Creating Real Imaginary Worlds:
Mythopoeic Interaction and Immersion in Digital Games

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Introduction

Mythopoeia is a term that refers to the making and renewal of myths[1]. Myth is in itself a complicated concept that delicately balances concepts of truth and fiction. Myth refuses the designations of fact or lie, and instead operates beyond those terms. Rather, myths are metaphors, articulations of that which transcends the human psyche, of a type of knowledge that cannot be explained or contested. Throughout mankind's history, mythmaking, or mythopoeia, has been an important part of the legacy passed on between cultures and civilizations. The creation of narratives that are based on, or within particular mythologies, have the power to affect us and move us, in ways that non-fictional stories cannot, simply because myths are fictional truths. The impact of these kinds of stories can be gauged by examining their longevity and spread[2]. What that tells us is that the *way* something is told is perhaps even more important than *what* is told. Currently, mythopoeic digital games not only offer the possibility of reading and hearing about faraway lands and galaxies, but a chance of partaking in the sustaining and making of new myths.

This dissertation will explore and answer the question: how does the constrained nature of digital games, together with the improvised chaos of make believe, interact with, and benefit from (or become inhibited by) the further constraint of mythology? As new narrative technologies are introduced, they affect how myths are written, sustained and should be interacted with. Furthermore, with new visual media the level of detail has risen exponentially. No longer are myths carried by oral tradition, textual accounts, or even photography. The new myths come superimposed at us with photorealism – 24 photos per second, with full Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound, and with vibrating haptic game controllers for true interactive affect and immersion. Altogether, the combination of mythopoeia and narrative technology becomes a very powerful medium for interactive storytelling of which we are only beginning to grasp the full potential. In this context, what I will attempt to argue is the following:

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[1] Mythopoeia as a term is dependent on the definition of "myth" and "mythos", which is what it refers back to. Generally mythopoeia is used to designate the preserving and embellishment of a traditional story written according to a mythic pattern.

[2] Consider the indigenous beliefs of ancient Egypt from pre-dynastic times in 4th millennium BCE (Spence, 1990) or the Christian mythology of the Old Testament (Holy Bible, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

- That mythological narratives are particularly appropriate for game structures
- That the contrived structure of games is disguised by the myth
- That the inherent chaos of play is contained by the myth
- Why the affective power of myth is greater, and more immersive than non-fictional narratives
- The paradox that mythological narratives benefit from their fictionality thereby becoming more believable and real than non-fictional stories.

This necessarily involves a mapping of the tensions between mythology, narrative and gameplay and a close examination of how interaction is linked to that tension.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters, chapter one providing the general introduction. Chapter two introduces key terminology, and a brief contextual history of game studies. Chapter three focuses on the interface – in other words the modalities (experiences and expressions) that grant access to a mythology, and also subsequently inform and affect the interaction with the narrative that exists within the mythology. Because pleasure, punishment, and emotions are central parts of play, the most relevant modality for ludic[3] interaction is affect theory, which will be used to explore the relationship between the player and the act of gameplay. Chapter four maps another modality of mythology interaction – focusing on the absorption of the experienced narrative. The key question here is: what does narrative mean in relation to gameplay, and the aim of the chapter is to explore the tensions between gameplay, narrative and interaction and to show how digital game narratives are different from traditional narratives. There will also be some focus on certain key aspects of mythology interaction and attempts to show how these aspects are either enforced or subverted by the superimposition of myth upon a ludic narrative. The discussion here focuses mainly on ludic freedom and chaos in parallel with gameplay limitations and expansions. These expansions and limitations decide what you can and cannot do with the character, and how the programmers hide the trail of breadcrumbs to afford the illusion of total freedom and randomness for the player.

Another important, perhaps self-evident factor in gaming, which I address in this chapter, is pleasure. Pleasure is the reason we play games, or interact with any kind of fiction. When we hear the word "game" we might associate with words like "escapism" or "fantasy". I dare venture to say that pleasure is the driving force behind all kinds of experience-based entertainment, and subsequently it should become an important part of the answer to questions about how and why we play games. Closely linked to this experience are concepts like immersion and affect – the bringers of pleasure and what Samuel Coleridge called "willing suspension of disbelief" (1997:497). And

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[3] The act of play, sport or being in a playful state of mind (Zimmerman 2004:159).

the formula is simple: the greater the immersion, the more successful is the game. I would imagine this being a very common way of measuring quality in gaming. In other words, it should be possible to gauge the gaming experience (or even the mythic experience) by measuring the level of immersion. Level of immersion, in turn, is directly linked to affect, thereby putting affect at the very core of the gaming experience. These linked terms come together in the last sections of this dissertation, particularly when examining how games manipulate and present the passing of time using sound and image. By picking apart and analyzing selected game texts and apply theory, I will present a structured model of interaction for the mythopoeic gaming experience with particular emphasis on affect and immersion. To accomplish this, the first important thing to do is establish key terminology.

Chapter 1: Establishing a Framework

The way we tell imagined stories amongst ourselves, and engage in the creation and preservation of myths, is crucial to our psychological development. Digital games serve as springboards into artificial worlds, where these imagined stories are maintained and expanded. Mythic narratives have the power to rise above their medium, become "remediated" (Bolter & Grusin 2000:5), i.e. simulated, translated and adapted to other forms of media and subsequently, to take on a life outside of their originating medium, their artificial universes sustaining, expanding and growing in detail. In these cases the fictional world of the games exist beyond the game – has become more than the game. The mythic world has been given its own story to tell, its own meta-narrative, framing and facilitating the game. Digital games such as Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth (2005) and World of Warcraft (2004) are pushing the borders of digital, narrative experiences, because of how they combine digital interaction with traditional notions of play and elaborate mythological interaction. In other words, these games involve the activity of visual mythopoeic storytelling facilitated through the activity of play.

Towards a working definition of "game" and "play"

The advantages of using the term "digital games" are advocated in The Business and Culture of Digital Games: Gamework and Gameplay (2006). Rather than separating computer games from video games, a separation which quickly becomes problematic, it was decided at the DiGRA 2003 conference that the term "digital games" would be useful to designate the entire field with its arcade, computer, console and mobile games in all their diversity (Kerr 2006:3). To avoid confusion, I will use the recommended term "digital game" to reference all forms of games technologies.

Terms such as "game" and "play" are deceptively simple and commonplace. In order to fully understand the utility of these words it is necessary to establish working definitions early on. For a definition to be useful in the context of digital games, it is especially important that it recognizes the diversity of the medium. A particularly effective approach comes from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Philosophical Investigations (1953), where he defined "game" as an elusive term that cannot be defined using only one definition. He argued that several uses of "game" share "family resemblances", and that a singular definition only applies to a narrowly circumscribed region rather than the whole concept (Wittgenstein 2001:32). Wittgenstein puts his finger on something very important when discussing mythopoeic digital games. Though they are all gathered in the same

category, they can be very different, and offer very different experiences, even when within digital games.

Marie-Laure Ryan, a researcher in the field of digital narrative and interactivity, expands in Narrative as Virtual Reality (2001) on Wittgenstein's notion of what it means to play games:

> One feature that comes to mind as a necessary condition is the pleasure dimension: games are freely played, and played for their own sake. If we focus on institutionalized games, as opposed to free play – a distinction is made in English by the contrast game/play but expressed in neither French *jeu/jouer* or the German *spiel/spielen* – we can add a second basic feature: games are constituted by rules, and these rules [...] are absolutely binding. (2001:177-178)

Ryan is perhaps making an obvious point, but nonetheless a very important one that needs unpacking: that games are more than rules and organization – they are also supposed to be fun and engaging. To break it down, we may then argue that the purpose of gaming is emotive and affective, because its core purpose is to stimulate the player in a positive way. It becomes a break from reality, and everyday routine, and a way of escaping into fantasy and imagination. The interesting paradox that Ryan is pinpointing is the paradox between rules and play, and that the game is given its purpose through the constraint of rules. Rules are always there, even the statement "there are no rules" is a rule. Through the learning and following of rules pleasure is achieved through a sense of accomplishment.

According to game designer and academic Eric Zimmerman, "play" can be divided into three categories: formal gameplay, informal ludic activities and finally the act of being playful, or in a playful state of mind (2004:159). A general definition that applies to all these three states is, according to Zimmerman a "free space of movement within a more rigid structure". He elaborates further by stating that "play exists both because of and also despite the more rigid structures of the system" (2004:159).

Game designer Ed Byrne defines play in the context of digital games in his book Game Level Design as: "[m]uch in the way that even through building a game level shares many common elements with building a movie set or describing a location in a book, what sets it apart is interactivity – the player has the opportunity to choose and alter the flow of events to his desires. That's the 'play' in gameplay" (2004:7). The identified key aspect by Byrne is the player's ability to affect the outcome of the game, and this is one important factor that sets the game narrative apart from a traditional narrative. Whereas the game needs an interaction, for example the roll of a die, to determine an outcome and how to progress, the traditional story simply progresses through diegesis.

The difference then, is that the game, once the die has been cast, *results in* a narrative rather than *is* narrative. This is an important difference between storytelling and gameplay.

Game and digital media theorist Craig A. Lindley argues in his article "Ludic Engagement and Immersion as a Generic Paradigm for Human-Computer Interaction Design", that digital games encompass a wide range of productions, though they are all called games. He argues for the necessity of a narrow definition of game "that can be associated with different modes of engagement and immersion from those of other formal ludic semiotic subsystems" (2004:5). Hence, Lindley defines game as "a goal-directed and competitive activity conducted within a framework of agreed rules" (2004:5), and calls this the *ludic* or *ludological* definition of game. Being goal oriented means to engage in the activity in order to reach some final state where there is a reward or measure of progress indicated. Competition may be between real or simulated players. The rules do not require learning, but rather obeying, which is implicitly or explicitly agreed upon by the player.

