EXTRA LIVES, EXTRA LIMBS: VIDEOGAMING, CYBERNETICS, AND RHETORIC AFTER "LITERACY"

by

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(Under the Direction of Michelle Ballif)

ABSTRACT

This project situates videogaming as an activity that, in its cultural and technological distinctness, challenges the discipline of Rhetoric & Composition studies. This project responds to that challenge by playfully reconceptualizing rhetoric itself, by exploring its history and "extending" many of its core concepts in conversation with the tradition of media theory. To begin, it proposes a two-fold move designed to bring these conversations into contact. The first is a rereading of the emergence of the Sophists, both historically and historiographically, with the aim of offering a "technologization of rhetoric," that is, a sense of how shifts in history and (its historiographical perception) can be read as effected by differences in technological media. The second move, a "rhetoric of technologization," reads trends in the modern discourse of game studies, their attempts to cope with the emergence of videogaming, through the lens of twentieth-century rhetorical theories.

These two moves prepare the project to build an "extended" rhetoric according to the principles not of literacy, but of electracy, a concept which names an emergent electronic apparatus after literacy. The chapters that follow each take on of Aristotle's *pisteis*, or proofs, as a jumping-off point for exploring how certain rhetorical concerns stand to be reworked and reconceptualized due to the emergence of videogaming as a medium. One chapter explores, by

considering the confluence of both image and computer code in gaming, how the concept of *êthos* (character), once influenced by gaming, leads to questions about how to approach rhetorical criticism and teaching. The next chapter considers mechanically-accelerated approaches to thinking about aesthetic experience as a way of stretching *pathos*, the proof based on emotion. The final chapter concludes by linking the long history of the term *logos* with the equally fraught history of "space" as a term of debate in media theory. Each of the three chapters offer case studies of particular games for how the medium as a whole sheds light on important rhetorical issues, and vice versa.

INDEX WORDS: Rhetoric, Video games, Cybernetics, New Media, Electracy, Sophists, Grammatology, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Rhetorical proofs, Composition, Procedurality, Image theory

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B.A., The University of Florida, 2001

M.A., The University of Florida, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

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August 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a handful of my colleagues from various institutions – Matthew Barton, Sarah Robbins, Sara Steger, and Douglas Eyman – for their feedback and support during various stages of this project. I would especially like to acknowledge Wendi Jewell, thanks to whose collaboration a substantial part of this project's third chapter emerged into view. And I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. Michelle Ballif, whose patience and good humor, through a writing process that never quite found a balance between long layoffs and bursts of activity, gave me the much-needed confidence to pursue an eccentric topic, and to do so in a way that would hopefully produce good conversation.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the First-Year Composition office at UGA, Drs. Christy Desmet and Deborah Church Miller, for allowing me to pursue the topic of this dissertation in my own teaching, a process that deepened both my grasp of the subject matter and my desire to pursue it academically.

Finally, I'd like to thank my family and friends, especially my wife Sara, for their support and good humor throughout the long arc of my college career. Thanks for keeping me focused and keeping me playful.

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Introduction

This project intends to contribute to Rhetoric & Composition studies a playful attempt to reconcile the apparatus of literate rhetoric passed down from antiquity with an important emergent technology of our time: videogaming. Rather than providing a rhetoric for videogaming, in the sense of a toolkit to appropriate gaming into education, this project seeks to enunciate and develop a videogame-rhetoric. Working from foundations in rhetorical history, media theory, and critical theory, this project hopes to investigate gaming first and foremost, in its interesting and unique contours, in an effort to recognize what rhetoric, understood as both an object of study and as a facet of lived experience, may come to look like under the influence of this emergent cultural and technological phenomenon.

The primary stake for this discussion rests in how the Rhetoric & Composition community (or "communities,"often) can make the most of videogaming. Games, I've found, are often reduced in the scholarly imagination (broadly conceived across any particular disciplinary line) to one of three things, which I'll discuss individually. One eminent reason that games do not enjoy greater prominence is because they can be so easily reduced to another, much more often discussed, area: that of computers. I have already conceded that videogaming is, a priori, an activity mounted on the medium of the computer, for which a long-standing conversation already exists, discussing how computers create new opportunities for meaning (consider Lev Manovich's discussions on the "art of the database"), mediate identities (going

back to Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen*), and so forth. The fact that I am making the same claim about videogames in particular will surely strike some as frivolous; since video games are mounted using the same technologies as personal computing, why is the distinction necessary? (Indeed, many critics, like Ken McAllister, avoid the term "video game" altogether in favor of the more technically precise "computer game.") At best, the reasoning could go, I have introduced some kind of generic distinction by proposing to focus on a specific class of computing technologies – those designed for play. While I have been careful to keep the backing of computers close at hand, my argument is nonetheless that the age of console gaming comprises a distinct set of moves, technologies, and texts that do far more than create a generic distinction. While none could argue the relevance of computing to global affairs, the technological specialization inherent in the modern console gaming market can often go overlooked, but would do so at the expense of consigning the technological and cultural specificity of gaming to the wastebin. To argue that the discussion of videogaming as an end unto itself is frivolous is roughly akin to arguing that popular films need be subordinate to cinematic history in toto, or that Scottish literature, say, can only be interpreted in the context of British literature. Such totalizing gestures obliterate not only ideological differences, but entire genres and rhetorical traditions. In our present moment, games represent not only emergent technologies but a rapidly growing rhetorical tradition unto itself, one that deserves specialized care.

A second major road block to gaming's position in Rhetoric & Composition studies is the tendency of specialists in these fields, particularly composition, to view games primarily as textual objects. By this I mean that, when games are approached in the conversation, they are often broken down and read – the sensationalist violence and sexual content of games like *Grand*

Theft Auto III prompt particularly vigorous disagreement. Indeed, scholars are not immune from the force of a popular imaginary that paints games as something other than or less than a meaningful activity. In 2002, U.S. District Judge Stephen Limbaugh, reacting to notably violent games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, *Doom*, and *Mortal Kombat*, ruled that in video games "[there is] no conveyance of ideas, expression, or anything else that could possibly amount to speech" and that, as such, video games do not qualify for protection under the Constitution's First Amendment (Au). The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed in 2003, overturning Limbaugh's decision and effectively granting games the same constitutional protections enjoyed by any text, but scholars, already accustomed to the activity of textual criticism and bereft of any counterprevailing framework, may tend to halt the conversation at this text/not-text binary. At best, violent games, such as those listed above, may be pursued and critiqued as purveyors of dangerously fascist ideologies based on their content; the first-person visual dimension of many games becomes, unproblematically for most critics, an avenue for full-on identification with that content. To read a game's content – its text – is certainly valid, and I certainly don't want to discount the pernicious ideologies that can and do flood much of modern gaming. But more often than not, the straightforward reading of video games as ideological vehicles (as speech, as messages, as texts) reduces them to texts while ignoring the presence of play, a distinction emphasized by Gonzalo Frasca's conceptual division between narration and simulation. While many games do tell stories, and rely on certain presentational principles to create their virtual worlds (setting, characters, persepective, what film studies terms *mise en scene*), the process of production is ultimately of coequal importance. Games are not simply to be read; they are interfaces that require action. These two processes are complimentary, sure, but the critical bias implicit in Rhetoric & Composition (and indeed, implicit in English departments and in the

humanities in general) often misplaces or ignores the aspect of gaming as discursive production (much less of games as a form a play – a more radical distinction to which I'll return later) in favor of retaining the more comfortable and simplistic logic of either ignoring games entirely or yoking them to textual frameworks.

The widespread critical bias that drives the field of gaming towards "literacy" has the further side-effect of misplacing and marginalizing attempts to think of videogaming in terms of its constitution as a distinct *medium*. Cynthia Selfe, who along with Gail Hawisher co-edited and assembled the recent *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*, has done a great deal more than any other high-profile member of the R&C community to bring gaming into the conversation, particularly through her oft-cited construct of "multimodal literacy." Derived in part from the work of Gunther Kress (*Literacy in the New Media Age*), "multimodality" hearkens a form of literacy that surrounds and entangles more modes of communication than simply the printed word. In her view, the New Media age (broadly construed) expands "literacy": the very idea of what it means to read and write text. Multimodal literacy catches sound, pictures (static and moving), typography, and all the other aspects of the "multimedia" age in a single construct designed at getting at how New Media texts in particular offer careful interweavings of these various "textures" within a single text. My complaint with the term is not that it insufficiently describes the full range of New Media textuality (indeed, the term is broad enough to catch nearly anything that emerges from the computer), but that the very term "literacy" saddles the concept an insuperable weight: the weight of not only Derridean "logocentrism," but of the term's rootedness in the incommensurable medium of alphabetic writing. To think in terms other than literacy is a challenge I'll address later, and which this project's analysis of the videogame medium hopes to justify.

Third, if play is acknowledged, it is as a a "knack," a trivializing element without meaningful weight by itself. If the ludic does have a place in the conversation at all, it is as a brief distractions from the business of work; in contrasting versions of postmodern theory, James Berlin makes roughly the same claim in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*. The "play" of the deconstructonist theory has a certain place at the academic table, but at a certain point, we're told, we'll have to do the responsible thing as rhetors, and roll up our sleeves to meet the real problems of the day head-on. Ludic postmodernism, this negative argument has it, offers an intellectual exercise that, while stimulating, nonetheless fails to rise to the material demands of our surroundings. The same was once said of rhetoric itself, by no less than Plato in his famous dialogue *Gorgias*. Plato levels a similar charge at the medium of writing in the *Phaedrus*, seeing it as a corruptor of the mind, beneficial only for records-keeping and official tasks, but not as a medium for meaningful discourse.

Without being tedious, it may suffice to say that Plato has been proven decisively wrong on both counts, the knowledge of which fact should impel us as rhetoricians to attend more closely to sites of play that may not normally receive our attention. Speaking, then, from this position of discontentment with the current conversation, this project faces the problem of constructing a more valid means for dealing with the rhetorical situation of video gaming. First, a definition of rhetoric is needed if we are to avoid the trap of reducing the entire discipline down to a particular kind of work at the expense of acknowledging the value of play. (Is "rhetoric" to be defined as the art of persuasion? As the art of public discourse? Or as something more fundamental?) One conversation where that definition has been hotly contested is that of rhetorical history; by consulting that conversation, I hope to attend to a larger array of possibilities. The patterns of rhetorical history reveal a further opportunity: a chance to consider

how rhetoric evolves as a tradition alongside distinct lingusitic media. By integrating the two conversations into a shared framework, this project establishes exigency for considering videogaming as a distinct medium that, by necessity, changes the nature of rhetorical enterprise itself – in ways more subtle and potentially complicate than catch-all terms like "multimodal literacy" may admit. Rather than defining the term as the art of argument or the art of public discourse, I'd instead offer to define rhetoric as the study of the relationship between text and texture – between the possibilities of meaning and the possibilities of how meanings can be uttered. What remains from there is to offer perspectives on how videogames serve to bend and retwist our conceptions of how rhetoric is created, perceived, and negotiated.

Sophistic Rhetoric

To that end, I will adopt throughout this project a stance towards rhetoric, both as an object of study and as a style of performance, best understood as Sophistic. In the hands of Victor J. Vitanza, Sophistic rhetoric moves form the work of persuasion to the play of language. His appropriations of Lyotard's "just-linking" and Kenneth Burke's "casuistic stretching" provide a pair of indispensible techniques. Lyotard's "just-linking" is more than just a theoretical forerunner of hypertext; it suggests an *êthos* for scholarship based more on affinity and exploration than the need for a logical "completeness" to which no discourse can ultimately lay claim. Such freedom firms up the core of this project's method, which seeks to place into conversation a diversity of conversations, ranging from rhetorical history to new media to popular videogaming in an effort to suggest provocative "linkages" between them. Burke's notion of "casuistic stretching" developed in his *Attitudes Towards History* – whereby "one

introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles" – is a second important factor in this project's approach. As much as possible, I hope to avoid the trap of playing the antifoundational game only to assert a newer, better, shinier foundation – what one might call the "add games and stir" approach. What will be hazarded here instead is a "casuistic stretching" of classic rhetorical concepts, a process that I will also refer to using Marshall McLuhan's trope of "extension," which I will detail momentarily. By maintaining a stance of Sophistry, this project remains committed to, in the words of Sophistic scholar John Poulakos, searching for "possibility," from the Greek term *kairos*, rather than dealing with concepts as though they were fixed and static. Rhetorical scholar Eric Charles White phrases it this way: "*Kairos* discovers in every new occasion a unique opportunity to confer meaning on the world. It is, in that sense, an appropriate term with which to [consider] the will-to-invent" (14). Marginal, nomadic, and unbound by tradition, the Sophistic "will-to-invent" is both a long-neglected possibility that merits attention and a philosophy that I wholeheartedly pursue in the pages that follow. (Hence, I hope it is clear, Sophistic rhetoric offers *both* an object of study to which I will return *and* a critical practice that I will continually attempt to perform. Throughout this project, unless I refer particularly to one aspect or another, I will tend to use the word "rhetoric" holistically, to refer to both.)

The Sophistic tradition long buried in rhetorical history takes concepts such as truth and meaning and renders them more contingent on possibility and circumstance than on the transcendence of philosophical truth (Poulakos). Sophistic rhetoric also reintroduces embodiment into the equation in a way that is especially important for this project; drawing on Vitanza's reading of Favorinus in particular, I read Sophistic rhetoric less as a *technê* for persuasion than as a system of performance. Rhetoric is not a means to an end; instead, rhetoric

in the Sophistic sense names a much wider conceptualization of how messages are transmitted, through word and through the body. Considering, among other sources, Gorgias's comparison of rhetoric to a drug, D. Diane Davis argues that Sophistic rhetoric ultimately collapses the notion of a pure, integral being: "We have to be *under the influence* (of language, of technology, of History/Tradition) to Be at all" (74). To that end, not only will readers see me lift the phrase "under the influence" and appropriate it into my own discourse, but they may also find this project's writing style "under the influence" of the techniques used by Vitanza's *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*: using word play and digressions to demonstrate my own willingness to "invent" new meanings on the fly. Through those methods I would adopt the performative style of the Sophistic rhetor Gorgias, of whom Poulakos writes: "He is content to have diverted himself by playing with language, playing, that is, with a malleable medium of dynastic powers and deceptive qualities. Put another way, he is content to have participated in the game of words [and] to have tried to bring them into the game" (*Sophistical* 67). I intend, of course, to engage in this "playful" *êthos* as productively and as responsibly as possible, though in the process some unproductive confusions may arise. I'll devote the remainder of my Introduction to identifying those possible confusions and addressing them.

On "Postmodernism" and "Poststructuralism"

One possible source of unproductive confusion that may arise in this project is my sometimes-conflation of the terms "postmodern" and "poststructural." I fully acknowledge that both terms have their own distinct and loaded histories, and while the latter is often caught in the

economy of the former, I will not ever intend to elide their important differences. For many of my purposes throughout this project, though, I will tend to assert both as broad domains of thought pertaining to the same general goals: namely, the multivalent destabilization of linguistic meaning, subjectivity, and discursive structures. "Postmodernism," in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* refers primarily to, as he puts it, "an incredulity towards metanarratives," such as "progress" or "Enlightenment" (all buoyed up, Lyotard argues, by a fundamental surety of metaphysical thinking) that have served in past ages to "legitimize" knowledge production, particularly in the University (xxiv). In the "legitimization crisis" that follows, Lyotard shifts his attention away from "foundational" thinking towards an attentiveness to the plurality of what Wittgenstein called "language games," the ways in which discourses act by their own rule-sets, none of which can lay claim to being fully or finally true (10). Lyotard's take on knowledge production forms one stake of my argument; in my own case, I will be especially keen to study particular "language games" where the once-integral "metanarratives" have been "dispersed" (xxv).

The field of "poststructuralism," we could say, plays out Lyotard's generalized "incredulity" at the particular level of linguistic meaning, by addressing the implicit binaries that structure certain critical "language games." A poststructuralist take might, for example, take the philosophical/rhetorical binary as an example of a particular language game used throughout history to legitimize the former practice at the expense of the latter. A poststructuralist take, though, would "deconstruct" the binary itself, demonstrating "incredulity" towards its capacity to generate "truthful" meaning by investigating the conditions that produced such a binary. (Such a take on language production echoes this project's desire to play with Sophistic rhetoric, the repressed half of a long dominant binary.) Growing out of poststructuralism, through the work

of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault in particular, is a set of discourses that offer the same insighful analyses at the level of not just language, but of subjectivity and sociocultural formations as well. Again, Vitanza provides a crucial trope to which I will return to regularly: regarding the historical and critical dismissal of the Sophists from the "history of rhetoric," he critiques the "one-two" logic of logocentric thinking. Rather than think in terms of *dissoi logoi*, the notion of there being two sides to every story or two options for every circumstance, Vitanza instead proposes a critical attitude that reaches beyond binaries altogether. In a process he punningly terms "(ac)counting," he proposes: "what is wanted is a movement... from '1' to '2' (polis) to 'some more' (third) subject positions," that is, to an uncountable, excessive, Other possibility uncharted by the rigid "one-two" habits of binary thinking (36). Vitanza's achievement, a game of his that I join in playing, is to reach for the "some more" in an effort to actively perform the instability in language that poststructuralism asserts.

In that regard, I will tend to refer to "poststructuralism" as referring to the particularly linguistic and discursive dimensions of how Lyotard frames the general notion of philosophical "postmodernism." In all, I am far less likely to refer to "postmodernism" as a particular historical era or as part of any particular periodizing model, as it functions for, among others, Fredric Jameson, who defines "postmodernism" as the era of "late capitalism" following World War II. As a Marxist, Jameson defines cultural products of the postmodern era (drawing on examples from visual arts, architecture, and literature) as elements of the larger "superstructure" deriving from the "base" created by "late" or "multinational" capitalism. My own project will largely disengage with Jameson's periodizing sense of postmodernism, preferring instead to attend to the "language games" that grow out of particular emerging technologies. That material aspect of my project does ring true with Jameson's own materalist approach (and indeed this will

not be the last time I cite Jameson), but I will tend to use "postmodernism" more in Lyotard's sense, as a term more closely aligned with "poststructuralism," even if – somewhat Sophistically – I will play from time to time in the slippages with the term. Ultimately, what both terms lead me to, and the reason I will use them interchangeably from time to time, is that both point towards a scene of what Vitanza punningly calls "de-term-ination," a word that draws attention to the Sophistic project of denying "metanarratives" of one truth at the expense of other possibilities, while at the same time drawing attention to the fact that such "metanarratives" work not through some mystification, but through particular linguistic "terms." I will refer often to "de-term-ination" throughout my project, with particular attention to terms derived from Aristotelian rhetoric, and I would ask the reader to think of it as being in conversation with both "post-" terms elaborated on here.

The Pisteis: Êthos, Logos, and Pathos

Burke's notion of "casuistic stretching" – whereby "one introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles" – is another important factor in this project's methodological approach. The "stretching" trope, one that I place in conversation with the sense of "de-term-ination" mentioned above, is one that will form a central axis of the work of this project: a play on (and play with) three well-known terms from the tradition of Aristotelian rhetoric. As part of a project demonstrating a playful "incredulity" towards the received narrative of rhetorical history in particular, I will subject to conceptual "stretching" the *pisteis*, or proofs, which represent perhaps the most well-known of Aristotle's contributions to the study of rhetoric. In the *Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle codifies three means of persuasion, developed

through the process of rhetorical invention, that can be used to provide means of persuasion for the rhetors audience. These are *logos*, proofs based on good reasons and logical argument; *êthos*, proofs based on the good character and trustworthiness of the speaker; and *pathos*, or proofs based on appeals to emotion and feeling. The range of these terms throughout the rhetorical tradition is well-known to most scholars of Rhetoric & Composition; they have formed the backbone of a well-balanced rhetorical approach for centuries, acting as a heuristic for writers to approach their audience in a manner that goes beyond mere factual reporting. The capacity to understand and exercise control over these proofs represents, to Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, the quintessential art that makes rhetoric a true disciplinary art form: "All men develop some instincts for adapting means [that is, *pisteis*] to fit the subject, occasion and audience, but by experience and education some men so refine these instincts that their success ... can be attributed to an art rather than to a mere knack" (39). While avoiding Corbett's determinism (particularly his loaded distinction between "art" and "knack"), I am interested in playing his game: using the *pisteis* as a means of having a conversation on my other terms.

Within the body of my own discussion, these terms will serve a somewhat different function. Their widespread availability in the rhetorical conversation allow them to function less as static concepts than as flexible *topoi*, a term traditionally meaning "mental store[s] of ... strategies," but that can also mean commonplaces ("common places"), that is, as locations out of which to work (Covino & Jolliffe, 88). In each circumstance where I deploy them, I will be less concerned with their various meanings across the tradition (what semioticians might call a diachronic analysis) than with how the broad domains of concern represented by each (reason, character, emotion) can be dramatically put into "play" by exposure to the emergent medium of videogaming. (However, some terms, such as *logos*, have such multivalent meanings that some

historical unpacking will be required in order to suss out its dimensions fairly.) What I will mean to suggest is not that *êthos* as an inventive strategy will somehow change, or that videogames can be used to somehow teach *êthos* more effectively. Instead, *êthos* will serve as a commonplace: as representative of a long-standing conversation whose limits I will look to "stretch" and "extend" (to borrow metaphors from both Burke and Marshall McLuhan respectively to which I will frequently return).

There's a double-game in this move of mine that may strike some readers as unfair – my simultaneous insistence on the existence of a definitional border-to-be-stretched, and my resistance to define those borders at any great length. This begs the legitimate question: how do you "extend" a definition without first "defining" what's being extended? Ultimately, "stretching" and "extension" are less about taking the new and the *possible* and somehow rendering them within the categories of the old (what I referred to earlier as the "add games and stir" approach), but rather using the old as organizational strategies to cope with the emergence of the new, making them act as what Greg Ulmer (in *Teletheory*) calls "relays" or heuristics. Terms like *logos* in particular, with their own loaded histories, will be treated less as models to be consulted than as broad topics or domains that serve as a beginning place for another conversation, one that I will attempt to root in the technological specificities of videogaming.

Extension Metaphors and Electrate Grammatology

To investigate the rhetorical possibilities of video games, the project first assumes that any new medium represents the "extension" of the human subject coupled with an inescapable "amputation" – a loss of some supposedly "natural" capacity that came before. The impact of

this double-move, the large-scale changes wrought by new technology on human affairs, is what McLuhan indicates in his famous maxim: "the medium is the message" (*Understanding* 7). The foundational method for this project, then, will be to consider video games as a form of rhetorical "extension," McLuhan's dominant trope describing the effects of the emergence of a new technology – every new technology, including every new linguistic medium, quite literally "extends" the body: its abilities and the range of its perception. For McLuhan, the trick is not merely to identify how exactly the medium extends or augments the body, but to trace the contours of change that the extension introduces into the whole system; the "message" of any given "medium" is not about naming a "content" that emerges from a new medium, but rather sketching out how the extension unbalances what it had previously meant to be human, to make text, to be-in-the-world. To paraphrase Heidegger's essay on technology, media are not notable for the new tricks and toys they offer, but rather for how technology returns to the very source of Being, changing the very ground on which Being itself rests. For the purposes of this investigation, my hope is to focus less on the grand ontological scheme of things, and to focus instead on notions of rhetoricity: how the little "messages" that constitute human interaction – that is, rhetoric – stand to shapeshift under the thrall of the big Message of the Medium.

To develop a sense of rhetoric that helps to account for the shifting nature of the media used to transmit our words (and ourselves) to others, Katherine Hayles's notion of the "material metaphor" is an especially useful linch-pin. Her book *Writing Machines* proposes the expression "material metaphor" to name the location of "traffic" between language and the material technologies of media. That "traffic," how it variously structures, enables, and disables discourse, bears an all-too strong resemblance to McLuhan's notions of extension and amputation. Every medium, every "writing machine," offers unique possibilities for how

discourse can emerge; Eric Havelock's analysis of alphabetic writing's impact on the development of Platonic method essentially charts the "material metaphor" of writing – how it "extends" such capacities as concept development, though at the cost of amputating what Walter Ong might call orality's sense of "being in the world." In this sense, Hayles's contribution to media theory also dovetails nicely with Sophistry's emphasis on the situationality of discourse. Our present moment, marked by the emergence of imagistic media, can be well-served by a Sophistic stance on rhetoric, a stance that can now be fruitfully "extended" to pay attention to the importance of differing media. In all, the project will work out of a "cybernetic" approach to rhetoric, one that does not divorce the rhetorical act from its instantiation in a particular technology. Like the Greek root upon which the word is based, the basic methodology proposes to look at steersman and ship not merely as related entities, but as part and parcel of the same system. (A more detailed definition and discussion of cybernetics will follow in Chapter 1.)

For Greg Ulmer, the twentieth century is marked by the emergence of an entire new "extension" to our traditional account of the relationship between language and technology. This emergent appratus (a combination of technological medium, subject formation, and institutional formation) represents, to be more accurate, entire new sets of extensions and amputations that challenge our traditional accounts of how being and language behave. To rephrase Diane Davis, "electracy," the label Ulmer gives this emergent apparatus to distinguish it from the prior apparatuses of orality and literacy, represents Being under-the-influence-of imagistic media, particularly through the dispersed image-based discourses of the Internet. As a critical discipline, "electracy" continues the work of Derrida's "grammatology," detecting and working with the inherent collisions between material technologies and discursive and linguistic construction. As an offshoot of grammatology, it necessarily represents a combined attention to

both technological specificity and (for my purposes) rhetoric: "If grammatology could be said to make any choice at all between science and interpretation, it would appear to choose both," and in so doing, keep alive the "irresolvable contradiction... between empricism and theory" (Wilson 87-8). What "grammatology" as a term specifically keeps alive is the critical space to deal affirmatively with distinct emergent technologies by recognizing that those technologies are necessarily always-already in conversation with the more familiar (and falsely divided) disciplines of both rhetorical production and poetic interpretation.

While I will argue later for the videogame as a distinct (rather than merely composite) technology, I will invoke "electracy" as pointing the way towards having a conversation on grounds other than those well-trod by attempts to render distinct technologies in terms of "literacy." Crucially, as James Inman points out:

> It is important to distinguish electracy from other terms, such as computer-based literacy, Internet literacy, digital literacy, electronic literacies, metamedia literacy, and even cyber-punk literacy. None of these other terms have the breadth electracy does as a concept, and none of them *draw their ontology from electronic media exclusively*. (52, emphasis added)

Later chapters in this project will discuss the outlines of that "ontology" at greater length; what matters for the time being is my assertion of "electracy" as helping name the distinct ways in which image-based media, including videogames, need to be addressed: not merely as subsectors of the greater project of "literacy," but in terms of all its own. To continue relying uncritically on "literacy," I would assert, ultimately reduces the object of study into a pre-established framework, rather than looking towards differences in materiality, allowing those to inform insetad the development of the conversation. Confronted with the emergence of the new

apparatus, Ulmer proposes a mindset based on "invention." Rather than yoke the products of electracy to the interpretive frameworks of literacy, Ulmer proposes, quoting the haiku poet Basho, "not to follow the masters, but to seek what they sought," using the poetic and rhetorical strategies of literacy as a "relay," as illustrating a path towards other possibilities (*Internet* 1, 43). It is in that spirit that this project will use Aristotle's *pisteis*: not in an attempt to, for instance, look for "emotional" experience in gaming, but rather to attempt to sketch how the meaning of that experience is being fundamentally reshaped in advance of us, how it has been extended.

Chapter Breakdowns

The first two chapters of this project function as semi-independent focal points, each designed to invoke a set of conversations and concerns that will commingle more freely in the body chapters that follow, rather than being connected to one another by any particular causal sequence. Instead, I would tie the two together using a similar filament, folded over on itself to do two distinct yet related kinds of work. The first chapter, "The Cybernetics of Rhetorical History," offers neither a reading of rhetorical history nor of rhetorical historiography per se. Rather, it takes the conversation regarding revisionary historiography, the attempt of rhetoricians to re-include the Sophists into rhetorical history despite their dismissal throughout most of the "tradition," as an opportunity for discussing what I might call the "technologization of rhetoric," a discussion of how the historical conversation can be read as part and parcel of the conversation of media theory. In short, it will argue for a "technologized" reading of the historical shifts within rhetoric, using the discipline of cybernetics as an interface. The second chapter, "Game Theory as a Composing-History of Rhetoric," reverses the direction of that conversation. Rather

than the "technologization of rhetoric," this chapter pursues a "rhetoric of technologization," using established categories of twentieth-century rhetorical theory to (re)organize the current discourse of game studies. With that, the "double-move" of the first two chapters prime the way for the chapters that follow by insisting on a tight theoretical and methodological braid between media studies on one hand and rhetorical studies on the other.

The chapters that follow will take Aristotle's *pisteis* as jumping-off points for considering how rhetoric, in the broad sense of both an academic discipline and a more widespread set of practices, stands to shift (to be stretched and extended) through contact with the emergent technology of videogaming. The project's gaze will drift from time to time to the pedagogical scene of the classroom – the traditional venue through which rhetoric (in its narrow, normalized, literate sense) is disseminated – but with a broader definition of rhetoric comes also a concomitant desire to have in mind scenes other than instruction. Each chapter will, using one of Aristotle's terms as a relay, explore what I would "link" to as an emergent rhetorical dimension of videogaming.

Chapter three, "Procedurality, *Êthos*, and the Work-Play of the 'Imalgorithm'," begins with an investigation of the elements of videogame "grammatology." The term "imalgorithm" is a neologism of my own devising, braiding together the mutually dependent media of "image" and "algorithm," or computer code. In videogaming, I argue, each mode – which I argue form third and fourth modes of discourse after speech and writing – offers distinct contours that inflect our received (that is, "literate") understanding of how meaning can be produced and interpreted. In proposing a composite grammatology of both image and code/algorithm, what is particularly put into play is a tension that my project will return to throughout: the difference between "middle" terms and radical "Third" or "Other" terms. That tension will be introduced as part and

parcel of my first conceptual "stretching," dealing with the proof of *êthos* – the proof dealing specifically with character and moral standing, but which invokes more generally concerns over attitudes and trustworthiness. The choice of whether to pursue a critical discourse of "middle" options (that look for common ground and hybridity) or "Third" options (that seek radical possibilities outside simplistic "one-two" binaries) speaks to the construction of the kinds of ethoi that rhetorically minded game scholars should adopt regarding their objects of study (Vitanza 7, 36). The composite grammatology of the "imalgorithm," I argue, mobilizes that tension. In a sense, videogaming is about making a choice between "one-two" and "some more," a choice that inheres at the level of the *êthoi* game scholars should adopt. Particularly interesting for my discussion will be the tension between the terms "work" and "play" in Rhetoric & Composition studies; like any binary, their interplay can be disrupted as a way of glimpsing other possibilities. A case study based on the 2007 game *Portal* will mobilize these various layers of my discussion, exploring the "imalgorithmic" construction of gaming and the problematics of the work/play binary on the way to developing an "extended" sense of êthos appropriate to helping scholars grasp the possible "Third" meanings in their objects of study.

The fourth chapter continues the search for "Third" possibilities by turning attention to a critical site eschewed by the third chapter: the position of the game-player. Rather than use *êthos* as an opportunity to provide some critical reconstruction of the gamer's subjectivity (a well-worn critical move, as this chapter's earlier citation of Sherry Turkle suggests), this chapter works instead through the proof of *pathos* to discuss the topic of "subjectivity" from a less totalizing angle. In keeping with this project's general desire to keep "play" front and center, Chapter 4, entitled "Stings, Scalpels, and the Sublime: *Pathos* Accelerated," takes *pathos* as a relay for exploring the emotional experience of gaming. By first considering the varying critical

perspectives on emotion, and later through a foray into the fields of design and aesthetic theory, the chapter pursues how emotional experience is inflected and hyperaccelerated under the influence of videogame images. Specifically emerging into view is a tension between two distinct limbs of aesthetic – the "beautiful" and the "sublime" – that places at stake in aesthetic experience the constitution of the subject. Through discussion of the aesthetic theories of Immanuel Kant and Walter Benjamin, that tension can be reconfigured "under-the-influence" of gaming through an attention to emergent technological differences. Without proposing some radical redefinition of gamer subjectivity, this analysis can be a beginning point, pursued through a case study of the game *Bioshock*, for viewing how emotion's varied dimensions are inflected by contact with the technologizing force of videogaming.

The fifth chapter, "Space Invaders: the Imalgorithmic *Logos*," enters into conversation with the most loaded of Aristotle's *pisteis*: *logos*, a term that has come through the poststructural tradition to function as a stand-in for the totalizing power upon which all the grand "metanarratives" are founded. Less important for my conversation than reviewing prior critiques of logocentrism is to consider *logos* from the standpoint of the "technologization of rhetoric" initiated in the project's first chapter. Given the role that *logos* plays as a critical term in defining language itself, it should come as no surprise that the term is one of watershed importance in the attempt of many, including not only Victor J. Vitanza but also Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and a host of others, to cope with the emergence of both the Sophists and of Platonic method. Derrida's own take on *logos*, most notably through his concepts of trace and *différance*, provide the relay for considering how the emergent grammatology of videogaming "stretches" and "extends" the concept in its own ways. Whereas Derrida sees the technology of the written word as leading to a scene of the continual slippage and deferral of meaning, my own sense –

developed through an engagement with the "rhetoric" of game criticism – is that "space" becomes the possible locus where "Third" meanings can be produced and negotiated. A foray, then, into the discipline of spatial theory, combined with case studies on the videogames *World of Warcraft* and *Final Fantasy VII*, interrogates how games serve as sites of spatial production and interpretation: that is, as the possible "grounds" for an emergent spatial rhetoric.

In all, the five chapters presented here are not intended as a device for providing a solution to the "problem" of how the academy (broadly), departments of English (in particular), and Rhetoric & Composition studies (most particularly) can approach videogames as objects of scholarly study or as opportunities for pedagogical application. What it pursues instead is less a *technê* for game-studies than as a beginning point for a broader conversation about the functions of play, pleasure, and (yes) rhetoric in the academic enterprise. My often unstated assumption is that the rhetorical dimensions asserted in this project are not merely theoretical abstractions but are thoroughly imbricated in the lived day-to-day lives of the students we interact with daily. Rhetoric & Composition studies, in particular, is often on the forefront of these cultural shifts, "servicing" (a term I use somewhat "under erasure") a population of primarily college freshmen, and often tasked with the duty of enculturating these often-unruly subjects into the ways and means of University-level study and discourse. To paint videogaming with the brush of "literacy" (to call for an "image literacy" or a "gaming literacy") misses the point. What my investigation reaches for is the sense that an emergent third apparatus – "electracy" – is being developed and invented around our ears, and that our job as scholars is to meet this watershed change in its own terms, being willing to "play" productively with our own. In linking somewhat disparate conversations, and through playfully "stretching" the possible significances of a received trinity of important terms, my hope is to offer an unstable foray into an emergent

technology and set of cultural practices that has always-already begun to reshape our lives, our limbs, and ourselves.

Chapter One:
The Cybernetics of Rhetorical History

The machines that we use, also use us. Starting from a position that our encounters with technologies are not simple, one-dimensional affairs, this chapter seeks to explore areas of relation and convergence between the ways we think of technology (broadly stated) and the ways we think of meaning-making (equally broad). As part of a larger project concerned with the emergence of a specific technology (videogaming), I want to start by considering some ways in which we might better understand the relationships between writing technologies (or, really, language-making machines of all stripes) and the amorphous pseudo-entity called "rhetoric."[1] My purpose in doing so is to respond to one of the emergent pressures of our time: our extension, though technological media, of our ability to communicate with others, reformat our language, and refashion ourselves. Opting for a broad concept of "rhetoric," my goal in this chapter is to consult the tradition of cybernetic theory in an attempt to devise a conceptual model for linking rhetoric to media technologies, for exploring how our mental and material tools are intimately related, and to begin to suggest how we could better explore our present context. The insertion point, the moment that provides the opportunity for the linkage, is the conversation within the study of rhetoric pertaining to the historical exclusion (and reinclusion) of the Sophists and of Sophistic rhetoric. My goal in this chapter will be to re-read that conversation in a way that responds to the "emergent pressure" of cybernetic theory; this chapter will, in effect, have argued for a technologization of rhetorical studies.

With my intent being to focus later on the videogame as a particular emergent medium, the more general theory of "cybernetics" becomes a linchpin concept for my project. I'll acknowledge now, though, that in applying it to more specific objects of study, though, some difficult and tenuous connections will be hazarded, involving several more terms, many of which I'll import, whole-cloth, into the discussion for the sole sake of subjecting them to torturous "stretching" at a later date. At its core, I intend to use the terms "cybernetics" and "rhetoric" as fluidly as possible, and to resist any serious attempt to define them. And yet, as terms such as "orality"and "*logos*" creep their way into the discussion, my project will certainly be caught between a pair of uncomfortable imperatives: one, to define my terminology as precisely as possible; and two, to demonstrate resistance to the de-term-inism such terms provide. Indeed, the latter half of this project will be primarily concerned with subjecting three important rhetorical terms – *pathos, logos*, and *êthos* – to a process of stretching and re-definition. When these terms appear, then, I hope that you'll accept them *sous rature*, that if I should make claims about "orality" and "literacy," that I'm not trying to de/term/ine, say, Gorgias, but to get at how both terms suggest important emergences. This project, and particualrly this opening chapter, is not an attempt to solve the *logoi* (the word, the law, the rule) of technological emergence or of rhetoric's history, but rather to work through the terms of both technology and history to suggest a principle of *kairos*, of possibility. Neither history nor technology is destiny; to paraphrase (as I continuously will) Victor J. Vitanza, if we were to trust our own *logos* too closely, the permanence and meaningfulness of our own terms, then we would create the same Platonic mis/take, and attempt to convert *kairos* into *logos*. As my choice of subject matter pushes me, I'd rather push "reset" and play a different game. Through cybernetics, in particular, I believe we have a way of having two fluidifying conversations at the same time, a way of blending two

streams of thought into one, for long enough to look at the important ways in which they nuance one another.

A term importing numerous valences, and used variously by a number of disciplines, "cybernetics" can be best traced to Norbert Wiener, who minted the term in 1948 amid his researches in the emergent field of human-computer interaction. The word itself derives from the Greek *kibernetikos* (helmsman), in an attempt to create a conceptual territory at the intersection of human subjects and their technologies; a ship's helmsman neither has his course determined by his vessel nor exists distinct from it. The "helmsman," in other words, names the locus where subject and machine are united into a single system, a point at which the borders between the two could be thought to blur. Helmsman and ship configure and are configured by one another; so too do all subjects find themselves variously hailing and hailed by the tools they use. The term is sometimes taken up in cautionary terms as signaling a larger move towards the redefinition of humanity, that somehow human beings are themselves being redefined by technology's prevalence in modern life. Weiner himself defines the term as "the science of control and communication of the animal and the machine," a definition whose very "and"-heavy syntax seems to collapse borders. In a far different environment, Olivier Dyens, though rarely invoking the term directly, calls on the humanities to produce a "cultural biology" interrogating the ongoing synthesis of body, technology, art, and environment. On the other hand, M. Joseph Sirgy's book *Self-Congruity* comes out of a market-research paradigm; however, despite invoking "cybernetics" in the title, no coherent definition emerges except from a triangulation of certain other phrases: "tests of values" – "stress" – "management of feedback." On yet another hand, Elaine Graham speaks of "technologization" and how the "contours of human bodies are

redrawn" to no longer end at the skin. In either case, the term catches a two-pronged concern: the relationship between (human) bodies and technology.

So, while the term "cybernetics," taken nakedly, may invoke science-fictional notions of human essence variously augmented or polluted by technology, this project instead seizes on what Vitanza might call a "nonpositive affirmative" valence of the term. Technology, or videogaming in this project's particular case, is not a detraction from what it means to be more authentically human (a negative construction of cybernetics, based on a similarly negative construction of what it means to be "human" – "human" as not-mechanical). Nor is technology best approached as a useful tool, as amplifiers for our native human abilities (a reading that, while attractive, still rests on the same negatively constructed definition of what it means to be human). Instead, cybernetics names a perspective on the technological equation favoring neither side; just as the helmsman cannot be tidily divided from the ship, neither can subjects be completely divided from their technologies. Indeed, though cybernetics may have begun, defined by Wiener, as a study of "control and communication of the animal and the machine," the waves of development which follow the term's evolution guide the conversation away from talk of control towards a more nuanced and subtler recognition of how deeply the two terms interpenetrate. While Hayles recognizes the "first wave" of cybernetics as being primarily concerned with "homeostasis" (a conceptual state of balance in a given communicative system), the "second wave" following it becomes increasingly concerned with "reflexivity" (that which generates a system becomes part of the very system it generates) as part of a larger awareness of "autopoesis" – the notion that cybernetic systems are not merely self-maintaining, but self-creating. In the "third wave," this notion blossoms into the belief, sprung partially from advances in computer coding and DNA research, that the self-making, self-maintaining

cybernetic system of materiality and information is itself the "springboard" towards any object's metaphysical emergence (Becoming, in a sense, preceeds Being – an anti-Platonic stance if ever there was one).

For Hayles, then, the three waves of cybernetic theory lead her towards the growing awareness of a "posthuman" condition. The structure of the relationship between body, information, and communication serves to unentrench the notion that there was ever such a thing as a human essence. Our bodies and our selves are now infinitely more diverse, augmented, and fluid; the Cartesian duality of mind and body no longer holds. Though I've personally seen the idea encounter harsh resistance from self-labelled humanists, posthumanism – built by Hayles on the foundation of classical cybernetics – is neither a rejection of "humanity" nor an uncritical championing of the technological. Instead, it proposes a switch of that very terminology – that we move our conversation away from talk of essence and being and closer to questions of relation. Rather than retreat from materialism altogether (the classic Cartesian mis/take) or submit entirely to it (the negative side of Marxian dialectic), cybernetics fashions a third alternative, what Vitanza might call a nonpositive affirmation of instability and fluidity between humans and their machines, and it is just that site of instability and fluidity that this chapter will explore in (somewhat) greater depth, in an effort to produce a (cybernetic) technologization of rhetoric.

Another figure in this conversation whose contributions (and terminology) deeply impact our attempts to think of rhetoric technologically is Marshall McLuhan, whose watershed work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* was published in 1964, less than twenty years after the publication of Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics* (1948). The book's opening essays, most notably "The Medium is the Message," "The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis," and "Media

as Translators" lay out through a pattern of intentionally vague and oracular images and allusions what I call McLuhan's "extension" model. At first referring solely to information media (7), and later expanded – apparently – to include all technologies (47), McLuhan argues that these technologies (medial or otherwise, though my conversation will focus on the former) represent "extension[s] of ourselves." These extensions are partially metaphorical, in that media technologies expand the range of human language and linguistic interaction. The written word extended the range of communication; the printed word, even more so. McLuhan ratchets up the stakes most interestingly in arguing that these extensions are more literal than we might admit: the real material body is effected by the technologies we (metaphorically) attach to it. Throughout *Understanding Media*, a variety of terms (most notably "hot" and "cold") are introduced to assess individual media; the hot/cold terminology, introduced in the second chapter, denotes cultural "textures" introduced by media, though the terms continue to connote bodily sensation. McLuhan further argues, through an extended re-reading of the Narcissus myth, that the body undergoes a process of "autoamputation" when processing a new extension. To extend and (infinitely) machine itself, the body undergoes a process of numbing and, eventually, loss.

So, when McLuhan claims that the body is extended by technology, is his "body" the natural biological body, or some metaphorical body? Both.[2] McLuhan argues in "The Gadget Lover" that the introduction of the wheel effectively amputated and augmented the human foot (46-7). On a metaphorical level, he discusses the extension in "speed and scale" that the wheel was able to bring to human affairs, how it augmented the native capacity of the foot, at the expense of a loss of what I can only call some essential "footness." Metaphorically, then, McLuhan redraws the borders of the body to include its wheel-extension; at the same time,

though, the real biological body never drifts far from his attention. His discouse is peppered with references to the human "sensorium," the body's sensory apparatus and how it is variously augmented, extended, and amputated by technologies. In a metaphorical sense, the wheel might "extend" the foot, but that metaphorical extension echoes in the real as well, in the very real changes to individual identity, social formations, and perceptual regimes that result. In this sense, one of the virtues of McLuhan's model is how it projects an image that seems to anticipate much of what Hayles will later break down as the various "waves" of cybernetic theory. His discourse refers, for example, to a kind of homeostatic "rebalancing" that attends the "autoamputation" process (46-7). Just as the systems approach of early cybernetics seeks to locate vectors of exchange and balance *within* an animal/technology/communication system, so too does the real/metaphorical body numb, amputate, and extend itself through the technologies it encounters. His hot/cold differentiation places pressure on the mechanisms of extension themselves (not the propensities of the human subject matter – the "system" which they impact) as having the most influence on "making" the system what it is. McLuhan's extension rhetoric inherently favors neither the (artificial) extension nor the (natural) body. Indeed, as Hayles explores through her "posthuman" reading of cybernetics, "extension" ultimately jettisons the natural/artificial distinction altogether. What matters, instead, is an ongoing process of encounter and negotiation between human/linguistic subjects and their machines.[3]

In (re)turning to rhetorical histories, Hayles's posthumanism, nuanced by McLuhan's notion of technological extension, provide important conceptual starting places. The former's follow-up to *How We Became Posthuman*, 2003's *Writing Machines*, offers some terminology more useful to the traditional domain of English studies: making sense of documents. As its title suggest, the book's primary interest is the sketching of interesting dimensions of meaning-

making to emerge from the practice of writing under-the-influence-of-technologies. Crucially, her book is not a variation on the tried-and-true "add computers and stir" approach, but rather an attempt to look at writing itself – the literate practice of alphabetic writing – from the vantage afforded not just by the computer, but by a growing artistic awareness (spawned in large part by the Oulipo and Dada) of the aesthetic and semiotic flexibility of written documents themselves. Rather than simply import the entire apparatus of literacy – material, institution, subject formation, and all – into the "postliterate" (or what have you) age, her analysis is careful to distinguish writing as but one type of semiotic activity. This distinction will be useful later.

Of equal interest to this project is Hayles's concept of the material metaphor, her conceptual area of "traffic between words and material objects" (22). The idea is introduced fairly early in *Writing Machines*, and, although mentioned few times thereafter, its spectre certainly haunts and nuances her discussion. From her concept, I generate two central provisos that will underlie much of this project's work, from the current excursus on rhetorical history(ies) to my more direct investigations of videogaming as a medium. One, the material metaphor in its very name argues that "meaning" (whatever that means) is constructed through that scene of "traffic"; if all media are "translators" of experience (in McLuhan's words), then what should interest the analyst is neither the tools themselves nor the semiotics that result. What is interesting, and what our media-saturated age pushes us to better understand, is the level of the system, not the message. If classical cybernetics pushed this understanding towards a desire for (militaristic) "control" or "organization," then this project's desire is to back away from such Enlightenment metanarratives towards an attempt to embrace the con-fusion of media, messages, and bodies currently littering (productively!) our mental landscape.

Secondly, the productive quality of this con-fusion becomes even more apparent when one considers the non-singular quality of the "material metaphor." The term, by itself, does not encompass any-number-whatsoever of interactions happening within a cybernetic system. Instead, the "metaphor" names only a single point of transaction/translation between language and a material structure: Hayles herself considers materialities of screens, cursors, cameras, analog type, and even the "n-dimensionality" (McGann) of the printed page. Following McLuhan, then, the cybernetic trick is to see the subject as multiply extended, with each extension providing unique translation points. These metaphors are in a state of constant operation, something of a material analogue to Nietzsche's take on language itself as a "mobile army of metaphor" (455). We are hooked into not one, but multiple "translators of experience," each acting with a cybernetic gravity all its own. Even our own critical gaze is invested at a particular point of translation (print literacy); the work of this project isn't so much to disentangle that critical gaze (by pretending that there's some way to detach ourselves from that extension), but rather to play games by switching between various extensions, using the various available perspectives to disrupt the logo/print-centric game and move on towards others.

And what is this "other" game? Part of the critical difficulty of this project is that it seeks to dislodge the centrality of print/literate ways of reading, writing, and critiquing, but cannot quite articulate an alternative to replace it. In considering the nascent alternatives to the strictures of print/literate thinking, I suggest the more complicated, multivalent methodology imbricated within cybernetics, McLuhan's notions of extension, and Hayles's material metaphor, but I'd also like to provide a somewhat broader perspective. If, to hazard a university-wide metaphor, McLuhan attempts to write the microeconomics of technological emergence, then Gregory Ulmer works on a more geological scale. If a more McLuhanian perspective seeks to

micromanage the emergence of every new technology as augmenting and rebalancing the body/sensorium, Ulmer prefers instead, in terms that I feel do not inherently contradict those of McLuhan, to locate three distinct phases in humankind's cybernetic development. In *Applied Grammatology* (1985), *Teletheory* (1989), *Heuretics* (1994), and *Internet Invention* (2003), Ulmer develops both a theory of and practices for "electracy": a third term to stand among orality and literacy as naming the great tectonic shifts in Western meaning making. Siding with Walter Ong and Eric Havelock on the revolutionary effects of the emergence of the alphabetic word, Ulmer's "electracy" hails a new grammatological apparatus founded not on the alphabetic word (in all its precision, distinctness, thing-ness) but on the image (via the specific "electrate" media of photography, film, television, and, yes, hypermedia).

Like McLuhan, Ulmer's "electracy" work catches three concerns. The first, technology, defined in this case as the emergent domain of image-based electronic media, is best approached on its own terms. Thus, instead of reducing the domain of hypertextual experience to written "text" – the dominant trope of so much mid-1990s conversation – Ulmer focuses instead on images as a point of distinction, and cites image-theorists like Georges Bataille and Roland Barthes in pursuit of newer, subtler dimensions of meaning making to emerge from those technologies. With the shift in meaning making also come shifts in both subjectivity and social formation. The oral collective self (see Ong 45) gives way to the distinct literate self (Havelock), which in turn appears to be giving way to a differently extended and rebalanced composite electrate subject, the contours of which we have yet to fully explore. Fredric Jameson's work on "late capitalism" and the rise of the multinational corporation also signals, for Ulmer, the likely *locus* of institutional power-shift, away from orality's church and literacy's state.

These latter concerns, however, function for Ulmer as analogues more than anything else. His chief concern, as stated in the introduction to his *Internet Invention* (which itself provides perhaps the best capsule summary of his entire approach) is to follow the principle of the Japanese haiku-poet Bashō: not to follow in the masters' footsteps, but to seek what they sought (1). So, as I'll be discussing shortly, if Plato's great discovery is of concepts (and later, Method), Ulmer's apparatus-theory holds that the job of inventors in our current context is to perform an electrate analogue: to work *through* the emergent technologies to invent new genres, new rhetorics, and new systems of linkages. (Or to rephrase for my purposes: we need a rhetoric of technology less than we need technologized rhetorics.)

That, in a nutshell, is my project's long-term goal: to think through the medium in an effort to enunciate rhetorical possibilities. First, though, this project will have needed to develop a fuller sense of how the technologization of rhetoric is not merely a critical move prompted by the age of "electracy" but is rather a conversation with deeper roots. To develop a sense of what is at stake, this discussion will turn towards the important and longstanding conversation concerning the emergence of "rhetoric" in Ancient Greece (4th and 5th centuries BCE). Not only will this move, I hope, clarify the importance of drawing an analogue between the emergent technologies of our time and that of another – the Greek context and our own appearing to both serve as "primal scenes" where we are encountering new technologies – but this move will also, more importantly, bring the term "rhetoric" into more intimate focus. For all of the foundational work I've cited from Katherine Hayles, Marshall McLuhan, and Greg Ulmer, none of them pays any sustained attention to "rhetoric" – as a term, much less as a (non)discipline.[4]

My goal, in this sense, is to bring these conversations together – to re-read rhetorical history cybernetically, to get a fuller sense of how technology attended important developments

in both the history and historiography of rhetoric. In so doing, I will pave the way for my next step: an exploration of my particular medium of interest. If the emergence of particular technologies have, historically, led to alterations in the way we think of rhetoric, what might we make, then, of the stretchings, extensions, and amputations sure to be provided by the emergence of the videogame in our own time?

To arrive there, first I'll have to play a tentative game called "the Cybernetics of Rhetorical History." What I'll suggest in the following pages is neither an exhaustive account of rhetoric's history nor an extensive review of the historiography available on the subject. Truthfully, I claim no expertise in those areas, and gladly (dis)engage with rhetorical history(ies) in that way. Instead, I borrow a more playful and exploratory *êthos* (not to mention language) from Victor J. Vitanza, who also stages excursions into rhetorical histories (through handfuls of selected texts and figures, both primary and secondary) in pursuit of intellectual possibilities rather than capital-T Truth.

The scope of my view here will be largely limited to a handful of players, on either side of a classic well-worn scholarly divide. On one side, we have the philosophical tradition, embodied most pronouncedly through Plato (or Socrates/Plato), and his student Aristotle; on the other, the oft-maligned Sophistic tradition, which I'll be exploring primarily through Gorgias and Isocrates, two highly divergent rhetors in their own rights. At stake in exploring these figures, their rhetoric(s) and conflicts, is to consider their interactions as part and parcel of a cybernetic system: as a system of both subjects and technologies, as a system that seeks homeostasis. We can consider "homeostasis," in this case, to be the eventual Platonic/Aristotelean consolidation of rhetoric into a tidy literate system. Rather than seek to "recover" the Sophists (others have, with more success than I'd ever hope to have on my own) for cybernetic purposes, my goal is rather to

re-purpose the Sophists themselves as a group of more cybernetically aware rhetors, as a group always-already aware of the technologization of rhetoric. If, as McLuhan argues, the tendency of technology is to produce shock and numbness, thereby obviating self-awareness (*Understanding* 42), we could possibly read the Sophists as resisting this tendency, as seeking a more fruitful and systematic account of language-in-action than is afforded by the systematic numbing narcosis of Plato/Narcissus's philosophical method. To pursue this line of thinking, I'll explore the rivalry between Gorgias and Plato as being, at least in part, a meeting of two distinct technological apparatuses: the oral and the literate.

Plato's most infamous invective against rhetoric is in his dialogue *Gorgias*, wherein Socrates confronts the titular rhetor through playing a (typically Platonic) definitional game. Plato/Socrates's refrain throughout is the call to account for the "nature" of "the art (*technê*) of rhetoric." In framing the very question "what is the nature of his [Gorgias's] art," Plato exhibits one of the most notable dynamics of literate thinking: the capacity to think in abstract concepts, in this case "art." In pre-Socratic times, *technê* generally referred to a specific rhetorical handbook: a set of "techniques," one might say, for persuading audiences through oratory (Walker). Yet, as Havelock explains in a slightly different context, the contour to emerge most clearly in Plato's texts is the capacity to think beyond from local, contingent "acts and events" to get at a clearer notion of "the thing itself." Thus, whereas knowledge of, say, law was at one point confined to memory, the capacity to set the law outside the memory (through writing) makes individual acts and events "irrelevant":

> What we require to think about and know is "the law itself".... And so the Platonic pages are filled with the demand that we concentrate not on the things of the city, but on the city itself, not on a just or unjust act but on justice itself by itself, not

> on noble actions but on nobility, not on the beds and tables of the heroes but on the idea of bed *per se*. (*Preface* 217)

And so, we should also add: not on the handbook-technique (*technê*) of rhetoric, but on the art (*technê*) of rhetoric itself. Socrates pushes relentlessly for a conceptual account of rhetoric. Taking from Gorgias the cue that the result of rhetoric is "persuasion," Socrates again pursues the typically literate-minded move: to transport the abstracted concept of "persuasion" away from any local circumstance and to use it as a test-measure for the philosophical constitution of rhetoric. Noting that practitioners of other arts – medicine and ship-building, for example – can produce their own brands of persuasion, his logic is unable to produce a single universal measure of rhetoric's true nature. Socrates redoubles his efforts after another cue from Gorgias, this time attempting to massage the universal concept of "justice" (note Havelock's reference, above) into a potential definition, but this too fails. In this, though, *Gorgias* follows the by-now familiar pattern: to abstract from the local practice of rhetoric a universality of justness which must always belong to the rhetor, and which Socrates can syllogistically prove doesn't always happen.

