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The Age of Video Games:
Language and Narrative

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General Introduction

The birth, growth and spreading of the Internet has revolutionised the modes of communications between humans, providing a new form with which people can communicate with each other, even at great geographical distance. It also entails that the interaction between humans has changed, since many instances of communication are mediated by a device or a machine.

The rise of the Internet has also introduced new linguistic and narrative aspects, which have embedded themselves into the lives of a vast percentage of the world population and particularly inside pop and youth culture.

The first of the two aspects, is the impact that Internet has had (and is still having) on language. With the diffusion of new software or programs that enable instant communication between people, the English language seems to have acquired the state of Lingua Franca (Newbold and Ludbrook 2012) even in the fabric of the World Wide Web, since it is widely used and is the lingua franca of choice between users who do not share a common mother tongue.

The point of my study, regarding the different and variegated nuances that this new jargon has introduced, is to denote its characteristics, analysing them through previous studies published on the matter (Crystal 2006; 2008), as well as displaying some of the myths that have influenced the reaction of the general public. Furthermore, due to the fast pace at which the Internet language is changing and being modified (a rate much higher compared with the normal development of a language), this study will also offer recent examples that have been formed and introduced within the context of the Gaming Community.

The second aspect, connected with language, is that of video games which, thanks to the diffusion of computer technology, as well as the support of the Internet, have now embedded themselves into the life of many young adults (Thornham 2016). The diffusion of this medium has only been partially discussed by academics (since it is a recent medium), who have not yet come to an agreement as to how analyse them in their complete form or how to categorise the new field of study that video games require in order to be fully comprehended (see for instance ludology and narrative literary theory; Aarseth 1997; Newman 2013; Nielsen *et al.* 2008). In my study, I present the research of the academic community that has been done on the argument and, even though the research is not conclusive (as is not the comment made upon the research), the analysis of the different opinions, provided with

examples and annotations, should furnish a clear picture of the publications done until recent times. Furthermore, in the interests of academic research, this dissertation will also present an analysis of some specific aspects of video games (e.g. the language used by the gaming community, the moral in video games), together with general comments on how the reaction of the public has influenced the study of video games as well. Finally, in order to provide a broader and more detailed picture, the last chapter of the *corpus* will be provided with an in-depth analysis of the narrative in a video game still under development, created by the author of this dissertation and his close friend and colleague.

The intention of this analysis is to provide an inside-eye perspective on the construction and discussion of the main narrative, together with other aspects of video games (e.g. music score, translation form text into image, how the narration is given to the users).

I: The Language of the Gaming Community

Introduction

While the technologies for worldwide communication are in a continuous state of evolution, with the speed of the Internet connection reaching unimaginable velocity (that is, unimaginable ten or twenty years ago) such as a hundred megabytes per second (100Mb/s), or even higher velocities in places that allow for it; and while mobile phone technologies have evolved and are still in evolution, with mobile phones which can now, with a certain type of contract given by the service provider, easily connect to the world wide web without any additional cost; so the language of the internet and of texting has, if not evolved in the strict sense of the word, at least changed from the previous decade. The template or the base structure of the Internet language has not changed much since its first appearance, with acronyms, clippings and initialisms still being the most used and most economic and comfortable way to deliver a message.

Nevertheless, the Internet language, Leet Speak and texting are still widely perceived as a threat to the integrity of the language, be it English, French, Italian or any other language spoken throughout the world. Although the media has opted for a reduction of news reports on the dangers of the Internet language and texting, namely, fewer news reports on the dangers of the Internet language; it has instead, in various tentative ways, tried to approach and breach the divide between adults and young people, with advertisement campaigns which use the "young adults jargon". The divide, however, is still perceivable and the fast pace at which the Internet language is changing, namely, the fast and unpredictable way in which new words with the same or with a slightly different meaning are being introduced into the internet jargon and sometimes completely substitute previous used terms (e.g. noob vs scrub), renders the task, for everyone who wishes to acknowledge and learn this jargon, a lot more difficult.

Furthermore, the introduction of electronic sports (E-sports, 1972) and their growth, which has led to annual and monthly events in which different teams from different parts of the world challenge each other to win a monetary prize and win the title of "World's best E-team" has complicated matters even further, with specific terms or jargon being used to refer to an important match in which a player has exceeded the public's expectations. Terms which have been created during or soon after those

matches and which will influence the evolution of the jargon in a momentary manner, if those terms are not instead introduced and slowly become a standard word used to refer to something (e.g. Kappa).

While the linguistic study of the Internet and texting jargon is still being analysed, even though a great amount of research and academic publishing has been produced to give form to a research method (see for instance Crystal 2008); the development of such research might still need improvement, to better understand the evolution characteristic of such a restricted and specific language.

The focus of this chapter will be to analyse some of the aspects of the Internet jargon, providing an analysis, some examples and gaming situations in which the lingo was used or is being used, with particular attention to the evolution and appearance of new words or slangs that have made an appearance in the web-sphere or which have substituted previous terms, rendering them "obsolete". It should be noted, however, that the term obsolete might not be best used in this instance. As the language evolves terms substitute each other with irregularity, not because those terms have become obsolete or old, but because the sudden push of players using another slang term, which may or may not differ completely from the previous used one, have rendered the old word less appealing or less common in use. Nevertheless, the previous and somewhat forgotten word can still be used and will be used inside specific games, without the appearance of hostile traits towards the 'old jargon'.

Finally, some references with texting language have to be made in order to provide a clear enough analysis of some of the similarities between the internet and the texting slang. The main focus, however, will still be that of the computer and gaming language.

1.1 Language Divide

"New technologies are a permanent and persistently growing part of our lives. However, the learning curve of new technologies such as computers, cell phones and other personal digital devices is not easy for everyone to keep up with. New technologies allow us to communicate faster than ever before. Computers, cell phones or the combination of

both are rapidly creating a language not understood by all users of those devices. Before the wide-spread use of personal computers, text was either handwritten or typed on typewriters. With the development of personal computer the public was introduced to word processing programs. The World Wide Web then made it possible for writing and casual chatting to take place without typewriters and paper. A new form of communication has emerged in video game culture–it is a language that is challenging the written word" (Bibo *et al.* 2009: 1).

Following the definition given by Bibo *et al.* (2009) the language of the Internet appears to be a "rival of the written word" (*Ibid.*), a treacherous power that might one day be able to dethrone Standard English or any other standard in a language. Furthermore, the language used within the Internet Gaming and Texting communities appears to be neither oral nor written but a blend of the two, using codified letters and numbers to create and produce oral sounds that resembles the oral and written expression, but not entirely (Crystal 2006). If such fears are to be rigorously addressed and followed, then the idea that the Internet language is dangerous and may modify forever the use of the language, to the detriment of the English language or to the detriment of those languages in which the jargon is used, appears to be real and problematic: "Typed utterances […] appear to be a meager substitute for everyday oral and written speech"(Steinkuehler 2006: 42). Although to some extent, the language used within the game chats might appear simplified and bare or even impoverished, it hides more complex constructions than early thought of, even though the linguistic methods with which new words are coined may appear redundant and repetitive:

"At first blush, the use of language within such digital worlds appears rather impoverished. Riddled with (a) abbreviations (e.g. *afk* for *away from keys*, *g2g* for *got to go*), (b) truncations (e.g. *regen* for *regenerate*), (c) typographical (e.g. *ot* for *to*) and grammatical errors (e.g. the adverbial form *too* in place of the prepositional form *to*), (d) *syntactic erosions* (e.g., the omitted initial string *I have* from both [*I have*] *g2g* and [*I have*] *no poms*; Thrasher, 1974), and (e) specialized vocabulary (e.g., *ef* for *elven Forest*, a particular territory in the virtual kingdom that elves call home, and *poms* for *potions of mana*, a liquid potion that increases the rate at

which one's "mana" or magic power is restored after depletion from repeated spell use)"(Steinkuehler 2006: 42).

However, the debunking of the idea that the continuous use of the Internet language may be harmful for learners of a language (be it young native students of the language or students that have decided to learn a particular language), has already been made and can be exemplified by the following quote:

"Its code-like appearance, however, is misleading: Closer examination of such talk reveals that, in fact, Lineagese (and other MMOG variants) serves the same range and complexity of functions as language does offline. Such language is simply forced to do so within the tight constraints of the given medium of communication–one small chat window with a maximum turn of 58 characters allowed per turn"(Steinkuehler 2006: 43).

Lately, as might be predictable by the fast evolution of technology, the chat windows allow for more characters use and thus more space to compose and send messages. However, for many multiplayer games, the number of characters has not increased manifolds, allowing for a thorough and syntactically complex conversation, as the maximum characters number still ranges between 150-156 in some multiplayer games (e.g. *Dota2* and *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*). Nevertheless, even though disdained and reprimanded by the media in many situations, the Language of the Internet and of the gaming communities has survived and evolved and: "As such, [it ought] to be part of our research agenda despite their periodic bad press"(Steinkuehler 2006: 41).

Besides the general characteristics, word formation and coinages, which will be discussed later, the Gaming slang, and more generally the Internet slang, presents the issue of Language Divide (Bibo *et al.* 2009), namely the divide between those who know the Internet terminology and use it accordingly even in social situations outside the web world (offline) and those who do not know how it is formed, used or what the acronyms, clippings and initialisms stand for.

Although at first glance it might appear that the language used within the Internet chats or in the gaming communities is elitist and tends to exclude those players or users who are not frequent users of the jargon, or indeed, those who do not actively participate in internet chats or gaming communities, due to economic or time reasons, it is not actually the case. Furthermore, some have argued that: "digital technologies are necessarily atomizing and isolating in nature" (Payne, 2005). Even though it may appear to be so, because of the nature of the computer, which is usually used by one person at a time, the statement is not entirely true (Thornham 2016). It may prove true of course, if contextualized in the situation in which a single person uses it; however, in the case of multiplayer games or, more in general, Internet chats, the sociability of the act is undeniable. "It [computer use] is characterized by a high level of sociability within peer groups. Young people exchange software and various tips for more efficient use of hardware and software. Video games are often played collectively" (Flinchy, 146, 2002 quoted in Payne, 2005). Evidently, multiplayer games are not only played in a social context, which in turn constructs social organizations between players, but also give possibility to players to interact with each other and exchange in meaningful communication or banter; an example of complex communication might be provided by the activity of the elf Gaveldor in the game *Lineage*[1] (Steinkuehler 2006: 45). Indeed, 'talking about games' is not only a social activity within the game, but also a social discourse which may happen outside of the Web world, namely offline. Although further argumentation might be given, namely that the language of videogame is, in some way, creating a language divide:

> "Leet Speak or 1337 5p34k is a language used most among gamers to create an elite cultural boundary between gaming experts and gaming newcomers 'newbs'. The language has created a DLD (Digital Language Divide) amongst expert gamers 'leets' (elites) and individuals"(Bibo *et al* 2009: 4).

it should be also mentioned that the use of this language is not intentionally exclusive: "The language is not created to alienate anyone or maliciously leave people out, it is used to streamline conversation and improve play" (Bibo *et al* 2009: 4).

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[1] *Lineage*, NCSOFT, 1998

The use and learning of a specific jargon, or of a specific type of language and set of acronyms used within a specific type of game, is by no means easy, although it might prove quick, as the jargon is readapted for almost every game (this excludes common expressions found throughout the gaming world, but also in the Internet and Texting language). Providing as an example the slang language used in two different games, *Starcraft 2*[2] and *Dota 2*, the difference between the two jargons is perceivable. First of all, the first main perceivable difference is that of the gameplay type.
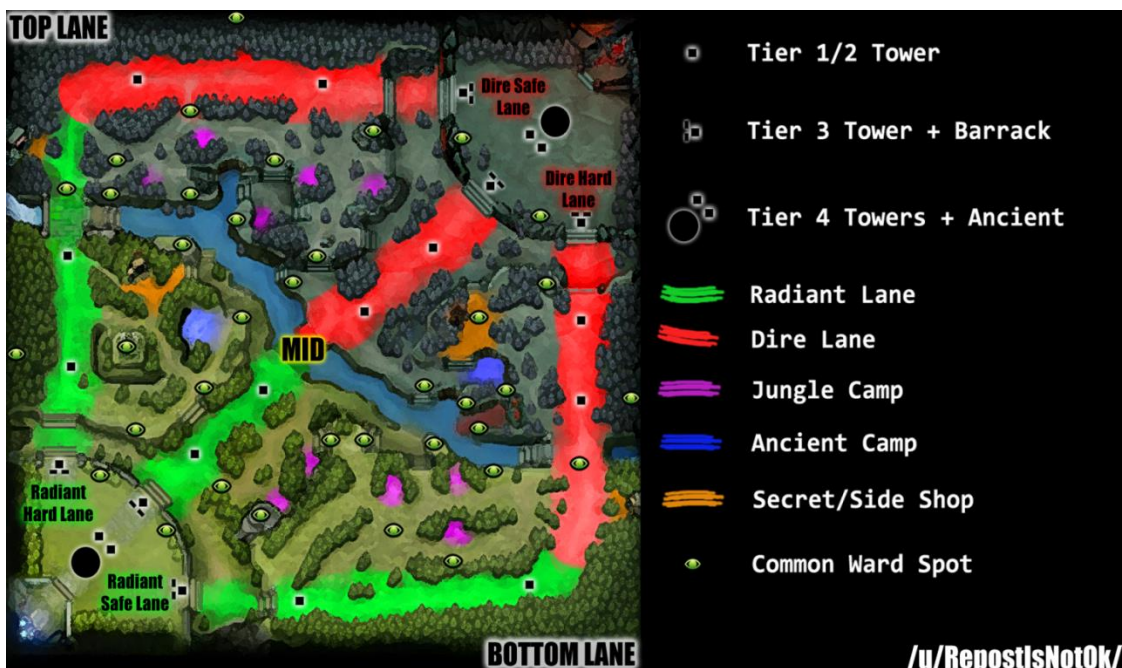
Dota 2 is a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena, which involves the battling of two teams made of five players each. *Starcraft 2*, instead, is a real-time strategy video game, which, beside the single-player campaign, also offers a multiplayer matchmaking in which players fight each other, from one players *versus* one player to a maximum of four *versus* four players in official game maps (maps made by the community also hold up to twelve players). The map used in *Dota 2* is only one, thus there is no variety, and is divided in three 'lanes' in which players divide themselves based on the roles they choose. The three lanes are commonly known as: top lane, middle lane and bottom lane and are truncated as Top, Mid and Bot. The roles which the players can take are four: carrier, abbreviated as carry which defines the player or number of players who will be dealing the most damage in team fights; the support, sometimes abbreviated as 'supp' which defines players who will provide assistance to the other members of the group with healing spells, or which can also provide assistance during the team fights by ensnaring or blocking enemy players; the tank which is the player who will take the most damage during team fights and provide distraction and cover for the carriers who will do most damage and the jungler, who is usually referred to specific types of characters which usually gain experience and levels by detaching themselves from the main group and going into the 'forest' or 'jungle' to kill neutral monsters. Additionally, the game presents also in-game specific jargon which, for example, is not found in *Starcraft 2*.

For instance, the term 'ss' can be found in other Massive Online Multiplayer Battle Arena (Moba) games, but is rare to find outside of that type of video-game and, as an example, is not found within the *Starcraft 2* gameplay context. The term 'ss' presents the last two consonants of the word 'miss', which, in a game like *Dota 2* is used to signal the absence of one of the enemies from one of the lanes. This forms of communication, arguably rather simple, provides insight to the other members of

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[2] *Starcraft 2*, Blizzard Entertainment, 2010

the party, who will be on the lookout for the missing player, who might decide to aid his other party members by joining at the last second in a fight, thus providing the element of surprise. In the beginning, players had to write in the chat the absence of one of the enemy players; this would result in a chat message showing: 'ss mid'. The message, to every person who has never played a Moba game, is rather incomprehensible. The phrase itself refers to an alert message, given by the player standing in the middle lane of the map to the other players of their team to tell them that the enemy player is absent and might try to 'gank'[3]. Nowadays, the action is done by pressing the left Alt button on the keyboard and subsequently left-clicking the avatar of the missing character. To signal the return of the absent enemy player inside their original lane, players use the truncated word 're'[4]. Further examples of *Dota 2* specific jargon might be provided by the acronyms used to refer to objects which can be purchased at the shop with in-game currency. One example might be that of the object called *Black King Bar*[5], which is a protective object frequently bought by players. To avoid complex syntactic constructions, players refer to it as BKB (also bkb).

Dota 2 Map

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[3] *Definition of 'gank'* (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=gank&defid=1891803) last entry 04/04/17
[4] *Definition of 're'* (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=re) last entry 04/04/17
[5] *Black King Bar definition and characteristics* (http://dota2.gamepedia.com/Black_King_Bar) last entry 03/04/17

The jargon of the video-game *Starcraft 2* is rather different from the one found in *Dota 2*. First of all, mention of the fact that the gameplay itself is rather different from the aforementioned game should be taken into account. *Starcraft 2* is a real-time strategy game, namely, there are no turns in between players' actions, thus, there presence of "dead moments" in which players think about their next move is non existing (*Dota 2* does not present turn-taking either, but during the start of the match, the gameplay is quite different from that of the end game). Every player possesses their own specific strategy which can be modified or adjusted based on the action or strategy used by the enemy player. The structure of the game is rather simple; matches can be played between different numbers of players, from a one *versus* one match, which is also the main match type during international tournaments, to a four *versus* four match in which teams are created to challenge other teams.

Furthermore, unlike *Dota 2* the videogame presents more than one map in which it is possible to play, with different terrain construction, which in turn, can be used to take advantage and overcome an *empasse* or to have the upper hand in combat (e.g. an elevated hillside which allows for a better view of the battlefield, allowing for ranged troops to shoot farther away before the enemy reaches the allied lines).
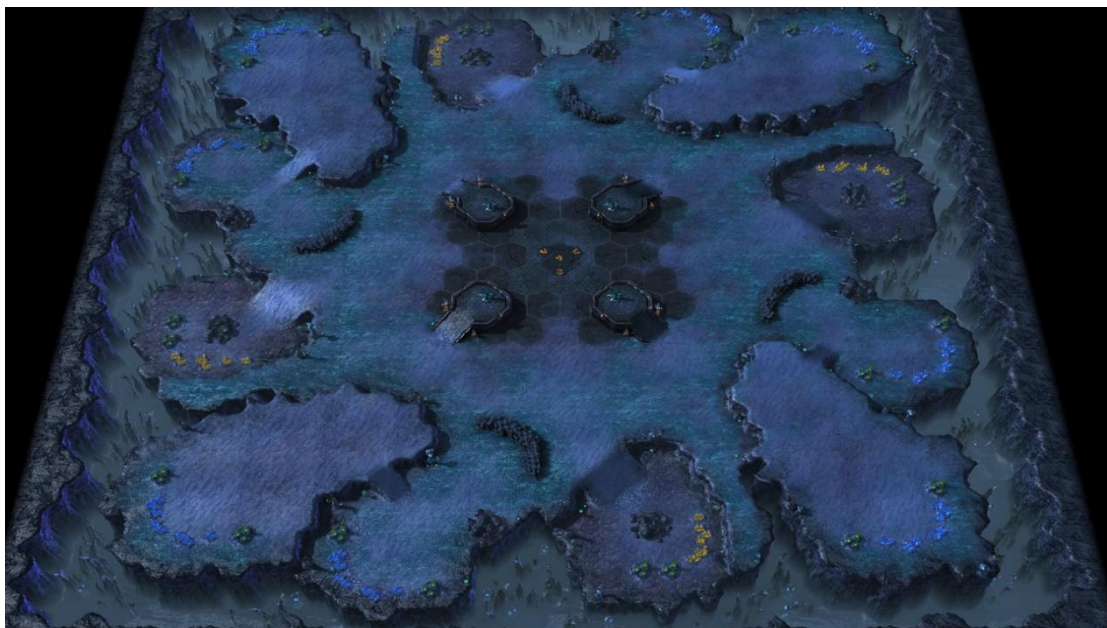
Example of Starctaft 2 1v1 map

Furthermore, the videogame does not present to the players a roster of different characters from which to choose, but three different 'races' with each possessing their own unique units.   The three 'races' present different styles of gameplay and different strategies, with a specific slang for each one of them.

The Terrans are what may resemble humans most. Sent on a colonization mission launched from earth, the expeditioners built their new life on another planet, which is ruled by the Emperor Arcturus I; the Protoss, the second "race" within the *Starcraft 2* world, is an alien form of life with psionic abilities and highly advanced technology; the Zerg may be instead seen as a lesser developed 'race' of aliens, with the Overmind (the leader) controlling and directing the actions of The Swarm (i.e. the collective)[6].

Alongside the general aspects and description of the different units, the multiplayer game of *Starcraft 2* presents specific game jargon, with general acronyms, definitions and initialism as well as specific definition for each and every 'race' available. An example of blend, taken from the Protoss units could be that of "Chargelots". The term is formed from two different words: the first word, which is the base of the blend, is the word "zealots". The zealots are a common fighting unit which can be created at Warp Gate (i.e. the main building from which the fighters can be summoned and warped in). The second word is the word "Charge" (sometimes also found as speed) which represents a unit upgrade which improves the fighting abilities of the zealots, granting them a velocity improvement, which in turn allows them to run at a faster pace for a brief moment of time towards the enemy, thus diminishing quickly the distance between the Zealot and the enemy unit (the Zealots themselves are melee units, they do not possess firearms. Instead, they are equipped with laser blades).

Another example of blend may be one taken from the Zerg units which, like the previous example is used to refer to an upgraded version of the base units, the "Cracklings". As with the previous example, the blend presents the base word with which to construct it, namely, zergling. The zerglings are the base unit of the Zerg 'race', which are created at the Spawning Pool, one of the main buildings with which players can create troops. The zerglings can then be upgraded at the Spawning Pool, allowing them to gain better movement speed and a higher attack speed,

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[6] History and characteristics of the different "races": (http://us.battle.net/sc2/en/game/race/) last entry 06/04/17

namely, the upgrade decreases the interval between each attack made by the unit (like the zealots, zerglings are a melee unit as well)[7].

Although the game presents the player with large amounts of information and terminology which, in turn, has been modified and abbreviated by the players to improve the gameplay and, when necessary, streamline conversations; the game has also acknowledge terms coined by the players to convey specific strategic meaning. For example, the term Zerg Rush is a phrase used to identify a specific kind of Zerg attack: "A term used for a swarming attack, and/or winning a battle by throwing bodies and outnumbering an opponent"[8]. The term has become so common in usage, since it derives from the previous videogame *Starcraft,* that when the phrase "zerg rush" is written in the Google search bar, the results of that research will not be accessible, as a quick swarm of Os munches away at the page results. There are, of course, more examples which can be taken into account regarding game strategies that have become common in usage in discourses. For instance, the "MMM" term is used to refer to a strategy made by players using the Terran units, which involves the focus on the creation of three type of units: Marines: the base unit of the Terran army; Marauders: quick units equipped with jetpacks which can jump across terrains with difference in altitude; and Medivacs: space ship which provide aerial support to ground units by healing wounded allies. Further instances of Digital Language Divide may be found in other games as well:

> "Of the myriad interpretive systems implicit in community practice that gamers enact (Steinkuehler, 2005), the central one of interest for this analysis is the "newbie versus beta-vet" distinction. Within *Lineage*, as with most MMOGs, there is an overwhelming characterization of players in terms of a continuum that runs from *newbie* (peripheral participant; Lave & Wenger, 1991) to *beta vet* (central participant)" (Steinkuehler 2006: 48).

The term beta-vet refers to a limited number of players who have had the chance, given by the developers of the game, to try and play the game before its release date, providing, in turn, useful insight on any error in coding, or identifying any issue

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[7] Starcraft 2 tactics and strategies: http://wiki.teamliquid.net/starcraft2/Strategy
[8] Zerg Rush, (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=zerg+rush&defid=1235651) last entry 06/04/17

or problem that may still be present in the game (Steinkuehler 2006: 48). The term which is generally used to refer to this stage of development of a game is "beta testing". Since only a limited number of players have access to this sort of testing, jargon and slang words may be created and used between those testers. Moreover:

> "Newcomers, on the other hand, use terms that have now replaced the older beta ones. For a beta vet, moving around the virtual world by means of special scrolls is *venzing; for a newbie*, it is *teleporting*. For a beta vet, the huge spiders found in Heine Forest are *shelobs*; for a newbie, they are *aracnids*, the label now assigned within the game"(Steinkuehler 2006: 48).

Although it may seem rather difficult to bridge the gap in the language divide, namely those who speak that language and those who don't, players are always providing queues and hints to new players, to help them understand the mechanics and language of every different game; although, as Steinkuehler argues:

> "Fellow gamers regularly engage in apprenticeship to help transition one another from the periphery to center (Steinkuehler 2004a); however, to ascribe the term *newbie* to someone is to signal your perception of the position within the social hierarchy, often in terms of your own (ostensibly higher) one. As Liadon, one informant, remarked, *newbie*, is a derogatory term that applies to anyone who one wants to demean, or has shown any lack of knowledge on any facet of the game"(Steinkuehler 2006: 48-49).

Despite the fact that, it may appear as if the "expert" community of players position themselves as the holders of higher knowledge and thus have a better understanding of the game; in reality, the label is temporary, as the term "noob" cannot be used but in a momentary condition, until the new player has a good enough grasp and knowledge of the game and its slang to be recognized by the others as part of the community:

> "For some people [newbie] it's anyone less knowledgeable than themselves. For others, it stops at a certain level. Being a newbie or a bet vet is contingent, not a game-granted right."(Steinkuehler 2006: 49).

Granting that the discussion on the Digital Language Divide within this paper is not concluded and is not comprehensive of every aspect, the apparent language gap between the have and have-nots of Information Technology (Payne 2005) seems to be more bridgeable if the aspects of common language learning are taken into consideration. This does not mean that the Digital Language Divide is inexistent or covert; indeed:

> "Discussions of the "digital divide" continue to endure well over a decade since its popularization because no policy solution has yet bridged the social inequities between the information communication technology (ICT) haves and have-nots. In fact, the digital divide's basic meaning has transmogrified into a vast array of differing definitions and conceptions over its brief history -- a single techno-social fissure that has splintered into a multitude of cracks" (Payne, 2005).

Additional instances of language divide might also be taken into account, if the issue: "[…] that women continue to receive less socialized encouragement and acceptance has clear implications for new media education"(Payne, 2005) is addressed.

