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I

IN THE THIRD-PERSON crime simulator *Grand Theft Auto 3*, the fictional performing of all sorts of criminal nuisance is a possibility. (Squeamish readers, or those that are adamant videogames are playing a decisive role in the moral degeneration of modern society might want to turn away now!) Here is one possibility for players of the game: while driving around in the rundown red-light district of Portland Island, try stopping beside one of the women dressed in leather dresses and knee-high stockings who say things like "Have you ever been down south?" The fictional woman will bend down to the car window and eventually hop in. Now drive to a secluded area, stop the car, and wait. What happens? The car begins to rock up and down, slowly at first, and then more quickly, squeaking all the while. As it does, your health meter increases and the cash meter decreases. Eventually, after the car has stopped rocking, the prostitute exits and walks away. This is all obviously of questionable taste. But the *really horrible* part is that it is possible to mug the prostitute and take back your money!

Though I am reluctant to tell you this, the first time I discovered the trick, I felt a sort of sadistic joy at my reprehensible behavior. Friends in the room at the time thought the whole incident hilarious; except for one who thought it extremely revolting. Perhaps now though, I feel guilty for what I did to the prostitute. (Hence my reluctance to let you know of my sinister fictional activities!) Of course, this episode raises a host of ethical questions; I will not attempt to answer them here. What I am interested in is the possibility of fictional interaction itself. The important point is that this fictive episode seems to show that it is possible in the case of videogames to feel guilty or ashamed for *what one*

does in a fictional world. But how is this possible? What does interacting with a videogame amount to that it allows for this intimate (and dubious) emotional connection?

There is a wide and impressive literature in the analytic philosophy of the arts concerning the nature of fiction and the practice that surrounds it; this literature gives us an ideal theoretical basis from which to explore the topic of videogames. But also, videogames will allow us to return our attention to the theory, perhaps perceiving areas in which it can be improved, so as to become more generally applicable. I begin this paper by setting out some initial descriptive examples of the ways in which videogames are interactive fictions. After discussing an ambiguity in the notion of what it is to interact with a fiction, I deal with two prominent aspects of that interaction; that focused on *fictive props*, and the apparent interaction players have with *fictional worlds.* Next, I argue that the interactive nature of videogames alters the character of our interest in them. Rather than a focus on interpretive and sympathetic engagement with narratives, videogames involve their appreciators in an active engagement with the problem spaces or kinetic narratives of gameplay. Finally, I argue that because action and emotion are close cognitive bedfellows, and because emotion plays an important role in the psychology of fictive practice, that the emotions experienced by videogame players will be distinctive to that fictive form.

II

Videogames provide their players with a variety of opportunities for interactive engagement. The last ten years have seen significant development in the extent of the fictive interactivity of videogames, especially with the advent of the "next generation" consoles such as Playstation 2 and X-Box, and the burgeoning genre of PC gaming. With the intention of providing some descriptive substance for the following theoretical discussions, in this section I present some examples of the ways in which modern videogames are interactive fictions, and how they differ to more traditional fictive forms in this respect.

Many videogames involve exploring an environment. In *Grand Theft Auto 3*, the player, in the guise of a criminal protagonist, is able to explore the streets of Liberty City. Completing the objectives of the game often depends upon this ability to explore, but the act of exploration is fun in itself. The character can take a subway trip around the city, explore the many back alleys and side streets, and even climb

upon roofs to get a view of the city from above. In the initial stages of the empire-building game, *Rise of Nations*, the player may send out scouts to discover the lay of the land and the location of material resources.

Contrast this with the fictive engagement one has with a film or novel; there the epistemic access the audience has to a fictional world is constrained by the narration. With most traditional fictions, the rule is that audiences are passive observers of a predetermined fiction unfolding before them. This claim of passivity is not meant to deny the fact that traditional appreciators must be *cognitively active*; appreciators of all fictions must actively infer and elaborate interpretation-relevant detail.[1] Videogames, however, seem to be active pursuits in a more robust sense.

As well as exploring the fictional world, the player is able to manipulate and interact with the fictional environment. Early videogames were impoverished in terms of the range of actions that players were able to carry out; the proto-first person shooter *Wolfenstein 3D* allowed the player to do little more than open doors, shoot at hordes of Nazis, and pick up keys. But the example of the first-person adventure game *Red Faction* shows how things have developed. In this game and its sequel, not only is the environment populated with responsive items such as control panels, vehicles, and pieces of mining machinery, but also the terrain itself can be altered using the powerful weapons available to the player-character. Faced with a dangerous security station, the player may decide to use a rocket launcher to burrow a new tunnel to skirt the area.