In proffering a cybernetic take on this infamous incident in the History of Rhetoric, I'd like to reconstruct Plato's encounter with Gorgias not merely as a meeting ground between differing intellectual traditions, but also as cybernetic meeting ground, where two distinct material apparatuses, with two somewhat distinct constructions of the world, come into contact. While I'd like to avoid the harsh duality of sifting Gorgias into the oral register and Plato into the literate (the former's orations survive in writing, while the latter famously prefers the spoken word to print), their discourses do demonstrate certain tendencies that I'd suggest we read in the light of the propensities of their chosen media.

While Jack Goody and others have pointed out how writing was generally regarded as a mere tool for bureaucratic or business functions, Platonic method appears to mark the emergence of writing as a distinct mental formation. The capacity to think abstractly and work in concepts leads Socrates and Plato towards the invention of Method (Ulmer, *Invention* 28-31), towards the invention of a rule-bound system designed to interrogate ideas and arrive at a larger sense of Truth (itself an abstract concept, grasped only through the abstraction-machine of alphabetic writing). The genre designed to perform method is dialectic. Though still a spoken form, dialectic derives entirely from the grammatology of writing; rather than yielding to the poetic monologue of oratory, dialectic structures a back-and-forth conversation based on questions, responses, and counter-questions. Dialectic disrupts the construction of poetic eloquence, of the extended metaphors that were the hallmarks of oratory. The rapid back-and-forth pace interrogates rather the truth-value of the independent statement, the statement divorced from a larger context of utterances. Nowhere is this more evident than in the *Gorgias*, wherein Socrates uses his back-and-forth method to disrupt his interlocutors' performances and claim victory for himself.

And what of Gorgias? This cybernetic history risks too harsh a divide if we accede to the notion that Gorgias, orality, and Sophistry allow for a kind of unmediated being in the world. If the Sophistic revision of rhetorical history casts Plato as the villain who banishes the Sophists, the poets, and the rhetors from the ideal Republic (and in so doing engenders an entire philosophical tradition devoted to similar ends), then the insistence on the material importance of the oral/literate divide risks demonizing the latter while lionizing the former. From the opposite angle, that same divide plays into a longstanding rhetoric of progress, and could therefore just as easily champion the advances of Platonic literacy while viewing Gorgias as a mere “oral”

throwback. If this discussion hopes to achieves anything, it's a breakdown of both metanarratives. While I would retain some sort of value in my discussion for the terms "oral" and "literate," I also have to be careful not to reify them, allowing them to de-term-ine Gorgias or Plato or whomever. One way or the other, I feel that the key of this method is to focus less on the extensions themselves, and more on the bodies to which they are attached.

In calling so strongly on the image of the extended body, cybernetics risks mis/placing orality; the "technology" of orality/aurality is the human body itself: no extensions needed. This language, then, risks recasting the Plato/Sophist divide as a breach between technologized and non-technologized modes of being, with the latter unfairly squashed like so many rose petals beneath the oily gears of progress. This rhetoric further runs the risk of taking the (nontechnologized) body as a discursive given, and thereby instantiating the rhetoric of extension as some sort of foreign invader, with all technologies following the alphabetic word as merely compounding an already-negative tendency towards problematizing our once simple and Edenic being-in-the-world. I'd rather not play that game; as Donna Haraway writes, there is no returning to the Garden of Eden ("Manifesto" 151). Instead, I'll ratchet up the stakes for cybernetics itself by including even orality as a kind of extension. In the words of he who crafted the extension metaphor to begin with: "the spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to experience it in a different way" (McLuhan, *Understanding* 57). Gorgias himself even seems tantalizingly close to realizing this is in his own oral/poetic rhetoric, in casting language (*logos*) as a kind of drug: an outside force with a power and consistency all its own. D. Diane Davis, working through Martin Heidegger and Avital Ronell, affirms the drug as an apt metaphor for our technologization; that Gorgias so skillfully plays with

it suggests to me that Gorgias is working *through* orality, rather than being constrained (de-termined) by it.

The properly cybernetic perspective doesn't take Gorgias and the *logos*-drug as some kind of rhetorical truth; rather its perspective is perhaps most interesting given its ability to construct a system that condenses and combines propensities of both the oral and written registers (because Gorgias's system cannot be entirely either but is always-already constructing itself based on both). Gorgias, like the other pre-Socratic Sophists was, in Havelock's words, "in the position of trying to describe the ground rules of what [he] was doing" (*Preface* 300). However, Havelock claims somewhat problematically that the pressure of the literacy apparatus to develop a set of abstract rules and concepts precipitated a kind of "warfare against the old consciousness and the old language" (*Preface* 301). I suppose that, out of the ashes of this "warfare," Plato found free rein to develop his own philosophical system. Still, if Gorgias's example proves anything, it's that "warfare" is far too loaded (and, no doubt, phallogocentric) term to describe the evolution of rhetorical thinking at that time. Even if Gorgias does not fully engage in Platonic dialectic, the richness of the "Encomium to Helen" and "On Being" suggests not a debilitating warfare between partially incommensurable outlooks but an affirmative balance-seeking between the two.

My analysis will return to the topic of drugs at intervals throughout this project; for now, to the end of establishing my cybernetic model, I'll briefly consider some features of Gorgias's rhetoric itself and play a bit with the strictures of the oral/literate divide. Gorgias's Sophistic rhetoric does demonstrate certain features that Walter Ong correlates with oral consciousness. Foremost, perhaps, is Gorgias's retention of poetry as a method of rhetorical delivery. Ong unproblematically correlates poetry with an oral "state of being," and while his broad label

appears to also catch notions of metaphor and likeness (the same that vexed Plato, which puts Ong in the problematic position of mis/taking a Platonic view for a quintessentially literate one), his discussion is more useful for the way it correlates the rhythmic features of poetry with oral consciousness (72, 157). Poetry, more affirmatively, is the genre crafted in oral cultures to preserve memory and create images; that John Poulakos credits Gorgias with innovatively integrating poetry into his rhetoric should be taken as further confirmation of the latter's affirmation of the power of his own medium ("Gorgias," 169). In choices of subject matter, Gorgias demonstrates another oral tendency: to phrase discussions around "heavy" heroic figures, such as Helen in the "Encomium" (Ong 69). Furthermore, Gorgias's oft-cited role as a freelance rhetorical instructor, attendant to the rise of the law court in the time of Corax and Tisias (Poulakos, "Gorgias" 168), frames much of his rhetorical activity in what Ong would call an "agonistic" context, where verbal competition thrives (Ong 43).

Yet, predictably, the value of this oral/literate strategizing is limited. For starters, we could just as easily point out handfuls of Ong's "psychodynamics of orality" which do not seem to manifest in Gorgias's rhetoric: a reliance on "formula," for one; "traditionalist" being another (38, 41). Rather, both of his surviving works indicate Gorgias's desire to play with and challenge dominant paradigms: to play games with the notion of "being," to "rescue" (or rehabilitate) Helen, to redefine the power of *logos* itself. Indeed, as Havelock might have it, his ability to abstract *logos*/"speech" as a separate entity demonstrates an entirely *literate* ability. The survival of his works in manuscript surely suggests the same, as does Poulakos's suggestion that Gorgias himself wrote a rhetorical handbook during his lifetime ("Gorgias," 168). And what of Gorgias's oral stylings? Ong ghettoizes "copious or excessive" speech as an oral feature, one that he

supposes to die out in the much more restrained and dignified literate condition (39-40). My own take on this move is much more fractional.

One could argue, I believe, that the will-to-excess displayed by Victor Vitanza (via Georges Bataille) is a trans-medial condition: *in whatever medium you will, perform excessively*. Vitanza would, then, dis/engage in the orality/literacy question, championing excess/hystery as a solution that obviates the oral/literate divide altogether. Rather, what matters to me in a cybernetic reading of Gorgias is the *excess* to which he invests in the poetry of his rhetoric, and our ability to then take that excess and (materially) affirm it. Even the fair and balanced *Rhetorical Tradition* of Bizzell and Herzberg pejoritavely dismisses Gorgias's "Encomium" as "overly antithetical and symmetrical in structure and overly alliterative and assonant in sound" (38). Bizzell and Herzberg shruggingly concede that Gorgias's oral rhetoric must have produced an effect akin to "magic," a term of a piece with the Ongian notion of "magical consciousness" in oral cultures. Along these lines, we could wrestle with the anti-rational, anti-intellectual, and therefore academically marginalizing character of that language. But, to borrow from Victor Vitanza's (anti-)methodology of hysterical leaping, in so doing we could at best claim a positive value for orality: an Ongian magic^{pos} spun from Bizzell/Hershberg's magic^{neg}.[5] Yet, in Gorgias's spectacular excess, I would follow Vitanza into a place where his analysis (not so curiously) doesn't wish to go (363, n6) – attempting a nonpositive affirmation of the oral extension of the cybernetic (rhetorical) body.

The categorical orality/literacy game simultaneously suggests a set of useful contours, while in its very categorization creating a logical trap door – a technologization of rhetoric that becomes a *de-term-ination* of rhetoric – for this analysis. My own reading suggests that Gorgias is a figure of crucial importance for how he nimbly side-steps that trapdoor, crafting a rhetoric

which seizes upon both literate concept-formation while never forsaking the available poetic contours of his oral delivery method. Even Gorgias's tendency towards rhetorical "excess" is best read, not as an either/or quality (as Ong does, sifting it into the oral register), but as a combinative quality – a quality that exceeds the boundaries of any attempt to categorize it, a quality that creates a rhetoric of *kairos*, of possibilities that result from the affirmation of all the elements of his own system of extensions: the body and the written word. If Plato over-invests in literacy, Gorgias tries to slip out of the game and work within all of them – an intellectual and material nomad. And yet, the dominant (literate) history figures a victory for Plato and for the logic of the literate extension. How might a cybernetic view of rhetoric, then, reckon Plato's victory?

In making and thoroughly qualifying these claims about oral and literate extensions, the key is to avoid the harsh polarities that have characterized much of the critical reception of apparatus theory. The systemic nature of a more full-fledged cybernetic theory, rather than simply sift history and human experience into one of three containers (oral, literate, electrate), insists that all the extensions hold sway within the same system. Not only can human beings not be fully separated from their technologies, but neither can their technologies be tidily separated from one another. If we are to argue then, that both Plato and Gorgias demonstrate some degrees of engagement with both oral and literate registers, one could predict the response: why, then, talk about technology at all? Somewhere between these two views, one obviating technology while the other pursues it deterministically, is a potentially fertile middle ground, where material and message can be seen as intersecting in dynamic ways. In this case, my reading resists both isolating Gorgias as a mere oral poet and demonizing Plato as the ruthlessly mechanical harbinger of a Literate Age.

Instead, I'd hazard a different take on Plato's rejection of rhetoric, one that stems from Plato's attitude towards his own technology. His *Phaedrus* reads along lines familiar to rhetoricians and trackers of literate logic in general: dialectic discourse led by Socrates on the nature of love and truth, with a solid dig at rhetoric worked in for good measure.[6] The stakes for my discussion, however, get ratcheted noticeably up when Plato/Socrates turns towards the subject of writing. Of those who employ the (at the time relatively novel) technology of alphabetic writing, Socrates says: "they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance *by external signs instead of on their own internal resouces*.... And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden on society" (96-7, l.275, emphasis added). McLuhan's response to Plato's odd disavowal of his own medium is usefully pat: "[he] shows no awareness here or elsewhere of how the phonetic alphabet had altered the sensibility of the Greeks; nor did anyone else in his time or later" (*Gutenberg* 25). While McLuhan concedes the possibility that Plato could have made himself aware of the emerging contours of literacy (a sentiment echoed, I'd guess, in Burke's notion of the "terministic screen"), what fascinates me instead is Plato's dismissal of writing from within writing. Beyond any adolescent finger-pointing and shouts of "hypocrisy!", I'd prefer instead to consider what Plato has to gain from such a move.

While the oral/literate theses of Ong and Havelock point towards a certain celebration of philosophical abstraction as the marker of progress from oral to literate Being, I find it entirely possible that Plato's tension over *mimesis* – the concept of imitation which appears to most latently fuel this fear and loathing – suggests a deeper tension about writing itself, about its inherent instability, which finds its most crucial enunciation in the work of Jacques Derrida. In *Speech and Phenomena*, he writes "we cannot refrain here from going by way of a written text,

from ordering ourselves by the disorder that is produced therein – and this is what matters to me first of all" (133). He captures the disorder produced by writing through his notion of "differance": the flip-side of Havelock's idea that writing discards "the accidents and incidentals of place, time, and circumstance" (*Preface* 217). If indeed alphabetic writing is always out-of-time, dis/placed, then its meanings are always already differed and slipping. In a playful analysis of *Phaedrus*, Derrida likens Socrates's construction of *logos* to a family structure, in which a written word is always somewhat lost and misplaced in the absence of a father:

> The origin of *logos* is its father. One could say anachronistically that the "speaking subject" is the father of his speech. And one would quickly realize that this is no metaphor, at least not in the sense of any common, conventional sense of rhetoric. *Logos* is a son, then, a son that would be destroyed in his very *presence* without the very *attendance* of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him and answers for him. Without his father, he would be nothing but, in fact, writing... The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father. (*Dissemination* 82)

Thus, to avoid breaking up the happy family of the *logos*, Plato must double back on his entire literate mentality. He must reject the written word's inherent (mimetic) instability, its slippage and *différance.* Still, he also must also reject those, probably the handbook-writing Sophists of his day (a category which to at least some extent catches Gorgias and Isocrates), who would substitute the "conceit of wisdom" for the "living and animate speech of a man with knowledge," all while preserving for himself the literate gifts of abstraction and concept formation (98, l.276). Through this tactical denial, Plato ties his technology off in a (k)not, obviating amputation in favor of a system of pure, logical extension.

Plato's dream, we could argue, is the dismissal of writing from any support system. Writing exists if and only if it can preserve knowledge and truth. Writing must not slip; its meaning must not slide or be deferred. It must mean what it wants to say and say only what it means. Plato therefore contains the potentially disruptive materiality of writing by placing it in the service of philosophy and dialectic. Writing becomes a system of pure equip-mentality. But as I will have noted, here and elsewhere, writing cannot be assimilated into a *technê* so easily, no more than a prosthetic can function without a body. Writing provides a means for setting language outside the body, creating a particular visual interface, but the point, as McLuhan would continuously remind us, is to remember that our media are not "tools," but "extensions." The extension trope reminds us that we are more intimately connected to our language than Plato might think. This is just one of the consequences for unravelling the (k)not of writing: to move from narratives of denial and loss towards a fuller embrace for those elements of the languaged-experience denied by the Greek tradition, and to a fuller self of ourselves as multiply machined cybernetic beings.

A further necessary point of discussion for this cybernetic take on rhetoric's history (histories) is to consider not only the source material, but the historiographical conversation surrounding that source material, and the extent to which it conciously engages the inherent "technologizations" beneath its own rhetoric. In making this transition, from history to historiography, I hope to bridge a fairly important gap. As much as this cybernetic, technologically infused approach might make interesting connections when applied to source materials – to Plato and the Sophists, construed as so much historical "text" – the approach is as much, if not more, valuable when considered as part and parcel of our own critical methodologies. When we, as critics and scholars, go about our scholarly business, we do so

from within a system composed of multiple technologies, multiple extensions into the world. This is not to hazard the simplification that critics are caught between opposing poles of romanticism (via orality) on one hand and rationality (via literacy) on the other. Far from! Instead, I'd have us use Hayles's notions of "material metaphors" and "media-specific analysis" to create an *êthos* of critical reflection on the linguistic media we use in the course of our work, to be aware of just the extent to which Tools R Us. (I will return to this aspect of the technologization of rhetoric in this project's third chapter.)

In an important sense, this move mirrors the evolution of the cybernetic discipline itself, the move from the first wave's concerns over homeostasis, how a subject can be thought of as existing within a technological system, to what Hayles calls the "second wave of cybernetics," with their concerns over what Humberto Maturama calls "autopoesis." In short, during this second wave, scientists gradually started shifting focus away from the role of the system to the role of the observer, concluding that subjects "[do] not so much discern preexisting systems as create them through the very act of observation" (131). Not only does this principle apply to what we might call the first-person system – the system of interactions we observe, like those of Gorgias, Plato, and their various writing machines, but this observation eventually applies in equal part to the order of systems above that, for not just Plato and Gorgias, but also *those who would "observe" Plato and Gorgias*. So what is required here is not just a sense of the cybernetics of rhetorial history/ies, but a larger sense of the cybernetics of our own critical methods. For that reason, I'd like not only to explore the oral/literate dynamics of Plato and the Sophists, but to explore how those dynamics are (often uncritically) replayed by those discussing them. The Schiappa/Poulakos debates over historiographic methods are a great starting point, with further nuances added by the very different "recovery" efforts of Susan Jarratt and Victor J.

Vitanza. Without needlessly belaboring the point, I'll argue that Edward Schiappa's history/historiography of Plato and the Sophists pursues a zeal for literacy of near-Platonic levels, while the responses of John Poulakos and Susan Jarratt variously engage and disengage in the problematics of the "media metaphor" in the course of their responses – with varying results, all of which are ultimately vital for understanding how so much of our rhetorical understanding hinges on our appreciation for material media.

My go-to source of interest here is Edward Schiappa's *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece*, a well-researched, well-written, thoroughly sensible kind of book which has had the unfortunate side effect of jettisoning the Sophists (and their rhetorics) further towards the margins of rhetoric's history. What makes it particularly interesting for my case aren't Schiappa's methods *per se* but rather the extent to which Schiappa's brand of history-building seems fruitfully coincident with our ongoing conversation about rhetoric and technology – particularly through his take on the importance of language. I trust Schiappa's earnestness in claiming that "our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced by the language that we have to make sense of that world," a position that can even been seen as fruitfully coincident with poststructural theories of language, particularly their notion that the structure of language is what largely de-*term*-ines thought (12). Still, and with none of this attempting to dismiss the impressive depth and quality of his research, Schiappa does set a kind of arbitrary marker around what it means for "language" to emerge into the world. While he borrows from Havelock the insight that ancient Greek thought in Plato's time can be best characterized as an attempt to develop its own "conceptual vocabulary," and from Thomas Kuhn the notion that a lexicon is "prerequisite" to understanding, Schiappa, like Plato, seems unwilling to acknowledge the conditions for the emergence of that very vocabulary (11). The linchpin of

Schiappa's argument, that "the introduction of the term *rhêtorikê* signals a revolution of sorts in the way discourse education was thought about," works only through a disavowal. Whether or not one agrees with the centrality of the specific term *rhêtorikê* in Schiappa's analysis, his methods disavow the idea of the term's emergence through any path other than those provided by extant (usually Platonic) writings. Schiappa goes so far as to unproblematically credit Plato with rhetoric's invention; having noted that the word appears in none of the more noted Sophistic texts (*Dissoi Logoi*, "the Encomium to Helen," etc.), he postulates that "even if Plato did not coin *rhêtorikê*, he might as well have, given the subsequent history of the word" (16, 19).

Let's trace the circuit of these moves in more cybernetic terms. Schiappa's own rhetoric betrays no particular hostility towards the Sophists themselves, whom I would argue he prefers to portray as unwitting dupes, fumbling with what limited vocabulary they had and failing through no particular fault of their own to produce a systematic account of "the art of rhetoric." Nor does he lavish much time (in this particular book, anyway) to disputing with Neosophists like John Poulakos. His focus, rather, is on the evidence. The weight of sheer textual evidence – or rather, the weight of that textual evidence's *lack* – leads Schiappa so far as to downplay the important differences between the philosophical and rhetorical traditions. The Sophists and their views are, according to Schiappa's writing-logic, so primitively "predisciplinary" that they cannot even serve as points of meaningful comparison: "the dichotomy often used to distinguish between Philosophical and Rhetorical discourse is simply not evident in the texts of the fifth century that describe Sophistic education" (115). Once again, the written text sets the terms, and the Sophists come out on the losing end of the debate.

Ignoring for a moment the surprising ease with which the attitudes of both Schiappa and Plato towards Gorgias coincide (Schiappa places doubtful quotation marks around the notion that

Gorgias's *Encomium* offers anything of meaningful "theoretical" value), what I would note instead is their reliance on a doggedly "literate" approach. Like Plato, Schiappa's work seems closed off in a (k)not. Writing not only determines his fundamental logic, but also determines what counts as evidence within that logic – no rhetoric without the written word. In the course of summoning that rhetoric, though, a larger scene of possibilities are lost through the very propensities of that medium; Schiappa misses out on the *autopoesis* of his own methods – in his adherence to literate, textual, logocentric evidence, he *creates* an essentially closed system in the act of trying to *describe* it.

What other options does he have, though? Am I suggesting that scholarship would be better served were Schiappa to borrow from more oral logics, freely associating his way towards a greater collective understanding? Hardly! Schiappa plays his literate game, and plays it well. But like the Sophists, whose contributions he ultimately elides in favor of Plato's more systematic approach, we might as materially invested thinkers question the efficacy of playing only one sort of cybernetic game. So, take for instance Schiappa's reliance on the notion that a lexicon defines what can be known. As material, cybernetic thinkers we might ask: is it lexicon or is it technology? After all, in Havelock's analysis, we need the technology first to even get to the point of carving out abstract terminology. Thus, Schiappa begins with concerns over truth. He disputes the notion that Neosophistic rhetorics are "justified and appropriate" (*Beginning* 9), while hoping for greater intellectual "honesty" (*Beginning* 13). Resorting to such absolutes – truth, justice, honesty – allows Schiappa to argue against the "situational ethics" of Sophistry in decidedly non-Sophistic terms.

Particularly through a recovery of Isocrates, Poulakos's *Sophistical Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* proposes a rehabilitation, a rational (not historical) reconstruction of the Sophists'

contributions to what rhetoric can be. The question for this discussion is: "how does Poulakos account for the emergence of distinct writing technologies and their influence on what it means to be rhetorical?" The best clue lies in his choice of subject matter. Isocrates forms the pivot point of Poulakos's discussion. But why? Isocratic rhetoric comes closer than any available alternative (save only Aristotle's) for creating a strong conceptual method around rhetoric. His rhetoric, promoting civic virtue (*arete*) and education, displays no trace here of the wild instabilities inherent in Gorgias's mythopoeticism, much less the wild performativity in the Sophistics of Diogenes. Isocrates offers instead a more Sophistical alternative to Plato/Aristotle's will-to-(philosophical)Truth, a rhetoric methodical enough to work within the (literate) *polis*. Yet, despite what Havelock would certainly seize on as an essentially literary cybernetic move – an attempt to make rhetoric safe for the emergent literate apparatus – Poulakos regards Isocrates's writing rather unproblematically as a delivery system: as a substitute for the rhetor's "vocal weakness" (136). At most for Poulakos, writing can "escape the ritualism of public performance [and] transcend the demands of local audiences," a logic that leads Isocrates towards the development of what most call his inherently democratic program for rhetorical education. Poulakos does not focus as Havelock does on the psychodynamics of literacy, concept formation being chiefest among them, although he does gesture towards the scene of rational "contemplation and study" afforded by the shift from spoken to written discourse (138). Yet still, even if one could argue that Poulakos does not offer a full-fledged media studies engagement with Isocratic rhetoric, his desire to account for the contours of the literate apparatus set him noticeably apart from Schiappa. Between the two approaches, we can account for a pair of commonly observed blind spots in attempts to "technologize" rhetoric:

regarding literacy as either a path towards Truth (no such thing as extensions) or doing so as a delivery system (the extension as a value-neutral).

So far, I've considered the rhetorical scene of 4th and 5th Century BCE Greece as something of a cybernetic system, one in which the conversation/conflict between Plato and the Sophists (particularly Gorgias, in my limited reading) can be viewed as a meeting ground between distinct approaches to medial "extension." Yet, at the same time, following Katherine Hayles's discussion of the second "autopoetic" wave of cybernetic thinking, I would also include historiographers as part and parcel of the very same cybernetic system. Our observations are neither value-neutral nor media-neutral. Particularly in our present moment, amid new forms of extension (be)coming into being at such accelerated rates, I maintain that our critical gaze is necessarily bound up in its own system of values, informed by the dominant technologies (writing, print) of our time. In moving beyond, in investigating some more extensions within the system, we become the system. My exploration of both Schiappa and Poulakos does enough, I hope, to admit into the conversation the various potentialities, pitfalls, and problematics associated with this media-infused approach to rhetorical histories and historiographies. A third figure, however, may yet offer some more productive (con)fusion.

Susan Jarratt, in *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, negotiates the issue by trying to partially dissolve it – not entirely, which is a crucial move. Whereas Poulakos's attempt to say "no" to determinism effectively argues for an integral, non-technological Being, Jarratt's argument for an "evolutionary rather than revolutionary" approach to mediality posits the possibility of a technological Becoming (31). Noting, for example, the existence of persuasive speech "in the earliest records of Greek discourse," she strikes against the harsh duality the she argues gives Plato hegemony over rational *logos*, the viewpoint that

reads history as the progress from mythic to logical thinking. This viewpoint only maintains validity, though, if we play along the lines of Schiappa's take on literate extension. In identifying Platonic method as the emergence point of a new form of thinking, Havelock observes not the Platonic concept of *logos*, as much as the creation of a *logos* of *logos*, a kind of conceptual reflexivity, a *logos* that, following the logic of the bifurcated sign, reaches back and reflects on itself. To enshrine Plato as a genius or revolutionary of literacy requires that we take the extensions of literacy as a given truth; that we allow Plato's *diaresis* of truth-by-exclusion. (And by "exclusion" I mean not only the exclusion of poets from the Republic, or of the Sophists from the public sphere, but also the exclusion of writing itself, which as Derrida argues destablizes the capacity to "account" for *logos*.) I sense that this far from Jarratt's goal, as she mounts her discussion of Havelock and apparatus theory as the springboard towards the reclamation of the Sophists and of a sophistic "third term": *nomos* – the "custom-law" between (Platonic) extremes of *mythos* and *logos*, magical and rational thinking. Similarly, Poulakos variously dis/engages with Schiappa/Plato to pursue a Sophistic "rhetoric of third alternatives" (71).

In both approaches, third terms are not precluded by the literate *logos*; we could instead argue that Plato simply stumbled onto an approach to *logos* that best mirrored the material metaphor of alphabetic writing – splitting, bifurcation, *diaresis* – and that the subsequent hegemony it enjoys derives not from chance or Being, but Becoming – literate-*logos* took on dimensions of meaning not according to any "revolutionary" Platonic genius, but rather because of an "evolutionary" process: we, in becoming Platonic-literate, crafted a concept of *logos* that followed the contours of the literate medium. If we are now becoming-electrate, seeking a third term (such as *nomos*) into which we might evolve a bit more comfortably, without the

logocentric baggage of Platonism/literacy/Enlightenment, is not a bad move at all. Poulakos and Jarratt would move on and create fresh territory, refusing to take the logic of the literate extension as an absolute. If my project differs from theirs, it's only in wanting to reverse the flow. I would rather take the autopoetic view – to affirm the extensions of electracy for whatever they are, and to use them as lenses to account for "some more" possibilities in how we think of *logos*.

The goal in my critique of Schiappa is not to disparage his methods *per se* but rather to hazard a characterization of his methods in cybernetic terms. He pursues a kind of perfect logic of the literate logos (alliteration unintended); the written word is his medium, his method, and his message. In celebrating alternatives to Plato's logocentric dominance over rhetoric, though, my analysis calls attention to the figures of Gorgias and Diogenes of Sinope, both of whom were successful rhetors in broader ways not attended to by the "knotty" logic of Plato/Schiappa, and both of whom made rhetoric about more than literate *logos*. They dis/engaged in multiple media, in multiple "active translators" of experience; theirs was a rhetoric of the medial metaphor, enriched by possibilities of oral poetry, written logic, and bodily performance (Davis & Vitanza, 132-6). In showing the limitations of proscriptive approaches to media theory (those of Ong, for instance), a more well-rounded cybernetic approach avoids the pitfalls of essentialism (material for Ong or ideological for Schiappa) on one hand, while at the same time not obviating material differences from the picture (as John Poulakos quite nearly does).

One could perhaps argue, in the wake of my oral/literate revisions of Gorgias, that, since both Sophistic and Platonic approaches to rhetoric demonstrate both literate and oral features, the oral/literate distinction is ultimately of limited value, as it serves to form no fully practical point of distinction. First, my hope is that I've pinpointed a middle-ground for the distinction to serve,

somewhere between determinism and mere academic posturing; it's not that the medium determines the message (as McLuhan is frequently misquoted as suggesting), but rather that the medium contours the message, nuances its shape, and creates possibilities for its emergence. Second, while I might concede that the oral/literate thesis is of limited usefulness in the Greek context, its ramifications take on a near-explosive significance when one considers the proliferation of media forms over the last 150 years. While it may not be horribly significant to argue that Gorgias demonstrated propensities associated with both media forms of his time, it's nothing short of vital for present-day theorists to somehow catch a model of rhetorical subjectivity that involves not just orality and alphabetic literacy, but also print literacy and photography and film and hypertextuality and (yes) videogames. In my next chapter, I'll move ahead to explore the video game as a medium, as a set of extensions all its own. In subsequent chapters, I'll hope to – with Vitanza, Ulmer, and Derrida helping point the way – play with "some more" ways in which those extensions may reshape, rebalance, and possibly invent subtle new dimensions in how we might not just observe, but think of, rhetoric's future histories.

NOTES

1 For the purposes of my conversation, I'll return again to the nebulous anti-definition offered in my Introduction. I tend to conceptualize rhetoric as more than merely an academic discipline (or sub-discipline), and as more than the art of public speaking or persuasion. These elements, read through certain postmodern and poststructural lenses, afforded by the likes of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Kenneth Burke (among others), can be usefully conflated. When discussing "rhetoric" then, I am referring more to a larger concept of meaning and its emergence through language. As languaged beings, "rhetoric" seems to name a broad area of concern over how we make (sense of) reality and communicate with one another. I suspect that, at times, the valences of what I want "rhetoric" to mean will shift; unless noted otherwise, though, please assume that I'm referring to this broader, more conceptual term.

2 While we may argue the potential problems that may emerge from a reduction of the body to so much sensation-processing equipment (McLuhan was in no position historically to consider, say, Deleuze & Guattari's "desiring-production" approach to body politics), I would use the sensorium to support the complexity of McLuhan's thinking, and its attempts to cultivate a cybernetic framework for approaching life in the technologized world.

3 Seeming to fall into a niche between McLuhan's extension metaphor and Hayles's hailing of posthumanist thought also stands the important contributions of Donna Haraway. Her oft-read and oft-discussed "Cyborg Manifesto" is a modern classic in the burgeoning media studies field, notable for rocketing the term "cyborg"

from quaint and science-fictional to being practically synonymous with a brand of materially inflected postmodern subjectivity. Like Hayles, Haraway claims exigence for her construction based on the emergence of literal cyborgs: the percentage of the population (Hayles ballparks it at 10% or so upon her writing in 2002) whose bodies are literally augmented through technology, whether we mean through artificial organs, limbs, or other machinic extensions such as corneal transplants, cardiac pacemakers, etc. Like McLuhan, as well, she forecasts/prescribes a variety of updates, hybrids, and dissolutions to/of traditionally held ontological and metaphysical categories: gender, species, technology, the Other. I've generally read Haraway and Hayles along similar vectors; if my work seems to priviledge "cybernetics" and "posthumanism," it's only to avoid doing violence to the more specific valences (particularly along gender lines) of Haraway's "cyborg."

4 Both a discipline, in that the term has a history and attendant historical weight, but a (non)discipline in that, as Victor J. Vitanza among others has argued, rhetoric suggests a more profound structure of instability in our very concept of language.

5 The use of the superscripts is another tactic I borrow from Vitanza, one that he uses to clarify various vectors for understanding a term – whether that term is being used in a sense that is negated (neg), "positive" (pos), both (pos/neg), or in the truly radical "nonpositive affirmative." See *Negation,* pg. 131 and elsewhere.

6 Plato, *Gorgias* (75-6, l.262): "... the art of speaking displayed by a man who has gone hunting after opinions (*doxa*) instead of learning the truth will be a pretty ridiculous sort of art, in fact no art at all."

Chapter Two:
Game Theory as a Composing-History of Rhetoric

My first chapter has set out to strike up an alliance between the traditions of media theory and rhetorical historiography, to craft a sense of how rhetoric functions cybernetically: that is, as an enterprise that extends languaged agency while simultaneously problematizing the notion of a stable, coherent agent. It follows, then, from this "technologization" of rhetorical history, that the introduction of any distinct medium may have the power to effect far-reaching changes in our construction of what is possible rhetorically. Just as the power of alphabetic writing prompted Aristotle to (unfairly, for the most part) remove the speaker's body from the rhetorical equation, the broadly construed realm of "New Media" have in our own time been read as part and parcel of a reassessement of the nature of knowledge[1], the constitution of the rhetorical agent[2], and the referentiality of text itself.[3] In this chapter, my goal is to narrow the focus of the "electronic media" conversation to one particular medium – videogaming – with the goal of establishing a methodology for discussing how to best phrase the material propensities of the medium in the light of theories of rhetoric. To do this, I'll first present a survey of various schools of thought in the young field of "game studies," linking where necessary to foundational works and theories in New Media studies. Methodological differences within the field will be discussed not simply as differences in how to approach videogames *per se*, but for how these differences manifest fundamental divergences in how videogames create rhetorical experience. Based on this survey, I will have completed the second half of my introductory gesture. While the first chapter

hazarded a “technologization of rhetoric,” bringing the unfamiliar discourse of cybernetics to a particularly loaded scene in rhetorical history, this chapter reverses course: presenting rhetoric as something of a strange and outside influence amid the young discourse of game studies. The “rhetoric of technologization” undergirding game studies will point the way to this project's ultimate goal: an application of the “theoretical and methodological braid between media studies and rhetorical studies” to the (rhetorical) study of videogames.

To date, few, if any, attempts have been made to practice rhetorically self-conscious game criticism. This is not to say that these writers are unaware of the rhetorical dimensions of their arguments, as many of them pull from the larger critical tradition to build their own methodologies. Ken McAllister, for instance, builds his “grammar of gameworks” on fundamental notions laid out by Adorno and the Frankfurt School, while prominent “ludologists” like Gonzalo Frasca and Espen Aarseth deal frequently in the terminology of social semiotics. This survey finds the field redolent in charged rhetorical imagery and terminology, in the wake of which a number of important conceptual differends emerge. Though by no means complete or exhaustive, in sketching out what I see as a number of the more prominent trends and figures in the field, these differends can be explored, not to resolve them in the pursuit of a “better” Grand Unified Theory of videogaming, but to fashion relays designed to point at the places where we have yet to explore. Through a consciously rhetorical engagement, we may come to understand what a rhetoric-under-the-influence-of-gaming might look like, and how it might behave. This process of (recon)figuration may illuminate the sorts of rhetoric we might be unsuspectingly reliant upon and how that rhetoric might be nuanced, how our literate-Aristoteliean extensions are necessarily being shifted, relocated, or amputated altogether. In a sense, each work in this interlocked network of game theorists attempts to pinpoint certain aspects of our received

rhetorical ecology – an "ecology" that I will broadly piece out using terms taken from some of the major schools of twentieth-century rhetorical theory. What will remain from there is to propose a method of my own, one (hopefully) designed to answer the call of my previous chapter: to begin to design what a rhetorical history under-the-influence-of-gaming will have looked like.

The "Narratological" School[4]: Games as Texts

In the first issue of the online journal *Game Studies*, founder Espen Aarseth declared 2001 "Year One" for "computer game studies." It's closer to the truth to acknowledge that videogames had been objects of scholarly (albeit limited) attention for many years prior. Often considered under the broad and often unusable rubric of "New Media" studies, particularly hypertextual studies, games largely entered the conversation in the humanities through an expected and comfortable vector: narrative. Games, whatever else they do, tend strongly to present a story of sorts to the gamer, and for that reason could be (and often were) positioned in the general context of hypertextual fiction. Janet Murray, working through a reading of the popular mid-90s adventure game *Myst*[5], declares in 1997's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* that "a game is a kind of abstract storytelling that resembles the world of common experience but compresses it in order to heighten interest" and that games are essentially a form of "symbolic drama" in which "we have a chance to enact our most basic relationship[s] to the world" (142-3). Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s in fact, this narrative/folklore approach to gaming enjoyed nearly uncontested sway; in the rare places gaming appeared in the academic conversation, it was always nearly in terms of the "symbolic dramas" being contested on screen.

One such prominent example is Sharon Sherman's analysis "The Perils of the Princess," which reads out of the story of *Super Mario Bros.* a re-enactment of basic cultural archetypes of male empowerment and female helplessness, to the detriment, she argues, of girls in the game's audience (255). While the forms of narrative interaction of course diverge wildly from the book-based narratives of the past, the rhetorical thrust of Murray's arguments here (reflected in Sherman's all-too typical reading), and those of a wider community considering the emergence of digital culture, emphasizes the delivery of narrative experience to the player.

This "narratological" school represents a particular set of possibilities nestled within game studies, one often regarded as at best supplementary or at worst contrary to the bulk of "serious" game scholarship. Though Aarseth's "Year One" proclamation might have the rhetorical effect of erasing the contributions of narrative-minded critics, in truth the purpose of his move is to enshrine game studies as a distinct field of study, one whose different object of study necessitates a different set of tools and approaches, centered on a definition of what makes the medium distinct: "Games, however, [are not] static labyrinths like hypertexts or literary fictions. The simulation aspect is crucial: it is a radically different alternative to narratives as a cognitive and communicative structure. Simulations are bottom up; they are complex systems based on logical rules." Finding in "complex systems based on logical rules" the material, grammatological difference that invest games with their unique power – that make them "games" rather than "interactive fiction" – Aarseth is often regarded as one of the founders of the "ludology" approach to game studies. A prominent ludologist, Markku Eskelinen, offers the following exemplary reading agains the "narrativist" approach. Despite a certain vitriol in his rhetoric, his dismissal of Janet Murray's reading of *Tetris* does, I believe, demonstrate the critical stakes involved in the tension between the two approaches:

> [Quoting Murray, *Tetris* is] "a perfect enactment of the over tasked lives of Americans in the 1990s – of the constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into our overcrowded schedules and clear off our desks in order to make room for the next onslaught" [Murray 143-4]. It would be equally far beside the point if someone interpreted chess as a perfect American game because there's a constant struggle between hierarchically organized white and black communities, genders are not equal, and there's no health care for the stricken pieces. Of course, there's one crucial difference: after this kind of analysis you'd have no intellectual future in the chess-playing community.
>
> Instead of studying the actual game Murray tries to interpret its supposed content, or better yet, project her favourite content on it; consequently we don't learn anything of the features that make *Tetris* a game. The explanation for this interpretative violence seems to be equally horrid: the determination to find or forge a story at any cost, as games can't be games because if they were, they apparently couldn't be studied at all. (par. 6)

Eskelinen correctly identifies the core problem at stake: narrative offers game studies a kind of legitimacy within academic departments, but at the cost of affording an exploration of what makes games medialogically distinct.

While many have claimed more recently that the debate between narratology and ludology has been "exaggerated," the binary constructed between the two has performed the useful service of helping to catch a set of rhetorical divergences that may have otherwise gone unexplored (Jones 4). Indeed, as leading ludologist Gonzalo Frasca notes, at no point does Janet

Murray specifically identify herself or her concerns as being based on “narrative”; and indeed, Frasca is hard pressed to see anyone in game studies – including Aarseth himself – who assumes the label of the opposing “ludologist” school (“Ludologists”). So, as artificial as these terms are, or as any binary is, I'll continue affirm them as sources of productive tensions within the emerging field. Frasca's defense/apology “Ludologists Love Stories, Too” nobly attempts to reverse the polemic flow of the conversation, in part by noting that the conversation has largely lacked “clear, specific definitions” of what counts as narrative. Marie-Laure Ryan addresses the broad-spectrum notion of narrative from both the standpoint of “diegesis” (narrative as on-screen content) and “dramatic” (narrative in a sense of the presentation of a story), ultimately rejecting both in favor of calling on an entirely new “phenomenological category tailor-made for games.” Whether or not, ultimately, a better definition can be settled upon, what matters is that the conversation hails game *content* as a first area of concern, and attempts to in some way sketch out the rhetorical situation of how rhetorical agents encounter games-as-text under-the-influence of the gaming environment.

In so doing, we may read the narrativist approach as an attempt to rhetorically construct games as informational objects, which is to say that while the presentation of a game might be variable, it is supposed in some way to hold an inherent meaning. The extreme construction of this view suggests an alignment with New Critical approaches to textual hermeneutics, one that marginalizes the active role of the player. (Murray's interpretation of *Tetris*, for example, depends much less on the game player's input than his/her interpretation of the visual pattern on the screen.) Following, however, in the light of the previous chapter's attempt to read rhetoric cybernetically, I'd argue instead that attempting to re/phrase any aspect of game criticism in terms of modes of textual interpretation (to build a “rhetoric of technologization” in those terms)

is doomed to fail from the outset, misplacing as such a move does the inherently active role of the user. Instead, I suggest framing narrativist, ludological, and other approaches to game studies in terms of how they approach the active production of meaning, that is, how they might be thinking of games as forms of rhetorical production, finding in accounts of twentieth-century surveys of rhetorical theory a set of useful analogues.

This assumption of "meaning" in videogames, though, is hardly anything as static as the term might suggest. Nothing in Murray's rhetoric suggests that the "meaning" of *Tetris* is in any way fixed or absolute. Instead, the meaning she finds there is particularly local, situated in a particular historical and cultural moment (in this case, the end of the Cold War). Murray's larger reliance on the tropes of hypertextuality and interactivity further suggest that whatever meaning we may assume is *in* the game does not reside there but is rather determined from without by the contingencies of the individual's encounter with the "multiformal plot." This tactic is echoed by popular game and digital culture scholar Henry Jenkins, who also reads "meaning" in games while recognizing that the form of the medium renders those meanings more contingently. Responding to critiques of the "narrative" approach, he calls for a broader approach to storytelling by focusing instead on evocative "game-spaces" (citing particularly American McGee's *Alice*, a playful fracturing of the *Alice* narrative) as part of what can helps some games craft what we might otherwise confuse with narrative pleasure. Eloquently, he states: "Stories are not empty content that can be ported from one media pipeline to another." Jenkins responds to Troy Dunniway's attempt to read the levels of an adventure game in terms of Joseph Campbell's formulation of the Hero's Journey monomyth by pointing out how, in a game, "the sequencing of actions may be quite loose" (125). Jenkins, though, doesn't oppose the use of that particular cultural metanarrative so much as he cautions that the medium will necessarily process it in its

own forms. In all, then, Jenkins wisely sidesteps the epistemic violence inherent in attempting to interpret games in the light of narrative by reversing the course of the conversation: through our encounter with games, a new kind of narrative will build itself (similar to Marie Laure-Ryan's call for a new "phenomenological category"). Making it clear that I'm not attempting to criticize Jenkins's approach per se, I still read out of this the same rhetorical move discussed earlier with Janet Murray: a rhetoric that places the construction of "meaning" as the chief avenue of rhetorical agency.

Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* offers one of the more insightful and widely read approaches to how meanings are re-mediated in electronic form. Particularly convicting is the encounter he engineers between (print) narrative and (electronic) database spaces, the latter being for Manovich the fundamental medialogical structure upon which the new media are built. Using film as a kind of interface metaphor, his book explores a range of New Media forms, including videogames, to develop a sense of how database forms create new possibilities for expression. While claiming (playfully) that they are "enemies of one another," Manovich re-reads what we traditionally think of as narrative in terms of databases: "The 'user' of a narrative is traversing a database, following links between its records as established by the database's creator" (227). The traditional narrative is, in this sense, merely a one-dimensional database, without the multiple criss-crossing "trajectories" that elevate a powerful electronic database (like those that power most games) to a navigable space in which the user can move in any direction whatsoever with the expectation that their non-trivial effort will bear non-trivial effects. In this sense, all (print) narratives are databases, but the inverse does not apply: "This 'technical' or 'material' change in the definition of narrative does not mean that an arbitrary sequence of database records is a narrative" (227). Videogames, then, rise to Manovich's notion

of "narrative" (even if it stops short of the largely imaginary dream of full "interactive narrative") by configuring a number of non-arbitrary elements: providing both an agent (player) and narrator (game) and a "series of connected events caused or experienced by actors."[6] Whereas a database is a "data structure," narratives (which for Manovich includes games) correspond to algorithms: just as the reader of a novel can abstract from the characters, settings, and plot a sort of thematic logic, so too do gamers understand their activity in terms of abstracting from the play process a logic of organization. In short, narrative and database is not a binary choice, though Manovich does elect to yoke videogames under the former term rather than the latter.

Elsewhere, dealing with videogaming more specifically, Manovich hedges his notion of narrative in terms more reflective of the influence (though diminished) of the database form: "Instead of narration and description, we may be better off thinking about games in terms of *narrative actions* and *exploration*." Manovich's reconfiguration of narrative experience is necessarily ergodic – "the player herself has to perform actions to move narrative forward" – though the nontrivial effort is phrased less as a process than as a route to a sort of narrative product. When confronted with a health potion, enemy, or new passageway, the player "immediately acts," thereby creating the narrative action that drives experience forward (247). Important here is Manovich's perhaps oversimplified notion of immediacy, one that implicitly reduces the cybernetic consitution of the gaming subject to a Pavlovian cycle of stimulus and response, devoid of any significance save those supplied by the atomistic meanings within the database. Regarding *Myst*, Manovich's rhetoric of immediacy subordinates the process of play to the production of textual effects, noting how "just as in traditional cinema" the navigation-structure of the game's visual *lexia* "slows down time to create suspense and tension" (312). A

great deal more time is spent exploring various regimes of computer-mediated space, though when his considerations drift toward videogames, "exploration" as a process is again subordinated to a content, this time of a more cultural-ideological nature: "American frontier mythology," with its themes of "exploring and 'culturing' unknown space" and its promotion of "systematic" tactics for "mapping" those spaces (272). In these distinctions, Manovich paints a picture of videogaming as an activity that effectively flattens out the space of the database, substituting for its possibilities and configurations either a sequence of linear meanings or immediate actions.

Still, through enshrining textual meaning as the central concern of the gaming process, I read the narrativist approach as an inverted version of current-traditional rhetoric.[7] Just as current-traditional rhetorics emphasized a "plain, unadorned style" while de-emphasizing the role of the writer's process of invention, both Murray's sample reading of *Tetris* and Manovich's "flattened" database approach demonstrate a critical tendency in game studies – one frequently repeated in the public media, especially regarding exposure to violent content – that de-emphasizes the role of the player in "inventing" responses to the "problems" portrayed onscreen. The gamer is presupposed to have brought "ideas and insights" to the scenario, so what remains in the process of gameplay is simply to act those ideas out, giving them a correct form, through which the underlying "meaning" of the game itself can be absorbed. The process of that agency goes unexplored. In current-traditionalism, the "correctness" of a writer's form is thought to reflect an existent, latent interpretive schema, based largely on Aristotelian notions of rhetoric, a framework that channels action towards the ends of expression (of Truth). In this case, the role of expression (to be contrasted with later rhetorical theories, which tend to approach "rhetoric as *doing* something"[8]) is shared between user and machine; the machine is thought to express

meaning, while the player's expression is limited to the (one would assume subconscious and automatic) application of interpretive schema. Gameplay is, in that sense, the standardized form, applied from without, through which the meaning of the game finds expression. In both current-traditionalism and narrativism, the existence of "meaning" within the object of the discourse forms a central underlying assumption. Furthermore, while the hypertextually inflected rhetorics of Murray and Jenkins afford the subject-agent much greater sway in constructing and interpreting narratives, this rhetoric, like current-traditionalism, also assumes an integral, self-motivated subject, while simultaneously (as Eskelinen suggests) granting literature studies a kind of hegemony over the conversation.

Yet, as Jones and Frasca have demonstrated, the terms "narrativist" and "ludological" themselves cannot be assumed to do much work, or for very long. Just as current-traditional rhetorics exist in the modern rhetorical conversation as a set of possibilities (debased and flawed, but possibilities nonetheless), so too does the broadly construed narrative approach offer a set of possibilities and problematics within a wider ecology of ideas. Through it may be tempting to read the evolution from current-traditional to expressivist or social-constructivist rhetorics as a "progress" out of a debased state, the Sophistic framework adopted in the previous chapter urges me to think of the former as merely a set of possibilities (*kairos*) alongside others. Drawing a line between current-traditionalism and the rhetorical framework in which the narrative approach operates is an attempt (*un essai*, as Montaigne might have it) to invent a rhetoric around the *process* of gaming, a rhetoric that must necessarily create different effects and textures than a rhetoric of *text*. This project approaches the ongoing process of invention as a conceptual *bricolage*: we may have noticed here how the narrative approach illuminates some aspects of the cybernetic-gaming process (its textual elements) at the expense of others (the active engagement

of the player), yet that lack does not invalidate the approach so much as creates a field for further discussion. By continuing to survey contributions to game studies in the light of rhetorical theories, we may continue to populate our understanding with moments of both awareness and lack, the sum total of which will not magically create a full understanding *ex nihilo*, but may perhaps point the way to where existing attempts to theorize gaming have not yet taken us.

The "Ludological" School: Games as Action

To Diane Carr, while videogame studies may (and should) draw from disciplines like cinema, psychology, and programming to develop and sustain a multidisciplinary approach to a varied topic, " all these perspectives quickly boil down to a "tension between textual analysis ... and audience-based research" (12). The term "narrative," deployed broadly, ultimately catches a useful rhetorical concern: the capacity of videogames to contain, construct, or afford the construction of textual "meaning," in ways partially analogous to current-traditional theories of rhetoric, particularly that theory's constructions of agent and agency. The more ascendant and dominant school of thought in videogame studies, ludology, is less a "school of thought" than a differing rhetoric for approaching games, one whose foundational considerations have found wider purchase with the community. Instead of interpreting textual meanings, the ludological approach attempts to look at games *procedurally*, as systems of exchanges and relations among users and machines. A ludological reading might begin by responding to Carr's characterization of "audience-based research"; in its very language ("audience") most attempts at game studies get off on the wrong foot by misidentifying the nature of the player as being somehow passive to the process of the game, rather than participating in an active role. Still, in discussing some

various configurations of ludological approaches to gaming in the light of twentieth-century rhetorics, we may locate a set of possibilities combined with a set of rhetorical blindspots.

As its title suggests, Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext* pursues an understanding of textuality in general, ranging from electronic hypertexts to more traditional print works (and, yes, to games), through an approach that mirrors that of cybernetics: the notion of balancing agency with the demands of the machine. Famously dismissing the notion of "interactivity" as vague and meaningless, Aarseth rephrases "action" as a matter of what he calls the traversal function, the process by which some sort of text (a "scripton") is made manifest from a database of available elements (or "textons") (48). "Meaning" and "significance" are replaced in Aarseth's rhetoric with concerns over activity and process. Aarseth identifies seven particular variables in the traversal function, the combinations of which may produce 576 different "media positions" in which any cybertext from *Super Mario Bros* to the *I Ching* may be situated (65). Aarseth's rhetorical goal is "to determine the exact significance of the materiality of the medium," to account via an extensive typology for how any given medium medium offers a distinct set of possible traversals. Combining this typology with more general considerations of the structure of gaming (the tradition most frequently invoked through reference to Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois), ludologists attempt to consider the precise materialities of videogaming as a question of the processes they afford. As a species of Katherine Hayles's call for "media-specific analysis," ludologists tend to center on the traversal function as the source of gaming's "specific" impact.[9]

For Gonzalo Frasca, a game is first and foremost a structure of rules, and the purpose of ludology is to understand how rules simulate existing social systems. Unlike the social/narrative approach of Henry Jenkins discussed earlier, though, Frasca's semiotic scene is less concerned

with the replication of social meanings than with creating a platform for play. A game's medialogical distinctness rests in this, that a game is a structure of rules that afford opportunities for play. By virtue of its foundations, resting on the mechanical and algorithmic construction of the computer, a game must necessarily create the kind of gaming referred to by Caillois as *paidia*, not *ludus*; while the latter refers to a state of free-form, rule-less construction, the former refers to most structured games, like poker or Monopoly. The significance of the ludological perspective is that, by approaching a game through its rule-structure (for poker, say, the structure of betting), we find not the "meaning" of the game, but the structures within which players can negotiate "possiblilities" of their own (231).

In Frasca's reliance on social semiotics, we can catch a rhetorical drift away from the charge frequently levelled at Espen Aarseth – that his typology risks reproducing a stale formalism.[10] In the latter's exploration and de-term-ination of the "traversal function," we most definitely have a rhetorical move away from the "narrative" school's search for meaning in game textuality, replaced instead by an attentiveness to the larger, systemic process of rhetorical interaction itself. Frasca: "Narrative may excel at taking snapshots at particular events but simulation provides us with a rhetorical tool for understanding the big picture" (228). While Aarseth is frustratingly elusive at times when it comes to defining "the big picture," Frasca's contributions to ludology propose to study the structure of a simulation (the structure of its rules) to get at a sense of how each game systematizes a set of ideological meanings, which we experience not through the "meaning" of the images and texts displayed, but through the traversals afforded by the game's structure. In that sense, by positioning the game-player as an agent within a system that preceeds him/her, and by seeking through analysis to understand the structure of that system, ludology demonstrates certain structural fidelities with twentieth century

"cognitive rhetorics," which sought to understand rhetorical interactions (in writing) as matters of interplay among the rhetor's "system" of cognitive faculties (Moran and Ballif, xvi). Like ludology, cognitive rhetorics propose a "general theory" designed to take as a conceptual starting place the "structure" of the system: for cognitive rhetorics, the human mind, and for ludologists, the game-system. By the *fait accompli* of cybernetics, we may in this sense read ludology and cognitive rhetorics as part and parcel of one another, the former simply redistributing agency away from the formerly integral subject and into the apparatus to which the subject is attached. To the extent that ludology invests agency in the machine, the game is assumed to afford certain processes to the user; to the extent that the user retains agency, he/she initiates the "recursive interactions" among those functions (xvi).