For our intents and purposes, "play" can therefore be defined as a voluntary, pleasurable activity that is subordinate to a finite set of pre-determined rules. The activity furthermore requires some degree of performance or role-playing, which can be referred to as existing in a playful state of mind. Furthermore, the activity can be either solitary or carried out in a group, in either case, the rewards and motivations remain the same – a sense of pleasure aroused by a feeling of accomplishment measured against the objective of the game. "Game", is a derivative term, which can be defined as the pre-determined rules that govern the act of play. For our purposes, there is no need for a more specific definition than that, and the term then accounts for the "family resemblances" mentioned by Wittgenstein.

With these definitions ready at hand we can use them as tools for interaction. I propose considering play as an activity, a concept, and a language. Play is the language of interaction, and of decoding our surroundings. In other words, the imaginative, yet regulated act of play informs how we may interact with numerous things in everyday life. Going to a formal dinner party is a voluntary, pleasurable activity that is subordinate to a finite set of pre-determined rules, and an activity that involves plenty of role-playing. Therefore, going to a dinner party is an act of play, and knowing how to socialize can be considered learning (decoding) the game. Play is sensing the environment, and adapting to moods and surroundings – reading the room. It is therefore an act of semiosis, an act of reading signs and decoding signifiers, which in itself is a game of interpretation, decision, exploration and navigation. Therefore, knowledge, exploration and play are inextricably linked to one another. These three closely linked concepts should give us a model for approaching mythopoeic gaming.

Towards a working definition of "mythology" and "myth"

Mythology is a collection of myths existing within a particular cultural context such as a belief system or a religion. A myth is a fictional narrative, or fable that has some basis in reality, and that embodies the dreams, hopes, fears, and ambitions of a certain civilization at a certain time in history. It is the story of the order of things, how things came to be, and has been called meta-narrative by French theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard (1991:xxiv). As the prefix "meta" suggests, it goes beyond narrative – articulating something of a higher order. What that means is that "the meta-narrative organizes language games, and determines the success or failure of each statement […] that take place within them" (Malpas 2002:24). The myth – or meta-narrative therefore operates under a certain set of rules, which determine what is valid and what is invalid within the context of the mythology.

This very broad and vague definition is a necessary starting point for considering other theorists. As myth can be seen as an explanation of the world, it has been at odds with modern science through several theorists, who have seen myth as an irreconcilable primitive science, or as a reconcilable modern science. "Because moderns by definition accept science, they cannot have myth, and the phrase 'modern myth' is self-contradictory" (Segal 2004:13). Then, as a primitive science, myth is connected to religion rather than science itself. Examples of critics that place myth under religion, and therefore as a precursor to science, rather than as science in its own right are Edward B. Tylor (1958) and James G. Frazer (1922). A predicament with this view is that it does not seem to account for the fact that myth has survived in the wake of science.

Another problem with both Frazer and Tylor is viewing myth by its denotation rather than its connotation. Emerging from this debate is Joseph Campbell, who approaches myth in relation to psychology in The Hero With a Thousand Faces (1949). What makes Campbell particularly insightful is his Jungian approach to myth. Campbell arranges his mythic characters in archetypes, as inspired by Jung, representing the building blocks of the unconscious. Campbell believed that these archetypes could not only represent aspects of the single unconscious mind, but also of the collective unconscious in that everyone shares the same basic idea of what a hero or a quest is, thereby making it possible for people that do not speak the same language to enjoy the same stories. During his career, Campbell explored the myths of several religions, and importantly summed up his ventures by stating that "every religion is true […] when understood metaphorically" (Campbell & Moyers 1988:56). Campbell's approach is therefore one of myth as archetypical and universal metaphor.

In The Hero With a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell describes myth as the "secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation"

(1993:3) In <u>Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor</u>, Campbell describes the first function of myth as "reconciling consciousness to the preconditions of its own existence –that is, of aligning waking consciousness to the *mysterium tremendum* of this universe, as it is" (2001:2). The "great mystery" of the universe, or of the world, that Campbell refers to, and the sense of awe and curiosity it attracts, is an important theme of the mythic narrative, and subsequently of the mythic game. Yet another important aspect of myth is its capability to maintain authority over the "fiction" it perpetuates. In the introduction to <u>American Foundational Myths</u>, editors Martin Heusser and Gudrun Grabher defines myth as follows:

> To refer to a given statement as myth is an act, which, once it has been accepted by society, imbues that statement with extraordinary qualities. Most importantly, it becomes authoritative – not only in the sense that it defines itself by its own mode of being […] but also because it cannot and must not be challenged in terms of truth. (2002:9)

What Heusser and Grabher are arguing here is that myth operates through presence rather than in terms of truth or falsity. Its presence renders any discussion regarding its validity moot. Indeed they state that "as a basically non-discursive form, myth refuses explanation because it is itself an explanation. It is the unquestioned first link in the chain, the beginning, *arche*, *origo* – and thus, paradoxically enough, the supreme Derridean *logos*" (2002:10). And, indeed as Marie-Laure Ryan argues in <u>Narrative as Virtual Reality</u>, that "in a fictional universe, objective reality corresponds to fictional truths, and fictional truths are established by textual authority. This authority means that fictional truths are unassailable, whereas the facts of the actually actual world can always be questioned" (sic) (2001:104).

Based on these theorists we can agree that "myth" constitutes knowledge – an obscure, unassailable, authoritative and fictional truth – a metaphor – that necessitates decoding. It also draws attention to the great mystery of the universe, and incites a desire to unravel that mystery. In other words, a function of myth is to articulate that which cannot be understood, in this case answer the questions: why are we here, and what is the meaning of the world?

When the myth is decoded through the act of play, it becomes directly linked to narrative immersion. Myth's relationship to narrative is that of an embedded narrative existing in an overarching (framing) narrative and the myth is parallel, superimposed and authoritative, without being a digression. Taken together with exploration and play, the knowledge representing myth provides the third link in what I choose to call the semiotic chain of interaction, which is made up of knowledge, exploration and play, and completes the model of interaction for mythopoeic narratives. The acquisition of knowledge can only come through exploration, and exploration, in

turn, is inevitable during mythopoeic play. Therefore, interaction with a mythopoeic narrative will always contain the semiotic chain of play, exploration, and knowledge (see fig. 1).

INTERACTION

| PLAY |
| EXPLORATION |
| KNOWLEDGE |
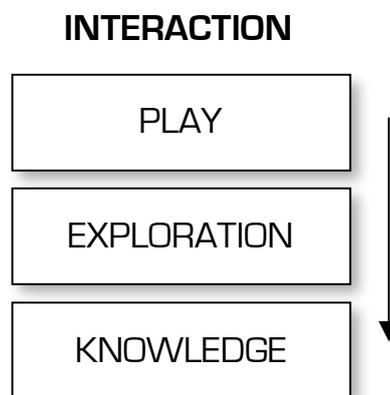
Fig. 1. The semiotic chain of mythopoeic interaction

As a model for interaction, it should prove useful for examining the mythopoeic digital games. Moving on from definitions of myth and games, to understand the context in which digital games exist, a brief historical context of the academic field, and its current state is appropriate. I see two reasons for this: one, to give a contextual background to the digital game as a media object and to disassemble and show how a game narrative is different from a traditional narrative, particularly in relation to terms like immersion and affect. Second, to show how the field has developed, and what the main discussions thus far have been.

The Emergence of Game Studies and The Narrativists vs. Ludologists Debate

The new academic field of game studies has, since its conception around the turn of the new millennium, witnessed an intensive academic debate between two theoretical groups "ludologists" and "narratologists". According to Gonzalo Frasca, the term "narratology" was invented to signify "those scholars from [various] disciplines preoccupied with the narrative aspect of gaming", and "ludology" to signify the "as of yet non-existent discipline that studies game and play activities" (Frasca 1999:2). The debate between narrativists and ludologists began in July 2001 with the first issue of Game Studies – the first academic, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to digital game studies. Much of the debate concerns how to suitably approach digital games research, and how to best position this within the broader spectrum of new media. Digital games have been available since the 1970s and can hardly be categorized as "new", but arguably, recent scholarly attention has brought about something of a revisiting of the medium – which makes it new in academic terms. Since digital games share certain traits with cinema and literature, games have in the past predominantly

been researched by humanities. In an attempt to turn this untilled academic field to a different approach, Frasca is careful to point out in <u>Ludology Meets Narratology: Similitude and Difference in (Video)Games and Narrative</u>, that the purpose of game studies as a separate discipline "is not to replace the narratologic approach, but to complement it" (1999:1). For many scholars, certainly those who identify a deficiency in existing formal methods for strictly ludic research, Frasca's is a welcome addition to the study of digital games.

Frasca points to several ways in which the ludic elements of games cause them to differ from established notions of narrative. For example, one might say that a game consists of one "winning" path and several "losing" paths. The winning path would be the "plot", and Frasca refers to Claude Bremond's agency scheme[4], according to which the game would form a narrative, but Frasca disagrees with this definition. Frasca argues that "Bremond's scheme does not represent narrative itself, but the possible narratives made available to the author when […] crafting the story" (1999:7). Frasca argues that there will not be a narrative until the author decides which possible path to take, thus generating a "sequence". Even though there are structural similarities between the "narrative sequence" and the "gaming session", these are not the same thing according to Frasca, because the session is a successive result of gaming, not something that can be applied to the act of gaming itself. Producing narrative and being narrative is not the same thing (1999:8).

In the seminal <u>Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace</u> (1997), Janet Murray maps the literary and artistic capacities needed in a computer to write and create procedurally and to anticipate the actions of the interactor, in order to deliver the rich characteristics of a digital environment. In opposition to Frasca's thesis, Murray awaits the coming of what she calls a "cyberbard", and argues that "[o]nly when these disparate efforts […] converge will the medium come into its own as an expressive art form. It seems quite possible […] that a future digital Homer will arise [combining] literary ambition, a connection with a wide audience, and computational expertise" (Murray 1997:213). Murray concludes that the full bloom of the computer as a storytelling medium is yet to come and that it is mainly a question of available technology.

