Title: “If it's in the Game, it's in the Game”: An Analysis of the Football Digital Game and its Players

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“If it's in the Game, it's in the Game”: An Analysis of the Football Digital Game and its Players

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Steven Craig Conway

Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the representation of football, as sport and culture, within the medium of the digital game. Analysing its three sub-genres - the televisual, the extreme and the management genre. This dissertation outlines how each configures, incorporates, rejects or ignores certain conventions, values and practices connected to the socio-cultural system of the sport, and the wider sport-media complex in its representational and ludic system.

Though the marketing literature surrounding these games often makes claims to their simulative quality, these products will be shown to present very particular, dissimilar, and above all ideologically loaded versions of the sport they claim to impartially represent. In an evolution of Baudrillard's (1983) concept of the simulacrum, these digital games will be revealed as euphemisms for sport, as inoffensive representations of something that may in reality be considered too offensive, or too harsh for inclusion into a marketable product.

Also central to this thesis is the increasingly trans-medial nature of sport consumption, as the post-modern consumer does not simply distinguish between the various media he or she consumes and the 'reality' of the mediated object; indeed it is the mediation of the sport that now constitutes the dominant interpretation of its conventions and values. To quote John Fiske, the media no longer supply 'secondary representations of reality; they affect and produce the reality they mediate' (1994: p.xv).
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bedfordshire. It has not been submitted before for any examination in any other University.

Name of Candidate: Steven Craig Conway

Signature:

Date:
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Introduction

Good or bad, a play always includes an image of the world... There is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences.

(Brecht, 1978: p.150-1)

The sports digital game is fiction. Yet it is a fiction full of verisimilitude, a fiction that chafes in discomfort at such labelling. It wants, and indeed attempts, to present itself as non-fiction, as accurate, holistic representation of the sport as game and industry; as EA Sports' motto proudly proclaims, 'If it's in the game, it's in the game'. It does not claim to provide its own 'image of the world', instead it markets the product as a reflection of the existing one, evident in the promotion of such games as not game but 'simulation'. This thesis is concerned with the consequences of such a culture of production, in terms of both design (the text) and consumption (the player and sub-culture).

On Wednesday the 18th November, 2009, the Republic of Ireland lost to France in the play-off stage to reach the finals of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. This defeat gained instant notoriety, firstly because the French player Thierry Henry had obviously 'cheated' in the build-up to the winning goal by handballing the football twice, and secondly, because the sports media used this event as an anchor for further discussions on sport regulation and culture, which quickly spiralled into a political issue and gained a similarly intense focus from many mainstream media outlets, an instance of ‘vortextuality’ as Whannel (2010) defines it.
Demands were made by the media, certain players, and the FAI (Football Association of Ireland) to replay the match, in the spirit of sportsmanship. In an interview with French football magazine *L'Équipe*, French defender Patrice Evra responded, “The replay, I'll do it when you want on a PlayStation” (21st November, *Daily Mail*, 2009).

Following Arsenal's elimination from the Champion's League by Barcelona on the 6th of April 2010, Arsene Wenger was quoted in *The Guardian*, praising Barcelona player Lionel Messi as “like a PlayStation”; this was part of an entire article by Keith Stuart where he asks 'Who's better: the real Messi or the virtual one?' (8th April, 2010: p.2), playing a variety of digital games to re-enact Messi's goals from the match.

In 2008, Everton Football Club announced they had officially paid for the rights to use the *Football Manager* (Sports Interactive, 2004-present) digital game database as a scouting tool, allowing Everton manager David Moyes to search the records of 380,000 players compiled by 1500 researchers across the globe, whilst Northern Ireland manager Lawrie Sanchez contacted Sports Interactive (developers of the *Football Manager* videogame series) for scouting advice on lower league players eligible for the national team (Macaskill, 2009). Simply put, various boundaries, between entertainment and politics, fiction and non-fiction, technology and society, virtual and physical, are merging, moving, and perhaps even eroding.

Football has a long history of being both entertainment and political expression, but it is no longer a sport understood simply through live spectatorship, or supported by local communities living in close proximity to the team ground. Modern sport is supra-sentential (Price, 1998: p.89), broadcast globally, live on television, radio and across the Internet. Its discussion fills newspapers, magazines, and web forums. The audience's consumption of sport is now, at least partly, a mediated
consumption, influenced by various formats, sources and personalities, some of which may have little to do with the actual playing of the game itself, but all of which can impact the reception and comprehension of the sport; to quote Ted Friedman, 'Any medium . . . can teach you how to see life in new ways', and may 'reorganize perception' (1999: p.133), thus the digital game medium (alongside television, radio, print media et cetera) can have significant consequences for how we come to understand sport culture.

As Crawford (2009b) has argued, Huizinga (1949 [1938]) was perhaps wrong in describing his ‘magic circle’ as being a distinct area away from everyday life. As this chapter's opening quote articulates, games take up our time, they change our mood, they communicate ideas and values, they may influence our behaviour, and they have the capability to directly involve objects traditionally considered outside the boundaries of the circle (Conway, 2009b).

The inspiration for this thesis began with one simple question - after noting how various reviews, press releases and product blurbs concerning the sports videogame described the product not only as a 'simulation', but also claimed definitive connections between the virtual and the physical - *What then, do sports videogames simulate?*

The obvious answer would of course be that this genre of the digital game replicates, or at least attempts to imitate, the sport it claims to represent. Yet such an argument, though logically sound, is empirically problematic. In playing these products, one finds that each, though apparently united by a common theme, offers a markedly different experience in comparison to rival products; all are interpreting

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1 Whether referred to as digital, computer, or video game, this thesis uses such terms to describe any game played through a digital medium, whether that is personal computer, game console, mobile phone et cetera.
their source model in completely different ways, and more than this, they do not simply offer their own representation of the sport, but of an entire cultural industry.

Answering the original question, one must conclude that each digital game within the football genre offers not an unbiased simulation of the sport-as-played, but an approximation of the sport and its culture, based upon the developers’ own understanding of what constitutes the cultural and ludic experience of the game; as will be shown, this takes numerous, incongruous forms in terms of both representation and play.

On top of this, sport as popular culture is already a particularly polysemic entity, the meaning of which is partially determined by the consumer (Sandvoss, 2003), as Fiske (1989) states, the 'popular text is an agent and a resource, not an object… The pleasure derives both from the power and process of making meanings out of their resources and from their sense that these meanings are ours as opposed to theirs' (p.124-127); it is a semiotic reserve through which the enthusiast makes his or her own meanings both socially and culturally. As we will find in chapter one, this has many consequences for the player of the football digital game.

Videogames have emerged as a medium in an era where, as mentioned, the division between producer and consumer is merging and becoming increasingly interdependent for the completion or enactment of the text. Paradoxical concepts such as mass customisation (the buyer provides input at the assembly stage of their product, for example choosing the hardware that goes into their Personal Computer) are becoming common within our knowledge economy, as Leadbeater remarks:

The more knowledge-intensive products become, the more consumers will have to be involved in completing their production, to tailor the product to

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2 Derived from Latin “ludus” – Play.
their needs. … In a knowledge driven economy, consuming will become more a relationship than an act … with the consumer as the last worker on the production line… (1999: pp.32-33).

This approach to production has infiltrated many aspects of the end user experience, and has found its ultimate expression in the ergodicity\(^3\) (Aarseth, 1997) of the videogame; that is to say, the openness and customizability of the digital game text allows the consumer to edify and manipulate content on an unprecedented scale in relation to previous consumer entertainment products. The openness of the videogame product aligns itself fruitfully with the polysemy of sport culture, where one is driven to participate, or at least to involve oneself in a distinctly partisan, selective capacity.

In arguing for the value of this thesis, there are various criteria available for submission. Economically, one could cite the enormous impact of the videogame industry, with $11.7 billion dollars being spent on entertainment software in the USA alone in 2008 (ESA, 2009: online), whilst the average US consumer spends more on videogames than on print media, television or music (The Nielsen Company, 2010). The cultural prevalence of the digital game industry’s products can also be argued, digital games being key drivers of convergence and trans-medial storytelling for globalized entertainment (Jenkins, 2006), whether this is creating new cultural icons, such as Nintendo’s ever-present ‘Mario’ character (Kent, 2001), originally starring in *Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1983), or transferring cultural icons from other media, such as *Enter The Matrix* (Shiny Entertainment, 2003) and sequel *The Matrix: Path Of Neo* (Shiny Entertainment, 2005) that not only allowed the user to play as a selection of characters from *The Matrix* film trilogy (Wachowski Brothers, USA 1999-2003), but

\(^3\) From the Greek 'ergon' (work) and 'hodos' (path), as the player must choose a path and work through it, whereas in other media the path is chosen for them by the author.
actually broadened and deepened several of the films’ sub-plots by including footage
and dialogue not included in the original movies. Recent surveys are also showing
that the videogame is becoming the dominant medium of choice for young people,
who are now spending more time playing digital games than watching television
(Michigan State University, 2004: online).