The worlds of videogames would be bland if other fictional agents did not populate them. In *Grand Theft Auto 3*, a range of people populates Liberty City. Many of these people must be interacted with to succeed in the objectives of the game, though others merely populate the world as Mafiosi, Chinese Triad gang members, prostitutes, pimps, and quite often, innocent bystanders caught up in the criminal mayhem. Of special importance in this regard is the enormously popular life-simulator *The Sims*. Gameplay in *The Sims* is dependent upon setting up a home and fostering friendships with fictional folk— friendships that can even turn into romantic affairs. These affairs involve many of the risks associated with real such affairs, and jealousy, cheating, and fights are common.

Interaction with videogames even involves overt physical action. Originally the control surfaces of videogames involved joysticks or

keyboards. More recently, interaction—especially for console games—has involved a control pad. But many modern games now involve novel physical means of fictive engagement. Thus one can ride a bike, point light-guns at screens, dance on patches on the floor, balance on skis, snowboards, and skateboards, and when voice recognition is involved, even talk to the hardware, all in interacting with the fictional world of a videogame. Note that this physical mode of interaction with videogames seems of a different kind to those initially discussed; here it is not a fictional world, artefact, or person that is being interacted with, but a piece of videogame hardware.

III

Having introduced some initial examples of videogame interaction, I might ask: what is it to interact with a fiction? This is a deeply ambiguous question. The issue has at least two aspects relating to the two general kinds of interaction identified immediately above. The first aspect of the question queries our substantive interaction with fictive works. How do appreciators base their fictive participation on the contentful props—fictive works—that are created for the purpose of grounding such games? The second aspect of the question is quite different: what explains the ostensible interaction with fictional worlds and people that fictive participants have?

That the question of what comprises fictive interaction is ambiguous will be no surprise to those cognizant of the extensive philosophical literature on fiction. The ambiguity might initially seem one of ontology; of *just what it is that is being interacted with*: in one case items of the real world, in the other, items of a fictional world. But, since it is widely held that fictional worlds do not really exist, the ambiguity must ultimately depend upon *semantic* features of the language involved in fictive participation that gives rise to this *apparent* ontology. The key to characterizing our interaction with fictions is initially to come to an understanding of the linguistic character of reports of interaction in fictional worlds.

Two linguistic idioms are in operation in the sort of discussion of fictions in the initial descriptive sections of this paper. Each idiom has its own distinctive pragmatic and ontological context and commitments. A first non-fictive mode of speaking is relatively easy to understand. In the philosophy of language declarative utterance is often seen as a standard mode of linguistic expression, depending for meaning, in

a popular theory, on truth conditions. The truth conditions of a sentence depend upon reference and syntactic structure. Thus, when one makes a declarative utterance with the pragmatic intention of asserting a fact about the world, they intend to refer to items in the world. It is in this first linguistic mode that one might speak of interacting with and videogame controller or piece of software. There is little mystery here.

The second kind of linguistic mode has been much more difficult for philosophers of language to understand. In part this is because these fictive utterances appear ostensibly just like declarative utterances.[2] One might declare of their participation with a videogame, "the zombie cyborgs are overrunning my position!" Such an utterance cannot be taken as being true in virtue of reference to *actual* zombie cyborgs, though. But how then does the utterance fit into the theory of meaning sketched above, given that some of the terms of the utterance seem to lack reference?

I can do little here but signal the detail of a possible response to this issue. I suggest that when fictive assertions are made, as well as literally expressing the content of a fiction, the utterer intends to provide listeners with premises on which to base a game of make-believe or pretense. The utterance has pragmatic intentions in addition to assertion that modifies the target of the assertion from its ostensible referents, to items of fictive content. Hence, the apparent ontological commitments of the utterance are suspended. It is in this sense that one speaks of "shooting at the zombie hoard" in a first-person shooter, or "building a vast medieval empire," in a game such as *Rise of Nations*.