Systemic "modelling" forms the key rhetorical component in both ludology and cognitive rhetorics. Both approach rhetoric as a matter of process, to the detriment of other factors, most notably the role of "social context" (xvi). While Frasca's "Simulation versus Narrative" essay forms part of his attempt to rescue ludology from a kind of techno-solipcism through linking the possibilities of simulative systems to the tradition of socially conscious theater (Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed), his rhetoric nonetheless invests power in the individual game-player, who is through to enter into the simulation (often citing games like *SimCity* as examples) as a kind of blank-slate, whose capacity to comprehend the traversals available in the system has not been already influenced (much less determined) by social context. Instead, Frasca argues, the free and independent exploration of the modelled/simulated system by the player *produces* social insight as a result, given some tweaks to content. Ian Bogost's notion of "procedural rhetoric" also gestures towards the social while still relying on this "cognitive" framework. Dividing the realm of the game from the active role of the player, Bogost argues that "video games make

argument with *processes*" ("Rhetoric," 125, author's emphasis). Games model the system, and the player is, in Bogost's rhetoric, expected to, through the process of playing, emerge from the game into the wider social arena with a renewed sense of "how things work." The social, then, is incorporated at the expense of an ultimately false binary between game and player. At its core, both Bogost and Frasca risk overdetermining the ludological aspects of the game – indeed, the very material construction of games – in an attempt to re-invest the subject with a modicum of enlightenment. If twentieth century cognitive rhetorics took flack for regarding their models of writers' processes as anything other than a "mere trace... an abstraction," then we may, from our own Sophistic vantage point, regard ludology as in some senses cutting off a set of possibilities – not only the subjective possibilities of pleasure and play, but more pressingly (in this case) the possibilities that gamers may find their own ways to resist the models which they are given, or riff on those models in their own ways – that the social will indeed find its way to leak into the cybernetic circuit, but on the side of the player, not the game.

The "Learning" School: Games as Culture

In hailing cognitive rhetoric as an area of consideration, this discussion risks dovetailing ludology as a species (I've argued) of that rhetoric with the pursuits of cognitive science, as applied to game studies. The latter has found a place in game studies, frequently in attempts to define the kinds of subjective experiences produced by gaming interactions. References to cognitive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's concept of "flow" are legion in game studies, as are attempts to address states of learning and immersion in games through similar scientific schema. Alison McMahan adapts perceptual psychology in an effort to define "immersion"

states in games, while James Paul Gee's oft-cited contributions towards legitimizing videogames in academia come through his own training as a educational psychologist. With reliance on cognitive science (or any "science," really) comes a familiar set of rhetorical blindspots – most notably the postivistic assumption that behavior can be known and predicted, in much the same way that cognitive rhetorics may have attempted too strongly to "model" rhetorical interaction, and to regard the solitary subject as a closed system. Still, for the purposes of my discussion, I'd like to disentangle these terms. While the methods of cognitive science may tend to recapitulate the problematics cited above, my "game" in this chapter is less to (re)label ludology as "cognitive rhetoric" than it is to point out how ludological approaches to game theory bring to the understanding of the gaming process what these rhetorics brought to the understanding of discourse/document production. In the transfer between literacy-production and cybernetic process, ludology and cognitive rhetorics hail similar possibilities and problematics. While cognitive psychology might lead towards cognitive rhetorics in the context of literacy-production, we may note in gaming criticism how the same tactics might be bent towards different ends, considering the material differences between the two.

In the particular case of James Paul Gee, psychology forms a crucial pillar of his method, though his application of that method foments an altogether different account of the rhetorical process of videogaming. Citing Wittgenstein's notion of the impossibility of "private languages," Gee situates his account of videogaming rhetoric in the context of the "different social world[s]," in which "any specific way of reading and thinking is, in fact, a way of being in the world, a way of being a 'certain kind of person'" (6-7). What videogames appear to provide is a set of discrete "semiotic domains," which transforms the question of videogame content into a broader set of "lived and historically changing social practices" in which "content" (whatever it

may be) is "generated, debated, and transformed via distinctive ways of thinking, talking, valuing, acting, and, often, writing and reading" (22). To understand the configuration of each domain is to understand the kinds of learning that take place therein, how players learn from the game itself how to position certain semiotic elements in certain given situations (32). On this foundation, Gee discusses 36 different "principles of active learning," through the discussion and enumeration of which he both defends videogaming as a constructive activity and establishes a place for the medium in the context of educational psychology, yet all this is supported on a rhetorical foundation far exceeding the process model imbricated here.

If narrative approaches to gaming reproduce the forms of current-traditional rhetoric (their emphases on the static nature of textual form), and if ludological approaches reproduce the forms of cognitive rhetorics (through their emphases on subjective process), then my discussion would locate a third rhetorical focus in much of the academic conversation surrounding game studies. As my brief reference to social-constructivist rhetorics may suggest, a third major movement in game studies seeks to interrogate the broader social scene surrounding gaming, to locate in the machinations of popular culture sites of both determination and struggle in the gaming process. *Conversation*, perhaps, best names the discursive mode implied by these attempts to account for gaming processes. Where the narrativists look toward the *unveiling* of content through the process, and ludologists posit *arrangement* of traversals as the key rhetorical mode, this group of scholars seems to read gaming from the outside in, to read the process of gaming as constructed in conversation with broader ideas about culture, economy, and notions of self. While Gee's rhetoric sometimes allies him with the cognitive-ludological set, his larger project focuses on principles of social learning which are engaged through gaming. He works through popular games in a variety of genres (including strategy game *Age of Empires* and

shooter game *Deus Ex*), deftly demonstrating in all cases how both games and social learning engage one another in an ongoing conversational process. Games are not merely tools to advance social learning, nor is social learning merely a schema for analyzing the experience of the game. This is reflected in the very rhetorical arrangements of Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Literacy and Learning*, which weaves its 36 principles of active learning among its various body chapters, each devoted to considerations of how gaming engages in larger processes of identity formation (chapter 3), discourse conventions (chapter 5), and cultural models (chapter 6). Even the title of its first chapter, "36 Ways to Learn a Video Game" makes a distinct rhetorical stand: "learning" suggests more than either experience or analysis, but rather a transactional process, one that assumes that the result of gameplay is transferrable to domains outside the gaming process itself. In this crucial distinction, we may catch a rhetorical drift away from the possible de-term-inations of both the narrative and ludological frames, into yet-more possibilities for what we might say about games and gaming.

Despite its position here, the attempt to account for gaming via the social represents, in fact, the oldest and most common approach to gaming in both the popular and academic presses. These have most commonly taken the form of invectives against the violent content of videogames, and the causal relationships that can be argued between the "learning" of videogame violence and the production of real world behavior. One extensive overview of this conversation can be found in Craig A. Anderson's 2003 article "Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions," which summarizes much of the extant findings in behavioral psychology and draws a distinct linkage between gaming and aggression. The conversation can trace a certain pseudo-intellectual line of heritage back to 1999, in the aftermath of the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, when the mass media was quick to draw

associations between the killers' actions and their tastes in music and videogames.[11] While Gee evinces none of this cultural alarmism (indeed, early in his book, he invites violent games into the conversation, on the principle that they are no less learning vehicles for all their problematic content), he does share a central rhetorical strategy with Anderson, accounting for gameplay (its processes, possibilities, meanings, influences on gamers – everything that we might say makes a game "rhetorical") by attempting to characterize it in the social and institutional terms.

Another popular version of this "drift" towards the social is the tendency in composition studies to consider videogames in terms of "literacy." This concern is especially well-delineated in Rhetoric & Composition studies, as part of an intellectual tradition stretching back at least as far as Richard Lanham's 1993 *The Electronic Word*, a crucial early document in opening up computer-based discourse to the normally print-centric composition community. Its first chapter, subtitled "Literary Study and the Digital Revolution," establishes by name alone the notion of exploring the possibilities of electronic communication as a variation on "literacy"; further chapters go on to discuss intersections between computer-based writing and such classical rhetorical concerns as the "virtuous" speaker ("The Q Question"). Gail Hawisher & Cynthia Selfe's edited collection *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* follows in this tradition. In a simultaneously liberating and frustrating fashion, Hawisher & Selfe's introduction does not produce any particular definition of the "literacies" they hope to investigate, invoking (or implying, perhaps) a broader set of skills and awarenesses. "Literacy" most frequently invokes the concept of "critical literacy," a meta-awareness that identities, communities, and ideologies are discursively constructed. What we do know is that "literacy" and "gaming" are not equivalent: one mission of the collection is to explore "the ways in which literacy practices and values intersect with gaming practices, values, and environments" (1). The characterization of

gaming as an "environment" is striking here (and is echoed elsewhere in Hawisher & Selfe's introduction), as it provides a distinct third alternative to the process/product binary associated with the narrativist/ludological debates. Gaming is not a literacy in itself, but rather a kind of hazily defined discursive field wherein various literacies collide and reconfigure.

Without hoping to speak universally for all participants in the collection, I think it fair to say that *Gaming Lives* on the whole speaks to how gaming-subjects and game-texts are rhetorically co-constructed. Contributors investigate how gamers construct themselves around gaming – gaming here becomes less a process than an institutional setting in which we can look at "literacy" whatsoever. The third chapter[12] offers case-studies of how gamers in other cultures receive and interpret games largely produced and published in the US. The authors deftly define the range of influences that constitute gameplay, integrating Gee's notion of games "semiotic domains" with an awareness of "design grammars": the game's "internal" procedural construction and the "external" social dimensions of play, which combine to form the sum architecture of the domain (53). However, the authors do not stop with Gee's account. Instead, they push ahead to reconstruct the "critical literacy" of game-based learning by accounting for geopolitical differences; game-literacy finds itself redefined as a matter of reading one's self in terms of one's geopolitical situation, in contexts of globalization and multinational capitalism. Gaming, then, becomes the field in which literacies of culture and self are established and negotiated. Literacy is invoked in its more classical sense in the fourth chapter, "Gaming, Identity, and Literacy,"[13] by focusing on a rarified sub-set of games and gamers: text-based adventure games, long since marginalized in cultural importance by the sophistication of video technologies.[14] Insofar as those games involve reading and writing (both in terms of gameplay and in terms of the development of web communities around the games), gaming can be tidily

contained as (literally) an act of literate engagement. The preservation of the "field" approach works, but at the expense of (most) gaming's medial distinctiveness. Continuing this theme, Debra Journet's "Narrative, Action, and Learning: The Stories of *Myst*" takes a distinctly narratological approach; her purpose eschews hermenutic exercise in favor of a discussion of "transformational" identities that are shaped by game play, and which can be harnessed for active literacy and learning (111). Again, as in the prior example, the methodologies of print narrative analysis enjoy powerful sway. More importantly, in all three of these samples (by no means exhaustive of the excellent work in the collection), the notion of gaming as a sort of field for literacy is continually reaffirmed. For Hawisher & Selfe, ultimately, gaming lives are not just enmeshed in Huizinga's "magic circle" of play[15], nor are they entirely determined by received literacy practices. Instead, the gaming-circuit interconnects with other rhetorical sites; gameplay is not merely interpretive, but is in fact *productive* of meaning, however tightly those meanings may be circumscribed.

Ken McAllister's *Game Work* offers another widely read variation on the "outside-in" binary, this time through focusing on the larger cultural-entertainment complex in which gaming is produced. Working out of a Marxist/Frankfurt School approach, he argues that computer games "stand at a point in the dialectic where a variety of forces may be manipulated such that dominance over competitors, technologies, players, concerned citizens, and/or the media can be a result" (67). McAllister addresses these "manipulations" through a conscious deployment of rhetorical terminology – Barry Brummett's subdivisions of rhetorical acts into exigent, quotidian, and implicative functions[16] – though throughout his work, he is far more likely to cite "dialectic," and the creation of dialectical meaning/truth, as the chief area of concern. Rhetoric merely serves the mean to the dialectical end: "games are comprised of rhetorical events that work to

make meanings in players" (31). Unlike the narrative school, which locates these meanings in the transaction between the gamer and the game-text, McAllister's analysis consults a wider range of sites from which these meanings are imported: game design, gaming journalism, and communities, each of which inflects the "meaning" of the game – its ultimate, socially determined "truth."

In Gee, Hawisher & Selfe, and McAllister, then, I read a third rhetorical approach to game theory that carefully avoids the excesses and de-term-inations of both the narrative/current-traditional and ludological/cognitive approaches. Through differing in both subject matter and methodology, all three (con)figure the social dimension in which the "meaning" of gaming flows in from without – through institutional configurations, literacy practices, and interpersonal reinforcement. We have, then, a cybernetic reconfiguration of "social-constructivist" rhetoric, wherein the formerly undisturbed circuit of game/player is bombarded at all points by outside influences that bend and shape the flows of meaning. The purpose of this "bombardment," though, is not nearly as destructive as my choice of words may suggest; on the contrary, the chiefest feature of social-constructivist rhetoric is that it "conceives of rhetoric as *doing* something, specifically constructing and modifying reality and social conditions and relations" (Moran & Ballif, xx). In Gee's case, the processes that constitute the game create active learning. For Hawisher & Selfe, gaming is significant because it spurs other forms of literacy practice. Gaming's "meaning," then, is derived from culture and reinserted back into it. Taking his cue from Theodor Adorno, McAllister suggests that the role of the scholar in this process is to become involved in these various spheres of discourse, thus influencing their dialectical productions.[17] What is taken for granted in this rhetoric is the absoluteness of that "production,"

of a continuous flow of discourse among sites, and the notion that the proceeds of that flow form new "truths" and insights that can be re-inserted back into that flow.

Social-constructivism, in a sense, offers an ecological theory of discourse, with rhetoric serving as the agent of change within that ecology. James Berlin argues that "truth emerges only as the three – the material, the social, and the personal – interact" (qtd. in Moran & Ballif, xxi). For Gee, the "truth" of gaming rests in the way in which individuals "learn" from the material structure of the game, and how those principles of active learning can be meaningfully pursued in other social dimensions (in education). For Hawisher & Selfe, the "truth" of gaming proceeds from how social literacy practices are generated as personal responses to the "material" of gaming. Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witherford, and Paul de Peuter offer quite nearly a replay of Berlin's trio through their titular focus on technology (material), culture (personal), and marketing (social) and the interlocking and mutually informing relations between the three. Though they argue that the "degree of control over the flow of information" enjoyed by the player is constrained by "the processes of game design, technological innovation, and product marketing," their underlying rhetorical imperative is less the *constraint* of meaning-production than it is (as for McAllister) the process of rendering that production contingent upon the interactions of all the forces in play (294-5). Unfortunately, this "contingency" reading brushes up against the unfortunate tendency of all of these critics to accord the bulk of the rhetorical power to the social dimensions, to the forces outside the gameplay circuit itself. Hawisher & Selfe, notably, spend little time in *Gaming Lives* addressing the process of gaming itself, foreclosing on its medialogical distinctness in favor of tracking the flows of literacies and ideologies into and out of the circuit. McAllister admits up front that the process of gaming itself is of far less concern than the wider "grammar of gameworks" he hopes to construct around the

ecology of that process. Theorists of game studies working within this paradigm thus risk misplacing the individual gamer by painting him/her as a kind of *tabula rasa* de-term-ined by social ideologies leaked into the process of play. (The magic, ultimately, ends up leaking out of Huizinga's "magic circle.") To the extent that the gamer is afforded the capacity to construct meaning, those meanings are either re-inserted into a pre-existing ideological ecology (determined by the "constraints" mentioned by Kline, et al.) or take place in manners fundamentally extrinsic to the gaming medium itself.[18]

The Other School: Gaming as Meaningful Play

In social-constructivism, the "truth" of rhetorical production is delayed, but never permanently deferred, routed instead through considerations of the larger social-cultural environment. An utterance takes on truth not as a result of its own implicit merits, but because of its position in the greater "conversation of mankind." Rendered as an approach to game studies (as part of the "rhetoric of technologization"), social-constructivism delays the "truth" (the meaning, the effect) of gameplay, placing it first in conversation with social, cultural, and institutional forces. When the "truth" does arrive, then, it has by virtue of its journey been rendered (disciplined, we might say) into accepted disciplinary forms (learning, literacy, etc.). What remains for this conversation is to consider a handful of other game studies theorists who have adopted approaches disruptive to that disciplinary conversation, those who have sought ways to approach possibilities outside of that conversation.

My motivation for seeking out such theories, and categorizing them in this light, is provided by Greg Ulmer's approach to "apparatus theory." In an effort to avoid the stark,

deterministically tinged rhetoric of Marshall McLuhan, Ulmer adopts a wider perspective on the relationships between media, language, institutionality, and subject formation. An "apparatus" is less a de-term-ination provided by a particular material medium than it is a mutually reinforcing set of relationships. As Ulmer has it, the "literate" apparatus of alphabetical print, solitary embodied subjectivity, and academic schooling expresses the medialogical propensities of the alphabetic medium[19], and creates its own conceptual, methodical, and ideological structures to maintain itself. Ulmer cites the invention of Platonic, dialectical "method" (as interpreted by Eric Havelock) as the glue that binds this apparatus together, one side effect of which, as my last chapter argued, was the subjugation of rhetoric (then understood primarily as an art of oral discourse) to a secondary role in the understanding of how language works in the world. Despite the rehabilitation of "rhetoric" in the last few centuries, the literate apparatus is still very much with us. Ulmer's *Internet Invention* points the way to a new apparatus formation, "electracy," based on the regime of the electronic image; proposing its own methods ("heuretic" invention), materials (found images), and practices ("mystory"), electracy furnishes us with a set of *possibilities* that are unaccounted for in the literate apparatus. Similarly, with every new medium, we may find unique possibilities and "media metaphors" for translating and rendering our experience in different ways. Through rare, I argue that some game critics are attempting to locate and respond to these sites of possibility in ways that attempt to work outside the received strictures of the literate apparatus.

Through varied and far-ranging in its approach (more so than my summary here has done justice), Ken McAllister's *Game Work* has the effect of ultimately inscribing gameplay in terms native to the literate apparatus, and therefore circumscribing many of its possibilities. This inscription is fundamentally rooted in McAllister's methodology, based as it is in a concern over

"dialectic." Now, for McAllister, "dialectic" is hardly the "one-two," back-and-forth structure that the term sometimes implies for rhetoricians, who more often associate the term with the anti-rhetorical, "truth"-seeking dialogues of Socrates/Plato. Dialectic is for McAllister the sum total of ideas, imagined almost as a massive bumper-car ride in which any ideas whatsoever may encounter one another, collide, impart energy to one another, and zip off to the next "encounter" – an idea much more in tune structurally with the Burke's "conversation of mankind." McAllister renders "rhetoric" at the level of collision (to push the silly metaphor), as a system of acts wherein ideas enter into conversation and debate with one another. Gaming *is* rhetorical, insofar as every act of gaming represents a specific collision and configuration of ideas garnered from advertising, journalism, and the game developers themselves – all forces with the power to structure the possibilities for what gaming can "mean" to us. But in doing so, we have to assume that the "meanings" of advertising, journalism and development are more solid or more absolute; the local meaning is contingent on outside meanings, which we have to pretend (at least for the time being) are less contingent. To give the critic agency, McAllister has to lock the meaning down somewhere. Even if the meanings of advertising and the discourse conventions of game journalism are contingent, they are at least bounded – the bumper cars don't leave their designated play area. If we apply Ulmer's take on apparatus theory, it becomes clearer that what McAllister attempts is in keeping with the forms and institutional structures, not of gaming-electracy, but of text-literacy. If, as I've argued, gaming provides its own metaphors, its own possibilities and formations, then how can we try to discuss them?

While McAllister's "grammar of gameworks" offers a way of bridging gaps among distinct discursive spheres, Mckenzie Wark's *Gamer Theory* starts out by obliterating and fluidifying such distinctions altogether. Playfully, he sets out to problematize any easy

distinctions between the gamer and the game s/he plays, between the space of the game and the "real world," instead rephrasing the question of gaming by throwing out the distinction of "reality" altogether: "Whether gamespace is more real or not than some other world is not the question; that even in its unreality it may have real effects on other worlds *is*" (020).[20] Rather than phrase these "effects" in grammatical or discursive terms, Wark proposes a neologistic construction of his own to encapsulate the "unreality" that games put forcefully into play. His term "allegorithm" catches a double-relation between sign systems (which he assumes to be irreducibly unstable) and number systems, the mathematics that drives the computer: "Allegory is about the relation of sign to sign; allegorithm is about the relation of sign to number" (041). I'll return to the "allegorithm" figure in a moment; for now, it's urgent to point out how here, perhaps more than anywhere else, Wark's rhetorical configuration shows. Following in the wake of poststructural theories of language (those of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan), postmodern rhetorics propose a re-evaluation and problematization of "traditional notions of the rhetor, of the text, and of the rhetorical situation" (Moran and Ballif, xxiii). In this case, Wark does so by fluidifying the boundaries between these three concepts, by insisting on a real world that is irreducibly "fractured" (029) on some level, and by challenging the primacy of the speaking/gaming subject in the rhetorical equation.[21]

The cumulative effect of these moves is twofold. First, it renders the hypothetical subject not as a pre-existing unit who exhibits certain processes and behaviors when exposed to gaming, but rather suggests that the subject is always-already "under the influence" (to paraphrase Diane Davis), constructed *by* language (*by* gaming), instead of vice versa. Secondly, as if further disregarding the Platonic theory of form, Wark conceives not only a destabilized subject, but also a destabilized text, one in which material and message collide and collapse. For instance, in

reading *The Sims*, he deploys his "allegorithm" figure to read the very real economies of work and production that the game purports to model (render algorithmic) by just-linking (Lyotard) out to the real economy that fuels the machine itself – the labor of programmers[22] and in the trade of processor materials from African nations ravaged by war and the environmental costs of mining (047-8). "'There is no realm of the pure digit which does not betray the hand marked with muck and blood somewhere.' And yet the whole point of a game is its separation, the line dividing it from gamespace and enclosing it in a self-contained algorithmic world of its own" (048). These linkages are less about using a game to build a campaign of social awareness than encouraging an understanding where text, subject, and world are not held in separate Platonic spheres, but are always influencing one another. Narrative approaches to games assume some production of meanings to be interpreted by the agent; ludology assumes a stable social context in which a subjective process can have meaning. Social-constructivism assumes the contingency of textual meaning, maybe, but holds onto an integral subject at the center capable of sorting through the various meanings, earning it a charge of "crypto-foundationalism" from postmoden rhetorician Victor J. Vitanza (274). Wark's approach, instead, discovers other possibilities by destabilizing the positions of subject and text, working through the "allegorithms" provided in certain games to build not a theory about games, but a gamer theory, one that playfully takes the "center" deemed impossible in poststructural thinking and relocates it to the game, instead of to the subject, the "text," or social convention.

Wark's free play of technique finds a usefully instructive concretization in his adoption/inversion of one of the classical tropes of critical theory: Plato's Cave. In the original version, humankind lives chained down inside a cave, seeing only a play of shadows on the wall, reflective of a more "true" reality outside that cave, a world of purer forms that the Enlightened

individual can find through a rigorous dialectical examination of his/her circumstances. Evincing Lyotard's "incredulity toward metanarratives" at this prospect, Wark repurposes the Cave for the ends of his own project: "Gamer theory starts with a suspension of the assumptions of The Cave: that there is a more real world beyond it, somewhere, and that someone – some priest or professor – knows where it is. The gamer arrives at the beginnings of a reflective life, a gamer theory, by stepping out of The Cave – and returning to it" (019). In reconfiguring the classical critical apparatus, Wark's rhetoric upends the assumption of Otherness in our objects of study; to borrow a phrase from Moran and Ballif's summary of postmodern rhetorics, he reads the gamer as an "effect of language," or, more accurately, of "gamespace." The spectre of the real world haunts Wark's analyses through a sustained attention to the "military entertainment complex" whose influence (echoing Fredric Jameson here) fragmented reality. That fragmentation, though, is not a scene of loss that can somehow be repaired through the construction of newer, better "truths." Rather, Wark approaches gaming through Benjamin's use of "allegory": "In the allegorical mode, says Walter Benjamin: 'Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive but just verdict can be passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance'" (029). The function of allegory is that it fragments the already fragmented assembly of modern life, revealing the means by which the bourgeois order is made. Still: "And yet this possibility too seems exhausted. The fragmenting of the fragmented seems routine to a Sim. No other world seems possible" (029). In this, Wark plays against the idea of total reasoned enlightenment while still holding open the necessity of "playing" (with) games, reading their always-multiple allegorical (and "allegorithmic") possibilities without regard for the binary approaches that have characterized most of the approaches to this point.

Beginning his book *The Meaning of Video Games* with a brief discussion of how the narrative/ludological debate was "exaggerated," Steven E. Jones offers his own idiosyncratic arrangement of methods and texts in his pursuit of "meaning" (4). While each side lends itself to unproductive caricature, both succeed in locating "what was *special* about games as a form before generalizing about their cultural significance as if they were a more violent form of TV" (5, emphasis added). Jones's contribution to the conversation is less that he develops a meaning for determining what that "specialness" is, and more that he attempts to position as many aspects as possible against one another. Citing the "punk" *êthos* of the bizarre Japanese import *Katamari Damacy*, Jones's rhetoric demonstrates resistance to the narrative/ludological divide, reading its gameplay instead as a kind of self-conscious parody of play itself, play deliberately emptied out of any grander significance (53-4). Simultaneously, though, Jones also plays in the gaps left by the cognitivist/expressivist leanings of ludology, contextualizing the process of its gameplay (and the awareness of "scale and proportion" that results) in the light of "collector culture" in the US and Japan.[23] Jones considers his approach preferable to the "military-entertainment complex" readings of Mckenzie Wark, which tends like much of critical theory "to undermine the agency of fans and players (as well as artists and game designers)" (54). Though making no particular moves to reinstate the kind of integral, self-aware agency that I've argued undergirds the ludological approach, his approach through cultural linking suggests a more dispersed approach to the assumptions of agency noted elsewhere. His "just-linking" between *Katamari Damacy* and eBay may simply be an attempt to trace the convergence of a particular cultural logic (in this case, "collecting") without acknowledging the role of the individual *per se*, but we may similarly read the subject's agency being caught up in the middle, as being produced by these overlapping discursive fields – a strangely postmodern move for someone who speaks

of critical theory's sometimes “condescension” (53). What Jones offers instead is a meaningful step beyond the loss of agency implicit in both the narrative school and Wark's attempts at radical analysis, one that posits the player as a *flaneur*-like figure, who through the process of gameplay “wanders” through other extant cultural sites. If there is “meaning” in the game, it does not lie there implicitly beneath the surfaces of either its text or its pattern of traversals, rather Jones's latent rhetoric presents a postmodern take on the subject, the text, and on institutionality – a rhetoric of just-linking between sites in and out of the game.

In some respects, Jones's approach to the *flanuer*-like subject allows for an interestingly fluid motion, one where gaming accretes significance through touching upon any site whatsoever – narrative, ludic, or cultural. Despite this fluidity, and Jones's attempts to recoup some agency for the gamer, the passage of that significance is still fairly one-dimensional. Various meanings leak into the game/player circuit from various obtuse angles, but the play of signification ends with the gamer. The gamer's experience doesn't put anything back out into the system. The play ends with play. Often discussed in Rhetoric & Composition circles, and more complex than a brief discussion can hope to do justice, Ian Bogost's *Persuasive Games* attempts to complete the move, stretching beyond the narrative/ludic binary to look at gaming as a form of meaning-production, in ways that are simultaneously innovative and frustratingly bootstrapped to problematic rhetorical regimes.

Bogost's methodology proposes an anti-Platonic collapse of content and form/process, necessitated by the material form of the algorithm. However, where a media theorist like McLuhan might simply wish to explore the ontology of that collapse, Bogost insists that the collapse is best explored *rhetorically*: “Videogames do not just offer situated meaning and embodied experiences of real and imagined worlds and relationships; they offer meaning and

experiences of *particular* worlds and *particular* relationships" (*Persuasive* 241). Still, in his earlier article "The Rhetoric of Videogames," Bogost phrases this particularity, through a somewhat curious return to Aristotelian notions of rhetoric, of specific persuasive acts that work to create meanings in particular contexts. Interestingly, Bogost's account of rhetoric precludes the Sophists and begins, like that of Edward Schiappa, with Plato's *Gorgias*, where the term first appears. This slight detour, which allows an initial tidy definition of rhetoric as "public speaking for civil purposes," is quickly usurped by a more standard Aristotelian (read: "systematic, philosophical") approach. The article gestures to wider rhetorical domains, mentioning the discourses of both visual rhetoric and broadly construed digitial rhetoric, but even in this movement, Bogost is careful to maintain rhetoricity as a matter of persuasion. Bogost, channeling James Zappen: "Studies of digital rhetoric help to explain how traditional rhetorical strategies of *persuasion* function and are being reconfigured in digital spaces" (qtd. in "Rhetoric," 125, my emphasis). Bogost maps onto the work of persuasion a more contemporary perspective, allowing for procedural rhetoric to be concerned also with "expression," but even then, the notion that game processes "make claims about the world" still enshrines a rhetoric of truth-construction, of socially determined and mediated meanings. Bogost's own rhetoric analyzes particular kinds of "claims" rooted in awareness of larger social, political, and economic structures: "the business ethics of fast food" or "ethical and material choices about third-world farming" (*Persuasive* 126-7). James Paul Gee's social-constructivism leverages open the abstract operation of truth-production at the expense of providing "content" or relying on actual "specific areas of experience"; while his "content gap" like an opportunity for some sort of local, embodied choice, Bogost (in language more Isocratic than Aristotelian) suggests filling that gap with content that is "socially, culturally, or politically beneficial" (250-1). Defining the

"beneficial" introduces crucial problems for Vitanza's poststructuralism, which reads Isocrates's *paideia* as a ultimately negative construction; Isocrates's rhetoric opens up greater possibilities (Poulakos) for how we may interact within the *polis*, but that *polis* relies for its very existence on keeping out the barbarians.[24]

It's telling, then, that much of *Persuasive Games* focuses on a handful of somewhat marginal games that prominently feature content of a highly charged political or cultural nature, usually at the expense of more popular titles. Bogost cites approvingly games like *9-11 Survivor* that emphasize particular relationships to particular people (9-11 survivors) and spaces (the WTC, not abstracted as an "American symbol," but as a very real building where real people worked) and *The McDonalds Videogame* (which models fast-food business practices in a manner designed to challenge/expand the player's view of that industry's inner-workings). When the "barbarians" do appear, in the form of a reading of the immensely popular *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, Bogost phrases the game's value in terms that reappropriate useful meanings back into the proverbial *polis*.

Citing the need to keep your character fed, and the dearth of healthy options for doing so in inner-city San Andreas (a model, he argues, of "the social forces that drive the poor and working-class residents of the inner city to consume fast food habitually" [115]), Bogost proposes that the procedurality of the game might produce an awareness that exceeds the "magic circle" of play: "Players of *San Andreas* might leave the game and make new observations about the world around them, and about how social opportunity and disclosure often overshadow the issue of self-restraint" (116). Bogost rephrases the point similarly later in *Persuasive Games*: "Playing the game with an interest in these procedural affordances for advancement allows the player to read its claims about crime and nutrition in the light of his experience of those issues in

the material world" (259). "Interest" here is key: if Gee says that a kind of learning-logic is implicated (or more pointedly, "being constructed") in the process of play, Bogost backs off of that point, arguing that the construction is of little or no value in the absence of specific content. Instead, he shifts his stance from gamer to critic, and implies that by equipping one's self with a particular critical "interest," one can re-enter the game's procedurality in a manner resonant with the real world. This stance-shifting requires a certain degree of agility, less a matter of cognitive processing ability than a matter of performative, epistemic flexibility. While Bogost's desire to approach games in terms of a problematically constructed "real world" may rub awkwardly against the anti-positivistic tendencies of postmodernism, the notion of maintaining a particular interpretive "interest" can be read on a critical line deriving from Jean-François Lyotard's critique of Kantian analytics of taste.[25] If Mckenzie Wark would like to hold open the quintessentially poststructural idea that gamespace can function allegorically, as a holding tank for whatever content we see fit to assign to it, Bogost's solution is to run as hard as possible in the opposite direction, greeting postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives not by rejoicing in it, but by reversing its flow, by figuring a criticism that is attentive, first and foremost, to a rhetoric "that advances and challenges the logics that underlie behavior, and how such logics work" – a positivistic assumption that those "logics" can be understood (*Persuasive* 258).

Ian Bogost achieves, then, a complex and interesting critical model, though one whose basis in potentially problematic regimes of thought trips up any of my attempts to read it as a straightforwardly "postmodern" rhetoric of the gaming structure. Perhaps it will be better to have read Bogost as postmodern in the sense that his approach, unlike the more exclusive conceptual divides imbricated in the rhetorics of ludology or narratology[26], figures an "ecology" of critical approaches, where classical rhetorics (Aristotle) sit alongside mathematics (set theory,

von Neumann architecture), which sit alongside media theories (Kittler, McLuhan) and analyses of particular game-structures. While "ecology" makes up in postmodern fluidity what it lacks in specific, pointed rigor, it has become the single most dominating metaphor in game studies. In her introduction to *The Ecology of Gaming*, Katie Salen argues that the acknowledgement of gaming's situation at the vertices of many intersecting personal, economic, and sociocultural discourses necessitates a "broad and interdisciplinary" approach, one that hails an "overall 'ecology' of gaming, game design, and play, in the sense of how the various elements – from code to rhetoric to social practices and aesthetics – cohabit and populate the game world" (2). "Game world" is a sufficiently broad phrase here to merit comparison with Wark's "gamespace" (the idea of a world-gone-gamic), therefore maintaining the same rhetorical texture of de-centeredness, while the eco-logic (to parse the term out) Salen suggests is founded not on a hierarchy of approaches, but of conversation ("cohabitation") among them. Preserving that sense of plurality is undoubtedly important as the conversation around gaming grows and struggles for institutional legitimacy; hence, I'd wager, Jones's eagerness to dismiss the narrative/ludic "debate" as a fiction.

This survey is not designed to somehow exhaust rhetorical history or even the range of twentieth-century rhetorical theories, but to instead illuminate the rhetorical possibilities that have already been put into play. Rhetoric is possibility, so our job is to keep finding more by dis/engaging in this economy of various forces: in the "real" world and in the politics of our own critique. While Steven Jones's dismissal of the usefulness of the narrativist/ludological divide is an attempt to move the conversation outside those strictures, he accidentally substitutes one binary for another; instead of "narrative or ludology," we get, rephrasing Edward Schiappa: "Narrative/Ludology: Oasis or Mirage?" Rather than resort to such a divisive critical practice, I

follow suit with Salen in opting for a sort of ecological overview of approaches to gaming. In the rhetorics of technologization surveyed here, all these participants in the conversation have attempted to selectively foreground nodes of profitable interaction within a larger framework: cultural messages, the role of the gamer, the presence of physical machinery, etc. Most of them take games as objects, processes (what have you) to be interpreted, subjected to hermeneutic analysis. Bogost is rare in wishing to reverse the direction of that flow, and to that end adopts Aristotelian theories of persuasion, with the problematic side-effect of placing an essentially de-centered interpretive tactic in the service of a highly foundational persuasive strategy. I will continue this discussion, then, by considering how we might push against the narrowness of the will-to-persuade as a way of phrasing rhetoric under-the-influence of gaming. Having considered from two distinct angles how the traffic between language and material media might be (re)phrased, the question becomes: How can we deconstruct and reconstruct the *medium* of gaming to open the way to anticipating more *messages*, more possibilities for how we compose ourselves as subjects, as communities, and as part and parcel of the material techno-logics that surround us? The chapter that follows will start to seek out those messages by first exploring a multilayered definition of videogaming as a distinct technological medium, in an attempt to seize upon the dual grammatological layers (image and code) that serve as our distinctly new "extensions." What will remain following that process is the first of several attempts to engage in a project of "stretching" out Aristotle's *pisteis:* technologizing our received rhetoric. Each subsequent chapter will attempt to build upon that general pattern by isolating different aspects of our new technological extensions and attempting to phrase them in terms of their rhetorical possibilities (that is, moving to rhetoricize our technology, thereby rebeginning the continual cycle wherein medium and message inform one another).

NOTES

1 Lester Faigley's discourse on networked communication in *Fragments of Rationality* demonstrates through what Katerine Hayles might call a "media metaphor" the same basic notion expressed in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: that so-called "knowledge" is a socially constructed and reinforced artifact.

2 Likewise, to hazard another somewhat raw connection, Sherry Turkle's account of the construction of *êthos* in online spaces in *Life on the Screen* plays out a variation on postmodern "performance" theory, frequently identified with Judith Butler.

3 Jay David Bolter claims in *Writing Space* that the de-centered, interconnected nature of hypertextual writing is in a sense a material realization of poststructural theories of language.

4 Here and throughout this chapter, I will make every attempt to refer to various "schools" of game theory while keeping the labels themselves "under erasure" as much as possible. These labels are considered nearly useless within the community of game scholars (for reasons I explore shortly), though in each there is a clue to underlying rhetorical assumptions, making the labels tactically useful.

5 *Myst* provided an emblematic opportunity for joining videogames with the larger hypertextual conversation, largely for two reasons. One, like hypertext fiction of the period (notably Michael Joyce's *afternoon* and Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*), *Myst* is constructed as a series of static images, designed to be "read" and "explored" for linkages to further "nodes." Secondly, the gameplay of *Myst* furnished a sequence of simple binary choices; in exploring the fictional world(s) of the game, the player could choose to free one of two feuding brothers from imprisonment. The game's success in scholarly circles was also no doubt aided by its visual quality, based on an elegant design style combining a variety of artistic influences. Giving equal expression to both its unique artistry and its ability to provide a classical kind of mimetic experience, Steven Poole notes that "[*Myst*'s] pleasurably organic topology extrapolates inventively from the real, natural world" (218).

6 Manovich's qualifications for what counts as narrative are provided by Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

7 Citations throughout are drawn from the introductory survey of rhetorical theories supplied in Michael Moran and Michelle Ballif's *Twentieth-Century Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, page xiii.

8 Moran and Ballif, pg. xx.

9 Markku Eskelinen and Raghnild Tronstad's article "Video Games and Configurative Performance," for example, takes Aarseth's traversal function and uses it as a sort of methodological prism, holding it up to varieties of performance theory to get a better sense of how game players "perform" actions.

10 For example, in Rune Klevjer "In Defense of Cutscenes" (section, "Discursive Modes").

11 Jon Katz's 1999 article "Voices from the Hellmouth" and his 2001 book *Geeks* reference the media hysteria surrounding Columbine, the mass outpouring of fear and loathing directed at "geek culture" (broadly defined in general, but localized in specific instances to gamers, fans of heavy metal music, or simply those with differing tastes in clothes) that followed, and the counter-resistance felt by those geeks/gamers who felt they were unjustly persecuted during this process.

12 Erin Smith and Eve Dietsch, "Lost (and Found) in Translation: Game Localization, Cultural Models, and Critical Literacy," in Hawisher & Selfe, pp. 53-70.

13 Daniel Keller with Paul Ardis, Vivienn Dunstan, Adam Thornton, Rachel Henry, and Brett Witty, "Gaming, Identity, and Literacy," in Hawisher & Selfe, pp. 71-87.

14 In fairness, this move is less surprising when read in the context of the rest of the collection, whose chapters focus on gaming in broader terms, including analog table-top role playing games such as the infamous *Dungeons and Dragons*.

15 The "magic circle" is a concept established in Johan Huizinga's 1938 *Homo Ludens*, often regarded as a founding document in game studies. Game studies theoriest Hector Rodrigues offers the following useful summary: "According to Huizinga, the consciousness of play as a separate and self-contained sphere is often reinforced by the pervasive tendency to enclose the players within a spatiotemporal frame, the so-called 'magic circle,' which isolates their game from the more serious tasks of daily living. The separation often consists in a literal physical precinct: a chessboard, ring, arena, field, stadium, stage, altar, etc. There are also sharp temporal boundaries, a clear beginning and an end, which clearly mark the game off as a temporary interruption of ordinary life. The game unfolds within a temporarily closed world."

16 *The Rhetoric of Popular Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2006.

17 In so doing, McAllister avoids what Moran & Ballif cite as a major failing of social-constructivism: its tendency to consider the production of truth (and critical consciousness) rather than "how that production sustains

hierarchical systems of power" (xxi). Kline (et al.) can be read as reversing this flow altogether, reading first the power structures that deliver games to the player as a matter of laying the groundwork for considering what meanings gamers may produce through "digital play." Regardless of this important methodological difference, I group these critics together for their common attentiveness to the position of the player within a greater ideological economy.

18 In this regard, Hawisher & Selfe's *Gaming Lives* has the effect of misplacing the "game," rather than the "gamer" in the constructiong of meaning. Regardless of this differential, the rhetorical texture is still similar – the literate-social scene (including literacy's preferred institutional location: the classroom) is still the place where "truths" are produced.

19 Namely, the tendency of alphabetic writing to encourage "division and specialization." The alphabet atomizes units of discourse, and that logic of "atomization" carries out at the level of cultural and intellectual conversation.

20 The Harvard University Press edition of *Gamer Theory* foregoes page numbering in favor of numbering each individual lexia in Wark's discussion, a gesture to the work's original status as a hypertext. The sometimes odd-looking numbering convention used here reflects that scheme.

21 *Gamer Theory* concludes, in fact, with the following playful reversal of traditional terms and priorities: "The final question for a gamer theory might be to move beyond the phenomena of gaming as experienced by the gamer to conceive of gaming from the point of view of the game" (223).

22 Here Wark notes a very real controversy in the videogame industry, when in 2004, software giant Electronic Arts (EA) was targeted in a class-action lawsuit by a number of current and former employees, citing unpaid overtime and cruel working conditions. First brought to public attention in the blog of one programmer's fiancee, programmers and designers were forced to work thirteen hour days, seven days a week in order to keep up with rigorous production schedules. (Credit: wikipedia.org, "Electronic Arts"; gamespot.com, "EA settles labor-dispute lawsuit," 10/5/05)

23 The "narrative" of the game has the player charged with creating new stars to populate the night sky after the King (in a drunken state) blows them all out. To do so, the player rolls a sticky ball (a katamari) around a given area, *collecting* whatever loose items happen to be in its way, everything from paper clips to cars to innocent bystanders, in an effort to roll up the best possible "star."

24 Reviewing Isocrates's brand of Sophistic rhetoric, one that held rhetorical training – with all the betterment in personal and civic affairs that comes with it – open to all, Vitanza points out that the precondition for such training is (quoting Finley) "a predisposition to virtue and a proper station in life." The *paideia* the Isocrates proposes to teach is, effectively, a prerequisite for the very teaching: "anyone steeped in Greek culture, in Hellenism, or *paideia*, is someone who is *not* depraved but who is honest and just. Barbarians obviously would be excluded" (154).

25 Kant's Analytic of the Beautiful depends on a disinterested viewer, but Lyotard counter-argues that "disinterest" results in a disregard for the real materiality of the object. To get Enlightenment, Kant sacrifices local, contingent meanings for disinterested, universal ones. (See Chapter 3 for a more extended discussion.)

26 Noting, of course, that these two "rhetorics" are largely ideational creations without actual practitioners. As Frasca (among others) points out, no one has readily assumed these labels, and it is exceedingly difficult to find someone who practices a "pure" form of that criticism. If Frasca holds open the door for a wider rhetorical ecology, I'd argue that *Persuasive Games* is the book that ends up walking through it.

Chapter Three:
Procedurality, *Êthos*, and the Work-Play of the "Imalgorithm"

Image and code (the latter often referred to as "algorithm" or "procedurality," terms that I will tend to use interchangeably) represent third and fourth modes that join the "first" and "second" modes of speech and writing, and it is the videogame medium, I argue, that represents the most culturally ascendant manifestation of those modalities. My discussion will attempt to deal with each distinct (sub-)medium on its own, the better to clarify not only the distinct textures and possibilities to emerge out of each – how each, to (eternally) return to McLuhan's trope of extension, extends or augments our capacities – but also, ultimately, to argue for the videogame as a distinct medium in its own right, one that exists at a juncture between the two. Thinking of the videogame in terms of both discrete and composite modalities provides a sort of groundwork for the explorations I propose in the following chapters. As my previous foray into rhetorical histories and historiographies has argued, rhetorics tend to find themselves de-termined in these ways: along the lines of the propensities of the material word, along the lines of the possibilities that they offer. So, as Plato (dis)engaged in the material affordances of the written word to frame his non-rhetoric, and as the Sophists playfully (dis)engaged in the mixtures and methodologies afforded by each, modern videogame studies have found themselves caught in the difficult position of attempting to frame the possibilities of this emergent medium without always fully engaging in its distinct materiality. An exploration of the limited scholarly efforts made to

bring these materialities into the conversation offers, I believe, the first step towards renewing and rephrasing our own discourse, which is itself a pivotal ingredient in our understanding of videogames: what they are, what they do, and what they will have pushed us to become. To that end, I will in this chapter begin the process of "stretching" elements of classic rhetorical terminology, starting with the term *êthos*, in an attempt to reach out towards other concerns and possibilities. However, when I ask what videogaming "will have pushed *us* to become," the "us" in question will be directed not at the subjectivity of the gamer (though it is a topic my discussion will continue to skirt, with a more sustained engagement to come in the next chapter), but rather the *êthos* of our rhetorical-critical enterprise, with an eye towards how a "rhetoric of technologization" might impact the *êthos* of composition studies. Having established in the previous chapters a sort of "composing-history" of game criticism and a historiographically infused take on cybernetic theory, my goal is to *broadly* invoke those conversations together, to speak to the wider community of Rhetoric & Composition studies and to the *êthoi* of critique and discourse-production those communities tend to mobilize at the expense of other emergent electrate possibilities.

RhetOrigami: On Image-Rhetoric

Not surprisingly, much of my desire to think through the videogame medium in its own terms derives from the work of Greg Ulmer towards establishing a scholarly conversation around his neologistic term "electracy": the emergent apparatus of textuality, institutionality, and subject formation in the age of the image. The invention of the photography, part of a line of technological development which includes the related media of film, television, and digital imaging (a major constitutive factor of online experience), begins a potentially watershed change

in what we may call rhetoric. In *Applied Grammatology* (1985), Ulmer applies Derrida's account of the literate "apparatus" to the emergence of electronic media, pointing as his subtitle suggests, towards the emergence of a "post-" or "e-pedagogy." His later works *Teletheory* (1989) and *Heuretics* (1994) continue the line of logic, suggesting the need to develop not only new "writing" genres, but also to reverse the traditional received ways we think of the invention of those genres; rather than apply established methodologies to electronic or imagistic "texts" (thinking of them as "texts" is, of course, part and parcel of those very methodologies), Ulmer calls for us to use those texts as grounds for experimentally, tangentially, developing new methods. To deal with the conditions of emergent media, he argues, scholars need not simply update their playbook of established terms, but instead to think about fomenting inventive practice. In *Internet Invention*, Ulmer lays out in clearest terms the groundwork for thinking of this invention by tracing the need to circumvent established literary categories[1] in favor of working with and within the propensities of the underlying grammatological ingredient of the Internet age: the image. Specifically, he zeroes in on a crucial clue provided by that famous student of semiotics, Roland Barthes: the notion that while an image[2] has literal meanings, of the sorts usually bandied about in semiotic circles, it also prompts for other, more subtle sorts of meaning. Barthes names this other, subtle dimension the *punctum* – that which stings or pricks one emotionally, and Ulmer seizes on that possibility as the starting point for the creation of a different sort of rhetoric, one whose methods and products rest more on subjective logics of association and that account for the individual's capacity to forge meaning out of broad interconnected networks of both "literal" and "felt" messages.

For the time being, though, I'll leave aside the particularities of Ulmer's pedagogical techniques for a more sustained engagement with his source material. Barthes's attempt

throughout *Image/Music/Text* to approach the "third meaning" of the image, while not intended to begin the avalanche of grammatological possibilities that Ulmer crafts, can be read an attempt to investigate how images might, as a distinct medium, offer certain unique "extensions" of meaning-making experience. Barthes demonstrates, both in *Image/Music/Text* and elsewhere, as in *Mythologies*, two distinct levels of significance, what he here terms the "informational" and "symbolic" levels. The former level, the "informational," is the level of immediate and obvious content, the signifier/signified relationship at its most obvious. The "symbolic" level is where the total informational sign is read as being itself significant of grander meanings; Barthes calls this the level of "myth," the level of a "second-order signifying system" where more "global" meanings are imparted (*Mythologies*, 114-5). At the time of its writing, in 1957, Barthes appears to have been content to treat both "alphabetical and pictorial writing" under this same term, and to produce out of the study of them both a consistent second-order critical "metalanguage" for establishing the significance of our cultural objects – from wrestling to plastic to fashion – in the formation of our unconscious mythologies. By the time of "The Third Meaning" in 1970, Barthes alters this trajectory significantly, placing less trust in a universal "metalanguage," and shifting attention instead to the possibilities of pictorial "language" offering a radically different set of configurations to the simple Sassurean algebra of the written sign. By pointing towards a possibility that lies outside the dominant rhetorics generated by writing, these new configurations will serve as the stepping stones for grasping the shape of an emergent rhetoric based on the material proclivities of videogaming.

In the "Third Meaning" essay in particular, Barthes argues, with a typical reliance on a loopy, tangential, and often recursive writing style, for an alternative meaning – "evident, erratic, obstinate" – ensconced within the matrix of the photographic image. In encountering an image,

Barthes mentions how, in keeping with his earlier foundations in structuralism, its "informational" and "symbolic" meanings can be read, but how something else, something arbitrary and accidental, compels the viewer in other directions. Rather, though, than chalk these "signifying accidents" (Barthes mentions an image where he finds himself taken with oddities such as the slant of an eyebrow or the shape of a hairdo) to simple subjective excess, to be divorced from the corpus of rational thought, he accepts their excess, their wantonness, and their unbiddenness as meaningful givens. Though he admits "I am not sure if the reading of this third meaning can be justified," he argues for *something* (a "theoretical individuality") that "exceeds the copy of the referential motif [and that] compels an interrogative reading... a 'poetical' grasp" (53). Each image is, in a sense, the ground for not only an exchange of informative and symbolic meanings, but may also offer another level all its own – one based not on discourse conventions established from without, but rather on the singularity of individual reaction. If the "second," symbolic meaning is intentional – "it goes on *ahead of me*," quips Barthes, riffing on the etymology of the word *obvious* – then of the "third" meaning he says: "As for the other meaning, the third, the one 'too many,' the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive, I propose to call it the *obtuse meaning*" (54). Barthes here plays a risky game: on one hand insisting on the slipperiness of his object of study, yet on the other hand simultaneously de-term-ining it – bringing into the fold of his own critical discourse. It may be more useful, then, to treat Barthes in this case as a Sophist-in-action, one devoted in this case to sniffing out other possibilities, even if those possibilities pose inherent challenges to our received notions of thinking:

> The pictorial 'rendering' of words is here impossible, with the consequence that if, in front of these images, we remain, you and I, at the level of articulated language

> – at the level, that is, of my own text – the obtuse meaning will not succeed in existing, in entering the critic's metalanguage. Which means that the obtuse meaning is outside (articulated) language while nevertheless within interlocution.... In short, what the obtuse meaning disturbs, sterilizes, is metalanguage (criticism). (61)

Barthes's double-play here renders the obtuse meaning *exterior* to the critical (read: logocentric) metalanguage, yet in his own pronouncement – for, whether Barthes intended it or not, his language is now part of our critical metalanguage – that *exteriority* is rendered *internally.* (The discourse folds itself over to contain the obtuseness, and in the process, perhaps, even comes to resemble it.) My own discourse here must observe this play, participate in it, and even borrow some of its own tactics, even as it makes the interesting/difficult move of extracting the "obtuse meaning," appropriating it into yet-another critical game not of Barthes's design. To help ease that move, I'll take a moment to follow a telling simile in "The Third Meaning," one that may help establish better both what the obtuse meaning "is," and how it may be best approached from the standpoint of rhetoric and textuality.

The unique meaning-making *texture* to fall out of the photographic image resists critical definition, resists being brought into the domain of critical discourse. Yet it exists. Barthes, then, while insisting on a "third meaning" that "disturbs" and "sterilizes" established logocentric conventions, tries instead to *translate* the term – to, as the etymology suggests, "drag over" the notion into another discursive field. The result of such a horizontal maneuver paints the "third meaning" as a crucial texture, even if its meaning cannot be fully or finally understood in the same terms.

> The obtuse meaning can be seen as an *accent*, the very form of an emergence, of a *fold*...marking the heavy layer of informations an significations. If it could be described (a contradiction in terms) it would have exactly the same nature as the Japanese *haiku* – anaphoric gesture without significant content, a sort of gash rased of meaning (or desire for meaning). (62, author's emphasis)

While Barthes's emphasis on the obtuse meaning as a "fold" fruitfully coincides with Deleuze's concept of the same name, the gesture to the tradition of haiku poetry is perhaps more significant here. Grade-school level creative writers are familiar enough with the haiku and its simple structure of five, seven, then five syllables per line. Yet Barthes explores with greater perspicacity more profound ramifications in *Empire of Signs*, his book-length treatment of Japanese culture.[3] In the Western tradition, the haiku form is attended by a traditional narrative reading: "a syllogistic design in three tenses (rise, suspense, conclusion" (*Empire of Signs*, 71). Yet for Barthes, the form's simplicity translates not to a simplistic narrative reading, but to a more profound reorientation of the functions of both text and criticism: "Deciphering, normalizing, or tautological, the ways of interpretation, intended in the West to *pierce* meaning, i.e., to get into it by breaking and entering... cannot help failing the haiku; for the work of reading which is attached to it is to suspend language, not to provoke it" (72, author's emphasis). While Barthes's earlier metaphor for the obtuse meaning – that it "sterilizes" critical metalanguage – connotes a scene of antiseptic destruction, his analysis of haiku provides perhaps a better term, that of "suspension." The haiku, and by extension the image, may be said to mobilize "informational" and "symbolic" meanings, but those meanings are not, in the final analysis (ha!), the end of the story. Were we to lift those meanings (to, in another punning sense, "suspend" them), we would detect behind a storehouse of other meanings, meanings that resist

rational-literate detection. Barthes ultimately places the *haiku* quite near the geographic center of his exploration of Japanese culture, as the already-decentered center of his exploration/ construction of an Empire of Signs, or what we might re-term an Empire of "third meanings." The image, fueled by (and productive of) these "third meanings," occupies a similar position for my own argument, about the novel extensions of rhetorical possibilities being offered by the videogame medium. And yet, as I argue earlier, grasping (or at least gesturing towards) this possible extension is insufficient for our understanding of gaming as a whole. To proceed will also require a sense of what we might as well call another "third meaning"[4]: that of computer code.

RhetAlgorithm: The Difficult Case of Computer Code

To develop a sense of "code" as a medium – much less to consider its rhetorical contours – requires an even greater amount of careful positioning and delineation. While by no means absent from the discourse, "code" has only rarely been addressed in itself as a subject of investigation in the humanities. When code is addressed, it is usually through similar sounding, yet not entirely congruent, concepts: digitalization or networking, for instance. In the swirl of digital humanities' various attempts to define the objects of its studies, both digitalization (the reduction of meaning into discrete numeric states) and networking (the capacity of radically broadened communication through the exchange of those discrete numeric "packages" of info) identify crucial features or textures, yet rarely are the underlying material foundations of those features extensively investigated. One possible reason is to avoid the fear of McLuhanian reductionism, that is, narrowing the "meaning" of computing to the "medium" of computing code itself: its grammatological "nature" or material affordances. I propose to investigate that

layer of thought here, following the conviction that "code" must be regarded as a player of equal importance in the structuration of videogame "rhetoric," and following more particularly in the footsteps of Ian Bogost, whose already-discussed work on the rhetoric of videogames is founded upon a method explicitly designed with the "medium" of code in mind. In what follows, I'll attempt to craft first a working, yet intentionally multivalent, sense of what I mean in addressing "code" as a medium, and from there to play the game with code that Greg Ulmer has played with images: to consider the emergence of critical-creative methods based on that medium. One such method, Ian Bogost's "unit operations," helps form a starting point for my own discussion, though its limitations point the way to another possibility, that of a fusion – both conceptual and methodical – between image and code.