The social consequences of engagement with the medium are also relevant;
whether this is discussing the use of the digital game as social tool (Ducheneaut &
Moore, 2004), as part of a group’s cultural identity (Jakobsson, 2007), as a point of
socialization (Jansz & Martens, 2005), or to the other end of the spectrum, where the
computer game is seen as inherently anti-social, as encouraging lone consumption and
an unhealthy lifestyle (Berger, 2002), as fostering anti-social behaviour (Fairfield,
2007), or to the longstanding debate over violence and aggression caused by these

Nevertheless, a doctoral thesis is still worthless if it does not contribute
anything new or original to its discipline. Therefore one must naturally ask what is the
contribution of this work to the wider field of Game Studies? In answering, I would
clarify that my contribution is targeted towards a number of objectives.

The Focus

Contemporary Game Studies research mainly focuses upon four areas: the
text, the user, the culture, and ontological questions relating to these issues
(Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, 2008). Whilst my work touches upon each of these areas, the
main focus of this dissertation is upon the text and the user, whereas questions
concerning videogame culture and the ontology of games arise from and are
addressed by these analyses. My thesis attends to three key aspects of Game Studies hermeneutics; the theoretical, the analytical, and the socio-cultural.

From a theoretical standpoint, the textual analysis attempts to address many current shortcomings noted within past and present examinations of the digital game text, and in a broader sense the shortcomings of current Game Studies academia in examining both the game and player.

Firstly there is an omission engendered by a significant negligence of the non-diegetic in studies of media; articles examining films, television shows, and now digital games all too often gloss over or otherwise completely ignore non-diegetic features such as the credits, the title sequence, or in the case of computer games, the introductory videos and menu systems. Yet these features, being the first audio-visual stimuli the consumer encounters, narrows and specifies the kinds of meanings the product intends. If we accept de Certeau’s (1984) argument that texts are like cities, where the reader/viewer/user can pick one of many streets to travel down in creating meaning through their engagement with the text (literally in the case of the videogame), then these initial encounters delineate the city limits, and suggest some of the more habitable high streets the user should travel down in their journey. As Rune Klevjer remarks in his discussion on the incorporation of video sequences into the digital game:

The cut-scene may indeed be a narrative of re-telling… but more importantly: it is a narrative of pre-telling, paving the way for the mimetic event, making it a part of a narrative act, which does not take place after, but before the event. The cut-scene casts its meaning forward, strengthening the diegetic, rhetorical dimensions of the event to come.
In line with this ignorance of the non-diegetic, the auditory environment of the
digital game is something that attracts scant discussion in Game Studies, perhaps an
historical ignorance due to the first home videogame console (1972's Magnavox
Odyssey) neglecting the incorporation of audio hardware or processing features;
sound is regarded as something of a second class priority in the videogame industry,
where graphics are paramount due to their multi-modal marketability within a popular
culture that is predominantly visual, gorging upon spectacle. As Fiske elaborates:

The spectacular involves an exaggeration of the pleasure of looking. It
exaggerates the visible, magnifies and foregrounds the surface appearance, and
refuses meaning or depth. When the object is pure spectacle, it works only on
the physical senses, the body of the spectator, not in the construction of a
subject. Spectacle liberates from subjectivity. Its emphasis on excessive
materiality foregrounds the body, not as a signifier of something else, but in its
presence.

(1989: p.84)

As we will see, this 'exaggeration of the pleasure of looking' is particularly
pertinent to our analysis of the nascent extreme genre of videogames, exemplified by
the FIFA Street series (EA Canada, 2005-present), whilst conversely the management
genre’s negation of this pleasure through sparse, minimalist graphics is a conscious
rejection of such convention.
The observer-participant case study in this thesis is an experimental approach to understanding the player. As is noted in the literature review, clearly outlined theoretical models for observing the gamer in situ are yet to be widely agreed upon by the Game Studies community. Consequently this chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive examination of the videogame player, but was instead conceived as a case study of a group of gamers to be used as an anchor for discussing wider issues related to videogames, culture and sociology.

The analysis presented in the case study is a hybrid approach formed through the appropriation of various concepts, detailed more extensively within the chapter’s introduction. The primary purpose of this model is to reverse the insular nature of much contemporary work on the videogame player, and work on many sub-cultures in general, instead attempting to position the playing of digital games within the user’s wider social practices that both influences and is influenced by elements existing outside of the videogame text and community. As discussed by Crawford (2009b), a life cannot be neatly divided between a person’s cultural practices, between online and offline activity, between work and recreation and so on, as T.L. Taylor reminds us, 'My call then is for nondichotomous models. One of the biggest lessons in Internet studies is that the boundary between online and offline life is messy, contested, and constantly under negotiation' (2006: p.153).

From an analytical perspective, this thesis attempts to extend the boundaries of the textual analysis towards an all-encompassing model for understanding the total system of the digital text; there is no privileging of diegetic over non-diegetic, or graphics over sound, or play over narrative: this is undertaken in the belief that one must examine all facets available equally to gain an understanding of the multiplicity of meanings within the text, and it is hoped that this investigation offers an exemplary
instance of such work. The analysis questions the nature of representation, play, simulation, spectacle, agency, catharsis and pleasure, whilst also probing the validity of theoretical concepts such as the paratext (Genette, 1997), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), uses and gratifications (Sherry et al, 2006), authorship, reception, community and others.

From a socio-cultural standpoint, I question the relationship between the various media representations of sport; how does one influence the other? Does one have domination over the other? Indeed, does the medium now determine both the representation and consumption of the culture? This extends to the participant in videogame culture, the player. I ask where the digital game sits within their recreational (and in certain instances, professional) lifestyle, what needs are met socially, how the formation and sustenance of the game’s community (editing, tournaments, forum discussion et cetera) operates, and what kind of pleasures are evoked through use of the text.

Yet this dissertation does not confine itself solely within the territory of the digital game text and culture, choosing to combine a focus on videogames with that of the world of sport, particularly the aforementioned football computer game genre. This decision has been made for numerous reasons, but is partly a response to the relative dearth of academic research on the sport genre of the digital game. Whilst MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Games) and Virtual Worlds (such as Second Life [Linden Labs, 2003-present]) receive much scholastic consideration (Castronova, 2005; Chan & Vorderer, 2006; MacCallum-Stewart, 2008; Steen et al, 2006; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; Taylor, 1999, 2003, 2006 and many more), the territory of the sport simulation remains under-examined, with very few analyses regarding the complex and multi-faceted nature of interaction between the sports
industry, the digital game industry, and the consumer; as Leonard (2006) phrases contemporary scholarship on the digital sports game, it currently exists as 'a barren wasteland of knowledge' (p.393).

Whilst the videogame resides in an immensely paratextual (Jones, 2008; Stewart, 2009) and intertextual universe, drawing in, and indeed constantly referencing influences from other media and cultures, the sports simulation takes this to an even more extreme degree, as Baerg explains when discussing the implementation of player statistics into the digital game (vital numerical information concerning the virtual athlete, for example Cristiano Ronaldo’s height and weight, through to numeric assessments of his dribbling speed, shooting power et cetera, normally rated between 0 and 99):

[N]ot only is the experience of playing the game intertextual (Crawford, 2008), but the very construction of the game exists as an intertextual process as well. Player ratings data provide one of the vital intertextual links between real world sport and its digital counterpart. The data fails to exist in its current form without the influence of other forms of mediation. According to Booth and Muller-Mohring, sports journalism, television broadcasts and sports talk radio shape the player rating construction process. Therefore, in building on Crawford’s work, intertextuality plays as much of a role in the production of the game as it does in its consumption.

(Baerg, 2010 forthcoming: p.8-9)

Further to this, though the playing of a game is always an intertextual, and often paratextual process, in terms of the sports videogame these are not so much
features as requirements for both effective participation and pleasure. One cannot
know which of the English Premier League football clubs are of a high quality if they
are unfamiliar with the division; one can also not know where to deploy a player such
as Liverpool’s Steven Gerrard, and how to use his avatar, without either prior
familiarity with his footballing career or through repeated playing of the digital game.
The intertextuality of the sports simulation, that is, the understanding one brings from
previous experience with the text and culture to their comprehension of the sports
simulation, is a synthesis of knowledge concerning both the videogame and football
sub-cultures; incomprehension of either would contribute towards a ludic disability in
engaging with the product. Thus in forming an analysis of the sports digital game, one
ignores either videogame or sport culture at his or her own peril.

The Simulation?