In the light of Frasca's initial proposal for a "game studies" discipline, Jesper Juul rhetorically asks in his article entitled "Games telling stories: A brief note on games and narratives" whether games tell stories, and proceeds to argue that "answering this should tell us both how to study games and who should study them. The affirmative answer suggests that games are easily studied from within existing paradigms. The negative implies that we must start afresh" (2001:1). The implicit question here, regarding who might research digital games has often been interpreted as a binary opposition: either game research belongs to the humanities as in the past, or it belongs to

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[4] Bremond, Claude. <u>Logic du Recit</u>. [The Logic of Narrative] Editions du Seuil: Paris, 1973.

ludic game studies. The deciding factor seems to be the presence of narrative. In his conclusion, Juul offers a middle ground in saying that games and narratives are not completely distinct from each other, because games sometimes make use of narratives (2001:2). Even if narrative itself is not part of the active gaming experience it is part of the packaged experience. Juul continues by affirming that most games do share several traits with narratives and that digital games can both come out of, and in turn generate narratives.

There is a problematic dichotomy at play here. What needs to be carefully addressed when discussing the connection between games and narratives is the entanglement of narrative and gameplay. To be truly constructive, the debate should not concern itself with dissecting how or if they are entangled, but rather embrace the entanglement as one concept. There are ways of structurally analyzing narrative, and ways of approaching the structure of gameplay, but these two by themselves will never realize the full potential of the medium of digital games. A holistic approach must be agreed upon that factors in that narrative and gameplay together create something else entirely. Ludologists favour abstract games like Tetris (1984), because they are appropriate for their approach. Narrativists naturally choose games with strong narrative components, because they closely resemble cinema or literature. Two approaches that view games in a very specific light. Digital games cannot be analyzed in great sweeping strokes as one medium, they must be regarded as a spectrum where the games on each end share very few similarities, save some degree of interactivity (see appendix 1). A game like Tetris has very little in common with a game like The Dark Eye (1995). Though these games coexist, and are both digital games, they should not be forced to share commonalities. We return to Wittgenstein's definition of game as a group of objects that share "family resemblances", and under the circumstances this seems to be the most nuanced approach for games studies to take, and should award the most interesting research results.

An example of what happens when equating Tetris – or perhaps a game of tennis, with a game like The Dark Eye, is shown in an article featured in Game Studies first issue, "The Gaming Situation" by Markku Eskelinen:

> Outside academic theory people are usually excellent at making distinctions between narrative, drama and games. If I throw a ball at you I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories. On the other hand, if and when games and especially computer games are studied and theorized they are almost without exception colonized from the fields of literary, theatre, drama and film studies. (2001:1)

Tetris requires reflexes, and mathematical thinking. The Dark Eye requires some familiarity with the works of Edgar Allan Poe, patience and a taste for the dramatic and slightly hallucinatory. Simply put, The Dark Eye throws a ball and expects the player to catch it, stop and ponder its

importance, its connotation and how it can shed some light on where the player is, and who he is. In other words, Eskelinen's approach is too narrow and willing to disregard. He is right in saying that the fields of literary, theatre, drama and film studies are inadequate, but that does not mean his proposition is not.

Eskelinen's narrativist "colonization" is an argument that has subsequently been carried on by several theorists. The study of digital games is virgin soil, its untapped research potential there for the taking. Proposed by Eskelinen is a more formalist approach to games. He argues that digital games engage in a "configurational practice" rather than the interpretive practice associated with narrative. He concludes his arguments by claiming:

> [G]ame components, their dynamic combination and distribution, the registers, the necessary manipulation of temporal, causal, spatial and functional relations and properties not to mention the rules and the goals and the lack of audience should suffice to set games […] apart from narrative and drama, and to annihilate for good the discussion of games as stories, narratives or cinema. (Eskelinen 2001:9)

Marie-Laure Ryan, presents a more careful argument for a different approach in her article entitled "Beyond Myth and Metaphor: The Case of Narrative in Digital Media", and argues that "whereas hypertext and virtual environments implement respectively diegetic and mimetic narrativity, the two traditional literary modes defined by Plato, the case of computer games is more problematic" (2001:14). She continues to argue that simply translating analytical models from existing media such as cinema and literature fails to recognize some of the unique qualities of games and is in danger of being reduced to simply something cinematic or literary. She states that "[n]arrativity performs an instrumental rather than a strictly aesthetic function: once the player is immersed in the game, the narrative theme may be backgrounded or temporarily forgotten" (Ryan 2001:14). And of course this entails another problem. Abstract games such as Tetris (1984) cannot hope to afford the same gaming experience as Grim Fandango (1998) or The Dark Eye (1995), which means that if only one analytical model is employed, it will be insufficient. Ryan furthermore states that

> [t]he inability of literary narratology to account for the experience of games does not mean that we should throw away the concept of narrative in ludology; it rather means that we need to expand the catalogue of narrative modalities beyond the diegetic and the dramatic, by adding a phenomenological category tailor-made for games (2001:14).

As Ryan and Juul both suggest, either extreme approach is inadequate to fully appreciate the potential of the study of games as an academic field. There are recognizable intersections that must be accounted for and for that new approaches need to be developed. Julian Kücklich argues that

games are narrative because "[p]laying a game, like reading a novel, can be regarded as a form of semiosis, an interaction of signs" (2003:1).

Interestingly, the narrative versus ludology debate was the topic of Janet Murray's preface to a keynote talk at DiGRA 2005 in Vancouver, Canada. Obviously meant as an attempt to put an end to what she regards a non-existing argument created by the "formalist" "game essentialist" ludologists themselves:

> It is time to reframe the conversation. [G]ames are not a subset of stories; objects exist that have qualities of both games and stories. […] It is time to recognize the difference between the useful formalist methodology and the distractingly prescriptive ideology of game essentialism (2005:1).

There is clearly a basis for a common ground despite the somewhat territorial tone of the debate. Games have to, and should be, studied, as suggested by Frasca, Juul and Eskelinen, but perhaps a third area needs to be recognized. Ludic and narrative needs to be treated separately, and there might also be an intersecting area that works interdisciplinary and draws upon both ludic aspects and storytelling aspects. Anything else would be insufficient, and underestimate the potential of a diverse and interdisciplinary field. The definition of "game" should be reworked and expanded upon, to include those narrative components that are so contested. Computers and other digital media reinvent themselves all the time, and with the emergence of new narrative technologies, the need for new definitions seems more urgent than ever.

To conclude chapter one, we have now been equipped with thorough definitions of "game" and "myth" and developed a model for the mechanism of mythic interaction. Furthermore, we have an understanding of the beginnings of the field of game studies and its most prominent scholars. Important to conclude here is the diversity of the medium "digital game", and the danger of making sweeping statements about digital games as a whole. Some will be inherently narrative, and some will not. Any analytical model will likely be appropriate for Wittgenstein's "narrowly circumscribed region", rather than the medium as a whole. Another important comment is the production of narrative as opposed to being narrative as voiced by Frasca (1999). Clearly there is a distinction here between traditional narration and game narration.

In the next chapter, I will show how myth informs the actual act of gameplay. Particularly, the semiotic chain of interaction will be expanded with the greater context of affect and immersion, as a conduit to myth, or as a way of talking and interacting with myth. One word comes to mind from the world of computer technology, to describe this particular function of myth, and that is "gateway". As the gateway (linguistically) connects different computer systems with each other in a network, acting as translator, diplomat and enforcer, similarly does myth provide a universal

setting, purpose and constraints for the game narrative. I will further show how myth imbues the game narrative with realism to the point where clear distinctions between reality and fiction either disappear or become meaningless. In this context I see myth as a gateway to immersion and affect.

Chapter 2: Point of entry into myth: Deconstructing the interface

Mythology as interface for immersion

A myth imposes boundaries and rules on the world in which games and play take place. These boundaries and rules not only limit, but also enhance the experience, and feed into the imagination of the player. The myth must therefore not be seen merely as a narrative framework, but as a spatial and temporal realm of regulated make-believe, where stories are enacted, told and understood. When engaging with a fictional text that is based in a larger mythology, one underlying objective for the player automatically becomes the decoding of the myth itself. As the protagonists evolve through character arcs, the myth gradually reveals itself. In what manner the myth is decoded, is governed by the ability, and potential of the player's character. Player experience is subsequently measured by how well the player knows the mythology, and how accustomed to, or "streetwise" he or she is, in the game-world. Victor Nell theorizes the pleasure of reading literature in Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure (1990), and argues that immersion and pleasure exists independently of dramatic craftsmanship and quality of prose. He argues that "in terms of attention theory […] the ludic reader's absorption may seem as an extreme case of subjectively effortless arousal which owes its effortlessness to the automatized nature of the skilled reader's decoding activity" (Nell 1990:77). In other words, the decoding and transition between the real world and the fictional world, should be as effortless as possible, to maximize immersion and pleasure. Immersion is a narrative term defined by Janet Murray in Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace as the "sensation of being completely surrounded by another other reality that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus" (1997:98). One way to measure levels of immersion is in terms of proprioceptive (sense of the body and its movements), exteroceptive (external stimuli) and interoceptive (internal stimuli) responses to the text. Marie-Laure Ryan argues in Narrative as Virtual Reality that a book that is difficult to read and difficult to decode, not only demands conscious concentration, but also proves difficult for the reader to immerse in, making the reader easily distracted by external elements. A book that is easier to read offers deeper, and more pleasurable immersion (Ryan 2001:98). The key element seems to be one of comprehension. If a text is easily decoded, i.e. understood, it promises deep and pleasurable experiences and the capacity to carry the reader off to the storytelling realm.