For the purposes of my discussion, "code" refers to the whole spectrum of alphanumeric computer "language," beginning with the "operator code" written by programmers to the "compiler code" of ones and zeroes rendered by from that operator code into the bare-bones information needed by computers to do their work. One of its chiefest features is indeed a rhetorical one, as defined by Katherine Hayles: "code is addressed to both humans and intelligent machines" (*Mother*, 41). It is within that second dimension – the notion of a "grammar" shared between machines apart from any immediate embodied human agent – that code finds its great locus of difference. To fully review the constitutions of that dimension would require a lengthy detour into mathematics, which I will attempt quickly here, if only to elucidate some of the major rhetorical features that appear to emerge.

First, no history of computing is complete without a reference to Alan Turing, the Cambridge mathematician whose work on deciphering the Nazi's fabled Enigma code during World War II led him further towards the development of "discrete mathematics" and with that, a

model for a logical device called a “Turing machine,” capable of performing mathematical operations.[5] Still, an abacus could do the same thing. Turing's genius stroke was to develop a model for a logical machine capable of not only doing math, but reading and interpreting the results, then continuing to perform operations on the results. Turing died young, before his model could be fully realized, but his model of a “Turing-complete” machine became the foundation for the development of modern computing architecture. In the Turing-complete model, the proceeds of any mathematical operation can be fed to and interpreted by any other Turing-complete machine. John von Neumann, a lead collaborator on the ENIAC project, one of the world's first fully functioning digital computers, helped develop and leant his name to what is called the “von Neumann architecture” for computer engineering, which stated that any computer should “be able to perform any kind of computation through programmable control rather than physical alteration of the computer itself” (Bogost, *Unit Operations* 25). In these discoveries, the medium of “code” takes form as a material and logical structure, seemingly tied off in a knot from subjective agency. A user is limited to giving instructions, which are interpreted by an input/output structure, the results of which are fed into a mathematical process which determines some set of outcomes, which can be returned to the user through another chain of instructions and/or passed through to another “agency” within the system itself, or – through the advent of networking – to another system altogether. The term “algorithm,” coined by Turing's mentor and collaborator Alonzo Church, refers to such a “chain of instructions” that can be read by any Turing-complete machine. As such, I'll often use the term “algorithm” somewhat synecdochically: as a term that refers to the mathematical structures propelled around by the “code” medium, and therefore representing in some way the “embodiments” of code itself. Algorithms are, in a sense, the signifiers of the code grammatology; this crude metaphor, though,

will shortly implode on itself, and in so doing will show the potential for using "code" – broadly construed – as a means for re-thinking what a rhetoric-under-the-influence-of-gaming might look like.

In grappling with "code," then, we start to discover an interesting – though challenging, given the steep cross-disciplinary learning curve – paradigmatic shift in the ways we normally think about language and meaning. New Media theory in the humanities has focused more broadly on the ways in which linguistic meaning is re-rendered; George Landow's *Hyper/Text/Theory* or Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen* are two monuments of mid-1990's New Media theory, both of which address the structures of computing specifically in terms of how they work to "translate" existing human faculties – lingustic meaning in the first instance, rhetorical identity in the latter. What Ulmer's logic points me towards instead is a desire to edge around the inherent literacy bias that paints New Media or computer-based objects as a function of writing. Rooted in the grammatology of the image, Ulmer charts the possiblity of radical third meanings, meanings that we normally wouldn't bother accounting for from within our received frameworks of literacy, subjectivity, and rhetoric. Can't we hazard a guess, then, that a similar "third" might emerge from code as well, from the algorithmic flows and exchanges of meaning rendered as numbers? Without essentializing such a "third" as some end-all, be-all rhetorical goal, we could try to detect some previously undetected nuance in how "code" as a medium tends to behave, how it is constructed, and how it appears to effect certain shifts in our received constructions. To borrow some deconstructive parlance, the goal from there isn't so much to re-center rhetoric around a newer, more stable, more materially "true" set of meanings, but rather to find an/other node where meanings can be rendered more unstable and more multiple. All of that to say: hypertext theory is a start, but our emerging apparatus of algorithmic code has more far-

reaching consequences than simply giving us literacy (and the networks of current-traditional, expressivist, and social-constructivist rhetorics based thereupon) back in a different form.

Still underlying all this exploration, though, is an implicit and unproductive collision of terms, bound up in the drive to sort out what code might *mean* in the sense of the medium's "message" – the change in size, speed, or scale that it effects in rhetorical affairs. The difficulty here is to extract that question from the realm of "signification," a tempting tendency given how well Barthes's obtuse meanings dovetail with familiar structuralist notions of textuality. (The third meaning stands outside of the signifier-signifies structure, but is still located relative to that structure.) In addressing the issue of code, Katherine Hayles embarks on a similar kind of play, using as established guideposts the structural and poststructural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida. In considering the materiality of code itself, Hayles nuances a position for code alongside the formers' notions of the structures of speech and writing, respectively, rooted in a rhetorical drift that slides from questions of *meaning* to questions of *action*. She argues that "code has become arguably as important as natural language because *it causes things to happen*" and pulls from Alexander Galloway's *Protocol* the notion that "code is [uniquely, we could add,] executable language" (49). The core, materially true fact of code lies less in its mathematical nature – "digitizing" by name means the breaking up of continuous/ analog experience into bite-size numerical chunks – than in the regime of structures through which the math *happens*, through which discrete values are computed, outputted, interpreted, and recomputed for agencies both within the computer and without. That "regime," rooted in the simple on-off structure of a digital transistor chip[6], comes about due to mounting structures of complexity involving both human and mechanical agents – a crucial distinction to which I'll return shortly. Hayles invests in the executable nature of code what Derrida invests in the

"trace" of différance: the possibility of ever more complexity arising out of a binary system. For Derrida, the "trace" disrupts the smooth operations of signifier and signfied; for Hayles, the code's constitution as a medium of action ensures a continual process of transference and translation. "Signifieds on one level become signifiers on another" as results from one operation are fed inexorably into another, creating the complex, multilayered behaviors of a computer system. The "meaning" of code, then, inheres in this complex network of relations, rather than in some as-yet-unglimpsed possibility for textual (or imagistic) significance.

The role of a supposedly integral human agent (that is, of an *êthos* which this project is attempting to track) within the various stacks of code comprising gaming is stretched by Hayles's multilayered take on the apparatus of code. Not simply the "input" end of a simple input/output processing loop, we can start to suppose that any gamer's agency occurs at not merely one, but multiple intersections of code's various agencies. As soon as one layer of processing is complete, the results are loaded in to memory and fed back into another node. The gamer telling Mario to jump interprets a variety of signfiers on screen, all of which are the result of discrete computations (instructions from the processor of what to draw on the screen and where). The user's intentionality comes in response to those calculations, but crucially her input is passed off to another "layer" within the system, which is in turn interpreted and passed off to the graphical layer, and so on. And this is only an over-simplified example; under the surface are multiple processes, ones that calculate the information – both diegetic and nondiegetic – onscreen, or that communicate the user's actions to other users in the same virtual environment, or that monitor the system's own performance. It is ultimately insufficient to argue that a gamer's agency in these environments is limited by the digital logic of the machine. The choice to have Mario jump or not is not simply an unproblematic node in a simple cause-and-effect sequence; in fact,

the algorithm of the player's decision is itself nested in multiple fields of other algorithms. The player's choice may be inserted into the rigid binary logic of *one* layer of computation, yet all the while her capacities to observe, evaluate, and intuit those choices is influenced by others. In the blizzard of activity afforded by modern microprocessors, a gamer's choice is less active than *retroactive.* It's not simply that the user leads the way and the machine responds, or vice versa – the player's own actions are determined retroactively by the combination of multiple layers of computation. This is quite nearly the actantial equivalent of Derrida's notion of "deferral," but one that must be distinguished from that familiar poststructuralist keyword precisely because of the important re-layering at stake between the user, her intentionality, her observations, her actions, and the system. The object of a proper game criticism can be, as Alexander Galloway has argued, to consider these multiple layers of action, interaction, and mutual intellection between the gamer and the system. More specifically to my own purpose, though, we have to ask: "how does all this jargon talk – all these attempts of mine to discern what the Xbox humming beneath my TV is 'really' up to while I'm gunning down zombies with my friends – reflect a scene of expanded rhetorical possibilities for subjects-under-the-influence-of-gaming?"

To answer, I'll turn to perhaps Hayles's most *rhetorically* provocative contribution to my project: her definition of code as "language that is addressed to both humans and intelligent machines." Its rhetoricity strikes me through the sense of *bifurcated address*, the notion of code being a sort of single utterance differently interpreted and (re)acted upon by two distinct sorts of agents. The two major (and, as I've readily admitted, fictional) schools of videogame theory variously engage with this issue: the ludologist assumes that the process of gameplay is *with* the machine and in a sense *for* the machine – the sketching out of "traversals" is a matter of feeling out openings in the algorithmic structure. The gamer figures out combinations of actions that

will propel the game into a desired state, like arranging *Tetris* pieces in order to eradicate them or sending Mario through a pipe into another section of the fantasy world. The narrative and cultural conversation retorts by questioning the nature of that "desire" by locating its source outside the matrix of gameplay itself – Mario only enters the pipe to rescue the princess, which as Sharon Sherman's aforementioned "Perils of the Princess" proposes, represents a play on a classical, though certainly misogynistic, cultural code. Each perspective catches an end of Hayles's "worldview of code": ludologists and narrativists addressing respectively the extent to which code addresses the machine (the process of moving between discrete mathematical states) and the human subject (by simulating cultural codes in an intelligible manner). And yet, both sides in a sense fail to fully parse the significance of the medium in Hayles's own phrasing – the substantial gap in agency within the apparatus of code that hesistates to assign a traditional *êthos* based on agency.[7]

In claiming that code "is addressed to both humans and intelligent machines," Hayles supplies perhaps half of the rhetorical equation. In Kenneth Burke's terms, she perhaps accounts for rhetorical audience without a sense of rhetorical agency per se, for her passive diction leaves open the question as to who is doing the "addressing." Rather than attempt to fill that gap in – to assign author/ity to the gamer, the programmer, or to the system itself – I suggest instead approaching the question of the code-rhetor from the standpoint of what Roland Barthes calls "the middle voice." Not so coincidentally, Greg Ulmer calls on the middle voice as a medium for composing mystory, declaring that in the middle voice "one is the recipient of one's own actions: responsibility is neither assumed nor avoided but is discovered as an effect of writing" (57). According to Victor J. Vitanza, who consults Barthes with an eye towards linking the middle voice to *kairos* and the "will-to-invent," the tactic of "reclaiming" the middle voice

returns rhetoric to the scene of the subject's "incompossibility"; in it the subject is neither grammatically active or passive, but rather exists in a "bifurcated" state (284-5). Channeling not only Barthes but Charles Scott and Eric Charles White, the middle voice serves for Vitanza as a "means of resisting and disrupting traditional language-rhetoric, which has been made overly rational by the influence of, first Platonic, and, then, Aristotelian philosophies" (285). For the terms of this conversation, the messy material facts of computer code (the inherence of mathematics as a mode of discourse, the awkward translations between voltages and semblances onscreen) offer this "middle voice" as an interesting rhetorical texture that can help us reconceptualize the kinds of discursive productions made by gamers in contact with these underlying structures of code. In an interesting sense, if Ulmer's "third meanings" in images are a matter of interpretation (the rhetor as "reader"), then the exploration of algorithm/code offered here helps, I hope, to elucidate the rhetor as what I can only think to call a "node" of production. The game-rhetor can neither wholly produce meaning, but nor are her responses merely feedback in a system: the conclusion often left-over from our received rhetorical approaches to game theory and criticism. (Vitanza even goes so far to say that the middle voice serves as an antidote to "scientific protocols"; by moving to distinguish between a gamer's agency and the underlying mathematics, I hope to have disentangled the potential of the middle voice from the binary circumstances out of which it seems to arise. This voice is not a scientific phenomenon, but rather an emergent one, a symptom of the "complexity" undergirding Hayles's "worldview of code.") The bifurcation of address proposed by Hayles blurs one of the key lines suggested by the survey of videogame and rhetorical theories presented earlier: the assumption of a integral agent. I've split no hairs about my desire to push forward into greater rhetorical possibilities, more of a sense of what arrangements are possible through our culture-wide encounter with the

gaming-apparatus. This disruption of agency, of a rhetor's *êthos*, is a productive first step, not simply because it's suggested by postmodern and poststructuralist rhetorics, but because this disruption appears to follow the propensities of the medium under consideration.

RhetOperations: Methods and Composite Grammatology

To propel the conversation forward, though, I wish to spend a few more moments seeking what Greg Ulmer seeks in his construction of "electracy," a sense of *method* to complement a sense of medium, an antidote to the possibility that this discourse is stealth-foundationalism under the guise of McLuhanian media guruism. Rather than accept the "third meaning" of the image as a given and working from there, Ulmer posits a wider notion of an image-based apparatus, most reified in the forms of a composite subject, the disciplinary formation of modern entertainment, and the institutional structure of the multi-national corporation. Each serves as an equal locus/participant in the functioning of the apparatus, making "electracy" a more complex construct than simply defining it (as McLuhan's oracular tone often accidently does) as the "message" of the image "medium." Ken McAllister's "grammar of gameworks" does this to an extent, in a sense pursuing for games the wider network of discursive sites (producers of games, critics of games) that form the larger apparatus responsible for producing "code" and defining its meanings. What my complaints of McAllister register, though, is a dissatisfaction with existing methodologies, not McAllister's "apparatus"-wide view.

In order, ultimately, for this project to move towards its goal of "stretching" received rhetorical terminology in a way that accounts for the pressure applied by videogaming (and videogaming subjects and videogaming discourses and videogaming institutions – all part and parcel of what we might as well call an emergent "minor" apparatus), I need not only do this

McLuhanian wrangling with the possible "message" of its composite media but also more fully account for what sorts of methodologies will allow us the access needed to perform such a stretching. I've demonstrated to this point a certain indebtedness to postmodern and poststructural rhetorics not simply for their implicitly fluid approaches to notions such as "method" (registering in English studies as a set of resistances toward, for instance, the traditions of textual reading and New Criticism at the expense of others), but for their tendency to acknowledge, or at least make room for, the material components of discourse that deserve vital consideration at this moment of technological development. I've particularly looked to Greg Ulmer, himself influenced heavily by Barthes and Derrida, as someone who speaks to the importance of methodology. In his *Heuretics*, he addresses methodology as something that needs to be actively "invented" (in contradistinction to the tradition of *hermeneutics*, the application of a static method to a variety of textual "targets"), that invention prompted, as *Internet Invention* details, by the advent of a new apparatus. Following that lead, it stands to reason that a meaningful rhetorical approach to videogame study must consider terms and frameworks that account for not only the imagistic, but also the algorithmic aspects of gameplay. What does a rhetorical method-gone-algorithmic look like? What possibilities might it reveal about the sorts of experiences offered by gaming, and the sorts of meaning-production that might follow in its wake? The figure of the "middle voice" suggested by Katherine Hayles's reading of the "worldview of code" offers a productive image of the would-be rhetorical subject*/êthos,* and with that I'd push forward to figuring out "some more" ways for would-be scholars, teachers, and critics to encounter those subjects and the meanings they produce in and through gaming, in and through a composite imagistic and algorithmic apparatus.

If anyone has developed a method for inquiry in the humanities that expresses the "logic" of code, that person would be Ian Bogost who, conveniently enough, has videogames in mind. His book *Unit Operations* offers an outline of his theoretical model, which I will explore here in order to establish how it adapts the logic and modalities of computation in order to invent a unique methodology. Bogost initiates his concept of unit operations through a definition of the "unit," which names less a particular class of objects than a critical apparatus for naming any object whatsoever: "a material element, a thing. It can be constitutive or contingent, like a building block that makes up a system, or it can be autonomous, like a system itself. Often, systems become units in other systems" (5). This recursiveness in the term isn't Bogost wanting to have his cake and eat it, too. Instead, complex systems (aggregations of units "such as works of literature, human conditions, anatomies, and economies") can act as units in a *cybernetic* sense, citing second-wave cyberneticist Humberto Maturana's notion of autopoesis. A self-creating and self-maintaining system can be thought of as a discrete unit when that system is placed in the context of a larger ecology of forces.[8] Extending the same notion to communication, Bogost effectively furnishes himself with the conceptual flexibility to selectively pin down aspects of videogame textuality and procedurality and, having defined their meaning as units, sketch out any number of possible relationships to other units. In the aforementioned analysis of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* in Bogost's *Persuasive Games*, for example, the procedural "unit" of feeding one's character is read alongside another "unit," this one read out of the "real" world instead of the "game" world – the vicious cycle (self-creating and self-sustaining) of urban poverty and poor nutrition. In this model, Bogost achieves a version of what Katherine Hayles establishes as one of the chief features of code as a medium – its capacity to affect change across *multiple layers* of information.

The inherent disconnect between ones/units and multiples/systems is smoothed out by Bogost via Alain Badiou's notion of the "count as one." Working from a complex theoretical apparatus involving Marxism, Spinoza, and set mathematics, "Badiou offers a means of thinking about the process of configuring things of any kind... into units" (13). This process, the "count as one," "serves as a process for constructing a specific multiplicity, *enacted by an agent*, formal or abstract, conceptual or substantive" (emphasis added). For Badiou, the kinds of radical multiplicities proposed by Gilles Deleuze in his models of the rhizome or smooth/striated space[9] fall short of providing the grounds for true multiplicity on the grounds that Deleuze's "Platonism of the Virtual" ultimately reins in all of his multiplicities under a single system: the Body without Organs (46). The system effectively becomes the new entity; the BwO of *Anti-Oedipus* becomes the fateful inverse of the Cave, the virtual-multiplicity of Deleuze standing in for the real-essential of Plato's ideal forms. While producing multiplicities, Deleuze's model does so, or so Badiou/Bogost argue, by the substitution of one system for another, producing in effect what the latter calls a "systems operation" as opposed to a "unit operation." Bogost's "ligature between the cultural and the computational" offers in place of Deleuzian "deterritorialization" a tactic of temporary re-territorialization of ideas and complex systems in a discrete framework. He insists that "the movement away from systems thinking is really a movement away from the simple, orderly, static categorization of things. [While] the gesture of a system operation is one of definition and explication...[,] unit operations articulate connections between nodes in networks; they build relations" (8). In this regard, he later cites Žižek's appropriation of Lacanian "units" of meaning "without returning necessary control to the Lacanian project," that is, without getting caught up in what Peter Starr calls the "vicious circularity... of the Lacanian system" (34).[10] As regards my own project, I can congratulate myself for performing a version of this, borrowing

liberally from and just-linking between rhetorical, composition, and media theories without feeling indebted to any systematic project of "denegation" (Vitanza), for example. More vitally, the node-and-connection emphasis staves off the risk of circularity in how rhetoric(s) might approach the question of gamers and their play: by refusing to enshrine a system (which connotes some sort of *telos*), unit operations allows for more *ad hoc* kinds of connections, both by the gamer and the would-be critic. Still, the very computational logic (of being finite, discrete, and multiply layered) on which unit operations relies rings harshly with, and is indeed dismissive of, much of the poststructural underpinnings of modern rhetorical theory. Is being-computational antithetical to being-poststructural? What value is there in the race between the two to see which perspective is the more antifoundational?

In the previous chapter, this project cited Victor Vitanza's notion of ac-counting. Just as Plato (through Socrates) calls in *Gorgias* for rhetoric to produce an account of itself, and Edward Schiappa asks historiographers of rhetoric to account for the Sophists as either an Oasis or Mirage, Vitanza poses a playful meta-question designed to leverage open differences in method. Plato counts to "one" (the one substance, the primum mobile, the capital-T Truth that underlies phenomenal appearances), and Schiappa counts to two (either/or, dialectical logics, *dissoi logoi*). Vitanza asks that we count, then, not to three, but to "some more," to more radical possibilities of excess that cannot be reinscribed elsewhere. One one hand, Bogost's reliance on the "unit" might risk a dangerous kind of essentialism. In the Maturana example, for instance, our capacity to reduce the complex cybernetic system of an animal's physiology to a single "unit" in a larger ecology rests on the assumption that the system itself can be fully and completely known. Should some nuance of a frog's perceptual regime have somehow slipped our scientific gaze, then the unit would lose its "fungibility": its capacity to be read as a unit among other units.[11] In

this possible objection, we end up with a revision of unit operations that problematically offers both vast computational freedom (the ability to count any units whatsoever) and the tantalizing possibilities of the middle voice (by inserting the critic/agent into "some more" multiply layered systems-as-units), buttressed up by problematical assumptions (of the sort Vitanza warned about earlier) about our capacity to objectively *know* the world: the very epistemological tendency that the middle voice works against.

The antidote to this potentially unproductive impasse, one that will inform later attempts to "stretch" the concept of *êthos*, comes from the recognition that the "count as one" is less a strategy – a road to the Platonic One – than a temporary tactic for deterritorialization. Why belabor this point? In part, to avoid the rigid and mechanistic associations most in my field have stored up against our left-brained brethren in the science and math fields. In the ghettoization of the modern university we in English departments (rhetoric departments, education departments, composition departments or more likely subdepartments) tend to react to all these talks of computation and hard sciences with a degree of fear and loathing. This is less, I figure, out of quasi-Romantic bias (though it certainly factors in), and more out of a sense of incommensurability between the apparatuses through which we view the world: one based on the objectively observable, the other on the subjective and felt dimensions of experience. Each of those perspectives, of course, reduces fields of intermingling units to so many "systems operations," which defined as Bogost via Badiou have the ultimate effect of overdetermining complex interrelations at the expense of more discrete emergences. Furthermore, hashing out Bogost's unit-system differential also helps me locate a productive area of *similarity* between his model and that of Deleuze and Guattari, despite the former's deep-seated discomfort with the potential "totalities" of poststructuralism. For the purposes of my investigation, I pose the

question: what happens should we treat both "image" and "code" as units, as named sets of material propensities capable of multiple discrete interactions? While the complete adoption of the "unit operations" tactic seems partially insufficient to dealing with the uniquely imagistic aspects of gaming, the tactic does importantly return us to the topic of Barthes's "middle voice," if only in that as a tactic it promotes what Vitanza finds so important about the middle voice: its capacity to destabilize the static position of the reader/critic. Bogost himself even holds out an interesting possibility in his reading of Deleuze's overly systematic spatial model, that between smooth and striated spaces there exists an interesting third possibility. Noting themselves that spaces are always in a process of mixture and translation ("we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact only exist in mixture"), Deleuze and Guattari name a third space, "holey space," as the locus of that change. In earlier flirtations[12] with space terminology, holey space is named as a possibility that itself "communicates with smooth space and striated space" (415). Indeed, that prospect of translation-as-communication saves the concept for Bogost, as he offers as "[Deleuze and Guattari's] most practical fungible guideline" the following quote from the latter: "What interests us in the operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the *passages or combinations*: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces" (500). The middle-voice, similarly, can be read a destablizing tactic of "passage and combination," wherein the rhetorical agent can (re)encounter his self and his discourse; even if this reading might limit its more radical possibilities, the tenor of my project here (developing some sort of method for reading rhetoric and videogames as part and parcel of one another) asks that I continue to play with Bogost's terms. The rhetorical value of unit operations rests in the suspension of absolute

meaning via the repositioning of the rhetorical agent not as a creator of discourse, but rather as an arranger of units into any-pattern-whatsoever by way of the middle voice.

Still, the inherent favoring of the algorithmic over the imagistic in Bogost's own *Persuasive Games* – the fact that images (whatever they are) are mis-placed – leaves a potentially fruitful conversation untouched. I do not find it sufficient to merely have images fill a "node" in Bogost's methodology; the apparatus-logic of images may in fact suggest a different way of "build[ing] relations" among various material and ideological units. To phrase it differently: a unit-operations approach to a game might investigate the relationships that emerge between, to return to a prior example, a game mechanic (a particular control structure) and a game's depicted setting. To bring the image into the conversation might mean not only expanding on the image-as-diegesis formula of the unit itself (the notion that "image" is primarily narrative/diegetic in value), but may also – more tentatively and more profoundly – suggest that the network that links the two, image and algorithm, might be more multidimensional. This is less a problematization of Bogost's prismatic methodology and more an attempt to read the proceeds of that methodology in Ulmerian terms: to risk emergent relations between gamers, code, and image that follow the contours not of literate engagement (much less Aristotelian persuasion) but of imagistic flows and associations. Hayles does fairly by following code down the rabbit hole and arriving at the phenomenology of voltage on silicon, hazarding from that an emergent grammatology of fits and starts, of unambiguous open and closed states, of complexity rooted (as Bogost also seems to believe) in the atomic relations of discrete ones and zeroes. Ulmer follows Barthes into the matrix of the "third meaning" and emerges with a desire to re-invent methods, to make the academy re-invent itself, around the

incompossibilities of the electrate self. The videogame, whatever it is, will only come into view at the intersection of the two.

Arguing, then, that videogames construct rhetorical experience through an intersection of imagistic and algorithmic "meanings" (in the McLuhanian sense of their material and discursive propensities), a properly poststructuralist take on rhetorical theory suggests that the methods we use to interrogate that rhetorical experience should derive not from the received apparatus of "literacy" – whose historical/material construction was given serious scrutiny by Marx, Nietzsche, and later by Derridean deconstruction – but from an/other position that takes into account the reshaping of discourse under current material and social conditions. My own definition of gaming as a composite image-and-code based medium leaves me, then, with a double-agenda: to define each constituent medium as having powers of its own while combining both in a way that sacrifices no fidelity in that combination. The potential weakness in an image-based methodology is its totalizing power: Ulmer's *electracy*, as my incomplete treatment here risks, drifts towards becoming a tactic for indulging the "inherently" emotional attachments of the image. Bogost's code-based method of unit operations, on the other hand, offers flexibility and precision, but does so in a way that leads its creator back towards Aristotle and Habermasian concerns over argument in the "public sphere" in ways that undercut my desire to have it provide a "middle voice" for critics and gamers. My rhetorical theory of videogames depends on a (Vitanzian) denegation of those perspective, one that would break up [at] that totality, and so it needs a figure of its own to rely on: not the image or the unit, but another sort of possibility.

An exemplar figure for that work of reconciliation is WJT Mitchell's *Picture Theory.* To borrowing terminology from Lyotard, *Picture Theory* attempts to navigate the conceptual differend between image and algorithm. The trick is not to hazard a comparison between the two

media; Mitchell calls such methods “weak” in his own attempts to craft a theory around the importance of pictures when the latter is so frequently compared to written text. Rather, Mitchell encourages the would-be critic to consider how such differences only emerge from scenes of mixture:

> The best preventive to comparative methods is an insistence on literalness and materiality... to begin with *actual conjunctions of words and images*.... The relative positioning of visual and verbal representation (or of sight and sound, space and time) in these mixed media is, moreover, never simply a formal issue or a question to be settled by 'scientific' semoitics. The relative value, location, and the very identity of 'the verbal' and 'the visual' is exactly what is in question (90).

Mitchell's “image/text” offers him ultimately a “wedge to pry open the heterogeneity of media and of specific representations” (100). In semiotic terms, *Picture Theory* attempts to take snapshots of the synchronic axis of image/text relations: how signficances are assigned to image and text respectively by viewing them in moments of mixture. In more rhetorical terms, Mitchell's tactic is pleasantly Burkean by arriving at a sense of what sorts of agency are afforded by image and text only by studying them in the context of a wider rhetorical scene. It's not too much of a stretch to read Mitchell's image/text as kind of “multimodal” variation of Bogost's more cleanly stripped down “unit”: both are designed to define a unit of study and to, by doing so, define a method for approaching it. An interesting difference emerges in that, while in Mitchell's model the question of mixed media can never be fully “settled by 'scientific' semiotics,” this very gesture connotes that, whatever else we think about them, both image and text construct linguistic meaning in some way. In *Unit Operations*, Bogost arguably departs from that conversation altogether. By subordinating the image, emphasis falls instead on code,

on procedurality – on actions, not meanings, as performed by both games and critics. Mitchell too, though, has a kind of action in mind: he offers his book "not [as] a history of verbal and visual culture, but [as] a *theory*" (100, emphasis added). The question of semiotics – over what images and text *mean* – is given a place to play out without foreswearing the importance of action – what images, text, and critics *do*. My project is to do the same, in a sense, substituting for "image and algorithm" (or, collapsed for easier reference as "imalgorithm") for image and text and then, more interestingly I hope, using those relationships as a means to interrogate familiar concepts in rhetorical studies as they find echoes in games. The trick is less to ask "how does the control structure of *Bioshock* complement its aesthetics?" so much as "how does the composite imalgorithmic construction of *Bioshock* demonstrate how a traditional rhetorical category – say, emotional engagement – stands to shift on a fundamental level under the sway of this new medium? What can its operations – both discrete and systemic – teach us?" The "us" in question is not simply the wider community of Rhetoric & Composition scholars, but ourselves as subjects both reacting to and constituted by the "extension" of gaming-technology. Bogost describes this engagement (from the standpoint of a player but in terms that I think could be used to include the critic as well) by channeling Espen Aarseth's "cybertextual" model on the way to addressing his own concerns: "While Aarseth argues that computational works are better understood as cybernetic systems than as new, electronic versions of other kinds of texts, he scarcely acknowledges that an ergodic work might synthesize in a manner similar to a literary text," that is, as part and parcel of "some ideological context" (99). Bogost's attention to ideology, which carries so admirably over into *Persuasive Games*, perhaps sells short the full range of experience here, as it refashions the cybernetic loop as a literary experience while falling short of recasting its exchange of units as a possibly "electrate" experience. The figure of

the "imalgorithm" is an attempt to do so, by nuancing out the ways we "count" units while still preserving the fundamental structures of both Aarseth's cybernetic loop, structures that, as I've argued anyway, are endemic to our rhetorical and critical apparatus in the first place.

Attending to this wholly phantasmic neologism of mine requires that I root these potential emergent possibilities in some set of meaningful stakes. For me, the point of worrying over all these medialogical methods, risking charges of foundationalism for buying into McLuhan, and – yes – making up fun new words, is that historical precedent quite possibly demonstrates that nothing less than the construction of the human subject is at stake. What we possibly have in this moment are untold numbers of shifting and competing priorities for how subjects are constructed, discourses both cultural and corporate (if there's any difference under Jameson's "cultural logic of late capitalism"), and these discourses are finding new ways to emerge through the technologies we use. When previously citing disagreement with the "social-constructivist" leanings of Ken McAllister or Ian Bogost, I did so only to set my sights on a possible bigger picture: the notion that not just discourse, but what it means to be a rhetorical subject might be changing – a subject that produces and interprets language, and builds on those processes a sense of what the world *is* and how to interact with it. To think of gamers as rhetorical agents, then, means neither that we suspend a sense of their authorship, their "authority" to determine the meanings of their own play, nor simply that we declare their authorship as being somehow "in partnership" with the game, as a give-and-take between subjective and systemic demands. The middle voice as a concept can unfortunately lend itself to just that, rendering the subject as a sort of traffic circle around which various meanings orbit before being sorted out elsewhere. However, I would posit *affirmatively* that play is an act of the middle voice: a process during which the player-as-rhetor encounters and is encountered by both objective and "felt"

dimensions of experience. However, my reading of Mitchell encourages a stance that refuses to atomize those dimensions or to discover some hidden algebra that would define the extent to which the gamer engages in pictorial/emotional experience or is confronted by algorithmic/ ideological questions in any given moment.

Each moment in the process of gameplay shows us the middle voice, doubled. Not only do we have a scene of a profound openness and possibility wherein gamers position themselves amid the competing imperatives of ideologies, mathematical structures, and subjective experience, but we have beyond that (we might say "within" that loop) yet another layer of complicated exchanges. This inner loop attends to another possibility – that of not a multiplicity of meanings, but a suspension of meaning. If Vitanza (rightfully) celebrates the middle voice as a perspective that affords greater possibilities of meanings – "some more" configurations for engaging (with) language and the languaged world outside the realm of Platonic/Aristoteliean/ scientific discourse – the other possibility hidden within that middle voice is that of silence. Because, while Ulmer's conductive logic relays him from the obtuse meaning of images to the middle voice, Barthes himselves hazards a comparison in another direction: "The obtuse meaning can be seen as an *accent*, the very form of an emergence, of a *fold*... marking the heavy layer of informations an significations. If it could be described (a contradiction in terms) it would have exactly the same nature as the Japanese *haiku* – anaphoric gesture without significant content, a sort of gash rased of meaning (or desire for meaning)" (*Image/Music/Text*, 62). The linkage to haiku is something Ulmer himself capitalizes on in *Internet Invention*, using it as an relay to shift the conversation from traditional Western concerns like metaphysics to more "syncretic" concerns like mood and state of mind (49-60). Barthes himself, in his exploration of Japanese culture, develops the centrality of *haiku* to Japanese thinking, playing in that same grey

area of speech without the will towards semiotic meaning: "Deciphering, normalizing, or tautological, the ways of interpretation, intended in the West to *pierce* meaning, i.e., to get into it by breaking and entering... cannot help failing the haiku; for the work of reading which is attached to it is to suspend language, not to provoke it" (*Empire of Signs*, 72). This (counter)statement, perhaps more than any other, helps establish the crucial conceptual differentiation between my proposed model and that of Bogost. "Procedural rhetoric" attempts to treat the fact of the algorithm as a given, as an arranger of actions; the clear subordination of image (or of "visual rhetoric") to the fact of the algorithm effectively normalizes the image's obtuse dimensions. In such systems, the image merely supplies *studium* content, meaning that is either straightforwardly "informational" (the statistical data on a Heads-Up Display, perhaps) or "symbolic" by virtue of its insertion within a system of procedural rhetoric (*Image/Music/Text*, 52). The work of the middle-voice of gameplay, which we may isolate in "imalgorithmic" fragments is to attend to the process of play itself, not to the critical work of ideological analysis that the image effectively "suspends."

Silence is not just an absence of participation, but an infra-thin possibility of the gamer asserting for herself a type of as-yet-unmapped agency. Attempting to describe its features or contours, neither the punctum meaning of images or the mathematical layering of code is sufficient. Silence (or "silence-as-the-middle-voice") shows up the insufficiency of either language to fully account for the experience of play. And yet, that area of ineffability seems to be the precise source of much of gaming's power. In proposing this composite of mine – a composite of both objects of study and methods for pursuing that study – I mean to understand it better, and to establish some terms and practices through which scholars in rhetoric (and, maybe, composition) can better understand how this nascent multi-billion dollar industry is quite

possibly rewriting our rhetorical history for us and, regrettably it seems, largely without us. What do we make of rhetorical agency under the influence of gaming? How might gamers understand themselves as rhetorical agents? How can scholars of rhetoric both understand and contribute to these emergences? What, ultimately, is the "message" behind this "medium"? In the chapters that follow, I'll be running off in search of three completely arbitrary categories of experience, following a trail of bread crumbs began by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Specifically, from the defiles of this complicated "imalgorithmic" middle voice, I'll want to ask questions about emotional, logical, and ethical experience – about questions of felt experience, objective experience, and the experience of the self.

Player 2: Re-processing Disciplinary *Êthos*

I'd like to hazard a link to another conversation where the stakes are related; I'd like to argue that how we define gameplay has everything to do with how we define our own critical enterprise. This leap provides the space for my first conceptual "stretching." The development of a more materially engaged vocabulary for the rhetoric of gaming represents a scholarly effort to define games as rhetorical engines, as extensions of ourselves and our capacities to generate meaning. The easy and customary first move, then, is to discuss "ourselves" by way of redefining the subjectivities – the *êthoi* – of "students" or any conveniently constructed Others-who-game. This classical move is perhaps most notably enshrined in the early chapters of Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen*, which addresses the composite and fluid identitiy(ies) of mid-90s chat room users. A closer to home example might be Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe's collection *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*, where all of the "lives" are youthful, belonging to the late-teen to early 20s age group predominantly serviced by the university

system. (Similarly, I could cite Lester Faigley's 1992 landmark *Fragments of Rationality*, where the then-novel technologies of asynchronous online conversation are studied with an eye towards the reconstitution of rational discourse by the students using that technology.) While their ethnographies are careful and insightful, they represent only one small facet of a larger potential project: a reconception of the stability of *êthos* as a critically demarcated term after the turn to electracy.

To be clear: I don't seek in this short space to argue that the meaning of *êthos* – taken here as Aristotle's proof based on character, extrapolated more widely as a concern over the subjectivity of the rhetorical speaker – is somehow radically different due to the cultural saturation of the "imalgorithmic" medium of gaming, that rhetorical subjectivity has undergone a radical transformation. The demarcation that does concern me proceeds from this chapter's investigation of videogames and their distinct meaning-making "units." Particularly potent in that conversation is the sense that both code and images function as what Deleuze and Guattari call "holey spaces," unpredictable spaces of "passage and combination," yet what also haunts the scene of that conversation is the sense that these "units" emerge through a process of play, itself a hugely loaded term to which my conversation has paid little attention until now. Just as in the first chapter I considered Plato's dismissal of writing as a "knack" or a plaything, so too does gaming face similar charges today from academic quarters. What potential lies within the spaces of passage and combination tends to be, as the above examples illustrate, cordoned off as a concern more suited for ethnography study than "serious" rhetorical consideration: a dividing line is established between the players and the serious workers. Ultimately, the concern I'd "just-link" to is the loaded dividing line between two *êthos* positions whose distinctions stand to

fluidify under the pressure of gaming: those between teacher and student, between the subjects-who-are-supposed-to-know, and the subjects-who-are-supposed-to-play.

For compositionists, the importance of *êthos* is doubly instantiated, as the field's conceptual identity is bound up in the tension between theory and practice, rhetoric and pedagogy. For that reason, I'm keen to listen in on an important conversation within Rhetoric & Composition: that of the nature, use, and purposes of play. Consulting that conversation will offer insight into how composition studies (broadly conceived) may negotiate the instabilities produced not only by an emergent rhetorical apparatus predicated on the activity of "play," but that also possibly encourages "play" of an altogether more radical sort. This may seem like an unfair baiting of another conversation, as this project has already scrutinized the Platonic and foundationalist drifts in much of the rhetorical framework undergirding composition. My intention, though, is not to bring composition into the conversation only to demolish its *êthos*. I believe instead that, amid the widespread popular pressure to make room for gaming within the pedagogical enterprise[13], the composition community's pre-existing conversation with play serves as an ideal jumping-off point, or rather, an ideal point to consider "some more" extensions. A "rhetoric after literacy" occasioned by the "imalgorithmic" medium of gaming can start to come into view by considering first how "play" informs (and deforms) this conversation's sense of itself, its own *êthos*.[14] By briefly considering various takes on what "play" means, we can ask of composition's *êthos*: what possibilities do the "middle voice" provide? How might its received *êthos* process those possibilities? What other possibilities may come into view by reversing the field and inventing (to borrow Ulmer's preferred term) an electrate *êthos* for gaming-study from the ground up? In short, what occasions this just-linking to the work/play dynamic is the pressure to develop (account for might be more accurate) an *êthos* that can pursue

the possibilities of gaming and play amid the competing demands of the received rhetoric that puts composition teachers to "work" at the expense of (or quite possibly in spite of) the wider "play" of discourse.

While videogames are a relatively new entrant to the critical scene, "play" has been a topic of conversation in composition studies for at least a generation. A brief (and admittedly limited) review of two sources in that conversation will serve to set up the stakes for the extensions to come, by both anticipating aspects of imalgorithmic textuality that affirm a playful *êthos* and by simultaneously constructing a system that delimits the range of that *êthos*. The expressivist and process-based rhetoric of Peter Elbow is among the first to call for an attention to play, and to playfulness in the *êthos* of composition. Specifically, he calls on writers to interface with the "intellectual enterprise" writing by approaching it as a system of games: the doubting game and the believing game (148). The doubting game asks writers to adopt a stance of critique and error-detection; the believing game, on the other hand, is designed to provide a loftier vantage: "a point from which more can be seen and understood" (149, 163). While Elbow's game-system is interestingly *active*, the structural similarity between this compositional strategy and videogame procedurality – both are systems of inter/action among rhetorical agents – is not fully sufficient for defining the stakes involved in this sort of "play." Instead, as concerns the rhetorical *êthos* Elbow puts into play, I am less concerned about the particular construction of either game, and more concerned about the process of negotiation among these states of play. While the analytical framework of the "doubting game" is far more comfortable to most logocentrically trained writers, Elbow asks that writers maintain a sense of fluidity. The doubting game "not the only game," and he further insists that the two games are not only "complementary" but "interdependent.... only halves of a full cycle of thinking" (174, 176, 191).

In that sense, the real *êthos* Elbow summons is one that finds a middle passage in the cycle of doubt and belief; both games add up to one larger game where the writer is invited to experience him/herself as "the recipient of one's own actions," to borrow Ulmer's phrasing of the middle voice (57). While this seems to harmonize nicely with the rhetorical dimensions of code, this is a sort of play that leaves other units unaccounted for: the audience, the institution. Within the literate context of composition, this game functions by virtue of its circumspection – it acknowledges no need to "just-link" to other units beyond it; in its isolation, this "game" risks becoming a totalizing systems-operation. Ultimately, Elbow's attempt to introduce play into the composition equation creates a wonderful set of possibilities while simultaneously calling our critical attention to its own inertia. As critics since Elbow have continued to explore the possibilities in play, spurred particularly onward by the development of electronic writing technologies, this project can encounter other constructions of "play" that will help point the way to a critical *êthos* for videogaming.

Albert Rouzie's *At Play in the Fields of Writing* shares Elbow's desire to push composition away from its "work" *êthos*. Published in 2004, it also has the opportunity to address two watershed concerns after Elbow's time: the advent of hypertext via the Internet in the 1990s, and composition's own debates over the role of postmodernism during that same time. Rouzie specifically cites James Berlin's critique of so-called "ludic postmodernism" and his subsequent attempt to "recuperate the critical potential of ludic communication without diluting or restricting play so as to be unrecognizeable," a practice usually addressed as "critical postmodernism," associated with Berlin's "social-epistemic" rhetoric (3). Rouzie later cites Teresa Ebert's complaint that ludic postmodernism's desire to attend to language as playful and unstable "has no political impact because it is nonrhetorical, a diversion from the material

practices that truly count" (qtd. in Rouzie 26). Rouzie jumps into this debate in an effort to smooth over the distinction between ludic and critical approaches, between "playful actions" and "serious content" (1). Contra Ebert, he argues that play's "dialectical qualities can make it a powerful force for resistance and change"; he specifically sets his critical gaze on the inherently playful[15] writing medium of hypertext, finding in that broadly conceived medium (his discussion later ranges over different hypertextual applications, including Hypercard and chat rooms) the roots of a "serio-ludic" rhetoric (27). The *êthos* of such a rhetoric, he argues, is to "to recuperate play from its binary opposition to work/seriousness" (7) Whereas Elbow's approach to play, then, constructs a self-contained game in conversation with itself, Rouzie hopes to harness the power of hypertextual writing in order to bring a kind of play – an instability, but also a source of "pleasure" (3) – to the *êthos* of composition, working under the belief that work and play do not represent ideological absolutes, but broad domains that can be hybridized. And yet, like Elbow, Rouzie insists that "play" is possessed of its own "dialectical qualities [that] make it a powerful force for resistance and change" (27) – a highly problematic gesture, as it seeks to devolve onto play the characteristics of the same "critical postmodernism" stance that marginalized play in the first place.

This terminological sniping is less an attempt to invalidate Rouzie's rhetoric *per se*, than to point out instead how the loaded term "play" seems to double some of the concerns I've associated with procedurality. Both terms appear to simultaneously describe discrete states and fluid states. Both are in conversation with literacy/work, but are powerfully other-than literacy/work. While Elbow manages play by creating it as its own self-sustaining system, Rouzie's language attempts to reach a perfect Lagrangian point where intellectual "work" (represented by Berlin's drive towards critical literacy) is balanced by the freedom of unalienated

and pleasurable "play," but achieves in that very drive towards dialectical synthesis a cross-contamination between the two *êthoi.* Play in this latter configuration always-already drifts towards becoming work, just as the Bogost's account of procedurality tends to render code's differences in terms of literate criticism. In both critical moments, the "other" term (play, code) is disciplined through interrogating its *significance* via a "ligature" of sorts between it and the more comfortable domains of the critical or cultural. The issue for my discussion, then, is to discuss briefly how competing definitions of "play" can be put in conversation from this chapter's prior discussion of the technological specificities of games, with an eye towards how the reshaping of "play" effectively reshapes the *êthos* of the critical/pedagogical enterprise of "working" with videogames.

Games, whatever else they are, are *played*, and at least some of the conversation surrounding videogames has to do with how that play can be defined. The two most oft-cited theorists of play are Johan Huizinga, whose 1938 work *Homo Ludens* provided one of the century's first sustained efforts towards treating play as a viable object of scholarship, and Roger Caillois, whose work represents a significant extension and amplification of the former's work. Huizinga defines his critical project in terms of his dissatisfaction with existing frameworks for treating play. He writes that while his contemporaries have defined play in such various terms as Freudian wish-fulfillment, as a behavioral outlet for expending excess energy, or even as a restorer of one's energy, "All these hypotheses have something in common: they all start from the assumption that play must serve something which is *not* play" (2). Perhaps Huizinga's most famous phrase defines play as a "magic circle," which "synthetic world" theorist Edward Castronova most succinctly defines as "a shield of sorts, protecting the fantasy world from the outside world" (147). Game theorists Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman similarly adopt

Huizinga's “circle” metaphor to describe play, asserting that the process of engagement with a videogame is “genuinely magical” on some level (95). Based on these definitions, a “ludic” *êthos* based on this model of play would value the experience of the magical and the subjective: a stance familiar to the expressivist school of composition, and one that falls into line with the self-contained play of Peter Elbow's system of writing games. In that respect, this sort of “stretching” of *êthos*, an attempt to account for the term's transformation within an electrate rhetoric of gaming, leads only back towards tropes already available to compositionists. We've played this game before.

If the Huizinga's “expressivist” account leads unproductively towards a comfortably integral *êthos*, the the play theory of Roger Caillois can help illuminate a path towards an *êthos* more attentive to fluidity and hybridity, a move that maintains a problematic all its own. Specifically, as concerns videogames, both Castronova and Salen & Zimmerman follow their accounts of Huizinga's model with qualifications. Castronova doubts the integrity of the “magic circle” in the networked and interconnected spaces of “virtual worlds,” arguing that the circle around synthetic worlds “cannot be sealed completely; people are crossing it all the time in both directions, carrying their behavioral assumptions and attitudes with them' (147). Salen & Zimmerman construct a similar contrast, arguing that the “closed” state of play described by Huizinga is only one half of an equation for understanding videogame-play; the other is through an understanding of the surrounding culture, an *êthos* that interestingly parallels Albert Rouzie's desire to keep the pleasure of play (within the magic circle) in conversation with the serious dimensions of critically minded “resistance and change” (96). Roger Caillois, whose theory of play is highly based on that of Huizinga, attempts to redress the “magical” undertones of play through a strategy of division and classification. He defines both a broad continuum between

play within rules (*ludus*) and outside of rules (*paidia*), as well as an alternate system as four distinct sorts of "play" (competition, chance, mimicry, and vertigo)[16]. These terms provide Caillois's theory with a degree of flexibility and conceptual rigor, arranged into various combinations they provide the framework for his ultimate goal: "a sociology derived from games" (57). Play, in this model, is defined in a manner more complementary to the ends of a what Rouzie or James Berlin might call a "critical" *êthos*.

What ultimately emerges from Caillois's critical *êthos* is a take on play that not only avoids "magic," but views play as an active stripper of magic from lived experience:

> Without doubt, secrecy, mystery, and even travesty [terms which game theorist Alexander Galloway defines as not just magical, but also including the similarly "hidden" domain of real-world politics[17]] of can be transformed into play activity, but it must be pointed out that this transformation is necessarily to the detriment of the secret and the mysterious, which play publishes, exposes, and somehow *expends*... the mystery may no longer be awesome. (4-5)

Caillois's concern is less interesting for my project as a "more accurate" or "real" construction of play, but rather as a reflection of a rhetorical framework determined to rescue play from the "magic" circle by emptying it of that magic. Writing in a somewhat different context, composition theorist Lynn Worsham has addressed the tendency of academic discourses, even those with the most well-intentioned "critical" impulses, to implicitly neutralize the radical value of the "alternative" discourses with which they come in contact. Citing attempts by "epistemologists" to codify the properties of one such alternative, she argues that they "assume an *interpretive stance* toward *ecriture féminine* as an object of knowledge and a repository of truth," under which circumstances the alternative is both emptied of its power and often "found

lacking" (84, emphasis added). The shadow of the academic *êthos*, the "interpretive stance" fueled by "an institutional power of great force," asserts itself here with the problematic consequence of delimiting (de-term-ining, as Vitanza would have it) the object of its attention (Dobrin 48). For Sidney Dobrin, this problem is part and parcel of the larger "ecology" of academic discourse; in my own terms, I might argue that the attempts described above (both Elbow and Rouzie, Huizinga and Caillois) deal with play within the received "one-two" logic[18] of the literate apparatus (which includes the institutional space of the academy). For this project's "stretching" to be complete, I will have needed to consider an *êthos* for discussing videogame-play that resists the gravity of that apparatus.

Read in terms of that literate "ecology," a possibility remains: the "middle voice," which I have suggested here is a potent possibility re/turned to the scene by the grammatological construction of gaming. The question becomes then: "is the middle voice a sufficient position from which to construct an *êthos* complementary to, and sufficient for, rhetorical forays into videogame studies?" The figure of that middle voice offers the immediate benefit of positing a speaker who acts from a state of "bifurcation" and "incompossibility" (Vitanza 284-5). Borrowing from the parlance of semiotics, Katherine Hayles affirms this possibility when she argues that code reverses the traditional priorities of the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. In writing, the former is actually present while the latter represents unseen possibilities, yet in code, the storehouse of available options at any given time is, in fact, more "real" than the flickering "virtual" signifiers available onscreen (53). The "middle voice," existing in a fluctuating state where the "incompossible" subject grasps possibilities may just as easily describe the *êthos* of the database, where possibilities exist in multiple possible combinations. This voice, then, seems to position the would-be electrate game-critic's *êthos* between the excesses of the two takes on

"play" that I've broadly aligned with the theories of Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois: neither entirely cut off from the conversation nor de-term-ined by its proximity to an academic discourse that would de-term-ine it. The "middle-voice," here, seems to act as an "executable" potential[19]: a critical *êthos* we can use to actively play games with and rearrange the workings of the discourse from where we sit.

And yet, this entire process of grasping after a particular new determination always risks falling flat on its face: this would-be rhetoric of mine, it could be argued, doubles down on the inherent "meaning" of procedurality, as if such a meaning existed. Without intending to, my attempt to de-term-ine an emergent sense of critical *êthos* snaps down hard onto the nasty underside of code: what Hayles calls its "intolerance of ambiguity." At the same time as a "worldview of code" serves to actively re-wire many hard-ingrained humanistic expectations about how textuality works (or plays), Hayles in nearly the same breath points out how the "meaning" of coded media is predicated on a "specialized community of experts" working within the "embedded practices" and "hegemonic reinscriptions" of multinational capitalism (51). It is very likely this aspect of code that drives game theorist Mckenzie Wark to bemoan, beginning with terms that may as well be lifted from Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*: "While the counter culture wanted worlds of play outside the game, the military entertainment complex countered in turn by expanding the game to the whole world, containing play forever within it" (016). While the middle voice remains as a possible tactic for interfacing with games from within, it is still ultimately a participant (if an ineluctable and slippery one) within that system: like Wark, our moment of clarity should emerge through a *metalepsis*, a leap outside the game:

> Gamespace is just like your Playstation. It appears to itself as a rigorous game, with every action accounted for, and yet it relies on a huge power cord poking out

> the back that sucks in energy from an elsewhere for which it makes no allowance.... There is something outside The Cave after all. Game over. (210)

In similar terms that also – like Rouzie, Worsham, and Dobrin – orbit a conversation surrounding the theoretical *êthoi* of composition studies, Cynthia Haynes channels both one of Katherine Hayles's references to incompatibilty between different versions of Windows (proof of code's "intolerance") and Mckenzie Wark's insistence on a space outside the "game": "I would not have us use one 'operating system' instead of another, subscribe to one 'provider' instead of another, or advocate one 'interface' instead of another.... I would not have us build more foundations on modernist soil" (694). If "play" has only taken us so far, what might a gaming-*êthos* need to escape this gravity? If the "middle voice" is ultimately an insufficient tactic for getting outside the narrow game of the literate apparatus, what sort of voice is?

A too-narrow grasp of procedurality, it seems, disservices our sense of how scholarly *êthoi* can interface productively with "play." Its opportunity for a middle voice, for all of its potential, is still caught in the over-determining ecology of an outside institutional force ("capitalism" or "the university"). A videogaming *êthos* put into play in such a situation is always-already doomed to fall into the habits, methods, and strategies of the academic "operating system." The alternative, to follow the logic of not only Cynthia Haynes but of Victor Vitanza, Greg Ulmer, and all those who have pushed this discussion towards more radical and interesting "thirds," is to reach for a sense of *êthos* that lies outside of that system. If Vitanza's declared *êthos* in *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric* is to adopt a position more interested in "both/and" than "either/or," then we have perhaps detected how the inherence of procedurality in videogames points the way towards an "both" stance without yet showing us the "and" of an outside radically Third term.

Such a critical *êthos*-position is ultimately necessary for my project because it "searches for third terms (but this has nothing to do with Hegelian synthesis) *outside* of those binaries. ... It searches for the remainder, the 'stormy' overflow that cannot be contained or ac/counted for in a binary structure (which, as Vitanza suggests, can only count to two, or One-cum-two [a middle ground or Hegelian synthesis], but never to *three*)" (Davis 89). Specifically in need of disruption for my project to move forward is the "intolerance of ambiguity" associated with procedurality – its material ability to count one-and-two but never to three. While a somewhat Luddite reaction might be to decry that intolerance as a limitation inherent in and unique to the apparatus of computing (and gaming), poststructural approaches to rhetoric, that "intolerance" has roots in deeper sources. D. Diane Davis traces such an intolerance back to a scene familiar to my project: the scene of the early conversations between rhetoric and Platonic method. What is at stake in my discussion for code is extended by Davis into a conversation about language in general; the importance Davis assigns to the relationship between structure and erasure offers a telling tale about my own project's attempt to craft an *êthos* for videogame research:

> Language must be mastered as a tool for reason to *work*, and through its lens poetic/mythic language becomes a "word/magic" that has nothing to do with "reality." Plato and Aristotle assume that the world is naturally orderly, and, like good protostructuralists, they go about fitting everything into their obsessive-compulsive structural schemes – what can't be fit in gets erased. (84, emphasis added)

The question of what "gets erased" is taken up by Davis's "rhetoric of laughter" in nearly the same breath, with some alarming attention paid to the stakes in the discussion: Plato and Aristotle tried to "calm the storm" of "language and Being": their "anaesthetic is purchased at

the expense of free-play" (84). To collocate these terms together, we have in Davis's discussion a not-too-coincidental contrast between work and play, and an inherent alignment between those terms and structure (Plato/Aristotle as "protostructuralists") and Being, painted in terms of stormy excess, which resists and slips the bounds of the structure. Crucially, the "play" Davis refers to here is not the sort of "play" encountered in the somewhat colloquial or sociological senses of Rouzie's discussion (play as a definable sort of activity). Davis's line of flight away from a worldview based on a heightened "intolerance of ambiguity" is to address play/Being at the level of the signifier itself, play in the Derridean sense of language continually moving and slipping, not "play" as a system of significance constituted by the work/leisure dialectic.