Nevertheless the accessibility and possibility of bridging the language divide, in regards of the videogame language, does not appear to be either impossible or too dangerous, even though the Internet language has been labelled as: "A major risk for humanity"(Crystal 2006: 1). What needs to be taken into consideration, is the time needed to learn and understand the language, especially since many multiplayers games, which on average use more specific terminology and jargon than a single player game, require the players to invest large amount of time in order to grasp the characteristics of the gameplay.

1.2 Main Characteristics

"One of the most obvious - but not thereby less significant – features is the lexicon that belongs exclusively to the Internet, and which is encountered when someone enters any of its situation. This lexicon does not include terminology associated with computer science, programming, electronics, and other relevant subjects. Terms such as *cable, disk, bit, binary,* and *computer* form part of the jargon of science and technology which extends well beyond the Net. By contrast, a large number of words and phrases have emerged which are needed to talk about Internet-restricted situations, operations, activities, and personnel, making this one of the most creative lexical domains in contemporary English, involving all major lexical processes"(Crystal 2006: 87).

The language of the Internet and of the gaming communities seems to have appeared from out of nowhere, expanding and insinuating in every corner of the World Wide Web and reaching and influencing even texting language. One of the main negative remarks that have been addressed to such jargon is that it will ruin and destroy the standard English language, or any other standard in a language for that matter, as well as impoverishing the vocabulary ad learning abilities of children and young adults (Crystal 2006; 2008). The reasons for these critics can be explained by the fact that the Internet language relies on a large use of abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms, blends and logograms. Arguably, the development and evolution of any human language has seen a recurring moment in which new forms of speech and syntactic construction have arisen, changing and reshaping the language as it was known up until that point. Furthermore, the usual response of the general public or of the educated few has always been one of animosity or hostility towards the change that was slowly creeping into the language (Crystal 2008). However, one other recurring aspect of human language evolution is that, acronyms, abbreviations and contractions have always been a part of it. Some of them have become so common in usage that their original meaning has been forgotten or put aside. For instance, one of the most common words in the English language, the salutation "goodbye" is a contraction derived from the fourteenth

century "God be with ye"[9]. Another famous instance of initialism used in official papers is that of Lord Fisher who, sending a letter to Winston Churchill, decided to abbreviate the phrase "Oh, My God" into "O.M.G."[10].

Further instances of abbreviation, acronyms and initialisms can be found in the texting language, which, to some extent, may have seen the acquisition of some Internet lingo into the language of the mobile phones:

> "As with logograms, the examples may be new, but the process is not. People have been initializing common phrases for centuries. The Latin initialism *pm* (*post meridiem* 'after midday') is first recorded in English in 1666; *NB* (*nota bene* 'note well') in 1673. […] Some have become so familiar that people forget their original status as initialisms (CD, DVD, AIDS) and may even be unable to say what letters originally stood for, as in the case of *laser* ('light amplification by the stimulated emission of radiation')"(Crystal 2008: 43-44).

Thus, it should not come as a surprise to see people and Internet users come up with new logograms and acronyms while using them accordingly in every Net situation. Nevertheless, the general public has always questioned the use of this abbreviations, asking why should it be necessary to "impoverish" the language so much when a language standard has been already put to use in every other context. One of the reasons to explain this linguistic behaviour, especially in the gaming context, may be that of time constraint. First of all, videogame chats are usually *synchronous* (Crystal 2006), meaning that the exchange of messages and the communication process does not occur over a stretched period of time, like an exchange of written letters would; the exchange happens immediately, allowing for the addresser and addressee to exchange ideas and immediately see the response of the other party. However, videogame time constriction, together with the in-game chats character limit, may allow only for brief messages and quick exchanges of words. Arguably, this phenomenon does not happen in every game, as there are many games, like MMORPGs, which allow for 'dead time' in which it is possible to

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[9] Etymology of the word "goodbye" retrieved from (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=good-bye) last entry 06/04/17

[10] Retrieved from (https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/08-06-12-churchill-omg-letter.html) and (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/06/first-known-use-of-omg-winston-churchill_n_1748042.html) last entry 06/04/17

talk and express ideas and concepts more thoroughly; but in many games, like first-person shooters, the in-game time constriction and the hectic action, may prove as an hindrance for complex communication. For instance, in the case of the game *Counter-Strike Global Offensive*, players are not given much time to either exchange in pleasantries or start a complex conversation where it may be possible to know other players and their surroundings, thus making Internet friends. A general competitive match has a ten minutes waiting time which allows for players to connect, in which, theoretically, players could engage in conversation. This may or may not happen, based on the personal will of every player within the game; however, it would always be a limited exchange, since, first of all, the number of players in a competitive match is set to a maximum of ten, five for each team; secondly, once all participants have connected, the timer resets and the countdown for the beginning of the game starts. After the beginning of the game, players have only ten seconds in which they have to organize their inventory, namely buying weapons, grenades and armour, and provide indications to the team (should the team be formed by players who already know each other or by players who are playing together for the first time).

For instance, a typical indication given by one of the two teams might be that of "rush b flash". In this case, the team providing the information is the "terrorist team", as teams are divided in two groups, the attackers or "terrorists", who need to place a bomb and defend it until the explosion, or eliminate the adversaries; and the defenders or "counter terrorists", who need to defend the two bomb sites by eliminating the other team or defusing the bomb once it has been placed to score a point. The "rush b flash" phrase, said by the terrorist team, warns the others member of the party that, during the round, the team should try to rush towards the bomb site B (in every *Counter Strike* map two bomb sites are present, called A and B), armed with flashbang grenades, thus creating a diversion and distracting or blinding the members of the other team, thus gaining time to kill the enemies, plant the bomb and defend it by either killing the remaining members of the other team or letting the bomb count-down reach the zero mark. Albeit rather simple as phrase construction, this message carries a large number of details, given to the other members of the team in three simple words.

Of course, communication exchange in first-person shooter games does not begin and end with indications or strategies, it also allows, should the players wish to, for more general conversation on the game or match itself; for an exchange of

pleasantries and comments on the play-style of a particular players or on more general topics which may enable and allow for a more complex conversation later on in a private chat.

Although arguably first-person shooters may seem to be more constricted and limited for in-game communication, this is not always the case, especially with other game genres such as Massive Multiplayers Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs):

> "The virtual worlds that MMOG players (MMOGamers) routinely plug in and inhabit are persistent social and digitally material worlds, loosely structured by open-ended (fantasy) narratives, where players are largely free to do as they please– slay ogres, siege castles, or shake the fruit out of trees"(Steinkuehler 2006: 40).

Beside the general description of what happens in a MMO videogame, the above quotation also describes what players may or may not be able to do within the boundaries of the game world. This, however, also implies that in some situation (during free conversation between players or in more specific situations such as "pledge hunts" (Steinkuehler 2006: 43)) messages exchanged by players may prove to be more complex, structurally, and harder to understand for anyone who is not part of that community, or for someone who has just entered that community. For instance, the phrase muttered by Gaveldor: "afk g2g too ef ot regen no poms" (Steinkuehler 2006: 42) provides a great deal of information, which is given through acronyms, logograms and abbreviations. Following the analysis made by Steinkuehler of the utterance:

> "Tone Unit 1 is *interpersonal* and servers as a request that temporarily disengages the speaker from the ongoing collaborative "pledge hunt" activity during which it occurred. Immediately after delivering the utterance, Gaveldor did not go "away from keys" by leaving the computer and therefore suspending all online activity […]. In this context, *afk* functions much like the more common request *just a minute* or *one sec*

(Jesperson, 1924), which temporarily disengage the speaker from the activity and momentarily suspend one's obligation to the (social) interaction at hand"(Steinkuehler 2006: 43).

The sudden shift of meaning of the acronym *afk* (away from keyboard) appears to have been understood by the community with which Gaveldor is playing, because of the shared understanding of Internet language and also because of the knowledge of the general aspects of the videogame. Following the previous quote Steinkuehler adds:

> "Gaveldor stated where he was about to go and why, providing content information that characterized his forthcoming respite from the activity in terms that assume familiarity with the constraints and affordances of being a *Lineage* elf"(Steinkuelher 2006: 44).

That is because: "In terms of constraints, elves rely on mana or magic power to cast maintenance and enhancement spells on themselves and others" (Steinkuehler 2006: 44).

Therefore, in order to understand simple or complex utterances made by players within a videogame, a basic knowledge of the terms used is necessary to join within an Internet community:

> "Making sense of Gaveldor's utterance, given its code-like appearance due to its morphological and syntactic omission and complexities, requires familiarity with the lexical and grammatical features of Lineagese. It must be mentioned that it also requires considerable background knowledge acquired only through having actually played"(Steinkuehler 2006: 44).

Turning back to general aspects and characteristics of the Internet language, since the previous examples refer to more specific situations, although even those instances are a part of the gaming slang; it seems that the Internet language

displays both elements of written and spoken language (Crystal, 2006), as well as presenting different styles of language, from formal to informal. Indeed: "What makes Netspeak so interesting, as a form of communication, is the way it relies on characteristics belonging to both sides of the speech/writing divide"(Crystal 2006: 31). Of course, in many situations (e.g. e-mails or blogs) the written medium is what appears to be mostly evident, especially in a formal situation, since both blogs and e-mails allow for a more complex construction of the discourse, as well as the possibility of reading the text again to check for any grammatical mistakes or errors in level of formality. However:

"In contrast to the Web, the situations of e-mail, chatgroups, virtual worlds, and instant messaging, though expressed through the medium of writing, display several of the core properties of speech. They are time-governed, expecting or demanding an immediate response; they are transient, in the sense that messages may be immediately deleted (as in e-mails) or be lost to attention as they scroll off the screen (as in chatgroups); and their utterances display much of the urgency and energetic force which is characteristic of face-to-face conversation"(Crystal 2006: 31).

Even though the language of the Internet appears to display properties of the spoken language, some of the linguistic elements present are not part of the spoken conversation:

"But there are several major differences between Netspeak and face-to-face conversation, even in those electronic situations which are most speech-like. The first is a function of technology – the lack of simultaneous feedback. Messages sent via a computer are complete and unidirectional"(Crystal, 2006: 32).

Indeed, even in chatgroups, in which people usually chat and talk on a different range of subjects and topics, phrases are usually constructed to participate in that conversation, giving an opinion, making a statement or simply adding something to

the conversation itself. Nonetheless, even if chatgroups are *synchronous* as opposed to e-mail or blog conversation which are *asynchronous* (Crystal, 2006): "the rhythm of an Internet interaction is very much slower than that found in a speech situation, and disallows some of conversation's most salient properties"(Crystal 2006: 33). In fact, a problem related to Internet conversation, one which also has a major effect on online multiplayer games, is that of lag. The concept of lag or latency is easily explained. Lag or latency is usually referred as a delay between the forwarding of a message and the response of the server which makes that message appear on the screen for the other participants to read or, in the case of videogames, lag is the delay between the action or message of a player and the response of the server (Crystal 2006). The issue of lag between players or between people in a conversation does not seem to be extreme; however, it does disrupt an element of spoken conversation: "Turn-taking is so fundamental to conversation that most people are not conscious of its significance as means of enabling interactions to be successful"(Crystal 2006: 35).

Furthermore, studies of Internet interactions have also highlighted how, despite their spoken language likeness, the exchanges found within the Internet world lack one particular detail: "[…] studies of e-mail and chatgroup interactions have shown that they generally lack the very features of spoken language which indicate most spontaneity – notably, the use of interaction signals (*m, mhm, uh, huh, yeah…*) and comment clauses (*you know, you see,   mind you…*)"(Crystal 2006: 43). This, however, may explain the sprouting of elements such as *smileys* or *emoticons* which, although they do not compensate any lack of emotion during an Internet conversation (Crystal 2006: 37), allow for a, possibly, clearer depiction of what the sender is saying:

> "Written language has always been ambiguous, in its omission o facial expression, and in its inability to express all the intonational and other prosodic features of speech. Why did not one every introduce smileys there? The answer must be something to do with the immediacy of Net interaction, its closeness to speech. In traditional writing, there is time to develop phrasing which makes personal attitudes clear; that is why the formal conventions of letter-writing developed. And when they are missing, something needs to replace them. A rapidly constructed Net

message, lacking the usual courtesies, can easily appear abrupt or rude. A smiley defuses the situation"(Crystal 2006: 41-42).

Until now, it appears that the Internet language shares more features with traditional writing, rather than with traditional spoken communication. First of all, most communications online, whether in chatgroups, e-mails or in-game chat, are written, even though there may indeed be different levels of formality during type-written conversations, a Skype conversation with a friend presents a different register than the one used to write a formal e-mail to someone (e.g. Hey! *versus* To whom it may concern). Furthermore, even though the late development of technologies has permitted simpler forms of communication, allowing Internet conversations to happen not only through type-writing on keyboards, but also through webcams (Skype) and Voip (Voice over Internet Protocol), offering in return more complete forms of communication through the Web and allowing, in the case of videogames, simpler methods of message delivery that would lighten the burden of fast typewritten discourses during matches (i.e. the possibility to talk via Voip with a group of friends through voice processing built within the game itself or via a free program such as *Teamspeak[11]*); still, a large number of communication exchanges and discourses are done through type-written words that appear on the screen. Hence, theoretically, seen the differences between written and spoken conversation, it should be possible to affirm that the case of the Internet language is still a matter of written proficiency, rather than the spoken one in which people engage everyday outside of the World Wide Web (Crystal 2006).

Nevertheless, The Internet language and communication method still presents differences, even from the standard written conversation, for instance:

> "The other Internet situations also display differences from traditional writing, with respect to their space-bound presence. E-mails are in principle static and permanent, but routine textual deletion is expected procedure (it is a prominent option in the management system), and it is possible to alter messages electronically with an ease and undetectability which is not possible when people try to alter a traditionally written text"(Crystal 2006: 46).

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[11] Teamspeak System GmbH, 2001

Indeed, although nowadays the possibilities offered by the electronic mediums to change and alter the contents of the messages are fewer than it was previously possible, the time limit to which Internet communications are bound is perceivable. Not only in the case of e-mails, which are routinely deleted from accounts, together with spam and unwanted e-mails; but also in the case of chatgroup and in-game chats (Crystal 2006). In the case of chatgroups, the items of a particular conversations, between two or more participants, might be saved and provided for others who join the conversation at a later time and who might want some background on what is being discussed upon. However, once the session is over and every participant has disconnected, the system proceeds to delete the entire conversation, which might not be available at a later stage. Of course, the conversation might not be immediately deleted and lost in the fabrics of the Internet forever, as it may be stored by the providers for a limited period of time. Nevertheless, the participants of that conversations might not be able to retrieve one particular portion of the conversation and would have to start over. The time limit of the written chat medium is more perceivable in in-game chats. Beside the general action of the game, which might be momentarily hectic or rather calm, the physical space given to the chat is rather limited, allowing only a number of messages to be visible for a limited period of time. What this means is that the chat is not always on screen, but appears and disappears after a set time-period, allowing players to read the contents of the messages, without shifting the attention from the ongoing match too much. Furthermore, since the space given to the chat is limited, players who would want to see previous messages by other players would have to scroll upwards to see any previously sent message. In addition, unless the match being played is a competitive one, of any game, in which the participating players have to remain until the end perforce, thus being able to see the in-game chat from its beginning to its end; in the case of a non-competitive or casual match, players who join at a later stage of the match will not have the possibility to scroll upwards to check any previously sent message; they will, instead, have access only to the messages sent from their entrance into the game. Of course, players can ask to the other participants for clarification, should they find themselves in the midst of a flame or spam war happening in the chat.

Arguably, video-game matches and therefore, chats, might still be available to some players when stored, especially in the case of a report filed by other players (one or more) to signal an issue, with the game or with the player (e.g. spamming, flaming, feeding *etc.*); however, in many cases, the personnel overseeing the reports made by other players will not be the same as those players who have filed the report. Furthermore, unless the report is done to complain about the spoken behaviour of one or more particular players, in some cases chats are hidden from the stored videos of the match, as they might prove distracting or counterproductive to those who need to verify the claims made by the online report.

As it can be evinced from the previous analysis of video-game chats, as well as e-mails, chatgroups and other form of Internet communication:

> "Netspeak is identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both. Davis and Brewer see it thus, as an eclectic resource: 'Writing in the electronic medium, people adopt conventions of oral and written discourse to their own, individual communicative needs"(Davis and Brewer 1997: 19 quoted in Crystal 2006: 51).

In addition to the previous comment regarding the medium of the Internet communication: "Baron, in a metaphor which takes up the species theme, calls it an 'emerging language centaur – part speech, part writing."(Baron, 2000, 248 quoted in Crystal 2006: 51).

Before delving into the word formation process on Internet forums and in videogame context, a small aside should be made in regards of the texting language. Much like the Internet language, or the gaming language, texting relies heavily on abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms and logograms. Although, to some extent, the texting language may have reused some of the Internet lingo or taken inspiration from it, such spontaneous evolution of language is unprecedented:

> "But texting is different. Here we have a set of linguistic adaptations being introduced by youngsters, on their own, spontaneously, rapidly, and

without professional tuition. I have, quite frankly, never seen anything like it"(Crystal 2008: 148).

The reason behind such linguistic development may be explained due to the limits, given by the limited number of characters per message, by the low cost of a text message (Crystal 2008), compared with a standard phone call and by the accessibility to the keyboard which was, in the beginnings of the mobile era, not the most comfortable of ways to send a message:

> "It's easier. And it's fun. Abbreviations speed things up. Sending a message on a mobile phone is – notwithstanding the virtuoso performances of many young people – not the most natural of ways to communicate. The keypad was not originally designed with language in mind: it was intended to cope with numbers, not letters"(Crystal 2008: 65).

In fact, to access different letters the same number had to be pressed more than once, to reach the desired symbol which was only part of a larger and possibly, more complicated word (Crystal 2008).

In connection with the Internet language, the quickness and the directness of the medium also appears to be one of the reasons that justify its quick diffusion:

> "Texting is far more immediate, direct, and personal than alternative methods of electronic communication. It is more convenient than instant messaging, where both sender and receiver have to be sitting at their computers. Assuming your phone is on, you are likely to receive a text message rapidly, whereas an email can sit in your inbox for a considerable time"(Crystal 2008: 93).

Nevertheless, the texting medium and the subsequent use of abbreviations and acronyms within the instrument, have generated panic in the public domain,

especially in regards of young users who might, for instance, not be able to discern between the proper vocabulary of school and the texting lingo used among friends (Crystal 2008). The alarm connected to the use of the slang has not subsided with the years and, texting, is still perceived as a threat to language development in young people, even though, in recent years, the development of instant messaging and the evolution of technology towards a more language-friendly mobile keyboard has, partly, solved the issue of character limit, giving access to complex phrase construction. Furthermore:

> "In 2007 I had the opportunity to work with some groups of teenagers studying for A-levels at various schools in the UK. They all texted. I asked them whether they would use text abbreviations in their schoolwork. They looked at me with blank incomprehension. One said, 'Why would you ever want to do that?' They were perfectly clear in their minds that texting was for mobile phones and not for other purposes"(Crystal 2008: 152).

Thus, it seems that the users of the texting slang are more than aware of the situation in which the use of the lingo is allowed and not allowed.

Turning back to word formation in the Internet language, which incidentally is also connected to the formation of texting words, even in the form of borrowing, it appears that the majority of word formation process in Internet gaming forums are clippings and acronyms (Kalima, 2007).

Despite the fact that, according to Kalima:

> "Unfortunately there has not been much research into word formation in the context of the Internet. While this is an extremely vibrant and constantly evolving area of language use, there have not been extensive studies to how new words become integrated into the language use on the Internet"(Kalima 2007: 7).

a trend in the word formation can still be analysed. Following the result of Kalima's study, who surveyed a gaming forum for two months it occurs that:

> "Looking at the data, two words formation processes clearly set out from the res of the data: acronyms and clippings. These two made up 76 per cent of all the words included in the data, well over two thirds. The remaining 24 per cent was divided between meaning shifts, derived forms, blends, alternative spellings and coinages"(Kalima 2007: 10).

Undoubtedly, the two words formation processes, acronyms and clippings are also vastly used during video-game matches and, more generally, in the gaming community. The reason behind the prominence of acronyms and clippings in the word formation process has been justified and explained previously. Following the previous explanations, which by no mean conclude or solve the discussion on the Internet language, on the gaming language and on the word formation process, a list of words commonly found in Internet communication and exchanges will be provided. Some of the words used in the lists can also be found in Kalima (2007); Bibo *et al.* (2009) and Crystal (2004). Although the lists presented will not comprehend every slang word found and used in the Internet language, as the introduction of new words within new multiplayer videogames and Internet forums happens at a fast pace, it will still prove useful, giving a general idea of how the language works.

The first list collects a number of expressions commonly found in gaming communities; words which are game specific will be followed by an explanation and a collocation, indicating in which game those words may be found.

General Terminology

B or b = back (indication to go back, thus avoiding unnecessary risks)

Dps = Damage per second (Used In MMORPG games to indicate either how much damage a player is doing per second or to indicate how much an item is doing damage per second)

Filthy Casual = Used to describe a player

Haxxor = Hacker

Noob = Newcomer, someone new to the game (also found as: noob, newb, newbie, n00b)

Ownage = To score points easily against the enemy team

Ownage = To score points easily against the enemy team

Penta kill = Killing five enemies in a row

Pro = Skilled player, professional

Pwnage = Variation of 'ownage'

Pwned = Used to refer to somebody who got killed easily by an enemy

Quad kill = Killing four enemies in a row

Ranged = A ranged weapon or attack

Rekt = Wrecked, used when a team loses the game with a substantial difference in points scored

Rekt = Wrecked, used when a team loses the game with a substantial difference in points scored

Scrub = Newbie, Noob

Triple kill = Killing three enemies in a row

Uber = Extremely powerful

Acronyms/Initialisms

Afk = Away from keyboard

AI = Artificial Intelligence

AKA = Also known as

Asap = As soon as possible

Atm = At the moment

BB = Bye Bye

Bbl = Be Back Later

Bg = Bad game

CG = Computer Graphics

DIY = Do it yourself

Exp = Experience

Fps = First Person Shooter

Fps = Frames per second

Ftp = Free to play

Ftw = For the win

FYI = For your information

G2g = Got to go

Gg = Good game

Gl = Good luck

Hf = Have fun

HP = Health points

Hs = Head Shot

IIRC = If I remember Correctly

Ikr = I know, right?

Ima = I'm going to

Imho = In my humble opinion

Irl = In real life

Lmao = laughing my ass off

Lol = Laughing out loud

MLG = Major League Gaming

MP = Mana points

Np = No problem

Npc = Non-player Character

Omg = Oh my God

Pc = Player Character

Rofl = Rolling on the floor laughing

Roflmao = Rolling on the floor laughing my ass off

Sry = Sorry

Tba = To be announced

Tbh = To be honest

TP = Teleport

Ttyl = Talk to you later

Ty = Thank you

Tym = Time

Tyvm = Thank you very much

Wp = Well played

XP = Experience points

Phonograms

B = be

C = See

Cya = See you

K = Ok

KK = Ok

R = Are

U = You

Y = Why

Clippings

Atk = Attack

Congrats = Congratulations

Def = Defence

Dex = Dexterity

Frag = Fragmentation Grenade, also found as verb (to frag somebody = killing an enemy)

Min = Minute

Sec = Second (measure of time)

Sta = Stamina

Str = Strength

Tho = Though

Logograms

2pro4me = Too pro for me

3spooky5me = Exaggeration
used to enhance and ironize the
original meaning (2spooky4me =
too spooky for me)

Every1 = Everyone

L8r = later

M8 = Mate (noun)

The second list presents a selection of acronyms used to convey swear words
or curses which may be found both in the gaming context, as well as blogging
or chatgroup contexts.

AF = As fuck

Asafp = As soon as fucking
possible

Fck = Fuck

Ffs = For fuck sake

Fml = Fuck my life

Ftfw = For the fucking win

Fy = Fuck you

Fyfi = For your fucking
information

Fyvm = Fuck you very much

Fyvm = Fuck you very much

GD = Goddamn

Gtfo = Get the fuck out

Hs = Holy shit

Jfc = Jesus fucking Christ

Omfg = Oh my fucking God

Stfu = Shut the fuck up

Tf = The fuck

Wtf = What the fuck

The third and final list presents a series of borrowings from the English
language which have become common in use in Italian in videogame context.
However, many of the terms may not be in use anymore, as the custom of
translating videogames in other languages other than the one in which it was
originally created is becoming more widespread, thus allowing for acronyms
and clippings to be created in many different languages. Furthermore, many of

the terms are used both as nouns and as verbs, acquiring the suffix –are, which is found as a suffix of the first group of regular verbs in Italian.

Chargare = To charge

Flammare = To flame

Healare = To heal

Laggare = To experience lag or latency issues

MMORPGs to indicate the player who has the role of tank, namely receiving damage while providing cover for the other players)

Ranged = Used to indicate a ranged attack or a ranged weapon (e.g. a bow)

Respawnare = To respawn (also used as a reflexive verb)

Ressare = To resuscitate somebody

Spammare = To spam

Spawnare = To spawn (also used as a reflexive verb)

Tankare = To tank (usually used in MMORPGs)

Greetings and farewells in video-gaming

In-game chats are, generally, very restricted and prohibitive in terms of characters utilization, meaning that, if compared with Instant Messaging chats and E-mails, in-game chats would certainly have fewer characters available, thus restricting the length of the messages sent by players to other players. Furthermore, unlike emails, game chats do not possess structural elements. As described by Crystal:

> "And individual e-mail consists of a series of functional elements, for which terminology varies somewhat, all of which are similar in purpose to those found in traditional letters and memos. 'Compose' screens typically display a bipartite structure, with a preformatted upper area (the *header* or *heading*) and a lower area for the main text (the *body* or *message*). In some systems, if we choose to attach a file to the e-mail, a third space

becomes available, in which an icon representing the attachment is located" (Crystal 2006: 100).

As a matter of fact, in game chats do not provide *headers* since, in the economy of a game chat where player can more simply address each other by writing the nickname of the addressee in the chat, it would be a waste of time and space. Furthermore, in-game chats do not provide a system with which players can send attachments of any kind, because it would slow down the speed at which messages are sent and would, possibly, slow the game down by increasing the lag levels and, consequently, increase the loss of information packets. Thus, in-game chat allow only for a limited number of characters (a hundred twenty-six for the videogame *Dota2* and a hundred twenty-three for *Counter Strike: Global Offensive,* including spaces). Although the match chats are usually recorded by the game system for posterity, thus allowing community control, should a report of flaming be signalled to the community (see below), the in-game chats and talks may be classified in a similar way to the Instant Messaging ones.