As mentioned, the word 'simulation' is often applied not only to sports
videogames, but also to games in other genres, most conspicuously in the SimCity
The term as deployed within the videogame industry’s marketing literature is derived
from the field of computer science, where simulation is, as defined by Princeton’s
WordNet, ‘(the technique of representing the real world by a computer program) "a
simulation should imitate the internal processes and not merely the results of the thing
being simulated‖". This has much in common with Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al’s (2008)
designation of the ‘process-oriented’ genre of digital games, of which the simulation
is a sub-genre, partially defined as reproducing 'minor details even at the expense of

4“Simulation.” WordNet, from http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwno2=&o0=1&o7=&o5=&o1=1&o6=&o4=&o3=&s=simula
tion&l=4&h=0001000#e – accessed 25/09/09
immediate gratification. The obstacle in these games need not be any external enemy; it is often the challenge of mastering the complexities of the interface' (2008: bold in original, p.44). In other words, a major qualifier in separating the 'simulation' from its relatively simpler brethren is the degree of complexity evident in its environment, both procedurally (graphical complexity, weather effects, object physics, AI) and ludically (the breadth of mechanics, parameters, inputs and the sophistication of the interface).

Such games heighten the intricacy of their environment at the expense of instant fulfilment, a design strategy that immediately distances such products from their arcade heritage, whose sole purpose was to immediately provide gratification to the gamer in an effort to retain their interest and subsequent investment, as Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al (2008) go on to state, 'quick and intense arcade-like experiences are usually anathema to process-oriented games as many strive for realism while some focus more on recreating the physical experience of dealing with a real-world system – and pay less attention to the game’s accessibility or how fun it is' (2008: p.74). As we will see this has many consequences for the pleasures afforded by the game and also the way the player views the experience; such differences can be identified as philosophically rooted in the distinction between what Kant would refer to as ‘vulgar’ and ‘pure’ taste (2004 [1790]).

As mentioned, each game analysed within this thesis includes features and behaviours that have nothing to do with the original system (the game-as-played), yet are still recognizable as part of the larger culture, e.g., business aspects of the modern sport industry. As Scott and Ruggill note, 'Sports games such as FIFA football ([EA Sports], 2004), ESPN Major League Baseball ([Blue Shift Games], 2004), and NHL 2004 ([EA Black Box Studios], 2004) claim at once to authentically represent both
“sport” and the commodification of sport, or rather competition and how that competition is packaged in and by the media' (Scott & Ruggill, 2004: pp.63-64).

Thus in using the term 'simulation' it is informative to understand precisely what is being simulated. Jesper Juul provides an instructive clarification in this instance:

A game does not as much attempt to implement the real world activity as it attempts to implement a specific stylized concept of a real-world activity. The tennis and football games implement only what are considered interesting core parts of the real world game... this goes to show how games are often stylized simulations; developed not just for fidelity to their source domain, but for aesthetic purposes. These are adaptations of elements of the real world. The simulation is oriented toward the perceived interesting aspects of football, tennis...

(Juul, 2005: p.172)

Though he is wrong in assuming that such games ‘implement only what are considered interesting core parts', Juul is correct that such simulations are overtly stylized for aesthetic purposes, to make them more familiar, impressive, and enjoyable for their target audience. Instead of only simulating the 'core parts' of the real-world sport, these simulations in fact simulate much more; cultural aspects (such as fandom, various forms of media coverage, consumerism et cetera), business aspects (wage negotiations, transfer negotiations, sponsorship and advertisement deals, and so on), psychological aspects (personality traits of players, management ‘mind games’), social aspects (relationships between manager and fans, manager and player, player
and player, to the non-diegetic online ranking and communication systems, multiplayer rating systems), and finally they can also incorporate aspects of popular culture that are at best tenuously linked to the original sport, such as the inclusion of hip-hop music and 'parkour' (urban free-running) game mechanics into the ‘extreme’ sub-genre of the football digital game, allowing avatars to run up walls for example.

Of course one cannot mention simulation without addressing the concept of the simulacrum articulated most notably by Baudrillard (2004), and the sports videogame fits neatly into this category, as Juul outlined above, they are 'stylized simulations; developed not just for fidelity to their source domain, but for aesthetic purposes'. They retain certain similarities, yet in doing so also take on a style of their own; they are interpretations bursting with verisimilitude, as Baudrillard would say, copies without any definitive original.

Yet in applying Baudrillard, perhaps especially so, one must pay attention to both the heritage of his concepts and the subtleties of his critical project. Baudrillard should be viewed as an inheritor of the Durkheimian tradition steeped in the analysis of human relations and communication; as Merrin’s (2005) overview elucidates, Baudrillard is best viewed as a radical exponent of this perspective. In his study of tribal societies, Durkheim perceived a clear separation between the ‘profane’ world and the ‘sacred’. Simply put, we can separate the profane as the everyday routine of production, and the sacred as that created through mass social engagement, typically congregations for festivals and religious rituals where the possibility exists that the group will undergo a psychological transformation, where the individual will comprehend a 'new life flowing within him whose intensity surprises him' (Durkheim, 1915: p.225); though Durkheim notes the cause for this is fundamentally social, not spiritual, it matters not to the participants, who undergo a genuine sensation of
transformation nonetheless, as Durkheim describes, 'he is raised above himself and that he sees a different life from the one he ordinarily leads' (1915: p.220).

Throughout his work Baudrillard would conceive of this collective tribal life as the contrast to our modern world of simulated artefacts, communities and relationships that base their imitation upon these symbolic connections.

This communal lifestyle exists in tandem with the concept of symbolic exchange which materializes itself most evidently in the ‘gift economy’ of these societies, where gifts are given regularly between members of the community, obeying three cardinal rules: one must give, one must receive, and then return a gift of greater value. Such practices act to increase social rank, strengthen social bonds, and create a resource of social power, due to a sense of obligation and the danger of losing face. Such custom extends to other forms of transaction within the studied tribes, e.g. speech, which again must be given, received, and crucially, returned on an equal or greater level; this stands in direct contrast to what Baudrillard calls the modern practice of ‘non-communication’, evident in for example the unilateral nature of the television broadcast. It should be noted that in this matter, though cited as an inheritor of McLuhan, Baudrillard is staunchly anti-McLuhanist in his view of the media (Merrin, 2005); whilst McLuhan saw electronic media as the potential retribalization of modern man, bringing us back to a communal mode of experience, Baudrillard saw it as the exact opposite, as the final destruction of this experience through the assimilation of the symbolic and sacred into the simulacral.

Baudrillard noted how the simulacrum was causing the extinction of symbolic relations within contemporary Western society, seen as a dangerous and disruptive practice to capitalism, with its constant threat of violent irruption. This change manifested itself most obviously through the emergence of the global media and the
prevailing trend of consumerism, where the symbolic was becoming replaced by what he called the semioticization of the object. To briefly outline, in *The System of Objects* (1996) Baudrillard noted how the object had become detached from its original symbolic role. That is to say the object, formerly tied to and realized through human activity, was now instead being utilised as a signifier; consumption is concerned not with functional value, but the idea and meaning of the object, thus explaining the monetary value of an object far exceeding its functional use, as its sign value became the prime determiner in such an economy.

As we will see this has a concrete effect upon the social relations of games players, where the sub-genre you play, the game you select, and the replica team shirt you wear, all have demonstrative sign value within the subculture that communicates certain qualities and characteristics.

This detachment from grounded symbolic exchange was coterminous with the desacrilization of society (again seen as a threat to the ethos of rationality and capitalist production), to undermine notions of community and therefore created a more individualized populace whose safe, profane productivity became mirrored in social relations and media technologies, such as the mobile phone as Merrin illuminates:

The mobile phone ... does, however, provide an excellent Baudrillardian example of a form that only appears to increase communication, the streets full of oblivious, down-turned individuals thumbing their abbreviated and almost meaningless messages back and forth representing a dystopic relation of that world of non-communication ... For him the man in the street 'talking away to no one' represents 'a new urban figure', one imposing on everyone else 'the
virtual presence of the network’. Emphasizing the priority of symbolic relations against such a sociality and public imposition, Baudrillard describes him as ‘a living insult to the passers by’.

(2005: p.23)

Put simply, Baudrillard believed mobile phones *simulate* communication, much like television phone-ins *simulate* debate, and online polls *simulate* political involvement; they strip it of its symbolic potential, that is to say its ability to cause confrontation, transformation and perhaps even violence, instead creating a safe, profane and expurgated environment. Whilst there is merit to this argument, especially in the representational techniques utilised by the sports videogame, in my observer-participant case study I hope to illustrate how certain aspects of these lived, symbolic relations are still regularly enacted through the use of these products.

Baudrillard believed that the removal of the symbolic through the implementation and use of media and technology creates the simulacrum; the sanitized, verisimilitudinous copy of something that never wholly existed in the first instance. Baudrillard traces the historical and philosophical heritage of the simulacrum, from Plato’s warnings of the deceptive power of the image, to the 8th Century iconoclasm of Byzantine, which saw the simulation of Christian figures in art and sculpture as immoral and powerfully distorting, to the modern day where we are now so immersed in a world filled with ‘the evil demon of images’ (Baudrillard, 1987: p.28) that their powers of ‘diabolical seduction’ wholly consume us so that we cannot now distinguish between the simulacrum and whatever may exist outside of it (ibid.). Simply put, we, as a culture, have so perfected the creation and exchange of signs that
we possess the means to create a fantasy world ‘more real than real’ (Baudrillard, 1990: p.11) due to the seductive veracity of the replication. As Merrin ruminates:

The ‘disenchanted’ simulation whose ‘hyperreality’ eclipses experience in its technical perfection and absolute semio-realization of the real. The simulacrum, therefore, is marked not by an unreality but instead by its excess of reality and truth, by a ‘diabolical’ conformity… that makes it ‘more real than real’… a transparent hypervisible image, a ‘pure and simple exhibition’ in which everything is immediately realized for us in advance in a single hyperreal dimension.