Rather than getting tied up in an already well-established conversation on the relationship between identity and poststructuralism[20], I'd like to consider how Davis's broad theoretical strokes on free-play and Being can help my own project rig up an alternative space to deal with "play" and *êthos*. In particular, I'll turn away from "free-play" in the sense of the continuous deferral and slippage of meaning[21], and turn more particularly to how those broad theories can be applied to the slightly less broad domain of identity politics. The goal of my provocation here being to suggest an *êthos*-formation harmonious with the grammatological structures of gaming, my last move will be to consider identity formation from the standpoint of composition, a perspective that will help translate this general poststructural concern into one more fungible within the specific concern here. Student writers, like gamers, exist in an odd nexus where their identities are marginalized. Channeling the postcolonial theory of Edward Said, Bruce McComiskey writes that our habit of thought is to define ourselves (as scholars) by rendering the "other" (the student, the gamer) as an "opposite" (69). In such a way, to paraphrase Davis, our *êthoi* are comfortably positioned in a structure of opposition, while anything that doesn't fit into

the binary of opposition "gets erased." Historically, such markers of opposition have included gender and race; here, it means squandering the potential value of "play" by linking it to an ecology of "work." McComiskey's frame for recomputing those *êthoi* derives from the argument that both Foucault and Derrida draw upon their nearly shared views of the nature of language as a kind of free-play to structure "identity *and* difference" not as opposites but as a "complementary pair" structured by an aporia, or gap (70, emphasis added). The conjunctive "and" is hardly an accident. Rather, it is Foucault's direct attempt to sidestep the "discrimination" that creates and maintains difference by a process of intuitive "resemblance," one in which the "inevitable connection between one element in a series and that which immediately follows it" asserts itself over what Davis calls the "storm of Being," that is, identity that is not overdetermined from without (Foucault, 60-1). Imagine, then, if you will, Foucault's model of "identity *and* difference" with the terms replaced with the two senses of "play" generated earlier: Elbow's self-defining play on one side and Rouzie's determined "serious play" hybrid on the other. The "aporia," the gap between, represents the second possibility, the possibility of free-play, the "and" that complements the middle voice's "both."

What might this "both/and" model mean in terms of how we might reach beyond our received sense of play towards the possibilities in the videogame apparatus? How, based on this model, might we imagine a critical *êthos* that runs complementary to the "imalgorithmic" construction of the gaming medium? To continue pointing towards his discussion as a relay for my own, McComiskey proposes to use Foucault's "critical practice of geneaology... to lay bare the oppressive forces at work in various discursive formations' constructions of identity/difference oppositions" (71). As admitted before, McComiskey's context for writing about postmodern identity theory are the very real conditions under which his students encounter

marginalization: a circumstance that hardly anyone could rightfully ascribe to gaming, which enjoys a cultural, if not academic, hegemony. Yet, as Rouzie points out, a sense of "play" and its attendant pleasures is a much more problematic position; for it to have been admitted to the conversation at all has meant proferring it an identity based on "inevitable" differences between play and narrative, or play and ideology – tactics of establishing difference that are especially familiar to the scholarship surrounding videogames. Yet, there's a kernel of truth in that establishment: Games are, through the "grammar of gameworks," de-term-ined objects, so it doesn't help to pretend that a sense of wild free linguistic play is fully and unproblematically made available there. What ultimately do we want to preserve? What does a "free-play" *êthos* look like? McComiskey's connection with Foucault answers: a discursive/critical identity that can find the play in the Other without colonizing it or insisting on a "inevitable connection." If, ultimately, a purely procedural approach is insufficient to the task of constructing an identity-through-play, then we might only need to appeal to the fact of what code mobilizes through gaming: Those connections will no longer be "inevitable" but will come accidentally, by happenstance, through conduction – that is, through the obtuse and through laughter. If Mckenzie Wark warns gamers to construct an *êthos* that is both "ludic and lucid" (019), then the third step beyond that would be to play the game of being both "ludic and lucid," but then to also risk falling into the gap, the risk of counting "units" differently.

Practically, this "ludic, lucid, and laughing" approach to *êthos* can be approached as a question of *materials*. The "imalgorithm" serves as a figure setting off a kind of rhetorical chain-reaction: an unpredictable and constantly self-reiterating cycle that prompts a form of critical "unit-making." The stretched and extended scholarly *êthos*, under these conditions, finds itself pushed towards a critical mindset that encourages possibility (*kairos* – no real surprise there, as

it's been a recurrent term so far), but that specifically approaches the possibilities of scholarship – both in research and teaching – from the standpoint of a continual and self-informing "play" involving not just an object of interest, but also any materials whatsoever that happen to be near-by. Resisting the "inevitable connections" in our mindset that would link, say, a videogame to a particular rhetorical mindset, this *êthos* would push beyond for more associational plays, more possibilities in how games can be approached not just as meaningful play, but as plays of meaning. Part of that process is to accept the videogame, in all of its messy emergent grammatology, as part of the available "database" of our own materials. To offer an analogue, his scene of material-selection forms the core of the rhetorical *êthos* of Geoffrey Sirc's own compositional project. Referencing in particular the despair evinced by prominent composition scholar David Bartholomae about the quality of his students' writing, Sirc points out that the issue is less with the students' writing *per se* than with the selection of materials chosen by Bartholomae as exemplar[22]; the inevitable failure of his students to fully resemble the exemplar creates moments of "disciplinary slapstick [that] cause him, in true Modernist fashion, to dig in his heels, insisting on the need for more discussion 'on the fundamental problems of professional writing' [16] .... This is composition under the sign *limited possibilities*" (38). In terms of my own stretching, I suggest that Sirc might as well be describing Rouzie, slipping on a banana peel as he tries to "play" the critical game with not only a limited sense of the available tools[23] or at the very least, within the bounds of a system that will always limit the possibilities. To round off my discussion, I'll consider how Sirc suggests arranging his materials, and why his process might ultimately offer one of the best overall clues as to what a videogame-infused *êthos* might look like.

Inspired by the "ready-made" *êthos* of French avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp, Sirc elaborates an approach to composition studies based on what philosopher Giorgio Agamben (and Cynthia Haynes, cited earlier) calls the *quodlibet*, the principle of "whatever," not in the sense of "it does not matter which," but in the sense that "it always matters" (Agamben 1). Just as Haynes suggests a sort of "free-play" where we avoid being encoded into one sort of product or another (one operating system over another), Sirc calls for an approach that is "idea-generative, not product-oriented; it's data-interaction," an approach that bears more than a passing resemblance to Bogost's "unit-operations" (56). To do so, Sirc borrows Duchamp's tactic of "the sign of the accordance, by which all terms vibrate together in an endless troping" (41). Beginning with a contrast between writers Richard Rodriguez and Richard Hoggart, Sirc coordinates (counts off) a number of other similarly constrasted and coordinated unit-pairs, between Malcolm X and varied "readings" of his autobiography, between a student's St. Croix narrative and the "unified" idea out there of a more-ideal (because more critical, because more modelled on the example of a master writer like Mary Louise Pratt) travel narrative (43,55). This *êthos* of free-play, then, manifests itself at the level of the materials with which Sirc chooses to work, using any set of materials whatsoever to continually reconstruct (and by so doing, *de*construct) the relationship, expressed as a Duchampian mathematical ratio), between an "ideal" sort of writing and students' actual writing, between the ideal and the possible. In modernism, according to Sirc, "their space for composition was that infra-thin line between writing and good writing, words and knowledge; it was a very special, *definitive* space in which the artist could work[,but] Duchamp abandoned that definitive space, the traditional forms, limits, concerns, and materials. He went totally off the page... the resultant 'becoming' being anything-whatever" (61). Sirc draws on potential "anything-whatever" (*quodlibet*) from the

discourse of gangsta rap, using that music and the scene around the music as a "found" set of materials to which his students can react. What his example suggests to me, and where this conversation will end for now, is that *Composition as a Happening* may have coincidentally provided the most fully imalgorithmic sense yet produced of an *êthos*-under-the-influence of gaming, one that allows for the "free-play" of association and language while returning doggedly to the processing and reprocessing of distinctly defined (if only contingently) "units." The *êthos* this project looking for is one that engages in those grey areas, areas that may seem unnecessarily ludic or frivolous, and that does so *affirmatively*, unwilling to, as Sirc puts it, sacrifice the "cool-site [electrate] *wow*" to the "literate *hmmm*" (50).

In the case studies that follow, I will apply the "imalgorithm" to the study of a pair of games, beginning with and focusing on 2007's *Portal*, by Valve Software. Adopting the methodologies of both Geoffrey Sirc and Ian Bogost, I will be interested in test-driving the former's push towards an *êthos* based on "cool-site *wow,*" one that celebrates and engages affirmatively with the electrate structures of gaming. The case studies will be particularly interested in the exchange of "units" within (and possibly *among*) games, exchanges that can be proposed and sketched out using Duchamp's "sign of accordance." Furthermore, the case studies will offer a double-play of sorts: not only looking at the work/play dynamic as represented in *Portal*, but using that dynamic as a relay for how our own critical *êthos* can be usefully redrawn.

Case Studies: From *Portal* to *Rock Band*

To begin, I'll draw from a critical/hermeneutic tradition that is reasonably well-worn within the humanities in general, and that forms an aspect of the "critical consciousness" *êthos*

within rhetoric and composition in particular: Karl Marx's notion of the "commodity fetish," which originates in his *Capital* and subsequently is taken up by Theodor Adorno's wider-scale critique of the "culture industry." Fetishism, Marx argues, is rooted in the social character of labor; it is by "being exchanged that the products of labor acquire, as values, one uniform social status, distinct form their varied forms of existence as objects of utility" (44). By saying this, Marx relies on a fundamental Platonic/Aristotelian distinction between use-value and exchange-value, the latter deriving from the world of social appearances, not from an appreciation of the "true thing itself." In other words, I'd suggest that the rhetoric of "commodity fetishism" is inherently *logos*-based.[24] Broadly, I would characterize the appropriate rhetorical response as the development of a more proper "critical consciousness" (to paraphrase Freire), a *logos* powerful enough pierce the signifier and empty it of its false meaning. In such a fashion, the false *logos* of the commodity fetish could be placed against the "true" *logos* of critical consciousness, resolving itself dialectically into a kind of Truth. Furthermore, as others have explored, the grounds for that "critical consciousness" are, in the age of postnational capitalism, more widely dispersed than ever before. Fredric Jameson redefines "commodity fetish" as "a vast process of abstraction which seethes through the social order" (235). Channelling Guy Debord, Jameson is especially keen to locate this more widely construed process in our age's obsession with image and spectacle, which constitute the "final form of commodity fetishism" (236). These terms, these critical moves, serve less the purpose of deliberating *logos* (though a later chapter will, of course, "stretch" the term in its own ways) than they serve to demonstrate, to establish the grounds, for the critical *êthos* commonly deployed in academic discourse: a recipe for making games "work."

Videogames, definable as procedural arrangements of images, seem especially ripe for criticism in this regard, and it is for that exact reason that Valve Software's 2007 game *Portal*

offers an exciting opportunity for discussion. The game's narrative is set in the confines of a corporate-scientific testing complex, where a disembodied computer voice directs the unnamed player through a sequence of tasks designed to test Aperture Science's newest product. Played through a first-person perspective, *Portal*'s approach to perspective confronts the viewer with what I would call an "imalgorithmic" immediacy. First-person *visual* perspective, traditionally associated with the popular first-person shooter (FPS) genre, allows players to *act* on the game space "as though they were a part of that space" (Morris 81). While this claim smacks of a certain uncritical rhetoric of "immersion," one that my project will return to in a later chapter, I cite it here to point out the particular pressure exerted by that perspective: a will-to-mastery[25] of the space "presented." *Portal* in particular compounds this tendency by keeping its display relatively uncluttered: non-diegetic visual elements are nearly absent from the screen, creating the sense of "immersion" in the image without the superficial reminders of the inherent "code" beneath.[26] Every item in the visual field is "in play," part of the puzzle to be solved. In that regard, I argue that what is "in play" within *Portal* is the work/play tension itself; this case study will look to how the game imalgorithmically figures this tension, but then will take a step back to consider the critical *êthos* we need to bridge the interpetive gap between what Sirc calls the "literate *hmmm*," the reading of the game's "meaning," and the "cool-site [electrate] *wow.*"

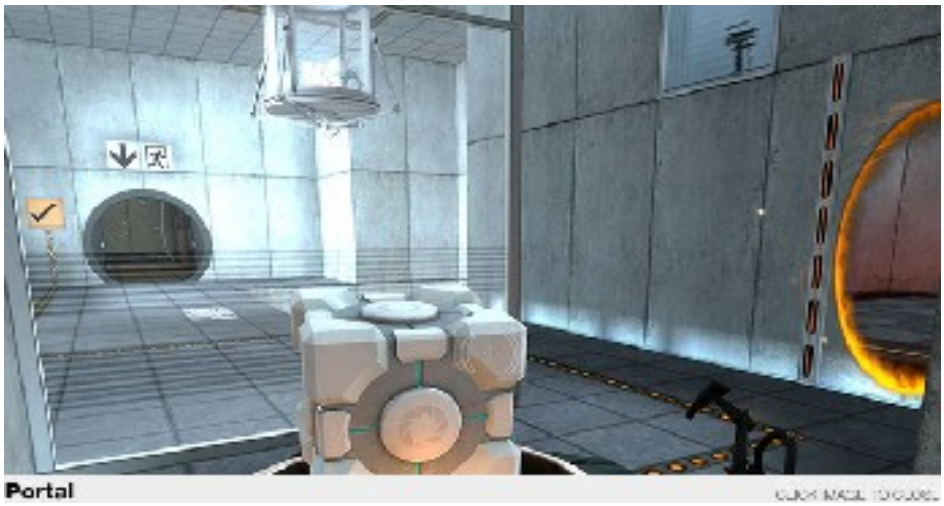

Figure3-1: The Aperture Science Enrichment Center, the corporate testing environment that provides the setting for *Portal*. Note the orange "portal" punched into the wall on the right side of the image.

Portal provides a knowing play on its perspective through the effacement of its protagonist and through play on the logic of its space. The game begins in an oddly confined room, looking something like a futuristic prison cell. The player's character, who we cannot see due to the game's first-person perspective, is beckoned by an equally disembodied voice belonging to GLaDOS, a computerized system who walks the character through the Aperture Science Enrichment Center testing regimen, instructing the player/character in the use of the game's titular technology: a "Portal Gun." The Portal Gun has the power to create "holes" in the space of the testing facility, allowing the player instantaneous passage across obstacles. Placing a one "portal" creates an entrance; the second "portal" – wherever it is placed – creates the exit. In a series of increasingly complex puzzles, players warp the "imalgorithmic" space of the facility by using the "procedural" power of the gun to disrupt its physical rules, yet this activity cannot be rendered separately from the game's other work: figuring an implicit critique of corporate discourse.

Punching holes in the material space of *Portal* cannot (and should not) be conceptually separated from the act of punching holes in its oppressive ideology, one defended by its

spokesperson GLaDOS with a mixture of haughty bureaucratic language and childishly obvious contempt. In one early instance, the player hears the following "warning," delivered in a straightforward monotone:

> Please be advised that a noticeable taste of blood is not part of any test protocol but is an unintended side effect of the Aperture Science Material Emancipation Grill, which may, in semi-rare cases, emancipate dental fillings, crowns, tooth enamel, and teeth.

Such playful spoofs of stilted, bureaucractic language run almost continuously through the first half of the game, as the player's character navigates her way through the Aperture Science Enrichment Center training course, composed as a series of discrete chambers. Each chamber adds subtly to the degree of challenge, effectively "instructing" the player in the various applications of the Portal Gun. At the end of the 19th and final Testing Chamber, the player finds herself plunged towards an incinerator, accompanied by the following none-too-humane valediction from GLaDOS:

> Congratulations! The test is now over. All Aperture technologies remain safely operational up to 4000 degrees Kelvin. Rest assured that there is absolutely no chance of a dangerous equipment malfunction prior to your victory candescence.

With some quick thinking, the player can escape GLaDOS's trap, which allows the game to continue in a somewhat different form.[27] Now, instead of progressing through a series of clean, surgical Testing Chambers, the player climbs through the rusty industrial innards of the testing center, a path that will ultimately lead to a confrontation with her cybernetic tormentor.

To return to this chapter's concern over the *êthoi* of work and play, GLaDOS desires to catch the player within a kind of corporate "work"-ethic, regarding her as a functionality

embedded within the confines of the Enrichment Center's testing apparatus. The game's presentation of its own space is a double-play on that same *êthos*, encouraging through the first-person perspective an uncritical alignment between the *player*'s gaze and the *work*-space of the Enrichment Center. The Portal Gun itself becomes, through this play of associations, the embodiment of a Marxist commodity fetish. Within the confines of the narrative, its only exchange-value is that which is ascribed to it by the voice of GLaDOS, the corporate Other: "The Device is now more valuable than the organs and combined incomes of everyone in <Subject Hometown Here>." And yet, the trap door in both the fetishization and GLaDOS's evil plan is the use-value encoded the Gun's capacity to disrupt the layout of the game's space. First, this disruption leads the player, ultimately, to destroy GLaDOS's computing core (thereby bringing the game to its end-state). Secondly, it is only through the disruptions of that space that players are able to effectively glimpse themselves: through careful portal-placement, characters can see "through" the portals in order to glimpse themselves. The "concealed" body, of a young dark-skinned woman, is thereby "unconcealed"; the developer's commentary track packaged with *Portal* reveals the woman's name to be "Chell." "Playing" with the Portal Gun offers, in these respects, an alternative to GLaDOS's interpellative power: her capacity, as Althusser would have it, to "hail" Chell into being as a subject under her discourse.

Figure 3-2: The Portal Gun can be used to allow the player to grasp herself. The moment is both an escape from the phallic disembodiment of many first-person games, while also figuring a critique of capitalism's interpellative power.

Yet in that same regard, the collision of work and play within the game can be (mis)read as a more straightforward *alignment* of terms, ripe for Marxist critique: a narrative in which the player "masters" the space of the game through a "commodity" which reduces the whole of the game's experience to so much exchange value, viewed from the domineering gaze of a player whose participation in the game is limited to yet another process of fetishization: the reduction of play to a commodity bought in a video game store. In my analysis, though, I have sought to demonstrate the inherent limitations in such a critical apparatus, pushing through the structure of videogaming for fluidification of the critical *êthos* that would ascribe such fetishization to the player. Alternatively, I'd suggest that *Portal* can be read as an affirmative play on the very structure of the commodity fetish itself; furthermore, this affirmative play is not (and cannot be) native to *Portal* as a kind of canonical master-text. All that *Portal* does is engineer a sequence of

narrative and procedural tricks to highlight what I claim to be a more inherent possibility emergent from "imalgorithmic" grammatology – that the borders of work/critique and play are increasingly porous. The critical attempt to more straightforwardly align the terms put in play by the game (fetish, interepellation, etc.) represents a normalizing practice, an attempt to "quiet the storm of Being" by, as Sirc might have it, imposing an "alignment" on gameplay from without, disciplining it according to a master's (i.e. Enlightened) discourse. Play, thus negated, becomes at absolute best the means by which Enlightenment can be reached, provided that the player slip the grasp of the game's fetish and emerge into a space of critical reflection. At worst, play can be fully negated as just so much "ludic postmodernism," a clever play without structure, cut off and contained in its own self-fulfilling cycle. This approach to gaming criticism, which I might call a limited "one-two," approach leverages a reading of the game that provides certain critical opportunities, while still failing significantly to adopt an *êthos* that would engage the full possibilities of the medium. What might it mean to adopt a gaming-*êthos*, under these circumstances, and what might these other "possibilities" look like?

Rather than abandon the notion of the "commodity fetish" altogether, I believe that the electrate, extended "grammar of gameworks" repurposes the notion in somewhat different terms, towards different ends. Just as GLaDOS playfully mocks the player's position as a consumer (as a subject interpellated under corporate capitalism), only to find herself demolished, the "commodity fetish" – like GLaDOS herself – reawakens in an alternate form.[28] In that sense, what matters more than (or as much as) configurations of materiality and ideology in a game like *Portal* are the ways that those very messages are also distributed by a more open "free play" of images. Far from being a purely theoretical abstraction, though, I think that some of this "free play" is rooted in a very real, very specific place: the environment of the gaming console itself,

where “fetishized” forms participate and commingle in an economy whose fluidity tests our critical willingness to engage in play affirmatively.

While I'll return momentarily to wider “play” of *Portal,* I'll stop for a moment to consider a useful analog: another “imalgorithmic” construction that achieves a distinct sort of rhetorical experience through play. The greatest achievement of the Japanese game/cartoon *Pokemon*, writes Anne Allison, is that it turned the basic “imalgorithms” of the game (the capture, breeding, training, and fighting of “pocket monsters”) “into something like a shared language that promotes communication.” Both the “images” of the individual Pokemon themselves (particularly the near-ubiquitous yellow Pikachu) and the “rules” of their exchange function as a sort of “serious play,” in the sense that they can be made available to scholarly criticism, but their significance is more profound. The *êthos* of *Pokemon* is neither purely ludic nor ideological; it is an *economic* space that encourages “exchanges perpetuated outside the parameters of the game itself and into currencies of other kinds ... mixing metaphors, economies, and pleasures” (203). What becomes significant in this “play” is not the images or rules *per se*, but rather the extent to which those “imalgorithms” inititate a much freer play of significance: becoming a scene of other “mixings.”

The leap suggested by Allison runs parallel to the ethical leaps suggested by Sirc's “sign of accordance,” itself a more ludic subspecies of Bogost's “unit operations” approach. As Sirc would have it, via Duchamp, Allison's take on *Pokemon* describes a scene where “all terms vibrate together in an endless troping”: where the literal, inscribed (and partially fetishized) activity of gaming “vibrates” and is translated into “currencies of other kinds” (Sirc 41). I would attempt to hazard the same “sign of accordance” with the highly inscribed, equally fetishized scene of mass-market console gaming. Unlike the relatively “open” environments of PC

gaming, consoles are the products of massive corporations (Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo), rely on precise technological specificity, and prohibit cross-compatibility. Like *Pokemon* their technological specificity is rooted in a sort of procedurality: the precise mechanical/algorithmic structure of its hardware and software. Yet, like *Pokemon*, too, the console's precise organization and specificity could form the meeting ground for another kind of economy. Allison's reading of *Pokemon* slips the bounds of the commodity fetish – she reads the space of the game as configurative, rather than one of domination, in spite of how the "game" is uncommonly commodified through videogames, trading cards, cartoon shows, and toys. The space of console gaming, particularly in its last generation offers, through the integration of network technology, such a platform, and it is to one specific instance of a fluid, mixed "economy" that I'll consider now.

Figure 4-3: A screenshot of *Rock Band*.

The 2007 game *Rock Band*, published by Harmonix for all three of the major gaming consoles, is a game that tests the critic's willingness to engage in an economy of *quodlibet*: of "whatever" meanings. From any traditional critical standpoint[29], the game offers no narrative to

occasion a narrative criticism, and its procedural/gameplay elements are strikingly simple and straightforward. Based on the logic of the *Guitar Hero* series (previously developed by Harmonix), players attempt to time their input actions to a sequence of visual cues roughly representing the rhythm and musical notes in the given song, accompanied by an audio track of that song. The diegetic space of the game consists of half of the screen devoted to representations of the players' "band" and the other half comprised of the board or boards on which the note sequences are displayed – but more interesting still is the more dispersed and networked "space" through which the economy of game play is configured. Accessible through the "Music Store" are several options for downloadable content, songs that can be purchased in order to supplement the game's pre-existing set list according to the individual's taste.[30] So far, *Rock Band* can (and likely should) strike the rhetorically minded critic as little more than a collection of highly ornamental fixtures strewn about an interface designed to help its players commodify the experience of playing music (play in its most negated sense). The "cool-site [electrate] *wow*," in this take on the game's imalgoirhtm, drifts within the gravity of an easy "literate *hmmm*" reading. In just the sense that Sirc pushes to avoid, this critical configuration of terms (purchase, commodity, even the spectacle mimesis of the game itself), what we could call its data-set or its way of "counting" units for critique, fails to detect a new possibility.

What I propose instead is merely a reordering of terms, prompted by a particular ocassion: *Portal*'s leakage into the space of *Rock Band*. Shortly after the game's launch, Jonathan Coulton's "Still Alive" (GLaDOS's valedictory ballad) became available for downloadble content in *Rock Band*. Far from being an isolated case, this type of fluidification between the borders of different games demonstrates an increasingly prevalent "collage" logic to the experience of play in the modern console era. The long-running *Super Smash Brothers* series

published by Nintendo allows players to fight one another as characters[31] drawn from that publisher's long list of classic titles; the Internet is teeming with homegrown "mashup" projects that effectively lift material content from one gaming-space and import it to another.[32] Still, though, the gravity of the "literate *hmmm*" asserts itself. After all, the work of the collage is hardly value neutral; Gaudelius and Garoian, picking on the thread of "exchange" that originates in Marx's *Capital*, argue that most collage-based pedagogies (in any composition instruction) ultimately contribute to a systematic community fetishism, as images are frequently "exchanged" without being themselves critiqued in advance (90). While the collage itself can represent a "new" composition or production, the individual contents undergo a process of fetishization (read also: mystification) beforehand by becoming "spectacle mimesis, stereotypical reproductions that perpetuate rather than critique the spectacle of visual culture" (91). Even if that is a fair charge to lay against, say, the mash-up aesthetic in general, or the works of game mashups in particular, what does the critique of collage in particular do to inflect this reading of *Rock Band*? (And by extension, the "free-play" electrate *êthos* that my conversation is reaching for?) If the imagistic component of the game is so thoroughly co-opted before the fact, it's a short distance from there to arguing that videogaming's value has always-already been negated, as its proceeds cannot help but be overdetermined by the capitalistic apparatus that precedes it. In such a case, "Still Alive" offers less a kind of Othering or fluidity, and more a commodification. To return to and paraphrase Ian Bogost, the song's "fungibility" as a unit of exchange derives from an overdetermined process: the mechanisms of postmodern capitalism. Given the steep funding and manpower needs, can any console videogame or game technology can hope to escape those mechanics? Can the striation never be smoothed out[33]? Game over?

To sketch a line of flight out of here, adopting an *êthos* that looks to the "free-play" of signficance in order to reroute the traffic of the collage toward detecting other possibilities beyond the space of the screen, I conclude by turning to the material space of the console controller. Earlier, this analysis pinpointed the Portal Gun as a material/ideological switching point, a play mechanism that effectively blasts holes in both the work/play dynamic (and, by extension, wiggles its way towards the grounds of a "middle" sort of *êthos*). Playfully, I suggest that GLaDOS's creepy "Still Alive" escapes through one of these holes; in the massively networked rulespace of modern console gaming, the curious pleasure of portal-making is echoed in the way that the game finds itself translated into other economies. The Portal Gun eventually finds itself doubled in the real material forms of *Rock Band*'s plastic instrument-shaped controllers. Like the Portal Gun, these "tools" function as configurative agents of the "cool-site" *êthos*: they are simultaneously material objects, objects of production and fetish, and active *producers* of (or, in a sense "Portals that create") a space of "mixing metaphors, economies, and pleasures" (Allison 203). Rhetorically minded investigation and critique of gaming can, ultimately, "count-as-one" that entire space, and attend to the translations of materials, pleasures, and discourses that happen there. The choice of the *Rock Band* controller offers an interesting technological specificity (a play on the cultural form of rock music), but any similar site of material playfulness could serve as the methodological antidote to enthymemic rhetorics: those that would look to games as texts possessed of meaning, or reduce play to so much commodity fetishization. To paraphrase Mckenzie Wark, our *êthos*, our "electrate" *êthos* that seizes on the possibilities of the medium, might be emblematized not just by "be ludic, but be lucid," but also, through the logic of the "sign of accordance," by "be ludic, but rock out."[34]

Too often, the work of "serious" scholarship engages so thoroughly in a process of terminological and topical specialization that the inherent connectivities get missed. The freedom to "count as one" these diverse units cannot be entirely constrained to a search for semiological meaning or serious discourse production in a broad sense. A "serious" project like Ian Bogost's *Persuasive Games* offers critical rigor, a comfortable framework of ideological critique, at the expense of a glimpse at how his method of "unit operations" could be used as a window more into lived experience. Hawisher and Selfe's *Gaming Lives* records those lived experience through literacy narratives, but does not venture into the configurative matrix of the games themselves to consider how their structures inflect those "lives." Of course, neither of the aforementioned works ever claim to be engaging in any discourse of absolute truth-production, revealing the definitive answer to what gaming "is" or what games "mean." As the discourse around gaming grows, though, the pre-existing rhetorical tendencies of the University may ultimately close off the greater spaces of possibility that lurk outside. In seeking what Vitanza seeks, a space of multiplicity and conversation, an escape from the negative, I hope I have offered a small provocation encouraging scholars interested in game studies to always-already engage in a reformatting of terms and expectations, to consult games *rhetorically* as opportunities for a conversation based on inclusion (of other scholars, other methods, other games and gamers) and a celebration of play. In the following chapter, I will (re)turn to the position of the gamer, less out of a desire to hazard any determinations about gamers' emergent subjectivities under gaming/electracy, but rather to "play" at that hallowed category from another angle: by considering the (multiple) rhetorical dimensions of emotional experience under-the-influence of gaming.

NOTES

1 Take one such illustrative instance: Since the Western logocentric (read: literate) tradition has been founded on the practice of "definition" – of the establishment of a word's "true meaning," Ulmer, citing Georges Battaile, asks students to write "anti-definitions," writing out a term based solely on subjective details and feelings.

2 The essay in which Barthes establishes this notion is "The Photographic Message." Ulmer, however, extrapolates its value to images of all kinds, including film (the essay is, after all, based less on still shots than on "readings" of scenes from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*) and digital images. Since moving images are more at stake than stills in any discussion of videogaming, I will return to the important distinction between the two in Chapter 4.

3 The phrase "Japanese culture" should be taken with some reservations, though, as the "Japan" Barthes studies is, in the words of critic Edmund White (printed on the back cover of my edition of the book), "not the real Japan, but rather one of his own devising.... For Barthes, Japan is a test, a challenge to think the unthinkable, a place where meaning is finally banished."

4 In this moment, I might like to point out, McLuhan and Barthes dovetail together in an interesting way. If McLuhan's oracular phrase "the medium is the message" refers to a change in the size and scale of human affairs introduced by any new technology (a fair gloss of the opening chapter of *Understanding Media*), then Barthes's explication of the "third meaning," traced here through systems of association and metaphor, fills in for us the "meaning" of the image "medium."

5 My summary here of the development of the computer and algorithmic mathematics is pulled from a number of sources, all of whom I will credit jointly. Particularly indispensible are Martin Davis's *The Universal Computer: From Leibniz to Turing*, which surveys the development of these logical and mathematical structures, and Ian Bogost's *Unit Operations*, which early on defines and surveys both Turing and von Neumann's work. Important supplementary sources are Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*, an exhaustively detailed historical fiction set partially during Turing's work on Enigma, and Wikipedia's numerous and informative entries on Turing, von Neumann, Alonzo Church, the Church-Turing thesis, algorithms, and Turing-completeness.

6 Katherine Hayles manages, with her customary clarity, to explain many of the underlying material and programmatic structures of computing, from the computer chip on up, in the second chapter of *My Mother Was a Computer*, pp. 39-61. I'll refer to it in its entirety here, with the open and grateful acknowledgment of its contributions to my grasp of what makes computers tick.

7 At most, I'd argue based on the earlier review of literature that a certain amount of position-jockeying has taken place over the definition of gaming "space" – James Paul Gee implicity separating gaming as a social sphere related to, yet distinct from learning, with Mckenzie Wark expanding "gamespace" to include all spaces, real and imagined. This loaded metaphor will forma major axis of this project's 5th chapter.

8 Bogost cites Maturana's work on frog physiology, in which the latter, with Francisco Valera, developed autopoetic systems theory. The world-creating neurology of a frog is a complex system, but that system can be read as a unit, Bogost maintains, when considered in the context of, say, "predator-prey relationships within swamp ecosystems" (6). Perhaps not coincidentally, an account of the same research figures prominently in Katherine Hayles's exposition on the development of "second-wave" cybernetic theory in *How We Became Posthuman*, chapter 2.

9 Chapter 14 of Deleuze & Guattari's *A Thousand Pleateaus* (pp. 474-500) deals with both smooth and striated spaces at length, though the division between the two is anticipated earlier in the "Treatise on Nomadology" (pp. 380-7). Smooth spaces are aligned with nomads and rhizomes, whereas striated spaces are those of territorialization, definition, religion, and logic. Much of my often-uncritical use of the terms derives from Stuart Moulthrop's application of them to hypertext studies in his landmark article "Rhizome and Resistance: Hypertext and the Dreams of a New Culture" in George P. Landow's. *Hyper/Text/Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995, pp. 299-320). Moulthrop equates hypertext with a smooth space, while noting that the "resistance" always connotes a striated space, the incommensurability between the two effectively undermining the latter's viability. It is the precise construction of "smooth space" as leading to yet another form of Platonism that Bogost/Badiou target.

10 Bogost cites Lacan's $ – the subject barred by language – as one such unit that nonetheless represents an "impossible rift in consciousness itself," which is to say a symbolic totality (33).

11 In the prior example of Lacan's $, as much as that unit may drift towards the construction of a totality within the "systems operations" of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the unit is "fungible" (a term most native to economics) because it can be lifted from that systemic economy into another. As Bogost demonstrates, "Žižek's use of

Lacanaian units [is] a fundamental break from systematicity... [in which] Lacanian units remain (or become) subject to further reconfiguration" (*UO*, 34). In a similar respect, one could also associate fungibility with Lev Manovich's notion of "modularity," one of his five principles of New Media (30-1), with a unit-idea being "fungible" when it can be treated as a detachable "module" from a prior systematic whole.

12 Assuming, that is, that a word like "earlier" has any meaning whatsoever in the light of the rhizomatic construction of both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

13 See also James Paul Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Litearcy*, Ian Bogost's *Persuasive Games* (both of which my project has already cited, as well as (much) less academic sources like Marc Prensky's *Don't Bother Me Mom – I'm Learning!*

14 Subsequent chapters, tracking similar "imalgorithmically induced" shifts in the significance of both *pathos* and *logos* will return to the figure of the game-player.

15 Rouzie cites Jay David Bolter's *Writing Space*, whose argument he accurately summarizes: that hypertext, by virtue of its fluid linking between *lexia*, is inherently playful and unstable, a realization of poststructural approaches to language (3).

16 On ludus and paidia: *Rules, Play, and Games*, pp. 30-36. His typology of four distinct types of play are discussed throughout the same book, but receive more focused attention in the sixth chapter, "An Expanded Theory of Games," pp. 71-80.

17 Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 95-6.

18 Vitanza's "(ac)counting" metaphor reappears consistently across *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*, wherein the received Platonic logic counts to one and two (two alternatives, dissoi logoi) but refuses to count to "three" or to "some more."

19 Hayles argues that "code has become arguably as important as natural langauge because it causes things to happen." "Code," she later quotes from Alexander Galloway, "is the only langugae that is executable" (49-50).

20 My conversation would be remiss if it were not to mention Donna Haraway's landmark "Cyborg Manifesto," a crucial document in this field, almost universally cited in all matters where subjectivity and *êthos* are put into conversation with technology. Rightfully so, as passages such as this confront the reader with an aggressively non-binary (re)approach to the traditional subject: "The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polls based partly on a revolution of social relations" (151). That I do not call upon it here is primarily symptomatic of my desire to build a data-set of more unfamiliar terms.

21 This "free-play" is a term that also has its own complex and unacknowledged history, deriving from Derrida's sense of *différance*, a pseudo-concept voiced throughout his work, though perhaps most famously in the early pages of *Of Grammatology*. Again, as with my previous all-too-brief citation of Donna Haraway, I opt to avoid a lengthy exegesis on Derrida (using Davis's adoption of the terminology instead), preferring to develop my own set of terms.

22 Bartholomae's class project, as described by Sirc, was for students to construct a travel narrative drawn from their own experience, and to treat the writing of that narrative as a critical consciousness-raising exercise. The work of "contact zone" theorist Mary Louise Pratt was given to these students as an exemplar (cf. Sirc 37-8, 43).

23 Reading *At Play in the Fields of Writing*, I get the sense that Rouzie's project was long in gestation. That said, its 2004 publication date is somewhat at odds with its distinctly mid-1990s subject matter. The technologies Rouzie focuses on to develop his notion of play through digital writing include hypercard, HTML, and chat-room type environments, subject matter addressed by Bolter (1991) and Turkle (1995), but that do not seem to fully rise to the context of what are often referred to as "Web 2.0" technologies developed in the 2000s. Such "newer" media might include text messaging, blogging, social networking, and – yes – modern console gaming.

24 Which is not to suggest "logocentric."

25 This is likely the reason that many of the noted games in the FPS genre knowingly or subconsciously drift towards narratives of militarism. the popular *Halo* series is a mostly incoherent set of stories serving little purpose other than to set the faceless Master Chief protagonist against hordes of aliens (or other players). The equally popular *Call of Duty* series reproduces Allied military victories in World War II (though one of its more recent entries took the fighting to a modern-day Russian republic and an unnamed Middle Eastern nation).

26 For contrast, consider *Half-Life 2*, developed by Valve: the same company responsible for producing *Portal*. In that game, the space of the first-person perspective is overlayed with many common elements of what are generally referred to as Heads-Up Displays (HUDs). The screen contains information about the currently equipped weapon, the available amount of ammunition, the player's current health status and resistance to

radiation: all reminders of mathematical constraints on the player's actions. Consider also the examples of classic arcade games, that include such nondiegetic data as the player's "score" or initials: further reminders that the play of images is grounded at least partially in a scene of mathematical computation. By eschewing such display elements, *Portal* turns much of its "play" over to the image, leaving its algorithmic nature implicit.

27 GLaDOS, for her part, later assures you that the whole thing was simply a joke but that she would still appreciate it if you'd surrender and give her the Portal Gun back.

28 In the game's final moments, after GLaDOS's final processing core is destroyed, the player finds herself ejected ("thrown"?) from the testing facility. The screen fades out, replaced by fields bright orange ASCII text, reminiscent of 1980s computer terminals. In the sequence that follows, GLaDOS sings a song (written by composer Jonathan Coulton) celebrating her "triumph," expressing her "satisfaction" with the outcome of the test, and reminding the player that "[she's] doing science and [she's] Still Alive." Apart from referencing many of the game's in-jokes (including the "delicious and moist" cake used to lure/taunt the player throughout), the closing moments reaffirm that some part of the "machine" (in the literal and corporate senses) has survived destruction.

29 By which I invoke primarily the schools of rhetoric and/or game scholarship referenced in my chapter "Game Theory as a Composing-History of Rhetoric."

30 In *Guitar Hero: World Tour*, developed by rival company Neversoft, a further interface is added which allows players to "record" music of their own devising and upload those tracks to a shared space where they may be downloaded by others for free. The convenient argument for compositionists would be to pursue this possibility as a chance for legitimate "authorship" at the expense of affirming its play as producing a wholly unanticipated kind of authorship, with "author" appearing under erasure.

31 Including, coincidentally enough, characters from *Pokemon*. (2008's *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* includes Pikachu, Jigglypuff, and a Pokemon Trainer as playable characters.)

32 For two specific examples, see McWherter's entries at *Kotaku*, identifying mashup projects involving *Portal* and other prominent games.

33 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari devote a chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* to the textural distinction between smoothness and striation. The latter is a space of nomadism, possibility, and openness; the latter, one of structure, mapping, and logic. Each space, though, depends upon the other. Indeed, each space actively produces the other. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 474-500.)

34 The annual Conference on College Composition and Communication hosts a "Rock and Roll Party" every year. This *êthos* sounds good for the band, but why not a party where everyone plays?

Chapter Four:
Stings, Scalpels, and the Sublime: *Pathos* Accelerated

With *pathos* I continue the terminological game of my project, subjecting Aristotle's classic *pisteis* to extension and examination with an eye towards using them to detect emergent nuances in what we might call a rhetoric under-the-influence-of-videogaming. More so than with the previous chapter's discussion of *êthos*, I will begin by spending time with the term *pathos* itself, tracking its various interpretations and instantiations in the rhetorical tradition beginning with Aristotle.[1] Despite that beginning point, though, I would insist that, in invoking *pathos*, I invoke Aristotle's emotional *pisteis* no more than I invoke its literary usage, which is usually something akin to *katharsis*. In the particular context of videogaming, I call upon *pathos* somewhat analogously to the often ill-defined notion of "fun," a notion central to gaming discourse. *Pathos* also summons to the scene a highly fraught and complicated set of discourses concerning emotion and its relationship(s) with embodiment, the latter being yet another term in need of attention, given not only the embodied "cybernetic" discourse of my first chapter, but also the "algorithmic" discourse of my third chapter, which posits play as an active process requiring the player's (never entirely disembodied) actions. As in my previous chapter's attempts to situate a discourse of the "middle" alongside a discourse of the "third" or the "Other," I will convene the difficult binaries of logic/emotion, mind/body, and beauty/sublime less out of any desire to find a comfortable middle, but to sketch how exposure to the grammatological contours of gaming produce lines of flight out of those binaries, into territories not yet glimpsed by our

received (Aristotelian) framework. If the previous chapter asserted a line of flight out of the work/play binary in an effort to "stretch" out an *êthos* based on the principles/values of "unit-counting" and free-play, this chapter will explore how videogames (as "designed" aesthetic objects) lend themselves to forms of emotional/aesthetic experience that exceed and reconfigure that framework. When we develop an entire technological apparatus devoted to the pursuit of "fun" and that constitutes its activity through a series of visual and (increasingly) physical "shocks" (two terms I'll use to suss out this "stretched" *pathos*), the ecological approach to media suggested by McLuhan, Hayles, and others suggests that we ourselves are not immune from the change. Our language, our rhetorics, and ourselves will feel the impact of how this technology re-routes "feeling" and the possibilities for creating meaning (and identity and community) based on those "feelings."

Emotion, On Beyond Aristotle

Starting with Aristotle, *pathos* is concretized in the rhetorical tradition according to a very particular (and limiting) set of concerns; the received history of that term serves as a nodal point for gathering and concretizing those concerns. The term simultaneously creates a location where "emotion" can be brought into the rhetorical conversation and de-term-ines the contours of that "emotion." While Aristotle shows a degree of genius in bringing *pathos* into the conversation in the first place, there's also little doubt that his placement of *pathos* in a greater rhetorical network dominated by *logos* also constrains its power, limits the idea's range of influence. By consulting some other perspectives on what *pathos*/emotion can be, this project can hopefully open up a space of its own.

While I won't claim to provide any form of exhaustive historical survey, I explore a handful of thinkers who "route" emotion in ways both traditional and challenging. For Aristotle, I'll argue, *pathos* locates a particular set of concerns, anxieties, and possibilities, and the received history of that term serves as a nodal point for gathering and concretizing those concerns. In preparations for a chapter ostensibly riffing on Aristotle's pathos, his rhetorical "proof" based on emotional resonance, I was struck reading those chapters from *The Art of Rhetoric* corresponding to emotion. For all I've heard over the years – and indeed, uncritically rehashed to my students – I had anticipated a lengthy exegesis on how various emotional tactics can sway the minds of the audience. I had even anticipated the equivalent of a sidebar conversation, where Aristotle cheekily whispers: "Don't worry, this stuff only works when it's wed to a nice, brawny system of logical appeals." In tellingly straightforward fashion, the *Rhetoric* does precisely the right thing: before one is to discuss emotions, one must first *determine* them, creating set of shared terminology. And so, Book II, Section Six does precisely that: listing a variety of different emotional states. But the conversation stops there, as though the use-value of those emotions were somehow self-evident to the rhetor.

This project will move to consider this "self-evident" approach in more particular terms momentarily, particularly in how it expresses a potential for viewing Aristotle's approach to emotion more favorably. Regardless of the extent to which we would prefer to valorize Aristotle for his attempt to make room for emotion (and the body), over the longer course of the history of rhetoric, the set of binary determinations he constructs ultimately create the conditions for *pathos*'s expulsion from the scene of rhetoric. We could note first, of course, how Aristotle himself is fundamentally ambivalent about the role of emotion in the framework of rhetoric. Ekaterina Haskins, for her part, sees little ambiguity in Aristotle's subordination of emotion to

the process of the logical argumentative enthymeme: “For it [enthymeme] will either drive out emotion or it will be useless” (1418a12-17, quoted in Haskins 103). Later responses to and departures from Aristotle in the rhetorical tradition tend to affirm this basic point of view. Peter Ramus repudiates Aristotle's approach by redefining the relationships between rhetoric, dialectic, and grammar, reducing rhetoric to a matter of “style and delivery” (Conley 128). Ramus, too, “drives out” *pathos* by making “the [logical] syllogism ... the proper mode of 'decisive speaking' in disputes, if not in rational discourse in general” (129). The role of *pathos* in rhetoric is further marginalized in the era of the high Enlightenment. Descartes's radical rationalism, wherein according to Conley “proof, not argument, becomes the sole concern in rational inquiry” effectively creates a situtation where in “human action was removed from the realm of truly rational inquiry.” That is, only the rational is *true* enough to merit rhetorical attention, with everything else jettisoned (172). Of course, Descartes was not without his share of detractors, and it would be a mistake to assume that his method has persisted unperturbed up until the present. Still, the radical divorce of not just the body-and-mind, but the realm of human affairs in general from the corpus of rhetoric creates a profound center of gravity. I can't help but agree with Conley's general assertion that “virtually every important position on the nature of rhetoric enunciated since Descartes can be seen as extentions of, or reactions to, a few basic principles in his philosophy” (171). For instance, while “emotion” is permitted entrance into Alexander Bain's rhetorical framework in 1859's *Emotions and the Will*, Bain carefully retains the hardline Ramian/Cartesian separations between the various classes of proof. He effectively reroutes the *pisteis*, each according to its own “basic function of discourse,” with “feeling” addressed to “pleasure.” Relative to the three rhetorical theorists considered here, Aristotle's framework for considering emotion is comparatively rich and nuanced; nevertheless, for the purposes of my

discussion, it is the process of *de-term-ination* he unleashes that provokes the harsh dualisms outlined here. While my provocation here, interested in *pathos*, is happening at quite some distance from these Cartesian dualisms, the inherently bodily and imagistic activity of videogaming (and the conversation that would dismiss the rhetoricity of that play) does at least engage them, even if on the way to other possibilities. Before considering those other possibilities, however, I'd like to dwell for a moment on other attempts to characterize and (re)phrase what Aristotle is up to in his conception of *pathos*. More specifically, in reapproaching Aristotle through variations on some of these classical binaries, I can develop a sense of the stakes involved in how rhetorics address the "self-evident" nature of emotional experience.

Jeffrey Walker's *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* seizes upon just that "self-evident" aspect of Aristotle's *pathos* in order to demonstrate how the latter's rhetorical framework may in fact be far more fair to emotion that previously considered. (Walker's analysis is especially useful for my own discussion, as it also interfaces with another aspect of *pathos* that my own discussion will not consider at any real length: how the term functions simultaneously in the bifurcated traditions of both rhetoric and poetics.) Rather than consider the proofs of *êthos* and *pathos* as somehow other-than logical argument, Walker argues that Aristotle includes "pathos and êthos *among the enthymemic sources of persuasion*," and suggests that "he [Aristotle] considers enthymemes to be 'something more than an act of ... reason' and to carry affective force" (181, emphasis added). The enthymeme, under Walker's redefinitional move, becomes more of a neutral medium than a particular strategy, capable of serving as a "relay" of sorts for whatever meaning – emotional, ethical, or rational – the rhetor chooses to attach to it. The effect of Walker's move, though, wreaks odd effects on how rhetoric shapes emotional experience.

Considering anger – one of the emotions dealt with in Aristotle's discussion of *pathos* – Walker reframes *pathos* in a way that does not entirely free it from its proximity to Aristotle's preferred mode of rationality: "'Anger,' then, is a specific mode of intentionality that arises quasi-syllogistically as a 'conclusion' from a conjunction of perceptions and interpretive frames *including physiological states* that act like 'premises.'" (173-4, emphasis added). In this moment, "emotion" is reduced to an intentional "conclusion" based on a simple logical progression; the *body* is made available as a term of discussion here, but only insofar as the body is a receptacle of distinct "physiological states" that inexorably lead to corresponding emotional states. This attempt to make Aristotle's rhetoric safe for emotion by reshuffling its categories succeeds, I'd argue, only by basis of another exclusion: The body serves as the *erased* major premise in the would-be "'in-thymatic' kind of rationality" that Walker claims emerges from Aristotle (174). To recover that premise will take a recourse to another conversation altogether, a necessary move, I argue, for attempting to develop a sense of how a videogame-based rhetoric should function. In the interim, though, the emotion-as-enthymemic construct can yield interesting side effects.

Laura Micciche, for example, latches onto the *social* dimensions of Aristotle's attempt to account for emotion, but does so in a way that risks turning emotion into a systematic *technê* for use in the rhetorical enterprise. "Emotion [in all his examples] is experienced *in relation*, between people within a particular context" (11). This approach is "fundamentally rhetorical" because, as Kenneth Burke might have it, emotion is placed in the dramatic situation, positioned in a scene among various actors. Yet, for Aristotle's approach to cohere, it must take place in a social arena "where people tacitly agree upon what counts as indignation or any other emotion. That is, only through *collective, implicit assent* in communal life does emotion have meaning" (11, emphasis added). Even if we loosen this critique up by possibly arguing that Aristotle's goal

is to transform "tacit" agreement to something more powerfully open, vocal, and public, the structure that Micciche describes here is fundamentally enthymemic in its structure. *Pathos* enters the rhetorical matrix only through excluding any unruly perspectives (or, to remember Walker, bodies) that do not "assent" to the shared meaning of an emotion. What Micciche and Walker's shared conception provide, through their acceptance of the enthymeme's fundamental validity, is a sense of how Aristotle constructs emotionality in the form of a very specific *tool*. The thrust of Aristotle's approach in Section Six, cataloguing and sorting a variety of emotions, provides what we might think of as an emotional toolbox: a set of technologies that could be applied any way whatsoever. Their particular, local, and contingent applications – everything that makes emotion unstable, uncanny – can be avoided so long as Aristotle stops his intervention at the stage of determination, leaving behind the possiblity of individuals "counting" emotion differently.[2] Of emotional experience, Micciche argues that "experience" is not necessarily the best term to use. Rather than approach emotion as something that happens to us, she reverses field and approaches emotion as an active *process*, doing so in a way that helps shed further light on the immense gravity exerted by Aristotle's language. In this moment, the haunting language of the "toolbox" approach comes to fruition as Micciche implicitly valorizes Aristotle's approach to pathos as a method of rhetorical production by expanding the same underlying conception to the very *sensation* of emotion itself: "The idea that *experiencing* an emotion – not expressing, perceiving, or analyzing one – may require *skill* represents a titanic shift in thinking about emotions" (47, author's emphasis). Unfortunately, Walker's approach to enthymeme demonstrates that this "titanic shift" is, at absolute best, occuring within a logocentric/enthymemic framework. At worst, this "titanic shift" is not really a shift at all, but

merely the next step in Aristotle's attempt to de-term-ine *pathos* as a toolbox for rhetorical persuasion, as a *technê*.

Still, just as the notion of a *technê* served a loaded function in my first chapter – representing both a negation of possibilities and the opportunity for cybernetic denegation – Micciche's heavily loaded emotional *technê* pushes beyond the limits of Aristotle's inscriptions. While I'm not concerned for the moment with assessing its efficacy as a pedagogical tactic *per se*, I am interested in how it "counts" *pathos*, particularly by factoring Walker's missing term – the body – into its "skill" set. As Micciche describes it, this "skill" requires that an individual tool his/her emotional state to be "responsive to context," and is best practiced and developed through "extralinguistic expressions involving the body" (51). Through this process, "emotions take form, and then take on other forms, or become fetishized as fixed forms between people" (50). Such a scene of traffic between emotional skill and "real world" environments (including the physical body), reflect and affirm a longstanding *êthos* of critical and social engagement in composition studies, an *êthos* particularly well concretized in the "ecocomposition" theory of Sid Dobrin & Christian Weisser. Just as Micciche's take on emotional "skill" sets the stage for an ongoing ecological circulation of various emotional "forms," Dobrin & Weisser argue in a more general sense for "an emotional approach to the relationships between discourse and environment [that] seeks to locate human values and ethics in a harmonious relationship to our environments" (158). In both of these scenes, emotion is generally figured as a sort of embodied performance occuring in a material context; what particularly interests me, then, in this take on emotion as a skill is how we might attempt to reconcile the "active" and "extralinguistic" process of videogaming (bolstered up by my reading of the medium's fundamental constituents: images and procedural action) as a kind of always-already emotional performance, albeit one that is

happening to bodies being always-already reconfigured by their encounters with the wider "ecology" of technology.

In moving "on beyond Aristotle" from the scene of this somewhat-negated *technê*, the first step is to complete the gesture begun by Micciche here by opening up to consider the body, and its role as a often-excluded term in the construction of *pathos*. In an effort to avoid such exclusivity *en route* to my own "extended" take, it remains useful to consider Aristotle as a kind of primal scene wherein important terms are defined and configured among each other. Like Dobrin & Weisser, I hope to treat both emotion and the body not as a "reflection of some inherent 'self'," but rather as part of a "constructed self [arising] from a complex history of that person's previous experiences" (160). Without falling prey to the pressure to uncritically align *pathos* with "body," I will try to treat with both terms simultaneously: the latter being a term caught in the terminological gravity of the former, a situation that cannot be "fixed" simply by turning it into a terminology of its own. As with "play" in the previous chapter, I hope to speak of "body" in a way that acknowledges the difficulties in treating it within the ecology of academic writing, while simultaneously exploiting its binary gravity to fuel a line of flight elsewhere: to a possible "third."