Arguably, in-game chats are not very complex in terms of message exchange either, namely, most of the message sent by the players will concern the current match being played or, in more unfortunate cases, will be a display of language abuse (flaming or spamming). Nevertheless, some recurring elements might still be identified. At the start of a match, in a mutual manner following a non-written law, players exchange greetings and formalities. Those formalities can be exchanged between players of the same team, should they not be a group of friends playing together, and between players of opposing teams as well. Moreover, at the end of a match, players usually exchange farewells in various forms, which may also include a comment on the quality of the match itself. The reason for this exchange of final messages may be explained by the vast and varied number of players playing a specific game at the same moment. What this means is that, after a match, a player might not find the other players with whom she has played for a long time, unless she personally adds them to their personal friend list.

The presented list of terms may not be inclusive of all the phrases utilised within every existing game, but is restricted to the more general terminology used variedly in multi-player games.

-       Hi everybody (also found as hi all, hello all, hello everybody, hey all, hey everybody). The first term is rather simple. It presents itself a standard greeting addressed to other players in the match. Even though the greeting is used towards every player, the use may spark a conversation with a former known game player within the match, should he or she know the sender.

-       Gl & Hf (also found as gl&hf, glhf, gl, hf). The second term is usually used at the beginning of a match and is used to wish to the other team a good and enjoyable match (good luck and have fun). The phrase itself might even be rendered in a more 'formal' way by adding ladies and gentlemen at the end; thus: gl & hf ladies and gentlemen. The acronym, however, can be ironized upon by changing the words attached to the acronym. A joke made with the 'gl & hf' acronym might be: get leavers have feeders. What the phrase refers to may be easily explained analysing the two elements 'leaver' and feeder' separately. The term 'leaver' refers to players who, for different and disparate reasons, decides or has to leave the game midway through, thus positioning the team which they have just left in a difficult situation, creating unevenness in the number of players[12]. The term 'feeder' instead refers to the act of feeding the other team or players with experience points (gained upon killing an enemy) and gold coins (also gained upon killing an enemy). The act of 'feeding' may be voluntary, in the case of a player who chooses to do so and who will be later reported by the other members of his team for 'intentional feeding'; or may also be involuntary, due to the inexperience of the player with the rules of the game. The terms itself is used in a derogatory way and may have originated from the custom map *Dota* developed by the players[13] of the real-time strategy game *Wacraft III*[14].

Nevertheless, beside the possible irony in the phrase 'gl&hf' which would have to be presented without the use of the acronym (thus, it would be written as 'get leavers have feeders'), the term 'gl&hf' is generally used in a positive and polite way.

-       Ns (nice shot). The third example is generally used while the game is being played (at the beginning, midway or through the end) and is used to compliment another player on the shot fired to kill an enemy. The commendation of such a 'kill' is usually done in first person shooter games; however, the term might be found in Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas as well. Furthermore the compliment exchange is

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[12] Definition of leaver (2,c), (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=leaver&defid=1712926) last entry 27/03/17
[13] *Dota* (Defence of the Ancients) map creation and development on (http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=18863) last entry 27/03/17
[14] *Warcraft III*, Blizzard Entertainment, Sierra Entertainment, 2002

usually done between the victim and the killer, either because the killcam[15] has shown to the player who got killed how the 'killer' has shot him or because the victim has seen the shot being fired and then hit him. Another form which may be found is 'nice kill'. The phrase is not initialised generally and, like 'nice shot', is used to describe and compliment upon a good point obtained by the enemy player.

- Wp (well-played). This example may be encountered either as a congratulation on the scoring of a point or at the end of a match. The first instance in which the acronym can be found may resemble the above mentioned use of the acronym standing for 'nice shot'. However, the initialism 'well played' is usually adopted in broader scenarios. To use the expression, there is no necessity for the presence of direct killing between players. The concept can be used to indicate a balanced and strenuous fight between players, which may or may not result in the murder of one of them, or may be used to compliment the scoring of a point by the team or by one of the members of the team, without the killing of any player. The expression might also be found paired with the acronym 'gg' (good game) at the conclusion of the match.

- Gg (good game). This expression is used at the end of a match, usually by every player in both playing teams, as a form of farewell and comment on the match. The term is generally used in a positive way and is not derogatory. Furthermore, the use of this acronym has become so consistent within the game sphere, that some game corporations have decided to incorporate such acronym to put an end to the match. In the case of the game *Dota 2*, during official competitive matches, teams might decide to end the game by writing in the 'all chat' included in the game the acronym 'gg'. By writing 'gg' in the chat, the game system triggers a countdown after which the main base (the ancient) will be passively destroyed by the system, thus, without the need of any enemy player to actively demolish it[16]. However, this function is only active during official matches and not on regular 'home' matches, thus avoiding any incomprehension by the computing machines which would result in an early end of the match. Furthermore, the expression 'gg' can be coupled with other acronyms. One of the terms with which it is usually coupled is 'wp', which allows for a more positive comment on the end result of the

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[15] Killcam definition (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Killcam&defid=5954807) last entry 27/03/17
[16] Example of 'gg' given during an official tournament
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG74JtuejMg), last entry 27/03/17

match (gg wp = good game, well played), whether it is expressed by the member of the winning or of the losing team.

- Ez pez lemon squez (Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy). The following example of slang term used in the gaming language presents two different forms of reading, depending whether the term is read in Italian or English. The phrase itself is used in an ironic and derogatory way and its meaning loosely follows that of the commercial from where it was born[17], namely, the easiness with which a game is won or a player is killed. Beside its use, the term also presents two different ways in which it can be pronounced, depending on whether the speaker is English or Italian. In the English case, the abbreviation of the expression will still be read as if it was written in standard English. That is to say that the use of the letter 'z' in exchange for the 'asy' ending of the word does not present a difference in spelling: /ˈiːzɪ ˈpiːzi ˈlɛmən skwiːzi/. Thus, the phrase written either in standard English or in gaming slang will not present any difference in reading and spelling for a native speaker of English.

However, in the case of an Italian reader, the phrase might be read differently: /ˈɛz ˈpɛz ˈlɛːmən skwˈɛːz/. Beside the opening of the vowel 'e' the phrase also presents, in the case of Italian spelling, the voiced consonant 'z' which is not followed by another sound; it is instead apocopate. Although the differences between Italian and English spelling are not too varied, it may prove interesting to see how a word found originally in standard English is reworked to fit into the Italian vocabulary and pronunciation scheme.

- Bg (bad game). The following example is used, like the aforementioned example of 'gg' at the end of a match or game and is used to described the quality of the match itself. To clarify, it should be mentioned that the expression 'quality of the game' does not refer to the graphics quality, the computing machine performance or if the encoding of the game is well done or not; it refers instead to the performance of the teams and players involved in a particular match, how the members of the team behaved and worked with each other and how the other team responded. The term itself is not positive, as it gives a negative description of how the game was perceived; however, it is not derogatory. The acronym is not adopted to describe a particular player, but to refer to how the match went, in a broader and more general way. Finally, the term itself is not usually coupled with any of the mentioned acronyms, but can be substituted by the phrase 'easy peasy lemon

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[17] Definition of Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy
(http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=easy+peasy+lemon+squeezy&defid=4342168) last entry 27/03/17

squeezy' which adds an ironic and derogatory undertone to the expression 'bad game'.

-        Gn (good night). This final example of gaming greeting and farewell is fairly simple in explanation and usage. The acronym is usually used at the end of a match and can be coupled with other expressions (e.g. gg wp gn; gg gn), or can be used by itself. Arguably, not every instance of gaming will end during the night; namely, if a player from Europe plays and finishes a match at 10 p.m. and writes 'gn' another player, who might be playing from the United States, might not answer to the wish of good night, because of the different time zone in which the two players are. Nevertheless, the use of such acronym is usually seen as positive and as a sign of a particular player disconnecting and shutting the game or program off (logging-off). Furthermore, although other instances can be found (good afternoon or good day) the acronym for good night is used to refer to a various number of time zones, even if the player writes it during the morning. More generally, it is an expression used to sign-off and disconnect from the game. The use is positive although not entirely polite; it simply is an exchange of formalities between various players.

Homographs

Homographs can also be found within the gaming slang:

> "Each of two or more words spelled the same but not necessarily pronounced the same and having different meanings and origins (e.g. bow and bow)."[18]

Given the definition of the Oxford Dictionary, the case of the Internet slang presents many similarities. Two or more words, in this case acronyms and initialisms, which are written, spelt and pronounced in the same way, but which have a different meaning. This is the case of two different words, commonly found in the gaming sphere, but also outside of it, that refer to a type of game genre (first-person

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[18] Oxford Living Dictionaries (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/homograph)

shooter) and to the frequency at which consecutive images (frames) are displayed during an animation (frames per second). The frame rate, also called frames per second, can be found outside of the gaming community, as it refers not only to the frequency with which gaming animations are displayer, but also to video cameras and motion capture systems.[19]

On the other hand, the first-person shooter game genre refers to a certain type of gameplay which is centred around gun and projectile weapon-based combat through a first person perspective, namely, the player will experience the game through the eyes of the main character, without seeing any other part of the body, although there are some exceptions, beside the hands, arms and the weapon in use.[20]

Both terms are abbreviated, inside and outside the gaming situation, as FPS (or fps). This could prove to be a problem for many readers who happen to enter a conversation after it has already begun. However, aid is provided by the context in which these two different acronyms are used. The following examples, which provide clarification for the context in which these different acronyms are used is completely made up and does not refer to any conversation.

> A: "I'm having trouble playing the game, there is a sudden fps drop in
> certain levels."
> B: "Have you tried lowering the graphics quality or locking the fps at 30?"

The context makes the use of the fps acronym clear. The player A is lamenting an unexplained and displeasing drop in the frame rate during the game session. Player B give player A some advice to help fix the situation, even if such solution might be momentary.

> A: "I've been playing that new fps game that has come out in 2016 lately.
> It's frantic and gory, I dig it."
> B: "You mean Doom? Best fps 2016".

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[19] Definition of Frame Rate (https://www.techopedia.com/definition/7297/frames-per-second-fps)
[20] First-person shooter honourable mentions
(http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1832/the_gamasutra_quantum_leap_awards_.php)

Here, as well as with the previous example, the context aids the clarification process. The game referred to in the conversation is *Doom* (Bethesda Softworks, 2016), one of the pillars of first-person shooting games. The first issue of the game was published in 1993 (*Doom*, iD Software, GT Interactive, Activision, 1993).

Another instance of homographs in the Internet language connected with the gaming language might be that of the acronym lol. The well-known and acknowledged meaning of lol as "laughing out loud" (Crystal 2009: 184) is still being widely used in the gaming sphere, with a number of games embedding the acronym inside the game chat, thus allowing the player to write the word in the chat with a quick click of a specific button either on the keyboard or on the joystick controller (e.g. in the case of Disc Jam[21] the 'LOL!' prompt command can be easily accessed by pressing the up-arrow key on the joystick's d-pad once, which opens the contextual menu, allowing the selection of a message to send to the other players via chat which will be sent by then pressing the up-arrow key again, thus making the word appear in the match chat).

However, since 2009, the acronym 'lol' has had another meaning as well. With the publication of the game League of Legends by Riot Games[22], the community of players has slowly introduced the acronym 'lol' to refer to the game itself. The new use of the acronym was neither refused nor rejected by the Internet community, which has integrated it into its vocabulary. The use of such an acronym, whether it is used to refer to the game or to the act of cackling, is of no particular difficulty. Likewise with the aforementioned acronym, the context clarifies the meaning and the use of the word.

For instance:

    A: "The last match we played was really good. Lol at the guy who left mid game"

    B: "True. He rage-quitted because he thought we were going to lose, noob."

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[21] *Disc Jam*, High Horse Entertainment, 2017.
[22] *League of Legends*, Riot Games, 2009

The case here is relatively simple, the use of the lol acronym refers to the act of 'laughing out loud'.

A: " I've been playing an entertaining Moba[23] game recently called lol"
B: "What's the name of the game?"
A: "Lol. As in League of Legends. It's a fun game."

In the second made-up example, the use of the acronym has to be clarified. The speaker indicated as B has no knowledge of the use of the 'lol' acronym outside its general and common use. Therefore B demands an explanation, which is provided by A. However, now that the speaker B has learnt the different meaning of the acronym, it will prove much easier to understand the usage of the acronym, depending on the context in which it is used.

The two examples provided do not, of course, conclude the discussion about the presence of homographs in the Internet slang. Other different types might be encountered inside different game realms or inside blogs or forums which discuss elements of a specific game.

Furthermore, since the number of multiplayer videogames has largely increased during the last decades, many more cases of homographs might be found in different video games, as the trend of using acronyms to refer to specific or important items within the game is diffused (see for instance Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning)[24]. However, the search for such homographs might prove counterproductive, since the acronyms refer, in large percentage, to items found within one specific game, therefore, not presenting any connection between two or more homographs, beside that of granting the same set of initial letters in the exact same order. Moreover, the task of categorizing each and every existing homograph might not serve the purpose of providing a clearer image of the Internet language. Since many acronyms found inside a multiplayer game might refer only to a specific type of game, the language, or rather, the jargon, creates a divide between players of different videogames. The divide does not create an insurmountable gap between

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[23] Multiplayer Online Battle Arena
[24] *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*, Electronic Arts, 2008

players, who, should the case present itself, might not understand what each player is referring to. Many cases of misunderstanding, like in the example provided above, are simply resolved by a question of clarification or by the search, by one of the players, of the meaning of a specific Internet slang term used inside a specific game (e.g. zerg-rush in Starcraft 2)[25]. However, learning such a vast amount of acronyms might lead to a case of information overload.

1.3 Language censorship

> "The lack of an elementary semantics also bedevils those software systems which attempt to evaluate the content of websites (*censorware*), replacing parts of words by X's, filtering out pages, or blocking access to sites which contain 'dangerous' words"(Crystal 2006: 224).

The issue of language formality has always been a major part of the internet community. As of today, many blogs and chats are provided with parental control, which allows the parents or, in the majority of the cases, the supervisor of those accounts to determine which pieces of information and language are safe for work (SFW) or not (NSFW).

In addition, many game developers and creators have decided to implement word-processing, thus allowing the machine to analyse words, names and nicknames to find inappropriate content or language and censor it. However, this solution has, sometimes, led to unexpected and hilarious outcomes:

> "[…] In one report, a student was barred from his high school's website from the school library because the software objected to his word *high*. A woman named Hilary Anne was not allowed to register the username *hilaryanne* with a particular e-mail company because it contained the word *aryan*" (Crystal 2006: 224).

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[25] *Starcraft 2*, Blizzard Entertainment, 2010

Although the results of such decision-making have sometimes amused their users, the necessity for a computing machine adequate enough to censor improper phrases or terms was still felt as paramount. However, the process of development and computation of such machines is still experimental and requires improvement and refinement.

In the meantime, developers and programmers have reasoned about what could have been done to fix the situation and to improve the current state of language censorship. This decision has led to different types of results which are spread throughout the gaming community in very different ways.

One such solution can be perceived through the nickname restrictions which have been used for decades. Albeit an innovative method, it still needs refinement. Since the programming unit or machine cannot extrapolate what is defined as 'context', the censoring of certain nicknames was still based on what the machine found allowable or not. Therefore, nicknames or sudonyms such as *SentientKiller* might be refused or banned, since 'killer' might be found on the forbidden word-list of a game. "Other examples of words which have been banned include *cucumbers* (because it contains *cum*), *Matsushita* (*shit*), *analysis* (*anal*), *class* (*ass*), and *speech* (*pee*)." (Crystal 2006: 224).

Therefore, in order to overcome such censorship issues, the game developers have decided to introduce a system of commendation and report. For instance, the videogame *Dota 2*[26] relies heavily on the messages and indications provided by the community. In fact, at the end of each match, a survey query appears on the screen of the player, allowing her to commend other players which have had (during that particular match) a good conduct, that have been helpful in aiding new players understand the basics of the gameplay or that have managed to solve a thorny situation of flaming. Moreover, the survey query also presents the possibility to report and signal to the gaming community, which is supervised by Valve Corporation, players which have broken the common rules of conduct by flaming, spamming or general language abuse. In addition, many games, including *Dota 2* allow players to report other participants, should they use libel, swearwords or improper words as nicknames. The latter example is, of course, not restricted to the gaming industry, but has proven to be widely used by blogs, research sites and inter-relay chats (Crystal 2006). To provide an example using the game *Battlefield*

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[26] *Dota 2,* Valve Corporation, 2013

1[27], in which players have, as aforementioned, the possibility to report language abuse and improper nickname use (e.g. *Hitler, XxXPussy_EaterXxX),* the community of players is active and with simple steps can report any libel or abuse made by other players. In addition to the community control, multiplayer games provide a system to mute players that have been excessively present in the chat (spamming) or that have used the chat system improperly, filling it with swearwords. The work of the system itself is pretty simple. In the case of computer gaming, if a particular player is being offensive, another gamer can mute that particular player (i.e. by simply right-clicking on the nickname of the player in question, and then by selecting the on-screen mute option with a left-click of the mouse) for the entire duration of the game. This, of course, is just a momentary solution. However, the included report system allows the possibility of an environmental-friendly gameplay.

Finally, the report system created by gaming development is not simply given to the participants of the game with no restriction or punishment for improper use. In fact, once the report has been sent, a recapitulation of the report is sent to the corporation and analysed by either an automatic system or by a moderator, providing further control on the report-action and, should the case present itself, excluding (banning) the specific player from the community for a variable amount of time (one week, a month, forever).

However, the report system itself is by no means secure or perfect. Many instances of report abuse can be found in the gaming sphere.

To solve the issue, some developing companies have opted for a more thorough verification, which involves the presence of a moderator who verifies and controls the claims made by the players. Nevertheless, the issue of language censorship is still being dealt with and a complete and thorough solution has not been reached as of yet and might not be reached for a long time. However, even if there is a slight chance that the problem will never be solved completely, which always depends on the evolution of technology and new systems specifically created to deal with such issues, the mitigation of what are defined by the internet communities as wrong behaviour and language abuse appears to be satisfying enough. Certainly, this is not the case for every existing community, as there might be some gaming communities which could be defined as more 'toxic' than others. Furthermore, the task of abuse control would be nigh on impossible for both the community and the moderators, as some language issues might go unnoticed.

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[27] *Battlefield 1*, Electronic Arts, 2016

Nonetheless, the communities and the moderators which work together appear to have slightly improved the situation, thus creating an environmental friendly experience for most of the players.

1.4 New varieties

> "It seems to be a standard convention for books dealing with digital technology to begin or end by warning their readers that everything they contain is going to be soon out of date; and a linguistic perspective on the subject is no exception. Any attempt to characterize the language of the Internet, whether as a whole or with reference to one of its constituent situations, immediately runs up against the transience of technology" (Crystal 2006: 257).

With reference to the above passage quoted from *Language and the Internet* (2006), it should be highlighted that the categorization and analysis of new jargon terms which have appeared recently in the gaming sphere, might need to be rewritten or reconsidered, as the jargon used even five years from hence might have completely separated itself from previously known words, reworked their meaning or, more simply, substituted the old ones with newer and catchier terms.
Furthermore:

> "The different arenas of communication described in earlier chapters will not remain as they are for long, given that the technological developments upon which they rely are constantly evolving, putting users under constant pressure to adapt their language to the demands of new contexts, and giving them fresh opportunities to interact in novel ways" (Crystal 2006: 257).

Albeit being a temporary categorization and analysis, the presence of new terms and words which have experienced a "revival" (i.e. jargon which finds its origin in older games and that is now being widely used in diverse context) is worth studying.

Moreover, many of the expressions listed and analysed might not be precluded to the sphere of gaming. Thanks to the wide diffusion of Internet connection, many cases which involve the utilisation of a slang gaming term in other cybernetic areas (such as blogging or instant chats) may be found. This further analysis is not meant to contest the use of such "gaming terms" in other net situations; it is instead meant as a simple analysis, which might unfortunately preclude the different hues in which these terms might be used in contexts found outside of the gaming sphere.

Finally, although the linguistic development of such jargon is still in course and will still be ongoing for many years, the arrival of different communication protocols such as the Voice over internet Protocol (VoIP) appears to be of great importance, as it allows for different methods of communication, as well as the possible primordial soup for many other linguistic changes:

> "[…] Others are already emerging, whose linguistic consequences can as yet only be imagines. Chief among these is the arrival of speech as a routine medium of Internet communication. Voice over internet Protocol (VoIP) allows analog audio signals to be turned into digital form so that they can be transmitted over the Internet" (Crystal 2006: 256).

Although the developing of new communication systems is extremely interesting, the main focus of this chapter will be to list the new terms that have slowly but surely come into usage in the gaming sphere, giving a brief explanation of those terms, as well as showing what "older" terms are being substituted or are being used less, in favour of the new jargon.

The first example which can be taken into account is the word *scrub* (or skrub).

The term is used to indicate a bad player and has, to some extent, substituted the slang term 'noob'. However, the term scrub originally related to the action of a player; namely a gross mistake made by such player who, despite making such an error, kept on repeating the same action over and over again. Furthermore, the origin of the term itself appears to come from the game *Street Fighter II*[28]. Within the context of *Street Fighter II* the term describes a way of playing the game, which involves the mashing of one hand against the control pad, thus imitating the

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[28] Street Fighter II, Capcom, 1991

scrubbing movement, or cleaning motion, done with a sponge.[29] However, the term has been used to describe a new player (noob) in various instances and has spread throughout the gaming community[30].

The second example of a new term which has found its way into the gaming community and which can be used in many instances is the word *rekt*, also used as a verb (to get rekt). The term generally refers to either a player or a team losing a match or a game. The term can be used both by the winning and the losing team (e.g. You got rekt son; the other team is destroying us, we're getting rekt!). The jargon itself, when used inside the gaming context generally refers to losing a match. However, the term can also be found outside the gaming context and can be used as slang to designate someone who is under the influence of drugs[31]. The term itself comes from shipwreck, meaning that something was destroyed during the disaster or that somebody was cast ashore after a ship accident[32].

The third instance of new gaming words can be found in the utilization of the acronym R.I.P. (Rest In Peace). The term itself is usually used to describe a kill or a character's death in a multiplayer video-game. However, unlike the two previous examples, this acronym has many variations which can be freely applied, depending solely on the will of the person writing it.

- R.I.P (Rest In Peace)[33]
- R.I.P (Rest In Pieces)
- R.I.P in pizza
- Rest in Pepperoni
- Ripperoni Pepperoni[34]
- R.I.P in Pieces

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[29] Urban Dictionary, "scrub" definition, entry n. 2 (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=scrub), last entry 21/03/17
[30] The term, used widely by the gaming community can also be found in videos, such as (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7wMpYQSAJQ). The slang term is found at 0:03. Last entry 21/03/17
[31] Oxford English Dictionary, definition of "wrecked" (http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230602?redirectedFrom=wrecked#eid). Last entry 21/03/17
[32] Oxford English Dictionary, *Ibid.*
[33] This slang term has also been inserted in the prompt chat command list in the *Disc Jam* videogame mentioned earlier in chapter I.
[34] Used both in the English and Italian language.

These variations of the same expression are not always fully written as in the above examples. Manifolds, the writing of such words is reduced to either "rip" or any combination of the aforementioned examples, without any capitalization (rip in pizza, ripperoni, ect.).

A fourth example is provided by the acronym "MLG" (Major League Gaming). The word itself comes from no slang or jargon. The Major League Gaming[35] is, actually, a professional electronic sports organization, which provides and offers tournaments in which players (playing alone or as a team) can challenge each other in order to win the final monetary price. However, the acronym has recently spread into common usage and is now used to define a well thought of way of killing an opponent, which can be done by one or more players (e.g. Mlg Pro kill).

The fifth example might be presented as a group of words, respectively, deaded and dieded. Both terms are chiefly used outside of the gaming sphere and context; nevertheless, both terms have been recently introduced into the gaming slang, albeit carrying some differences from their original use.

As a matter of fact, both words can be found in blogs and chat-groups and usually refer to something very tiring (dieded)[36] or something very reckless (deaded)[37]. This specific pair of terms presents an exaggeration, exemplified and shown by the use of the suffix –ed, used to form the past simple of regular English verbs, added at the end of the two words.

The following example of new Internet language variety should be mentioned with a premise. The term itself is not entirely new. However, throughout years of change in the Internet language it has survived and has been spread into other games. The Internet gaming word which is being referred to is: 'teabagging'. The term itself apparently comes from an intercourse and pranking practice[38]. However, in the context of Internet language and of gaming, the slang word apparently originated[39] within the game *Halo[40]*. The term itself became so popular in use that is actually found its way into an episode of *The Simpsons[41]*. The word refers to the act of repeatedly crouching and standing on the face of a dead enemy. Moreover:

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[35] Major League Gaming Site (http://www.majorleaguegaming.com/about); last entry 21/03/17

[36] Definition of dieded (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dieded); last entry 21/03/17

[37] Definition of deaded (http://onlineslangdictionary.com/meaning-definition-of/deaded); last entry 21/03/17

[38] For the definition of such practice, see: (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=teabagging). Last entry 23/03/17

[39] On the origin of *teabagging* (http://thoughtforyourpenny.com/2016/02/teabagging-video-games/) last entry 23/03/17

[40] *Halo: Combat Evolved*, Bungie, 2001)

[41] *The Simpsons*, Season 20 episode 19, Matt Groening, 2008.

> "[Teabagging is] a term heavily used in the first-person shooter multiplayer online game "Battlefield 2." Teabagging is referred as, upon a successful kill of another player, crouching over the head of the victim's dead body as they lay on their back (dead); and doing so repeatedly in a "teabagging" motion."[42]

The practice of 'teabagging' started with the introduction of what may be referred to as 'death view', namely, after a player died or was killed within a multiplayer match, the camera would still linger showing the dead body and the surrounding area. This 'death view' sprouted the practice of teabagging which was and is still being used as a provocation towards the dead player.

Another example of Internet language slang is that of 'feed' or 'to feed' or even 'feeder' when referred to a player. The two words can be found usually in First person-shooter (Fps) games or in Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (Moba). In the case of a Moba game, where the two teams are composed of a maximum of 5 players, the term is used to refer to: "A player who is killed by the opposing player or team more than once through lack of skills and experience, thus helping the opposing side."[43] The same definition applies to First Person-Shooter games as well, although the number of players present in a match might vary (from 12 to 64 online players), thus rendering the 'feeding' process harder or more complicated.