With this claim fresh in our minds, let us change the application of Nell's narrative theory from literary texts, to the concept of mythopoeia. If the same mechanics could apply for myth, as for any literary text, then immersion depends on a successful decoding of the myth, regardless of

the medium, or the narrative it encloses. Since myth frames and superimposes itself on the story, one might argue that only someone who can effortlessly decode all aspects of the mythology in which the narrative exists, can claim to fully comprehend all facets of the narrative itself. Thus, the myth acts as a catalyst for the narrative's potential for immersion pre-packaged with the exploration quest as part of the "hero's adventure" (fig. 2). Mythopoeic fiction lends itself particularly well to digital games because of the exploratory, and thematic nature of games. Of course, there are many types of digital games, and it would be a mistake to attempt general statements about digital games as such. These theories would not apply to traditional, ludic sports simulation games, or abstract puzzle games like Tetris (Mirrorsoft, 1984). It should be noted though, that some abstract games do incorporate myth, such as Arkanoid – Revenge of Doh (1988), and even mythological sports games exist, one example being the science-fiction sports game Speedball (1988). These exceptions aside, more interesting are established digital game genres such as "adventure", "survival horror", "first person shooter", "stealth" and "role-playing".
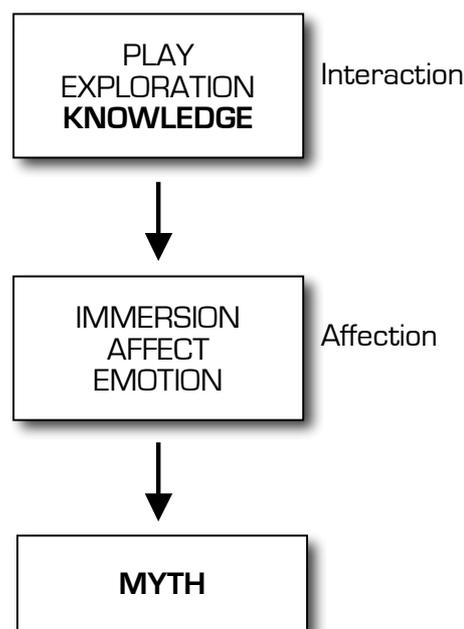

Fig. 2. The relationship between immersion and myth

These genres all have exploratory plots that are based in their respective mythologies. Simply put, making the protagonist go from point A to point B is by definition an act of exploration, and of suspense, with some kind of reward in the end[5]. In Game Level Design, Ed Byrne states that: "[v]ery commonly, a game's levels are set up in a narrative fashion, telling a story within a story. The player character enters the level, explores his surroundings, encountering increasing challenges

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[5] The hugely popular on-line fantasy role-playing game World of Warcraft whose first expansion set, according to a March 2007 press release sold approximately 2.4 million copies within 24 hours following its mid-January 2007 release, is a game dedicated to the exploration of an on-line mythological world inspired by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

and dangers along the way, until the end is reached" (2004:11). Furthermore, the act of mythological exploration, including the game-world itself and the plot, serves to disguise the unavoidably contrived nature of digital games. The mythology limits where necessary and enhances where possible.

One example where the mythology acts as enhancer is the use of bird-like creatures known as "Gryphons" for travelling long distances in the mythological game-world of Azeroth, <u>World of Warcraft</u> (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). This invention and dramaturgical device no doubt saves time, keeps the pacing of the story, and showcases the world, which remains visible throughout the trip. It is possible from the back of a Gryphon, to peer deep into the unexplored realms of dark and evil forces, where one would not dare to tread, not unlike a tourist safari, passing through dangerous places between destinations. The species of Gryphons that inhabit Azeroth has been created and utilized for the practical purpose of enhancing game play by showing the vastness of the mythological world to the player.

This "management" if you like, of the game-world, affords what Roland Barthes calls "the reality effect" which refers to the presence of apparently insignificant and "incongruous" detail in a narrative, that authenticate the fiction (1989:142). Marie-Laure Ryan adds in <u>Narrative as Virtual Reality</u> that "[t]he [portrayal of] seemingly random detail conveys the reader's sense of the presence of the setting and facilitates spatial immersion. The reader's sense of being there is independent of the verisimilitude of the textual world" (2001:130). In general terms, mythopoeic fiction provides a contextual reality that transcends the narrative, and the everyday details of the myth makes the narrative realistic or plausible – giving us the paradox of fiction, or perhaps in this instance, the paradox of myth. Our relationship with fiction and reality instantly becomes a complex one, especially when the constraints of the medium are well disguised. When executed well, it awards a narrative flow easy for the player to decode. Ryan furthermore states on the importance of balance between fiction and reality: "The ocean is an environment in which we cannot breathe; to survive immersion, we must take oxygen from the surface, stay in touch with reality" (2001:97). Ryan further correlates this statement by quoting psychologist J.R. Hilgard, who describes the condition as "dreaming when you know you are dreaming" (Ryan 2001:97). According to Nell, in further explaining this uses the example of watching a movie in which a monster enters a cave and traps a group of children: "I'm not one of them but I'm trapped with them, and I can feel the fright they feel" (1988:212). When a game becomes so intensively immersive as to create a physical response in the player, gameplay has entered into the realm of affect theory, which brings us to the next level of interfacing in our model of immersion and mythology.

The game world and the structure of mythology

When discussing myth in relation to games, it is necessary to clearly distinguish myth from "game-world". The game-world is the described geographical and structural place where gameplay takes place. In <u>Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth</u>, the game world is Innsmouth with its inhabitants, the buildings, and even the history of the town itself. The game-world is subordinate to mythology, and on equal footing with narrative. It acquires its knowledge from mythology in the same way narrative does. According to Bateman and Boon, the practice of game world abstraction is the "core of the game designer's work during the early parts of the design process, and [...] an important factor in any changes to the design during development" (2006:149). They further define game world abstraction as "stat[ing] the rules of the world the game is set in: the nature of the game world, the players' potential interactions with that world, and the manner in which that world is represented" (2006:149). The keyword here is abstraction and representation. Even with the most advanced digital games, the fictional world cannot possibly contain the same level of detail as the real world. Therefore the game world will always be an abstraction of the real, a representation of the real. The fantasy game, which might bear little or no resemblance to the real world, exists in a universe of simulation for which there is no real basis. French postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard called this the "hyperreal" (2001:169). The game world can therefore be seen as a secondary depiction, a distilled adaptation of a mythology that is designed to contain and support the narrative. To recognize the function of the game-world, a contextual historical account is appropriate.

Early games used single-screen environments to host play, such as <u>Space Invaders</u> (1978) or <u>Asteroids</u> (1979). Meanwhile, text-based adventures like <u>Zork</u> (1980) provided large, though abstract, text-based worlds in which gameplay took place. Salen and Zimmerman talk about "narrative descriptors" and describe them as "representations [and] depictions of one or more aspects or the game world" (2004:399). These descriptors can come from a wide range of sources, including the box, the manual, the soundtrack and the game itself. Anything that embellishes the narrative setting and tells us what the game world looks like is a narrative descriptor. Salen and Zimmerman go on to argue that it might seem as if fictive worlds and story events mirror the concepts of embedded and emergent narrative structures, and propose that "they are not parallel concepts" (2004:402). In other words, the embedded/emergent distinction identifies how narrative elements are organized in the formal structure of a game by determining if a narrative element is pre-generated or emerge from play. Fictive worlds and story events reference game narrative in a very different way, on the level of a player's imaginative engagement with the game story. "Both embedded and emergent elements can play a part in defining a game's fictive world or its story events" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004:402). What Salen and Zimmerman are arguing is that the

overarching narrative experience transcends the naked gaming experience, making it a part of it, rather than the sum of it all. My point is that most games bleed into other artistic realms making it a conglomerated media object, and that the whole encounter has to be taken into account.

With the concept of the game world, we come back to mythology as a concept superimposed over the gameplay and the story. Here, mythology is an idea, a framework and supplier of narrative material that ensures rich immersion for the player. The game narrative will be as immersive as the depiction of the mythology is successful. The debate concerning the tensions between myth, religion and science has taken up a significant part of the theorizing around myth. An important question asked by Robert A. Segal is how to bring myth back to the external world without facilely dismissing the authority of science (Segal 2004:138). As a way of approaching this question he proposes to use Playing and Reality by psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. In this text, Winnicott recognizes the world of make-believe as other than reality. Children who engage in play, acknowledge that play is a different state of mind than that of the real world. He furthermore describes the act of play as a transitional state that somewhat resembles Laure-Ryans theory of immersion as fiction with a toehold in reality, or the awareness of dreaming:

> It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion etc). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is "lost in play". (Winnicott 2006:18)

The liminal state discussed by Winnicott is what enables a child to transition into an adult, and furthermore, as an adult cope with the complexities and strain of everyday life. In other words, it provides a transition from the inner world of fantasy to outer reality, and from the known outer world to the unknown.

A similar state is illustrated when Campbell describes the overarching structure of "the monomyth" as "the adventure of the hero" and gives it three stages: departure, initiation and return (1993:ix). Campbell's hero marches into a strange and new world separated from the everyday world, where he encounters strange lands and strange forces: "[D]estiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society into a zone unknown" (Campell 1993:58). For Campbell, the hero's adventure can be summed up as follows:

A blunder or chance reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces he does not comprehend, in the "call to adventure" by what he calls "the herald" (Campbell 1993:51). If the call is answered, the first encounter is with a protective figure (1993:69). The hero goes forward until he reaches "the threshold guardian" (1993:77). The hero is

swallowed into the unknown and appears to have died (1993:90). Once passed the threshold, the hero advances to the stage of initiation. Here, the hero must face a succession of trials, secretly helped by the advice and agents of the supernatural helper (1993:97). Then the hero meets the mother-like figure of the goddess, who is the paragon of […] beauty, the reply to all desire, the bliss-bestowing goal of every hero's earthly and unearthly quest" (1993:110). They marry, and subsequently the hero becomes master of his domain. Also there is the father figure in the shape of an "ogre" that he fights and sometimes even kills. The hero wants to be one with the female goddess and seeks atonement with the male god. The hero moves to the phase of "return", and when the quest has been accomplished "through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy" (1993:193). Finally the hero comes back to everyday life and discovers that the two worlds are actually one and the same: "The two worlds, the divine and the human can be pictured only as distinct from each other – different as life and death. […] Nevertheless […] the two kingdoms are actually one" (1993:217).