(Merrin, 2005: p.39)

As we will see, this is evident within the sports simulation; a secure, sterile replication of sporting ideals, full of excess in the plethora of statistics and data that serve to provide an unambiguous, exact conception of the sport’s 'reality'. This is furthered by any potential for violence, subversion or transgression being wholly ignored by the developer. As we will see, the consumption of such simulacra is more and more tied to the consumer’s conception of the sport; as Baudrillard states, we exist ‘in the denial of the real’ constantly utilizing the ‘simulacrum of the world’ and its concurrent ‘alibi of participation’ from the safety of our own homes (1998: p.35).

Indeed this conception of the sport videogame as ‘the real thing’ is even perpetuated by those directly involved within the sports industry, who use the latest sports videogames as a didactic resource. As NBA (National Basketball Association) team Houston Rockets’ general manager Daryl Morey remarked in an interview, “I don't play EA Sports as a game. I use it as a tool” (Good, 2008: online).
This was in response to the incorporation of a feature known as ‘Dynamic DNA’ into the *NBA Live* series (EA Sports, 1995-present), which uses data gathered from the latest NBA matches, analyzed and categorized by a real-time video-indexing engine created by Synergy Sports Technology, and then applies it to the player and team information in-game (i.e. player behaviour and success rates, favoured movements and tactics), so that what statistically occurs in the real world sport is reflected in the digital game. This feature is utilized by the developer and wider industry to invoke a scientific discourse that furthers their claim that the simulation is now a mirror of the real-world sport, for example in Electronic Arts’ description of a similar feature for the *FIFA* series (EA Sports, 1993-present), called ‘My Live Season’, “The new My Live Season… will feature weekly updates of player form, transfers, injuries, suspensions, fixtures, results and league standings, creating a mode that mirrors the real world, where gamers play their favourite real-world teams’ games in complete authenticity”.5

Thus the product attempts to further erase evidence of its own overt mediation, as Baerg states:

The determinist element of the Dynamic DNA metaphor also suggests the potential transparency or even invisibility of the digital game medium. If Dynamic DNA data represents how real world basketball players have acted in a given game and determines how players will respond in the simulation, the medium ostensibly disappears. To see the real game is to increasingly see the virtual game. To see the virtual game is to increasingly see the real game. Graphical verisimilitude may be important, but the integration of DNA data

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5 Electronic Arts Ltd, ‘FIFA 10 Live Season 2.0 Tutorial Video’, *Playstation Store*, 2009 – accessed 08/10/09
into the simulation blurs the line between the real and the virtual to a new degree.

(forthcoming, 2010: p.18)

Yet, as I aim to demonstrate through my textual analysis, this appeal by the industry to scientific rhetoric, as a 'system of nonsocial, nonpolitical truths grounded in nature and thus objective, universal, and unchallengeable' (Fiske, 1989: p.183) is required to mask the fact that these videogames are all developed from an inherently biased and subjective position, creating simulacrum (Baudrillard, 2004) that offer a utopian, perfectly-realized version of the sport that has never existed, and furthermore never can exist except within the simulacrum. As Baudrillard laments in *The Perfect Crime* in regards to the simulacrum's technical supremacy, 'the world has become real beyond our wildest expectations' (1996b: p.64).

The term 'simulation' within this thesis refers to Baudrillard’s critical concept. This stands in contrast to the rhetoric of the videogame industry in claiming that these products are accurate simulations of the real-world sporting event.

My hope is that by using the term 'simulation' throughout my analysis, attention is drawn to the often large distance between the genuine sporting event and the computerized approximation of it (if any approximation occurs at all, as we will see many aspects of football culture are simply neglected). We should not forget, though the videogame industry uses 'simulation' in a generic fashion inherited from computer science, and indeed applies it to these games as claims to their authenticity in relation to sport culture, one prominent definition of simulation, used within football adjudication itself, is defined by the FIFA rule book as 'attempts to deceive… feigning… pretending' (FIFA, 2009: p.117). My thesis is directed towards addressing
how, why, and to what degree these simulations deceive in claiming to represent the
definitive version of football, and how this impacts the culture, the community, the
player experience, the future of the genre, and our conception of sport.

Finally, I move the concept of the simulacrum a step forward, using these
digital games as the anchor to discuss what I view as a culture of euphemisms, where
the 'real' thing is being replaced not only by its simulacrum, but by simulacrums
operating as euphemisms, removing anything that has the potential to cause offence,
replacing it with milder, sanitised, inoffensive versions.
The Thesis Structure

Immediately proceeding this chapter outline are two closely connected sections, Literature Review and Methodologies, the former discussing theories and work relevant to my thesis, the latter describing the methods I utilized for my analysis of the digital game. After these two sections I provide a History of the Football Digital Game, detailing its representational and ludic features, their development over time, and the specific games selected for analysis within this thesis. Then come the thesis chapters, each investigating a separate aspect of the football videogame genre.

Chapter One provides a sociological case study of a group of gamers playing the televisual Pro Evolution Soccer series (Konami, 2001-present). Taking as its major sociological foundation the symbolic interactionist perspective first formalized by Herbert Blumer, this section applies, among other theories, Erving Goffman’s frame analysis to the study of a selection of groups playing different iterations of Konami’s televisual series of games. I firstly examine the demographics of the gamers involved, and how this relates to notions of technicity (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006) and masculinity within the realms of both digital game and sport culture. I then consider past sociological approaches to the issue of the game player, from Huizinga’s (1949 [1938]) commonly invoked and often misapplied concept of the magic circle, to Ned Polsky’s (1967) groundbreaking ethnographical analysis of pool hustlers, and finally to contemporary participant observation accounts such as T.L. Taylor’s (2006) analysis of players of MMOGs. In heeding Crawford’s call (2009b) for a sociological approach that attends to a more inclusive understanding of these activities as one
segment of a larger, varied social life, I link these practices to the user’s wider comprehension of sport and culture, as a single part of an increasingly complex intertextual and paratextual endeavour.

The chapter is sectioned into five distinct categories; Dress, Custom (routine actions, conventions and rules set by the group), Body Language and Proxemics (proxemics being an analysis of the distances between actors, first introduced by Edward Hall (1966)), and Argot (specialised language used by a certain group). Also considered is the social meta-game discovered after numerous participant-observational sessions, whereby certain tactics and strategies were invoked by players to disrupt the social hierarchy of the group, to either lessen another’s social prestige or to increase their own.

**Chapter Two** is an investigation of the non-diegetic space of the digital game, anchored through a discussion of the start menus and introductory videos present in recent examples from each of the three sub-genres of the football simulation. This chapter discusses the importance of the non-diegetic space as a symbolic structure through which the audience absorbs specific representational and ludic meanings before entering the diegetic gamespace, shaping particular expectations for proceeding visual style and ludic engagement.

**Chapter Three** studies another niche, often undervalued aspect of the videogame (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, 2008): the audio system. The aural environment is separated into four distinct categories, with each sub-genre’s use of these categories analyzed to understand both the developer’s motivation and the user’s reception in relation to the wider football culture.
Chapter Four is an extension of this auditory examination, focusing upon the inclusion (or subversion) of traditional sports commentary within these products. The televisual genre follows broadcast convention, utilizing live commentary teams consisting of a famous commentator and ex-footballer, whilst at the other end of the scale the extreme genre subverts such conventions through a rebellious use of celebrity radio DJs and alternative music. We will seek to discover how the producer’s choice positions the user and affects the consumption of the text.

Chapter Five investigates the neutrality of the machine. Whilst the computer is ideal for calculating game states and designating winners and losers, it remains a poor host in regards to the game being used as socio-cultural space with its own set of rules and etiquette. To borrow Smith’s terminology (2004), the machine can always calculate intra-mechanic conflict (arising from the game rules/mechanics), but never extra-mechanic conflict (arising from social interaction between players). For example, in American Football it is considered poor sportsmanship to carry on scoring touchdowns when it is clear the game is won, thus the winning team is encouraged to “run down the clock” with meaningless plays so that the loser can save face; to do otherwise would be seen as extremely poor conduct, and would no doubt elicit outrage from attending fans and condemnation from the sports media. Yet in videogames, no such rules exist, the machine cannot calculate social conventions such as this. By looking at these absences, we question what forms of play are being celebrated by these products, and conversely what is being neglected or undermined.