Another example of Internet slang which can be found both outside and inside the gaming context is the acronym 'irl' (In Real life)[44]. The use of this term is not restricted to the gaming sphere, but it can be easily found also in blogs, chats and forums. The term itself is rather self-explanatory, namely it refers to the 'real outside world' rather than the Internet world. Although the acronym itself can be found outside of the context of gaming language, one particular use is worth mentioning. Coupled with the phrase 'fight me' the use of the acronym forwards a request by one player towards another of 'fighting in real life'. Of course, the request is never taken seriously and is ironic most of the times; even though this particular acronym or

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[42] Teabagging, videogame definition (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=teabagging&defid=1558483) Entry n. 14. Last entry 23/03/17
[43] Definition of Feeder, (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/feeder), last entry 23/03/17
[44] Crystal D. *Txtng The gr8 db8,* page 193, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008

phrase is used: "When a person on internet gets annoyed by someone who insult about their physical appearance, or their jimmies just got rustled"[45]. In any case, on many occasions, it would be almost impossible to meet in real life, because even if the Internet allows for the closing of boundaries between users and allows people to connect and talk or play with each other over long geographical distances, those distances would still be present 'irl'. Furthermore, the 'irl' acronym presents some variations in use. It is indeed possible to encounter, beside the standard version, other varieties such as: Fight me on Twitter[46]; 1v1 me irl, 1v1 me on Twitter. Although these variations might seem strange, the request is always the same. Two players express the desire to detach themselves from the current gaming match and carry on fighting "outside" or, in this case, in a more private context (e.g. a private match) which allows for a more private interaction and challenge.

The second to last instance of new variety of Internet language, which in this case is strictly connected to the gaming world is 'RnG Jesus' which can be also found as 'RN-Jesus'. First of all, the 'RnG' part of the gaming term or adjective refers to Random Number Generator which is: "A device or process designed to produce a random (or pseudorandom) sequence of numbers or symbols"[47]. In addition to the standard definition, the inclusion of 'Jesus' refers to the presence of a supernatural, divine-like entity which can favour or hinder the dice throw of one or more players. The use of the Random Number Generator, however, extends much further than its simple use in videogames[48]. Nevertheless, within the videogame context, the Random Number Generator usually refers to Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORPGs)[49]. Of course, further instances of Random Number Generation can be found in other videogames such as *Darkest Dungeon*[50], in which the system is used to predict the success or failure of an action made by a player. The term RN-Jesus appears to have originated from the fans of two games, namely *Angband*[51] and *NetHack*[52] and has been diffused into other games which base or

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[45] Fight me Irl definition retrieved on: (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Fight+me+irl), last entry 23/03/17
[46] Twitter Inc. San Francisco, California, U.S. 2006
[47] Random Number Generator definition retrieved from *Oxford English Living Dictionary* (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/random_number_generator) last entry 23/03/17
[48] Random Number Generation (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Random_number_generation) last entry 23/03/17
[49] Random Number Generation (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=RNG&defid=3465466) last entry 23/03/17
[50] *Darkest Dungeon,* Red Hook Studios, 2016
[51] *Angband*, Angband Development Team, 1990
[52] *NetHack*, The NetHack Dev Team, Initial Release 1987, Stable Release 2015

heavily use the Random Number Generation as a feature[53]. Finally, the use of the phrase RN-Jesus can be applied to different games too: "*I was playing first round T-side running and spamming my glock, RN jesus gave me two headshots*"[54]. The quoted phrase may refer to the game *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*[55] which is a competitive First person-shooter online.

Finally, one last example of new variety in the terminology of the Internet Language may be that of the phrase 'git gut'. It is an intentional misspelling of the phrase 'get good' and is used in a negative but ironic way. It is usually used to describe new players who are not good at a particular game and who complain about the difficulty of a single-player or multi-player game. According to a forum discussion on the origin of the phrase[56], the term was created by the Metal Gear Online community on Playstation 3, to address fellow players who needed to 'get better' at the game[57]. After its coinage in Metal Gear Online, the use of the term spread inside other games, such as *Dark Souls*[58]. Furthermore, the phrase itself has been used in other games as well, usually in an ironic albeit derogatory way and has spread outside the game-world boundaries of *Metal Gear Online*[59] and *Darksouls*.

Git Gud

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[53] Origin of the RnG term found at: (http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RandomNumberGod) last entry 23/03/17

[54] Retrieved from (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=rn+jesus) last entry 23/03/17

[55] *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*, Valve Corporation, 2012

[56] Origin of the phrase 'git gud' (https://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/942282-metal-gear-online/51208294) last entry 24/03/17

[57] On the origin of the term 'git gud' (http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/git-gud#fn1) last entry 24/03/17

[58] *Dark Souls*, Namco Bandai Games, FromSoftware; 2011 (console), 2012 (computer)

[59] *Metal Gear Online*, Konami, 2008

Chapter II: The Narrative of Video Games

2.1 Narrative, Ludology and Video Games

The debate as to what video games can and cannot do (Juul 200), in terms of narrative and of narrative participation for the players, is still being discussed among academics in the fields of ludology and literary theory studies. A solution or a new field of studies that should be comprehensive and would thus allow to analyse and study video games with a new method completely detached from the influence of previous theories has, of yet, not been formalised. However, it is not in the scope of this study to argue with the academic productions published until now, nor to propose a new and reformed course of interaction with video games, thereby proposing a new field of studies. Nevertheless, it might prove interesting to analyse the different aspects proposed by academics, as well as, possibly, furthering the discussion.

To begin with, video games have been categorised or analysed as texts. This does not mean that they have been equalised with other forms of texts, like novels, nor that they share the exact same number of details with one another. However, to treat video games as texts appears to be the most feasible way to progress, since they contain narrative elements (Juul 2001; Newman 2013; Aarseth 1997), as well as pure texts in the form of code, which is re-elaborated by the machine to produce it in its visual form (Kücklich 2013).

Nevertheless, one of the first differences identified between video games and texts is that, in the case of video games, the user has to participate in order to progress in the story; namely, that the reader of a novel is at a safe distant from the events happening in the story, where the player, although not fully involved (since it is a video game and not reality), is still immersed and needs to participate and take action (Aarseth 1997: 4).

Notably, there has been a recent re-evaluation of the trend to classify video games as texts:

> "However, the analysis of these phenomena remains dominated by the
> paradigm of the printed text- and although the term 'text' has come to

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signify an increasing number of things, artefacts such as computer games are still being neglected by literary studies"(Kücklich 2013: 107).

Although this position might be argued with, the propositions furthered by this statement might move the current debate towards other aspects and change the method with which games are analysed and seen.

Similar to reading, however, the participating and interactive nature of video games requires the presence of an operator, therefore enabling the visualisation and interaction with the narrative, in the form, following Aarseth's scheme, of a triad (1997: 20). Furthermore, to fully understand the text (for lack of a better term) in a video game, the user needs to understand how the symbols presented on the screen work and what each of them means, in order to participate and hone her skills in either one particular video game genre, or in multiple ones.

Therefore, literacy is another element recognised by the academic community (see for instance Steinkuehler 2005 and Apperley 2010), since it is in the interest of the users to know the symbols appearing on the screen to become involved with the narrative.

Moreover, video games, or rather, the narrative presented in video games, is not detached from the aspects analysed by literary studies found in more traditional types of text. For instance, the attitude of *tmesis* ('skipping') (quoted in Aarseth 1997: 47; 78) can be seen also in video games. Although not every video game gives to the player the possibility to skip a cut-scene, the process of skipping lines is undoubtedly present, even in minor texts found within the fictional worlds (e.g. diaries, logs).

Nevertheless, the main discussion in the academic field regards the presence or absence of narrative in video games and how this narrative is purported. For years, video games and narratives were thought to be an impossible mixture, since many early-period video games (Esposito 2005) did not present a story with their interactivity: "A video game (e.g. Atari's *Pac-man*) has descriptions (the screen icons) and ergodics (the forced succession of events) but not narration (the game may be narrated in a number of ways, but like football, narration is not part of the game)"(Aarseth 1997: 95).

"However, strict adherence to ludology is not constructive […] Even the most orthodox ludologist must acknowledge that games do try to tell stories, or at least to give the players the raw materials to construct the story themselves"(Apperley 2010: 19).

Even though some academics still claimed that video games cannot tell stories (see the case in Nielsen *et al.*), the evolution of technology, pushed thanks to the general public's growing interest in video games, has proven otherwise, with today's developing teams heavily relying on simple or complicated narrative to sell their video games: "But even more important is the fact that there is a plot to many computer games; a narrative element that most traditional games lack" (Kücklich 2013: 108).

How these elements are presented to the player, however, is still under discussion, since it appears, as of yet, to be impossible for game developers to fully integrate narrative with interactivity. Nevertheless, interesting academic theories have been purported, notably one by Veugen:

"Computer games do not tell stories, nor do they show them, they create a story world in which the games 'lives' the story, for lack of a better term; so from the gamer's point of view it feels more like mimesis than diegesis" (Veugen 2011: 220).

Beside this interpretation of video game activity, other academic studies have pointed out to the difference between interactivity and narrative as well as introducing the concept of spatiality and the necessity of spatiality in video games narratives (Newman 2013, Kücklich 2013; Nielsen *et al.* 2008; Aarseth 2001).

First of all, to answer the question of spatiality, it is undeniable that video games are concerned with spatiality and that it is necessary for the developers to implement and represent space (Aarseth 2001) inasmuch as the depiction of the space is not left to the imagination of the player or reader, like in traditional types of texts, but is implemented by the developers.

Although it may be argued that the representation of space and architecture, even following the standards of reality, is purely cosmetic and serves the purpose of

enclosing the narrative within a believable environment, filled with the presence of a number of objects which cannot be used or modified by the (inter)action of the player (Adams 2002; Nielsen *et al.* 2008), the representation of space and the possibility to explore the virtual space are paramount in video games (Aarseth 2001).

Furthermore, spaces are connected with narrative, since they allow for different representation of levels (e.g. a desert or a snow-clad vale) and of different locations in which focal narrative moments might be inserted.

Nonetheless, spatial representation in not enough to consider the narrative of video games as purely interactive, even though a number of academics considers the narrative to be: "machinery for the exploration of and adventure in virtual space" (Newman 2013: 103), since, in several moments, the player is bereft of the possibility to interact with the game; especially, when certain narrative elements need to be inserted and shown to the player.

This continuous back and forth from interactivity to non-interactivity appears to be the crux of video games studies. In many situations, during gameplay or 'game time' (Newman 2013), the interacting role of the player is reversed back into a state of non-interactivity which are caused by various elements: loading screens (which sometimes fill the narrative blanks or give a quick summation of the events happened until that very moment), dialogues with other characters (which can be considered partly interactive since it is the players deciding which response to give to a particular character, even though a limited number of pre-encoded answers is usually provided) and especially cut-scenes. As a matter of fact, in a large number of video games the core elements of the story are usually presented to the player in their scripted form; therefore, without the possibility to interact or to act with those elements since the narrative of the story has to progress in a certain direction. Nevertheless, not every game presents this issue, since a growing number of video games allow the player to act upon certain aspects of the narrative, thereby reaching the end of the narrative in multiple ways (i.e. multiple endings).

Furthermore, the use of quick-time events (QTE) in video games grants more interactivity to the players. Arguably, the aspect of immersion might resent from such decision-making, since it appears quite disruptive to simply connect an important moment in a video game (e.g. saving a character from certain doom) to the pressing of a button (e.g. mash button A).

Nevertheless, different levels of interaction and narrative, as well as openness, may be inferred depending on the video game genre:

> "Thus, adventure games, for example, rank high in narrativity, but by the same token their openness and interactivity are reduced by the game's inherent narrative structure. Strategy games, on the other hand, have a high level of openness, for there is usually no order in which to complete certain tasks, and the possibilities for interaction are often numerous. The result of this open structure is that there is no real narrative tto speak of, and the frequency of interaction is relatively low. Contrarily, action games usually have a very high frequency of interaction, while the range of these actions is rather narrow"(Kücklich 2013: 114).

The difference between game genre and, subsequently, the different possibilities they offer to the player, also have allowed to define the presence of *ludus* (the pre-established rules of a game) and *paidiai* (the creation of game rules as the game is played which is much more connected to children's play) (Caillois 1995) in video games. Although it might be difficult to categorise video games under one of these two categories, the presence of either *ludus* or *paidia* (or a combination of the two) may influence the experience of the player. What this means is that a strict plot, one that does not allow the player to make her own personal choices, thereby changing the ending of the game, might be seen as *ludus*. The player is presented with a set of rules with which she needs to navigate the fictional world. The non-compliance to these rules results in the game over screen, therefore, requiring the player to replay a certain section in order to progress (Newman 2013) (it should be noted that every video game uses checkpoints from where the player can restart, should the character die). However, many video games do not simply present the story to the player as if it were a straight line. Many video games, especially in recent times, allow for the presence of *paidia* (i.e. the possibility for the player to construct a personal narrative element within the video game), loosening the necessary presence of a plot and giving the possibility of exploration to the player, therefore also enhancing the immersion aspect. Arguably, the presence of *paidia* in a video game can be restricted by the limitations (story-wise or gameplay-wise) given by the developers (e.g. The killing of innocent in *Assassin's Creed* will always result in the

desynchronization of the main character from the memory he is re-living, thus showing the game over screen to the player). Despite this, players have created different ways in which they can reconquer or enlarge the aspect of *paidia* in a video game, by either creating mods (short for 'modifications' made by players or independent companies and individuals that modify the code of a video game) which can modify some aspects of the game (e.g. creating new side missions) or by discovering bugs within the code and gaining advantages from it, or even by discovering or creating cheats that would rework some aspects of the game (e.g. immortality).

> "So the ergodic journey, a series of responses to events initiated by the computer that require action from the player, allows the player of a videogame to participate – albeit in a limited manner which is proscribed by the design of the game – in the encoding of the cybertext" (Apperley 2010: 15).

Nevertheless, even though video games differ in their construction of narrative and developers decide whether to put the accent on *ludus* or *paidia* (e.g. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare vs The Sims*), player can exert agency on those rules but most of all gamers want to exert agency (Veugen 2011) on the story they are playing with. Furthermore, the active participation of the player within the narrative frame renders the experiencing of the narrative personal, meaning that, even if the narrative elements will be presented always in the same order (the ones of the Main Quest) and can be recounted and discussed, the experience of the player will always differ from the others who have played the game (Newman 2013, Nielsen *et al* 2008, Veugen 2011). In a sense, the presence of the player exerting agency and participating within the narrative appears to detach from more traditional forms of storytelling. It is undeniable that in some instances the player can only 'witness' and cannot participate, during focal moments or turning points in the narrative, but she is the one taking action and making the voyage from point A to B in order to progress with the narrative. For instance, the change of scene from Act IV to Act V in Shakespeare's Henry V (1992) is provided to the audience with a change of background scenery, together with a change of costumes. However, the voyage to Calais is not shown, the scene switches immediately. In a video game, instead, the

player would be required to travel that distance (e.g. on a horse or through teleportation), thereby experiencing and acknowledging the space between her starting point and her arrival point.

Finally, independently from the decision to side with *ludology* or *literary theory studies* it may be useful to note that:

> "Many videogames are stories, as well as games. Sone games are more narrative than others but even the most abstract usually include the sketched elements of a fictional world. And we need to take into account the narrative elements of a videogame if we are to fully understand the medium and how player interaction is shaped"(Nielsen *et al* 2008: 204).

2.2 Elements of Narrative

The following section will be an analysis of part of the elements which form the narrative template and the narrative structure of a video game. The elements, however, cannot be categorised under one all-inclusive label. For instance, tutorials may not be wholly included in the category of 'narrative development' as they only serve the purpose of providing the player or the 'narratee' (Kücklich 2013) with the instruments necessary to 'decode' the visual aspects of the video game as well as introducing the 'basic' rules of a particular video game. Furthermore, some of the elements analysed below pertain to the two categories identified by literary theory studies as *diegetic* (part of the story) and *non-diegetic* (part of the storytelling).

Nevertheless, even though the narrative components of a video game may fall into one category or another, the whole of the practices (i.e. the elements which convey instruction on how the narrative is to be explored and the elements which only connect to how the story is presented to the player) is used by developers to construct a reasonable form which players can navigate and interact with, in order to play the video game.

Finally, not every element in this section is found in every existing video game. For instance, in many competitive multiplayer first-person shooters (e.g. *Counter-strike*, *Quake*) there is no Main Quest or Secondary Quest to speak of, since the gameplay is based on interactivity rather than narrative (Kücklich 2013).

Yet, this broad and general analysis serves as an insight on how some recurring elements are processed and explained to the player and how the player may exploit those elements to either rework the rules of the game to her own advantage, distance herself from the main narration, thus enjoying the product in a personal form (*paidia)* or break the rules of the game (cheating).

Tutorial

It's dangerous to go alone! Take this.

-*The Legend of Zelda*

Tutorials are and have been a crucial part in the developing of video games. Although not every game used to present or still presents the player with a tutorial (e.g. *Hyperlight Drifter*), thus forcing the player to discover the rules of a game by herself, without the aid of a pre-encoded system guideline, many video games still provide the player with the basic rules of the game or with the command prompts created in order to navigate the fictional world.

Additionally, tutorials are deemed so paramount by the majority of the playing community, that some developers have found necessary to either insert a section of the game, after the game was released, that would provide the basic tutorial for the game in question or had to insert a section in the video game that provided the basic commands of the game (see for instance the case of *Slain: Back from Hell*).

However, the first question which is going to be analysed and answered is: What are tutorials?

> "As with film, in games a visual grammar has come into being which addresses the audio-visual needs per genre. But the visual grammar is not meant as a gameplay obstacle. On the contrary, It is meant as a visual aide, for example highlighting important game props in adventure games or using mini-maps in open world games to show what is in off-screen space" (Veugen 2011 :221).

In many ways, tutorials explain and set the rules of the video game, thus they may seem to introduce the player to the *ludus* (Caillois 1995) portion of the fictional world.

Nonetheless, guidelines and tutorials should not be seen as form of restriction or control over the player; only as the way in which she is able to explore the fictional world in which the avatar she controls inhabits, therefore also providing the knowledge on how to control the playable character.

In the beginning, tutorials and guidelines on how a video game was supposed to be played and which combination of controls produced a specific response within the video game were given through booklets usually found in the jewel-cases containing the CD of the videogame. Together with the instruction manual, many games also presented, inside the booklet, a general background of the video game narrative (Newman 2013), as well as an incipit on 'the story until now' (i.e. until the player was required to play the game in order to progress with the narrative).

However, the contemporary trend of video game tutorials has changed, with little to no information given in the booklet of a video game, should the game be bought in its jewel-case rather than in its software format only, beside the general controls list. Nevertheless, tutorials have been integrated within video games in various forms.

"Part of improving one's kinaesthetic game skills is learning which buttons or button combinations do what. Consequently, playing a specific game on a particular platform means that the gamer not only improves her visual grammar, but that she also develops a sort of kinetic grammar, most notably in fast paced games which would otherwise become impossible to play" (Veugen 2011 :221).

One of such forms, and possibly the most simple, is to create in the main menu a section entitled 'Tutorial' for the players. Therefore, in order to acknowledge the rules of the video game, the player has to click on that section to access the tutorial. This method allows for two further different options: either the game presents a series of images, coupled with the list of buttons combination to make a specific

action (e.g. to crouch press the Shift button), providing the player with the actions available to her in the game or, inserts the player in a (not always) safe environment with which to test and improve the set of skills required.

This method, however, is not overused, since in many narrative-based video games a more integrative approach is preferred.

Nonetheless, this method may appear as the more direct (to address the player directly without the use of an in-game character) and approachable, since it provides the player with all the commands needed to begin playing.

Arguably, the necessity to provide the player with clear instructions is always the first issue when creating the tutorial (that is, unless the rules and controls of the game can be easily evinced by the player herself, without the aid of a guide).
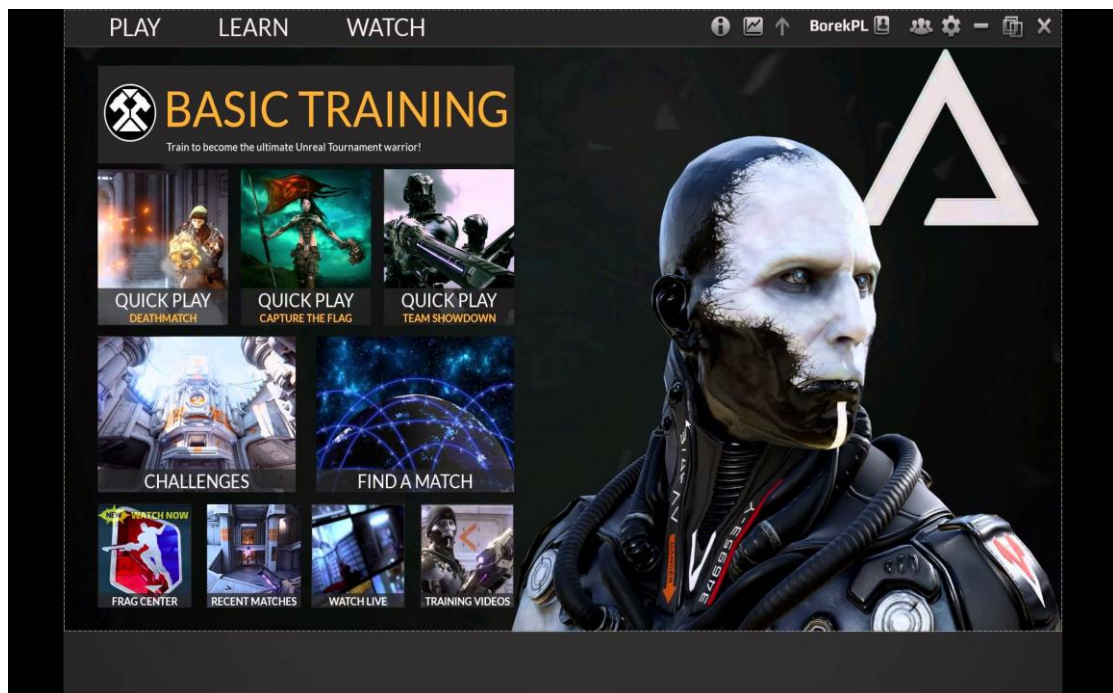
Example of Tutorial found in the game's main menu

In order to do this, the integration of the tutorial within the 'main' narrative of the video game, or in the main environment, therefore, without confining the player in a different section of the game to 'learn' how to play, is purported in different ways.

For instance, the instructions may be given to the player through a level within the game that serves as part of the story's background. An example might be

that of *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* which inserts a memory of the protagonist, Geralt of Rivia, that sees him training with Ciri (the second playable character of the video game) when she is still a little girl.

In this case, the narrative function is expanded. Even though the tutorial can be skipped by the player, the possibility to explore the tutorial environment to acknowledge the relationship between the characters of the video game, appears to be sufficient to create the willing suspension of disbelief in the player. Furthermore, the section also provides all of the core commands of the game, appearing on screen, leaving to the player the choice of how she is going to play the game (i.e. how she shall progress in the narrative with the choices given by the game).
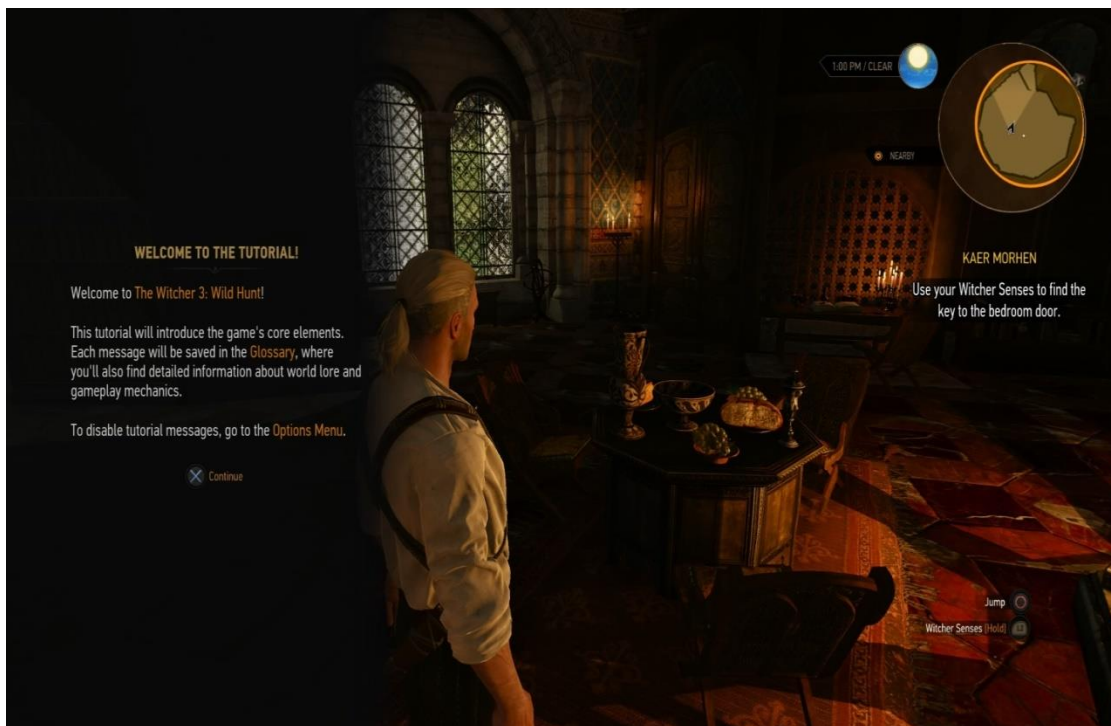
The Witcher 3 tutorial level

Until now, the examples provided may be categorised as providing the fundamental elements of a video game by 'addressing the player directly', therefore, following Newman's analysis (2013) disrupting both the interactivity of the video game (thus reversing it into a non-interactive state, like cut-scenes) and the player's immersion (reminding her of the triviality of her actions). Arguably, every non-interactive section

inside a video game disturbs the player immersion, be it a tutorial or a cut-scene or even a loading screen (Newman 2013).

However, it appears that, in relation with how the whole of the story is presented to its users, in certain cases, game developers have decided not to address the player directly, but to address them, thereby also instructing them on what to do or providing clues of how the games work, through their avatars or characters.

One final example might be that of the video game series *Metal Gear Solid* where, through the ear-piece carried by Snake, instructions are given to the player not directly, as with the above examples, but indirectly through Snake himself.