The relationship between reality and make-belief is similar to that of divine and human or myth and reality. The act of play is structured in a similar way to that of the monomyth. As we suspend disbelief, and willingly enter into a state of fantasy and imagination, we make a similar journey to that of Campbell's hero.

To summarize, and to come back to how myth is a particularly effective tool for narrative immersion, we can argue that by engaging with mythology we become part of it ourselves, we become myth. This is the power of mythology and the reason why it has survived the age of science. This also shows why the structure of myth is appropriate for digital games and their exploratory nature. Mythopoeic digital games put the player in the transitory state of make-belief, instantly transforming the player into Campbell's hero, and firmly into the structure and content of mythology. The structure of myth in its similarities to our game of make-belief becomes universal, and therefore appropriate and effective when used together with any narrative technology.

The affective power of mythopoeic digital games

Digital games are particularly powerful mediums in the hands of myth, because of their capabilities for cinema quality audio-vision, and their ability to technologically induce and aesthetically project haptic sensations. The myth comes alive in full ludic interactivity and photographic detail, 24 images per second with added 5.1 surround sound, making the medium much more forceful, visceral and "real" than cinema. Advanced "game controllers" with vibration

blur the borders between the real world and the world of make-believe to the point where the body believes it to be real, and the mind is not far behind to agree. French theorist Henri Bergson stated in Matter and Memory (1911) that there can be no perception without affection (1911:21). He also states that affect is a matter of perceived difference, and that affect exists in that part of space where our bodies and external images mix, and that affect can only be measured by subtracting the image of the body from its surroundings. On the relationship between perception and affection, Bergson argues that "[t]he truth is that affection is not the primary matter of which perception is made; it is rather the impurity with which perception is alloyed" (1911:21). Brian Massumi, in The Autonomy of Affect (1995), contests postmodern theorist Frederic Jameson who famously stated that we all live in a postmodern era where belief and affect has waned (2001:557). Massumi claims that, though belief may have waned, affect has, on the contrary, surfeited (1995:88). In the spirit of Massumi's prediction, a year later in 1996, the company Immersion released the first joystick for the PC market equipped with what is called "force feedback". This is a technology that allows for the sense of touch to enter gaming. This sensation is sometimes referred to as "haptic", particularly in relation to the perception and manipulation of objects using the sense of touch. "Haptic interfaces convey important sensorial information that helps users achieve tactile identification of virtual objects" (Burdea and Coiffet 2003:92). Burdea and Coffet argue in Virtual Reality Technology (2003) that technical literature often intermix touch and force feedback, and clarifies the two by defining touch feedback as the sense of surface, "roughness, slippage and temperature" without resistance, meaning that the user can move through objects. Force feedback is "surface compliance, weight and inertia. It actively resists the users contact motion and can stop it" (Burdea and Coffet 2003:93).

With the advent of industry-influential survival-horror games like Resident Evil (1996) and Silent Hill (1999), the gaming industry has transcended the traditional visual and aural feedback, and expanded to include force feedback. With haptic gaming, not only do you actually get to pull the trigger, your hands will recoil and vibrate to emphasize certain elements of gameplay. To illustrate this point, we will acquaint ourselves with the first-person survival horror game Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth (2005) for the purpose of for a moment becoming Jack Walters, and explore the town of Innsmouth, Massachusetts.

Based loosely on the novella The Shadow over Innsmouth (1936) by H.P. Lovecraft, Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth, has its mythological setting firmly rooted in Lovecraft's "Cthulhu mythos". Allegedly, Lovecraft at some point offered this definition to his mythos[6]:

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[6] The authenticity of this quote, and whether or not it originated with Lovecraft himself, has been the subject of some debate, and is ironically dispelled as "myth" by David E. Schultz on the official website of H.P. Lovecraft – "The H.P. Lovecraft Archive" <http://www.hplovecraft.com>

> All my stories, unconnected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practising black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on the outside, ever ready to take possession of this earth again. (Joshi 246:2001)

Over the course of his life, Lovecraft wrote several short stories that expanded and detailed his mythology, and among those stories, <u>The Shadow Over Innsmouth</u> is one of the more famous. The original novella, tells its story through a first-person testimony, by an unnamed narrator, who out of curiosity visits the old, and half-deserted seaport town of Innsmouth, Massachusetts. He finds, after having to spend the night in a local hotel, that the inhabitants are neither benign nor completely human. Soon it becomes apparent that he has stumbled upon a town that worships the terrible fish-god Dagon, and that the curious looking inhabitants are all hybrids or descendants of an ancient, unknown race of demonic, amphibian creatures. True to Lovecraftian style, the narrator, after researching the town's history, discovers in horror that he shares bloodline with some of the townsfolk. In the story's epilogue, the narrator fearfully transforms in mind and body into one of "them", beckoned by the sea and the underworld, to return to Innsmouth.

This narrative occupies a distinct portion of the mythology, expanding on certain parts, particularly by introducing the fictional town of Innsmouth to the reader. The reader digests the text knowing that the narrative represents a small part of something greater, more complicated, obscured whole. The focus, and tension of the narrative evolves in harmony with the gradual exposure of the mythology. For Lovecraft, too much exposure inevitably leads to insanity, and even suicide. This is perhaps the most important constraint of the mythology – a clever way of keeping it obscure and hidden, adding to its plausibility. Again, the myth awards the illusion of reality by integrating necessary limitations.

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of the visceral power of this particular game, it seems appropriate to introduce some of the more useful theories and methods available. There are several ways of analyzing the content, form, aesthetic and function of digital games. As already argued by several theorists (Eskelinen 2001) (Juul 2001) (Frasca 1999), it is inadequate to merely appropriate traditional film analysis to digital games simply because both share aesthetic similarities. To fully appreciate all facets of the rapidly growing potential of digital games as vessels for mythopoeic fiction, one should take a theory of affect into account, and consider the role of the physical body in the act of play.

The semiological approach to analysis of media texts, with linguistic models of analysis has been criticised by theorists like Steven Shaviro for being inadequate in explaining and expressing the mechanics of visceral cinema. In <u>The Cinematic Body</u> (1993), Shaviro rejects a Lacanian model

of cinema analysis because of its obsessive emphasis on the phallus, castration anxiety, ideology, and the structure of the signifier (1993:viii, ix). If the Lacanian theoretical approach fails to fully comprehend visceral cinema, it should prove even less adequate for analysing digital games. Instead, I intend to introduce the theories outlined by French philosopher Henri Bergson in Matter and Memory with Steven Shaviro's theories of cinema and affect in The Cinematic Body, and Brian Massumi's essay The Autonomy of Affect (1995), to approach games and narratives. These critics all take physiology into account, that is, the haptic elements of a text, as well as visual aesthetics and the soundtrack. The focus of affect theory is to examine external, visual, aural and cognitive stimuli, and their sensory impact on the human body.

Shaviro is influenced by the theories of Giles Deleuze, who in turn emerged as a scholar of Bergsonian theory. Shaviro, together with Brian Massumi, another scholar in the tradition of Deleuze and Bergson, argues that cinema is not a simple one-way experience whereby the viewer watches the screen. They propose that viewing is an exchange, because cinema causes very real physiological reactions in the viewer. Indeed, Shaviro claims that the genres of horror and pornography share "the […] goal of physically arousing the audience" (1993:100).

To understand the usefulness of Bergsonian theory, an example from Massumi's The Autonomy of Affect, is particularly illustrative. He recounts an experiment whereby hospital patients were administered mild currents of electricity for medical reasons. The conclusion was that the body reacts to external stimuli prior to the mind, and that the bodily, physical reaction precedes cognitive action and expression by as much as a half second (Massumi 1995:90). The sensory event pulls an impression of the future towards the present, and replaces it. In other words, this temporal and sensory shift, this precursor of emotion, deletes the present and converges the past and the future. The body becomes out-of-time, something Massumi refers to as "the realm of the virtual" and "potential" (1995:91). Potential therefore neither designate present, past or future, but seem to pinpoint a sort of temporal limbo where past and future converge without a present, an instance where infinite numbers of potentials coexist until a course of action is chosen. The virtual is a "superlinear abstraction that does not obey the law of the excluded middle" (1995:91).

When the body is about to leave the realm of potential and transfer the sensory response to the mind, making it cognitive, it becomes an emotion. Emotion, argues Massumi, equals reflected-upon affect, a "subjective content, [the] socio-linguistic fixing of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal" and he goes on to argue that it is crucial to distinguish between emotion and affect because affect follows a different logic and "pertain to different orders" (1995:88). "Out of the crowd an individual act or expression will emerge, and be registered consciously. One wills it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on socio-linguistic meaning […]

(1995:91). In other words, once the event is recorded and experienced cognitively, it is interpreted and verbalized. The objective and bodily reaction to a particular mood has become subjective emotion with a purpose, form and meaning. Steven Shaviro echoes the same thought when stating that "the retention of virtual images is [related to] an irreducible gap between stimulus and response", and calls it the "phenomenon of shock" (1993:50).

What Massumi and Shaviro are both arguing is that a precursor to cognitive response in the form of a physical bodily response is ultimately given a context and meaning – or one might perhaps even call it function and aesthetic.

Let us now turn to our example. The digital game Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth, uses Lovecraft's 1920's New England setting and mythology. The creators of the game have consciously chosen to omit textual and visual game components such as gauges, meters and dials, and opted for other ways of indicating health, life and progress, using sound and vibrations. If Jack is exposed to "horrific scenes, encountering strange creatures, or undergoing great stress" he loses sanity (Bethesda Softworks, 2005:15). This loss is indicated with "rapid breathing, increased heart rate" and "controller vibration" (2005:15). One of the game's (and one might argue would-be real-life) objectives is to avoid such things that might cause one's sanity to drop. In an early scene Jack enters a house where a religious congregation called "The Esoteric Order of Dagon" is said to dwell, to help the local police investigate reports of gunshots. The cult leader has explicitly asked to speak with private investigator Jack Walters. After entering the house and confirming everyone to be dead, the stress level increases slightly. Jack enters what appears to be an office, where he finds hundreds of surveillance photos of himself and a blackboard outlining his daily routines minute by minute. As he realizes his entire life has been scrutinized for the last three years by this suicide cult, his heart rate and breathing increase and become audible. There are thumping sounds and slightly blurred, shaky vision, and at this point the player can feel the heartbeats pulsating, vibrating from the game controller.