Nevertheless, however fictive utterances are fit into the theory of meaning, it seems clear that utterances about fictions are of two kinds; one couched within fictive practice, pretense, or a game of make-believe, and the other constituted by a run of the mill non-fictive sense. It is because these two modes are customarily run together that the philosophy of fiction is the confusing and contentious area of debate that it is. However, of importance here is that the existence of these two linguistic idioms means that we can deal with the nature of fictive interaction under two headings: interactions with fictive props, and interactions with fictional worlds.

IV

The first issue concerns the literal engagement that appreciators of fictions have with fictive works. Of course, in a sense all fictive activity is an interactive engagement. When one reads a novel they physically interact with the book and perform cognitive actions upon its content, such as inference and elaboration. What differs with videogames in virtue of which I have characterized them as interactive fictions is the nature of the fictive prop that is interacted with; where in novels and films the fictive prop is concrete, with videogames it is malleable and responsive.

At the basis of all fictive participation is a process of pretense engagement with representational content, perhaps of a form similar to that recently described by Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich in their "cognitive theory of pretense."[3] This theory sees the cognitive engagement in games of pretense as constituted by the placement of representational content or "premises" within a "possible world box." The function of the possible world box is to "represent what the world would be like given some set of assumptions that we may neither believe to be true nor want to be true" (p. 122). These premises then become the basis of the cognitive inferences and elaborations that ground pretense behavior in children; episodes that, importantly, are often characterized by their interactive nature. The interaction in children's games of pretense gives rise to a developing fiction in which the initial premises are elaborated on. As an observation on this ability's present use and its origins, Nichols and Stich are "inclined to think that the mind uses the PWB for a variety of tasks including mind-reading, strategy testing, and empathy," although they think that the evolutionary function of the possible world box was "to facilitate reasoning about hypothetical situations" (p. 122).

Several theories of fiction within the analytic philosophy of the arts are broadly consistent with this cognitive theory, and furthermore, they promise to allow us to extend the theory of pretense into a theory of fiction. Kendall Walton's theory of fiction sees the practice as similar to childhood games of pretense. Engaging in fictive practice for Walton is a matter of adopting an attitude of "make-believe" toward various fictive representations, and in this I think it is at least consistent with a cognitive theory of pretense such as that of Nichols and Stich.

These fictive representations are contained in what Walton calls "props," and form the basis of the elaborative and emotional engagement

that comprises our participation with works of fiction (p. 21). In childhood games of make-believe, these props might consist of natural objects such as tree stumps or artifacts such as models and toys; the properties of those objects making certain things true of the fiction that involves them. Importantly, the props in these games may allow physical fictive interaction. In its role as standing proxy for a grizzly bear, a stump is something that can literally be wrestled with, making it true of a fictional world that one is wresting with a bear.

Thus, fictive props exist as the physical instantiations of the premises of a game of pretense. In most sophisticated fictive media, the corresponding props are objects created specifically for the purpose of providing the foundation of a complex game of make-believe, such as the linguistic representations that constitute novels and short stories, or the modal representations that constitute films and television fictions. The benefits of having such pre-made fictive props are clear. Greg Currie argues that such fictive props "make it easier for us to weave together a pattern of complex imaginings by laying out a narrative; they give us, through the talents of their makers, access to imaginings more complex, inventive and colorful than we could hope to construct for ourselves."[4]

These representational props are the objects that are literally being interacted with in episodes of fictive practice, and their representational form will define the type of interaction that they allow. Whereas the stumps involved in childhood games of pretense might allow a physical engagement such as wrestling, the kinds of props at the basis of sophisticated fictive practice usually allow only an interpretative or sympathetic engagement with a fixed or concrete narrative.

Given that participating with videogames is also primarily an act of engaging with a representational prop, such a theory of fiction is entirely apt to capturing the nature of the fictive practice involved in videogames. What then is distinctive to videogames in this regard? The props at the basis of videogames are, like those of films and television, modal props in that they represent fictive content by means of visual, auditory, tactile, or even *somatosensory* representations. But more important than this modal nature, the fictive props of videogames are malleable and responsive, these features giving rise to the interactive nature of videogame fictions.

To understand how the fictive props of videogames are malleable and responsive, we can look at how these features exist in some of the fictive

precedents to videogames. Besides videogames, the other rare excep-
tions in fictive practice that provide malleable and responsive props—
such as fantasy role-playing games and pantomime—are cases in which
the props are other people. Pantomime, *Dungeons and Dragons*, and
importantly, childhood games of pretense, all derive their responsive
malleability from the fact that other people are props that are respon-
sible for the fictive content of the game. The stumps detailed in
Walton's theory of make-believe are not the most notable type of prop
in childhood games of make-believe; other children are. Other children's
minds add to the variety, spontaneity, and excitement of their games of
pretense because children's minds are very spontaneous and prone to
excitement. In this regard they are the perfect props for a game of
pretense.