"It seems paradoxical to equate a point of view from which the player sees through the eyes of an avatar with a narrative perspective that directly addresses the player. Yet this apparent paradox is the key to understanding the basic communication process of computer games, because it is obviously not the player herself who is addressed in such a way, but the 'narratee'" (Kücklich 2013).
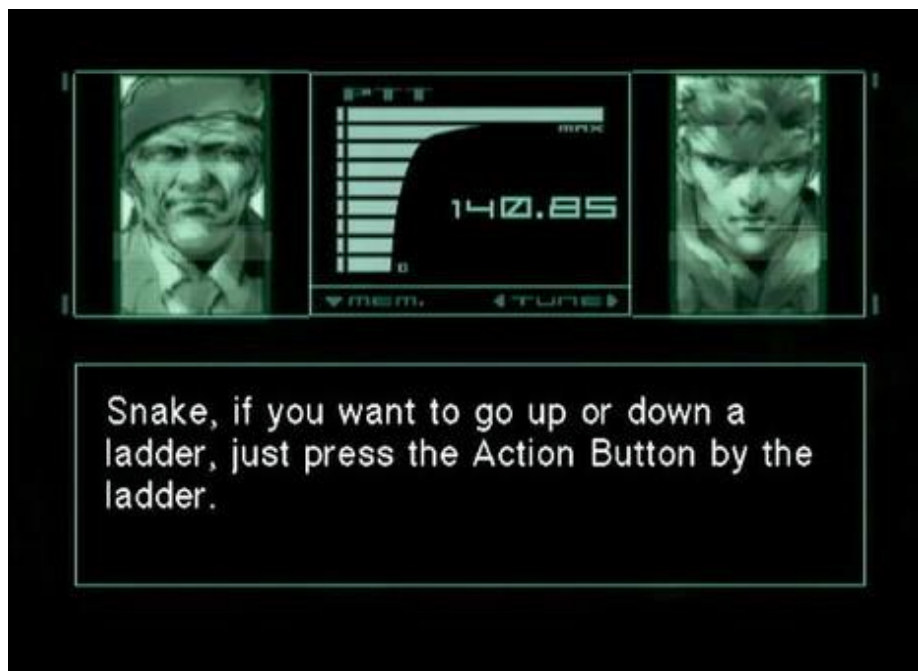
Metal Gear Solid tutorial screenshot

Finally, one last mode in which tutorials may be presented is through *helpers* (Propp 2009). Although this definition might not entirely fit Propp's categorisation of the agents and their roles found within a folktale, part of his definition might be extrapolated and used to refer to the agents within a videogame. Beside the agents or characters found in a video game that either directly help the protagonist with his/her quest, thereby assuming an 'active' part in the video game, *helpers* may also be identified as those characters who help with the progression of the narration (Propp 2009). Therefore, the characters present in a variety of tutorials, generally 'helping' the player with the basic commands as well as providing room for training should the player need or want to hone her skills before engaging with the video game story (e.g. the aforementioned example of *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* also provides a helper in the form of the character named *Vesemir*) may be identified as helpers and, in regards of the interactive portion of the video game (Kücklich 2013, Newman 2013) might be recognized as conveying information to progress in the narrative.

The Side Quest

> "Side quests have their own, much smaller, mini-narratives or they are just games of emergence that, apart from an initial 'story' to set off the quest and a concluding 'story' to round things up, do not need any kind of narrative. Other types of side quests for example most gathering/collecting quests, do not need any narrative at all" (Veugen 2011 :225).

The main narrative of videogames is usually expressed and resolved through the Main Quest Missions.

Nevertheless, video games developers may decide to create additional content which is not connected with the main story in order to broaden and enlarge the narrative while also providing the fictional world of video games with more detail (e.g. in role playing video games). To create such content and to give the player a reason to explore the make-believe world in its entirety, exploring and gaining knowledge of the surroundings, developers use side quests.

However, not every video game genre exploits or necessitates side missions in order to convey further details of the fictional world (e.g. horror games usually hide objects within the levels but do not require the player to complete other objectives beside the main one, since the focus of video games with a horror narrative is that of survival and not of exploration, even though the player might want to explore her surroundings).

In addition, following the statement presented in the above quotation, many side quests do not provide the player with more 'story', either connected with the main narrative or simply broadening the narrative element. Many, in fact, are simply put there as fetch or gathering quests in order for the player to gain experience points, equipment and/or money to progress further in the story Veugen 2011; Tavinor 2009).

Arguably, more recent video games integrate side quests in a different way, by adding elements to the main story or in the environment and even, sometimes, involving moral decisions which the player has to make, even though those moral decisions may simply refer back to a situation within the video game, without, then, conveying a moral message at the end of the main narrative (Zagal 2009).

Furthermore, video game developers might also overtly ask the player of making a moral choice or mask the moral choice until it is too late for the player to reconsider her course of actions.

Taking as an example *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red, 2013), the meaning and utility of the side quest will be made much clearer. The game itself is based on a series of books written by Andrzej Sapkowski, the Polish author who created the saga of the Witcher (Wiedzmin, 1990). As the narrative unravels, taking much of its content from the book saga, the player follows the steps of the protagonist Geralt of Rivia. Like many other games, *The Witcher 3* presents the player with side quests in which, sometimes, a moral decision has to be made. For instance, in one of the first side missions encountered the player finds herself in a village to find information about a missing person she is looking for. While perusing the village and asking some question as to whether this person has been seen in the village, the protagonist, Geralt, finds himself in front of the burnt-down building of the blacksmith. Upon inspection, the player can begin the side quest in which it is required to investigate the crime scene and to bring the culprit to the shop owner. After some investigation, the culprit is found, hungover, hiding in a shed. Here, the player is faced with what could be defined as a moral choice. The discussion options

given to the player to resolve and conclude the quest include two possibilities: the first is to bring the culprit to the blacksmith, complete the mission and receive the reward. The second choice however, involves a lie, bribery and an escape. Namely, the hungover culprit asks the protagonist to let him go unpunished; as a reward, the player will be paid by the culprit himself with some gold, to ensure that there will be no retorts on his person. Here, the player is faced with a choice that will influence his gameplay, not in the sense of how differently the story will progress after this choice, but more in a personal sense. The player can, in this situation, decide of his own accord how the game should be played, thus inserting his thoughts, morals and behaviours in an external environment. To some extent, the moral here appears simple enough: leave the crime unpunished or bring the criminal to justice. However, should the player decide to bring the criminal to judgment, she will also have to witness the resolution of the mission, before gaining any experience points. Until this point, the player can expect the resolution for the criminal to be either: a reprimand, a heavy fine, the beginning of a fight between the blacksmith and the culprit, etc. However, once the criminal has been brought to the presence of the blacksmith, things take a dire turn. As the very short cut-scene and dialogue show, the blacksmith does not want to forgive the criminal and make him pay for the damage. The dwarf swiftly calls the guards and sentences the culprit to death. Here the player who has decided to opt for what could be defined as the just act of justice towards an issue, is bereft of the good ending. The clash of the good act *vis à vis* the gruesome resolution of the quest prove, to the player, the presence of the unexpected, of the sudden and unpredictable, which contrasts the rational thought process of the player, which may have decided to opt for one solution in favour of another. Moreover, the possibility of a choice or the possibility of changing the choice in a later moment (e.g. while playing the game again for a second time), gives the player access to different styles of gameplay.

Arguably, this example may appear as a unique case, since many side quests (including *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt*) are rather simple, requiring the player to simply find a treasure or kill a certain number of enemies in order to gain experience points.

Nonetheless, some side quests may have an influence on the main narrative of a video game, should the game present multiple endings.

Using as an example the video game *The Witcher 3* again, one of the side missions (which can be skipped by the player, should she wish to do so) involves helping an

old friend of the main protagonist, Geralt of Rivia. Without delving too much into the story of the side mission, since the length of the mission itself, as well as the implications which the mission may have towards some aspects of the main narrative (i.e. this side question actively changes the final of the story, based on the choices made by the player) may appear to equalize it to the level of the main narrative, the side mission also provides, based on the player's choice, a helper in a later section of the game. Upon completion, should the player choose to profess her love to Triss Merigold (that is, through Geralt of Rivia), Triss will give up her first objective (escaping with other mages from the land via a vessel) and will be met later in the game, helping the playable character defending a stronghold from invasion.

In addition, this particular side mission also influences the outcome of another side mission, which concerns the relationship between Geralt and Yennefer. During these side missions, even though the whole game does not revolve around romance, as there is a lot of 'killing monsters' (CD Projekt Red 2015), the player is presented with three different choices by choosing to 'side' with Yennefer, Triss or both. Beside the three different possible ending which involve living with Triss, should the player choose to romance her, living with Yennefer or continuing the life of the Witcher alone, the side mission also influence dialogues and relationships between the characters and the protagonist, with notable differences in dialogue options and 'behaviour' towards the main protagonist.

Therefore, categorizing side quests simply as collateral missions with little to no interactivity does not seem to be totally true. Of course, the moral and narrative weight of side missions is always decided by the video game developers, who may choose to divide side quests between fetching and gathering quest, thus risking to build a redundant and dull gameplay, and more narrative-based and important side missions, which may have effects on the gameplay or on the main narrative. Nevertheless, side missions, especially in role-playing games and massive multiplayer open worlds, appear to be an interesting method to insert more detail and more depth into the fictional world of a video game.

Lore

Lore is a broad concept, connected to many aspects of human narrative and evolution (Andreen 2014). The analysis of lore in computer games is not meant to either undermine the value of mythology in the history of human kind or to elevate that of video games. The analysis and the integration of lore into the narrative elements present in video games serves to see how fictional world are made more believable and 'real' thanks to the influence of interactivity together with the artificial lore created by developers and, finally, how mythology and the real world lore can influence the lore in video games: "[…] Our dedication to the lore for a fantasy world comes from an inherent need to believe for survival. Our minds even come equipped with the faculties to reinforce these beliefs in spite of error (Andreen 2014 :80).

By expanding the narrative or, more generally, the story of video games, through lore, developers create an environment in which, through interaction, the player can explore and come to know her surroundings not just in a spatial sense, but also in a historical sense; therefore, collecting information of the fictional world as if it were part of a bigger picture or of an 'independent' system that give to everyone inhabiting it the possibility of being the hero (Andreen 2014).

> "Ultimately, the world must come together in such a way that the player's mental responses create a sense of realism. Successful worlds do not necessarily demand a total belief that the world is real, but rather the world must be consistent enough to appear as a functional reality"(Andreen 2014 :83).

In order to do so, developers provide the players with vast amount of information about the world in which they are playing. Arguably, most of the information is trivial and serves to no purpose, beside the creation of a fictional but believable reality. Furthermore, many game genres present little to no lore to the players (e.g. horror video games or first-person shooters); therefore, the discussion will focus on the genre of video games that mostly present this feature, role-playing and massively multiplayer online video games.

To construct the lore, developers gather information from many sources or invent those sources themselves:

"Writing for a game differs from every other type of writing … it serves a practical purpose and is rarely just creative. Even the dialogue between NPCs may be there to guide or inform players. It's all there to build a cohesive imaging experience for players" (McCoy quoted in Andreen 2014 :82-83).

In many MMOs everything is built to give the player a sense of reality and a sense of interactivity, from the missions they have to complete to the dialogues between the player and non-playable characters (NPC).
However, the sources for constructing the lore are varied and might come from different sources, mythology, culture and literature:

"The richness of the Greek's stories comes from the depth of their lore, the inspiration that lore gave to artists, and the resulting social impact. Lore both drives and is driven by society, and that is exactly why MMOs seek out the construction of a world rich in history and magic"(Andreen 2014: 82).

However, a major difference from the lore of video games to that found in other narrative and literary sources (e.g. movies and books) is that:

"Until video games, we were largely observers of stories. With some exceptions, stories in art were put on canvas, stories in writing into books, and films set on a screen to watch. Now, we have the capacity to participate"(Andreen 2014: 84).

To participate, also means to question the story which is presented to the player and to bring within the fictional world the cultural baggage of every individual, with their shared knowledge, into a fictional world which cannot contrast with previous learned notions of the everyday real world. In addition, every player also brings into her

gameplay her previous experience of other video games, therefore, comparing and contrasting what she has been learning with what she is presented with, thereby judging the final product as she would for a movie or a book.

To better explain the concept of lore and the concept of shared knowledge brought into the fictional world of video games, it might prove useful to further the analysis with an example.

The instance is taken from a mission which can be found in the video game *The Secret World* (Funcom, EA Games, 2012).The video game itself presents the player with the narrative connected with the main world, which is partially inspired by the literary works of Stephen King (*The Mist* 1980) and H.P Lovecraft. In addition, the character creation requires the player to choose between three different factions: Illuminati, Templars or the Dragon. Despite the presence of different factions, which only change the starting point and introductory cut-scene to the video game, the players can help each other out and explore the world together even if they have chosen a different alliance, unlike *World of Warcraft*.

Furthermore, the presence of investigation missions sometimes requires the player to use her knowledge of the real world in order to solve puzzles. Some missions for instance, present the player with Morse code (e.g. through intermitting lights) which needs to be deciphered in order to complete the mission (although the presence of walkthrough simplifies the player's work).

However, the mission called *The Kingsmouth Code* requires the player to solve the puzzle by bringing knowledge from the real world into the fictional one.

The mission begins in a church and requires the player to 'follow the traces of the illuminati'. To do so the player has to exit the church and follow the sewer covers found outside the streets as they were arrows (the manhole covers present upon them the symbol of the illuminati, the pyramid and a phrase in Latin saying: "Light Conquers All"). Following the trail will lead to a shack where, behind it, the next clue can be found. The Cabin presents the player with another phrase: "In the seat of power, the navigator immortalized, illuminating the path, to the sleeping priest and fletcher. In memory of Frans Hals, who perished in the light". The player needs to find the place referred to in the phrase to continue his quest. However, the game also provides clues as to where to search for solution, with a built-in internet browser that lets the player navigate the web in search for solutions (however, the navigation is restricted and only some sites are available to the player). Upon research, the player will find out that Frans Hans is a Dutch painter, therefore, he is immortalized

in a painting. As for 'the seat of power' the game refers to the Town Hall. Upon reaching the town hall, the player will be given another clue which, in theory, should help her in deciphering the riddle and move onwards towards the resolution of the quest. The clue is another phrase: "Time is the province of Kings and Gods. The hands of time point to truths written by kings in the words of God. The path is open to the enlightened".

First of all, the player needs to carefully choose which painting to inspect. In fact, should the player choose the wrong painting, she would be sent by the video game to another zone of the city and, upon arrival, discover that she has made a mistake and that now she has to go back to the town hall again.

The right painting shows the image of a man, seated beside a table and writing something with his right hand. Behind his right arm is a telescope pointing outside of the canvas. The clues here are multiple. Firstly the man is writing with his right hand on the piece of paper. Therefore he is writing the: "truths written by kings in the words of God".

Secondly, if the player follows the direction of the telescope pointing outside of the painting, she will notice that it actually points towards a clock situated up on the wall of the town hall. Upon inspection, the player will notice that the clock is broken and that the hands are stuck in a specific time, 10:10.

Thirdly, "the words of God" are written in the Bible. By connecting these clues the player may arrive at the conclusion of the puzzle. In fact, by either reaching out for a copy of the Bible or by searching on the Internet the first phrase of Kings 10:10 the player will discover that: "And she gave the kings 120 talents of gold" (*Kings 10:10*).

The player can now finally go back to the Solomon Church found inside Kingsmouth Town and, by exploring the ground outside of the church will find a cellar where the code is to be inserted.

Once the player has gained access to the cellar, one last puzzle will need to be solved. The loot is guarded by a computer password. However, hints to the password are given on the screen monitor: "As the famous Solomon Priest once said 'Light Conquers All'". This hint refers back to the first message found on the sewer cover outside of the church. Inserting the password "Lux Omnia Vincit" will result in the completion of the mission which will reward the player with artefacts and experience points.

Following the example, it appears that lore within video games varies greatly depending on the intentions of the developers. The above example gathers

information from the lore of the real world and reworks it in an interesting way, making it suitable for players to decode and enjoy the puzzle by solving it.

However, not every video game presents lore in the form of puzzles. Many, including *The Secret World*, provide the lore in different ways: through diary logs hidden in the levels, through newspapers or collectibles (e.g. scraps of paper scattered across the levels that need to be collected by the player in order to assemble the whole document).

Finally, lore may also be forwarded to the player in the form of mission or objectives to complete, or with chance encounters (randomly generated or fixed) with other non-playable characters.

2.3 Cheating

Cheating is a much diffused practice in video games. However, the term here is used in various contexts, from lines of code modifying the rules of the game (cheat codes), to the exploitation of bugs or loopholes by the players to gain advantage, to the use of walkthroughs made by other players in order to progress and solve puzzles impeding the progress of the gameplay.

> "Games should be regarded not only as texts, in which cheats can be used to skip certain passages, a practice known as *tmesis*, but also as media that foster new form of symbolic interaction between individuals, and as cybernetic systems, in which cheating performs a sort of 're-entry' of the environment into the system itself"(Kücklich 2004 :1).

The implementation of cheat codes into video games is a practice as old as video games themselves: "there is hardly a game that does not come with either built-in cheat modes, or design loopholes that can be exploited by cunning gamers"(Kücklich 2004 :1).

However, cheating is seen under a different light, depending on whether it is done in single-player games or in multi-player games.

The practice of cheating in single-player video games is not harmful or frowned upon by the community, beside maybe the 'hardcore' gamers, since it only

advantages the player in connection with the main narrative (i.e. progressing more smoothly or easily surpassing a tricky section of the game). Furthermore, cheating in single-player campaigns might prove rather amusing and entertaining, like spawning 'Lazer Bear' units in *Age of Mythology*(Microsoft Game Studios, 2002) or, regarding loopholes and bugs, providing a way for players to complete games in the fastest way possible by exploiting the architecture of video games (speedrunning), reaching incredible times of game completion (see for instance the speedrun of the video game *Prey*, done in 7:38 minutes).

However, when it comes to cheating in multi-player video games, the attitude towards cheat codes and bug abuse changes dramatically.

Inasmuch as multi-player matches (either competitive or cooperative) are seen as a common ground between players, where individuals from all around the globe can challenge each other on 'fair ground' using only the skills and knowledge they have acquired by playing the game multiple times and for a long amount of hours, cheating is seen as breaking the rules and gaining unfair advantage over other players. Certainly, it is no fun to enter a multi-player match and scoring points for the team to win the game, only to see the effort and the time spent playing the match come undone because one player in the other team cannot be killed.

Therefore, in order to avoid the use of cheat codes in multi-player situations, publishing companies have introduced control systems which identify and exclude players who are cheating

> "In many cases, the real challenge for 'professional' cheaters quickly shifts from competing with other players to trying to outwit the cheat detection systems of the games servers"(Kücklich 2004 :1).

It appears then, that cheating in online environments is not as much about winning over other players, since the codes used already provide an unfair amount of advantage over players not using them, like recoil deletion in shooter games, but about outwitting the control system in order to use the cheat codes and have fun with them.

However, it should be pointed out that not every cheat created for multi-player video games is used in a disruptive manner (i.e. ruining the enjoyment of other players), but that there are also many cheat codes or algorithms that try to avoid the

redundancy of certain games by changing the set of rules (e.g. the fishing-bot in *World of Warcraft* that allowed player to engage in other activities, in real life, while the algorithm fished for them, thereby gaining points and experience with fishing).

Nevertheless, cheating in multi-player environment has sometimes led to dire consequences (see for instance the case of *Diablo* in Kücklich 2004).

Finally, aside from the implications that cheating might have on the economy of virtual world (i.e. players grinding to gather rare and valuable objects and the selling them for real money on the market), the implications of cheating, expressed by the following quote, should be stated:

> "[…] The actual danger lies in the disillusionment of the players. Cheating in game worlds is a signal to the players that these worlds are not exempt from the rules of the real world. Rather, games are subject to the same power relations as the social systems we inhabit in everyday life. This does not make cheating a noble activity, deserving of praise rather than criticism. But it serves as a reminder that the playing field extends far beyond the boundaries of these game worlds, and what is at stake is our perception of games as cultural objects"(Kücklich 2004 :9).

2.4 Furthering the Narrative

The narrative of video games ends, most times, with the ending of the main narrative and the resolution of the requirements needed to complete and finish the game by the player.

However, players do not interrupt the relation they have with a video game once it has come to an end; instead, they further the narrative, by modifying it (adding new content) or by adding new stories within the game or even by tinkering with the game code in order to add new options (e.g. graphics tweaks, combat options, mods).

In addition, gamers also create new content, in the form of written text or of visual text, to show their appreciation towards a particular video game or brand (e.g. Machinima movies) also including the walkthroughs and different material created to

help other players progress during a particular hard puzzle or section which may be found in video games.

Finally, the discourse of fan made content also includes the aforementioned behaviour of cheating, in the form of either discovering the pre-encoded cheats within a game or by inserting new lines of code that alter aspects of the video game. The whole of these practices has been deemed an interesting environment for possible studies of video games:

> Work charting the richly productive cultures that surround and sustain videogames has focused attentions on the things players do with and because of games rather than solely attending to the moments of their interactions with screens and controllers. In doing so, researchers have highlighted the crucial yet comparatively under-reported contexts o play and the contours and impact of practices such as, for instance, fanart and fanfiction writing (Burn 2006), in addition to forms of amateur production that are uniquely game-centric such as the production of fangames and mods (Nieborg 2005 and Postigo 2008), machinima (Lowood 2007,2009) and gameplay practices such as cheating (Consalvo 2007), superplay and walkthrough production (Newman 2005, 2008). In their way, each of these studies contributes to a more rounded understanding of what it means to be a gamer and what constitutes playing – and playing *with* - games"(Newman 2013 :140).

The production of fan based material based on video games has always been part of the gaming community and has encountered, albeit some isolated cases, no refusal from the game developers and companies. Amongst players, these productions are known and often discussed in relation to the games inspiring them. An example of well-known fan made content might be that of *Freeman's Mind*, a series of sketches made by Ross Scott depicting the inner thought process of the silent character of *Half-Life* and *Half-Life 2*, Gordon Freeman.

The analysis and study of these creative forms also produced interesting and specialized studies on the use of English as Lingua Franca in fan made audio-visual productions (Franceschi 2011), with a note on how the community responded to fan movies (e.g. *Metal Gear Solid: Philatropy*).

"The production of comprehensive walkthroughs texts or the performance of superplay that seeks to publicly demonstrate the prowess of performance and the limits and boundaries of the game, involves kinds of self-consciously investigative play that more closely resemble reverse engineering particularly when we examine the operation of teams of players seeking out bugs, exploits and glitches in the game's code in order to reveal new ways of playing. What is most interesting about the cultures and practices revealed in this work is that, while they remain relatively underexplored in scholarly and even professional literatures, they are absolutely central to game culture. Most importantly, the textual production – the walkthroughs, videos of play, the machinima movies, fanart, fanfics and mods – and even the talk, which is often recorded in online forums and discussion boards – is intended to be published and consumed by an audience"(Newman 2013: 141).

In fact, many of the fan productions are judged not by the game developers, who might decide to act upon what they feel to be a breach of intellectual property (IP), but by the players themselves, who also evaluate the correspondence of fan content with the original game and decide whether to support or voice their disappointment towards a particular textual or visual fanart or fanfiction (e.g. *Freeman's Mind* has been praised by the community and nowadays the creator has begun publishing other sketches based on the second instalment of the video game, *Half-Life 2*).

The creation and publication of fan made content is of course, one of the forms that players have to show their appreciation for a particular game. However, those practices are not the only existing form. Mods, for instance, are an important feature of video games; and although not every single existing game provides the player with the possibility of creating new content, many developers have decided to allow the creation of new content, together with the possibility to modify the original code, for player to add substance and differentiation to the original product. Mods have been such a vital part of the player community that some video games were originally presented as mods created by players and, thanks to the success and the echo that these games have had on the playing community, corporations have decided to buy them and transform them into official video games (e.g. *Counter-Strike*).

"If one sees mods solely as the modification of an existing game and uses this as a very strict definition of a mod (i.e. the adaptation of an existing game and/or engine), many commercial games could actually be seen as mods. Because the cost of building a new up-to-date game engine, many commercial game developers license an existing engine and adapt it to their needs. Diverse commercial games as Postal 2 (Running with Scissors, 2003) America's Army: Special Forces (US Army, 2004) and Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (Ubisoft Montreal, 2002) are based on a version of the Unreal engine, but no one would qualify them as mods"(Nieborg, 2005).

Furthermore, in some specific instances and due to pre-existing issues in the developing and publishing sector, some games, which were deemed "incomplete" after their public release, where fixed by the gaming community and by the volunteers who, enjoying the game, decided to fix it by manipulating the code. An example of player-created mods that overhauled or reworked the video game might be that of *Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines*, where the community, due to the company shut down, decided to make a mod that would fix the bugs of the game, thereby, improving the video game experience for everybody.

However, before delving into the specific aspects of mods, a definition, following the analysis made by Nieborg, should be made: "In case of computer games mod is usually used when referring to user-made modification to pre-existing game"(2005). Furthermore, regarding those who create mods: "The "Who" can be a group ranging from player/authors, users, amateur (developers), modders or commercial developers and the "what" would be the technology"(Nieborg, 2005).

The creation of user-made content is also made possible thanks to the developing companies that have decided to provide the players with the and tools to create new content:

"Over the years the Unreal technology and the accompanying mod culture expanded immensely and an analysis of the games Unreal Tournament 2003 (Epic Games, 2003) and Unreal Tournament 2004 (Epic Games, 2004) shows many initiatives by its developers to facilitate,

institutionalise and encourage Unreal-powered modification culture"(Nieborg 2005).

The Unreal Engine is not the only engine providing tools for user to create and modify content. The Unity engine (Unity Technologies) also provides players with the tools to create the content, together with different End User Licence conditions (Unity Eula: https://unity3d.com/legal/terms-of-service; Unreal Eula: https://www.unrealengine.com/eula).

Notwithstanding the possibilities which these engines allow, starting from video game mods to fully developed video games: "mods are as diverse as there are computer games. They can differ in size and complexity and can make little adjustments to the original game or give a game a complete new look"(Nieborg 2005). Furthermore, mods are not created for one genre of game only:

"Other game genres have their respective mods cultures as well, e.g. Real Time Strategy (RTS) games/simulations often include a map editor in order to enable users to come up with their own battlegrounds and the life-simulation of The Sims (Maxis, 2000) also has well-developed community providing user-created content"(Nieborg 2005).