The game has thereby become affective and entered the realm of potential. It is stated in the game's manual that whenever Jack suffers a drop in sanity he can experience (among other things) panic and it is described as: "When panicking due to sanity loss, involuntary movement and reactions occur" (2005:16). Effects can range from increase in sensitivity of controls, camera motion blur on horizontal movement and involuntary movement (2005:16). The purpose of these realistic effects, this simulation of "real" emotional response, is to project and create a prosthetic emotional response in the player. The sounds and haptic feelings reflect what Jack is reacting to, in a virtual showcase of Bergsonian theory. In Matter and Memory (1911), Henri Bergson argues that the body is "a […] centre whence is reflected on the surrounding objects the action which these

objects exercise upon it: in that reflexion external perception consists" (1911:20). In other words, Bergson theorizes the body as an ultimately vulnerable entity, exposed to surrounding objects, and under a constant threat of potential disintegration. The source of affection is, according to Bergson, the struggle that ensues from partially absorbing this threat. Bergson states that perception measures reflection, and that affect measures absorption (1911:20). The pulse felt in the hands as Jack absorbs the surrounding threats, travels to the body of the player. The heart rate and arousal of the player will increase to match that which is felt. Gaming thereby becomes visceral, affective and tactile. As much as the frightened protagonist clutches his revolver, similarly we clutch the trigger of the hand controller. The emotion is made real with the vibrations of the controller and the sounds from the speakers, transferred together with the feeling of immersion. When we play we do not feel a piece of plastic in our hands, we feel the sweaty steel and wood of our (the protagonist's) revolver. Thus it can be argued that digital games are close to tactile, sonically equal to cinema, and visually growing more sophisticated every year.

The important difference between cinema and games is the mode of affection both project. Cinema works with affect on two levels. The first level of affect exists between the viewer and the screen, the second level between characters on the screen. With digital games it is not necessarily so straightforward. The same levels of affect exist, but function very differently. Because a game has the power to literally impose affect by emitting vibrations at certain dramatic points, it is no longer as simple as voyeuristic affect. The frequently used first-person perspective in games, and the power of interaction makes gaming a subjective experience. Thus, the affect exists between protagonists, as well as between the player and the screen, with the added dynamic of haptic sensations coming from the hand controller. The vibrations can induce a bodily response, triggered by the visuals and soundtrack. The voyeuristic viewing experience of cinema transfers to gaming with the addition of the subjective playing experience. The immersive potential of digital games is tremendous, because games can be regarded as a prosthetic, and an extension of the human body, where simulated physiological responses are transferred and induced in the player. The visuals take on a grain, a texture that has the power to affect the meaning of the visual imagery as much as sound.

To summarize, Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth clearly illustrates the nature of mythopoeic gaming in several ways. Most importantly, it is a good example of mythological decoding through exploration. In the game, the mythology reveals itself gradually, but only to a certain extent. The lesson is taught already in the opening cut-scene, in which we are witnessing the apparent suicide of the protagonist: too much knowledge leads to madness and despair. This strategy is employed to keep the mythology intact, always leaving parts obscured. This is one of

several ways in which the game invokes myth to enforce boundaries in gameplay, and is also one of the reasons why the Cthulhu mythos translates well to digital games. Another example that shows how gameplay can be enhanced and limited using myth, is the door that so mysteriously closes and locks behind Jack as he enters the spooky house where the cult resides. A door that closes by itself is made plausible through the ghostly situation, so that the player does not notice that being able to leave the house and ask the police for help would ruin the game. The event furthermore enhances the game by separating Jack from the normal world, making it a matter of lone survival and exploration, effectively shifting the focus from getting in to a situation to getting out of a situation.

The act of investigating the unknown is suitable for digital games because of how easily it can be broken down into a trail of breadcrumbs that the player follows. Furthermore, making the player-character a naïf without supernatural powers or knowledge, equipped only with a desire to acquire knowledge, (he is a private investigator, after all) immediately sets up the path of the character. As a consequence, the character becomes both inhibiting and enabling for the player. A common character arc in Lovecraft's fiction is the inevitable trajectory from curious naïf to enlightened madman locked up in an insane asylum. This predetermined fate, which is made clear to the player before the game even starts, and the elaborate ways in which the game shows and projects the sensitive nature of the protagonist, is precisely what determines in what way the player may navigate the narrative. Success in the game is determined by the player's ability to unravel the mythology whilst following the laid out narrative and maintaining sanity. A careful and strategic approach is likely to yield more success than running around, guns blazing. The myth therefore not only determines the mode and strategy of play for the player, but the consequences of the game narrative on the player.

The immersive level of the game is brought to a high because of the myth. The game's use of Lovecraft's mythological artefacts and madness is key to this aspect. References to "fake facts" such as books, people and events that exist only within the myth, serve to elaborate and solidify, and trigger the desire to explore, by means of Barthes' "reality effect" (1989:141). The fictional game-world being very similar to our own world, with one foot firmly in reality and the other firmly in mythology, corresponds to Marie-Laure Ryan's view of the important balance between fiction and reality (2001:97).

As we have now seen, myths as knowledge of a fictional environment, complement the narrative and structural component found in digital games. Furthermore, we have analyzed the characteristics of this relationship by determining its role in the games' capability of inducing immersion and affect in the player. To completely encircle my research question on mythopoeic digital games, the final aspect that begs a closer look is the meaning of narrative in relation to

gameplay. The differences have thus far only been mentioned in passing, but it is now necessary to map out discrepancies, differences and similarities in detail, in order to formulate a theory on the structure of the game narrative, if there indeed is such a thing.

Chapter 3: The Act of Play: Becoming One With the Narrative

The narrative structure of digital games

The digital game is constantly pushing the borders of what "narrative" means and has likely already forced a reworking of the definition of the word itself. What narrative means in relation to interactivity and play is a complex question that has proven itself difficult to answer. The recent ludology vs. narratology debate in game studies is a clear example of the fact that we have yet to come to terms with what the medium does, what it is capable of, and how it should be analyzed. The complexity can be summed up using three words: narrative, interactivity and gameplay. It is the presence of interactivity and gameplay that affects narrative in such a way that it will differ significantly from traditional, linear narrative. As Salen and Zimmerman state: "[d]iscussions of games as 'interactive narratives' predictably fall into polarizing debates about linear vs. non-linear storytelling of *games* as *stories* or *stories* as *games*", a debate in which some argue narrative and games are mutually exclusive concepts, and others argue that some games are narrative and some are not. Salen and Zimmerman's position is that "the question is not *if* games are narrative, but *how* they are narrative" (2004:379).

When examining what narrative means to digital games it is essential to first highlight the differences between the structure of digital games and the structure of more traditional narrative media. It is important to recognize early on that narrative theory is often used to describe the classic linear structure of novels and cinema and can only to a certain extent be applied to the hypertextual structure of digital games. The reason for this is the way in which digital games merge conventional narrative structure with core ludic elements and interactivity. These aspects can be identified as the three core components of digital games. As separate and contradictory as they might seem at first, it is more complicated than simply stating that the element of play and the element of storytelling are irreconcilable parts in a game where only gameplay and interaction are obligatory. To better show the complexity of the situation, let us closely examine the structure and composition of a digital game.

A typical game establishes an initial narrative situation at the start, usually through a cinematic cut-scene, or as a written backstory in the game's manual. The first level of the game is sometimes a prelude, a learning-by-doing segment complementing the manual, where the mechanics of gameplay are presented and practised. From then on, a standard approach is to "intersperse narrative elements amid the setting of gameplay tasks" (Rutter & Bryce 2006:122). In general terms, a game is organized in discreet levels of some sort, which upon completion offer some kind of reward in the end, usually in the form of a cut-scene or storyline progression. The

alternative to discreet level design is a disguised, continuous flow of play, which gives the illusion of continuous gameplay, though levels are still used. "Although the decision to use a discreet level of abstraction is generally motivated by technical issues", it can be tweaked to be "more easily navigated" and "designed with multiple objectives corresponding to different difficulty levels, enhancing and expanding the gameplay" with regards to the player learning-curve (Bateman & Boon 2006:169).

The path of gameplay comes in many varieties. The game itself has one starting point, and often offers several possible outcomes, where some mean failure and some mean success. Actions are punished and rewarded correspondingly, based on the player's ability to mentally decode, and physically react to, the gameplay situation. At a point of failure the game narrative usually rewinds in time and space to a previous "checkpoint", which can be at the start of the current level. Other games, such as the Halo (2001) series, have the character "respawn" meaning more or less instant reincarnation in the same place where defeated, until there are no lives left, keeping the temporal and spatial flow of the game intact.

This is one possible, common overarching structure for a digital game that shows the framework of the game. Rather than drawing conclusions about narrative using simple mainstream games, it is oftentimes is more interesting to use examples from games that employ more unusual and innovative techniques for developing and manipulating the game story, to show how games relationship to narrative is complicated. One example is Halo 2 (2004), where in mid-game, the player switches sides to experience the adventure from the antagonists' point of view, at a narrative point in time best described as "meanwhile", by actually playing an antagonist character. Another example is The Dark Eye (1995) which consists of a framing plot and a "nightmarish" plot. The framing plot provides points-of-entry into three parallel stories written by Edgar Allan Poe[7], which are then re-enacted by the player, once as the murderer, and once as the victim through what the game manual calls a "soul jump". Both games, and perhaps especially The Dark Eye, are interesting because they present a positively non-linear way of interacting with linear plots.