Thus, the malleability of the props in these interactive fictive games
usually depends on the malleability and creativity of a human mind.
Presently the computer, the technology at the basis of the videogame, is
attempting to simulate various features of the human mind: most
importantly for us here, the complex and responsive representation of
content. Its relative success at malleable and complex representation
has made it the ideal prop in games of fiction. The powerful processing
algorithms at the basis of modern computer fictions allow the fictional
worlds of videogames to respond in accordance with a participator's
fictional actions within them. This amounts to the software displaying
certain representational content depending on a player's interaction
with the controls of the game. This is not the place for a detailed
technical discussion of how the computer hardware and software
achieve this interaction. I will merely note what is distinctive to the
props at the basis of videogames: the important issue is that the props at
the basis of videogames are able to represent content contingent upon
a player's physical input to the prop.

V

The second issue I will deal with concerns the apparent interaction
fictive participants have in *fictional worlds*; their abilities to explore
cities, develop relationships, and wage wars. As mentioned earlier, to
resolve the apparent commitment to the ontology of fictional worlds,
we need to understand the semantic features of attributions of osten-
sible fictive interaction. I have already signalled the path I would take to

solving this problem, so I will quickly move on. We will take it for granted that ascriptions of interactions in fictional worlds can be given a sensible reading. But note that given the augmented interaction with fictive props afforded by videogames, the problem of semantics is particularly vivid with videogames. Videogames make it clearer that participants—in their descriptions of their fictive activities—frame themselves and their actions in terms of a fictional world.

I can use another piece of terminology coined by Walton to show what is distinctive of the involvement that players have in the fictional worlds of videogames: that of "work-worlds" and "game-worlds" (pp. 57–58). Walton thinks the notion of fictional worlds is as "dangerous" one, in that it implies a sense of ontological realism about the nature of fictional entities. Nevertheless, with these reservations kept in mind, we can see the utility in the term and variations upon it. In Walton's theory the notions of a work-world and a game-world allow the distinction between what is fictionally true of the work itself, and what is fictionally true of the game that appreciators play with the work when they participate with the fiction. All of the things that the producer of the fiction tacitly invites us to imagine as true of the fiction, and all the further truths that are derivable from these in the course of filling in and following the story, constitute a fictional "work-world" (pp. 58–59). The fictional world of the film *Star Wars* is one in which young Luke Skywalker leaves his childhood home on Tatooine, and has battles with the evil forces of the Empire. It is also true of the fictional world of *Star Wars*, that the Jedi are a fading race of powerful beings, that spaceships can go into hyperspace to travel long distances very quickly, and that, as we will find in a future episode, Darth Vader is Luke's father.

It is necessary to differentiate the "game-world" from a work-world, because there are many facts that are fictionally true of our interactions with fictions, yet, which may not be true of the work-world of the fiction. The game-world that I instantiate when I accept the invitation of the author and participate with the fictive prop, may include all the fictional truths of the work-world, but it also includes fictional facts that are not true of the fictional world, but that are fictionally true of my interaction with it. Nothing in *Star Wars* implies anything about my role as an observer of the fictional world; it is in the game-world that things are fictionally true of me as an observer of fictional worlds. It is fictionally true only in a game-world that *I am surprised that* Darth Vader is Luke's father. When we are tempted to frame ourselves in reference

to fictional worlds through linguistic reports, it is the game-world about which we are making fictional statements.

In most traditional fictive forms, though it is true that the game-world will contain many of the truths of the work-world—it is true in the game that I play with *Star Wars* that Darth Vader is Luke's father—it will not be the case that the fictional truths of the game-worlds we instantiate are true of the work-world of the fiction. It is not true of the work-world of *Star Wars* that I believe I could defeat Luke Skywalker in a light-sabre battle. However, the exceptions to this rule show how videogames will differ to traditional narrative fictions.