In addition, many games provide their own editors, e.g. *Neverwinter Nights*, with which players can not only create content (maps, new battlegrounds, items), but also allow them to publish those contents within the multi-player campaign in order to create new worlds with specific rules for other players to play in, ranging from the very simple battle arenas for player *vs* player (PvP) to narrative-based campaigns much resembling the role-playing of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Mods appear to be a fertile ground where players and developers can meet and produce or modify the original content of a video game by either adjusting or correcting issues and bugs present in the video game (i.e. beta-testers and community involvement after the game release), as well as providing new content, although not always in the form of the main quest, for players to enjoy the game despite his possible age (i.e. and old game may have its graphics reworked by the community, thereby updating the graphic options to the standards of today),

although this might clash with the current preservations and copyright infringement policies of video game producing companies (see Newman 2013).

Finally, mods and the possibility of modding a game appear to be a double-edged blade which can, in some cases, produce unlikely reaction from the video games corporations or by brands published by other companies (see for instance Nieborg 2005 and Newman 2013); and in some cases can produce a reaction from the playing community, should the terms be judged to be not fair:

> "The balance of power has to be even when it comes to IP rights. If not, the mod-community can turn their collective power against those who want to upohold stringent IP laws and turn to those who choose otherwise. By letting users not only freely produce what they want, but by also endorsing and stimulating mod-making, as the developers of the Battlefield franchise and the Unreal Universe do, developers give their implicit "go" when it comes to developing mods with similar themes"(Nieborg 2005).

In conclusion, mods appear to be a very useful tool for players and authors who decide to actively contribute to the development and progression of the narrative in videogames by, for instance, creating new side quests or mission or adding more character types or races from which to choose (see for instance the mods created for the video game *Skyrim*) and by also allowing the player to overhaul or completely rework the aspect of a video game. Therefore, the concept of mods together with the other forms of community participation (e.g. walkthroughs, let's plays video, fanarts and fanfictions) not only allow players to explore the narrative and enlarge it by adding personal analysis of video games and confront it with other players, but by also adding new content and ultimately keeping video games "alive".

2.5 Morality and Video Games

Video games, from their birth to their commercialisation, have always been questioned and discussed, due to their rich audio-visual experience combined with the realistic (although it should be noted that for many years the graphics of video

games did not reach the near photo-realism of today, since the graphic possibilities of the early video game period were fairly limited) depiction of blood and gore. Connected with the problem of what was being represent on screen and, mostly, to whom those images where directed (even though age restrictions are applied to different types of videogames), the contents and the actions that the player experiences and enacts during gameplay (therefore participating) have also been put to discussion. Finally, although this last instance is not directly connected with the issue of morality in video games, the unsocial and isolating nature of video games has been put under discussion.

The nature of video games in itself might, at first, appear to be one of never-ending battle or of forces opposing one another where resolution is only foreseeable in the form of battle-to-the-death to see who is left standing. However, many video games do not present violent content at all (e.g. *The Sims*), they only present the random circumstances that might happen, in everyday life (i.e. a character in the video game *The Sims* might be killed due to a fire starting in the kitchen; but this even does not make the game violent in itself): "*Violent videogame* is a term frequently used in the popular media to condemn games, but a violent videogame no more involves real violence than a zombie movie involves real zombies"(Tavinor 2009 :151). It appears that the use of the term 'violence' connected to video games in modern media is overused or used without its proper context.

The issue of violence is in itself rather interesting, as there seem to be different perspectives amongst the same issue. The term 'violence' here is not connected with the moral of video games which shall be discussed later. Nonetheless a differentiation of what is deemed, by the general public, to be 'violent agreeable' and 'violent disagreeable' should prove compelling enough.

As a medium, video game appear to be the new scapegoat, since most criticism, in connection with violent acts perpetrated by young criminal individuals, seems to be largely connected with the use or abuse of video games (see the case of the Columbine shooting in Newman 2013).

Yet, arguably, video games are not the only medium in which violent and morally questionable scenes are shown to the public (i.e. films). Nonetheless, video games have been accused multiple times because of their interactivity and because of the agency that the player enacts during her gameplay time.

Despite this, video games remain a form of fiction that in no way connects or should be connected with the real world; that is, no action (whether good or bad) in a video

game should be considered as the prompt to commit such acts in real life because: "That someone would adopt a violent behavioural script on the basis of what they have seen in a video game would arguably signal some kind of deeper cognitive behavioural problems"(Tavinor 2009 :156).

Furthermore, the depiction of violence and more generally, violence in video games is always put under the scrutiny of censors who decide whether a game can be accessible to the public and which portion or category of public should be allowed access to that product (i.e. age restrictions and warnings about the presence of blood and gore, foul language etc.).

Nevertheless, fear and panic regarding the possible (unknown) consequences which video games may have upon the minds of the children or on young people is still widespread and has received little and confused response from the academic world, which has tried to provide answer to these issues, although the findings of their surveys and researches are not over nor are the findings conclusive.

> ""*Let there be no doubt about it: these games are not harmless fun, as some think, but rather digital poison.*" exclaimed Senator Joe Liebermann in the American Senate last year. The target for his verbal weaponry was the apparently increasingly more violent computer games of the time - certainly a popular target when the army of worried parents and pedagogues take aim with the loaded bazooka of guilt transference. But if the discussion were to be characterized by one keyword it ought to be exactly that: Doubt. Researchers deliver relativistic statements, but there they are, the boys, hour after hour glued to the screen without showing the least bit of interest in the parental arsenal of character building activities ranging from brisk strolls to books filled with learning. Had it only been the television set that attracted them but no, it is something far more mysterious; an activity where the boys themselves are the active ones and where red slime monsters occur with the regularity of real world train delays.
>
> Surely, this must be dangerous?"(Smith 2006).

Therefore, since video gaming has been the subject of research only for a short period of time, the non-finality of the results should be expected. Nonetheless, the army of worried parents still demands an answer, which may or may not come in the

nearest future, with notable but still different results coming forth from the academic world:

> "Carsten Jessen and Lis Fauerholdt probably represent the most serious research done on the subject in Denmark. With a media ethnographic focus on concrete situations - for example the Introduction of Doom II (ID soft, 1994) in a youth club - it has been possible to attack (if not downright falsify) some of the commonly accepted premises of the debate. No, computer games are not used to replace human interaction and no, there is no obvious link between the apparent themes of the games and subsequent behavior patterns of players. The qualitative approach has hereby proven its relevance. What one may specifically miss at this point is the quantitative basis for generalizing the conclusions"(Smith 2006).

This last example is just one of the myriad of different results (positive or negative) coming from academic studies. Regardless, violence in video games should not be treated as the first form with which violent actions are 'rehearsed' before committing crimes in the real world: "These kinds of responses to videogames are *foreseeable*, to put it bluntly, only to the extent that crazy people are apt to do crazy things for crazy reasons" (Tavinor 2009 :158).

On a brief note, the issue of 'exclusion' or 'isolation' is also being discussed in connection with video games. However, this type of 'misanthropic' behaviour has been analysed and debunked:

> "The potential development of psychopathological disorder through extended use of videogames appears to have shaped the presuppositions of investigation into the field. However, as Funk (1992: 53) notes, 'researchers have failed to identify expected increases in withdrawal and social isolation in frequent game players'. Emes concurs, citing Kestenbaum and Weinstein (1985) study which, although highlighting different 'uses' and reasons for playing between 'high-rate' and 'low-rate' players, 'concluded that heavy video game use did not result in global psychopathology or social introversion' (Emes1997: 412).

Sherry *et al.'s* (2001: 12) findings are more forceful still, in their discussion of these issues of 'isolation', 'introversion' and pathology: '[computer] gaming appears to be a type of diversion that involves other people in social interaction. Their finding contradicts the solitary game player isolated from social contact. In facr, frequent game play appears to be highly social'"(Newman 2013: 70).

Undeniably, the act of playing a video game is in itself, social. Unless video gaming is analysed in his purest isolated form (i.e. someone playing a single-player video game alone in the privacy and loneliness of his own room), playing is a social activity which is enacted as well as discussed in groups. As discussed in Thornham (2016), video games actually give basis for discussion even when they are not being played. Roommates may discuss their latest progression in a particular video game or might judge their performances after the gameplay time has ended (Thornham 2016). Furthermore, even when playing a single-player campaign, players are not alone. Usually a public is present, and an active one at that. During social gameplay people might make comments upon the skills shown by a particular player and turns are usually taken by all those involved to keep the interest up, as well as evaluating different skill-sets and different gameplay styles (e.g. the stealth approach *vs.* the guns blaring approach). Finally, the social aspect of video games is rather evident, besides the vast number of games which are published with either a multi-player campaign or with a local co-op campaign (e.g. *Tower Falls*), the essence and basis of multi-players games only (e.g. *Unreal Tournament*) is that of being a place in which people can meet and test their skills. Beside the argument which sees multi-player video games as a 'social isolation', it is undeniable that, even though players are playing alone in front of a screen, they are doing it together with other people with whom they can communicate and form a connection.

With the argument on the isolative nature of video games concluded, the analysis can now be moved towards other aspects, namely that of morality in connection to violence in video games.

Together with the issue of violence and the depiction of violence in video games, the problem of morals and moral actions which the player has to decide and act upon, is another form which the general public uses to discuss and categorise the violent effect video games have on their consumers.

Unsurprisingly, some academics have commented on the accusations moved towards video games and their supposed constant presence of combat and violence:

> Why do game designers so often fall back on shooting and combat? Just why violence and death is so common in videogames is in itself an interesting topic, though I cannot say much about it here. I will say, however, that videogames are not distinctive in this regard. Steven Pinker notes that fiction and drama tend to explore universal human themes: "There are a small number of plots in the world's fiction and drama…. More than 80 percent are defined by adversaries (often murderous), by tragedies of kinship and love, or both. In the real world, our life stories are largely stories of conflict: the hurts, guilts, and rivalries inflicted by parents, siblings, children, spouses, lovers, friends and competitors" (1997: 427). Videogames are brimming with murderous adversaries; moreover opportunities to murder your adversaries. Our persisting interests in violence in the arts maybe natural, though this is not to morally justify those interests, of course" (Tavinor 2009: 166).

Beside the comments made on the presence of violence in video games, which, much resembling the context of fiction, drama and novels, does not permeate the entirety of the published video games, since not every video games has as its main scope the killing of others (e.g. *The Sims*). Furthermore, many video games also present the player with different options of action. For instance, a stealth game might give the possibility to the player to progress through the levels unnoticed and without the killing of a single non-playing character. Furthermore, even strategy video games allow for different methods of resolution (i.e. winning the level). The video game *Civilization VI* allows player to win the level in a variety of ways; from the most forward (Domination Victory), to the most complicated (Culture Victory). Therefore, many times, the violence in video games is not mandatory but depends on the strategical choices of the player. That is not to say that every human being is inherently evil and under the right circumstances will always respond with acts of violence; but that, with different possibilities in gameplay, the player might want to test her own skills and differentiate strategy between levels.

Moreover, the depiction of violence in video games is not always presented in the form of visual blood and gore, but might also be masked through the use of fictional non-existing characters, like, for instance, robots or alien, providing a virtual substitute and therefore, less depictive of everyday life.

> "Note also that on just who the violence is perpetrated in many videogames – Nazis, aliens, monsters, zombies, genetically manipulated mutants – extracts some of the moral bite from the content of the fiction in that these things are seen as somewhat outside the purview of regular morality. This *moral bracketing* allows these characters to more effectively function as *game fodders*. Indeed, when realistic or morally significant characters are used as formal game obstacles […] the game often takes on a different moral tenor" (Tavinor 2009: 166).

Nevertheless, in many instances, games have been questioned because of their strong 'immoral' content or because the video games depicted a fictional world in which, the actions and events might not have been accessible to every type of player (age restriction, gender issues, or the changing of the eternal aspect of the enemy, such as is the case in *Command and Conquer*).

The moral presented in video games might be divided into two categories, although these two may not comprehend every video game. Certain video games inscribe what actions are considered good or bad; others, instead, do not reward or reprimand players based on the decision they make, although some might change the end of the game (should the game present multiple endings).

> "In *Fable*, some of the actions performed by the player are categorized as good while others are considered evil. The player, by learning and understanding which (and when) actions are considered good or evil, can begin to understand the ethical framework that is procedurally encoded in the game" (Zagal 20099: 3).

Subsequently, in some instances, it is the player who has freedom of choice and who might want to explore different possibilities to see if those decisions have any consequence on the video game or on the gameplay. Therefore:

> "Difficult decisions aren't always moral decisions. A player wracked by the decision of how to spend a limited number of points on character upgrades is arguably more concerned with gameplay than ethics. It isn't hard to realize that these situations aren't moral dilemmas. The danger lies when dilemmas are presented as moral but, for some reason or another, aren't regarded as such by the players. This often happens when a moral choice is subverted into a choice of gameplay or play style" (Zagal, 2009: 7).

It is common for players to choose which resolution best fits the progressions of the game, since nothing impedes them from playing a second time and make their own personal choices; also players would rather make a certain type of choice, namely one that allows them to gain certain advantages and progress more easily in the game: "Gaming and gamers are a lot more reflective than they are often given credit for" (Tavinor 2009: 167) and this is shown by the sometimes meticulous calculations that player undergo in order to get the best they can from their equipment and fighting style.

However, although the moral choice of the game might be put in the background by the player seeking the best course of action for her style of gameplay, the issues of moral decisions still remains, with some games, more than others, breaking the moral barrier:

> "Unsurprisingly, there is a long history of criticism of videogames as expression objectionable viewpoints about violence, women, and minorities. *Manhunt* a game that depicts the filming of snuff movies, might seem to imply or express the view that such things are properly seen as entertaining. *Grand Theft Auto* seems to some people to express objectionable views about minorities and women; and these criticisms were certainly again aired with the release of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. These criticisms hold even given the fictional nature of these games (that really,

no people were in the least bit harmed because none of the depicted events occurred). And furthermore, because the player contributes to the content of the game, they might be held complicit in the immoral views expressed. Videogames can therefore be blamed because they do express morally deficient viewpoints" (Tavinor 2009: 164).

Although this description might be fitting enough for those who side for a stronger censorship or a stronger control over what is depicted in video games, it should be noted that, these games also help furthering the discussion in the real world. Incorrectly pointing at a medium and ascribing it the problems of today's society does not help in the least.

Furthermore, the morally deficient points might be put into discussion. Taking as an example the video game *This War of Mine*, a game inspired by the Bosnian war and specifically, during the 1992-96 siege of Sarajevo, the moral or heavy decisions which the player has to take in order to progress might be seen under a different light. The game itself does not present an action gameplay, since it shows the survival of the citizens rather than that of the soldiers. Nevertheless, the decisions which the player is required to take in order to survive (since it is a survival game) are not easy. For instance, during one of the game sections, one of the members of the group gets sick and needs medicine in order to survive. The player can explore and search medicines in abandoned buildings. However, the player can also enter what seems like an abandoned house, only to find that it is inhabited by an old couple, who owns the medicines that the player needs. Despite this, the medicines are also used by the old couple, since one of them is sick as well. Therefore, the player has to make a moral decision and decide whether she wants to take the medicine or leave it there and search for it in another place. These sort of decisions and actions, however, also have consequences on the characters that the player controls. Certain actions (like senseless homicide) might produce dire consequences on the characters (e.g. depression, alcoholism, suicide).

Aside from the technical aspects of the game, which requires strategy and decision-making in order to reach the end of the story, the moral presented here appears to be detached from the critics that have overwhelmed the gaming industry.

"It is also possible to turn this contextual defense on its head: we might say that rather than being an undesirable aspect properly dispensed with, videogames need the potential to be morally disturbing and provocative if they are to be art." (Tavinor 2009: 168).

It is in fact arguable that, together with other narrative mediums video games should have the possibility to question society by being provocative and disturbing, to some extent.

Finally, the debate on the moral dilemmas of video games is not concluded and will probably last for decades before the discussion might come to a conclusion, if it will ever come to a conclusion. Nonetheless, the power, together with the diffusion, that video games have is undeniable. Mostly because:

"Video games have been successful because they are beguiling. They inspire the full gamut of emotional reactions, from fear and hatred to utter devotion. As they become more and more part of our lives, and as tey grow in directions we can today only barely imagine, the field of video game studies will need new talent, both to develop these creations and to seek to understand them" (Nielsen *et al.* 2008: 243).

It is also in the hopes of this study to show that video games can be a powerful medium through which potent narrative and situations might be represented, whether completely fictional or inspired by the history of the real world.

Chapter III: A case study

Introduction

The linguistic and narrative discourse in videogames, discussed in the previous chapters, may be broadened and enlarged through the analysis and study of the process of video game creation, particularly of a video game in its early stage of development. The analysis might shed some light on the creative process behind the structuring of a videogame. *Vapor Knight*, the game in question is still at the beginning of its development, with little to no footage yet available. Nevertheless, the general plot, as well as the setting and the language used in the videogame have been discussed and agreed upon by the members of the developing team. Further notice should be made about the risk of change and failure of the developing process. Since the team is composed only of two members (one being the writer of this dissertation), it is in the interests of this analysis to mention how the team is composed, as well as how changes in narrative construction might appear at a later stage. As mentioned before, the plot of the videogame has been discussed and agreed upon and will be presented in a later sub-section which will provide the synopsis and character analysis. The following chapter will also be provided with an investigation on the modes of creation and level structuring or level layout, as well as a study of the music which is to be used within the game. With the aid of previously mentioned academic studies and researches on music (Newman 2013; Scirea *et al.*) the text will also provide observations into the composition of the soundtrack or musical score as well as explaining why such genre(s) of music have been thought fit for this particular setting of videogame and whether they create or not expectations or false expectations in the players (Scirea *et al.* 2014). In addition, the graphic quality of the project might be discussed and argued. However, since the project and the composition of the team, which may change, together with the shared knowledge of computing and programming, is limited, we have decided to develop and produce a videogame in what may be termed as an 'indie' production. What this means is that the developing team is not backed by any major producing company and, although the possibilities to produce 3D games with lavish and well-constructed graphics is possible, albeit requiring a profound knowledge of the selected computing programs; for reasons of time limitations and market openings,

we have decided to simplify our first project, producing a 2D side-scrolling videogame inspired by the recent reappearance in trend of 2D side-scrolling videogames or 'retro games'.

On a final note, the examples provided in the analysis do not mirror or ascertain the possible final product. The creation process of a videogame is not always definitive and may need redefinition or change based upon the narrative requirements and development set by the makers as well as possible redefinition of the game world setting. Nevertheless, the general idea and mood board of the game will be illustrated and shown.

3. 1 The development team

The team, composed of two members: Pietro Addis and Pietro Dinon, was created in 2015 by its founding member and head of the project Pietro Dinon. The one-man team had already begun with the planning of video game ideas, as well as some instances of animation for the videogame. However, later discussion of plot and game creation led to the joining of the team's second member (Pietro Addis) which then led to the composition and planning of the first official project. The team is known under the name of *Bad Octopus* a name which represents the team's fascination for both the octopus species and their ability to adapt to the environment depending on the situation (camouflaging, traversing narrow passageways) and their strength, as well as the passion for H.P Lovecraft's tales and novels. The first project of the team, is called *Vapor Knight: Death, Decay and Strobe Lights*, a 2D side-scroller beat-'em-up (or brawler), a *genre* of video game featuring hand-to-hand combat, or close quarter combat, against a large number of relentless and unforgiving opponents, set in medieval times and during the 1980s.

Team logo

3.2 The video game project

Videogame cover

"[…] Videogames have existed, in one form or another, for over 50 years, and it will be clear to those who have even a cursory awareness of the products of the industry that videogames have changed significantly both formally and aesthetically. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the blips of light that formed the bats and ball of tennis game *Pong* could be separated from the lavish near-photorealism of *Crysis 2*, *Battlefield 3* or *Infinity Blade II* by only a few decades, or that videogames could have so quickly become the global social, cultural and economic force they are today"(Newman 2013 :27).

It is certainly interesting to see how videogames have changed throughout the years, evolving from simple and rough shaped 2D graphics to the more defined yet still blocky shapes found in games like *Half-Life* or *Gothic*, where characters were still animated manually and in which movements and body language appeared as if

the inhabitants of those worlds were stick-man figures with a limited range of expressions, raising and lowering their hands, always clutched in the form of a fist, like stumps. Of course, not every game presented this instance of mobility issue, although they were never a problem to the players but were rather captivating to see. Nevertheless, the possibilities granted by the graphic cards and computing abilities of the time, that is, only sixteen years ago in the case of the videogame *Gothic*, released in 2001, were distant from the wonders and pleasing-to-the-eye forms that videogames have now reached in games such as *Battlefield 1*, *Quantum Break* or in games such as *Until Dawn*, in which skilful 3D animation has been merged with motion-capture, allowing for even more realistic graphics and character expression.

Nonetheless, together with the advancement of computer graphics in AAA (triple A games), there has been a 'revival' or return of 2D graphics and side-scrolling games in the form of 'retro' or indie (independent) games. The reappearance and solidification in the videogame market of such games has opened up new possibilities for independent developers, not affiliated with any major publishing company, allowing for the formation of developing teams in which the composition differs from the standard found in major publishing and developing companies (see for instance Newman 2013 :39).

> "While we are most used to thinking about the richness of opportunities for players, one consequence of the heightened spatial and experiential diversity of videogames has been a complication of the process of production. The range of assets – and it follows, specialist individuals and teams – required to produce games such as *Gears of War 3*, *Grand Theft Auto IV* or *Final Fantasy XIIII-2*, has necessitated major shifts in development practice. Most notably, the complexity and diversity of console games for current generation systems demands a more formalized, managed development strategy and effectively prohibits the 'one man band' operations commonplace in the 1970s and 1980s. The composition of the modern console development studio […] borrows in part from the film industry and in part from the non-entertainment software industry"(Newman 2013 :31).

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In the above citation, Newman talks specifically about the development of console games. The citation also mirrors what may be described as the current situation of computer videogames too; however, the computer videogame market, if compared with the console videogame market (the comparison however might not be effective at a later stage since consoles have also decided to partake into the indie videogame market, allowing developers to publish their games on console as well), offers to independent developing teams, the possibility to publish and sell their own games on the chosen platform (see for instance Valve's *Steam* or CD Projekt's *Gog.com*), thus entering the videogame market and, should the game prove a success, provide income to further develop videogames and even enter one of the indie publishing companies (see for instance *Devolver Digital* or Edmund McMillen's *Super Meat Boy*). Thus, the videogame project currently under development by the *Bad Octopus* team will not be associated with the AAA games but will be published under the label of 'indie game'. The idea of a 2D side-scrolling beat 'em up appeared to be the most accessible opportunity to us, due to the previous experience of one of the members in the development of such category of videogames.

Another issue which needs to be carefully addressed and solved during the development of any video game whatsoever, is that of the narrative structure or, rather, following the definition given by Nielsen *et al.* (2008) is that of the narrative action:

> "A central preoccupation of game designers is the problem of linearity–
> literally, of how to get a player to move through a game in a way that is
> compelling. As the narrative possibilities of video games have become
> more complex, so too has the debate over the mechanics of the
> narrative. Designers now generally accept that forcing the player through
> the fictional world does not make a good video game, no matter how
> compelling the narrative"(Nielsen *et al.* 2008: 181).

One of the reasons behind this allegation may be assessed through the changes that videogames have undergone in the last decade. Nowadays the exploration of the fictional world, together with the possibility given to the players to know and use the environment to their own advantage is fundamental in creating what may be

defined as a successful game. In addition, following the study of Esposito (2005), the period of video gaming from 1994 until the present days has seen the rise of bigger productions which led to a lesser diversity among video games. It is not sufficient to produce a video game that (re)uses the same set of scenarios or that requires the player to grind through painstakingly long levels filled with enemies that will not give any room for respite or exploration. Therefore, developing companies have started to produce video games which include the player and make her assume that she is the only force able to progress through the narrative and come to the end of the story. Arguably, the player is indeed the only reason why the narration progresses, since without a player the story could not be played.

With the case of a 2D side-scrolling game, the issue may prove even more problematic than in 3D games since the environment and background in which the narration is inserted is, literally, flat, not providing the player with any possibility of movement aside from the forward and backward motion as if on a 'rail track'. However, the video game industry and its developers have found plenty of ways with which to tackle the problem: "The key to a successful mechanics is to make players feel that they are contributing to creating a plot; the most successful narrative experiences happen in games where our actions have noticeable plot consequence"(Nielsen *et al.* 2008: 183). Indeed, this may be achieved through the construction of compelling quests (discussed in the previous chapter) which may push the player to play the next level of the game, keeping her involvement in the main narrative high enough while providing meaningful and challenging gameplay which tests the player. This may be done even in two-dimensional games, where players have to complete quests, levels and puzzles to access to the next area of the game, progressing with the narrative and the story. Even though the movements within the environment are limited, the background scenarios and the narrative action within the game have proven to be a sufficient drive for players to play the games. Taking as an example *Mother Russia Bleeds*, it appears that even what might be defined as games with simple narrative can be enthralling and compelling to the players. "Set in an alternate U.S.S.R, the story focuses on an imprisoned antihero with a crippling drug addiction as he breaks free and barrels down a journey of hate-filled vengeance" (motherrussiableeds.com). The gameplay is: "an unrelenting, ultra-violent 'Beat 'Em Up', brimming with hard-hitting action and game altering psychedelic twists. The game will be playable by up to 4 players"(motherrussiableeds.com). The gameplay and the videogame is actually

filled with hectic action that keeps the player stuck in place while trying to overcome and advance in the game, while an unrelenting and unforgiving horde of different enemies keeps on trying to kill the playing character, thus showing the game over screen. However, violence is not the only element keeping the interest of the player together and is not, in any shape or form, the only narrative drive within the game itself. As seen in the description, the playable characters are street fighters under the influence of the Russian mafia, which is drenching Russia's streets with a new type of drug called 'Nekro'. The characters decide to get behind the secret of this new drug and destroy the mafia's regime which, incidentally, is also connected to the government. However, the drug has some hallucinatory side effects which influence the narrative and gameplay of the videogame. The story in itself is rather simple, but with the addition of an interesting narrative and plot twists, the game suddenly become even more appealing, allowing for an interesting experience even though it is "limited" by the pixel-art graphics used.

