which precisely describe how narrative (particularly the complex exchanges between the ludo and framed narrative components) function in historical videogames. I also discussed the relationship between narrative/sjuzhet, story/fabula, and ludonarrative and framed narrative in different videogames. This led me to propose three categories of game-

narrative structures (ludonarrative/framed narrative combinations, balance and interplays): the deterministic, open-ontological and open, story structures. Characteristics and examples of each type were also described here.

Chapter 6 applied the narrative model to *Civilization* and *BiA* and allowed the discussion of a number of issues surrounding historical videogame narrative. In terms of the latter this included explaining how arguments and tropes can still be strongly invoked in the ludonarrative through framing controls and the relation of this to game-play, wider cultural discourse and resonance; the role of death; the deterministic story structure/ reconstructionist epistemology relationship; triple narrative layering; and the benefits and weaknesses of the deterministic story structure's emphasis on framing narrative. Analysis of *Civilization* explored opportunities for emergence; complex lexia; opportunities for extra-telic goals and configurative resonance; the role of framing controls in managing these lexia; the open ontological story structure/constructionist epistemology relationship; the role of *paidia*; the narrative implications of repetition; and the benefits and weaknesses of the open-ontological structure. The chapter concluded by noting that whilst the deterministic story structure emphasizes reactive historical *discovery*, the open-ontological story structure emphasises historical *discourse*.

Chapter 7 used the ecological approach to analyse the action of each game. The chapter began by explaining the approach and discussing affordances in historical videogames. Analysis of *BiA* revealed that the game encourages players to differentiate information in similar ways to historical agents and therefore functions as reenactment. Analysis of *Civilization* showed that it makes a number of ecological arguments and seemed to confirm Reed's idea that ecological psychology can make significant contact with history. This combined with the very form seems to indicate the game functions as a new approach to the past: ecological history. I also described how *Civilization* functions as a knowledge tool that extends the player *some* of the affordances of the academic historian and thus in practice affords a popular audience limited forms of historying.

Chapter 8 situated these conclusions alongside and within existing understandings of historical theory and practices by comparing (what I termed) 'digital-ludic reenactment' with traditional reenactment. This included exploring the issues of agency, challenge

and uncertainty; the focus on war; the benefits of digital-virtual construction; the social aspect and the presence of strong dramatic framing narrative. Importantly the discussion of work, play and suffering noted that both types of reenactment are work-like recreational activities that feature similar discourses, particularly the problematic weaving of suffering and authority/authenticity. The chapter concluded by using the ecological approach to outline two distinct layers (actualized and empathic) to reenactment, suggesting future improvements to reenactment and by confirming the importance of digital-ludic reenactment and thus the significance of the videogame as a historical form.

Similarly, Chapter 9 explored the relation between game-structures like *Civilization*'s and existing historical theory and practice. This involved an exploration of these games as counterfactual history(ing), as well as a discussion of the relative benefits and limitations of *Civilization* in this regard. This was followed by a detailed examination of the relative qualities of *Civilization* as a postmodernist text. This concluded that despite considerable epistemological tension *Civilization* does have significant connection to postmodernist ideas, particularly in the inclusive emergent game-structure and its connection to various forms of progressive history. Furthermore, I concluded that this epistemological tension is in itself a useful postmodernist quality and that we must understand these games as functioning with *dual epistemologies*. Finally, I argued that *Civilization* and similar games can be understood as popular manifestations of Hayden White's complex text, further evidence of the significance of the videogame as a historical form.

In the final chapter I argued that despite the obvious possibilities of the videogame as a historical form we must remain conscious of the effect of play. Here I used ecological psychology theory combined with wider research to explain that the process of learning to play historical videogames generally also entails learning to ignore their historical representations. However, I also proposed that this may function as a form of deconstruction and thus be a positive quality. Like *Maus*, games gradually destroy their own metaphors and representations. I concluded that though, as stated in Chapter 2, there seems to be no videogames that are *produced* with a deconstructionist epistemology, this cannot help but occur to some degree in *narration/reception* and we are returned to the notion of the dual epistemology.