Perception, movement, game time and immersion

In an immersive, fictional narrative environment there are several realities in existence. In a cinema situation, there is the inside and outside of the theatre, and its corresponding on-screen mirror images. Compare this to Winnicott's theory of make-believe, whereby a transition is made from the real world to the world of make-believe. Similar to Campbell's hero adventure, where a protagonist who is urged into transgressing from the real world into the divine world, goes through

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[7] Berenice (1835), The Tell-Tale Heart (1843), and The Cask of Amontillado (1846).

a series of trials and returns a wiser man. The experience of going to the cinema is similar – a transition from a mundane environment to an immersed state where anything can happen. The real world and the divine world are two recognized ways of experiencing reality: two worlds existing parallel and yet they are one and the same. This is similar to the character arc of the protagonist on-screen where Campell's hero is brought to life. As the audience receives the narrative, suspending disbelief and engaging imagination, a dual tension is created. The transitions the viewer beholds on the screen become mimicked *because* the viewer is in a state of immersion. This is arguably one of the reasons why mythopoeic narratives fit the structure of digital games so well. Campbell's hero is the same person as the player disengaging his disbelief and holding his game controller.

In cinema, and perhaps particularly in gaming, the transmission of affect and emotions can therefore be regarded as a mirrored meta-experience. It feeds off of the screen and at the same time becomes projected back onto the screen. The game affects the player as much as, if not more, than the player affects the game. The pleasure of playing the game arises from the fact that the body does not distinguish between projection and reality. Through suspension of disbelief and mimesis[8], perception leads to affection, thereby making fiction reality, or as argued by Bergson, "affection must, at a given moment, arise out of the image" (1911:20). The level of immersion is directly linked to affect, and has a direct impact on how a game is perceived and received, and this framing situation will always influence the perception of what is happening on-screen.

An important aspect when exploring the hypertextuality of digital games is "game time". Game time exists parallel with the experienced time of the player and outside of real time. Bergson gives us pure or abstract time, and also mathematical time, and thereby argues that time can either be ephemeral and unnoticeable or analyzed and broken down into discreet segments and actions (Bergson 2001:79)

Broadly speaking there are three types of games that treat the passage of time differently. First there are the turn-based games such as <u>Chess</u>, where game time is virtually non-existent, ephemeral, or structured into movements. Second, there is real-time, where game time and real time are the same. Thirdly there is transitory time, or crystallized time.
Consider again the example of <u>Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth</u>. When Jack hears the shotgun, time slows down to half speed, and all sounds disappear. As Annie Turner argues in "They're Here: The Rhythmic Accent, the Single Beat and Rhythmic Silence", that while "[t]he visual image of the action provides us with evidence of its occurrence, [...] its aural match

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[8] "Mimesis", in this instance, is equal to transference. Socrates, in the <u>Republic</u> distinguishes between two forms of "mimesis", on one hand the image or likeness that resembles the original it imitates, and on the other hand the semblance, that only mimics, or mimes its model without bearing any true resemblance to it. Writing would subsequently be an example of "bad" mimesis and speech an example of "good" mimesis. Thus for Plato, there are two kinds of signs governing mimesis: images (icons) and simulacra (phantasms) (Bogue 1991:2).

concretes the event's location at a temporal point, because sound is a temporal phenomenon and validates the motion of time" (2003:3). In other words, we become aware of what has happened and when. The image might tell us what has happened, but the sound gives us chronology. Movement is no longer what measures time, but rather movement is related to the time which conditions it. Bergson describes this acute sense of surroundings as "attentive perception", and argues that:

> [E]very attentive perception truly involves a reflexion, […] that is to say the projection, outside ourselves, of an actively created image, identical with, or similar to, the object on which it comes to mould itself. If, after having gazed at any object, we turn our eyes abruptly away, we obtain an `after image' of it: must we not suppose that this image existed already while we were looking? (1911:41)

Bergson furthermore states that "there can be no perception without affection", and here we seem to enter into a territory where multiple temporalities exist at the same time. We are in what can closest be described as no-time, where the heightened perception of an adrenaline rush is paradoxically simulated by the slowing down of game-time. This makes perfect sense, of course, because the only way to speed up perception in the player is to slow down the game. Time has in an instant become thick and syrupy, the previous half second lingering like a shadow behind the muted perception of the present. It would seem as if the past and the present exist simultaneously, but it is not an objective version of the present we perceive. It is a highlighted, discerned version where what is less important has been peeled away and what is more important is heightened. The heartbeats of the character are all we hear, and it's because perception is focused on the inside rather than on the outside, as is the case before and after this particular scene, what might be called real-time. I see an important connection here between the inward journey of myth outlined by Campbell and the game. As our attention is focused inward in the game, it mirrors the function and experience of myth as a psychological journey of self-discovery.

This manipulation of temporality is not an isolated instance in Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth. The uniqueness lies rather in the purpose it serves. Here, it is immersion at its purest. We are seeing and experiencing the representation of, and reality of, immersion in the game. This representation is then transmitted onto the player through the game controller, and through the altered visuals and soundtrack. The viscerality of the gaming experience can therefore be said to reflect as much as it projects. Transmission creates mimesis, and as the hero travels to the divine world to be transformed, so do the player. No longer is the player character a ghost behind the controls. It now becomes flesh and bone, embodied and pure. The two layers of affect crystallize into what Deleuze calls the crystal-image (2000:64), and give us through the time-image, a picture

of time itself, slowing down, as we sonically and visually become consciously aware of the body and its position within that crystallized time-frame.

Compare this sequence of gameplay with the third-person noir shooter Max Payne (2001) and also with Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time (2000). Here, the transmission of affect becomes cinematic rather than visceral. It still mimics immersion but in a very different way. Rather than being internalized, the action is cinematized. The action mimics Hollywood. The effect is advertised as "bullet time", and has a similar aesthetic to the genre of Hong Kong cinema. The motivation is according to the game manual that Max enters into a state of intense perception allowing him to aim more carefully. In the swashbuckling mythopoeic adventure Prince of Persia, it is a way of slowing down, and even reversing time to allow for greater immersion and control in the acrobatic swordfight scenes. These scenes measure the passing of time in relation to movement. The function of the dagger of time in Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is literally to subvert time, and to enable freezing, time travel backwards, and slowing down. Time controls movement, by enabling perception and therefore the same effect as in Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth is achieved – the simulated acceleration of thought by the slowing down of gameplay. In all these examples sound and space become transformed, and stripped down, as a signifier of image and time, the Deleuzian *opsign* and *sonsign*.

The question of narrative in relation to gameplay

Whether the narrative component is subordinate to gameplay or not, is a complicated question that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, depending on the genre of the game. Since digital games often are genre hybrids, a large percentage of games defer classification and interweave story with play in a very complex manner. At first glance, when looking at a plain, non-mythopoeic game, the narrative seems subordinate to gameplay. The narrative component in the game artificially creates a purpose other than mere "fun". The narrative is responsible for installing such dramaturgical components as protagonist, antagonist, quest and conflict, which is key when discussing the order of narrative and gameplay. Though gameplay might be strictly ludic and could potentially function well in its own right, the story framing the gameplay is on some level what drives the player to achieving the goal of the game. Jordan Mechner, who was part of the team that developed the mythopoeic digital game Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time (2003), argues that in direct opposition to cinema, where story is everything, "in video games the purpose of the story is to support and enhance the gameplay" (2007:112). Ed Byrne, states from a designer's point-of-view in Game Level Design that, though not obligatory, "a story might enhance a level and give the

players information about what they are expected to do, what they might need to avoid or seek out" (2004:18). He further argues that "many types of games exist without a narrative element, and leave it to the players to create a story if they really want one" (2004:18). Byrne uses chess as an example of a game that has elements of medieval war and politics that enhances the experience of the game without being necessary. This statement is interesting when looking at another argument made by Byrne which is that "gameplay is what drives games" but at the same time adds that "[i]ideally, a level will to some degree allow the players to create a narrative as they play, even if it's just a series of personal achievements" (2004:18). At first glance it appears as a contradiction in terms, to on one hand say that the story is how players learn what to do and why, and at the same time say that gameplay is what drives games. One would think that knowing what to do is important enough to be able to enjoy gameplay in the first place, but this minor confusion only shows how complex this aspect of digital games is. In fact it is not a contradiction at all. Thus it can be argued that, though narrative is not an obligatory component of a game, it generates a narrative through the act of play. Though as argued by Frasca (1999), generating narrative and being narrative is not the same thing.

For the player, the driving force is being the character inside the story – playing along with the story. The player is oblivious to the fact that the purpose of the plot is to support gameplay. In Computer Games: Text. Narrative and Play, Diane Carr examines the digital game Baldur's Gate (1998), a role-playing game based on the mythology of the tabletop role-playing game Advanced Dungeons and Dragons: Forgotten Realms (1987), and proposes that "in some computer games, the storytelling is non-existent; in others, it is merely peripheral. In Baldur's Gate, the story matters, even if it remains secondary to the pleasures, activities and demands of gameplay" (Carr 2006:31). She argues that narrative structures and spontaneous gameplay is entangled in Baldur's Gate – "so precise, specific tools are needed to prise them apart" (2006:31). "The player is approached, urged, ordered or invited by different characters to undertake missions or quests. Thus, some of the game's goals and objectives are delivered in a narrative guise, while other goals (such as gaining experience points to level up) are not" (2006:33). This is precisely the result of a liquefying dichotomy. The hybrid nature of a digital game like Baldur's Gate shows why it is so difficult to isolate and analyze the narrative component. The question of its usefulness is akin to analyzing the illustrations in a novel – it does not align with the medium's purpose, and it can be argued that the question of narrative and ludic structure of digital games is more complicated than simply stating that one is subordinate to the other. A simple example of the presence of simultaneous narrative and gameplay is the use of either first or third person voice-over narration, during gameplay sequences as well as during cut-scenes in The Dark Eye, Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, and Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth. Voice-over is a classic narrative tool, that when used

simultaneous to gameplay, makes it difficult to clearly isolate narrative and gameplay from each other. They exist separately, and at the same time, in parallel. Digital games can be story driven or purely ludic, but are also hybrids between the two.