In the fantasy role-playing books and games mentioned earlier such as *Dungeons and Dragons,* much of the content of the work-world is initiated or dependent on the game that is played with the work. Role-playing games are a cooperative enterprise. The dungeon master—that player who guides the action along and takes care of the behind the scenes mechanics of the game—provides much of the determinacy and richness of the fictional world into which the player-characters step. The player-characters themselves often bring an established fictional character, with a name, equipment, special abilities and the like, and the interaction of their character with the preset world of monsters and set-piece encounters constructs the work-world as the game is played. The work of authors, dungeon masters, and player-characters all contributes to the furniture and events of the fictional world.

These interactive books and games contain the bones or possibility of a work-world, which needs more than the interpretation of a participa-tor as traditional narrative fictions do. We might think that these fictive forms differ to traditional works in that a very real form of constructivism is true of them. Constructivism, crudely, is the thesis that the apprecia-tor of a work of art, at least in part constructs the meaning or content of a work of art when they appreciate it. In traditional fictions the author provides most of the content of a work-world, but in role-playing games, the players have an equal role in contributing to the content of the fictional world. A focus on the fictional worlds of interactive fictions makes it clear that the distinction between work-worlds and game-worlds can become somewhat fuzzed, as the game-world effectively *projects* into the work-world because of the fictional interaction.

My claim is that videogames are very much like these forms of fiction in that players contribute to the truths of the work-world of videogames by exploring environments, manipulating objects, and having relationships

with the characters represented in their props. Role-playing games can be seen as structural precedents for videogames. As a player-character, the player of the videogame steps into the fictional world of the videogame, making many new things fictionally true of that fictional world, but also of their role in that world. In videogames too, the game-world of the fiction interposes on the work-world. Of course, this augmented (apparent) interaction in fictional worlds is a direct result of the augmented interaction with the fictive props of videogames. It is because the fictive prop at the basis of videogames is able to represent fictive content contingent upon a player's input into the control surfaces that the game-world interposes on the work-world.

Note that in the case of childhood games of pretense the situation is even more radical. With games of pretense, there is no work-world as such, just the game that the participants play. This is because the games are not dependent for their premises on pre-existing works, as the players generate the premises as the game goes along. The game-world is constitutive of the fictional world generated by the episode of pretense. What minimal narrative independence there is in childhood games of make-believe is determined by the nature of the props involved in the game. A particularly large stump will make it true that that there is a particularly large bear. In literary fictions these props have become more complex and concrete, which means that the fictional world is more exclusively determined by the author's work. Videogames seem to be a step in the direction of childhood pretense from the situation with traditional narrative fictions, allowing the participator to contribute to the work-world.

The distinction between work-worlds and game-worlds that is so clear in traditional narrative fictions is beginning to smudge with the focus on videogames. Indeed, the distinction may merely be a remnant of treating concrete literary fictions as fictive exemplars. The undermining of the distinction may be a benefit of studying videogames as a novel species of fiction.

VI

The primary feature of videogames that motivates a player's interactive involvement is *gameplay*. Gameplay is the interaction in the world of a videogame fiction via the control surfaces of the hardware, with the intent of completing the objectives central to success in the game. The player can see the key on the ledge, but how to get to it? In the locker

two floors below there was a jetpack, but it needed fuelling; just where can they find the fuel? Later, having fuelled the jetpack, the player must struggle with the difficult local goal of hovering the awkward flying machine to the key on the ledge. These are all features of gameplay, which require the player to perform skills and tasks, and solve problems and puzzles. Doing so requires a dexterous manipulation of a fictional world. Gameplay is perhaps the fundamental quality of a videogame that adds to the fun and point of playing the game, and satisfying gameplay is possibly the strongest prerequisite of a satisfying game.

It is arguable that gameplay stands to videogames, as narrative and characterization stand to films and novels. The fictive games we play with videogames are different to those we play with literary and other traditional fictions, just as they are different to those children play in games of pretense. These differences between videogames and traditional fictions are a result of divergences in our pragmatic interests in their respective fictive props. A fictive game is foremost a pragmatic artefact, though it may involve semantic or other representational props. Our pragmatic interests in the fictive games we play with movies, plays, and novels are an interpretation or a sympathetic or empathic engagement in a fictive narrative.