Too easily does the trap of falling into a mind/body dualism presents itself to most conversations about emotion; to critically pursue emotion as an alternative to our received logocentric history suggests that the body can itself become the alternative to the "life of the mind" Enlightenment tradition. Hélène Cixous's "Laugh of the Medusa" most notably advocates a radical departure from phallogocentric tradition, challenging women to adopt a new *écriture* based on the body itself, its flows, instabilities, and performativities. Similarly, Julia Kristeva's provocations within and against the phallogocentric traditions of psychoanalytic theory seize

affirmatively upon the historically negated domains of both emotion and the body. Resisting the "superstitious" Cartesian duality, she attacks its negative foundations: "A *negativity* inseparable from the Hegelian notion of *Being* is thus precisely what splits and prevents the closing up of Being within an abstract and superstitious understanding" (74). Instead, Kristeva engages affirmatively in the material, including the bodily: "one dares think negativity as the *very movement of heterogenous matter*," a process Kristeva equates with that of Freudian "rejection" (74). Rejection/negativity, then, "is a step on the way to the imposition of the *superego*," whereas a rerouted approach to psychoanalysis turns more towards the "erotic pleasure" that bodies can receive when the rejected is welcomed back, (literally) rein*corp*orated (78-9). Just as Cixous crafts her denegated *ecriture féminine* to welcome back the body, Kristeva proposes a denegation through an affirmation of poetic language, a "semiotic" counterpart to the "symbolic" desire to divorce language from the body. Whereas *semiotic* activity "introduces wandering or fuzziness into language," "Language as *symbolic* function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive.... [T]he unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the world is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactiviating this repressed instinctual, maternal element" (104). Kristeva's project attends to both materiality and to resisting the systematicity[3] of "symbolic" thinking at the expense of other economies. This conversation will return to the topic of embodiment to consider it as the locus of other emergent possibilities, particularly in so far as those bodies are part and parcel of the emotional "environment" (to return to Dobrin & Weisser) of videogaming. But before making any attempt to affirmatively "relocate" the body in the matrix of concerns mobilized by this "stretched" *pathos*, it is important to stop and consider the problematics behind this approach.

Associating the body too strongly with emotion lends itself to a problematic all its own. Lynn Worsham warns against a too-literal reading of Cixous, one that either limits emotion to the body or regards the body itself as the end-all, be-all rhetorical *topos*.[4] Yet for all of that, Worsham affirmatively adopts Cixous's concerns, inserting them into a critical-Marxist approach rather than expressing them in the generative manner suggested by the latter. Eager to dislodge a potentially uncritical and unproductive conflation of emotion and body, Worsham argues, in terms similar to Micciche: "Ideology works to mystify emotion as purely a personal and private matter; it actively conceals the fact that emotions are prevailing forms of social life, that so-called personal life always takes shape in social and cultural terms" ("Afterword," 162). Yet, for all this, Worsham's materialism keeps the real situations of real bodies close to her concern. By interrogating ideological state apparatuses (her "Afterword" mentions the therapeutic/self-help industry as one, her 1998 article "Going Postal" gestures towards American "cool" and media coverage of mass violence as others), she considers embodied emotionality in the light of what Mary Ann Cain (herself working through the poststructural feminism of Luce Irigaray) terms an "imaginary space, one different from the 'real' ones of the practical world and the 'imagined' ones of metaphor, a space where the categories by which 'real' and 'imagined' are called into question" (46). Worsham's reading sidesteps the hints of feminine essentialism from Cixous's *ecriture féminine* while at the same time affirming its potential to fluidify the borders (falsely calcified by our collective "schooling" through the above-cited "apparatuses") between bodies, discourses, and subjectivities. To paraphrase Cain, Worsham would have us avoid the trap of fully assigning emotion and the body (emotion-and-body, we might say, counting it as a unit) to the realm of the "imaginary," without bringing it into the conversation of our "real" context, our here-and-now. What Worsham negotiates is a kind of middle-point that avoids the risk of returning control to

the Cartesian dualisms (mind/body, logic/emotion) Cixous and Kristeva work so actively to resist. For the sake of my own project, considering emotion "on beyond Aristotle" requires a critical double move: on one hand, the restructuring of emotional experience and expression through videogame grammatology must be affirmed as based in the highly fraught traffic between unpredictable bodies, technologies, and ideological apparatuses. On the other hand, the unfortunate critical tendency, as I will have noted, is to regard videogames blankly as another ISA that disciplines very particular (i.e., violent) emotional responses – swinging the conversation back towards the immense disciplinary "gravity" of ideo/logical debate without attending to other emergent possibilities. Considering these perspectives on emotional experience serves primarily to illustrate the substantial distance at which Aristotlelian *pathos* operates, while being mindful of the stakes involved in traversing that distance; yet what I also take from this conversation is a will towards fluidification, the seeking out of alternative positions "on beyond Aristotle," starting in these middle spaces of renegotiation between emotion and ideology, and continuing the path to outside, possibly more radical, Third terms.

In attempting to "recover" emotion, my attention will linger largely with Micciche and Worsham, as their goal (it seems to me) is to place emotion in conversation with the logocentric tradition that has preceded it, to count it as a viable location of consideration amid a university/academic culture which has been largely hostile towards it since Plato. And yet, in so doing, another valuable set of perspectives gets left out – the notion that what we need isn't a conversation *with* Plato and Aristotle ("good cop, bad cop(y)" as Vitanza quips) but a true possibility outside the bad/good binary. While Aristotle's incomplete approach leaves us to think of emotion as just so many states that can happen to us, and if Micciche attempts to reverse that trajectory by turning emotion into an active performance, there is nonetheless a third option out

there, best enunciated in D. Diane Davis's *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter*. Again, my concern in consulting Davis is less a sense of her particular rhetorical program than to get at her take on "laughter" as a way of thinking of emotion outside of the either/or pattern. Laughter – interestingly, an emotional state not considered by Aristotle – is for Davis a more profound kind of opportunity. What we could use, she argues, is not greater skill in expressing and experiencing emotion, but something altogether different. Quoting Cixous, she invokes the larger, ineffable cosmic "laughter that laughs you." Is this laughter, too, an emotion? On one hand, Cixous hopes to fling us into a more potent, integral mode of being, but that move is far more radical than playing the "add emotions and stir" game to our received Platonic mixture, making us more integral by way of balancing out Aristotle's predetermined equation. Instead, what Cixous and Davis suggest is a line of flight out of the emotion/logic binary altogether. This perspective, so much in line with my reliance on Vitanza and Davis so far, puts me in the difficult position of grounding for a conversation when the topic of conversation itself wants very much to un-ground me. Even if one could have a sensible conversation about emotion, there wouldn't be much sense in it. The territory will (be) de-territorialize(d) as soon as it is declared. Still, even if I'm not smart or savvy or properly situated enough to enunciate the possibilities for myself, it's enough in the space that I have to offer this chance for de-territorialization, this chance that emotion is neither a sidenote nor a method to a more logical/Enlightened end, but rather a messy, confusing, leaky, *topos*-that-is-not-a-*topos* in itself. (I'll beg your indulgence if all this rhetorical wrangling is tedious; we owe it to ourselves to have these kinds of conversations better than we, historically, have.)

But at the same time, that tactic could potentially sidetrack me, as laughter is developed as the antidote to logocentrism. Rather than dis/engage in laughter (like Vitanza and Davis) as an

attempt to melt the borders between Aristotle's categorizations of rhetorical (and by extension, languaged – and by extension, human) experience, I have chosen to invest in a different game. While recognizing how easily the position can be deconstructed, I prefer an affirmative play among the categories. If, as I've suggested, videogames always-already deal in the kinds of traffic sketched out by Aristotle's proofs, and if the goal in all of this is to create a theory around videogaming that can answer better to the concerns of the larger rhetorical communities, then my best recourse for the time-being is to engage in this terminological play as responsibly as possible: to borrow Aristotle's terms guardedly, and to avoid the tantalizing error of running towards more comfortable Sophistic and deconstructed language. The worst logocentric excesses towards which this tactic might draw me will, hopefully, dissolve into laughter in the final analysis, though the weight of my conversation might seem to linger on the (re)negotiation of binaries themselves. Specifically, Davis helps me catch another line of flight, one particularly pertinent to the issue of *pathos*: while laughter is linked by Cixous to the larger project of *ecriture féminine*, the dissolution of phallogocentrism by negating its negation, Diane Davis notes that "a face (but also a text and/or a *technê*) contorted in laughter, Milan Kundera notes, has never been considered beautiful or sublime" (2). Yet it's just that transitional point – from beauty to the sublime – that concerns me here. While Vitanza or Davis might urge my project forward into a deconstruction of gaming rhetoric – towards the state of denegated laughter, radical fun, *jouissance* that no technology (*technê*/*logos*) can provide – I'll hold my (ac)count just short of that mark. (I'll count one-two, and point towards "some more.")

The Design of Emotion

In all, these various conceptual stretchings lead me towards a *pathos* that is valuable for my discussion precisely for how it seems to skirt the edges of traditional rhetoric, how the term seems to catch and crystallize the irreducibly subjective, emotional, and bodily valences of languaged-experience, whether that language is creative/expressive or logical/persuasive. In the case of videogames, that "language" seems to undergo further folds, stretches, and strain. After all, while they can be analyzed to death as ideological machines (emphasis on the "-logical") or as opportunities for creative play with identity (the subjectivity framed for the gamer to adopt), we should note, even at the risk of sounding un-critical, that games are supposed to be *fun*. They are purchased for fun, experienced for fun, reviewed and critiqued (in the mainstream press, anyway) on the basis of the *fun* they provide. Yet that feeling of "fun" – the *enjoyment* to emerge from the game – is a third rail for academic critics: a place where our collective "rhetoric of technologization" does not go. En*joy*ment cannot be tidily defined or organized; Aristotle senses as much in giving *pathos* comparatively short shrift amongst the other, more Platonically knowable *pisteis*. A fact can be known, plotted, charted, as can the character of the rhetor. But enjoyment is by nature fluid, slippery, and subjective.[5] The goal here, then, is not to locate or define the pleasure of the videogaming experience (either universally or as a function of particular game-texts), but rather to develop a sense of how the material structures of the gaming medium itself seek to reposition, extend, and stretch the contours of that enjoyment. (In other words, by investigating design, this project hopes to point towards a rhetoric of gaming by first considering the "technologizing of emotional rhetoric.")

As a term, "design" invokes the broad range of concerns that seem most intimately related to the emotional experience of the videogame medium. It participates fruitfully in a

number of parallel discourses that can help this project to think of emotion as part of a fuller ecology of possible rhetorical (and by rhetorical, we might just as well say "languaged," which covers a fair amount of ground indeed) experience. First and foremost, "design" as a practical term catches the material valence that I'd like this conversation to have, that is, a concern about the material configurations of the medium in play. If we are to cope with how videogaming stands to sway our sense of what "emotion" is, we can begin by considering how the medium itself is configured to provide those experiences. "Design," as it has been used in Rhetoric & Composition quarters, has also frequently suggested not just a concern with materiality, but a growing sense of the need to consider multiple signifying modalities (text, sound, image, video) in composition curriculum. Such a move offers interesting potential resonances with this project's attempt to grapple simultaneously with the distinct regimes of image and algorithm. The term has the further advantage of being nestled within the discourse of game production itself. By considering how "design" itself is positioned in the rhetoric of game development, we may gain further clues as to how the material building blocks of image and algorithm may be configured to lend themselves to the creation of emotional experiences – particularly "fun," but in other potential ways as well.

Though not related in any particular way to videogame study, Donald Norman in *Emotional Design* argues that design is a simultaneously practical and emotional enterprise. His early work is frequently noted in media studies circles for his notion of "affordance" (the sense of approaching an object in terms of what it enables you to do), yet in this book he departs from that purely utilitarian mode of thought into a consideration of design as a fuller rhetorical activity, one that braids a person's emotional state with an object's use-value. He writes: "Sure, utility and usability are important, but without fun and pleasure, joy and excitement, and, yes,

anxiety and anger, fear and rage, our lives would be incomplete" (8). Far from a mere ethical platitude, Norman's approach references cognitive psychology, citing in particular Antonio Damasio's thesis that "emotion is a necessary part of life, affecting how you feel, how you behave, and how you think" (10). He goes on to specify three particular "levels" of emotional processing – visceral, behavioral, and reflective – and develops his own hybrid aesthetic/psychological methodology to deal with how the design of "everyday objects" (in his first few chapters, he references everything from computer interfaces and automobiles to ATM machines and teapots) spurs those processes.

While Norman's subdivisions among emotions are interesting, an awareness of Platonic/Aristotelian binaries could too easily deconstruct them. Emotions – in this case, those dealing with instinctual reactions to aspects of color and shape – can be visceral, sure; the very language of viscerality, though, sets up a limiting distinction by returning to the body. That Norman says comparatively little about visceral experience puts him in line with the phallogocentric "tradition" of aligning emotion with the body (the "viscera" his very terminology signals), femininity, the horrifying Other to masculine truth and rationality, the very mis/take that Lynn Worsham has warned against. His notions of Reflective and Behavioral nodes could easily be assigned to *êthos* and *logos*, respectively. Behavioral emotion is primarily in response to the question of whether the designed object follows the expected behavior. ("Does it work?") The logical cause-effect sequence is at stake here; emotion only seems to enter play via the frustration of an object failing to respond appropriately to "input" behaviors (77). Reflective emotion, Norman argues, enters into play at least partially through concerns over "self-image"; at minimum, all people "make statements about themselves and the things they care about" (84). In other words, this aspect of emotional experience seems firmly rooted in concerns over shared

values and personal character – textbook descriptors of Aristotelian *êthos*. Still, in saying this, we at least acknowledge that each formerly monolithic member of Aristotle's *pisteis* is shot through with some kind of emotion – a feeling. In that respect, Norman also helps stretch *pathos* with me, to show it covering more territory than we might think.

Regarding pleasurable emotions in particular (we are, after all, trying to head towards a sense of how to discuss "fun"), he references some fairly Kantian distinctions, particularly when it comes to defining "beauty" as something that happens on the reflective level, requiring (one would assume "rational") judgment. At the same time, his approach to photography (and "kitsch" in general) cites its power to spur involuntary idiosyncratic emotional memory, in passages that could just as easily have been lifted from Barthes's essay on "The Photographic Message" (87-88). In my reading of Barthes (shared with Greg Ulmer), that essay holds the move for a potent move beyond the logocentrism of the Platonic outlook, a re-engineering away from the logocentric bias. (Building a better rhetorical ecology by denegating *pathos* – a theme to which my analysis will return shortly.) Similarly, his notion of "reflective" emotional response can be read as following the Aristotelian move (as read by Laura Micciche) of locating emotion within the broader social context. The pleasure of effective "reflective" design is that it helps the individual "to establish one's self-image and one's place in the world" (87), while providing a touchstone for shared experience. A reflective emotional experience may serve as a "badge of honor," by inspiring a feeling of pride that "provides stories" for others (89).

In practice, Norman refers repeatedly throughout *Emotional Design* to a careful balancing of visceral (what we might – in a falsely negated way – have called "aesthetic") pleasures sustained by a careful *packing* of the design space. Citing Japanese industrial designer Kenji Ekuan: "Packing numerous functions into something and making it smaller and thinner are

contradictory aims, but one had to pursue contradiction to the limit to find a solution" (103). In detailing these overlapping complexities of emotion, the extents to which they touch upon our social, physical, and intellectual constitutions, the "contradiction" produced by "packing" must be pushed even further. For a design to provide aesthetic pleasure, a "packed" object must achieve a kind of immediacy, "giv[ing] rise to a never-ending interplay among [its] elements" while simultaneously promoting a scene of passive reflection, "time to study, analyze, and consider such rich interplay" (111). In other words, emotional design, with shades here of Laura Micciche's notion of "emotional skill," connotes both "the skill of the designer in providing a powerful, rich experience and the power of the perceiver" (111). Working through Norman, then, we can start to think of emotional enjoyment as part of a simultaneously active-and-passive process.[6] What will remain in this conversation is to read that simultaneity against the configurations of videogames themselves, not to just to observe how they reflect aspects of visceral, reflective, or behavioral design, but also to attempt to locate the occasions where this simultaneity enters play.

"Design" furthermore suggests a kind of rhetorical activity distinct from "writing." Gunther Kress argues in *Literacy in the New Media Age* that design is a multimodal activity that covers the the distinct signifying modalities of written text, image, and sound. Unfortunately, the tendency of Kress's wider argument is to foreground the importance of writing in distinctly Aristotelian ways, frequently at the expense of the power of the image. In his chapter considering the specialized functions of image in the grander scheme of discursive design, he writes: "Writing is used for that which writing does best – to provide, in fact, an account of events, and image is used for that which image does best, to depict the world that is at issue" (155-6). As my previous chapter [will have] noted, Greg Ulmer, works the image in far more

radical ways: images do not merely "picture" the world, but create active, emotionally probing experiences that exceed the symbolic economy of mere words (*logos*). That being said, Kress's notion of design is more useful for the way that, in offering a sort of "field" approach to New Media documents, affirming the "simultaneity" of those documents, the term opens up the possibility for discussing multiple forms of extension at the same time, as being part of the full rhetorical experience. Similarly, I have argued that videogaming must be similarly approached, as neither a purely imagistic nor a purely algorithmic/procedural medium. While Kress's reliance on an underlying rhetoric of "multimodality" lends itself to an atomization of terms – to thinking of words, images, etc. as modular pieces – the notion of "design" in general captures a useful rhetorical nuance.

"Design" is furthermore the term most frequently invoked in the "authorship" of videogames. In the modern "studio" era of game production, popular magazines refer much more frequently to the game "design" than to particular games being produced by a single author. One of the most famous single-author videogames of all time, *Tetris*, was according to its Wikipedia entry "designed" by Alexei Pajitnov. Even a figure like Shigeru Miyamoto – the creator of the *Donkey Kong*, *Super Mario Bros.*, and *Legend of Zelda* series – is referred to as a game designer, despite writing Donkey Kong almost singlehandedly. Even if it has been claimed that the authorship of games can be read as a kind of "writing activity" (in Hawisher & Selfe's *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*, for example), the predominance of "design" in the rhetoric of game creation should be attended to. By "design" we may refer to a wider domain of rhetorical activity including more than just "authorship" in the sense of narrative construction or code-creation. "Design" accounts for the creation of fluid and dynamic imagery, and the procedural rules that afford interactive experience – the key grammatological ingredients that

make a videogame a video/game. In other words, in pursuing "design" we are searching for not just a domain of writing activity but for a particular emotional effect: fun.

Early in his book *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*, former game developer Raph Koster straightforwardly defines his topic: "Fun from games arises out of mastery. It arises out of comprehension. It is the act of solving puzzles that makes games fun. In other words, with games, learning is the drug" (40). With minimal effort, one could take a gleeful Derridean sledgehammer to this statement, deconstructing Koster's simplistic reliance on terms like "mastery" and "comprehension" with all their logocentric baggage. Koster's rhetoric maintains this dogged alliance with the procedural/algorithmic level of the gaming experience, gesturing only occasionally to the ultimately "fleeting" pleasures that can be had from the aesthetic experience: "Delight strikes when we recognize [visual] patterns but are surprised by them.... [But,] recognition is not an extended process. You can regain delight by staying away from the object that caused it previously, then returning. You'll get that recognition again. But it's not quite what I would call 'fun'" (94). Despite Koster's unwillingness to have a little fun with aesthetics (and, despite his ludicrous assertion that beauty is "only found in settings of extreme order," a notion to which I'll return later in a slightly different form), his perspective is at least interesting for trying to afford different kinds of pleasure (including also pleasures of social interaction) a place at the table. Ultimately, his approach is integrative, even if we can (and by all means, should) argue with his attempt to define "fun" so narrowly.

What is equally significant about Koster's take on game design is the ever-present specter of another distinct emotional state: frustration. When applied to gaming, the term might take on a kind of immediate connotation. We may think, for example, of the frustration of trying to learn a new control scheme or solve a particular puzzle. (Indeed, Koster's analysis never ventures far

beyond the latter.) Interestingly, though, Koster's brief and largely dismissive take on aesthetic enjoyment seems to hold a clue for a more powerful gesture. Regarding a state of aesthetic enjoyment that isn't quite "fun," he asks: "Why does a beautiful landscape make us feel that all is right in the world? Because it meets our expectations and *exceeds* them" (94, author's emphasis). Now, we can by no means confuse Koster with a legitimate aesthetic theorist; he is a professional game designer and speaks out of that role, without considering the wider tradition around him. Still, read alongside his descriptions elsewhere of the need to balance the challenge of a task with the player's ability to learn at that task (the resulting emotional state is what Koster defines as "fun"), we have here a different kind of configuration – an emotional state emerging from the game where our expectations are overrun from without. In the procedural/algorithmic "mode" of the gameplay experience, Koster simply says "when we meet noise and fail to see a pattern, we get frustrated and give up" (25). The logic of this statement carries over into his take on aesthetics when he claims that beauty only happens in situations of extreme order – no pleasure can be gained from visual chaos. Or can it? This is the pivot point that has the greatest potential for helping us "stretch" our understanding of the emotional experience of rhetoric-under-the-influence-of-gaming: an understanding of how aesthetics, procedurality, and videogame technology collide. I will argue in the next section how Koster's allusions to the aesthetic interplays between order and chaos return this discussion to the scene of its earlier binaries. By returning to and momentarily inhabiting those binaries (adding beautiful/sublime to mind/body, logic/emotion), we can grasp – through an attentiveness to the reconfigurations of aesthetic experience made by gaming – the fleeting possibility of "fun" as a powerful third position.

Images, Acceleration, and the Sublime

While I claim nothing more than a journeyman's familiarity with the conversation, most students of the aesthetic theory tradition can locate its earliest underpinnings in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, a text whose most important goal, I take it, is to theorize textual pleasure by locating its source. Pleasure is de-term-ined (most notably in the experience of *katharsis*), and its headwaters located in the structure of the (in this case, tragic) text. My own discussion will fast-forward the timeline significantly, to consider the aesthetics of visual experience instead. My go-to source: a philosopher of no less Platonic constitution – Immanuel Kant. Like Plato and Aristotle before him, Kant makes a philosophical foray into aesthetics, into possibly the most difficult to define branch of the classic Platonic ideas of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Kant's philosophical career seems primarily concerned with the middle term, though he does devote a substantial chunk of his *Critique of Judgment* to the latter, to the definition and explication of a philosophical method designed to identify and interrogate what can properly be considered beautiful. Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful" becomes then a touchstone for Hegel (and other Romantics) and afterwards, for many French poststructuralists, who define their own views against those of Kant (Pierre Bordieu and, as I'll discuss later, Jean-François Lyotard). While aesthetics concerns itself with a smaller range of emotional experience than we have consulted thus far, it nonetheless represents the best opportunity to consider the presentation of "feeling" (broadly construed) in relationship with material technologies, particularly the image.[7] Aesthetics, in a sense, is the closest thing we have to an academic/philosophical tradition concerned with design. Despite their differences, I will have argued in a sense, that much of what constitutes "fun" can be phrased in terms of a version "aesthetic pleasure" that has been variously extended/amputated by the structure of the videogame medium. In other words, in

consulting the emotional experiences of beauty and the sublime, I hope to find my way to a more full and profound sense of how videogames produce emotional experiences.

I don't expect it to go unnoticed that one of my chief concerns, the regime of algorithmic code, will disappear from the scene for the time being. Kant's analytics (of the beautiful and of the sublime) are primarily concerned with visual and imagistic experience, the capacity to render philosophically sound judgments on artistic phenomena. The mathematical regimes of code do not enter into his considerations, and, indeed, their presence in a chapter putatively about the "emotional" sector of rhetorical experience sounds odd enough in the first place. By taking this slight detour into aesthetic theory, code will necessarily disappear from view, but this lapse is hardly permanent. Nor will code merely "haunt" the proceedings by insinuating a mechanical and automated substratum to my potentially stretched-out approach to *pathos*. As my case study analyses will hopefully bear out, the "worldview of code" impacts and inflects emotional experience in potentially subtle ways.

Any conversation about the acceleration and automation provided by the algorithm signals a second essential link for any conversation about aesthetics, and it is with this linkage (not with Kant) that I'll begin this discussion. Walter Benjamin's critique of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction represents a drastic turn in the tradition of aesthetic theory, not in the theory itself *per se*, but in the attention it wishes to pay to the material artifacts of the popular culture. For Benjamin's time, the unaddressed objects were film and photography, instantiations of a new, emergent category of media. From his foundations in Marxist thinking, Benjamin's incisive analysis lays bare the dangerous potential for these new media to effect potentially dangerous political change, not through political rhetoric as such, but by hailing an entirely new subject-formation into being. Whereas the balance of the aesthetic tradition

preceding him, from Kant to Hegel and beyond, had been able to sift apart the signifying domains of art and politics, Benjamin saw the distinction start to collapse all together, a change motivated by the material conditions of the Twentieth Century. I would hazard a connection to Benjamin on two levels: one, that his simultaneous concerns over both materiality and aesthetics runs roughly parallel to my notion of "design"; and two, that the "design" of the media experience has far-reaching power to restructure fundamental relationships of self, text, and society. In exploring Benjamin's notions of mechanical/aesthetic experience in the light of other contributions to aesthetic theory, the importance of the mechanical itself will be thrown into sharper relief. The function of this detour is to consult other voices who have considered the influence of technology on aesthetics – on emotional "feeling."

Infamously, the key to Benjamin's understanding of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is his concept of "aura." The reproducibility of a filmic art-work means the loss of its "core," its "authenticity," its "here and now" (105). In practically the same breath, Benjamin directly signals the material effect; the aura-less object "substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence" (104). Benjamin the Marxist seems poised to link the new material instantiation of media to the new material dynamic of subject-formation, using the capitalist structure of production as a go-between. Still, the path towards the material reconfiguration of the subject has already taken a detour; Benjamin's very language belies a deep-seated conflict among its terms. The aura is simultaneously a material presence, but its effect can only be conceptualized in terms of peculiar, traditional-sounding metaphysical conceptions. The very language of "authenticity," or the inner-outer dynamic implied by "core," suggest that Benjamin is already reaching for something more than a textual effect. While I would not go so far as to suggest some emergent concept of ontology in this work, I do think it is fair to say that Benjamin

is wrestling with questions of the metaphysical configuration of subject and object, at least within the domain of the aesthetic experience.

The "destruction of the aura" is a matter of "stripping the veil from the object," a statement that references the more metaphysically (or cosmologically) charged tradition of Kant. The notion of a "veil" draped over the object resonates strongly with his essentially Platonic distinction between the phenomenal matter of the object and its nominal substance; the former is the barrier that protects man from the terrifying sublimity of nature. So, by pointing this slight inconsistency out, it is not my intention to poke holes in Benjamin's dialectical, material method; I would rather run the risk of reading the tactic *affirmatively*, viewing it a chance to expand further on what is at stake in the cultural shift towards mechanically reproduced art. Benjamin's thinking is rather wrought on this topic: the veil represents both the object's "originality" and its having a place within the "domain of tradition," while at the same time it also enables "art's parasitic subservience to ritual" (104-5). Immanuel Kant also refers comfortably to the "veil," in the sense that it provides a separation line between phenomenal matter and the noumenal essence that underlies the phenomenal. Either way, the veil is taken up in the conversation as the metaphorical point where a safer, more conservative emotional pleasure risks falling into something altogether more challenging. The question remains for my investigation: when the film image is "unveiled," what lies beneath?

To help answer that question, let's backtrack to an earlier point in the tradition of aesthetic theory. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* takes its most famous detour in considering the philosophical configuration of aesthetic experience, and the basis on which one may render philosophically sound judgments of aesthetic phenomena. His Analytic of the Beautiful attempts to distinguish between matters of aesthetic pleasure (rendered by beauty) and matters of personal

taste by claiming that a judgment of "beauty" must not only be "universally valid," but must also precede the feeling of pleasure. While Kant's approach argues for a two-way structure in which pleasure first derives from the "free play of faculties," far more space in Kant's analytic is devoted to a sequence of "moments" in which an observer, free from any "interest" in the matter, reflects upon that pleasure to produce a universally valid philosophical judgment. This analytic takes the individual from mere subjective enjoyment to an altogether more robust (and, crucially, communicable) kind of pleasure. While both Kant and Laura Micciche regard this kind of emotional experience as a kind of "skill," Kant insists that the proceeds of the experience are only of interest when they can be rendered as stable philosophical Truths, not as contingent performances as in the case of Micciche. Following Norman, Kant seems only interested in "reflective" emotional experience, leaving any thoughts of visceral or behavioral experiences away.

Fortunately, Kant himself provides a kind of alternative, through a second Analytic, this time of "sublime" emotional experience. While not originating in his works by any means, Kant provides the most oft-cited definition of the "sublime" as a segment of aesthetic experience: that it forcefully overwhelms the viewer through sheer dynamism or immensity. ("The sublime is that which is absolutely great.") Unlike the contemplative beauty afforded by, say, a lovely painting in a gallery, the sublime can be factored into aesthetic judgment only once the viewer steps aside for a moment (has a "moment of recuperation") and collects himself (85). The sublime exceeds the beautiful by virtue of its being too-great, too-overwhelming. To use the quintessentially Kantian distinction, the phenomenon of the object cannot be totally grasped or apprehended, and in that moment, some glimpse of Nature's terrifying bigness – its essence, its *noumenon* – sneaks through. In the moment where, as Douglas Burnham says, you look at a

mountain and see not a simple geometric cone, but an infinitely complex array of ravines, boulders, and cliff faces, then you experience the sublime (online). Your faculties are insufficient to judge the phenomenal whole, only to grasp the thing-in-itself in all its absolute unknowableness. The noumenon, the "stripped object" is, for Kant, a negative concept – the boundary we cannot apprehend through our rational faculties.

The notion of the "noumenal" slipping through as part of the sublime aesthetic of film is hedged by Benjamin. The rapid-fire suturing of the film image closes off the rupture created in the subject; what residue is left there becomes for Benjamin, following Kant, the noumenal essence of political terror. In the harsh mechanations of the studio structure, Benjamin argues that film presents an "equipment-free aspect of reality [that] has become the height of artifice." In other words, the mechanical reproduction of image via the film apparatus simultaneously thrills with larger-than-life spectacle while simultaneously erasing the traces of its own artifice. Under this regime, the organic totality of the painter's art is replaced with the fragmented, flickering assemblies of camera-work. In his most telling analogy, Benjamin compares the aesthetic transaction between film camera and audience to that of a surgeon and a patient. "He [the filmmaker] greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs" (115). The terror of the "noumenal" is in a sense replaced by the fear of deliberate manipulation by an/Other. Indeed, terror more generally constitutes much of the aesthetic experience of the sublime, but a brief consultation with Friedrich Nietzsche may help allay the inherent fears in Benjamin's model, and help us move towards a more nuanced explication of the image itself.

Nietzsche is not alone in the either the aesthetic or the more general philosophical tradition in viewing the world as the scene of a kind of primal strife or *polemos*. In particular, in a line of thought that constituted much of his career, beginning with *The Birth of Tragedy*, was in viewing the aesthetic work as the occasion for the primal strife of the universe to present itself (33). This is Nietzsche's radical gesture out of the realm of Platonic/Aristotelian *mimesis* and towards the reconstitution of the work of art as vastly dynamic in itself. Nietzsche loudly celebrates the "ruptures" that occur through art, celebrates the Dionysian chorus through which "an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature" emerges (59). Nietzsche pries open the image of the Greek spectacle, finding in it "a great sublime chorus of dancing and singing satyrs *or those who permit themselves to be represented by satyrs*" (62, my emphasis). The aesthetic experience of Greek tragedy becomes therefore "the mirror image in which the Dionysian man contemplates himself" (63). Could anything seem farther from Benjamin's fear of fascist totality? What I feel is needed is to overcome the gulf separating these two thinkers by doing yet more tactical stretching, to (re)read Benjamin's image from the standpoint of the enormous sublime spectacle it masks, that of the Dionysian chorus lurking disruptively beneath. We must yet come to terms with, and sustain a tensive balance between, the ideological reprogramming of the subject and the opportunity presented therein for the precise opposite: the contemplation of the satyr (itself the symbol of anti-essential, anti-totalitarian thinking). Or, to echo Lynn Worsham, even if the aesthetic machines in front of us (videogames) create powerful forms of "emotional schooling," we must understand that that ideological process is never entirely fixed or complete. Other, more slippery forms of experience may emerge that we have not yet accounted for; following Nietzsche, we can sketch out the

potential for an affirmative sublime within the matrix of the image, of the possibility of gamers representing themselves as satyrs.

One possibility is the reconfiguration of the meaning-making machine, by which I mean a consideration of what it is that the image *does*. Nietzsche's Dionysian man, unlike the "plastic" Apollonian artist, takes no pleasure from the image itself; instead s/he turns to music, that other constituent element of the tragic scene. Music eludes metaphysics or even the sharply defined domain of textual meaning; it becomes, through lyric, a way of experiencing the world with "a coloring, a causality, a velocity all its own" (50). Strangely, as regards the dynamic space of art, particularly the detailed space of the photograph, Roland Barthes provides the bridge to link these two views. In his analysis of the photographic image, he points to what he in his semiotic idiom calls "third meanings." Greg Ulmer, who works within this paradigm of the image in ways I will be addressing shortly, summarizes Barthes's position from *Camera Lucida*:

> What Barthes discovered or observed emerging within photography is a new dimension of signification that he named with a neologism, *signifiance*, characterized by a meaning that is "obtuse" – a "third meaning," neither literal nor figurative [which he names] the "punctum" – that which stings or pricks one emotionally. The photograph produces a feeling that we associate with the experience of recognition or epiphany…. This power of a photograph [is] *to stimulate involuntary personal memory*. (Ulmer 43-4)

In the film, these punctum meanings become accelerated; the surgeon's scalpel could be taken to represent the accumulation of thirty-two stings per second. What is stimulated within the subject, then, is a sort of emotional feedback. Specifically, in his indictment of the fascist political-aesthetic, Benjamin looks with horror towards the aesthetic glorification of the war

machine, the deliberate manipulation of the emotional aspect of the image for the sake of generating positive feedback. And yet where Barthes and Nietzsche seem to be in agreement (or at least congruence) is in that emotional feedback proceeds automatically and individually. While Benjamin's fears are well founded, he overleaps the chaotic nature of imagistic meaning, landing in the only logical place: fascist social totality. The emotional sting, while initiated collectively, is *a priori* an individual experience. What emerges out of the mechanical sublime has the potential for much more Nietzschean destabilization than Benjamin accounts for: more seeps through the surgical incision than just ideology.

Before venturing into some considerations of how Benjamin's visual incisive-sublime can be tracked in a particular modern game, I'll take a moment to consider the other, more slippery layer to my notion of gaming grammatology: algorithmic code. I call this consideration "slippery" as the research available on the topic is fairly microscopic outside of computer science itself. A growing community, spearheaded by the journal *Critical Code Studies*, is growing into this niche area of study: the consideration of algorithmic code as a fundamental divergence in our understanding of how meaning emerges through language. Katherine Hayles's *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* offers what I consider the most useful to date awareness of code in-itself, promoting considerations of how "the worldview of code is positioned in relation to the worldviews of speech and writing [as represented by Saussure and Derrida respectively]; forging new ways to think about the foundational terms 'work,' 'text,' and 'document'" (11). Cheifest among them: the notion that code is executable language, language that becomes action. And yet, Hayles is constantly careful to note that "action" is delayed and deferred, routed through a system of electric switches and relays, translated from input to code, compiled into ones and zeroes by yet another distinct functionality, and only eventually is the

user's so-called control translated into screenic terms. Now, on one hand, the processing regime of code can be read as the opposite of the sublime – it happens away from our detection, incapable of directly "overwhelming" us. And yet, in its transitoriness, in its capacity to, chimera-like, effect states of action, to create flows of information, and to deconstruct the old philosophical barrier between Essence and Action, I see disconnects in play similar to those forwarded by Kant's sublime Analytic, a fundamental tension over the relations between embodied being and action.

In two ways, then, videogames seem to set the stage for a classically sublime experience: for a fundamental loss of control, in spite of what the rhetoric surrounding the technology may suggest. It's just that oscillation that seizes my interest here. And not just mine! When Jean-François Lyotard seizes on his own "the interest in the sublime," the sublime becomes the constituent element of postmodernity itself – by overrunning the barriers of the rational, the sublime challenges safe assumptions of the viability of Enlightenment metanarratives. "The failure of the imagination to present a case for the concept of infinity is thus presented or 'bounded' by the 'unbounded' power of the sublime" (131). In resisting rational appropriation, the sublime constitutes the border of the rational. (Control only appears in its absence.) The grammatological layering I've been tinkering with here suggests that, contrary to popular opinion, what might matter most about the gaming process is not our control over our destinies, or our ability to control and create our identities and stories, but rather the pleasure and terror that result from the true control always-already being pushed slightly beyond our grasp. To what extent, then can videogame "narratives" (the stories and structured experiences) acknowledge and harness what Benjamin and Lyotard have anticipated?

Case Study: *Bioshock*

My primary case study is 2007's *Bioshock*. My analysis of the game focuses on a combination of its narrative, game-structure (the sequence of actions that must be performed by the player), and its visual regimes. Published for the PC and the Xbox 360, the game's visuals take advantage of high-definition display to produce realistic effects and textures. The first few moments of the game display this dramatically as the player assumes control of an anonymous subject who has survived a plane crash. As "shocking" as the incident itself may be, the game puts equal parcel in the display of textures and animations through a scene that features rippling water, fiery debris, and a slowly sinking tail section. Briefly, the game's narrative drops the player in the wreckage of a gorgeously-detailed underwater city named Rapture, a would-be objectivist Utopia overrun by murderous Splicers (victims of an apparent zeal for genetic self-modification) and terrifying behemoths of more mysterious origin known as Big Daddies. And yet, just as in its opening moments, *Bioshock* participates in a certain technological navel-gazing, lovingly crafting visual displays of profound complexity, as the gorgeous Art Deco architecture yields to displays of rot and destruction (and nearly ubiquitous puddles from numerous leaks to the structure). I argue that it is within the game's visual regime that a more profound play takes place, a play that pushes against the very emotional experience those images provide: moments of delight, terror, and awe.

Figure 4-1: Screenshot of *Bioshock*. Note the sparse display of non-diegetic data.

From a more proper analytic viewpoint, there's little on the surface of *Bioshock*'s visual display to recommend it as a shining example of sublime aesthetics. Indeed, if anything, the high-level of graphic detail, especially when rendered in high-definition video, seems to skirt closer to Kant's classical notion of the beautiful. The environments of Rapture are pieces of art to be admired in themselves, of themselves. One could perhaps invoke the "terror" aspect of the sublime to account for the visceral reactions produced by certain perspective tricks, or through the grotesque violence of the Splicers. (In one particularly gripping sequence, a plaster mold of a human being is seated in a chair one moment, then reappears behind the player as soon as her back is turned. Upon rotating the view back whence the player came, she is shocked by the unexpected re-place-ment of the statue, which – of course – rears and attacks almost as quickly as the observation can be made.)

Figure 4-2: A moment of terror in *Bioshock*

Then again, the concept of "terror" in a videogame is hardly novel in and of itself: the "survival-horror" genre, often borrowing heavily from the visual tropes of horror cinema is, in my experience, the one of the most discussed game genres in academia. The only particular recommendation for the "terror" reading is the first-person perspective and its capacity to limit detachment from the action of the screen; the sparseness *Bioshock*'s limited heads-up display allows the image to exceed its own inset frame. The best, though still not entirely convincing, argument for the sublime in *Bioshock* could come from the speed and ferociousness with which the Big Daddies attack the viewer. On top of moving quickly for their size, their attacks come with speed and violence – the concussions produced by their blows tend to white-out portions of the screen while artificially seeming to slow player-response time. Even in this, though, these eruptions of violence are just that, sudden eruptions. Once the threat has been neutralized – by the death of either the player or Big Daddy – the viewer earns a moment of Kantian reprieve. The shock of the sublime is absorbed by the system into the game's larger aesthetic economy. As

Bukatman says similarly of technology in Science-Fiction film, “The might of technology, supposedly our own creation, is mastered through a powerful display that acknowledges anxiety [in this case, our anxiety over control] but recontains within it the field of spectatorial power” (265). This anxiety, in the game experience, is always crouching at the door, but the continual cycle of player feedback keeps the process stable, guarantees that the anxiety can be mastered and “recontained.”

Figure 4-3: The “Big Daddy” provides much of *Bioshock*'s horror, attacking with sublime speed and ferocity.

In this situation, I'd recall Walter Benjamin and his sense of how the sublime emerges from the mechanically accelerated image. His perspective is valuable precisely because its materialist alternative to Kant; while Kant would render aesthetic experience as a question of artistic *content*, Benjamin focuses on the frame. The mechanics of film not only overrun the contemplative space of painting through sheer size and dynamism, but, as Roland Barthes's punctum principle suggests, in their photographic precision hail a new, subtle order of meaning

making. Film always-already overruns its borders; hence Benjamin's fear of the scalpel effect – the incisive forms of control that may (and have) become available from this configuration. If we follow Benjamin, then, into *Bioshock*'s aesthetic matrix – its high-definition visuals, dynamic effects, and (as will become more significant later) subjective first-person framing – we may reach a sense of how the game's interface forecloses on the footholds of "recuperation," moments that are for Kant the only opportunities wherein sublime terror can be converted into aesthetic judgment. (I don't mean to suggest that this feature is somehow native to this particular game; in fact, these notions seem highly portable to other offerings, particularly in the dominant first-person genre.)

The change in the material condition of viewership and participation between Kant's scene of art-gallery reflection and Benjamin's scene of cinematic mass-spectatorship effects the conditions for the sublime's emergence. Indeed, Pierre Bordieu critiques as much in Kant:

> Totally ahistorical, like all philosophical thought that is worthy of the name (every *philosophia* worth its salt is *perennis*)—perfectly ethnocentric, since it takes for its sole datum the lived experience of a *homo aestheticus* who is none other than the subject of aesthetic discourse constituted as the universal subject of aesthetic experience—Kant's analysis of the judgment of taste finds its real basis in a set of aesthetic principles which are the universalization of the dispositions associated with a particular social and economic condition. (493)

Taken by itself, the image in *Bioshock* could be read as so much technological navel-gazing: dynamic animation combined with vividly realistic textures that create an ineffable feeling of "being there" in an imagined space. This "reading" of the image-as-such (indeed, as a reading of the still images presented here might encourage) does indeed tend to spur the disinterest of

academics and procedurally oriented game critics alike. Bordieu points out, though, that such readings may be emerging from a too-uncritical acceptance of logocentric, Kantian measures of what counts as aesthetic feeling. This is not to say that every video game, or every moment in every videogame is an *a priori* sublime experience, but it is to say that the metaphysical fence constructed by Kant to keep the two experiences separate has been either eroded or pried open.

Figure 4-4: The player's encounter with Ryan can be viewed from wherever the gaze is positioned.

And yet, *Bioshock*'s biggest trick has little to do with the aesthetics of the experience, or even with its narrative climax, although that scene sets the stage for it. The first half of the game concerns the unnamed protagonist's search for Andrew Ryan, the founder of the failed Rapture community. You locate Ryan through a series of frankly flimsy activities; a savvy critic could call the first half of *Bioshock* a series of levels in search of a unifying narrative purpose. The protagonist has to rescue an underwater arboretum, defeat a theatrical madman, and sabotage the power supply – each of which represents an narratively non-essential (though still entertaining) diversion from the relatively simple matter of accessing the next bathysphere station. At the

decisive moment of your meeting with Ryan, a pane of smoky glass separates the two, and Ryan launches into a dramatic monologue. So far, this is the stuff of James Bond villainy, not sublime terror.

The shock of the moment rests when the player is removed from control of the scene. In *Bioshock*'s confrontational moment, the intimacy and identification inherent in first-person perspective is maintained, without so much as a flicker to denote any change in the perspective. Interruptions of this kind, it has to be said, are hardly uncommon in games, particularly the narratively driven role-playing game (RPG) genre. The *Final Fantasy* series, for example, makes frequent use of narrative interruptions to forward the plot and develop characters, sometimes using cinematic "cutscenes," and sometimes (earlier in the series, especially) maintaining the same overhead view. Yet, this moment lacks that sense of cinematic detachment in favor of a first-person gaze: the incisive, high-resolution, subject-position that is the source of the game's earlier excitement and exhilaration. Within what Scott Bukatman might call an ongoing process of exposure to a "tamed" aesthetic sublime, the player experiences an altogether more radical and disruptive loss of control as the "player" beats Ryan to death, amid Ryan's telling taunts: "A Man creates; a Slave obeys." Is this Benjamin's prophecy come true? The otherwise rational subject hailed by mechanized aesthetics into an unwittingly dangerous and violent position? Yes and no.

Figure 4-5: the death of Andrew Ryan, which the player cannot control.

Looking particularly at the sublime potential behind cinematic special effects (especially in the work of Douglas Trunbull), Bukatman writes: “Cinematic *affect* is rooted in cinematic technology, but *effects* emphasize those underpinnings: if cinema is rooted in illusions of light, for example, then optical effects endow light with an overwhelming physicality” (273). And so in gaming, I've argued: much of Bioshock's *affect* is rooted in its intense, high-definition visuality. For Bukatman, though, cinematic *effects* are what push aesthetic contemplation towards brutal, sublime physicality; they, in effect, show the audience the scalpel, show them something beyond the real, and do so with “overwhelming physicality.” However, as much as Bukatman's analysis rings true with Benjamin, both are talking about film, not gaming. In gaming, the algorithmic underpinnings of the machine mean that the physicality is always-already in operation; there is always a literal, physical body handling a real controller. The tensions inherent in algorithmic action that Katherine Hayles alluded to as part of the “worldview of code” are not merely metaphorical. Our literal physical augmentation through the videogame

machine “relays” (to borrow Hayles's term) the aesthetic motions of sublime imagery towards the subject in ways much more profound and direct than could have ever been anticipated through Kant's scene of art-house reflection and “recuperation.”

As this study of *Bioshock* may more generally demonstrate, gaming *affect* is just as rooted as cinema in the display of *effects* (explosions, icons, and other bits of visual feedback), but the inherent structure of input/output renders the process of that affect continuously. The murder of Andrew Ryan, then, is the gaming equivalent of the cinematic special effect, doubled. Not only does the event dramatize the loss of control and the borders of the rational (in Lyotard's sense), but does so through the very self-same cinematic framing that had been, to this point, the site of an affirmative play. Furthermore, the lasting “shock” of that loss puts the lie to the game's earlier, more comfortable pattern, in which the sublime terror wrought by the rampaging Big Daddies can be, through a display of mastery, processed into a state of “fun” (brought back into the logocentric fold, if you will). In saying all of this, I don't mean to position *Bioshock* as some sort of master text. Rather, I think it serves in our moment as an example of a growing (if unconscious) awareness of the extent to which the cinematic, political, aesthetic, and machinic all seem to dovetail in our moment. Gaming technology in particular, in both pop culture and academia, offers us interesting opportunities to read these configurations from different angles.

Conclusions: Being-Sublime

Already, my discussion here has found many ways to over-reach itself, attempting to theorize (and, by extension, systematize) some notion of how we may come to think of and experience emotion in the videogaming age. To call this set of conclusions “Being-Sublime” is to risk setting the stakes uncomfortably high, though I'd implore the reader to read them

tactically, as attempts to stretch our grasp of gaming's rhetoric into largely unconsidered territory. In consulting emotion in the first place, the idea of this chapter was to get at something ineffable and personal. Gaming tends to be a solitary activity, despite the academic attention often lavished on the handful of games (such as *World of Warcraft*) that offer or encourage social interaction. While acknowledging the importance of the social dimensions of gaming (interactions both within the game world and outside of it, the importance of community, the self-fashioning that happens in online environments), and even acknowledging the emotional investment that bleeds in from the realm of the social (Norman's notion of "reflective" experience), emotion remains an experience that we tend to think of as proceeding from the body and being rooted in the personal, even if that process rarely ends at the borders of one's own skin. Without getting caught up in the bland generalities that paint gamers as solitary and socially awkward, I believe we can attend to these configurations of technology and textuality in an attempt to move our conversation into wiser considerations of how the gaming experience (or, to phrase it in more McLuhanian language, what our encounter with gaming technology) creates new kinds of emotional experience, specifically out of the oscillation of "beautiful" and "sublime" aesthetic experiences, and the possibility for an entirely more chaotic and disruptive "laughter" emerging from our "play" beyond that. Understanding that experience, through all of this loaded theoretical discussion, is very likely the springboard to creating better scholarship, better teaching, and better awareness of how rhetorical subjects under-the-influence-of-gaming are likely to interface with the world.

Perhaps the most crucial stake raised in this chapter is the notion of the sublime and the ways in which it complicates our notions of "control." Even if we are to acknowledge Worsham's views on the public disciplining of emotion (the ideological machinery that makes a

logos out of our *pathos*) or Ian Bogost's desire to do "serious" work with the procedural rhetoric of gaming, the reading I suggest here potentially reinstalls a scene of instability and possibility at the heart of the matter (through Barthes's *punctum*). This notion of mine of an involuntarily emotional sublime experience may at the very least suggest a kind of oscillation: a rapid exchanging of logics and pleasures in a manner that ideological critique can never quite touch. (This represents the "middle ground" that offers many opportunities for further consideration, even if my own project does not dwell there.) Furthermore, my argument about the sublime-in-the-electronic-image can be read as part of a more general historical tendency. David Nye argues in *American Technological Sublime* that "the sublime has persisted as a preferred American trope through two centuries" (281). Citing throughout his book a combination of natural (i.e., the Grand Canyon) and distinctly technological (the Statue of Liberty, the Atomic Bomb) places and events that have prompted "sublime" reactions, Nye charts a distinct "contradiction," one that he argues undergirds much of how Americans craft meaning out of their encounters with technology. The technological sublime "invites the observer to interpret a sudden expansion of perceptual experience as the corollary to an expansion of human power and yet simultaneously evokes a sense of individual insignificance and powerlessness" (285). Even if one prefers to read against the approach of Ulmer and Barthes, to locate the element of random *signifiance* in this oscillation, I would at least offer that the "perceptual experience" of videogaming imports more than simply a sense of "fun" or "frustration." These emotions, and the subjects constituted therein, are part of not just a machine, but of a *historical pattern of machines* to which a larger project of the "rhetoric of technologization" should attend.

Videogames like *Bioshock* find their own methods for fitting in with that tradition, though it is far more likely that a majority of games on the market satisfy what appears to be a distinctly

American craving for the sublime emotional experience by trading on the "bigger, badder, more" *êthos* of visual display. The possible outcome of that attitude is sketched by Fredric Jameson, who remarks of aestheticity in the "postmodern" era: "This is not to say that cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings ... are now free-floating and impersonal, and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria" (16). Whereas Koster casts "fun" as a matter of the encounter between player skill and the complexity of the task, I read that "feeling" of enjoyment as part and parcel of a similar give-and-take, this time between the sublime experience of high-resolution imagery on one hand and the player's need to control that feeling of fear on the other. I could read this contrast as another appearance of Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian distinction, but this time with a fuller embrace of the Dionysian than was ever anticipated in Nietzsche's theory of tragedy. Whereas the enjoyment of the tragic spectacle resolves itself in the re-institution of logic, leaving the Dionysian in the ritual space of the theater, the "fun" of the videogame – what Jameson might call its "peculiar kind of euphoria" – emerges constantly from its very process. If anything, the emotional here precedes the logical, in a manner that no longer necessarily resembles any "emotional" state recognizeable within the systematic discourse of Aristotle's *pathos*. What rhetoricians may want to consider, in applications ranging from videogame study to composition pedagogy, is just this sort of re-wiring of the classical subject we often take for granted. Greg Ulmer's invention of "mystory" in *Internet Invention* is a good start, considering its attentiveness to the imagistic domains of experience, but this approach needs to also be met with what Kristeva might call an attention to "the movement of heterogenous matter": that is, the coequal force of embodied proceurality that rerenders the aesthetic-emotional experience of the image so constantly. Such pedagogies offer

the hope of better interfacing with subjects whose encounters with sublime technologies make the uncritical acceptance of Platonic/Aristotelian rhetoric all the more unlikely.

Furthermore, what the conversation requires at this moment is a turn to the emotional that does not stop at ideological critique. Savvy critics will undoubtedly find in a majority of videogames powerful pedagogies for "schooling emotion" in familiarly unappetizing patterns, the production of aggression in particular. Such a critique, though, stops at what Norman might call the "visceral" level of emotional processing, frequently with the result of "writing" the gaming-subject as one of a less-complex emotional constitution than the rest of humanity. While acknowledging the very real problems potentially created by emotionally immature subjects coming into contact with gaming experiences of a too-complex nature, we cannot simultaneously wish for a future of enlightened gamers without understanding better how these gamers are equally emotional subjects. The mechanics of the medium may not bring us into the abode of a more integral and emotional being, but they also cannot entirely discipline emotion out of our bodies. The scene of sublime excess that we find ourselves in may place us on the doorstep of a more powerful understanding of ourselves as emotional beings, of a sense that emotion is in us and around us and can be more tightly woven into our lives. Yet, I argue that if the videogame medium is doing anything, it's creating a set of extensions that place that proverbial doorstep mere inches away from its opposite: from the disciplining of emotional experience into so much nonsensical play. Our choice to do more with videogames, to bring our literate lives alongside them and to appropriate them as objects of scholarly understanding, faces the interesting (false) choice here of disavowing emotion or running full-bore towards it. An awareness of the falsity of that choice is what provides what I've only alluded to here as the "third" or other possibility – the chance that the hyper-acceleration of emotional experience produces not just a free-floating

"euphoria," but a tantalizing glimpse of the "laughter that laughs you," the emotion that comes radically unbidden. The joke's on us, though: in making either choice, we will find ourselves within range of its opposite.

NOTES

1 The logic behind giving *êthos* comparatively short shrift has less to do with that term and more to do with *pathos*: a term that has been generally marginalized among the *pisteis* as being of lesser concern. With that conversation comes the need, I will hopefully argue, to rehabilitate some aspects of our rhetoric that the oncoming "technologization" may be interested in considering. I simply feel that *êthos*, on the other hand, requires no such recovery or unpacking, at least within the narrow sense of the term – that of a particular disciplinary stance or attitude – hazarded in the previous chapter. To a lesser extent, I have opted to reinclude here some of the aspects of *êthos* – the body being prominent among them – that tends to vanish from the traditional "good character" account of the term within the tradition. While this may be performing a terminological disservice to *êthos* and to the critical tradition surrounding the term, I hope that this chapter's "stretching" of *pathos* can yet hit on some of the sites important to this "technologization of rhetoric," attaching the same concerns to the project through a different "relay."

2 For example, Aristotle creates impressive, sprawling bullet lists of the various ways a person might experience fear – or its inverse, confidence. Section 2.5 ends with a pat "So much, then for the sources of confidence," not an account of how or why a rhetor should display confidence, or what advantages might be drawn from creating a climate of fear. By creating a set of shared terms, Aristotle may, as my readings of both Walker and Micciche suggest, build a bridge between subjective, embodied experience and the wider social scene, but the circulation of those terms from that point on is trivial. His analysis need not (and indeed does not) attend to the feeling of being "moved" by a performance or attempt to develop a method for doing so.

3 Without attempting any particular valorization of Kristeva *vis a vis* Bogost's method of "unit operations," I think that some connection between the two can and should be hazarded. The intent of Kristeva's rereading of the psychoanalytic tradition, and what particularly draws her attention to the philosophical tradition of Kant and Hegel, is her concern over the unrelenting systematicity of negativity: "Although *negativity* is a concept and therefore belongs to a contemplative (theoretical) system, it reformulates the static *terms* of pure abstraction as a process, dissolving and binding them within a mobile law." Kristeva's recourse to poetic language (to what Walker might call "lyric enthymemes") disrupts this systematicity, and treats the return of language to the body as a kind of "unit operation," in its most local and contingent sense.