Chapter Six scrutinizes what is referred to as the cybernetic system; the dynamic system of input and output, describing the variations between being perfectly balanced, to completely out of balance, and how this shapes the user experience. For
example, the Nintendo *Wii* console’s default control system is known as the *Wiimote*, a remote control that, through the use of accelerometers and infrared detection hardware, allows the user to play games that respond to motion; a golf game requires the user to swing the remote like a golf club, a tennis game requires the user to manoeuvre the remote as if making tennis shots, and so on. This is what I refer to as a *balanced* cybernetic system, where the input/output ratio can be expressed as 1:1; one movement by the gamer equals one movement by the avatar. Games using traditional control systems, involving analog sticks and buttons, are never 1:1, yet historically the more a game tends to claim “simulational” value, the more it tends to aim for this 1:1 ratio. For example, the *Microsoft Flight Simulator* series maintains a host of complex interactions and controls, and the player is able to purchase and use a ‘flight joystick’, a controller that mimics the features of many real yokes used to pilot aircraft, thus bringing the cybernetic system close to the 1:1 ratio. We look at how the sport simulation approaches the balancing of the cybernetic system, and how this influences the experience offered by the text.

**Chapter Seven** builds upon the previous chapter by analyzing the game mechanics and user interfaces to illustrate the underlying ideology of play held by each genre; I also introduce the opposing concepts of *hyper-ludicity* and *contra-ludicity*, and their implementation within the text. Using both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the game interface, I discuss the bias each product holds towards certain performances, whether that be offensive or defensive, violent or passive, and so on. We then relate this to the wider sporting culture, asking if contemporary trends in the global media-sport complex (Maguire, 1999) are compatible with these biases.
Chapter Eight focuses upon the videogame avatar. Firstly, I discuss the shortcomings of current definitions and studies of the avatar; these shortcomings are especially relevant to the sports simulation where games are neither creating a fictional character nor, in the televisual and management genres, attempting to exaggerate or caricature certain traits as is the custom of many other digital game genres. I then utilise Kromand’s (2007) ‘avatar categorization’ method of classification to understand how each genre’s use of avatars provides particular affordances and pleasures, both ludically and visually.

Chapter Nine is an examination of the sport celebrity within the football digital game. I begin by describing the modern cultural separation between hero and celebrity, expressed most tangibly within the media through criticism of “fifteen minute celebrities” (This Is London, 2008: online) emerging through reality television shows such as Big Brother (Endemol, 1999-present). Such criticisms attack the apparently undeserved manner in which these contestants are afforded their sought-after status; celebrity is viewed as something that ideally is to be earned through hard work and natural talent. Thus we have the sporting celebrity whose fame is seen as earned through notable accomplishments within their chosen discipline; Tiger Woods for winning fourteen championships and (currently) being ranked as world number one; Wayne Gretzky for his astonishing attainment of forty regular-season records in ice hockey; footballer Alfredo di Stefano for his outstanding scoring record, and so on.

Within the sports videogame, the celebrity avatar is given the means to achieve these heroic feats, equipped with special abilities and individual ability ratings far higher than the average unknown player. In this way the celebrity avatar provides for
the another form of *hyper-ludicity* in comparison to the regular avatar, as the gamer is now able to achieve feats within the gamespace previously impossible with the standard footballer. We find that certain sporting paradigms are buried within these representations; the notion of foreign flair versus 'British grit' and hard work, for example, and I illuminate how such cultural stereotypes are variously embedded throughout the studied texts.

**Chapter Ten** analyses the goal celebrations inherent to every sub-genre. I first trace the history of the goal celebration in relation to increasing media attention upon the sport, noting the evolution of the celebration from polite gesture to eccentric, acrobatic or indeed volatile message broadcast across media super-structures to audiences of millions, if not billions during tournaments such as the FIFA World Cup. I then examine the inclusion of the celebration into each sub-genre, and its increasing importance within the televisual sub-genre as not only visual spectacle but also as ludic ostentation. I discuss the obvious neutering of any celebration that acts as social or political commentary, such as footballer Paolo Di Canio’s infamous fascist salute. Whilst the gamer is given great freedom in choosing their celebration from a host of animations, or indeed performing their own celebration in the latest televisual iterations, there exists the paradox that the user is also greatly inhibited by these choices; this leads to my conclusion concerning the nature of agency and meaning-making in these products.

**Chapter Eleven** is a discussion of the latest addition to the televisual genre, known variously as the ‘Become A Legend’ and ‘Be A Pro’ modes. The basis of each is to provide for the user control over a single avatar for the entire duration of a match. The avatar is firstly created by the player, given certain representational and
ludic characteristics, from height to weight, facial features and hair style, whilst particular forms of agency are altered for positive or negative effect; genetic, technical and mental skills, such as speed, passing accuracy and aggressiveness.

The ultimate objective is to become a world-renowned player through winning all domestic and international honours with your chosen team. This chapter questions the distinct ways in which the player, as autonomous agent within the football industry, is represented, as well as the wider culture and business of the sport itself.
**Literature Review**

The discipline of Game Studies is at the moment a particularly dynamic and eclectic field. Not only do games, like other media, sit at the crossroads between technology, culture and society, but they also maintain one crucial difference that sets them apart; ergodic interaction (Aarseth, 1997). This requires the re-conception of many approaches, not least of all those targeted towards analysis of the media audience, if indeed “audience” is an applicable term to a consumer so involved with the product’s enactment.

I have investigated various topics (leisure, sport, sociology, psychology, play, New Media, and of course videogames to name but a few) and related sub-topics within each. In writing this literature review I adopt the schematic of the upturned pyramid; I will discuss firstly the works on broader subjects that have informed my thesis, before moving on to more specific influences. I will also offer particular theoretical influences within each chapter’s introduction where relevant.

**Media and Culture**

Definitions and evaluations of media and play are excellent starting points to formulate the more specific questions of my research. Williams (1974) provides valuable insight into the complex relationship between society and technology; though written before the mainstream use of personal computing in the home, it remains an important text by an author whose ruminations on the interactions between society and technology were prescient. Arguing strongly against technological determinism, Williams describes comprehensively the process by which new technologies are adapted to serve social needs, such as extrapolating the widespread
adoption of photography as a cheap, efficient means to strengthen familial connections in a time where families were becoming increasingly mobile and diasporic; such social needs are now expressed through new technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet, as Stubbs (1999) also suggests.

There have been many texts that have proved invaluable in providing rigorous overviews of academic disciplines relevant to this thesis, in particular work by John Storey (2009) and Longhurst et al (2008), are exemplary in their depth and breadth, the former illustrating how to apply media and cultural theory to popular culture, whilst the latter gives an exhaustive overview of the field of cultural studies. John Fiske's work (1985, 1989) also deserves mention in this vein, as his elegant analyses of popular culture (and, crucially, its audience) has been of enormous help in articulating my own work.

If New Media can be seen as a further extension of this need to maintain relationships as outlined by Williams (1974), then Terry Flew (2005) provides an admirable summary of the field, especially in detailing the 'three Cs of convergent media' (Flew, 2005: p.3): Communication Networks, Computing/Information Technology, and Content (Media). The interaction between these three creates the New Media we use today; mobile phones, satellite television, DVDs, and of course, the Internet. He also details what separates 'New' from 'Old' media (ibid.), notably that New Media is manipulable (i.e., transformable), networkable, and impartial (that is to say, digital information, no matter what the content, is simply a collection of zeroes and ones to the network it travels across). Manovich’s (2001) articulation of the five principles of New Media and his outlining of the defining differences between videogames and other entertainment media is also key:
Navigation through 3D space is an essential, if not the key, component of gameplay. *Doom* and *Myst* present the user with a space to be traversed, to be mapped out by moving through it… narrative and time are equated with movement through 3-D space, progression through rooms, levels, or words. In contrast to modern literature, theatre, and cinema, which are built around psychological tensions between characters and movement in psychological space, these computer games return us to ancient forms of narrative in which the plot is driven by the spatial movement of the main hero.

(p.246-7)

This perspective finds an ally in Jenkins’ (2004) proposition that digital game narrative should be analyzed in terms of space, not time, coining the phrase ‘environmental storytelling’ to communicate how stories are embedded within the game's architecture, awaiting discovery by the active user.

Castells (2000) gives a methodical, thought-provoking overview of the emerging ‘Network Society’, detailing how the boundaries of time and space are becoming submerged beneath the communicational infrastructure of advanced capitalist states, demarcating a technological poverty line where you are either connected or excluded from McLuhan’s ‘global village’.

Dovey and Kennedy (2006) provide an analysis of videogames as New Media content, and their notion of ‘technicity’ borrowed from David Tomas (2000) is interesting, being the formation of new identities based on technological interaction (the word being an amalgamation of technology and ethnicity), as people become more integrated with technology and the distinction between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ lives becomes blurred, demonstrated by social websites such as *Facebook* and
Myspace, Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) such as World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), and professional gamers such as Jonathan Wendel who have become millionaires through the playing of videogames as an occupation.