Though these chapters used *BiA* and *Civilization* to demonstrate these ideas, clearly this work says much about the videogame as a historical form and many other historical videogames that share structural characteristics with these games. So too, the framework itself, can be easily reapplied. As this indicates, there is much future work to be done. Indeed, future veins of investigation into historical videogames which spring from this work may include exploring cultural and prosthetic memory; focalisation; character intentionality and AI; genre and game engine; historian's voice; implied author/player; bugs/errors and postmodernism; multiplayer historical play; modding; historical knowledge transfer; empirical work on player responses; a greater survey of digital-ludic reenactment opportunities; extra-ludic content and further ecological investigation of the epistemological process of reenactment in any form. What this thesis also indicates is that historical videogames are not a homogeneous category. As I hope is now obvious, whilst there are some characteristics that are always present (for example the opening of the story-space), each historical game-structure works through particular and often very different structures. Accordingly, each has a variety of possible functions, strengths and weaknesses, styles of producing historical representations and opportunities for interaction with history.

History may indeed be a great game. Clearly, however, great games can also be history, accessible, exciting history that creates representations in new ways. Games can be and produce historical narrative. They are perfectly capable of meaning-making, sustaining arguments and creating discourse about the past. However, it is also no accident that some of the functions of these games described here are more akin to historiographical processes, actions, the *doing* of history. Subsequently, amongst the many different and exciting possibilities that have been discussed, one offer stands above all else: the historical videogame's playful enfranchisement which offers limited access to active types of engagements with history which previously were overwhelming, exclusive, rare or simply unavailable. Whether in the reenactment of game-structures like *BiA*, or in the experimenting with historical narrative, counterfactualism and progressive epistemology of games like *Civilization*, historical videogames allow popular audiences structured access to not only *history* but different types of *historying*. And at the very least, in this, the form is intensely valuable.

Indeed, perhaps the impact of games is reflective of wider changes in the way that popular culture intersects with history. 'Digital technologies have not only offered

historians new ways to pursue their research, communicate with one another, and give form to their ideas; they have also opened access to wider publics...These sites attest to an engagement of the popular historical imagination, and to their participants' active construction of historical meaning' (Urrichio 2005, 332). Similarly, Gish concludes 'History, in a very real sense, has become a participatory enterprise; videogames are but one element of a growing digital media network that allows players and users to write and reconstruct history on their own terms, in ways that are personally meaningful and individually relevant' (2010, 177). If we really are moving into an age of more postmodern (or perhaps pseudomodern) popular engagements with history then it seems that videogames may be an important part of (or even the vanguard of) the zeitgeist. Particularly so, given my conclusions here and if this really 'is a question of legitimation and access—you can't be an historian without certain skills, and these are hoarded and defended. The responses to on the one hand theory and on the other populism both suggest an anxiety about repositories of truth and knowledge and who controls them' (De Groot 2006, 410).

Furthermore, if videogames do make sustained contact with postmodernist understandings and approaches then perhaps there is a further alignment: 'Populism and postmodernism both produce multitudes, a diversity of meaning' (De Groot 2006, 410). Of course this populism also often places restrictions on history, as emphasized by *Age of Empires* designer Bruce Shelley; 'We're creating a commercial product here, a game that we'd like to appeal to a lot of people. Creating a truly accurate historical videogame would not only touch on areas we'd rather not deal with, in the end it just wouldn't be any fun' (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007, 205). Though this point must be acknowledged we must remember that this is not a weakness of the form as much as its expected role in culture, something subject to change.

Of course in such a technologically driven industry, the medium itself is also subject to change. However, perhaps the increasing sophistication of both audiences and developer-historian's in their usage of videogames as history will prove to be more significant. As Urrichio suggests, perhaps professional historians can still contribute to these games, not in terms of adding 'correct period detail or more pedagogical pop-ups', but instead by explicitly 'embedding various historiographic epistemologies as structuring agencies...a new dimension could be added to play, more coherently addressing history's rich complexity and relevance' (Urrichio 2005, 336). Either way,

the medium is still relatively immature and there is room for change. Of course this development is no less contingent than the history these games explore and in reality 'can we imagine the future of electronic narrative any more easily than Gutenberg's contemporaries could have imagined *War and Peace* or than the Parisian novelty seekers of 1895 could have imagined *High Noon*?' (Murray 1997, 66-67).