The analysis of *Mother Russia Bleeds* is not done to simply praise the video game itself. It shows how videogames can be interesting and appealing even with a simple and fleshed out narrative, without a strong personalization of the characters, which might on the contrary complicate the relationship and assumed connection between player and playable character (Nielsen *et al.* 2008, Newman 2013). Furthermore, the videogame is also one of the closest example connected to the developing project which is going to be analysed later in the chapter and serves both as an inspiration and as a limitation to the *Bad Octopus* team, since, at least for the first project, the chosen graphic design does not mirror the one found in *Mother Russia Bleeds*, but is rather a much simplified version of it, with a different mood board, namely the colour-pattern of the environment and the style of the animations. The following sections shall provide a discussion of the narrative and plot of our video game project, as well as providing the synopsis and lengthy examples of the story which will be reworked and inserted within the game.

Once the general plot has been explained and exemplified in detail, the analysis will move towards the linguistic aspects of the video game which will explain the reasoning that has led to the decision of splitting the narrative in two different forms of language (the archaic and the modern one), providing the sources for its inspiration; then the musical elements of the video game will be assessed and the analysis will end with the character development. However, even though the presented material might not be wholly included inside the videogame, it may still

prove useful to analyse the construction and reworking of a narrative from paper to videogame.

3.3 Plot

The plot of the video game can be summarized rather easily since the events of the story are quite linear and, in Propp's terms (2009), pertain to the type of narrations which see the disruption of the balance, a hero (or in this case, a false hero) travelling through space (and time) to defeat the evil presence which has destroyed the unity of the world and ends with the restoration of the balance.

Synopsis

The king of the land, Synthur, travels to greet his old friend Merlin in his tower, seeking advice about the words of a prophecy that sees the land they inhabit at risk. The prophecy foretells the coming of a great threat that will produce a bloody war, turning the land into a chaotic battlefield, unless someone stops it from happening. However, Synthur is taken by surprise when he finds out that Merlin had to flee from the tower, in order to save himself from the Necromancer (the enemy of the story). The situation is complicated even further when Synthur falls into the hands of the enemy, although only for a brief moment, and discovers that the Necromancer plots to find and kill his friend in order to gain the knowledge for space travelling in order to lay devastation on Synthur's realm, as well as gaining more and more power by conquering other worlds as well. After freeing himself, Synthur pursues the Necromancer through the realm and sees him traverse a magic portal.

In the nick of time, Synthur enters the portal after the Necromancer and is teleported to the future (the 1980s). There, he finds Merlin and warns him of the great danger. Merlin, however, reassures him and tells him that the world in which they have found themselves contains magical artefacts which, wielded by the right person, will be able to finally destroy the Necromancer and save Synthur's realm from certain doom. Synthur, then, sets out to retrieve the magical artefacts and defeat the enemy. However, what he does not know is that the artefacts which he is wielding will corrupt him and, ultimately, bring the prophecy about. In the end, Synthur will

defeat the Necromancer and return to his realm (thereby, revealing himself as a false hero). After he has returned, a new (and true) heroine will be introduced as the saviour of the land, the real hero of the prophecy and the game will come to an end.

Narrative analysis and reworking

The following extract is taken directly from the script of the videogame. However, the text should be treated, in its raw form, as something similar to the script of a movie. Being in its initial form, the content will have to be reworked in various forms. For instance, the depiction of the land and of Synthur's walking in the woods will not be presented to the player as a literal wall of text, unlike MUD sessions (Newman 2013; Crystal 2006), since that would only annoy the player, disrupting the immersion. Therefore, the initial description will be translated into a cut-scene showing the setting as a series of backgrounds and levels which are going to be used as an interactive environment, namely, the player will be able to explore those levels through Synthur even though the video game will allow only limited exploration, since it is a 2D brawler. After the introduction and possibly some words of explanation regarding the playable character that will appear on the lower part of the screen, the player will gain control of the character and will herself lead Synthur to the tower of the Wizard, thereby activating the second cut-scene which will present more detailed dialogue that will provide more information as to the setting of the video game.

Even though beginning of the story will present little to no interactivity, thus creating a barrier between the interactive experience of the player and the progression of the story (Newman 2013) the initial cut-scene will not be too long and will only take few minutes before its completion. Once the cut-scene has ended, the player will gain control over the character and will begin the game. After the player has made her escape from the tower the first part of the journey will begin.

The following quotation, expresses the choices and necessities we had to make in order to produce a believable environment:

"In the telling of your "story," the next most important task is to answer
your audiences first question.... "Where am I?" No matter how well

designed your environments are, if your audience can not answer this question in the first 15 seconds, you are already lost. This can be as simple as "Oh, I am in a dark warehouse." or "Ah, I am in the hold of a ship." Wherever it is, your first job is to present your audience with the opportunity to answer this question for themselves"(Carson 2000).

In order to do so, we have decided to present the video game as clearly as possible. Although the initial section might not be as clear as expected, the setting will no doubt be understandable enough. In fact, the player will be able to easily assess her whereabouts as: "I'm controlling a knight armed with sword and shield, therefore the game is set in medieval times and, in this very moment, I'm in a forest. Now where does this path lead me?".

The beginning of the video game

The text here presented is connected to the very first section of the game. Where deemed necessary, the narration will be interrupted and an analysis of how the text is going to be translated into a video game context will be provided.

" 'Twas the crack of dawn in yonder land, when spirits still roamed free and will-o-wisps danced around the bark of the trees, unhindered by the presence of man. A fresh and cold breeze, blowing from the mountain peaks, cooled the humid and hot summer air, bringing, to the few already awake to start the works of a new day, the prophecy of autumn and of cold winter to come. Amongst those who were awake, there was one who instead had not closed his eyes at all during the night. Bereft of sleep and ridden by incessant questions about the prophecy, this valiant knight, this chivalrous figure, silently walked the woods, his back bent in reflection as if his glorious deeds and noble lineage were but mere fragments of a past now unwelcomed by his mind, since far more dangers and, perhaps, far more glory awaited him."

This section is going to be presented to the players as a text appearing on the lower part of the screen in order to introduce them to the setting of the story. In addition, since presenting a wall of text with a dark background would not help with the

suspension of disbelief, a section of the level layout will be presented. The camera, focusing on the trees, mountain tops and the rising sun will slowly pan out, showing the larger picture until the forest ground and the character can be seen.

"Wearing his suit of armour, protecting him from the unseen dangers that might await him, he slowly paced the far too familiar steps across the woods, retracing with his memory all the times he had come and gone from that sanctuary, that homely place where, for long time, while young, he envisioned himself as the hero of hundreds of story and where, together with his spirit, his mind and knowledge of the world was shaped; the Tower of the Wizard. The creatures of the woods where undisturbed by his presence. The smell of trees was all around him filling his nostrils with fragrances of grass, pines, oaks and summer fruits. The winding road ahead of him, let its passers peak on the various elements which gave to the land that fable like appearance: towards the north-west stood the mighty tower, a pillar of stone surrounded by unrelenting vines which every year grew wilder and wilder, giving to the home of the Wizard the resemblances of an ancient tree, uniting the works of man to those of nature. A small window perched on the highest point of the tower allowed for an unobstructed view of all the realm and its surroundings."

Here, the player will not be presented with more text. As a substitute the player will see, while interacting with the character, the level layout that will move together with the movements of the player, showing the tower of the Wizard, the winding road and the will-o-wisps still moving around the trees. Furthermore, the smell of trees and summer fruits cannot be expressed in visual terms and are going to be left out. Nevertheless, those elements are going to be kept in the initial script, since they might help us build a believable environment.

"From that small window, Synthur watched and admired the vastness of his reign and, at night, plunged into the lake of stars visible from the window. There, his mind was cast to a time when he was younger and more innocent, not burdened by the problems of to-day, and asked the Wizard to tell him of his favourite tales, where he fought against mighty dragons of old, built of metal and fire, their scales so sharp and strong that no weapon could even scratch the surface, let alone pierce it. The hero of

the stories however, always managed to escape in one piece in the end and returned safely to his land."

This fragment too will not be inserted in the video game text, but helps in creating the environment for the player. Furthermore the exchanges and dialogues between the two characters will be constructed in order to introduce the friendly relationship between them.

"A sudden noise, coming from within the woods, interrupted Synthur's recollection and he, fearing the enemy might be afoot, put his hand on the handle of his sword, ready to unsheathe it. Slowly, he crept closer to the source of the noise, shrubbery being shaken violently from something inside it. Upon closer inspection, Synthur noticed that the noise was being made by a small creature of the woods, stuck between the branches. After liberating the creature from its shackles, Synthur noticed something far more dreadful and far more fearful. There, where the creature had got stuck, lay a rune of teleportation, used and now burned. He immediately recognized the mark upon the rock, as one pertaining to the Wizard himself and, upon closer inspection, Synthur realized that the rune itself was spattered with fresh and sticky blood. In an instant, the knight leaped out of the bushes and rushed towards the Tower, drawing his sword, ready to strike down any foe he might encounter on his way, ready to defend the Wizard, even if that meant losing his life; because he knew, deep within himself, that the words of the prophecy where real and that his quest would soon begin."

Here, the narration will integrate interactive parts. In fact, most of what is written above is not going to be inserted as text but as actions that the player has to take in order to progress with the story. The player will have to progress along the forest path and will encounter a shaking bush. Getting close to it the player will be able to interact with the bush, through a command prompt that will appear on the screen (e.g. Press X). Once the player has pressed the button, the video game will reverse into its non-interactive state and will present the player with the information of the rune spattered with blood through an utterance expressed by Sythur. Afterwards, the game will resume its interactivity.

"To reach the Tower faster, Synthur decided to cut through the woods, knowing all too well of the dangerous creatures that lurked there. Nevertheless, he pushed onwards, slashing and killing every wild animal crossing his way, until he reached the foot of the tower. There, he stopped for a moment, catching his breath. Then, screaming at the top of his lungs, he called for the Wizard: "Merlin, Merlin! Art thou within the Tower? Answer your liege, Merlin, for the door is shut and thou didst not bestow upon me the key with which to gain access to your abode without being invited first!" A long and dreadful silence ensued. Only the cold wind blowing through the branches of the trees answered the knight. Thus, relentlessly, he addressed the wizard again: "Merlin, 'tis I speaking to thee, your majesty and king! Speak soon or I shall come back with an army contingent and kick thine door down!". Synthur did not mean to blast through the door of the tower, nor did he mean to intrude upon the Wizard unless he desired so. First of all, he bore much far too much respect for the Wizard to even think to behave like that and second of all, the tower was protected by magic enchantments which provided a strong protection to the secrets and to the privacy of the mage, while also assuring the death of anyone who dared intrude upon him. However, when worried or doubtful, Synthur always addressed the mage this way and, depending on the answer he received, he either entered Merlin's tower or walked back to his castle. After some time had passed and still no answer came from the mage, Synthur decided to go back to the castle and come back at a later time to question the mage about his late voyages."

This long narrative section serves as a reminder to us, the developers, to change the environment and the background. The scene in fact will move into the forest with tall trees covering the view. Furthermore, this section is going to be interactive and will introduce the first enemies of the game. In order to reach the tower, the player will need to defeat a number of wild animals (boars, wolves and bears) in order to progress and reach the foot of the Tower. Once the player has reached the Tower, the narration will start again with a non-interactive section, showing the utterances of Synthur directed at Merlin that will not be answered.

"He was almost convinced that nothing was wrong, when he noticed that the entrance door to the Tower was ajar. Slowly he approached the door and carefully pushed it open with his shield. Nothing came of it; no magic missiles piercing through the

intruder's body, no explosions blinding and stunning the enemies. Alas, Synthur's utter fears were true, someone had managed to break into the Wizard's Tower and if that were true, no one in the realm was safe anymore. Blinded by fear and rage, the knight rushed forth recklessly, screaming at the top of his lungs to scare off the evil presence who had the guts to invade and hurt the inhabitant of the Tower. Little did Synthur know about the sheer power that any human or creature would have to wield to break in such remote and impregnable fortress. Too late did Synthur realize how strong such force had to be, too late did he realize that he was impotent against such raw power. As he set his foot inside the main chamber, he saw a dark and bent figure leafing through some ancient tomes. Synthur perceived the figure raising his hand, but he did not see him do it. For him, it was just a slight movement, but the force which came forth from the hand and sent him flying, crushing against the stone walls, was unimaginable. Suddenly, Synthur realised that he was down on the ground, with every inch of his body hurting. For some minutes, he became unconscious. He was woken up by an evil and clicking voice, which cackled incessantly: "Rise, rise my knight in shining armour, you've come to save your friend but you did not expect to find myself hither. Oh, what pity did fate reserve you, but what stroke of luck did it reserve to me. Now I have the means to find me a wizard, and rule the land without felling a single blow. Two birds with one stone; funny, is it not?". The Necromancer slowly rose from the ancient tome and cast his eye on Synthur, lying on the floor. Slowly he paced the distance dividing them, with regular and calculated steps as if to savour this moment. When he was above him, he looked through his helm and right into his eyes, with a mischievous grin: "I did not know kings had a right to be scared. Oh, don't worry, I shan't harm you, I need you alive and well, my liege". Finishing this phrase, the necromancer muttered a spell formula and with precise gestures of the hand summoned two of his minions, orcs. "Well, here are my safe keepers, guardians of my second most precious possession. But don't worry, I shan't be long. I'll soon be back with our friend, the Wizard". With this final words, he left the room, descending the stairs and exiting the Tower. Synthur was trapped, but his strong will never flinched and soon, he found a way to get rid of the orcs and pursue the Necromancer".

This final narrative section is going to be divided in chunks of interactivity and non-interactivity. The player will need to enter the door and walk the stairs up to the top of the Tower. Once she has reached the main chamber, a cut-scene will ensue, introducing the Necromancer and his overwhelming magical powers. The cut-scene will provide a dialogue (mentioned above) between the two characters; even though the dialogue will not be interactive and will not be modifiable by the player (i.e. the

player will not be able to decide what she is going to tell to the Necromancer). However, the cut-scene will be brief and the gameplay will resume, requiring the player to run and avoid the enemies guarding him, reaching for his weapons and killing them.

With the closing of the first part of the narrative, the players are introduced to the main character, who also represents the playable character, king Synthur and to the enemy of the story, which in this instance represents a threat to the land in which the characters live; the Necromancer. Furthermore, the narrative frame in which the story is set, appears to connect to the category of plot defined as *The Quest* (Booker 2004):

> "No type of story is more instantly recognisable to us than a Quest. Far away, we learn, there is some priceless goal, worth any effort to achieve: a treasure, a promised land; something of infinite value. From the moment the hero learns of this prize, the need to set out on the long hazardous journey to reach it becomes the most important thing to him in the world. Whatever perils and diversions lie in wait on the way, the story is shaped by that one overriding imperative; and the story remains unresolved until the objective has finally, triumphantly secured" (Booker 2004 :69).

The quest and the journey that the hero of the game and also the player, have to go through is presented soon after the introduction of the main character. Initially, the player is presented with a prophecy, which is only introduced within the context of the narrative as background. The players, in fact, will not learn of the words of the prophecy until later in the game, through items hidden inside the different levels. However, the prophecy will be connected to the previous events happening in the narrative frame, and will be an integral part of the whole narrative.

Arguably, the first segment of narration does not present Merlin (the Wizard) as an helper and indeed, does not introduce the character either since, as shown in the aforementioned fragment, Merlin is absent and is being chased out by the figure embodying evil in the game.

However, the character of Merlin, as well as his absence from the Tower, is the event that triggers the beginning of the first quest for Synthur: finding the wizard before the necromancer reaches him and does away with him.

It might be argued that the reasons for Synthur to embark in such a quest to save his friend represent the definition given by Booker of Quest:

> "We begin with the reason why the hero and his companions set out on their journey in the first place. The Quest usually begins on a note of the most urgent compulsion. Or the hero to remain quietly 'at home' (or wherever he happens to be) has become impossible. Some fearful threat has arisen. The 'times are out of joint'. Something has gone seriously and terrifyingly wrong" (Booker 2004 :70).

Something has gone wrong. First Synthur is presented with the Tower being open and defenceless, albeit being one of the most secure places in all the land. Secondly, upon reaching the summit of the Tower, the king falls into what might resemble a trap and falls into the grasp of the fiendish figure who wants to control and rule the land through his evil powers, overwhelming both the Wizard and the King, making them yield to his own personal plans.

From here on, the playable character of Synthur and, subsequently, the player, will have to go through a series of level, conquering each of them, in order to pursue the Necromancer and follow his steps. Going after the Necromancer and completing the various levels will lead to Synthur reaching a remote place in which, the Necromancer is summoning a portal with which to reach the Wizard, wherever he may be hiding. From this point, the player will be introduced to the other setting of the videogame. In fact, through the portal, the player will abandon the medieval fantasy period and will find herself within the context of the 1980s. This change of setting will, of course, be explained later in the analysis, together with the language used within the two different time periods.

However, once the player has been introduced within this new frame and the narration has progressed, albeit detaching the player from the interactivity of the gameplay, although for only a short time (Newman 2013) the character of Merlin will be introduced and his role will shift from Wizard in danger or distress, since his

situation might be compared with that of Princess Peach in *Super Mario Bros*, to that of helper:

> "We can say 'the hero and his companions' because a distinctive mark of the Quest is the extent to which, more than in any other kind of story, the hero is not alone in his adventures. The story does ultimately centre round the single figure of the hero. But more consistently than in any other type of story, we are also made aware of the presence and importance of the friends who accompany him" (Booker 2004: 71-72).

Although the helping character of Merlin will not actively take part in the video game and will not become a playable character for the player to use, his change of role will provide the player with new knowledge of the game surroundings as well as providing either the location of another quest where Synthur and the player will find new equipment in order to deal with the challenges posed by the game, or will provide that magical equipment himself, giving it directly to the player, with words of warning that will be connected to the prophecy mentioned before.

It may appear that the definition given to the narrative, thus describing it as a Quest, might not best suit the whole of it, since the general direction undertaken by the narrative frame resembles that of Overcoming the Monster (Booker 2004: 21) in many ways; namely a great threat endangers the land and Synthur's realm as well. Thus, in order to defeat the menace and restore peace within the realm, or rather, keep the peace in the realm by defending it against the evil forces first, the main character of the story has to embark on a quest that requires him to defeat and overcome the monster. The two instances, however are not disconnected. In the beginning, Synthur is conscious of the fact that he himself might need to embark on a quest, following the words of the prophecy, in order to gain honour and prestige as well as possible riches to increase his wealth. This situation already introduces the discourse of quest, adventure or mission to be completed in order to gain benefits from it. However, this instance is soon changed or reconstructed. The appearance of the Necromancer modifies the requirements needed to fulfil the quest given to Synthur, shifting if from what may be a simple case of finding Merlin, to the necessity of defeating the fiendish forces that plot to subvert the order in the realm and gain control over it. From this moment onwards, the narrative frame changes

from a rescue mission, i.e. saving Merlin before the Necromancer lays hands on him; to an Overcoming the Monster quest which will see Synthur defeating the main evil to save his own land.

Furthermore, even though these two plots (Booker 2004) are part of the whole narrative, they do not exhaust the possibilities and directions which the story is intended to take; since the videogame itself will present two more variations, namely the Voyage and Return (Booker 2004: 87) and The Hero As Monster (Booker 2004: 181) which will be discussed later on in the chapter.

For the first part of the game, namely the one situated in medieval times which takes around the 30% of the whole story, the player will find herself surrounded by typical medieval fantasy landscapes, which will not be too detailed or too lavish in their representation, due to the graphic restraints which we need to deal with.

Nevertheless, the player will be immersed within familiar and previously encountered environments (Newman 2013; Nielsen *et al.* 2008), those of fantasy narratives (e.g. *Dungeons & Dragons*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Forgotten Realms*), allowing the game developers to introduce elements and characteristics particular of those types of narrative, without, on the other hand, disrupting the suspense of disbelief in the player:

> "In every project I undertake, I am faced with the same challenge, "How do I draw my audience into my imagined world and make them want to stay?" Whether it's a 100 million dollar Disney ride, a 3D shooter, or a kid's entertainment title, it is my objective to tell a story through the experience of traveling through a real, or imagined physical space. Unlike a linear movie, my audience will have choices along their journey. They will have to make decisions based on their relationship to the virtual world I have created, as well as their everyday knowledge of the physical world. Most important of all, their experience is going to be a "spatial" one.
>
> If I have an all encompassing desire for any computer game I play or themed attraction I visit, it is this:
>
> Take me to a place that:
>
> Lets me go somewhere I could never go.

Lets me be someone I could never be.

Lets me do things I could never do!" (Carson 2000).

In fact, our aim, albeit not including the element of free choice in the game, is that of creating a believable world in which, through spatial experience, the player will be able to visit an imaginary world, in the role of a valiant knight (or, as will be explained later, a hero who will then become an evil character), travelling through a land stricken by the presence of evil, to restore and bring peace once more.

Furthermore, the spatial experience of the player needs to reflect the choices we had to take in constructing the narrative, as well as mirroring what may be expected from a certain type of environment; in this case, the medieval one. Inserting elements which do not correspond to the shared knowledge of what is to be found in a medieval environment might further break the connection between player and gameplay:

"If you have ever visited a medieval cathedral or even a large old church, there is a reason the vast interior is so awe inspiring. What you may not realize when you enter, is that the architects of these places have forced you to enter the church through a small confined space, before revealing the monumental interior of the main church. This is done quite on purpose, and it is the contrasting effect of having been confined in a small space that makes the adjacent room all the more dramatic" (Carson 2000).

If for instance, the player journeyed through the forest only to reach a remote but nicely kept house in which she is to find, at last, the character of the Necromancer, that would only distance the immersion between player and gameplay, as well as providing room for doubt as to why such a house should be there and why should it be inhabited by a supposedly vicious and fiendish person (Adams 2002). This reasoning has led to certain decisions being made. The first part of the game will show and describe a land without boundaries, where nature is still the ruling presence, thus putting the player in a *en plein air* environment. Merged with this landscape, the game will also insert, either in the background as a fixed element in

the territory, thus also providing a sense of spatial movement in a pre-constructed world, or as an element which is to be found on the journey, abandoned castles occupied by bandits, abandoned cathedrals now inhabited by malicious imps or by zombies and skeletons, as well as caves in which wild animals might be found and, ultimately, where the Necromancer is to be found in order to progress to the next part of the story.

Pursuit through Time and Space

Now that the main elements of the first section of the game have been analysed, the inquiry can move on towards the second part of the game, which involves the travelling of the hero to a distant (both in time and spatial terms) and uncharted land. Even though the characters present within the video game are taken from legends and fantasy novels (Merlin and Synthur being a reworking of King Arthur's legend), the theme of the voyage is not introduced to the character and the player in the form of an invite, like Bilbo receiving a proposal from Gandalf who is: "looking for someone to share in an adventure" (Tolkien 1937); but arises from a necessity. The character of Synthur and, by extension, the player, however, will not know of this change in time and place until they have walked through the portal:

> "Quite regardless of what outward form they take, Voyage and Return stories really fall into two distinct categories. There are those where the hero or heroine is transformed by the encounter with the mysterious 'other world'; and there are those where they are not" (Booker 2004: 89).

In the case of our video game project, the hero of the video game is going to be changed by the encounter with the new and different world, which will ultimately lead him to transform into an evil character. However, it should be noted that the world around him will not take part in his change of attitude but will, instead, denote it through objects and dialogs which the player may or may not activate during her gameplay time.

Before delving into the reasons why the protagonist of the game will change from a good character (connected with light) to an evil character (connected with darkness)

that will, eventually, return from his voyage and rule his own land as tyrant, an analysis of the changes in level design, challenges and depiction of the different character is due.

Once the player has entered the portal, she will be transported, as mentioned before, into the 1980s, where a different landscape together with different hues of the original colour board will be presented.

The pursuit is not yet over and the player will need to progress into this new and unknown world (unknown to the characters of the game), again following the Necromancer, who, this time, will lead Synthur to a discotheque in which Merlin is to be found.

During the initial stage of the level, the player will experience, through text appearing on the lower part of the screen, Synthur's confusion and bewilderment at this new world, completely different from the one he was accustomed to. However, this state will be only temporary. Once reached the inside of the discotheque, Synthur will lose trace of the Necromancer and, dazzled and blinded by the colourful lights within the club, will lose balance and stumble 'on a robed figure with glimmers of stars cast upon his dress, as if the constellation of the dragon had decided to bestow the knowledge of the past upon his pointed hat'. Thereupon, the mysterious figure will turn towards the main character and reveal his identity. After a brief surprise from both parts, inquiries on 'why' and 'what for' the characters are in that strange place will be exchanged. Merlin will reveal that he is used to time and space travelling and that many of the stories collected in his library are actually first-hand experiences which he decided to report, in case any curious individual would want to acknowledge them.

However, Merlin will warn Synthur about the danger of roaming in a different land dressed in armour and equipped with a shining sword and shield. The Wizard will, in fact, use his magic knowledge to cast upon the king a spell of illusion that will change his aspect. From that point onwards, the character will be dressed in the "fashion" of the ninety-eighties. His armour will be substituted by a leather jacket and denim jeans while his helm will be substituted by a blend of a motorcycle helmet and a medieval helm, from which the beauty and purity of his glance will pour out. Finally, his weapons will be substituted, as mentioned in a previous section of the chapter, either by Merlin himself or after a quest created in order for the player to acquire such equipment. The two new weapons, however, will be a keytar, which

will be given in exchange for the sword and the rim of a wheel which will substitute the shield with the crest of the family.

Following the renewal or restyling of king Synthur's appearance, the story will proceed from where it was left. The king will need, with the help of Merlin, to track down the evil necromancer and, bestowed with new powers, defeat and kill him once and for all.

However, the Necromancer will not be caught unprepared for he too is a traveller of worlds, although only a novice of the practice, and is followed by many who worship him as some sort of god, together with his endless army of orcs and skeletons.

The final part of the game will see the rise of king Synthur, after finally defeating the enemy, thus freeing his motherland from a threat that, were it not for the help received by Merlin, as well as the new items with which to battle evil, would have led to certain dismay. Nonetheless, as anticipated before, the destruction of the first menace will only bring to the fulfilment of the prophecy:

> "We can now see more clearly just what the Voyage and Return story is really about. If we consider those examples where the hero is changed by his experiences in the 'other world', we see that, by definition, he has begun the story in a state of limited awareness. It is this which has plunged him into a realm of existence he had never previously imagines, an experience which leads to a nightmare threatening him with annihilation. But as a result he has learned something of fundamental importance. He has moved from ignorance to knowledge. He has reached a new and much deeper understanding of the world, and this has led to a complete change in his attitude to life" (Booker 2004: 101).