Dovey and Kennedy then utilise this term as an example of cultural hegemony (following from Italian philosopher Gramsci’s [1992] original use of the term), where dominant technicities create and propagate certain primary meanings in association with particular technologies (both hardware and software), that in turn necessitate the creation of dominant associated identities, and consequently alternative, subversive identities that do not fit the prevailing mould; of course such dominance can also render these unorthodox identities ‘invisible’ due to their acceptance and internalization of the hegemony:

The power of hegemonic dominance is such that, first, technicities that do not fit the dominant model are made invisible by those that do and, second, that those of us who do not belong to the dominant group also internalize their power and make ourselves invisible.

(Dovey and Kennedy, 2006: p.16)

In terms of digital games this invisibility relates most obviously to female players, as is discussed in the observation-participant case study. As Williams et al report (2009) in their study of online gamers, women were substantially more likely than men to self-report the incorrect amount of hours spent playing, providing consistently lower numbers than in actuality. This discrepancy can be explained with reference to the dominant technicity, that being the young, technologically-savvy male player. Female gamers do not readily fit the stereotype of gamer as anti-social, ‘nerdy’
male, and all the negative connotations that readily attach themselves to such a
categorization. Thus the female users tend to lie more, obfuscating their participation.
Or of course as Dovey and Kennedy also mention (2006), they subvert such
stereotypes in an ironic, post-modern manner, such as the all-girl gamer clan, PMS
(Psycho Men Slayers), showing a determined, if minority resistance to the dominant
technicity.

Bolter & Grusin’s (1999) conception of ‘remediation’ describes how New
Media are often established, aesthetically and culturally, through modification and
adaptation of existing media’s principles, as the authors articulate:

[W]e call the representation of one medium in another remediation, and we
will argue that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital
media. What might seem at first to be an esoteric practice is so widespread that
we can identify a spectrum of different ways in which digital media remediate
their predecessors, a spectrum depending on the degree of perceived
competition or rivalry between the new media and the old.
(Bolter & Grusin, 1999: p.45)

Many examples of this can be found either on the Internet or within digital
games. For example the ‘webpage’ being called such because it is formatted similar to
the page of a book, the use of virtual cameras and computer-generated cut-scenes in
videogames, and so on.

They also describe the tensions between the opposing forces of ‘immediacy’
and ‘hypermediacy’; the former attempting to disguise any technological intrusion
(such as computer-generated imagery in Hollywood films blending seamlessly with
footage shot on-location), the other consciously presenting a technological patina to the viewer to fascinate and engage them with the technology. Such theories are vital to understanding the three football simulation sub-genres’ visual designs, as some seek to remediate other media and provide immediacy to the viewer (notably the televisual simulation), whilst others revel in their hypermediacy (the management simulation, whose tendency towards hypermediacy is a remediation of standard Internet browser program features).

Of course, these mediated representations are constantly evolving, as television follows videogame (such as the inclusion of computer-generated replays for controversial incidents, e.g., to show if the ball crossed the line), and videogame follows television (the entire televisual genre), as Bolter & Grusin eloquently describe, 'Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation. Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all' (1999: p.55).

**Sport, Play & Industry**

Huizinga’s treatise (1949 [1938]) on the centrality of play to culture and civilization provides an excellent starting point in defining how play and culture interact and overlap, and also illustrates the historical importance of play to society. Being published originally in 1938, Huizinga’s core ideas on play must be adapted for the videogame medium, rather than dogmatically translated. Particularly relevant are his thoughts on cheating (breaking the ‘illusion’ of the play-world) and community formation (how ‘being apart together’ in the ‘magic circle’ of play forms strong social bonds), as he explains:
The spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its illusion - a pregnant word which means literally “in-play” (from inlusio, illudere or inludere). Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community… A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over… the feelings of being “apart together” in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game.

(1949: p.11-12)

Later, writers such as Lasch (1991) articulated how this play element is steadily becoming commodified, and how this threatens the notion of play itself, which, seen as risk, is under threat by the influence of business whose very purpose is to create stable, predictable conditions, 'Risk, daring, and uncertainty – important components of play – have no place in industry or in activities infiltrated by industrial standards, which seek precisely to predict and control the future and to eliminate risk' (p.102); this has some interesting consequences for the representation of the industry within the examined texts. Sandvoss (2003) also provides an insightful overview of the commodification of sport, deftly dissecting the relation between sport, media, and globalization, summarizing:
In an attempt to emulate rational regimes of production, which Ritzer has summarized under the term 'McDonaldization', football clubs have begun to match fast food restaurants in their search for maximal efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. Such efforts have resulted in increasingly predictable, plain and interchangeable products that are available well beyond regional or national frontiers... Processes based on the rationalization of contemporary football such as the universalization and the standardization of football clubs have made distinction a matter of individual rather than collective definitions.

(Sandvoss, 2003: p.172)

Sandvoss then continues on to discuss fandom in particular:

As vision acts as the fundamental dimension of perception in contemporary football, other dimensions of experience have been impoverished. In light of the increasingly standardized and pasteurized semiotic structure of contemporary football, DIY citizenship is progressively transformed into 'IKEA citizenship' in which fans merely choose between interchangeable, ever similar, stereotypical messages and discourses, rooted in a pseudo-creative and pseudo-participatory environment. Fans are left to reassemble pre-cut parts with uniform results, from which the only possible digression is complete failure of assembly. Thus a number of fans in my study express the fear that the basis of their fandom was eroded in the face of the rationalization and simulation of football.

(Sandvoss, 2003: p.174)
Thus, as Sandvoss perceives it, the contemporary landscape of football is one increasingly bereft of any definitive cultural, social or political history, all football clubs are becoming a *tabula rasa* for the prospective fan, allowing them to project their own prejudices and desires upon the team, their own idea of exactly what it is ‘their’ team represents, which could be completely different to another fan of the same team.

This strikes a critical resonance for the football simulation, as cultural, social and political aspects of any club within the game are immediately severed on integration into the game’s database. For example, Barcelona’s roots as symbol of Catalan independence are completely disregarded when entered into the *Football Manager 2008* (Sports Interactive, 2007) database, to go against Barcelona’s own motto, it is absolutely not *Més que un club* (‘more than a club’). There are no rivalries, e.g., between Arsenal FC and Tottenham Hotspur, and no teams (domestic or national) are renowned for crowd trouble, illegal behaviour in the transfer market or violent play. Conversely, no teams are renowned for great support, impeccable behaviour or clean play. All teams and players are a ‘clean slate’ for the gamer to project their fantasy upon.

Various other authors refine their perspective to produce focused articles on the effects of globalization and commodification in sport, such as Manzenreiter’s chapter on the affiliation between sport and identity (2006), Horne’s theorization on the industrialization of sport, 'An urbanised industrial society with relatively efficient transportation and communication systems combined with a standard of living that allowed people the time and money to play and watch sports was the ideal environment for the emergence of commercial sport' (2006: p.43) and McPherson’s
analyses of consumerist cultures in sport gives an important historical perspective to the changing consumption of the game.

Hargreaves’ (2002) discussion on the tensions between globalization and nationalism (following on from Ohmae’s *The End of the Nation State* [1995]) is an interesting treatise on the global nature of contemporary sport, and Maguire’s (1999) study on the homogenization of Western sport (suggesting that lesser-known sports must adopt features and practices of their dominant counterparts if they are to find success in the global market) partially explains the emergence of the extreme simulation as a genre that takes elements from skateboarding and ‘parkour’ (‘free-running’) before recombining them under an urbanized football aesthetic. All such research creates a variety of resources to draw from in providing a historical and cultural overview of the sport digital game's evolution.

Following from this, in terms of sport and videogame history, books such as Polley’s (1998) tracing of the interaction between sport and society in the 20th Century (particularly football and England) is commendably thorough. Kent’s (2002) history of the videogame industry is also extensively researched and provides not only an overview of the industry as an emerging global business and culture, but also of important hardware and software milestones (for example, details of numerous console manufacturer’s marketing strategies and the design decisions behind various videogames); of particular interest to my own work are facts and figures concerning the sports genre, with Kent (ibid.) illuminating the long, and extraordinarily profitable, relationship between videogames and sport since William Higinbotham’s *Tennis for Two* (1958).

Goldlust’s (1987) evaluation of the sport/media/society triumvirate is even more relevant today than when first published. Highlighting the intensifying
incorporation of sport into everyday media practice, Goldlust’s analysis would prove prophetic as the media landscape now boasts 24/7 sports television channels, automated updates for football scores on mobile phones, over one hundred and fifty million soccer websites, and the pivotal relationship existing between the modern manager and the media, algorithmically expressed in games such as *Football Manager*.