One thing is certain; it is not a question of the medium becoming sufficiently complex to supersede our other forms. The argument here has not been about using games as a replacement but as part of a wider and enriched transmedia historiography. It would be foolish to argue that *Civilization* is more efficient at communicating certain historical ideas than in a book or that *Brothers in Arms* offers a more empathic depiction than *Saving Private Ryan* or far-reaching than *The World at War*. However, these games also offer playful, structured, active engagements with history and historying that other forms cannot. Just as in terms of 'intellectual density, or theoretical insight, film will always be less complex than written history. Yet its moving images and soundscapes will create experiential and emotional complexities unknown upon the printed page' (Rosenstone 2006, 159). So too, games may never reach written complexities whilst still offering things that books cannot, and these will always revolve around audience action in one way or another. Accordingly, 'there are plot types and character types that are best for the novel, others are best for oral storytelling, and yet others are best for the stage or the cinema. The question, then, is to decide which types of stories are suitable for digital media' (Ryan 2001, n.p.). Thus whether the book, film or game, 'the form derived for engaging with...[the past]...can only have the ontological status of being just another *formal* locus of appreciation, understanding, pleasure, ethical decisions, economic purchase, doubt, denial and/or acceptance' (Munslow 2010, 204). The videogame form, like film, 'doesn't do away with the old forms of history - it adds to the language in which the past can speak' (Rosenstone 2006, 6). Subsequently, we must be cautious about assigning too much importance to the videogame whilst allowing it to remain an exciting development *alongside* our other forms. Not, because it engages with the past better or worse than these forms, but because it does so differently. Subsequently we must work to determine the rules of engagement of the videogame '*with the traces of the past, rules of engagement that come out of the possibilities and practices of the medium in which they work*' (Rosenstone 2006, 159). And it is precisely the beginnings of this that this thesis has aimed to achieve.

Whilst games should not be a replacement, perhaps they do capture something that other forms have so far failed to. Hayden White has long suggested that history's relative decline in popular culture can be attributed to its failure to engage readers because of subscription to the format of 'the nineteenth-century realist novel' (Pihlainen 2008, 29). 'Where, he lamented, were the works which matched the moods of twentieth-century life and sensibility, where were the examples of, say, "surrealist, expressionist, or existentialist historiography"' (Rosenstone 2006, 3). Indeed, even 'print and motion picture stories are pushing past linear formats not out of mere playfulness but in an effort to give expression to the characteristically twentieth-century perception of life composed of parallel possibilities' (Murray 1997, 37). Whilst it is arguable whether or not these twentieth century styles are reflected in the historical work of the century there does seem to be something to the idea that the historical videogame reflects the notion of parallel possibilities and the participatory moods and structures of the twenty-first. If, as Rosenstone has argued, ''traditional history' has now run its course in terms of textual representation and...the next step is to create a new kind of history' (Munslow 2007B, 67). Then perhaps, again like film before it, the videogame form is important to the postmodernist effort to bring 'the practice of history kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century' (Rosenstone 2006, 3).

The popular videogame form does seem to be well placed to answer the call for different engagements with history that 'are needed not so much because the profession of history needs to change and perpetuate itself but because the demands of the society in which it is located (as well as the preferences of the individual consumers of academic history) reveal it to be an increasingly redundant practice in its conventional form' (Pihlainen 2008, 23). Alongside our existing forms, videogames have a role to play in such changes because of the multitude of possibilities that have been discussed, but particularly because the very form emphasizes three notions about the greatest game of all. Firstly, that the 'reality of history as a lived experience is that it is much more like a chess match than a novel, much more like football game [*sic*] than a play' (Ferguson 2012, xxvi). Secondly, because in the opening of the story space videogames emphasize the nature of history as 'a discursive practice that enables present minded people(s) to go to the past, there to delve around and reorganise it appropriately to their needs' (Jenkins 2003, 81). Consequently and finally, the videogame historical form reminds us of one of the few meaningful and unshakeable truths of the great game of history. That 'we can never really know the past, but can only continually *play with*,

reconfigure, and try to *make meaning* out of the traces it has left behind' (Rosenstone 2006, 164, my emphasis).

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