4 "Writing against Writing: The Predicament of *Ecriture Féminine* in Composition Studies" in Patricia Harkin and John Schilb (eds.) *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. New York: MLA, 1991. Pp. 82-104.

5 Corbett argues that Aristotle urges the rhetor to "forget" about emotional tactics "in the same sense that someone who has read a how-to book about batting should forget what he has read when he takes a bat in hand and starts swinging at the ball" (*Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, p. 93). The field of design is the closest thing to a science of those emotional tactics – the study of emotional *strategies*, perhaps – despite the tendency, which it seems traces back to at least Aristotle, to shrug and willfully disavow the possibility of such emotional *technê*.

6 Interestingly, Norman remarks in a brief section on videogames that the development of increasingly sophisticated "story-lines" creates "demands upon the player more reflective and cognitive, less visceral and fast motor responses" (131). The wrongheadedness of Norman's move (to place the emphasis on story) is evident, though his gesture to a scene of richer emotional experience is one to which my own discussion will return.

7 For the sake of this conversation, I will tend to treat all mechanically reproduced images under the same basic theoretical framework: a risky proposition, given my reliance to this point on a rhetoric of media-specific analysis. The practical motivation for this move is that the tradition of film and photographic theory has a much more robust history behind it than any study of computer-generated imagery to date.

Still, as my choice of "test subject" will later show, the raw processing power of modern videogame systems tends to obviate the gap. High-Definition graphics are increasingly the norm, creating cinema-like experiences through their size and detail. Furthermore, I argue that both Benjamin and Barthes are important for how they deal with the mechanical images in general, the proliferation of the image as a grammatological apparatus, as Ulmer argues. The "media-specific" portion of my analysis factors more into the mode of the image's presentation: in this case, through the procedural/algorithmic dimension of videogame "control."

Chapter Five:
Space Invaders: The Imalgorithmic *Logos*

While *pathos* is far more constrained (outside of appearances in literary criticism which I didn't bother to mention), *logos* is a wildly circulated term in rhetorical conversation, so it stands to reason that there's no easy way to define it or circumscribe it. To define it in the narrow sense to which it has been assigned as a member of Aristotle's *pisteis* is to almost willfully miss the point of the term's larger significance, even if doing so would tidily set the stage for my process of "stretching" its significance in challenging new directions. The virtue (and vice) of *logos* is that, as a term, it appears to require no stretching, as successive generations of rhetorical theorists and scholars have redefined the term with regularity. In offering an intentionally partial reconstruction of its many uses (the first move in attempting later to "technologize" it under-the-influence-of-gaming), I do not wish to account for any transcendent "new" meaning that the term might take on in the age of the videogame. Indeed, whatever else we may comment about its history, *logos* as a term leads us circularly towards the business of "meaning" itself. For Jacques Derrida, that economy of meaning is one fundamentally based on *logos*, not just as meaning the "word" (its most basic grammatical meaning) or Aristotelian "logic," but rather as representing signification itself, particularly the means through which signifiers are anchored down to particular meanings. What this chapter will more likely have argued is less the term's "meaning" (or a set of meanings), then how it may serve as an interface towards helping us explore

particular emergent rhetorical textures that loom particularly large under the sway of videogaming. Just as Derrida pursued *logos* to its breaking (or to be marginally more precise, its slipping) point in an effort to detect the limits of meaning making, so too will this chapter tend to concern itself with the "limits" that enframe our received "rhetoric of technologization," and how those limits are, under the influence of the disruptive and extensive power of emergent media, disrupted and dis-placed.

More particularly than in the previous chapter's foray into *pathos*, *logos* has the benefit of being a term often discussed in its own right, particularly as a linchpin in the construction of the history of rhetoric. So, to return to the grounds of my first chapter, I will return to the question of the Sophists as a way of leveraging out of the term its various meanings and inflections. Having already cited my discomfort with his history of rhetoric more generally, Edward Schiappa's approach to the question of *logos* is as good a beginning point as any, after which the discussion can fan out to catch ever more fraught drifts (particularly technological) in the term. Avoiding Aristotle, whose well-known application of the term as a form of rhetorical proof will get its fair share of attention later, Schiappa's gaze drifts towards the territory that concerned me in the first chapter, particularly the emergence of the Sophists (generally construed) as practitioners of rhetoric prior to its codification via Plato. In following Schiappa, I hope to bring my suggested "drift" into greater focus by reading both Aristotle and Derrida's later account in a loop with one another, each's sense of the term informing the other, and taking that understanding as a "unit" through which we can read videogaming in a new (rhetorical) light.

Protagoras and Logos, his analysis of the early Sophist's extant fragments accompanied by the requisite amount of historiographical positioning, does still regard Plato's coining of the term *rhetorikê* as the end-all, be-all node through which all rhetorical history must be read, yet

his approach to *logos* is a good deal more flexible and fluid. Rather than regarding, say, Aristotle's appropriation of the term as a starting point or an eventual destination, Schiappa (encouraged by the term's diverse use across many available *writings*) takes the ancient Greeks' conversation over *logos* as an opportunity to apply a principle from the writings of Eric Havelock. Schiappa quotes Havelock's argument that a term like *logos* cannot be tidily defined, nor a writer like Protagoras casually sifted into one of the traditional categories (rhetor, Sophist, philosopher), because such efforts "subtly distort the story of early Greek thought by presenting it as an intellectual game dealing with problems already given and present to the mind, rather than as groping after a new language in which the existence of such problems will slowly emerge, as language emancipates itself from the oral-poetic tradition" (22).[1] Later, following a discussion of Protagoras's famous "two sides" fragment[2], Schiappa adds that *logos* "was a much overworked word [whose] meaning must be derived from context" (91-2). Still, for all its flexibility, he does maintain that *logos* is a broader, more predisciplinary term for "what later would be called rhetoric," though I'd argue that such a definition, all by itself, not only again reaffirms the primacy of Platonism in defining rhetoric, but also invests *logos* with the responsibility (and the blame) of being the primary forerunner to a Platonic/Aristotelian codified art of rational discourse (41). Suffice to say, the narrative in which Schiappa participates here is one familiar to scholars of rhetoric, as it does seem to orbit Aristotle's later codification of *logos* as an avenue of rational appeal. I'll reapproach this narrative at greater length soon enough, but for now I'll return to the fragile possibilities Schiappa explores in the predisciplinary context afforded by his subject matter.

Though later limited to naming a particular argumentative vector, Schiappa offers that the Sophistic, predisciplinary understanding of *logos* is part and parcel of a complete worldview.

"Protagoras created his doctrines [of political philosophy, epistemology, etc.] as parts of a complete and whole way of looking at the world" (23). Continuing in the spirit of the Eric Havelock quote cited above, the "worldview" of the Sophists is, in a sense, shot through with the power of the oral/mythic *logos*. Or, to rephrase in McLuhanian terms, Schiappa argues that the pre-Aristotelian approach to *logos* is far-ranging in its effects and applications because it has not yet been codified and disciplined down into a particular "extension" of the body. Even more problematically and oracularly, the interpretation might go that language had not yet been fully disciplined into logic, because there was not yet the space outside of the body[3] in which it could circulate and find itself crystallized into other useful forms (into the "arts," as Schiappa terms them, of rhetoric, philosophy, etc.). It's in the slippage between those two terms – language and logic – that Protagoras and the Presocratic Sophists play, but critically that slippage is contained in a single term: *logos*.

In the end, this scene of slippage isn't of much use to Schiappa. He remains interested in *logos* as an interesting node where various meanings intersect, prior to the full birth of rhetoric as an "art" in Plato, but "the term *logos* was so comprehensive, in fact, that knowing the Older Sophists [like Gorgias] taught an art of *logos* rather than rhetoric might not appear helpful. However, to treat *logos* as identifying a restricted and clearly defined art is to give the term an anachronistic interpretation" (54). In this moment, Schiappa strikes a somewhat elegant balance, basically allowing the Sophists to have their capacious and all-encompassing *logos*, so long as the term remains anterior to the level of an "art," which is fundamentally the same move he makes to argue in *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Ancient Greece* that the Sophists neither possessed nor practiced a true discipline of "rhetoric." The fine-line distinction between a full-blown rhetorical "art" and dissociated notions and practices, however, isn't one that holds

up particularly well to the force of later revisitations of the term "rhetoric" itself. The acknowledgment of the dividing line itself, though, is useful as it points out the importance of intervening technologies; that Schiappa continues to use the dividing language is proof less of any critical failing and more a matter of his unquestioned reliance on the extensions of literacy in solving the issue of *logos*. The very dividing line installed by Aristotle (disciplining *logos* from a broad-spectrum epistemology to a particular rhetorical strategy[4]) as a result of those extensions becomes a systems operation[5] that allows Schiappa to selectively amputate part of the term's originary power. The goal of this project is less to return to those origins but to ask what clues left there can aid us, serve as our relays, as we search for a *logos* for videogaming.

Before considering how a more modern school of critics returns to the Presocratic notion of *logos*, I'd like to stop for a moment to consider another perspective on how the oral-literate divide problematizes the term, and how those problematics can help shape our sense of what *logos* under-the-influence-of-gaming might be. Though never engaging the term *logos* as such, William Covino's *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy* offers what the author calls an "eccentric history" of composition traced in no small amount to the oral/literate divide. Especially important here is Covino's account of "magic," how that term runs forcefully alongside what I would call the Gorgian account of *logos*, serving ultimately to de-term-ine the history of rhetoric in important and all-too-familiar ways. Gorgias himself is scarcely a blip on Covino's radar, though in investigating the rhetoric of "magic" the "Encomium to Helen" does get a reference, when Gorgias warns that evil speech (*logos*) can "bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion" (Covino 6). More generally, Covino defines magic as "symbolic action... in the service of individual or social transformation," terms that ring true with John Poulakos's account of Sophistic rhetoric's attentiveness to change and possibility.[6] Yet, in pursuing magic, Covino

arrives at a scene that keenly negates the convenient "possibilities" in the oral-Gorgian *logos*. Following Poulakos's interpretation, Gorgias's *logos* is closely tied to *kairos*, the principle of possibility and opportunity; magic, in its various rhetorical conceptions through the Renaissance, is rigid, formulaic, and tightly scripted.[7] Magical spells and incantations involve precise combinations of words and performative actions, and to somehow break or alter those combinations effectively drains the "magic" out of the act – the act's capacity to effect symbolic action. Whereas Protagoras's *logos* as a predisciplinary catch-all is insufficiently grounded in abstraction for Schiappa's taste, Gorgias's magical *logos* "arrests ambiguity" through its rigidly concrete performance (Covino 21). Despite these difference, though, I read both Schiappa's and Covino's accounts as both addressing the issue of *logos* in fundamentally similar lights.

The importance of magic in Covino's history emerges into clearer view after triangulating it with Covino's other two terms: rhetoric and literacy. This history finds a primal scene in the myth of Theuth referenced by Socrates/Plato in *Phaedrus*: the latter's rejection of writing (and by extraction, rhetoric) as a production of semblance (*doxa*) without regard to truth. In this moment, Covino (via Frances Yates) reads Theuth as both the "originary writer [and] the originary mage," creating in that moment a scene of immense stress for Plato, as writing's power to "extend" *logos* may "fall into the wrong hands... made to do the work of illusion, as rhetoric" (19). This requires a bit of sorting out. Gorgias, in the Platonic worldview, is a purveyor of magical appearances without regard to truth; his methods of poetic and performative delivery, residues of the mythopoetic tradition, are in Covino's reckoning less a matter of artistic expression (in the sense that we often ascribe romantically to the terms "poetry" and "magic") than a reliance on a mono-logic and highly genre bound set of methods guaranteeing the "magical" impact of his *logos*. Theuth's broaching of the oral-literate divide affords a whole new

universe of material and discursive possibilities, making the mission of the post-Platonic rhetors to establish "rhetoric as *technê* without magic" (20). The stress of the 4th Century BCE, crystallized in Plato's deployment of the Theuth narrative, is fundamentally a matter of what Schiappa references in Havelock: a worry that the "magical" qualities of the oral *logos* will find their ways into the extended written *logos*. Plato, we could argue, frets over this so much that he attempts first to draw a distinction between "good" magic and "bad" (Covino 20), but ultimately he banishes both writing (in *Phaedrus*) and poets (in *The Republic*) – thereby tying off the entire system of magical leakage then and there.

Covino's history, though, begins to get really interesting when it emerges into an account of the literacy-rhetoric dynamic leftover from Plato's partial (but never permanent) banishment of the magicians/poets/Sophists. Covino pauses momentarily at the beginning of his account of literacy to cite a broad definition of what he calls a "functional" literacy, a capacity to "uphold determinate correspondences between signs, meanings, and behaviors" – that is, as the general ability to "read" the world, including but reaching beyond the space of the printed document (24). The definition departs from there, into areas more familiar to compositionists: particularly, the domain of "critical literacy." While poetic monologue (mono-*logos*) rigidly performs a single point of view, critical literacy dynamically allows for a process of "ongoing [dialectical] critique" (25). Literacy, thus defined, is inherently non-magical (as Covino channels Jonathan Kozol), and differs from an oral/magical mindset due to its "alertness to ambiguity" (28). In this respect, perhaps, Covino's account of the literate *logos* drifts over the strong literate/categorical line established by Schiappa's literate/categorical reading of Protagoras. The notion of two differing *logoi* offered in Protagoras's most notable fragments becomes, despite Schiappa's intervention via Havelock and Ong, a distinctly literate (we might say post-oral) contour of

logos. Magical thinking, on the other hand, does not count that high: its situatedness and presentness[8] can be read negatively as its "plastic[ity]." For the sake of staving off the inherent contradiction, it may suffice to say that the plasticity of the oral/magical *logos* is a judgment sprung upon it *apres-coup*, rendered from within the extensions afforded by literacy. That Covino, like Schiappa, defines rhetoric from within the confines of those extensions is demonstrated by his statement that rhetoric is "the performance of literacy" (31). While "performance" returns to the well of ambiguity (by suggesting that rhetoric is always contingent, embodied, local), Covino's definition de-term-ines rhetoric as a propensity of a particular writing technology: rhetoric becomes a function of the written *logos*, instead of the other way around.

As my own analyses to this point have made clear, the framework I offer here posits rhetoric as an influence outside the circulation of any one of our technological "extensions," and so this discussion will move on shortly to other accounts of *logos* more complementary to that point of view. For now, we have two attempts to grapple with the broad term, in ways that I'd like to briefly consult: Schiappa locates *logos* somewhere on the narrow continuum between worldview and a logical and knowable *technê*, and Covino situates *logos* between oral rigidity and literate fluidity. One entanglement that presents itself to me comes from the terms that each writer uses as the departure point for moving *logos* towards more preferred grounds: worldview and rigidity. Curiously, the collision of these terms drifts back to the previous chapter's discussion of "the worldview of code," crystallized in Ian Bogost's method of "unit operations," both of which accept as a given code's "intolerance of ambiguity" (Hayles). The coincidences between "magic" and "code" are, in fact, so far reaching that they need further discussion. Like "magic," code is predicated on a strict grammar, precise parsing of terms, and clearly delineated conditions for its performance, and also, like magic itself, the operations of code occur without

the conscious awareness (or perhaps, "below" the conscious awareness, to use the layering metaphor familiar to code) of those it effects. Interestingly, the more conservative reactions to the world of code resemble those of Covino's reaction to magic; consider the familiar cultural conversations that computers cause far too much automation, that they "bewitch" children away from more beneficial pasttimes.[9] While many in recent memory have risen up to reverse this rhetorical trend, de-negating code and framing it positively as an engine for learning, the trick I would consider is the same as Victor J. Vitanza applies to the history (hystery) of rhetoric, not simply attempting to phrase either code or magic as a "positive," but rather moving beyond the positive-negative divide to a "nonpositive affirmation."[10] Part of that process, I believe, involves regarding code's "rigidity" not as something to be negated or forgotten, but rather something that must be (re)incorporated into our understanding if we are to continue to address the extensions of *logos* in the age of the computer. Code, in that narrow sense, can and should be regarded as "magical," understanding that in its rigidity it may form the grounds for new kinds of linguistic, knowable (that is to say, *logos*-based) experiences.

Similarly, and as interestingly, Covino's account of the magic-literacy divide passes through the defile of the "image," adding yet another important rhetorical drift to the hard-line account of the literate, rhetorical *logos*. Echoing language from Derrida, without ever making any direct references to his work, notes that in the still residually magical imagination of literacy, "words... originate from phantasms" (31). For Derrida himself, remarks Julian Wolfreys, the practice of literature becomes "the receptacle of the remainders and translations of those discourses and practices of the past that leave their phantom mark on ourselves" (154). Covino's refuge from all this frantic slippage – slippages embedded in the very firmament of the serious "critical literacy" his history champions – is conveniently in Plato, who associates these

"phantasms" with both opinion (*doxa*) and mere images (*eikones*) of the real. Rhetorical invention becomes, through association with these definitions, "a replication, or redirection, of the phantasmic imagination," a tool or a management system for redirecting the ambiguity inherent in the literate *logos* towards useful ends (36). Just as code appears to fall in this model into the lesser orbit of the oral-magical *logos*, so too does the image, whose capacity to signify represents a sort of instability that the Aristotelian rational-*logos* cannot tolerate. (Intriguingly, this definition of rhetoric appears to steer us right back toward Schiappa's third rail: rhetoric as the Sophistic practice of *logon technê*, as a non-systematic assemblage of teachings and practices designed to manage the manifestly slippery and "phantasmic" propensities of *logos*.) While both these connections between Covino's account of *logos* and image/code may chalk up to coincidence[11], both demonstrate a symptom that blocks further interrogations: the harnessing of literacy to rhetoric. This project, instead, posits an "imalgorithmic" *logos* – an aspect of languaged experience native to videogaming, one that seems negated and blocked by the barriers erected by Schiappa and Covino. Working without this framework, videogame grammatology risks either disappearing beneath the shroud of the plastic and magical or sliding back under the veil as a form of "secondary literacy," leaving a rhetoric that, at best, treats games as eccentric matters of "visual literacy," "media literacy," or "information literacy."

From *Logos* to Grounds

Under these conditions, it's telling that many scholars of rhetorical history and historiography have attempted to escape the dominant gravity that *logos* has generated throughout the tradition. Noting the connections I've hazarded here through my readings of

Schiappa and Covino, *logos* becomes the term that carries the weight of Plato, literacy, and the problematic tradition associated therewith. Eager to avoid the baggage of logocentrism, for instance, John Poulakos advocates a shift away from *logos* in favor of *kairos*. The lingustic disposition of the Sophists, he argues, sidesteps the baggage of *logos* by being "innovative," through a reliance on contingency and opportunity. Citing Gorgias's "Encomium to Helen," he writes of the emergence of *logos* not as a force of absolute truth, but as a "*dynastes* [ruler] who... deposed the tyranny of the tradition and imposed the tyranny of innovation" (141). Similarly, Susan Jarratt revisits *logos* through her account of Sophistic rhetoric and avoids its monolithical power by placing it into conversation with *mythos*: "A different approach to mythical and rational consciousness [summarizes Ekaterina Haskins] calls for viewing *mythos* and *logos* not as polarized states of consciousness but as complementary linguistic resources of collective memory and critical reflection" (31). The former "resource," that of *mythos* or mythopoetic language, was imbued by the culture of poets and prophets with a "potent, almost magical" power (Haskins 13). In William Covino's reckoning, though, that "power" is too easily derided as leading inexorably to a "magical" (ie, non-critical) consciousness (*a la* Freire and Shor); what Covino misses that both Jarratt and Haskins pick up on is the possibility of "magic" as a distinct resource unto itself, as an aspect of the *logos* that cannot be tidily amputated or dismissed. Aristotle himself, as Haskins notes, wants nothing more than to dismiss from *logos* anything but the purity of logic, going so far in his *Rhetoric* to equate *logos* and enthymeme, and to insist that *logos* never be mixed with *pathos* or emotional appeals: "for it [enthymeme] will either drive out emotion or it will be useless" (1418a12-17 in Haskins 103). The question becomes: if Aristotle's development of the enthymeme represents a fundamentally literate take on *logos*, one that ties off language in a knot, in an effort to harness its power towards very particular disciplinary ends, do

we have an alternative? If we push back against Aristotle's hard-line conception, if we undo the knot, what might we (re)discover within, and what might those possibilities look like when viewed from the standpoint of the videogaming apparatus? What might *logos* come to mean for us?

Victor J. Vitanza's "desiring-history" manufactured in *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric* spends its middle chapters precisely on this issue of *logos*: returning to the term through its ancient and modern instantiations, and playing in its slippages. The sort of reconstruction I've offered to this point, if left unproblematized, ends up attempting to construct what he would refer to as a *metalogos*: "Classical philology would fix words, or give an account (*metalogos*) of words (*logos*).... Whereas philology would create the conditions for purging 'noise' (excluding what it, by rule, denotes as noise), poetry – wild, savage poetry – would reinclude desire in language, the heterogenousness, the semiotic" (162). This process of reincluding desire, in all its stickiness and instability, back into language is a direct attempt on the parts of both Vitanza and Kristeva (and Hélène Cixous and many others beside) to move beyond the impossibilities of ever dealing with *logos* in its own terms. For Vitanza, it's Jacques Derrida who develops the critical practices needed to reapproach "the problem of *logos*" through an affirmative engagement with what he calls its "paradoxical nature ... its duplicity, or best put, its triplicity" (165). What Derrida is especially concerned with, says Vitanza, quoting Gayatri Spivak, is how *logos* is "a structure of violence," how its crystallization of both language and rationality into a single de-term-ined signifier that we must now "negotiate" with.

Negotiating with *logos*, part of which includes the project of "reinclud[ing] desire in language," is fundamentally a matter of coping with what Derrida sees as the inherent "triplicity" of language. In *Dissemination*, particularly in "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida constructs an

elaborate investigation of Plato's linkage between *logos* and *pharmakon* (a drug, a supplement, medicine). In the primal scene of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates elaborates on his deep-seated mistrust of the *logos*-via-writing by telling the tale of writing's invention and later rejection, on the ground that it is a poison (*pharmakon*) that takes away true knowledge. Derrida, in his normally dizzying fashion, traces the lines of association with *pharmakon* throughout "Plato's Pharmacy," though it's with his thoughts on *logos* itself that I'd like to stop for a brief moment, if only to try pointing the way to how a "triplicity" emerges. The King (Theuth's father) rejects the *pharmakon* of writing (writing as that "dangerous supplement" to the spoken word) because he is "suspicious and watchful" about the drug's capacity to replace him, to guarantee a *logos* removed from the originary source. *Logos*, Derrida argues, is a son – it doesn't exist outside the "presence" of the father. Thus, Plato/Socrates complains that the *pharmakon* offered by Theuth to his father is in fact a poison, and just as Theuth's *pharmakon* is a poison designed to create the father's absence, so too does writing seek to break the filial ties between *logos* and the presence of its literal "father" – the speaking subject, its source. This forces Derrida to ponder what *logos* is really getting severed from that makes it such a source of worry to Plato: what, ultimately, is the "father of the *logos*?" Derrida answers:

> The good (father, sun, capital) is thus the hidden illuminating, blinding source of *logos*. And since one cannot speak of that which enables one to speak [...], one will speak only of that which speaks and of things that, with a single exception, one is speaking of. And since an account or reason cannot be given of what *logos* (account or reason: *ratio*) is accountable or owing *to*, since the capital cannot be counted nor the chief looked in the eye, it will be necessary, by means of a

> discriminative diacritical operation, to count up the plurality of interests, returns, products, and offspring. (82-3)

Turning our back on the "sun," the infinite source of language, goodness, et cetera – is for Socrates an entirely necessary step that leaves two options: either ponder the reflection (*eikones*) of the sun in the water, or turn towards the "world of ideas" (*logoi*). The irony pointed out by Derrida's extended analysis is that the "world of ideas" towards which Socrates turns is based not on the King's *rejection* of writing (of the *pharmakon*), but rather on the *existence* of the *pharmakon*, because it is ultimately the latter that allows us to "count up the plurality of interests" that point the way back to the "father of *logos*." As Jasper Neel puts it, "Derrida argues that the word *pharmakos* is as visible in Plato's canon through its absence as it would be through its presence" and that it is "the price Platonic writing requires" (96-7). Ultimately, then (not to belabor the summary of Derrida's account, to which I doubt I have done justice), Socrates's rational *logos* – the stable language that forms the basis for good, true, rational ideas and their expression through Aristotle's rhetoric – gets propped up by a "third" position, that of the sun in all of its excess. Derrida's recognition that our received approach to *logos* (to language and rationality) involves a "turn" away from that source creates the possibility of a re-turn to that source, towards more radical possibilities for *logos*.

For Vitanza, the "radical possiblities" are best summed up as a matter of "reincluding desire in language" in ways that seek to destabilize the rational, enthymemic basis of Western logic. Vitanza cites Julia Kristeva as an ally, indirectly referencing her attempt in *Desire in Language* to construct an "intratheoretical" apparatus. Similarly, riffing on the received terminology of Saussurean semiotics (itself an attempt, to paraphrase Vitanza, to create a *metalogos*, an account of words and their meanings), Hélène Cixous confronts the enthymemic

logos and its attempts to sever the body, in all its fluidity and instability. She considers the "phallic signifier," the *logos* in Freud and Lacan that generates desire only by virtue of being divided off and repressed; rather than purge its noise, she hopes for its reincorporation when she asks: "Why should I deprive myself of a part of us? I want all of us.... What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire" (273). If Aristotle's full and final move is to discipline *logos* into an enthymeme by looping it and tying it off, Cixous and Kristeva push not only to undo the (k)not, but to view what's inside as a source of fullness and fulfillment. Performing her own loop, Cixous continually circles around to propose writing (more writing, excessive writing, writing outside the systems of castration and reinscription) as an antidote to the "lack" undergirding the classical account of *logos*: "Beware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the [phallic] authority of a signified [*logos*, the "true idea"]!" (1655). Such a writing practice cannot be defined, "for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded .... it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination" (1648). Rather than accept the negated, deferred (that is, Platonic) written *logos* as a given, both Cixous and Kristeva construct models that have in mind a source of excess over and beyond the authority of *logos* – that is, the "sun" as the Third position.[12] This rhetoric of (re)positioning will very shortly find itself echoed in one of the most dominant discourses that surrounds our attempts to understand videogaming.

The alternative to such creative deformations is to retain *logos* as a "structure of violence" (Spivak), a crystallization of both language and rationality into a single de-term-ined signifier that we must now "negotiate" with. In this, interestingly, Derrida and the wider tradition of deconstruction reconnect with a particularly Gorgian approach to *logos* that recalls the "magical" tradition. Working through the "Encomium to Helen," Haskins recounts Gorgias's

playfulness in defining (though that term might be too strong for his purposes) *logos* as both *bia* (force or violence) and as *paignion*, a plaything (110). She goes on to straightforwardly connect the "all-encompassing power of logos" with the "possibilities of its application," to problems ranging from the practical and political to the poetic and expressive. The significance of *bia* to the poststructural approach should be evident, but equally interesting will be the late-twentieth century reclamation of "play" as a critical ingredient in our sense of how language works. That "play" underscores the importance in poststructuralism of disrupting (or avoiding) harsh binary structures, of moving beyond the oral-literate definitional game which Covino and Schiappa treat as the only possibility. The "play" of poststructuralism is the play of the "third"; Vitanza answers the question of the logos through triplicity, "by continuing to call out to the Other for a third position" (169). In this desire for "thirding," we see an approach to *logos* that reverses the flow of the accepted philology of the term. Driving back through the history of the "rational" *logos* back to the Presocratic notion of *logos* as a method, or set of methods for being in the world, Vitanza sets himself up with a pair of influences to consult: the Sophist Isocrates and the philosopher Martin Heidegger, both of whose explorations of the term provide me with the last clues I need to form my own model of a *logos* for videogaming.

As philosophers go, Heidegger is an interesting case: not only does he interface very directly with the tradition of *logos*, but he does so in a manner that attempts somewhat to "liberate" the Sophistical approach to *logos* from the clutches of Platonic metaphysics. As Derrida notes, *logos* becomes in Socrates's hands the signifier of the "pure idea," that is of metaphysics; Heidegger's accomplishment as a philosopher is to throw away the questions of metaphysics ("what is real?" "what do we really know?") in favor of a single more crucial question "What is Being?" – a question ultimately inseparable from the question of rhetoric.

Victor J. Vitanza argues that "it is the Platonic view of *logos* that, according to Heidegger, inaugurates 'The History of Being.' (Which is really a series of histories of Being; for each age redefines *logos* for its own ends and thereby reconstructs Being.) My point is that when we study The History of Rhetoric, we are also studying The History of Being" (172). As the beginning point for a third alternative, the stakes of *logos* have shifted again, from the force of enthymemic reason to the pervasive structure of language games to the very ground of being itself. This move, however, is the construction of neither Heidegger nor Vitanza; it is anticipated most clearly in the work of the Sophist Isocrates, whose own "philosophy"[13] regarded *logos* – "the ability to speak, to persuade, and to be persuaded" (Vitanza 174) – as the entire foundation of human culture (*paideia*). *Paideia* represents the goal of Isocrates's program of rhetorical education[14], a *telos* if you will, which provides a telling context for Vitanza to offer the following notion, which will help bridge the gap from *logos*-as-equipment-for-living and *logos*-as-the-basis-of-Being-itself: "Speech," Isocrates writes, "is our guide (*hegemon*)" (172). Of course, Vitanza's playful citation of *hegemon* in the Greek original rhymes with Gorgias's earlier notion of *logos* as *bia*, or force, a notion reflected in the modern context in Derrida's critiques as "negotiations" with structures of (in this case, political) "violence." More telling in this context is how Isocrates sets up a metaphorical process, one that rings true with the well-rehearsed notions of both McLuhan and Havelock, wherein *logos* (language, rephrased by the latter as language technology) leads the speaking subject towards "culture," which is not merely a sociological construction but also an irreducibly personal one. For McLuhan and Havelock, the question of the society is also a question of the self, a matter of both subject-formation and institutional formation.[15] The appeal of Heidegger's exploration of the term, I argue, is that it will provide us a kind of metaphor for approaching all these subjects in one fell swoop.

The question, then, if we are to take Isocrates's *logos* as a meaningful clue to the larger History of Being that swirls around that priviledged term, is: "If the *logos* is our guide, where does it lead us?" Vitanza suggests an answer to that loaded question by offering an anachronistic, metaleptic take on the history of *logos*; reading backwards, he takes Martin Heidegger's account of *logos* as an influence on Isocrates, in an effort to sort out the full implications of Isocrates's, but also our own, approach to language. In the context of my own project, my sense is that stretching *logos* from Aristotle to Heidegger provides me with a model to follow. In order to figure out how videogames might function as a sort of rhetorical production – an ongoing cybernetic process constituting and constituted by the subjects attached to it – I need first to construct a sense of how *logos* might, in our current "augmented" technological context, be "counted" as a unit placed into rhetorical action with others. The *logos* of videogaming must amount to more than Aristotle's "tied-off" enthymeme, but I've also already registered my discontent with any attempts to unproblematically link either gaming or *logos* to the particular apparatus of literacy. By consulting Heidegger (via Isocrates and Vitanza), I think we may arrive at a third sense of *logos* more powerful than either the rational or the signifying senses to which the term has so long (and so exclusively) been attached.

My "third sense" represents a condensation of three particular metaphors, all used by Heidegger and cited by Vitanza. All three participate in the same overall metaphorical economy, offering variations on a common theme that offers a possibility for linking the study of *logos* to the study of videogaming. I'll begin by quoting from Vitanza's discussion of Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

> In Heideggerian terms, once that we discover that human beings are "thrown" into time/historicity, into our homelessness, the question becomes What is is to be at

> home? This question, rewritten for more specific purposes, becomes What is it to be at home in rhetoric? (Some variations of the question: Are we a function of rhetoric, or is rhetoric a function of us? Is rhetoric a function of *logos*, or is *logos* a function of rhetoric?) (170)

Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche basically answered that "we are a function of rhetoric, and rhetoric is a function of *logos*" (170). The layer added by Heidegger is that, by extension, rhetoric is a function of "being at home." Heidegger repeatedly indicts our "inauthentic" use of language. When we try to answer its questions (what is being?, etc) we try to limit the answers (Vitanza: "we practice a strategy of limitation"), instead of living "questioningly" (180). The result of that systematic inauthenticity[16] is the barbarization of language and the forgetfulness of being (of Dasein, being-there)... "and, consequently, his *falling away from his proper place in history.*" (180, author's emphasis). Already, then, in these two moments the question of Being (rhetoric, *logos*) finds itself bound up in questions of space: being "at home," or having a "proper place." In Vitanza's "hysterical" analysis, Heidegger's interest in having "grounds" becomes an influence on the much earlier writings of Isocrates, particularly the latter's interest in the preservation of the city (*polis*) based on rhetorical education grounded in a respect for culture (*paideia*, which as we've noted is itself grounded in *logos*); for Heidegger, though, the mythical model of the subject who questions Being (such as Oedipus and Heraclitus) enjoys a somewhat eccentric relationship with the place of the city is less unconcerned than "pondering its various possibilities of changing grounds" (187). By being "thrown," Heidegger argues, we find ourselves obligated to ponder the *logos* as the "grounds" of our own Being, and to see that Being as being built on a continually shifting foundation.[17] Again, from Vitanza: "Heidegger's view of *logos*/language or 'speaking/saying' is *perpetually an act of concealing/unconcealing*" (177, author's emphasis). In

this last gesture, Heidegger's metaphor becomes complete. *Logos* is language, but also the force of movement in language, its capacity to create grounds. The fraughtness of Heidegger's thoughts on the subject suggest that grounding, that space, is more than a mere descriptive metaphor. Space, while fruitfully coincidental for the purposes of any discussion of New Media (for reasons I'll enumerate shortly), nonetheless functions as both a potential foundational(ist) fallback and as a possibility, or rather, as a set of possibilities. Those possibilities might come into clearer view as I move to consider how this project's discourse concerning code and image interfaces with the history (hystery, really) of *logos* suggested so far, with an especially keen eye towards how the possibilities of *logos* manifest themselves in distinctly spatial terms that we can (figuratively and literally) "play" with.

Spatial Theory and (Un)Concealment

To deal effectively with the ways videogames structure space, it's useful to consult the wider tradition of computer-mediated communication that comes before it (the prior "rhetoric of technologization"), as many of the metaphors and tropes used in that conversation have meaningful ramifications for how game spaces fashion experience and pave the way for what I'm tentatively gesturing towards as an "electrate" mode of composition. Space and spatial metaphors are nearly ubiquitous in conversations stretching back into the 1990s (and well before), particularly dealing with the emergence of the World Wide Web. From growth of hypertextual writing technologies during that time, we can see the landmark publications of Jay David Bolter's *Writing Space* (1991)[18], Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theatre* (1993), and Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993), a

follow up to his *Virtual Reality* (1991). All three offer, in some way, an attempt to characterize the "message" of the emergent "medium" in distinctly spatial terms. Years later, citing particular examples including the web browser Netscape Navigator as well as important games like *Myst* and *Doom*, Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* argues that "navigation through space" had emerged as an "important paradigm in human-computer interfaces" (248-9). I, however, would take his argument a step further and argue that spatiality emerged as not just an "important" paradigm, but as a "master" paradigm – as a form of determination that acts as a potential road block to more productive approaches to space.

Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theatre* is a useful early example, for while her book actively engages in a metaphor that has nothing on its surface to do with navigation, it nonetheless participates in the dominant imaginary that renders space as a transparent category. While her target is neither gaming nor spatiality itself, Laurel forwards an understanding of human-computer interface (HCI) rooted in the principles of Aristotelian dramatics; she reads the computer screen's efficacy as being rooted in a "mimetic context" where the blips and pixels on screen are interpreted as performing certain functions. Our capacity to understand those functions derives not from any particular language, but rather from the extent to which the items displayed on screen mimic (hence, "mimesis") the behaviors of real objects. (Take, for example, the familiar interface metaphors of "folders" that store files, or "recycle bins" that help dispose of unwanted data.) The importance of Laurel's theatrical metaphor, though, has much less to do with the "actors" she sees on the mimetic stage, or even with her reliance on Aristotle (given my treatment of the latter thus far). Rather, Laurel's metaphor becomes pernicious when one attempts to regard the rest of the space available – the empty space of the screen unoccupied by any actor or bit of scenery (for instance, the "desktop"). Terry Harpold, in terms to which I'll

return again later, catches this concern when he addresses the "conceptual commonplace" of screened space as "a prior permeable field of agency," a space that we might think of as invisible or transparent, but which he refers to instead as "thin" ("Thick," 15). Laurel's metaphorical reliance on the thin space of the theater contributes ultimately to two self-sustaining misprisions: one, that the *mimesis* is uninterrupted or uninflected by the surrounding space, and two, that the behaviors of those actors can be scripted and controlled (that is, that the user's agency passes cleanly through the "empty" space). In such an environment, I find it no small wonder that the imaginary of navigation, exploration, and colonization is so appealing: both metaphors speak to uninhibited transfers of will, to uninterrupted and undeferred author/ity, to a *logos* that conceals itself.

Part of the appeal of the "concealed" *logos* (language that hides its contingencies behind the veil of fact – as Plato and Aristotle desired[19]) derives from the sensation of control. A "thin" space, a space that can be mapped and "known," is a space that can be controlled. One tactic to "unconceal" game spaces, to make space a more vibrant topic of conversation, is to attempt to read these valences out of them, to continually try on different metaphors for the spaces that electrate differences make. Pamela K. Gilbert finds the spatial metaphors of early hypertext scholarship particularly redolent of the "colonial narrative," arguing that they insist on "space[s] already mapped" rather than "the inclusion of others in a process of creation" (259). Nedra Reynolds similarly critiques the dominant "frontier" metaphor of cyberspace, channelling Fredrick Jackson Turner's famous hypothesis regarding the "closing of the American frontier," with references to John F. Kennedy's attempts in the 1960s to kindle the spirit of a New Frontier using "outer space" as the space of interest. Gilbert's complaint of a "space already mapped" is afforded by the frontier metaphor, as it insists on the creation of space as *always-already empty*,

and through which emptiness "implying – without ever stating – that this is a space where a certain kind of mastery is possible" (Jane Tompkins, quoted in Reynolds 23). Reynolds argues in terms harmonious with my own that the attempts to regard the spaces of electracy as a bold new frontier effectively render those spaces "transparent," which has problematic consequences for those who aren't doing the colonizing, with particular reference to how "dominant sexual-social politics" are reproduced there[20] (28). The frontier doubles, through a particularly potent American metaphor, the emptiness of Laurel's theatrical, mimetic stage; both spaces render the spaces of electracy (the spaces of the computer screen, the chat room, the videogame) as thin, penetrable, invisible, and – perhaps most importantly for my purposes – "unmapped."

The language of mapping leads, almost invariably, to the creation of "unities and identities across space and time that are meaningful first of all *because they are mapped that way*" (Harpold, "Dark" p17, author's emphasis). What "unities" does Harpold mean? Referring particularly to the metaphors of colonial discourse (and of the very real history of colonization in Africa and the Middle East), mapping provides a unity by arbitrarily and violently naming a place, and through which act designating the place with an artificial homogeneity. In terms of gaming, through, what else could be at stake in this drive to think in such spatial terms, along such received terminological lines? As my prior discussion of the sublime and *pathos* suggests, one such problematic unity is the unity of self, particularly regarding the strict classical dividing lines between mind and body, rational mind and irrational experience, phenomenon and noumenon. Regarding gaming as an activity, one of the most growing and dominant metaphors is the attempt to realize gaming as an activity taking place within "virtual worlds." Edward Castronova, an economist who has written at length on the subject, is fascinated by certain kinds of "persistent world" games such as *World of Warcraft*, and investigates them in terms of how

they increasingly encourage an "exodus" of real-world time, effort, and capital. The "unity" at stake in this critical model has less to do with any particular attempt at "mapping" the space itself as drawing borders around it. The "virtual worlds" of gaming frequently participate in this metaphor where, by virtue of being "mapped" off from other spaces, they act as a sort of vacuum into which minds and money are pulled. Even Nedra Reynolds argues that one prominent effect of the dominant "transparency" narrative of cyberspace is a kind of "compression" that could result in the increasing effacement of real physical spaces (30-1). Mapping, in this sense, not only seems caught up in the "thin space" imaginary of the game spaces themselves, but also appears to propose a kind of zero-sum game, where the entire "field" of potential spaces can only be subdivided, never added to, usually to the detriment of the "real." In more distinctly rhetorical terms, Rebekah Shultz Colby and Richard Colby engage gaming in an attempt to direct its potential towards the composition classroom. In pursuit of this worthy and interesting goal, though, their analysis runs headlong into the "mapping" imaginary. Noting the difficulties in blending the modality of play with the required "work" of the composition classroom, the authors treat the space of *World of Warcraft* as a closed-off space, borrowing from prominent game theorists Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois (303). While never explicitly engaging in the dominant tropology of navigation, the overall conception of game-space suggested here is one of an area "already mapped": the circle drawn around the area of play has the double-effect of locking in the play allowing it to exist within the harsh ecology of the logical landscape surrounding it. Ultimately, then, while not engaging explicitly in any conversation regarding navigation within the game itself (apart from noting how the game figures a persistent, always-online three-dimensional world that users explore), the navigable space *within* the game is

figured as a "magic circle," which suggests a double topography of spaces both within and without.

As with Reynolds, though, I feel that this model offers through its "double topography" the kernel of a move beyond the "concealed" *logos* that I feel leads us to these kinds of spatial dead-ends. To follow the "logic" established earlier, the path to a more "authentic" relationship with *logos* lies in the recurrent cycle of concealing and unconcealing. If the "unconcealed" *logos* brings us into contact with the "changing grounds" of Being, then it would stand that a similar sense of "changing grounds" should be brought to the study of videogaming, not through a refusal of, but rather a more nuanced interaction with, the general notion of "space." My position is that the larger question of what we do "within" electronic spaces has everything to do with how we understand the larger question of space. To think of the space of a game as merely a blank slate means too easily reducing the process of gameplay to "navigation" between (depending on your approach) prefashioned narrative or algorithmic (ergodic) nodes. Alternatively, an exploration of critical geographies may furnish us with a sense of the true breadth of the electrate/spatial *logos*, or, to put it in the broadest most Heideggerian terms: a sense of the possibilities it raises for how the Question of Videogaming can help inform the Question of Being. More particularly, just as I've argued that the "imalgorithmic" construction of gaming resituates "felt" experience, I want to argue that the same medial construction resituates "known" experience through space: our approach to gam(ing) spaces, then, has everything to do with how our collective critical gaze will attempt to define not just gamers, but their discursive production. By turning towards critical geographies, I hope to set that gaze towards a definition of game space as composed of multiple overlapping material and ideological layers.

Edward Soja's *Thirdspace*, fueled in large part by the unique methodologies of Henri Lefebvre, offers the critical model for sorting through both the multiple spatial layers of gaming experience and the habitual rhythms of our thinking that result in the various concealings and unconcealings of those layers. Lefebvre initiates that sorting through his own brand of spatially engaged Marxism, devising a pair of dialectical oppositions: between center and periphery, and between lived and conceived experience. Soja recounts Lefebvre's lifelong affection for the Other, for the peripheral and the marginalized: "Lefebvre always maintained a deeply peripheral consciousness, existentially heretical and contracentric, a spatial consciousness and geographical imagination shaped in the regions of resistance beyond the established centers of power" (30). In his critical geography, the material construction of spaces – the organization of actual city centers and peripheral regions – is part and parcel of larger ideological constructions, of how space is "conceived." By displacing more traditional Marxist subjects of study such as labor and commodification with the broader notion of space, "what Lefebvre was doing was *substituting everyday life for the workplace* as the primary locus of exploitation, domination, and struggle; and redefining social transformation and revolution as intrinsically more socio-cultural goals" (Soja 41, author's emphasis). Lefebvre imagines an ongoing dialectical relationship between what he called the ideological "representation of spaces" and the lived "spaces of representation," leading Soja, in terms which recall Victor Vitanza's rhetorical and historiographical methods, to argue that "two terms are never enough... There is always the Other, a third term that disrupts, disorders, and begins to constitute the conventional binary opposition into ... more than just the sum of its parts" (31). That "Other" position is the one from which, once properly understood, the various spatial wranglings above (the various textures of

thinness and metanarratives of colonization) can be coordinated into a more productive whole that can help suggest just why gaming presages such unique rhetorical power.

In an effort to make room for the Other, to build out of Lefebvre's dialectic a "trialectics of spatiality," Soja reorganizes Lefebvre's model of space into not two, but three distinct layers. The first layer, which Soja terms Firstspace, is the field of "Spatial Practice," which as its roots in *praxis* suggests, names actual, material spaces – the spaces we physically perceive around us. Secondspace is the potent ideological layer, where "representations of space" compete for sway; Secondspace is "conceived space." The third layer, "spaces of representation" is the layer of lived, social experience, and it is this layer, Thirdspace, that acts as the disruptive third term disrupting the tidy interchanges between material and ideological spaces. Of all three of these layers, Soja argues that "each 'field' of human spatiality [can be] seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical," not out of any inherent instability in the terms themselves but out of the ongoing dialectical (Soja says "trialectical") process wherein each overlapping category acts and is acted upon by the others (65). Interestingly, it is in the absence of that trialectical process where misprisions come into play. In terms reminiscent of this chapter's analysis of the colonial metanarrative in screened space, Soja critiques the "illusions of transparency" that cause perceived Firstspace "to collapse entirely into [ideological] Secondspace" (80). Redirected for my own purposes here, the acknowledgment of a "Thirdspace" layer is what may keep the perceived spaces of videogaming (and human-computer interaction in general) from "collaps[ing] entirely" into the ideologies of colonial narrative. The "Other" position is one from which that tidy alliance can be viewed, disrupted, and reconstituted in alternate forms. Soja marks out this Thirdspace position as "a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is

existentially shaped by the ... interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and concrete, the impassioned spaces of the abstract and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in *spatial praxis*" (author's emphasis, 31). While the realm of "lived experience" stands to be marked out (de-term-ined, if you will) by the influences of perceived and ideological space, Thirdspace represents in the best Lefebvrian sense a possible position where active lived interplay between "central and peripheral" sites can disrupt and even radically alter the power of the latter two categories.

To this point though, I've somewhat sloppily dragged a sense of gaming "space" into view by cobbling together complaints about other parties, which is as much as saying that I take exception to many of the critical habits of mind that offer problematic "layerings" of perceived and ideological spaces. Much of the exigence behind those layerings is rooted in a significant technological development: the advent of polygon processing in the mid-1990s (Thierren 248). Embedded into the console technologies of the Sony Playstation (1995) and Nintendo 64 (1996), this technology marks the turning point in games' capacity to depict space in the Firstspace sense: while limited in prior generations to "flat" bitmapped visual fields, polygon rendering creates three-dimensional "bricks." Earlier technological constraints limited the construction of space to usually one of two axes of movement: consider the example of *Galaga*, the 1981 arcade standard, whose sense of movement derives entirely from the ability to move the player's spaceship left-to-right. Namco's *Pac-Man* offers horizontal and vertical movement, conserved to the space of any given level's "maze" structure: any attempt to move "out" of the space of the screen (by exiting to the left) causes the player's yellow avatar to re-emerge within the same space (by entering from the right). Later games, including *Zaxxon* and *Super Mario Brothers*, expand on the elaboration of space from within that same fundamental paradigm. *Zaxxon* (Sega,

1982) takes an isometric point of view on the basic *Galaga* model and renders the space diagonally instead of on the horizontal x-axis, creating the illusion of three-dimensional depth. Far more importantly, *Super Mario Brothers* (Nintendo, 1984) represents the fruition of a scrolling two-dimensional perspective where the "movement" of the player (usually from left to right, up-and-down) creates an unfolding of more spaces off-screen. In reality, the player's titular avatar stands nearly still at the center of the screen. The space unfolds itself around him, gradually emerging as he appears to "move" towards the goal. (Mark J.P. Wolf's taxonomy of game spaces calls this model one of "independently moving planes" – one representing the avatar's movement, the other the background.[21]) The constraints of two-dimensional movement find themselves eased in the age of polygon rendering, though; Wolf's language on the topic is particularly charged as he likens the freedom available in such spaces to that of a roving film camera that "provide[s] players with *an unbroken exploration of space*, allowing them to pan, tilt, track, and dolly through the space" (66, emphasis added). Wolf's unconscious rhetoric here provides grounds and exigence for the continued exploration of the "Thirdspace" paradigm: without its intervention, the perceived 3D spaces of most modern videogaming will have found themselves effaced, "collapsed entirely" into the player's "navigational" gaze. On the other hand, I will have argued, through a return to my own "imalgorithmic" model, for a more sustained attention to how the "exploration of space" is, in fact, profoundly "broken."

This fretting over perceived (First) space provides, though, more than just a sort of "fire escape" for the would-be critic to escape the ideological, representational concerns of "Secondspace," the domain where material structures inform scenes of (meta)narrative/ ideological domination and struggle. In these moments, three-dimensional spaces (un)conceal themselves as spaces of navigation, or spaces that invite mapping in the most ideological sense

of the word. In my own rhetoric to this point, it's entirely possible that I've left myself open to that kind of critique, especially given my desire to critique and/or sidestep straightforward narrative/ideological readings of games or gaming in general. Very frequently, I feel that these sorts of critiques can and have showed up, resulting in the burgeoning field of Serious Games production and scholarship; while critics pour themselves into the Secondspaces of gaming worlds, I'm less concerned about any missed attention to technological/material specificities (though I did lodge that complaint earlier), and somewhat more concerned, particularly in this space, of a "third" possibility for how the *logos*/space of gaming might assert itself. "Thirdspace" as a concept, while unabashedly resisting conventional definition, does tend to coalesce around the dimensions of the social and the lived, and I feel that a careless critical practice could overdetermine the potential significance of that move. One important aspect of the "social" scene of gaming already anticipated in my analysis is the subjective dimension, the ways in which gaming media (in ways not entirely native to the medium, but often anticipated in the wider conversation over computer-mediated communication) fluidify traditional accounts of "essence" and "identity." *World of Warcraft*, which by virtue of its near ubiquity in the popular consciousness of gaming media is nearly ubiquitous in gaming scholarship, offers a particularly tantalizing case of this phenomenon: the game's persistent and lushly rendered three-dimensional fictional world sets the proverbial stage for all manner of possible social interactions. Castronova notes *World of Warcraft*'s very "real" economy, where players often slip the bounds of the game's simulation space and "buy" in-game currency with real-world currency[22]; Sherry Turkle and Julian Dibbel would no doubt see familiar strands of the identity play of mid-90s MOO/MUD space manifested in the textual interactions between players through the game's in-set chat interface.[23] While such analyses are certainly valuable, they represent the safe moves for

critics, particularly in Rhetoric & Composition and in the humanities in the general: *World of Warcraft*, after all, makes its social (Thirdspace) dimension manifest within the comfortable material (Firstspace) confines of a chat interface, allowing us to meet the Secondspace demands of identity formation on all-too familiar ground. On nearly the opposite end of the spectrum, I admire Hawisher and Selfe's *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* collection, whose focus is almost entirely on the "lived" experiences of gamers. Though my earlier citation of their volume critiqued the gravitational pull exerted by its somewhat teleological notion of "literacy" (the Holy Grail of humanistic Secondspaces), to which I could add a critique of its scant attention to gaming interfaces (Firstspaces) themselves, the editors do succeed magnificently at focusing on gaming as part-and-parcel of lived experience. The spaces of gaming activity, while not dissected with a technological specificity that I imagine lies outside the realm of its editors' interests, fluidify into spaces of identity and social interactions. A more sustained interaction with both Soja and Lefebvre can help me, I hope, offer even more potent fluidities by considering (some more) profound power relations grounded in the "trialectics of spatiality" – the process by which gaming *logos* conceals and unconceals itself.

It's when Soja and Lefebvre turn their attention from space to "power" that the stakes of their discussion reveal themselves. Noting the Marxist truism that "power is ontologically embedded in the center-periphery relation," Soja argues that power is no less important to Thirdspace, which as a third layer manages to be both apart from and yet enmeshed in the operations of that spatial power (33). If the "centers" (actual urban centers, but also power centers like universities) of spaces are where power finds itself concentrated and coalesced, and if the peripheries are those places where access to that power is constrained, then Thirdspace provides Lefebvre's possibility of an outside space, an alternative to those power-games. The

nearest analogue for my own discussion is Victor Vitanza's similar reaching out for an "Other" position that can take him outside the center-periphery relationship that constitutes the continual wrangling over rhetorical history, where Plato and Aristotle (good cop/bad cop(y)) occupy the center, and where the Sophists lurk marginalized on the periphery. Vitanza proposes a radical third position outside that history based on a denegated history of *logos*, just as Lefebvre calls for the disruptive figure of the "refined barbarian," an embodiment of "nomadic Marxism [which] provides pathways into a *space of radical openness*... not simply 'in-between' his bi-polar worlds of centers and peripheries, or in some additive combination of them. [This space] lay 'beyond,' in a (third)world" (Soja 33). Here, Lefebvre rejects the notion that the power of lived experience can or should be brought to bear on the center-periphery discourse. That "field" of activity can only result in the rejection of one position or the other, whereas Lefebvre's aim "is not to reject but to spatialize... to show how such spatialization *works against theoretical closure and reductionism whatever interpretive pathway is chosen*" (48, emphasis added). In the discourse of videogaming, I've argued, the pressure of our received critical *logos* drifts towards comfortable "centers" of critical activity: material centers like the computer, ideological centers like colonization. Of course, many other ideological "centers" compete for sway over the "lived experience" of the gaming-subject: within the larger "grammar of gameworks," we could note the conservative stance of gaming as a time-waster and brain-softener, the demonizing power of the news media, the will of well-intentioned academics to put gaming in the service of more ideologically correct learning, to say the least of the massive power of the games industry itself to shape the recognition of "gamespace." For both Lefebvre and Soja, these spaces are "storehouses of epistemological power," "dominating" and "ruly" because of their tendency, in Soja's words, to ground themselves "in language, discourse, texts, *logos*" (67). Just as Vitanza's

account (through Heidegger) of *logos* itself disrupts the center-periphery binary, so too does Soja's citation of the (standard, negated) *logos* demonstrate the need for a disruption of the "centralizing" tendencies of space, of the tendency of space to "conceal" itself through reliance on *logos*.

To further illustrate the vertiginous gravity of these "concealed" central spaces, consider the language of "cognitive mapping" as it is often applied to gaming. Taken by itself, the term "cognitive mapping" is most well-known in the humanities from its (re)definition Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism*, where it refers to "a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (51). In game studies, Michael Nitsche argues that gamers rely on similar cognitive maps, pertaining to two sorts of "totality." In his model of "story maps," he argues that gaming experience reconciles a "cognitive" map of the game's actual material space (the sum total of possible positions or "traversals" afforded by its code) with its narrative (Jameson might say "ideological") space (227). At best, we could argue that such a construction, which does attempt admirably to situate both the material/First and ideological/Second aspects of gaming experience, finds a sort of "middle" ground between the two. As a consequence, Nitsche's "cognitive mapping" model eventually finds itself seeking security in other, more ideologically "central" kinds of Secondspaces: the "story maps" he proposes work due to their adherence to certain narrative conventions; those narrative conventions rely on the conventions of film, and those filmic conventions of those of theater (229). In such a relay between comfortable and well-established "centers" of academic discourse, we lose sight of Lefebvre's hope of "resist[ing] theoretical closure"; the spaces of gaming will have needed redefinition along more radical (Third) lines.