Goldlust’s underlining of the steady movement from amateur to professional, and from leisure pursuit to industry are also applicable to the evolution of the videogame industry, as its humble beginnings as a playful appropriation of technology to its current standing as multi-billion pound global business, and the move from ‘amateur’ to ‘professional’ by videogame players is occurring with increased frequency (indeed, a group of professional gamers were interviewed and observed as part of chapter one's case study of the player); this movement towards professionalization is becoming common within numerous sub-cultural interests as a natural conclusion of their commodification (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Rambusch, Jakobsson & Pargman, 2007; Taylor, 2005)).

**The Player**

Sociologically, books focusing on methodology such as Ang’s (1990) guide on the politics of audience research, du Gay et al’s (1997) famous inspection of the Sony Walkman, and Miller and Slater’s (2000) guide to ethnographical research on the Internet are all useful starting points. Miller and Slater in particular ruminate upon the hollow division between the so-called ‘real’ and ‘virtual’, pointing out quite convincingly how the participants in their research would move seamlessly between each categorization and regularly incorporate them into the same sphere of everyday

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*According to a google search for “soccer” performed on the 24/06/09*
social experience (emailing a friend to discuss something that happened at school, using the Internet to keep communication regular within a diasporic family et cetera).

Giddens’ work (1993a, 1993b) is an invaluable guide to conducting any form of sociological work in the field, and his clear outline of the various modes of enquiry (from participant-observation to quantitative and qualitative surveys) is admirably concise and informative. Offering both broad outlines and specific case examples, Gidden demarcates the field of sociology historically and theoretically, providing the reader an excellent foundation for further reading.

In this vein, Goffman’s (1973, 1986) idiosyncratic work deserves special mention, straddling lines between sociology, ethnography, anthropology and psychology. Goffman’s conception and articulation of how we define, organize and act out our everyday lives in terms of the various ‘frames’ of context we find ourselves within is suitably eloquent and finds particular applicability in the medium of videogames. To summarise Goffman’s notion of frame analysis quite simply, a person’s behaviour changes and adapts dependent upon the frame they find themselves within; to scream and shout at the doctor’s office is not acceptable behaviour, to do so at a football match is not only accepted but expected. Thus the ‘identity’ of the person is dynamic and shifting throughout their day to day interactions, much like Jung’s concept of the persona (Hockley, 2001); we all have the capability to maintain separate work personas, father/mother personas, son/daughter personas, and so forth.

As mentioned, this form of analysis is particularly beneficial when applied to scenarios involving games as the circumstances are suitably unique to be able to identify the many differences between people’s “everyday” behaviour and the separate behaviours they can exhibit when immersed within the fictive world of play.
In relation to the sports videogame, the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ once more holds little value. It was a common practice within the communities observed to use information gathered from a football website/television show about an up-and-coming star player to investigate said player’s attributes within the digital game. The opposite would also occur, where a star player is ‘discovered’ within the digital game and the user then searches for details of this footballer on the Internet, or even becomes a fan of the footballer’s current team. This concept of ‘discovery’ within the game world is used by the game developer to increase the longevity and social use of the product, as Masuyama comments when discussing *Pokemon*:

The most significant aspect of the Pokemon concept is the fact that it is not a [closed] product. Take film: we see a beginning, an end, and finally, the credits rolling. That is a ‘closed' product. The Game Boy title Pokemon also has a beginning and an end, and even credits… [But] that hardly means the game is over. At the end, in order to complete the Monster Encyclopedia, the player sets out once again... in search of Pokemon. Also, a player may use a cable to trade Pokemon with other players.

(2002: p.41)

The gamer thus uses their experience of the product (and the sports-media complex in general) to become a ‘knowledge leader’ within the games-playing community (Blanchard, 2004), gaining status and authority through their mastery of the game. Bourdieu’s concept of social and cultural capital (1984) is also usefully adapted by Consalvo (2007) as *gaming* capital, applied specifically to the often diasporic community found in videogame sub-cultures (Mayra, 2006), as the kind of
practice detailed above becomes one of, if not the only way to gain status within such geographically dispersed groups, where the interactions between members centres singularly upon the playing of games.

Brian Sutton-Smith’s (2001: pp.10-11) work on play offers seven useful groupings, four of which are particularly relevant to gaming: ‘play as progress’ (play that furthers a person’s social, moral or cognitive development), ‘Rhetoric of play as identity’ (‘when the play tradition is seen as a means of confirming, maintaining or advancing the power and identity of the community of players’), ‘Rhetoric of play as power’ (a way of gaining social/financial status through successful play), and ‘Rhetoric of the self’ (‘Play is idealised by attention to the desirable experiences of the players – their fun, their relaxation, their escape – and the intrinsic or aesthetic satisfaction of the play performances’). Such categories many correlation with Stebbins’ (1992) work, detailed further below, and have a pronounced influence upon the analysis within the observer-participant case study.

Crabbe et al’s studies (2006a, 2006b) of football fans, funded by EA Sports (a tier of multinational game publisher Electronic Arts), provides valuable data on the average football fan; for example viewing figures, how and where they gain information (as mobile phones and the Internet are becoming an increasingly visible part of the football fan’s ritual, what Jenkins would call ‘trans-media storytelling’ (2006)), also the manner in which they use these experiences in private/social settings, all such information is gathered to then provide a list of binary qualities associated with football fandom (loyal/fickle, working class/middle class, passionate/effete, and so on). Though the research in and of itself provides no revelatory details or analyses on football culture, they do at least provide interesting oppositions that invite discussion vis-a-vis the changing character of football culture.
Boyle and O’Connor (1991) provide a brief but perceptive overview of the male pleasure in watching sport (comparing it to the female enjoyment of the soap opera), whilst Goldstein and Bredemeister’s (1977) thoughtful piece on the multifaceted relation between sport, media and socialization is provocative if perhaps too eclectic for such a small essay.

Specific to games, there are certain analyses that have proved useful in understanding the interaction between operator and game. Csikszentmihalyi’s work (1988, 2002) on the notion of ‘flow’, ‘the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter’ (2002: p.4), finds obvious connections with videogames.

In the introduction to Csikszentmihalyi’s edited book, *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (1988), Csikszentmihalyi defines eight fundamental components that shape a person’s enjoyment of an experience, all of which find resonance with the game experience: challenging activity that requires skill; clear goals and feedback; a merging of action and awareness; concentration on the task at hand; loss of self-consciousness; the paradox of control; the transformation of time; and what Csikszentmihalyi references as the 'autotelic experience', literally an event which has within itself the purpose of its existence or happening; in other words, ‘for fun’. During my sessions with players of football simulations it became clear that this flow state was an end in and of itself, gamers were in a way 'flow junkies', playing the game to get their daily dose of flow.

Williams (2005) gives a perceptive if brief overview of the history of social videogame play, and Calvert’s (2005) study and subsequent conclusion that gaming acts a foundation for young males’ social interaction, aligning itself with Jenkins’ (1998) earlier theoretical assertion that videogames have replaced the ‘boyhood
backyard’ for adolescent contestation and development of masculine identity, are all necessary reading when approaching the digital game medium from a socio-cultural perspective.

Aarseth's (2003) modification of Bartle’s (2008: online) designation of the four types of online gamer is informative; Hearts (social players), Clubs (‘Griefers’, who kill other players), Diamonds (those who seek to get the best score within the game’s rules), and Spades (those who enjoy exploring the game world). Aarseth adds to this the category of the cheater, those who either implicitly or explicitly breaks the rules set forth by the game, thus breaking the illusion of the virtual environment's authenticity. Using this concept informs my sociological work, as it is beneficial in understanding the disparate pleasures that can emerge through a variety of users engaging with the same game, and also in rationalizing the actions they take; one should remember that cheating is in itself a form of play (Kucklich, 2007).

Though Bartle dealt exclusively with players of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) and MOOs (Multi-Object Oriented), adapting the basic framework to users of sports simulations is an obvious transition. There are still players who enjoy the social aspect of the event, much like attending a pub to watch a football match amongst a crowd, clubs would be those players who set out to ruin the experience of others (empirically I have only found these to exist in online multiplayer situations), whilst diamonds are obviously those determined to win, and spades those who enjoy exploring the possibilities of the product, the aspects of it being a ‘not [closed] product’ as Masuyama (2002) described above.

Other notable works on cheating, specifically Consalvo’s (2007) and Kucklich’s (2007) mentioned earlier, aid us in understanding the cheater/cheating as integral to gaming culture (in the former) and as a valuable tool for analysis (in the
latter). Interestingly, games such as the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series actually include cheats as a form of reward (for example, enabling ‘big head’ mode, making all avatars’ heads enormously disproportionate to the rest of their body). As Kucklich describes, using cheats allows an alternative mode of analysis where a different, but in many instances equally valuable, experience (representationally, ludically or both) is offered to the player.

Shifting a focus from the player to the designer, experienced videogame sociologists such as T.L. Taylor have contributed an understanding of the motivations of the designers and owners of these virtual worlds (2002, 2003), and those who engage with them at various intensities (1999, 2005, 2006). She discovered, much as many other researchers (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004; Jansz and Martens, 2005; Sall & Grinter, 2007; Schott & Kambouri, 2006), that the use of certain multiplayer games by players is first and foremost as a site of social contact, bonding and contestation; to create a community and 'be apart together' as Huizinga (1949 [1938]) would term it.