Videogames, however, do not have the narrative structure of traditional fictions. One reason for this is that gaming scenarios are reversible. Regrettable fictional states of affairs can be avoided by merely replaying the scenario; indeed, to progress in the game a player *must* replay the scenario.[5] The satisfying narratives presented in films and novels depend on a linearity that counts against the ability to replay fictional states of affairs so that they might turn out differently. If the death of Lester Burnham in *American Beauty* were something that was not irrevocable, then his death would hardly matter to appreciators. In videogames, the death of the player-character usually resets the game back to an earlier stage. Another reason why complex narrative may be impossible in videogames is that to be satisfyingly interactive such a videogame would have to be able to represent an extensively branching fictional world. Such an extensively branching videogame would soon become exponentially unwieldy (Poole, p. 110).[6] What narrative there is in videogames is usually tacked on as back-story, or is comprised of non-interactive full motion videos. Rather than involving an interpretative or sympathetic engagement with narratives of the kind found in films and novels, in videogames our pragmatic interest is in interacting with a fictional world. Steven Poole thinks that videogames involve

"kinetic narratives" (p. 108). Kinetic narratives are *problem spaces* in which are player must act so as to solve a particular puzzle, defeat a boss-monster, or perform a difficult fictional task.

Thus participation with videogames involves decision-making as one chooses between plans of action to meet the demands of gameplay. In a real time strategy game such as *Rise of Nations*, the player can decide between a rush strategy in which they quickly build up and army and attack in the early stages of a game, or one in which they build up and fortify their economy before attacking; both strategies have strengths and weaknesses. But because kinetic narratives are reversible, the problem spaces they represent can be systematically explored. Failure in any one attempt will allow the player to explore a new means of solving the problem. Depending upon the lay of the land, a rush strategy might prove unsuccessful when it becomes too difficult to reinforce depleted forces. In that case the player may choose to be more methodical. Of course, some games have a set amount of lives that the player can use up in attempting to get through a section, after which the player must either restart the game or return to a saved point earlier in the game, thus losing their hard-earned progress.

VII

These issues lead us nicely on to a consideration of the role of the emotions in videogame participation. Emotion and action are close cognitive bedfellows. This should lead us to suspect that the role of emotion in interactive fictions will be distinctive. Indeed it is: the nature of videogames as interactive fictions determines the type of emotional responses we have toward them. The prevalent emotions in videogame fictive practice are frustration, anger, fear, and elation; these are notable for their dynamic nature.

Illustrating the kinds of emotions videogamers have, is the fantastic science-fiction horror-adventure game *System Shock 2*. In this game, the overwhelming feelings are those of fear and apprehension. The Starship Von Braun, alone in deep space on the other side of the galaxy, is dark, shadowy, and deserted. When other people are encountered, they are usually dead, or screaming and being chased by mutant hybrids wielding shotguns, and thus, about to become dead. Things have a startling habit of exploding when you approach them, and the personal email logs that you find all over the ship are filled with tales of strangeness and terror, as the crew, now mostly deceased, detail their

dealings with some unknown menace. In the email logs, crewmembers are about to divulge to you the secret of what is really occurring aboard the Starship Von Braun, when screams, or explosions, or the sounds of monkeys screeching, cut off the message mid-sentence. Just what is happening to the monkeys, why are their brains exposed, and why are they so malevolent? A creepy soundtrack adds to the overall experience.

But as well as the evocative environment, the game also arouses emotions through the kinds of tasks that the player must complete; that is, the kinds of problem spaces or kinetic narratives that are set up. Gameplay in *System Shock 2* is comprised of exploring further into the shadowy Von Braun to complete the various tasks set by a stranger who directs you via increasingly rude email messages. The power must be put back on line so that you can use the lifts to access deeper into the ship, but to do so you must avoid the security cameras that alert the roaming mutants to your presence. As the game proceeds, the challenges become more and more complex, and the monsters more nimble and deadly.

Juggling these fictional demands is a frustrating and fearful experience. At one stage late in the game when I found myself crawling around an enormous alien digestive tract, the game became so frustrating that I was on the verge of giving up. I found the problem spaces were so difficult as to be infuriating. Also, the tension builds throughout the game as you attempt to reach deeper into the ship's decks. Occasionally, when I was getting low on health and ammunition in the game, I got myself into situations where faced by a formidable foe, all I could do was panic. My ability to deal with the situation briefly left me, and I would hurriedly run away; I was unable to keep my head straight in order to deal with the situation. The world of *System Shock 2* is a terrifying and unsettling world. Yet the game is terrific fun because of this.