The gravitational power of our received critical/discursive models offer, ultimately, a substantial roadblock to the "unconcealment" of videogame space. Soja can clarify a line of flight, though, through this, one of his many nuanced definitions of Thirdspace:

> It [thirdspace] serves both as a separable field, distinguishable from physical and mental space, *and/also* as an approximation for an all-encompassing mode of spatial thinking [similar to Borges's notion of the Aleph].... it is both a space that is distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or First and Second) and a transcending composite of all spaces (Thirdspace as Aleph). (62)

In Soja's moment, the elsewhere-and-everywhere dynamic of Thirdspace virtually repairs the long-sundered realms of "the material and the social," whose disconnection Lefebvre tellingly lays at the feet of "King Logos" (*Production* 407, quoted in Soja 51). In the context of my postmodern rhetorical framework, the freedom to "just-link" (Lyotard) from Thirdspace to any other "space" whatsoever offers intoxicating freedom while presaging a kind of risk. The temptation here, perhaps, is to take the social dimension itself as a given (as I've argued the "social-constructivist" approaches to gaming of Gee and others have) without considering the notion that (to assemble a necessarily messy composite of terms generated thus far) the gamer-as-rhetor both encounters and produces spaces that are "composites" of the material, mental/ideological, and social, and that this mutually affirming cybernetic process represents for us the last, best vestige of King Logos's power. Without avoiding (or rather, while avoiding *tactically*) our community's (really, communities') need to consider how games are ideological constructs and how they impact the development of the social self, we can also as critics, rhetors, and teachers stop for a moment to consider in more "imalgorithmic" ways (in ways both fluid and discrete) how powerfully the practice of gamespace requires a careful and even-handed

relayering of our received traditional priorities. While the development of ludology returned a potent Firstspace perspective to the study of games as narrative and ideological objects (that is, to games as Secondspaces), and while the social-constructivist school wisely saw fit to reconsider gaming as a socially lived experience[24], the dismembered remains of the classically received Aristotelian *logos* also appear to demand a critical movement of not just re-categorization (recovering First- and Thirdspaces only to sort them into a "logical" taxonomy), but of mutual re-recognition.

The notion of "topology," particularly as expressed by game theorist Mckenzie Wark and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, offers me a working vision of how to progress beyond a "taxonomy" of spaces. For Wark, the material development of the "digital divide" has so effectively foreclosed on the old colonial metaphors of mapping and exploration, that in their place is no longer cyberspace but a "gamespace" which takes on many of the characteristics of Soja's Thirdspace (056). As with Thirdspace, Wark continually plays with the notion of "gamespace" as a sort of organizing catch-all for the gamer's experience. Every individual game is merely an "allegory" for this all-encompassing space; the materiality of play – the "spatial practice" of play – is reorganized, making all gaming a sort of "representation of space" (020). Pulling the ropes behind the curtain is the insidious spectre of the "military industrial complex" that wills gamespace into being and that through the digitization of lived experience remasters all life as a sort of ongoing game: "While the counter-culture wanted worlds of play outside the game, the military entertainment complex countered in turn by expanding the game to the whole world, containing play forever in it" (016). In terms that ring harshly with the radical, I'd say *kairotic*, hope of Soja's Thirdspace, Wark's own topology figures a spatial politics based on locking the gamer (not to be understood as actual gamers – Wark has his own

reconceptualization of subjectivity in mind) into place within themselves: "The fixed geometry of topography [mapping] gives way to the variable forms of topology .... The storyline of outward movement is complete; the gamespace of interior play commences" (056). In my own reading, Wark plays a valid game with these multiply layered categories of spacing – just one at cross-purposes with my own. His sense of topology grows from a potentially valid notion of the military-industrial complex as an all-encompassing "space of representation" in its own right, a Thirdspace that, through the material insertion of the digital into everyday life, enjoys nearly limitless ideological sway. My own stakes are far less ideological, if only because I would hope for a rebalancing of the terms. Despite the impressive range of Wark's *Gamer Theory*, I ultimately see nothing to be gained from coping with our digital extensions by, to paraphrase Donna Haraway, seeking out a new (evil) Garden of Eden that determines all our answers for us.[25] What I will preserve from my reading of Wark is how it provides a spatial interface for redefining classically received categories, not just work and play but also subjectivity itself.

Of course, Jacques Lacan's own topology offers a similar radical reconceptualization of subjectivity, but in a way that I find even more useful for studying games. Lacan's language, later in his career, drifted increasingly toward mathematical and geometrical models, attempts, in a sense, to "encode" his theories into "units" that could be processed discretely. While Lacan's precise topological formations are somewhat besides the point here, a brief overview reveals several striking similarities to the Soja/Lefebvre concept of Thirdspace. Furthermore, while that possible conceptual homology is interesting, my intent is to apply it to the present matter of concern: the structure of gamespace. Mathematically speaking, topology is the study of how complex shapes can be folded out of a single continuous surface; for Lacan, the unconscious mind is such a surface, pierced (given a "*coupure*" or cut) and folded over onto itself. Lacan's

conceptual divisions between the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic are the results of those originary cuts. One of the first and most important symptoms of those cuts is the development of the ego during the "mirror stage," in which the subject makes an imaginary identification with a symbolic representation of himself (his reflection in the mirror).[26] In that moment, the "I" of subjectivity is caught in the folds of the mind's greater topology. Lacan compares the "radical break instituted by language" to both a "signifying cut" and "a rim," both terms catching the topological drift in his thinking. The "cut precede[s] metonymy, when that word is understood to designate the endless slippage of meaning" (Chaitin 75). In this regard, the Derridean slippage inherent to *logos* is also caught in the matrix of topology, and in this move my own analysis comes full circle. Heidegger drives the *logos* into a play of spaces; the play of spaces (not just subjective spaces and ideological spaces, but the Thirdspaces/topologies that tie them together) is part and parcel of the slippages in the linguistic construction of reality itself.

While Lacan's topology tightly knits together the various theoretical threads of my discussion, its applicability to gaming is somewhat less apparent. The clue comes from Dylan Evans's take on Lacan's topology of the unconscious mind, a powerful statement of the power Lacan invested in his mathematical models.[27] Noting first that a topology, unlike a topography, "dispenses with all references to distance, size, area, or angle, and is based only on a concept of closeness or neighbourhood," he says: "Lacan argues that topology is not simply a metaphorical way of expressing the concept of structure; it is structure itself" (207-8). Such language tidily summarizes the stakes for both Wark and Soja in their attempts to develop spatialized theories of their own: topology and Thirdspace are not merely metaphors but refer to real-and-imagined locations. Wark's topology runs into trouble for me only when its take on the military-industrial complex overwrites the equally real space of the game itself, which effectively renders gaming as

always-already a metaphor for something else. Basing each chapter loosely on the experience of playing a particular game, Wark's focus is less on the "spatial practice" of the game, which means absenting the critical gaze from precisely the location I'm interested in: the space of gamers playing games. Rather than look to games to serve as a metaphor for a larger more dominating space lurking above us (or right around the corner), I take the reality of Lacan's topology, particularly his figure of the Borromean Knot, at face value. In the topology of the Borromean knot, real, imagined, and symbolic intertwine one another: in fact, the figure is less of a knot than an "interconnection of several threads" (Evans 19). The significance of the knot is that it harnesses discontinuity (between the various "registers") not by "mapping" out its differences, but by combining them in a single fluid space. Real and symbolic are not absolute locations; rather, their mutual positions are understood only in the sense of "closeness or neighbourhood." The refusal to indulge in any absolute mapping invests Lacan's topology with its force of Being, and allows us to view space on its own "shifting grounds." Heidegger, to bring this theoretical loop full circle, proposes the same sense of an authentic Being who ponders *logos*. I've opted to take his metaphor at face value, too, to look at the spaces of gaming for how they might structure Being (and becoming) in interesting ways. In that regard, I regard the theoretical continuity between *logos* and space as very real. In the same way, I regard the continuity between material, ideological, and social spaces as being very real, united as they are by Soja's topology of Thirdspace.

Figure 5-1: Lacan's topology of the unconscious, based on the Borromean knot -- a continuous surface cut and folded, producing the three registers of the unconscious mind.
Source: Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), pg. 19.

For my own methods, then, my thesis becomes this: games are a Thirdspace, a simultaneous tying together of the material, ideological, and social. The material spaces of the screen, the ideological spaces of the display, and the lived-social spaces of work and play: all three coexist in the process of gameplay at any given moment as an unbroken topology. The primary side-effect of this thesis, and the one that holds the most appeal for me as a rhetorician, is the possibility that any change rendered to one of the spaces must of necessity cascade to the other (indeed, as the topology argues, there is no fundamental difference). The de-term-inism of Wark's model risks endowing one facet of the topology with the power to determine others, and while I have neither the space nor the inclination to refute that view, the entire (affirmative) history of *logos* insists that its power can also be imbibed: that the flow of power is not entirely unilateral. (*Logos* is both *kairos* and *hegemon*.) When a gamer sits down to reorder the (virtual)

space in front of him, (s)he is also participating in a profoundly transformative pedagogy – a play of *logos* itself. For the rest of this chapter, I'll consider the ramifications of this play, and the further fluidities that result from this re-ordering of spatial priorities.

To find a relay for doing so, I'll (re)turn to Lefebvre himself:

> Western philosophy has *betrayed* the body.... it has *denied* the body. The living body, being at once "subject" and "object," cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of "signs of the non-body." Under the reign of King Logos, the reign of true space, the mental and the social were sundered, as were the directly lived and the conceived, and the subject and the object. (*Production* 407)

If the body and its "rhythms"[28] occasion Lefebvre's turn towards spatiality (a turn away from the "King" or concealed *logos*), then the relay I'd like to consider for (re)opening the *logos* of gaming space is the position of the player's "body" in the gameworld. This understanding begins, but is not limited to, a discourse on the player's avatar – the graphical representation of a user's intentionality. In Laurie Taylor's essay "When Seams Fall Apart," the avatar is considered not just a representation, but a site of active psychoanalytic projection, yet in the complicated and multilayered spaces of modern gaming, she notes the emergence of "seams" in the game's representation, spaces where the metaphor of control is disrupted due to changes in visual perspective. These seams are of interest to my own discussion, in that they demonstrate the failure of "King Logos's" full and final sundering of the division between subject and object, between player and avatar. In moments of inconsistency or breakage in the space of a game, the usual player responses are often confusion or frustration, but those moments hold open the possibility of a different way of thinking about both space and subjectivity.

Significant about the role of avatar-bodies in gamespace is the necessity of binding those bodies according to sets of rules, the algorithmic rules that structure game space. To the extent that the space of a game is a composite or Thirdspace, its freedom (and the freedom of the bodies within and without) is inherently marked out, as Terry Harpold argues, "in related structures of the program and the gameworld. In these cases, a structure in the gameworld or a pattern of play corresponds in a direct way to an underlying attribute of the program, representing it to the player in a form that is appropriate to the world and masks the technical requirement that it fulfills" ("Screw" 93). Rather, ultimately, than render the avatar as solely a concern of the image, representation, or identification, Harpold's intervention here is to consider the material, mechanical, and algorithmic substrate of gaming with an eye towards the impact it has on the play of bodies within the game. Crucially for my upcoming analyses, he proposes the notion of "recapture," where, faced with the limitations of its own representational power "the gameworld recaptures traits of hardware and software, repurposing them to its own ends and masking their potential disruption of the gameworld .... [It] takes place on the cusp of a sort of crisis in representation: exactly at the moment where entanglement threatens to bring forward the game's determinism... that determinism is turned back into the gameworld, so as to seem to be another of its (arbitrary but consistent) rules" (93). As the question of (virtual) bodies collides with the question of space, Harpold joins Taylor in wishing to pay attention to the seams – some unintentional, some intentionally "recaptured" by the game's design – that provide the "cuts," the defiguring ruptures, that create the wider topology of gamespace. By locating some of those "cuts" and exploring them, I hope to conclude this chapter with an eye towards how, under-the-influence-of-gaming, our understanding of some of our most touchstone rhetorical terms and tropes may be extended.

Case Studies: *World of Warcraft* and *Final Fantasy VII*

One noted gaming space that is worth immediate consideration is that of *World of Warcraft (*often abbreviated *WoW*), one of the most popular games of all time. The game is a darling among both critics and scholars, as it combines an immersive open world along with the traditional aspects of pen-and-paper role-playing games: the capacity to create a character, interact with others in a shared social space. The game's sheer scale is both its most notable gameplay feature and most pronounced selling point: spanning two continents, each divided into roughly 15 large zones (including several major cities), and rich in graphical and artistic quality, players are given free reign to explore the world nearly at will.[29] Still, to say that *World of Warcraft* offers the player the freedom to explore a massive online world is true, but for our purposes misleading. The player's avatar, significantly, *does not move through the space*. The player's body is a fixed position on the screen; its position can be altered somewhat by changing the "angle" or "zoom" of the proverbial camera, but it remains true that the player's avatar represents a fixed position with respect to the diegetic space of the screen. There is no exploration of the space without that body. If, then, we follow Lefebvre's logic and refuse to replay the classical mis/take of sundering the "mental and social," then we are left with a re-reading of the game's space where the player's intentionality doesn't simply respond to the world: it actively *creates* the world. The player exploring the terrain of Azeroth (*World of Warcraft*'s fictional world) does not explore a topographical space "already mapped,"[30] but rather brings proximal elements of that space into view. Indeed, much of the game's intoxicating quality derives not so much from the thrill of mapping what's over the next hill, but from the pleasures of traversing those proximities: after passing through the first few areas of the game, players quickly find that they have the option to pursue quests in different areas, allowing a certain

freedom of movement within the game. The only true "mapping" occurs when a player enters an area for the first time – after that, the game's larger topology effectively undoes that metaphorical pressure by allowing swift travel between various locations joined by essentially arbitrary nodes. The experience of the player under such circumstances is one where discrete packets of space are *produced*. The player traversing the space between Stormwind Castle and the encampment in Darkshire is simply connecting two distinct nodes of space and by that connection *producing* the next space in the world.

Figure 5-2: The avatar, centered.

Why insist on this distinction, though? The move to rephrase space in terms of production offers certain rhetorical advantages, not the least of which is that it rephrases the activity of play as just that, an active rhetorical process: a useful antidote to the popular imaginary that positions gamers as passive participants and spectators. Such a move, though, is equally as likely to draw a counter-argument: the spaces "produced" by gamers cannot be said to exist in any space outside the game itself; all the possibilities are already encoded into the gameworld. (Players in *WoW* cannot simply stumble onto a new space, or actively add onto the already established map.) This argument, though, is valid only from within a particular

definitional game: a move that would equate the game's space with previously written game code, not as an experience produced by the player in real time. Spatial possibilities may be constrained by material strictures (ie., storage capacity and processing speed), but I argue instead that the issue be defined along the lines of "recapture": the game as a composite-Thirdspace repurposes its material constraints into its construction, and the player encountering the game participates actively in that process. "Recapture" names less a technical or design process, and more of an ongoing rhetorical construction constituted by both gamer and designer. As Lefebvre has it, production is "defined less by *invariable or constant factors* than by the incessant to-and-fro between temporality [and] spatiality" (*Production* 71, emphasis added). That "to-and-fro" rhetorical construction, furthermore, is not simply one understood by the breadth of the game's map. Rather, I argue that the pleasure of playing *World of Warcraft* derives from the active production of its space by the player: the production of its topology, which the player understands as a conversation among technical, narrative, and ideological layers. Play becomes the temporal complement, an activity fundamentally inseparable from the spaces it produces. In this regard, the "imalgorithm" model suggested earlier could have a function here, naming the "units" of oscillating time-and-space (play-and-movement) that fly to-and-fro between player and gamespace. The player bending gamespace around the avatar is momentarily destabilized by the image itself (as argued earlier), finding a sense of relief only in the gradual exploration ofthe topology, the afforded connections between places.

Figure 5-3: A *World of Warcraft* raid interface. The multiple readouts show the status of fellow group members, while the textual fields towards the bottom coordinate communication.

All of this conversation, it should be noted, also fails to note another substantial component of *WoW*'s space: the space of social interactions within the game, one that I have not taken the time to fully consider, apart from subsuming it under the broad understanding of topology offered here. In a game whose primary material attributes are its breadth and persistence, the social attributes of party and guild creation, chatting, and even economics create even more depth, "thickening" (if you will) the space away from pure depth-of-field visuality. That I have little to say about the social element of the game itself reflects not any assumption of its value on my part, but the sense that the social dimension has been discussed, particularly as offering a species of identity play. I prefer instead to understand the social dimension of the game's space as an element of the game's heterogenous topology. Others occupy the game's space not only as avatars on the screen, but through a series of other marks: players in a

character's party have their vitals displayed beneath the player's and separate "windows" can be opened, containing information about the rank and whereabouts of friends and guild-members. In some circumstances, it is even possible to travel automatically to another player's location. In all of these respects, I limit my reading of the game as a social space to the question of how the social influences the player's production of gamespace.[31] I read the social space of the game – understood in its broadest possible terms – as deepening the topology of the space itself by linking players to other "neighborhoods" through conversation. When players converse, we can say that they are engaged in rhetorical production in the classical sense, but what is equally important is how, by virtue of that classical-textual production, they come to a deeper understanding of the space. The true exhilaration of spatial mastery in the game comes less from filling out the map (topography) than from an understanding of how the game's algorithms form a cohesive whole – how the disparate functions of terrain mapping, social interface, and travel knit together as one.

Disentangling a game like *World of Warcraft* from its spatial imaginary is made considerably difficult by its material structure, by the "seamless" nature of its interface, and even more difficult by its persistence: the virtual world of the game is in a sense "always on." In such circumstances, critics may find it all to easy to bypass the question of space, or rather, to treat space *enthymemically* – as Aristotle treats *logos* – disciplining space into a tool to be used towards other ends. Read more affirmatively, as I suggest above, it may be more rhetorically fruitful to suggest that players engage in "topological" thinking more characterized by continuity, contingency, and linkages; such a thinking could represent an affirmative "recapture" of the persistence of *WoW*'s space. To reinforce the usefulness of a topological perspective, I turn towards a game that represents the emergence of three-dimensional immersive spaces: 1997's

Final Fantasy VII, released by Square-Enix software for the Sony Playstation. As a Japanese style Role-playing game[32], *Final Fantasy VII* also invites players into a rich fictional world, one viewable in three dimensions for the first time thanks to that system's advanced polygon graphics technology. As much as the game indulges in the spectacle of these spaces though, frequently transitioning players between varying "angles" on the action (including the use of prerendered cinematic "cutscenes"), the game's spatial play – its topology – becomes most interesting in the places where it radically forecloses on the illusion of its own thinness.

Figure 5-4: A dramatic camera angle as Cloud is introduced to both his objective and the game's three-dimensional space.

Final Fantasy VII opens to a bravura sequence integrating gameplay and full motion video: a camera swoops dramatically through the somewhat dystopic city of Midgar, eventually tracking alongside a train. The train stops, several characters emerge, and in a nearly seamless fashion, the player is given control over one of the characters: the spiky-haired protagonist, Cloud. For the game's first few minutes, the player guides Cloud as his squad as they climb through the interior of a massive energy reactor. Players are given this sequence of exploration

and not-too-challenging enemy encounters to become familiar with the game's aesthetics, controls, and battle mechanics. And yet, something strange happens at the moment immediately before Cloud reaches his goal: a piercing noise sounds, followed by the screen going completely black. The depth-of-field illusion is replaced by a start screen populated only by some cryptic text. These interruptions happen at intervals throughout the remainder of the game, and are positioned within the narrative as odd eruptions of sound that only the main character Cloud can hear. The mystery of why he is overwhelmed by this Other voice becomes tied to the larger action of the game, but more interesting for the moment is the eruption of a powerfully flat and opaque space out from within a game whose spectacle is built in large part on the celebration of its somewhat jagged, though functionally three-dimensional, spaces.

Figure 5-5: The "overworld" view. While the graphics are somewhat jagged by modern standards, a simple controller input causes the world to "rotate" around Cloud – a novel feat for console gaming at the time of *Final Fantasy VII*'s release.

Figure 5-6: For contrast, an image of the previous release in the series, *Final Fantasy VI* (released as *FFIII* in the US). The illusion of depth is minimal, the perspective largely flat.

Thinness, the illusion of depth upon which a game like *World of Warcraft* is based and upon which *Final Fantasy VII* plays, is effectively a "concealment" of *logos*. Rather than being configurative of rhetorical experience, space becomes effectively mystified, cut off from its radical possibilities for reconfiguring subjectivities, emotional being, or the lived experience of our bodies. Thin space becomes a space of problem-solving, of "productivity" in its most

negated bureaucratic sense, a deflection that drives us away from the question of space itself, just as Aristotle's construction of the enthymeme mobilizes – through the purging of emotion – the force (*bia)* of *logos* towards other ends, while "concealing" the importance of *logos* itself in forming the grounds of Being. It's not that a rhetorical perspective on gaming should ask how spaces make arguments – that would only open up a conversation at the expense of effectively driving the electrate *logos* back into the categorizations of the literate. Instead, I would try (in the Montaignian sense) Harpold's thick/thin distinction as a way of dealing with space in its own terms – in ways that activate the tension between space as a receptacle for objects, and space as a lived experience in terms all its own. Soja captures that tension particularly as a matter of repurposing the spaces of lived subjective experience:

> ...the assertion of an alternative envisioning of spatiality (as illustrated in the heterotopologies of Foucault, the trialectics and thirdings of Lefebvre, the marginality and radical openness of bell hooks, the hybridities of Homi Bhabha) directly challenges (and is intended to challengingly deconstruct) all conventional modes of spatial thinking. They are not just "other spaces" to be added on to the geographical imagination, they are also "other than" the established ways of thinking spatially. They are meant to detonate, to deconstruct, not to be comfortably poured back into the old containers. (Soja 163)

FF7 is in this regard a radical detonation of identity; "identity" and "identification" through the avatar are caught in the blast wave of the game's shifting spaces. In *World of Warcraft*, the game's recapture of a fairly "seamless" topology does not simply augment our understandings of, say, social interaction or economics – becoming an/other economy in Castronova's sense. Its space is equally, if not more, an "other than" space: an extension of how space itself is thought of

and conceived, how the possibilities of being-in-space – coordinating all the manifold possibilities of material, ideology, and community – are reformatted.

To return also to Taylor's terms, what *FF7* does is to show us the "seams" in its space, effectively opening the floodgates to the transfers of imaginary power between the "thick" and "thin" registers. In the longer run of the game's narrative, space-switching functions as a tactic calling the main protagonist's fundamental lack of self-knowledge. The "Other" voice is fundamentally his own, as Cloud comes to discover that he has mis/recognized himself[53], yet I would argue that the spatial play here is more than a Lacanian bait-and-switch, where the production of space merely doubles a more primary (however challenging) narrative about identity. If nothing else, we are free at this point to "count as one" a unit where, as Taylor reminds us, the gaming-subject exists in multiple spaces at the same time, including those of the thick/thin spaces of the interface. *Final Fantasy VII* becomes significant, then, not just as an interesting "master" text that incorporates a Lacanian narrative, but rather as a disruption of our enthymemic ways of thinking about the rhetoric of space. The game's larger "topology" – its tying together of disparate spaces and subjectivities – is fundamentally a "recapture" of its own materiality. At the precise point when 3D environments become available, the game repurposes those extensions not by making the environment more seamless, but rather by dramatically showing us those seams. If we want to ask how gaming-subjects rethink logic, it is along these lines – the lines of what the spaces of their games recapture. While this conversation becomes increasingly unwieldy as critics and rhetors find themselves managing these various spatial "layers" of the game – the game as a procedural space, a narrative space, and a recaptured indefinite Thirdspace – the recognition of all those layers leads this analysis back to Heidegger's recognition of the recurrent cycle of the *logos* concealing and unconcealing itself. That singular

signifier – already holding onto the valences of logic, language, and Being – I argue that we should add space as a category that in its complexities, through acting as a "media type"[34] of its own, goes on to inflect what it means to be-logical, be-linguistic. In short, videogame spaces find radical ways to recapture the limitations of their own technologies, disrupting any simple enthymemic understanding of how technology "automatically" creates those spaces, and in so doing continually upset and reorder the way we think of space itself. But those spatial "grounds" become part of the larger complex of issues and questions denoted (and connoted) by *logos*.

The more-profound critical gesture would be, at this point, to re-define these "grounds" not as an emergent form of spatial *literacy*, but rather as a part of what we might call a "spatial electracy," a scene of profound and emergent conversation between subjects, machines, and discursive apparata (both in games and without). Space, in this restretched and extended take on Aristotle's *logos*, represents neither a final frontier to be explored or domesticated or a text to be read and interpreted. Rather, following Ulmer's notion of "chora," space emerges as "a third fundamental nature – a receptacle – that mediates and establishes the instantiation of the forms in things" ("Chora" 35). Still, the scene of this mediation should not be the drift that returns this conversation to an uncritical logocentrism where the overwhelming power of rational discourse is simply replaced by the overwhelming power of digital spaces, or by the primacy of a game console's materiality in determining the contours of those spaces. Instead, a more electrate understanding would see the question of space emerging less as a question of technological determinism than as a question of the broader conversation between discourse and technology knotted up in Ulmer's more multivalent notion of "grammatology." *Final Fantasy VII*'s layering of its space is not merely an accidental occasion that happens to catch subjectivity in its "braid," but neither is that layering purely a matter of technological affordances or constraints. What we

have in this game – in *every* game – is a kind of "choral" space that mediates between technologies, genres, and playing subjects. A rhetoric under-the-influence-of-gaming would be one that chooses *affirmatively* to step into that interstitial space and sees that space not as a de-term-iner of experience but as an emergent category of experience. The recognition of the "seams" in the space, and the steps the game's designers take to "recapture" a kind of seamlessness, is less a pathway for reasserting a new logocentrism of space (space defined as an absolute and knowable technical capacity), but rather as an occasion for leaping to other types of play: the play of identity, the play of emotion, the play of materiality. In fact, part of the reason that I have focused predominantly on console gaming is for just this reason: the virtue of console videogaming is its technological specificity. The fact that consoles serve as somewhat "fixed" technological environments (as opposed to PCs, which as a platform is continually evolving) allows for an easier fix on the seams: a useful gain, only in that it affords an easier grasp of the braid of "science *and* intepretation," or of what we might call the "choral" scene where technology and rhetoric continually sort themselves into new forms (Wilson 87, emphasis added). What will have mattered more to the fruiful development of a gaming-rhetoric is not the distant possibility of making spaces more definable or knowable but rather our critical willingness to engage in the elaboration of "some more" spaces – both real and virtual, material and discursive, both locked and fluid – where the conversation can continue. In the (in)conclusions that follow, I'll return briefly to the re-mediating and re-organizational capacity of these spaces, to bring back into focus the conversational possibilities emergent from this "electrate" rhetoric, and from the spaces within and around our play.

NOTES

1 Cf. Havelock's "The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics" in *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy*, ed., Kevin Robb (La Salle, Illinois: Monist Library of Philosophy series, 1983).
2 Schiappa hazards multiple translations of this fragment, pulled from a dizzying variety of sources, to the overall effect of: "For every matter (*pragmata*), there are two possible arguments (*logoi*)." Its most pedestrian variation, most certainly not included in Schiappa, might simply read: "There are two sides to every story."
3 Historically, of course, that space did exist: in writing. Yet I hold, as Havelock argues, that the fundamental process here is one of slowly "groping" after such spaces, as the generations of rhetors before and after Socrates attempted to locate the language needed to address their extension.
4 As discussed thoroughly by Haskins, *Logos and Power in Isocrates and Aristotle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).
5 See Ian Bogost, *Unit Operations*, pp. 7-8.
6 See particularly *Sophistical Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, pp. 61-4.
7 Covino quotes two postulates from Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe's *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic*: "Magical Social Action Consists of Symbolic Performances – And Linguistic Symbolism is Central to Magic" and "Magical Symbolic Action Is Rigidly Scripted" (Covino 15).
8 Covino cites these and other tendencies of orality, as drawn from Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, particularly its third chapter: "Some Psychodynamics of Orality." Among these qualities are the oral word's "closeness to the lifeworld" (42) of lived experience, "agonistic" tone (43), "homeostatic" role in preserving "equilibrium" (46-7), and situatedness in the particularities of context (49).
9 I note no particular patron of this movement in the modern context, apart from the perennial fear-and-loathing directed at "violent" media (generally construed) by government officials, notably Senator Joseph Lieberman. In the mid-1990s though, one such figure was Sven Birkert's, whose 1994 book *The Gutenberg Elegies* mourned, as the pun on McLuhan might suggest, the passing of the age of print.
10 In this regard, I'll return later to the "positive" critics of code, a community that I'd argue includes James Paul Gee and Marc Prensky. The latter's book, *Don't Bother Me, Mom – I'm Learning!*, is in its very title (and beyond) a problematic attempt to put a positive "spin" on the cultural construction of gaming as a waste of time.
11 Potentially objectionable is the connection between my account of the "image" and Plato's term *eikon*. I acknowledge that my history to this point has hazarded no link between "image" and any extant Greek term, which problematizes my attempt to link them here.
12 cf. Vitanza, pg. 168: "The sun is the third; hence, triplicity."
13 Ekaterina Haskins notes that Isocrates ultimately regarded his *logon paideia* as *philosophia*, not *rhetorikê*. (*Logos and Power*, pp. 3-4)
14 John Poulakos: "Isocrates's own promise was to turn his students into insightful governerors or responsible citizens.... [He] linked rhetoric to the articulation of wise governance and civic conscience" (133).
15 By way of paraphrasing both Havelock and McLuhan: For Havelock, the *paideia* of Ancient Greece is partially invented through Plato and Plato's development of philosophical method, a process that cannot have taken place without the individual subject formations afforded by alphabetic literacy. McLuhan writes the same kind of history, focusing on the English Renaissance, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, where sociocultural formations (a "world of jobs" instead of a "world of roles") are part and parcel of the subjective reconfigurations afforded by the printing press.
16 I intend this play on words to suggest a meaningful connection to Ian Bogost's critique of "system operational" thinking – thinking that engages in totalizing rather than "questioning" the operations between discrete units.
17 This model, Vitanza goes on to argue, belies both Isocrates's and Heidegger's eventual turns towards the most foundational kinds of thinkings, and I will return to this important valence later in my discussion.
18 Bolter's *Writing Space* significantly predates Internet-based hypertext (that is, hypertext through the specific syntax of HTML webpages). His medium of interest in that book, instead, is HyperCard, regarded by many as a forerunner to many of the features later explored and celebrated in hypertextuality, particularly the significance of non-linearity. The second edition of *Writing Space*, published in 2001, dovetails both conversations together.
19 Vitanza, pg. 178.
20 Reynolds cites Julian Dibbel's seminal article "A Rape in Cyberspace" as anecdotal proof of the consequences of such transparency. To return to the complex of terms I was using earlier, the concealed/transparent *logos* of these spaces foments not a Nietzschean "will to power," but a denegated "will to domination."

21 Wolf, "Space in the Video Game," page 61. Wolf does not mention a quirky play in *Super Mario Brothers*, though; in certain levels, the background "layer" moves automatically, forcing the player to effectively "keep pace" with the background. In citing this example, I want to maintain a sense of the "depth" of play available in these two-dimensional spaces, and avoid any potential criticism of some master metanarrative inherently favoring three-dimensional gaming, even though the latter garners far more attention through the course of my analysis.
22 *WoW*'s developers have cracked down on this practice, though it merely continues to mutate and persist, particularly as recent expansion packs (2007's *The Burning Crusade* in particular) ratchet up the need for in-game capital through the rewards of ever-more advanced weapons, armor, and even flying transportation.
23 Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen* famously includes an anecdote from a multi-user domain (MUD) devotee, who had split himself into four different virtual identities, each of which he felt expressed some part of the whole. Of the "real world," he says: "Real life is just one more window... and it's usually not my best one" (13). Julian Dibbell's article "A Rape in Cyberspace" (originally published in 1993 and anthologized almost constantly since then) relates the events in one particular MUD where the virtual "rape" of one of its citizens prompted a prolonged debate on the borders of the real and virtual worlds, and the ethical and emotional problematics of virtual *êthoi*.
24 Notably, I've mentioned, in Hawisher & Selfe's *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
25 From Haraway's famous "Cyborg Manifesto," pg. 151.
26 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits* (New York: Norton, 1977. Trans. Alan Sheridan), pp. 1-7.
27 I'm quick to remind the reader that this investment pays off: despite charges of "systematic" thinking, Bogost notes that it is through his "mathemes" that Lacan comes close to providing "fungible" units for analysis (*Unit Operations*, 34). Indeed, those charges of systematicity will continue to haunt even my discussion here: by recoursing to "mathemes" I hope to pave the way for a sort of "unit operational" approach to space – likely the most "systematic" category of them all. (After all, how does one render "space" into a "unit"?)
28 In this pun, I hope not only to recall Kristeva's desire to reincorporate the corporeal back into *logos*, but to also reference in passing another of Lefebvre's key figures, that of the "rhythms" of lived experience. These "rhythms" eventually become Lefebvre's preferred figure for imagining space, experience, subjectivity, and even the haeccity of things themselves: "The everyday establishes itself, creating hourly demands, systems of transport, in short, its repetitive organization. *Things* matter little; the *thing* is only a metaphor, divulged by discourse, divulged by discourse, divulging representations that conceal the production of repetitive time and space. The *thing* has no more existence than *pure* identity (which the *thing* symbolizes materially). There are only *things* and *people*" (*Rhythmanalysis* 7).
29 Following a common genre convention, though, it is impractical for most players to venture too far, too quickly. "Zones" in the game are geared towards particular levels of character: a freshly minted character may choose to make the long walk to the Eastern Plaguelands or the Searing Gorge, but their odds of survival are amusingly slender.
30 Jane Tompkins, cf. Reynolds, pg. 31.
31 Indeed, part of the wider-scale appeal of *World of Warcraft* is how the game's players participate in spaces of conversation and discussion beyond the boundaries of the game itself. Fans participate not only in discussing the game, but in reappropriating the game's imagery through comics and machinima. Even more interesting in this context is the ways that players effectively "expand" the space of the game by developing add-ons and modifications. Voice chatting, not explicity promoted through the game itself, is a near-univeral practice among hardcore *WoW* players, a practice that works within, yet exceeds the gamespace, producing new social spaces in the process. How these changes effect the game's overall topology is a subject for another day.
32 Japanese roleplaying games (often abbreviated JRPGs) tend to follow different trajectories from the role-playing game mold developed in America – most notably in the free-form pen-and-paper play of *Dungeons and Dragons*. While D&D allows nearly limitless freedom to create and customize characters, JRPGs tend to deposit players into established narrative molds: the "role-playing" aspect usually derives more from the act of exploring environments and equipping characters rather than choosing a "role" to play (that of a warrior or magician, for instance). The *Final Fantasy* series grew into the latter mold around the time of the American release of *Final Fantasy IV* (called *Final Fantasy II* in the US), which featured an epic narrative around a group of develop characters. The *Final Fantasy* series, published by Square-Enix gradually took the narrative form on as a main

component. Other JRPG series include the *Dragon Quest*, *Xenogears*, *Star Ocean* and *Chrono* games, all published by Square-Enix.

33 This Lacanian dynamic is mirrored by Cloud's first meeting with the game's primary heroine, Aeris, who initally misakes Cloud for someone else. This "someone else," who we later learn to be a dead soldier named Zack, is Cloud's "ideal ego," Lacan's term for "the source of an imaginary projection" of identity. Following the accident that kills Zack and wipes Cloud's memory, the former's identity and memories are "projected" over the latter. Zack, Cloud traumatically learns, is the "illusion of unity on which [his] ego is built" (Evans 52).

34 Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pg. 251.

Postscript: (In)Conclusions

Extra Lives

Hawisher & Selfe's *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* has occupied in this project so far the highly fraught position of representing both the good and the worse (I wouldn't say "bad") of the current state of gaming studies in rhetoric and composition circles, in that it attempts to seize on gaming as an emergent form of literacy while simultaneously tending to mis/take the construction of gaming as a distinct grammatological medium with its own emergent rhetorics. As this project concludes, having run roughshod over the field of rhetorical studies in an effort to sketch the outlines of those emergent, electrate rhetorics, I wish to return to a sense of what might be at stake in this re-evaluation of gaming from a rhetorical point of view. More particularly, I'd return to "rhetoric" with an eye towards one of the distinct senses of the term referenced in the Introduction; while my tendency has been to conflate multiple senses of the word "rhetoric," I'd like to especially consider "rhetoric" from the point of view of lived experience. In addition to representing, say, argumentative techniques or a branch of humanistic study, "rhetoric" can also refer to the unstable and impermanent frameworks through which subjects construct discourse and make sense of the world. In other words, having taken what I would consider a far more aggressively rhetorical approach to the subject of gaming than Hawisher & Selfe have, what becomes of the ways we might think of the lived experience of "gaming lives"? Answering that question will form the un/groundwork I need to answer, while still tactically avoiding, the more specific question of how to build a videogaming "rhetoric" in

the more technical sense noted above. In all, both senses of "rhetoric" will be split in order to reunite later, in a parting effort to reaffirm the stakes in developing a sense of rhetorical possibilities under-the-influence-of-videogaming.

I'd propose an astrophysical metaphor for reconceptualizing the "extra lives" of subjects-under-the-influence of gaming: *Gaming Lives* considers attempts to sketch the contours of the lived, experienced "rhetoric" of gaming by shining the light of literacy through the field. Like any light travelling through a vacuum, literacy will move in its own direction until affected by the "gravity" of an outside influence. By looking at the literate artifacts produced by gamers, the contributors to *Gaming Lives* can see how the "light" has been effected (reflected, deflected) by contact with the unknown force of gaming. Contrastingly, my own project has attempted to study the field of gaming itself in an effort to more closely develop a sense of what is exerting that gravitational force. My choice of metaphor here is less illuminatory than playful: it makes the attempt to cope with our "gaming lives" a matter, figuratively and literally, about *space* and about how the broader "field" of lived experience is being remapped by the ubiquity of modern gaming. While the final chapter of this project dealt with space as an (intentionally) broad and abstract category, I would like to ratchet up the stakes in these final moments by considering two parallel spatial phenomena that share a single label: "ubiquitous gaming."

Taken at face value, the term "ubiquitous gaming" summons to my mind images of bored youth playing cell phone Tetris on the bus ride to campus, of kids at the local pizza place fiddling with their handheld Nintendo DS systems, of the massive market penetration of the Nintendo Wii console in so many middle-class American homes, or of myself firing off a game of *Jewel Quest* in between grading stacks of papers. While that usage of "ubiquitous" is certainly one of value, I'd like to consider two other established uses of the term. Game scholar Jane McGonigal uses

the term "ubiquitous gaming" as a way of describing what are commonly called Alternate Reality Games (ARGs), games that "work to materially replicate the interactive affordances of digital games in the real world" (233). Without becoming distracted by considering any particular affordances, what is striking in McGonigal's phrasing is how her sense of "ubiquity" is concerned less with the frequency with which games are played out there in the "real" world than with how the space of the "real" is becoming indistinguishable from those of gaming. The effects of this blurring of boundaries are addressed in terms both *magical* (an "enchanted village, in which common objects have magically acquired new abilities") and *critical* – these gaming subjects "construct, consciously, a more intimate relationship between gameplay and everyday life" (235, 237). In another distinct sense, Jim Rossignol, who has written elsewhere about gaming history and culture, considers the emergence of "ubiquitious gaming" from a more technological standpoint. Just as the emergent phenomenon of "cloud computing" describes our capacities to store massive amounts of data on servers "out there" as opposed to on our personal harddrives,[1] Rossignol writes of ubiquity from the standpoint of "cloud gaming": about emergent services that would obviate particular console hardware systems (e.g. the Nintendo Wii, the Xbox 360) in favor of distributing gaming through a disparate network of online servers: making the specialized technologies of gaming available to anyone with a TV or computer. Under such a system (largely hypothetical for the time being, argues Rossignol, though one such "cloud" service was previewed at the 2009 Game Developers Conference), gaming becomes "ubiquitous" in the sense that gaming it becomes dis-located from hardware into the data that courses through computer networks and (thanks to Wi-Fi) through the very air. Such a scenario bears more than passing resemblance to Lev Manovich's notion of "augmented space," which describes "physical space [as] overlaid with dynamically changing information," thereby creating something of a

third state between “real space” and “virtual space” (251). The phenomena variously described here by McGonigal, Rossignol, and Manovich illustrate a dramatic change not just to how literate experience travels through “space,” but how the shape of the space itself is radically changing.

Indeed, all this talk about the changing shape of “lived space” has the familiar ring of the fifth chapter's discussion of Edward Soja's *Thirdspace*. To more fully mobilize that concept for my considerations of “ubiquitous gaming,” I'd like to return to that conversation briefly, linking it to another site visited in this conversation already, so that the cross-talk between the two can illuminate the “changing shape” of rhetorical experience. Consider, then, the playful take on corporate discourse and commodity fetishism in *Portal*, previously explored in this project's third chapter: a take that can also be read as a play on the rhetorics explored in my more recent fifth chapter as attached to the concept of *logos*. The game's display of space, the positioning of the player (as a gaze and as a body), and the fetishization of commodities (within the space of the game itself)[2]: all three layers answer to the Heideggerian problematic of concealment and unconcealment. The classical negated *logos* stays in concealment, in which regard *Portal* can be (mis)read as a straightforward alignment of terms, ripe for Marxist critique: a narrative in which the player “masters” the space of the game through a “commodity” (the Portal Gun), viewed from the domineering gaze of a player who has “commodified” the game through buying it. In my analysis, though, I have sought to demonstrate the inherent limitations in such a critical apparatus, pushing through the structure of videogaming for an *unconcealing* of that *logos*. Alternatively, *Portal* can be read as an affirmative play on the very structure of *logos* itself, in which the player “plays” aggressively with the structure of the spaces presented: blowing “holes” in both the First- and Secondspaces (material and ideological) of GLaDOS's testing center.

Again, without positioning *Portal* itself as a kind of master text, my (smaller) argument here is that the logic of the commodity fetish is destabilized in the Thirdspaces of gaming. In *Portal*, we arrive at yet another site of instability that emerges at the point where *logos* unconceals itself: where pleasures, machines, and bodies fluidify through play, where the "seams" become visible. Those "seams," where I've argued that play removes gaming-subjects into Thirdspaces of ideological and material reorganization, hold the key to a much larger argument, this time about the shape of rhetoric in the age of ubiquitous gaming. The "fluidity" described in these scenes is less one that I would import into gaming from without, in some attempt to align these terms with those of the ubiquitous "augmented space" mentioned above, than it is an aspect of rhetorical experience inherent to *logos* itself that is instead "extended" by gaming's emergent ubiquity. Specifically, Heidegger copes with this scene of back-and-forth movement between concealment and unconcealment by conceiving of *logos* itself as a continual movement between such positions: "*logos* as *kinesis* [motion]... makes it possible for man to fall away from himself, to possibilities which are not his own. This is what Heidegger designates as life's tendency towards 'falling' (*Verfallen*)[, but] Heidegger also thinks that the kinetic nature of *logos* admits the possibility of countering this tendency towards falling," that is, to an *affirmative* engagement in *logos* as what Vitanza would call a will to perpetual interrogation (Weigelt 139). What we end up with, then, is a hardly coincidental alignment of terms, wherein a "rhetoric of technologization" (*logos*-as-*kinesis*) and a "technologization of rhetoric" (ubiquitous gaming) inform one another, and where not just a particular game, but *any given game*, makes that convergence available. A predominantly literate critical apparatus, one that engages in a rhetoric more concerned with a "will-to-truth" instead of a more fluid "will-to-perpetual interrogation,"[3] is ultimately, I conclude, one fundamentally unprepared to fully account (ac-count) for the shape

of our "extra lives" in the age of ubiqutous gaming. Instead, I've argued, we need a radically revamped rhetoric that attends to the *kinesis* that now appears to inhere in the very core of "ubiquitious gaming" lives: that attends to the blurriness between terminological, spatial, and methodological lines and that isn't afraid to use games (to engage in play *affirmatively*) to cope with the blurriness.

Extra Limbs

That "coping," a word with pleasingly therapeutic connotations, belies a more serious concern for this project, though: a sense of how the community of rhetoric and composition (hailed throughout this project in various forms, both joint and disparate) may conceive of a videogaming-rhetoric in a more practical form: as a discipline (a "rhetoric" in the most limited sense of the term) that can be studied, or as a topic that can be put into the service of teaching. While my discussion has, to this point, tended to skirt questions of practicality in the interest of opening up a different sort of conversational space, I would respond to the pressure toward practicality by briefly re-turning to one of the tensions introduced in this project's first chapter. Specifically, while considering "rhetoric" in the broad-spectrum sense of a conversation (or rather a set of conversations) that variously challenges and affirms established metanarratives,[4] this conversation would be remiss if it did not also offer some consideration to "rhetoric" in its sense as a *technê* for persuasion, or for education in the persuasive arts. While I have no desire to suddenly and drastically reverse course and offer a *technê* for videogame study, videogame-based teaching, or videogame-based writing, I would like to consider in these conclusions how the broader sense of rhetoric suggested throughout this project might – eventually – spur

conversation toward more "practical" or "useful" ends by teasing out a short conversation about rhetorical (para)tactics.

This move of mine, while problematic enough for how it seems to reverse field against my highly theoretical *êthos*, is nonetheless one that rings consistently with my established grammatological framework. While in my first chapter, I levelled a critique at Plato and more indirectly, at Platonistic simplifications of "technology," which I argued is constructed in a far more fraught cybernetic process. Plato's dramatic mistake is in confusing the "extensions" made available to him through writing as mere tools, as a *technai*, for the production of "better" or "more true" discourse without fully considering the ramifications of that technology on the structure of the whole. Every extension, we remember from McLuhan, is attended by a scene of not only amputation (often negativized as the loss of some "essential" whole) but of a conversational process of massive internal reconfiguration. Cybernetic theory stresses how the "body" gradually deals with the stress of its extensions and discovers ways to put them to use: in that same regard, this parting gesture of mine toward practicality is designed to step into that scene of *eventual* reconciliation. As Gregory Ulmer, without whom this project would have no "electracy" toward which to move, puts it: "the dilemmas of the practical world [require] not a choice between two different approaches, but the interdependence of arts and sciences.... Yes; if it is not *useful*, I am not interested" (*Internet* 2, 4). While some brave compositionists have insisted on the need for a conversational space of pure theory apart from any concern over immediate practicality, I do at least want to acknowledge the immense rhetorical pressure to think of emergent technologies as "tools" to be put to some practical use, to be put in the service of producing scholarship or pedagogy.[5] The critical double-move on which my project has insisted, looking at *both* the "technologization of rhetoric" and the "rhetoric of technologization,"

has the effect of safeguarding this matter. Between science and interpretation, we should choose both (Wilson 87). By that same logic, when confronted with the choice of theory or application, we should also try to choose *both*: to see that material affordance and discursive construction are coinvolved and mutually fluid. Before trying to conceive of educational *technê* (or without giving up and assuming that it must necessarily be something foreign or somehow anterior to us), let's take this fluidity into account.

In the final analysis, as my citation of Wilson's summary of Derrida's grammatology (itself echoed in Ulmer's refusal to choose negatively beween "arts and sciences") suggests, I would prefer to identify the main scene of our "extension" through gaming as one of constant and fairly radical *fluidity.* This "message" of the videogame "medium" should be approached less as the seed for a particular *technê* than as an attempt to represent a more broad concept: the eternal recurrent fluidifying of our established categories (work, emotion, space). Just as my recent jaunt through *Portal* worked to demonstrate that fluidity as part and parcel of this project's broader understanding of rhetoric, I can briefly re-turn to the scene of that original analysis in order to demonstrate how a broad technique (not a *technê* in the classical meaning of the term) for making further rhetorical constructions (I hesitate to say for scholarly "work" or for teaching) can emerge from the rarified air of "fluidity." Ultimately, I feel that if my attempt to phrase up an "electrate" rhetoric has offered any sort of extension of practical value, it would be a willingness to "link": to reach beyond the borders of any one object of study and, like Geoffrey Sirc's working through Duchamp, to bring dissimilar and possibly dischordant objects into the conversation simultaneously. In other words, my *technê*, insofar as I've bothered to produce one, is in the "just-linking" offered between the games *Portal* and *Rock Band*, separated as the two are by a wide-gulf of genre, style, and apparent critical content. This repurposing of Lyotard's

concept (established in *The Differend* and zealously practiced by Victor J. Vitanza's own rhetorical project[6]) offers to my own project what Vitanza calls "the oxymoronic yoking of a loss of control and an appearance of control," which I would playfully define here as a tension between the broad rhetorical *fluidity* suggested earlier with an attempt to fashion a *technê* that would attempt to "control" later rhetorical production through some sort of programmatic "systems operation" (42). My desire to leap between games, occasioned by the flimsiest of excuses (GLaDOS's parting song being repurposed into the latter game from the former) represents my own somewhat feeble attempt to put into practice the "fluidity" that I have taken to be a more general property of rhetoric under-the-influence-of-gaming. This *technê*, if you could call it that, is one that I would call one of "extensive *kinesis*," building an extension out of the fluid movements and unstable behaviors of discourse (and of discursive machines) in this age of "ubiquitous gaming." I have stressed in this postscript that this "extensive *kinesis*" is not, in itself, the practical *technê* that composition practice might try to sketch out; nor from this analysis does it follow that the object of my pseudo/paratactic "*technê*" is even a game itself. Instead, it suggests a paratactial move prior to any attempts to create such *technai*: that play and leaping have to precede practicality, and that "leaping" in itself is – as a procedure – more worthy as an object of study than any given game.

Towards "Rhetoric after Literacy"

Though insufficient to provide the grounds for any particular critical or pedagogical program, the parting stretchings and extensions offered here will serve, I hope, as a sketch for a conversation that reaches beyond any particular consideration of the medium of videogaming.

I've chosen in these last moments to gesture towards a "rhetoric after literacy," not an "electrate rhetoric," as a final play on my own *êthos*: a reminder that I am participating in literacy in the act of writing this – not simply because of my "words and sentences" medium, but because I am working within the disciplinary context of the University: the formation *par excellence* of the literate apparatus. I gesture to this context for two reasons, and therefore close this project with two challenges. First, for me to insist fully and finally on the terminology of "electracy" would offer little more than a phenomenal performance of the same blindspot I've critiqued throughout my own project, as it would attempt to insert into the machinations of the University system a new "term," one that, even if were to overcome the steep resistance felt in many quarters toward gaming/play as academic pursuits, would serve only to reappropriate those terms into de*term*inisms. As I attempted to feel out in pointing the way towards a critical *technê* just now: there are useful limits to what we can do from inside this structure. So, in this final move of yanking my own terminological rug out from under me, I hope to convince the reader of the sincere need to keep literacy and electracy in conversation with one another, without attempting somehow to appropriate the one within the other. Second, my (in)conclusive postscript here has introduced the figure of "ubiquitous gaming," less out of any convenient dovetailing-effect it offers with the previous chapter on space than because it gestures to the most important sites where this "rhetoric after literacy" will be taking place: *out there*, in the spaces outside the disciplinary grasp (though not, perhaps, the disciplinary *reach*) of academic discourse. The challenge, then, is to acknowledge "gaming" not as simply the newest academic subject on the block, but to recognize it as as something far more profound: a discourse/technology that did not come from us, and will not heed any call to return to us. While pointing frenetically at various constructions of "electracy" and "electrate rhetoric," this project has often failed to account for

how the disciplines in which we work will make contact with the conversation "out there"; to rephrase this project's concern as a "rhetoric after literacy" simply reminds us of the conversation (only faintly alluded to in these pages) that is at least as important as devising either a "technologization of rhetoric" or a "rhetoric of technologization": imagining a discursive point where academics (in rhetoric & composition, or from anywhere, really) can dis/engage in the productions happening beyond the university. If my *êthos* of free-play and just-linking accomplishes anything, I hope, it's gesturing towards a possibility for building out there somewhere an unstable platform where games and rhetoric can collide, coincide, and enter into conversation.

Third – yes, there is a "third," or haven't you been playing along at home? – I dis/engage with this "rhetoric after literacy" at the last minute to have one last laugh. As I've had it this whole time: "Play," in my final reckoning, is to electracy what writing is to literacy. Play, by any "definition" we could hope to throw around it, is inherently unstable – it reverses the "order of things" and has us redefine and render unpredictable what had formally been rigid and knowable. My parting game, one that I hope you'll join me in having, is of the need to remember (to continualy keep in front of us amid the shifting "spaces" in which we "work") that the area "outside" literacy is always-already "inside." D. Diane Davis quips as much in the very moment she phrases up her pharmacological trope for what it means to enter into Being. All Being is "being-on-something," she argues, but the strength of being on any drug is, as she quotes Avital Ronell: "Drugs are excentric. They are animated by an outside already inside" (74). For all this project's various attempts to figure a construction of "electracy" or "gaming" that is somehow "beyond" literacy, I'd have us show that game up as a sham. Without being concerned about somehow sanitizing my own rhetoric, or backing away from neologisms because they are not

necessarily "safe," I choose in these final moments to laugh off my own attempts at too-serious self-fashioning, at insisting on "fluidity" rather than hard *technai*, at the formidable leaps of faith I've demanded from my audience in this project. I choose, ultimately, to dis/engage in "laughter," in "free-play," and in "fluidity" because those possibilities are already here, with us. They did not have to come from videogaming, though I argue strongly that videogaming is the occasion that brings them all into sharper focus. I think we should play at a gaming-rhetoric only to remind ourselves that these hazily understood extensions are not merely selective intensifiers of experience or harbingers of cultural catastrophe: they have always-already begun to reshape our lives, our limbs, and ourselves.

NOTES

1 The "cloud" in the "cloud computing" metaphor refers to the dispersed space of the Internet, where applications and resources can now be stored, rather than housing such applications on one's own personal harddrive. (Therefore, to use one fairly common example, Google's document service, GoogleDocs, offers a stripped-down word processing program, complete with online file storage, thereby obviating the need to install a word processor on one's home computer.)

2 I would remind the reader that, when introducing the topic of the "commodity fetish" in Chapter 3, I did so by pointing out how the concepts use in classical Marxism figures a scenario where "the false *logos* of the commodity fetish could be placed against the 'true' *logos* of critical consciousness, resolving itself dialectically into a kind of Truth."

3 Vitanza, *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*, pg. 199.

4 This take on rhetoric is particularly indebted to John Poulakos's *Sophistical Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, which concludes by rephrasing the value of Sophistic rhetorics for their power to put "stability and restraint" into continual conversation with "instability and freedom," and to favor "address[ing] particular events" over "promis[ing] lasting truths" (198-9). Both of these valences ring true with Lyotard's move to put into question (to express incredulity toward) Enlightenment metanarratives.

5 I would refer again to Lynn Worsham's "Writing against Writing: The Predicament of *Ecriture Féminine*" and to Sidney I. Dobrin's more extended discussion of the theory/praxis tension in his *Constructing Knowledges: The Politics of Theory Building in Composition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

6 See Vitanza, especially pp. 39-44, for a further discussion of Lyotard's figuration of "just-linking" and paralogy.

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