The digital game destabilizes boundaries of play and narrative, not only in how it generates or shows narratives, but how it redefines narrative, as we traditionally know it. Traditional notions of narrative are insufficient, and there is a need for a framework for analyzing digital games. The main differences between traditional non-linear narrative and the hypertextual structure of digital game narrative is the element of chaos and interactivity that gameplay is comprised of. This core interaction should not only be explicit but also involve meaningful choice to achieve meaningful play (Salen & Zimmerman 2004:61). Time, space and progression are parallel, iterative and superimposed – a different experience compared to traditional narratives, which is why existing narrative theories are ill-equipped to analyze the complex, and very present narrative structure of digital games.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Future Prospects

The world of mythopoeic digital gaming is an area that cuts across several disciplines on its quest for gameplay seduction and fulfilment. The conclusions we can draw thus far are as follows:

The first point I would like to make concerns the link between immersion and mythology. The framing meta-transition of make-believe outlined by Winnicott, and furthermore the journey of Joseph Campbell, blend together and give us a way of considering narrative immersion as an entry into myth, not only as a spectator but literally as becoming Campbell's hero. A player that immerses in a game enters into a divine (digital) world of make-believe where there will be trials and tribulations, after which he returns to the real world, changed and realizing that the divine and real are actually one and the same. Because of the perceived reality, and metaphorical nature of mythology, one can argue that conceptually, the divine, mythological world and the real outside world is one and the same, because the former is conceived out of the latter.

What I have described is both the player's experience and the character's experience, but as with all games the character and the player are one and the same. Therefore the structure of myth, as outlined by Campbell, follows the same pattern as the immersive gaming experience, and here is the chain of immersion. One state must be entered into, in order to fully appreciate and perceive the second. Consider this structure a meta-transition encompassing a narrative transition. Thus it can be argued that mythological narratives are particularly appropriate for game structures.

The second point concerns the structural and narrative limitations of gameplay. These limitations are naturally present in the digital game as a media form. Even the sense of ludic freedom sometimes experienced in MMORPG's[9] is simply a cleverly crafted illusion of freedom. The insanity in Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth, and the Gryphon of World of Warcraft are tools for disguising those limitations, by embellishing the mythology. Here, myth fills in the gaps left by the programmers and story developers, turning something that can break the illusion of the game, to something that instead adds to the illusion. Furthermore, the desire for ludic freedom is subtly contained in ways that the player never notices.

The third point relates to the perceived reality of myth, as opposed to a realism found in other types of games that can in turn be critically evaluated and dispelled. The myth embodies a kind of paradox in that it injects a level of realism into its form that non-fictional narratives cannot hope to match. What I mean by this is that the fiction of the myth seems more real than reality itself, effectively echoing the concepts of Baudrillard and the Borges tale of the representation that is

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[9] Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, is a term designating a group of games that are more or less enhanced virtual online communities with some adventure element added. An example is Blizzard's World of Warcraft.

more real than real[10]. This level of reality is directly dependent on knowledge and exploration through play in the semiotic chain of interaction. As we exist in the exploratory state of immersion we are much like someone in bed at night dreaming, where the dream is more tangible and real than the actual reality of the bed.

The fourth point relates to the affective power of immersion. I would like to again stress that affect is inextricably linked to the level of experienced immersion. Affect is furthermore linked to various modes of perception, which in turn plays an important role in how a particular situation is interpreted. The perception of time, space and movement are important elements that affect immersion and subsequently how well the player plays the game. Inducing and transmitting affect is the most important function of haptic gaming, and brings a new dimension to the mythopoeic gaming experience through engaging the sense of touch. Immersion determines the emotions experienced during play, and subsequently how enjoyable the gaming session is. Pleasure, and a sense of achievement, is after all the primary purpose of gameplay[11].

As a final conclusive point, what can be said about myth and virtuality is that the affective game and the myth serve the same function. In the documentary series The Power of Myth (1988) made for PBS, comprised of six one-hour interviews conducted by Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell states that the function of myth is to clothe in language that which cannot be talked about – a way of making tangible that which is abstract. In some cases the idea of God. The idea of the journey, of the transition, whether we talk about the transition of make-believe, the transition of the person, or the transition of the real and the virtual, it all works the same, and is all cyclical. As myth makes divinity concrete, the affective game makes the game world real. The hero's journey is the avatar's journey and the avatar's journey is the player's journey. It is a journey within oneself, a journey of exploration and of discovery.

As a metaphor for the divine search for answers and truth, mythopoeic games feed into this mechanism. The power of myth is to excite wonder for the mystery of creation and of existence, and to maintain that mystery. If the mystery is lost, then the myth is lost and we lose the desire to search for answers. As we play games, we undertake the journey of the hero; we become the monomythical hero both as playful people, and as participants in the actual game using an avatar or a persona. Myth imbues the gaming session with meaning beyond that of the object of the game itself. It reflects the same eternal quest that is within all of us, be it the journey undertaken by Jesus in the Bible or the journey undertaken by Lara Croft in the Tomb Raider saga, or by the person enjoying a good book or a good game. These are instances, references of the same thing – the

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[10] Borges, Jose Luis. "On Exactitude in Science" A Universal History of Infamy, London: Penguin Books, 1975.
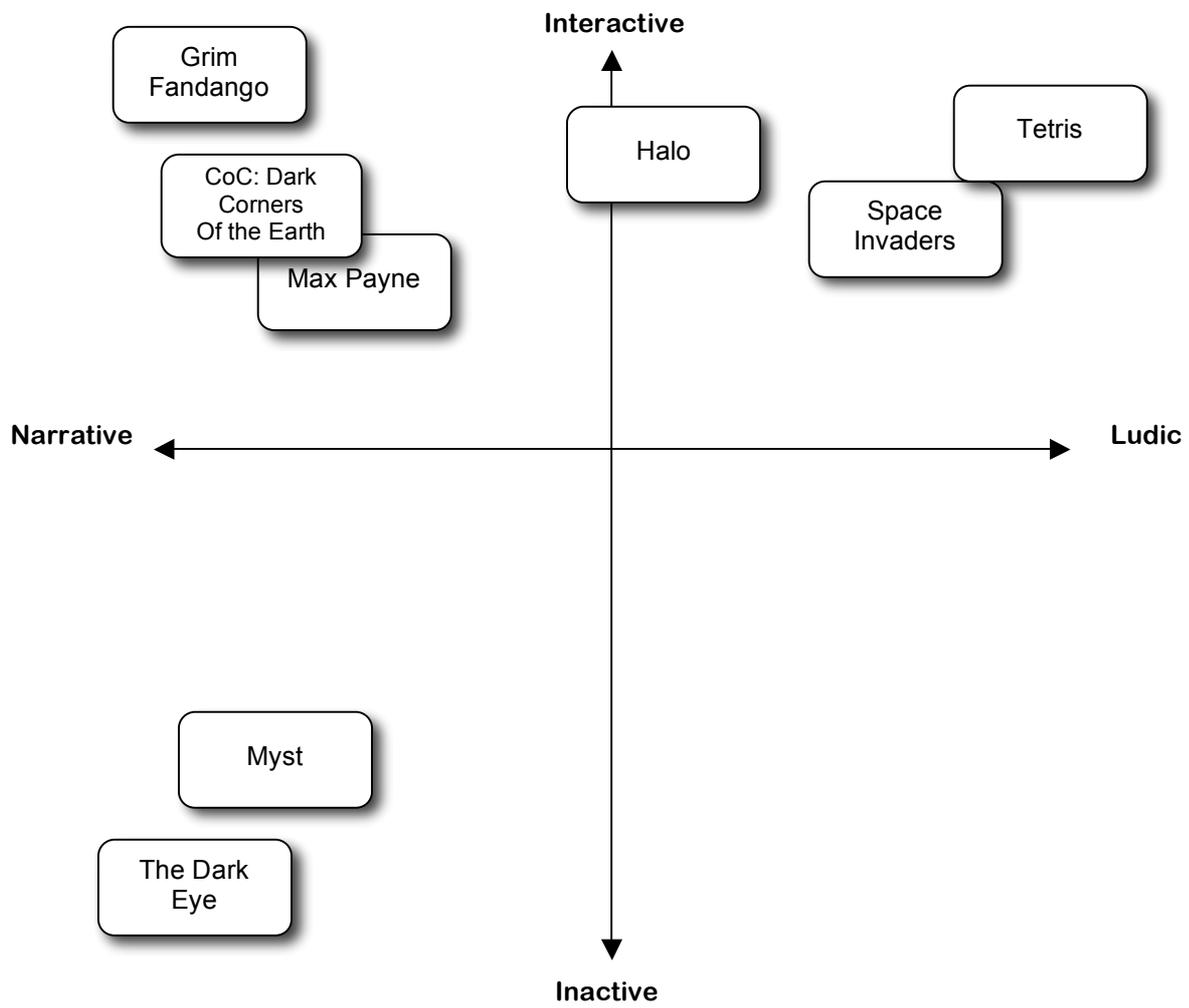
[11] Ryan, Richard M, Rigby, Scott C, Przybylski, Andrew. "The Motivational Pull of Video Games: A Self-Determination Theory Approach" Motivation and Emotion 30.4 (2006) pps 344-360, Springer Netherlands, December 2006.

search for the divine in all of us, the journey that can only be taken inwards. The affective game focuses on the bodily reaction, of the immersed state of the mind and takes the player to the divine world to be transformed. The focus remains inwards, on the personal change as part of the player's monomyth, fixed on the player's journey.

Perhaps it is only through physical trials and tribulations, through perspiration and cramping trigger-fingers, the player can truly emerge on the other side and experience the microcosm that harbours a life-altering journey undertaken in the space of a few hours in front of a screen. And who is to say that slaying a virtual dragon is any less daunting than slaying the real thing?

Appendix 1:

Selected games rated according to level of narrative component and level of interaction.

Interactive

Grim
Fandango

Halo

Tetris

CoC: Dark
Corners
Of the Earth

Space
Invaders

Max Payne

Narrative ←————————————→ **Ludic**

Myst

The Dark
Eye

Inactive

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