In fact, after the final battle, Synthur will have to return, though unwillingly, to his home land, to rule the land and defend it from the threats coming from the borders, represented by orcs and bandit raids. However, his thirst for knowledge will not be satiated and will only lead him to desire more power and even more knowledge than ever before. He shall abandon the council of the Wizard, together with the possibility of travelling with him to remote and unimaginable worlds and will instead try to recover, like the Necromancer, the ancient tomes in which the secret to space travelling is preserved.

Vapor Knight sketch

The rule of evil

With the final decision of Synthur to turn his back on his friends and his people, the main quest and the story of the game ends.

The shift from 'light' to 'dark', however, will not appear to be a *priori* decision made by the developing team, but will be introduced throughout the entirety of the second part of the game, the one situated in the 1980s. Fragments of the prophecy, which can be collected by the player, will be scattered all over the levels of the game. In addition to those elements, others will be provided which will hint at the change of Synthur's view of the surrounding world. Many times, for instance, the player will be able to 'speak' with the passers-by found in the levels of the game. During the beginning of his stay, Synthur will be described as: "a mysterious but beautiful man, who has light and hope in his eyes". Later on, when the lust for power has seized him, he shall be seen as: "a mysterious and beautiful man, who has decided to walk the path of darkness. Now, only hate resides in his gaze".

The theme of the "Hero as Monster" (Booker 2004) has been discussed by the *Bad Octopus* team and it has been decided that, through this change in narrative, it is possible to introduce another character, the real heroine of the game.

The idea of the hero as an evil character spurts from a common view on how the narrative of the first game, or of the first part of the game should end. King Synthur however, is not a character who starts, from the beginning of the narrative, as an evil presence within the narrative frame, unlike, for instance, Shakespeare's Richard III (quoted in Booker 2004), but is instead, a character that is transformed and changed by the surroundings in which he finds himself, during the 1980s portion of the game: "[…] by almost a complete inversion of the usual pattern, the hero or the hero and heroine are almost wholly light throughout the story, and where the darkness which finally engulfs them springs entirely from society outside them"(Booker 2004).

Filled with hope and courage, the character of king Synthur starts as a benevolent figure ready to embark on a quest only to save his friend from danger. However, much like the character of Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1954) his lust for power will ultimately lead him to his own undoing. Because of the new knowledge and new perspective that Synthur acquires from his travelling between worlds, his view of his own land will change and he will grow more and more restless, desiring to bring the wealth, power and technological possibilities of the 1980s into his own world.

Unless we decide to opt for a different ending, the game will finish with an ironical animated cut-scene in which, while the credits roll, it is possible to see king Synthur as the host of a grand ball within the walls of his castle. The dance, however, will not be a typical medieval scene, but will instead represent a mixture of both medieval and 1980s theme. For instance, the hall will be filled with 1980s music, together with the presence of some bauble which has been brought back by Synthur himself, like strobe lights.

Beside the ironic ending, which follows the 'tragic' ending of the video game story, the player will also be introduced to another character, who will either be part of the same game or will be the main character in the follow-up video game that will be developed after *Vapor Knight*.

The individual in question, even though she is still unnamed, is the real heroine of the story and the 'thundering force' which the prophecy talks about in the game.

This figure, in the narrative frame we have created, will have to renounce to her life in the 1980s and journey, much like Synthur into an unknown land. Here, the theme of Voyage and Return (Booker 2004) is reintroduced although it is reversed to some extent, since the protagonist will have to travel from the 1980s into medieval times.

However, even though the second game, or section of the game, depending on the length of the main narrative, is going to present the theme of Voyage and Return again, the possibility of the heroine of returning to her own time is still being discussed, since we have thought about the characterization of Merlin not as a wholly benevolent figure but as a one that tries to gain advantage from every situation, even if that should mean either the sacrifice of a person (the heroine) or the loss of a close friend (Synthur).

3.4 The language of Vapor Knight

The creation of two different worlds, as well as two different 'eras', could not be introduced and developed without either a justification or without the denotation of the differences between the two environments. In order to create an immersive enough setting that would neither make the players question the structure of the videogame, nor make them believe that what they were playing was 'not real', we have decided to opt for two different forms of language, in order to highlight both the differences between one world with the other, as well as creating a difference in the way the narrative or the language of the text is given to the player, thus, alerting her of the spatial difference between the previous section of gameplay, together with the spatial movement that the characters have experienced, by supplying a different vocabulary, particular for both worlds.

Completing the task might be easier said than done. However, we have decided to construct the first part of the narrative (the one set in medieval times) in the form of verse, namely, building a rhymed text that conveys the narrative elements and dialogues to the player. In order to do this, we have gathered inspiration and clues on how to build a verse based narrative from the great works of Shakespeare, Chaucer and Tolkien.

The point of this research is of course not that of plagiarizing their works, but to create something that may be closer to the medieval epics, the rich verse and prose which used the *blank* verse (Shakespeare), the iambic pentameter (Chaucer, Shakespeare) and the topic of the adventure (Tolkien).

In addition, the language used within the game might not mirror the vocabulary, the prosody and the phrase construction found within the works of Chaucer or

Shakespeare, but it is loosely inspired by those works, which have provided us with useful information on how to construct verses, as well as giving nuance and depth to the story we are showing to the audience.

The following examples pertain to the first section of the game and will be introduced and explained by a brief note at the end of each one. In addition, the last example of the list shall provide the reasoning behind the decision of our team to switch from the form of verse to a modern prose narrative, in order to highlight the passage of time, as well as the travel through space.

"Long are the shadows that over this realm loom,
But never will I live to see this land fall to its doom.
Before the prophecy is fulfilled and the land shattered by a war so bleak,
Thou shall see me die in battle and buried under the oak tree.
Thus, do not presume, Necromancer,
That I shall let you live to see the morning come,
Your blood shall flow before I leave this land undone;
Should ashes and flames be the chant to which people are lulled,
I shall be certain of the weight of my foot crushing your skull."

The first example is taken from the Tower section at the beginning of the videogame. The utterance is spoken by king Synthur who, although easily defeated by the Necromancer overpowering him, still retains his courage and addresses the Necromancer as a common crook.

The Necromancer will answer this first utterance in an ironic way, speaking in verse, although he himself is not given the possibility of talking in verse often, since he is not a noble character.

"Oh I see how it is, young king Synthur,
You plan on defeating me and deprive me of my virtue.
Therefore I tell you, and warn you to listen, careful;
For my wrath may become a tad reckless,
And I might just show you when vengeance may not be amended.
Thou had better not cross my path
And pretend to be the saviour of this land,

For relentless shall be my wrath,
If thou impede me from reaching Merlin to where he stands.
Thus young king, I spur you to be quiet and meek
Do not try to escape from hither,
Or I might just raise my finger and make you wither".

The above excerpt shall conclude the first encounter with the Necromancer who will, afterwards, evoke two of his orcs and command them to: "Do not let this vermin escape, I shall need his head if I am to conquer this reign! Guard him close and guard him well and if he tries to move or escape, unsheathe your swords and aim for his veins".

The next example of language used within the video game *Vapor Knight* is taken from the discotheque scene in which the speech will shift from verse to prose, due to the change in time and space. The dialogue, however, will first be introduced by the description of the environment, as seen through the eyes of king Synthur.

"Distraught by the blinding stars inside this strange new place, Synthur's pace came to a sudden halt and soon, he lost sight of the Necromancer. Confused and angry, he tried to get through the swarming presence of people within the building. Never he had seen such ritual, hundreds of people dancing under the light of moving stars that shone as if they were suns. A strange sound, resembling music, was coming from all around but no ensemble was there to be seen. Dazed, Synthur tried to find the entrance from where he had come in but, unfortunately, he found himself surrounded by even more people, looking at him as if he was some sort of elephant in the room. Constricted in his movements by the armour he was wearing, together with shield and sword, still unsheathed, king Synthur stumbled on an unseen step and fell flat with his back on the floor. It was then, that he saw it. A figure reflecting the lights in the room, shying away the darkness encompassing the walls, as if the sole person was able to bring light in a moment of desperation. The dress was sewn as if by magic, showing the depths and the vastness of the sky and every person inside that dreary place seemed to rotate around this person, acknowledging his presence and sharing in banter with him, to indulge themselves in pleasant conversation. Lifting himself up, Synthur regained balance and seized the person's shoulder. When the stranger had turned and gazed upon the king, Synthur's face became white with terror and surprise as he started talking".

Synthur:

"Mountain tops and plains I walked,
Searching for a friend whom I thought got lost,
In an endless pursuit I have travelled
Almost every corner of my reign,
Haunted by the images of a friend slain for naught,
By the evil hands of those who wish to dethrone me
And lay my name in ruin.
To and fro have I stepped the distance between my castle and your tower,
Yet no signal from the Wizard was to be found.
And now I have come from an endless distance,
Pursuing the Necromancer who seeks you,
To gain your power and usurp the land, the land in which we live!
Now I lost my compass and do not know where I am,
In this land of bright stars to close to shore,
And strangers whom I've never seen,
Which garments I do not recognize but cannot ignore.
Thus, Merlin you have to tell me,
Before I faint from this constant shiver,
Wherefore art thou hither?"

This section concludes the part of the narration given through verse. From this point onwards the text will be transformed into prose, after Merlin has bestowed over king Synthur the knowledge of the world in which they both find themselves.
However, before Merlin has cast his spell, the game will present another dialogue, which will not be understandable by Synthur since it will be given in the prose of the 1980s. Nevertheless, the player of the video game shall be able to understand what is happening during the cut-scene.

"Oh my God, Synthur? Are you ok? And what's this armour you're wearing, we're in the 1980s, not in some medieval place! Ah, I see that you do not understand what I'm saying, for my words are too different from the ones of your age. Here, let me cast

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upon you the spell of knowledge, to let you understand how this world is shaped. Worry not my friend, once the spell has worked you shall better understand me. What's this your wearing? Oh no, this armour shield and sword won't do! Don't you see how everyone is looking at you? Here, I shall put you a spell of illusion on yourself, but you'll have to get rid of your weapons. Now let's wait and see, well, you do look cool in this new garments you're wearing!".

Finally, as the main narrative of the game and the video game come to their conclusion, the player will be presented with one last piece of lore, which is the last scrap of paper found in the game with, written on it, the final words of the prophecy. During this last section, the player will take control of another character, who will have to defeat the now evil Synthur in order to bring peace in the realm. As the player reaches the portal and, hopefully, collects the scrap of paper, the player will come to realize that the writer of the prophecy was Merlin himself and that he, being already aware of everything that happened in the story, is the true puppeteer, working at the hands of destiny.

The following excerpt is taken in its entirety from the last words of the divination and may conclude the game by rolling the credits once the player has traversed the portal:

"Oh, what a sentence!
To be exiled,
Into the dread of night.
Bereft of the flickering lights,
That for so long accompanied the trover's life.
Oh, how will she manage to surmount
The horrors and the pains awaiting her beyond,
In that dark and dreary vale?
Although she feels all might be for naught,
She marches onward.
Alas, forger of tales,
Cast your benevolent eye in her direction!
Sing of songs yet unsung,
Tell of tales yet untold,
So that she may progress on her way!

For in her hands,
Rests our fate."

3.5 The video game soundtrack

Together with the creation and construction of the different elements found in a videogame, we have decided to opt for an original musical score, in order to avoid any issue connected with copyright infringement.

Furthermore, the choice of creating an original soundtrack allows us to construct, through music, particular moods and emotions connected to focal or specific points in the narrative (e.g. during cut-scenes) and during interactive gameplay (a song for battling enemies *vs* a song used to reflect the sad atmosphere at the end of the game), thus enabling the direction of feeling and expectations in the player.

> "Similarly, while it is generally true that early game development could be a solitary practice, it is not correct to suggest that all games created in the 1980s were the result of endeavour by individuals alone. The most likely reason for teams emerging would be that an individual, while gifted in the areas of game design and coding, possessed no artistic abilities either in graphic design or musical composition. Consequently, a team might comprise the designer/coder aided by an artist producing the in-game graphics, and a musician. Very often the musician would be a freelancer and very often a coder themselves. The videogame musician's coding skills were extremely important. With the advent of consoles such as the PlayStation, musicians have been able to contribute to games by providing music in standard audio formats and we have seen the surge in licensed music and the emergence of games as commercially valuable sites for artist exposure. With all the equipment and processing of the modern recording studio at their disposal, modern game musicians can present mastered music ready for pressing to CD." (Newman 2013: 33).

Further analysis and study of the musical creation process may lead to a reconsideration from our part, which may need the assistance of an expert music

coder or of a music editor in order to mix the soundtrack's 'final cut' before encoding it in the videogame.

However, should our possibilities hinder the auxiliary help of a third party in order to better develop the music writing process, we will nevertheless present an original musical score with the videogame.

The music which is going to be created for the videogame is also going to represent the two different eras in which the video game is set, thus, the *genres* are going to be varied.

Firstly, the entire body of music is not going to present neither a vocal part nor, consequently, any song lyric; since every piece is going to be entirely instrumental.

Secondly, the music genres selected for the videogame will integrate a macro group from which we have taken inspiration in order to create an appropriate soundtrack, together with the micro groups found within each music genre.

The first portion of the game is going to include instrumental folk and ambient music, together with more heavier sounds deriving from the *black metal* genre which can be found as a sub-group within the *metal* genre and culture. A major part of the different tracks is going to be played with acoustic instruments, together with a set of drum-kits which, unfortunately, have to be created and registered with the aid of a drum-machine.

Moreover, the video game soundtrack associated with the first part of the game will be differentiated even further. During moments of exploration and narrative development the music will convey a tranquil and rather calm mood which will be expressed in a *tempo* with ninety beats per minute. On the contrary, during fighting scenarios the music will grow faster and heavier in sound, with the appearance of triplets and *cavalcade* like rhythms. The *tempo* for the 'battle music' may be set around 120 to 130 beats per minute.

The musical score for the first part of the game is largely inspired by the works of bands within the *folk metal* music scene like the early *Ensiferum* (1995) albums and songs, namely *Windrider*, *Token of Time* and *Battlesong,* all found in the self-titled album *Ensiferum* (2001). Other bands which have influenced our creative process are *ensembles* or bands which have decided to compose music based on the works of Tolkien such as the Danish group known as: *The Tolkien Ensemble* (1995) and heavier sounds still connected with the *black metal* scene like the Austrian band *Summoning* (1993).

The second portion of the game is, alternatively, going to present a very different soundtrack connected to a complete different musical genre.

On account of the game being set, for the majority of the gameplay, in an alternative world during the 1980s, the music will have to represent the different *genres* and variations of music present during that period. In order to do so and in connection with the aesthetics of the videogame which would like to represent a 'retro' and 'vaporwave' interpretation of the 1980s period, the use of electric instruments and synthesizers is paramount for the creation of an adequate musical environment.

Therefore, the musical score we are going to compose will heavily rely on the use of electric guitars, bass guitars and synthesizers, together with the use of a drum-machine.

Nevertheless, the music intended for the second part of the videogame is going to be faster, with a minimum of a hundred beats per minute, together with an up-beat tempo and feeling.

Likewise, in connection to our previous research which was intended to produce as a result a genre of music that would fit and merge appropriately with the atmosphere of the medieval part of the videogame, an exploration and examination of different possible sources from which to seek inspiration and gather ideas has been made, resulting in bands like *Dance with the Dead* heavily affecting our taste and attitude towards what we may find fit for the 'modern' part of the videogame.

Finally, without mentioning too many bands nor too many video games, two more mentions should be made. The first is music composer Mick Gordon, author of the latest *Doom* soundtrack and of the *Prey* soundtrack, who blends synthesizers with heavier electric guitar sounds. The second is the band named *Fixions*, which composed the soundtrack for the aforementioned game *Mother Russia Bleeds.*

The research, which is still ongoing, of different genres of music which may be mixed and played with, therefore enhancing the video game immersion, also helped build and refine the idea of recursive music. Namely, a composition that can be repeated without interruption or without the player noticing the record's end and beginning, thus disrupting the environmental immersion, such as might happen during an hectic fighting section.

"Importantly, it is not left to visuals alone to convey the heightened level of intimidatory excitement that is to be manufactured. The videogame

musician has a number of tricks. In *Donkey Kong Country*, there is a separate musical motif that accompanies each Boss. In addition to the arrival of this new and specific motif, there is an immediately noticeable change in tempo as the music speeds up to signal the increased significance of the encounter. Tempo, however, is perhaps the crudest of the musical tools available to the composer. Meter and key can also be manipulated. To add further to the perceived sense of freneticism and urgency, every few bars, the piece drops out of standard time and rushes into 7/8, thereby missing a beat. As this beat is missed the key of the piece rises a semitone. The effect is undeniably dramatic and creates a tension and urgency in the player. The shift into 7/8 pushes the action along giving the impression of time running out. Similarly, to the Western ear at least, such a time signature is relatively uncommon and breaks both the rhythm and melody in an unfamiliar and unnerving fashion" (Newman 2013: 78-79).

Furthermore, many Boss encounters present a unique musical composition, which is not repeatable in any other section of the game, because of its association with an event that is unique in terms of combat moves and special skills (e.g. a metal dragon 'breathing' laser beams).

The exploitation of the shift in tempo to 7/8 will be used in the videogame, to alert the player of the change of pace from a peaceful situation (e.g. exploring the surroundings at the beginning of a level) to a brawling situation. The soundtrack may even be used to alert the player of the presence of enemies before their eventual appearance.

Additional instances of music utilization within videogames can be found in the research study published by Scirea *et al.* in which: "Transformational algorithms act upon an already prepared structure, for example by having the music recorded in layers that can be added or subtracted at a specific time to change the feel of the music"(2014: 2). This structure however, is not going to be used in the development of the videogame.

Nevertheless, another important aspect of the musical component of a videogame is the musical foreshadowing (Scirea *et al.* 2014). To a certain extent, it is possible to affirm that, within the context of our video game project, musical foreshadowing will always be true as opposed to false.

Considering the rather simple and linear narrative which the video game presents, false musical foreshadowing or, the association of soundtracks which convey an opposite mood compared with what is happening at a narrative level (e.g. a gloomy and sad soundtrack connected to a happy ending), may not serve a real purpose and may, once again, disrupt the immersion of the player or generate confusion during gameplay time.

Nevertheless, musical foreshadowing is going to be used, albeit only in its 'true' sense; that is, the musical score will always represent what is happening or what is going to happen in terms of emotional drive (e.g. fast tempo during a fighting scene; relaxed ambient music during exploration sequences and pleasant and cheerful music during respite moments).

3.6 Character development

"In an influential investigation, Propp indicated that the psychological motivations of characters were insignificant beside their function in driving the narrative. As such, they are important only insofar as they exact some effect and transformation upon the narrative whether through action or the consequences of this action"(Newman 2013: 126).

In order to create a believable setting introducing characters with which the player could associate with, without forcing her to question the action taken within the game, the depiction of the characters is rather fleshed-out and simple. Following the statement made by Kojima during the creation of the enormously successful game *Metal Gear Solid* and taking inspiration from his words: "We tried not to give him [Snake] too much character because we want players to be able to take on his role. Snake isn't like a movie star. He's not someone you watch, he's someone you can step into the shoes of. Playing Snake gives gamers the chance to be a hero" (Kojima quoted in Newman 2013: 129).
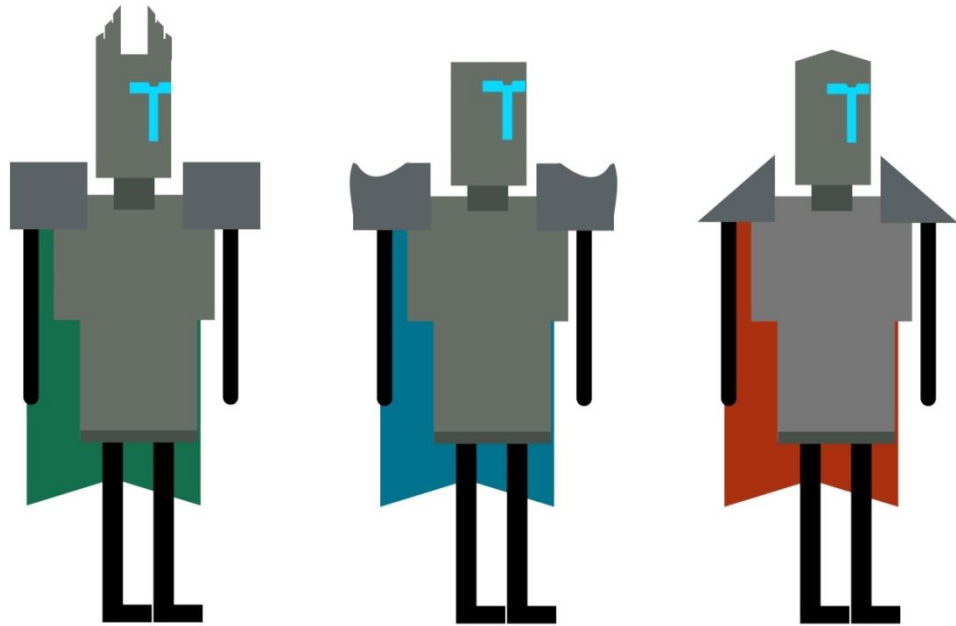
early development

*King Synthur medieval appearance storyboard*

Insofar as the characterization of the protagonist is concerned, the character of Synthur appears to be bland and rather flat, not because he needs to represent an unpleasant character but because that would favour the connection between the player and the fictional character inside the video game:

> "The importance of being able to identify with a game's characters is something of a recurrent theme in video game design manuals; there is a belief that the stronger the personality of the character, the easier it is for the player to feel alienated from it. The implication–that designers should create characters with only vague attributes, is the opposite of a typical modern literary perspective, where characters are praised for their vivid uniqueness"(Nielsen *et al.* 2008: 180).

Furthermore, looking closer at the depiction of the other two main characters as well (Merlin and the Necromancer), it may be argued that even their appearance seems

to be rather flat and dull. However, this only allows for a smoother progression of the narrative. Without the player embodying king Synthur, the narration would not be able to progress and come to an end. Therefore, we have decided to represent the character as might be defined by the elements of a fable. Synthur represents the hero of the story, although he shall be revealed to be a false hero at the end of the videogame; the Necromancer embodies the evil character whose only aspiration is to gain more and more power and Merlin represents the helper (Propp 2009).

Finally, the characters of Synthur and Merlin will present, thanks to the *denouement* of the story, more personalized characteristics which have been mentioned before, allowing the player to build a personal narration of the characters and then compare it with what is presented to her at the end of the video game (Newman 2013).
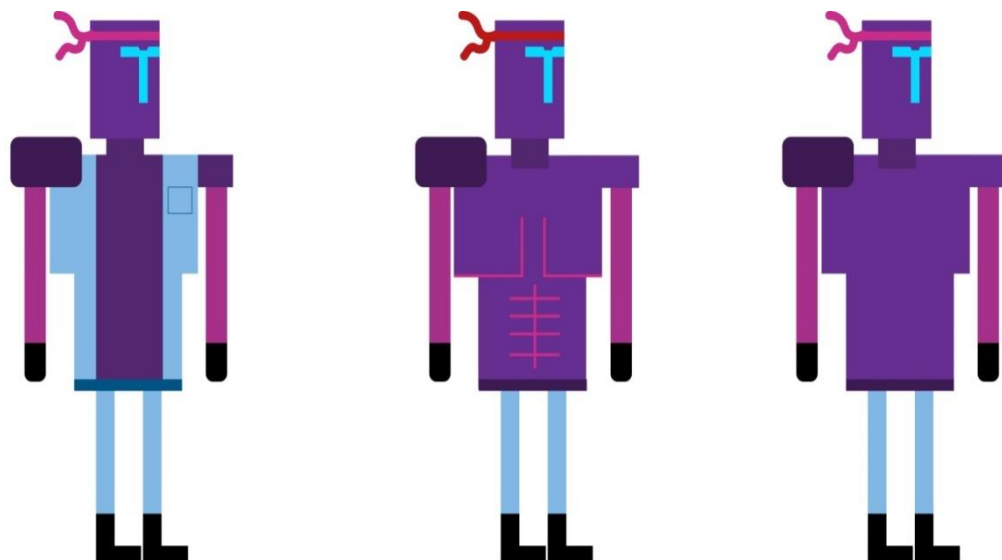
early development

King Synthur 1980s armour sketches

Conclusions

In light of the research purported in my study, it appears that the spreading of the Internet has redefined the concept of evolution in language as well as revolutionising the modes of human interaction.

Although this new form of language has been wrongly accused of being harmful to the standards in the language and to the young individuals who are learning a language (Crystal 2006; 2008), it appears, as has been shown in chapter I, that this general panic is without foundation and that instead, this jargon, created spontaneously by young people, is part of learning and playing with language (Crystal 2006; 2008).

In connection with language, the birth and spreading of video games has changed the ways in which narrative is given to their users, both in format and in content.

Although there have been numerous academic studies on the subject of video games and of how the narrative is given to the players (Aarseth 1997; Juul 2000, 2001; Newman 2013; Nielsen *et al.* 2008), a new field of study has not been formalised and the debate between ludologists and literary narrative theorists is still ongoing.

Nevertheless, a great number of aspects in their research have been mentioned and analysed in chapter II, together with specific elements found in video games (quests, music, narrative).

In addition, the topic of narrative participation of the players, in the forms of mods, cheating and fanfiction has been broached, together with the analysis of morality in video games (Newman 2013; Zagal 2009; Tavinor 2009; Veugen 2011). As has been shown, the moral of video games can be discussed and analysed; however, the presence of moral or of moral ambiguity does not necessarily entail that video games are bad and that they actively change the perspective of the real world in their users (Zagal 2009; Tavinor 2009).

Finally, in connection with chapter III, my study has tentatively shown how narrative in video games are constructed and translated from their textual form to the audio visual form (although even this form presents text in the form of code [Kücklich 2013]) and how other elements can be introduced and reworked to provide an immersive experience (music, dialogues, background).

In conclusion, it appears that both the aspects of language and narrative of video game can be analysed in different ways, and although both ways have given results, it seems that a reworking of the field of study is needed if the discussion is to move forward. Furthermore, the suggestion that video games are harmful and dangerous, although further studies are required in order to provide a final answer, does not seem to be too reasonable. I hope that further research will provide the means to show if video games are harmful or not (although I do not believe them to be so) and that video games will be recognised as a new form of art (Tavinor 2009) as well as a different form of narrative.

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