I suspect that these emotions, ostensibly directed at shotgun wielding mutants, and maniacal monkeys, are really caused by at least two classes of stimuli. First are the evocative representations of the fictional world—the grotesque sounds the mutants make, the darkness of the ship's interior, the indistinct sound sources. Secondly are the situations represented within the fiction in which the player must act; these comprise the fictive aspects of gameplay. Because the player of videogames has an interactive engagement with these situations the emotional connection is especially close. The player is at risk of failing the challenge posed by a fictional situation; in which case they are likely

to become frustrated or even angry as they lose the progress they had achieved in the game. If they succeed after many desperate attempts to defeat the foe, or clear the puzzle, they might be elated.

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio argues that generally the emotions are involved in representing to an organism the immediate and extended demands of homeostasis.[7] Faced with a rich decision space in which we need to act, emotions not only focus our attention, but also help to bias the choice over options so that efficient decisions might be made. "What dominates the mind landscape once you are faced with a decision is the rich, broad display of knowledge about the situation that is being generated by its consideration. Images corresponding to myriad options for action and myriad possible outcomes are activated and keep being brought into focus" (*DE,* p. 196). "Somatic markers" help to focus attention, to bias among the various representations that are attended to, and to guide the eventual decisions that are made. They are the feedback from the bodily states attendant to affect programs. Damasio proposes that "a somatic state, negative or positive, caused by the appearance of a given representation, operates not only as a *marker for the value of what is represented, but also as a booster for continued working memory and attention*" (*DE,* pp. 197–98, emphasis in original).

Notwithstanding some problems with its broad-brushed approach to characterizing the emotions, this idea helps us to perceive something important about the role of the emotions in the fictive practice involved in videogames.[8] Here, the emotions often seem to act to represent to the player the demands of homeostasis *in a fictional world.* The emotions appreciators have for videogames are usually derived from their interaction with the gameplay: the player feels angry at their inability to defeat the massive fiery lobster monster, frustrated by the difficulty of completing the platform jumping task, fearful of possible loss, or elated at defeating the hordes of mutants and maniacal monkeys. The emotions seem to guide decision-making in the fictional world of the videogame by boosting attention and concentration; or when one panics, they seem to frustrate this ability. The emotions we have for videogames are framing devices that channel our interaction with these fictions; this may be because this is the role that the emotions play in circumscribed forms fictive practice such as pretense and conditional planning, psychological processes that may form the evolutionary origin and basis of fictive engagement as noted earlier (Nichols and Stich, p. 122).

I am now in a position to say something of the example with which I introduced this paper. Alex Neill argues that appreciators of fictions are denied the experience of particular types of emotions because of their inability to act within fictional worlds.[9] One cannot be guilty in connection with a fiction because they are denied the possibility of interacting with the fiction in a way that would make the ascription of guilt appropriate. The fictive practice involved in videogames—including that involving the representations of other responsive agents—shows this to be inaccurate. Our emotional entwinements with the fictional worlds of videogames have the potential to involve us in a much more intimate manner than those we have with traditional fictions. The kinds of emotion we have for videogame fictions—the frustration, fear, and elation I felt while playing *System Shock 2*, or the sadistic joy, and later guilt I felt for the unfortunate prostitute in *Grand Theft Auto 3*—seem more strongly focused on our own role in the developing fiction than are the emotions appreciators have for traditional fictions that are essentially sympathetic or empathic in form.[10] Because our roles in generating the content of fictional worlds are extended in the case of videogames, so are the types of emotions we might feel in conjunction with such fictions. The guilt I felt for the fictional prostitute in *Grand Theft Auto 3* is merely an especially vivid example of this intimate connection with interactive fictions.

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY, NEW ZEALAND

1.   Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 144–69.

2.   There is good reason to think that they *are* declarative utterances; see Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 19–20.

3.   Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich, "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense," *Cognition* 74 (2000): 115–47.

4.   Gregory Currie, "The Moral Psychology of Fiction," in *Art and its Messages*, Stephen Davies, ed. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 53.

5.   Steven Poole, *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), pp. 112–14.

6. Daniel Dennett's discussion of hallucinations is a treatment of a similar problem; in fact Dennett explicitly notes the connection D. C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 5–6.

7. Anthony Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994); hereafter abbreviated *DE*; Anthony Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion, and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage Books, 1999).

8. Paul Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

9. Alex Neill, "Fiction and the Emotions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 254–55.

10. Susan Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).