An interesting but undervalued vein of work on the role of the videogame onlooker (those who are in attendance but do not actively participate in playing the game) by Lin and Sun (2008) remains particularly incisive in its analysis of the onlooker’s role as part of the gaming community, and the complex and shifting relationship between player and viewer is a subject that requires much greater scrutiny as the onlooker is not merely audience member, but also advisor, critic, supporter and detractor depending upon any of the numerous scenarios the game-playing subject may find themselves within.

Communication and the formation of relationships within these online communities is a continual font of discussion and analysis, with Jonas Heide Smith offering a wealth of work on interaction between players from the view of a game
theorist (‘game’ here referring to mathematical game theory), also contributing to an essay on the effect of the computer game medium on communication (Tychsen et al, 2006). Developing ideas on cheaters and griefers (those that play a game explicitly to cause anguish to other players, as opposed to cheaters, who may wish to maintain a respectable veneer of fair play), Smith (2004) differentiates between extra-mechanic and intra-mechanic conflict (the extra being social conflict in game space, the intra being results of the game rules), and categorises the extra-mechanic conflict in three categories: cheating, local norm violation (betraying rules agreed upon by the community), and grieving. Such categorisations are incorporated into chapter one, as local norms and variations of social etiquette were found to be common in multiplayer scenarios.

Turning to the central argument of game theory, Smith (2005, 2006a, 2006b) creates an excellent reference tool for the ‘whys’ in addressing the reasons behind player co-operation, antagonism, and the rules of online etiquette; his thesis contends that a rationalistic perspective on benefits and costs seems to guide the majority of gamers’ interaction with others. He also adapts sociologist Zahavi’s (1977) ‘handicap principle’ (Smith, 2004), which develops the use of ‘conventional’ and ‘assessment’ signals to explain trust in social relations; as Zahavi explains, 'the reliability of communication (or advertisement) is increased in relation to the investment in the advertisement' (Zahavi, 1977: p.603).

From the perspective of online sports videogame players, a conventional signal would be a player saying “I do not cheat”, whilst using an anti-cheat program such as Punkbuster (http://www.punkbuster.com/) would give an assessment signal, an investment in the advertisement; such work serves as a useful guide in analysing the online gaming community.
Specific to the sports digital game, Garry Crawford has written a collection of excellent studies (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2007), analysing both the game and operator. From a sociological perspective, Crawford is particularly beneficial. In his earlier work, Crawford focuses on football fandom, and uses a diagram to articulate the regular progression of the football fan (2004: p.42):

General Public >>> Interested >>> Engaged>>> Enthusiastic>>> Devoted>>> Professional>>> Apparatus

Adapting this to videogame culture, and particularly the sports simulation, is fruitful in analysing the career of an operator, for example, fans of Pro Evolution Soccer can be seen to have progressed from one end of the spectrum to the other on websites such as PESrankings (http://www.pesrankings.com), where the fans-turned-apparatus are paid to host competitions by online companies such as Play (http://www.play.com), who recently instigated a competition with £50,000 prize money at stake.

Crawford’s analysis (2006) of the Championship Manager series, later renamed Football Manager, is an example of how videogames, though, as mentioned previously, are sometimes lambasted as ‘anti-social’ and ‘alienating’ (Berger, 2002: 107), are often used as points of entry for social interaction and bonding, as Crawford cites a group who hold a weekly meeting at the neighbourhood pub to discuss various issues arising from their experience with the product.

Looking towards virtual communities, this is something which has already received quite extensive attention from game scholars (Constant II, 1993; Jones, 1998; Manninen, 2002; McLaughlin, Osborne and Ellison, 1997; Miller and Slater, 2000;
Rheingold, 1991, 1993; Roque, 2005; Stone, 2000; Wilbur, 1997; Willson, 1997), yet remains problematic (Bell, 2001; Breslow, 1997; Bromberg, 1996; Donath, 1999; Hakken, 1999; Reid 1999; Zickmund, 1997). Also, the majority of work focuses on Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) or ‘persistent worlds’ as opposed to the transient worlds of the sports videogame.

Yet work on MMOGs provides various general concepts that can be productively adopted for the player, regardless of game genre. Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) discuss Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ in terms of the MMOG, but this adaptation can also serve the offline gaming community. They use Oldenburg’s eight characteristics that define a ‘third place’, almost all of which can be applied to the sports genre, and are perhaps more applicable to these games than the MMOG; ‘neutral ground’ (where players are free to come and go), ‘leveller’ (where one’s place at work or in society is of no consequence), ‘conversation as main activity’ (‘playfulness and wit’ being highly-valued), ‘accessibility and accommodation’, ‘the regulars’ (people who give the space its ambience), ‘a low profile’ (homely, without pretension), ‘the mood is playful’ and finally ‘a home away from home’ (five defining traits: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth), all of which are found offline within gamer groups who meet regularly to play their favourite games in a social setting, such as the participants of this dissertation’s case study.

**Digital Games and Society**

Gender, ethnicity and class are contentious issues within the videogame medium that still require much study. Taylor (2006) discusses the place of the female in MMOGs, whilst Catherine Beavis (2005) takes an original approach in locating a
girls-only Counter-strike (Valve, 2000) team in the physical world, to see how they are reacted to both on and offline; Bryce and Rutter (2003) provide a broader investigation of the same subject, their conclusions being similar to Beavis's concerning the perception of girls in gaming as alternative and irregular.

Christopher Warnes’ (2005) intriguing examination of race in fantasy role-playing games (RPGs) from an historical perspective succeeds in provoking new insights into previously overlooked features of RPGs and videogames more widely, but his analysis is slightly anachronistic and myopic due to his refusal to consider any modern games in his article, many of which, as he admits, gives greater freedom to the consumer in overcoming the very factors he attacks.

Rojek (2000) discusses leisure as a ‘status-positioning activity’, as something which we use to both align and differentiate ourselves in regards to others, to symbolize our status within society. He uses Goffman’s (1973) schematic of the ‘performative culture’ to illustrate how our leisure tendencies (defining leisure as ‘surplus energy’) have moved from the ‘ritual’ (religious practices and festivities) to the ‘performative’ (as discussed earlier, the notion that people play ‘roles’, much like actors, dependent on the context they find themselves within everyday life). This discussion of the performative is something that can be effectively applied to agonistic gaming communities, revealing differences between their performances as team players in online games, as participants in virtual communities, and as members of society in the physical world.

Of course in discussing leisure and class we should once more turn to Bourdieu's (1984) work, which analyses the many ways in which these differences between social groups are both formulated and formalised within everyday life. Featherstone (1987) offers a concise summation:
The production of cultural symbols, be they high culture, popular culture or consumer goods, are therefore the subject of an endless process of struggle on the part of classes, class fractions and groups to rename and legitimate the particular set of tastes which reflect their interests. Those classes which possess a high volume of economic capital (the bourgeoisie) and cultural capital (the intellectuals) are clearly in a stronger position to define what is legitimate, valid and 'pure' taste. The appreciation of legitimate taste depends on the accumulation or investment of a high volume of cultural capital (e.g., education, knowledge of high culture and the arts) symbolic capital (presentation of self, demeanour) and economic capital (money) which contrasts to the non-legitimate common, vulgar tastes of the working class who possess little capital of any kind and are disinclined to invest... In effect their own tastes are naturalised, being a set of classificatory practices unconsciously assimilated by virtue of their common occupancy of a specific point in the social field, and a certain antipathy and hostility developed towards the 'strange' tastes of other fractions.

(p.122-123)

Then going on to describe the concept of ‘habitus’:

Bourdieu terms this set of classificatory schemes, unconscious dispositions and taken-for-granted preferences *habitus*. The differential formations of habitus for different groups and classes will result in a 'natural' disposition to produce certain practices and to classify and judge the practices of others. In
effect habitus is the generative principle of taste differences. It systematically produces a set of distinctive preferences which form the basis of different lifestyles. This set of taken-for-granted preferences is evident in the agent's sense of the appropriateness and validity of his taste for cultural goods and practices - art, food, drink, sport, hobbies etc. Habitus does not, however, simply operate on the level of everyday knowledgeability, but is embodied being inscribed on the body and made apparent in body size, volume, demeanour, ways of eating, drinking, walking, sitting, speaking, making gestures, etc.

(p.123)

Hence the stereotypes that emerge from the habitus of the videogame player, e.g. the anti-social 'geek' (because they spend their leisure time using computers), white middle-class (because they, or their parents can afford the computers and the educational facilities to use them), unhealthy (because they are not outside exercising) and male (because technology and competition are all deemed exclusively as domains of ‘boy culture’ (Jenkins, 1998)).

As Rojek (2000) mentions, Stebbins’ work (1990, 1992, 2007) on the concept of ‘serious leisure’ as an important component of modern society is enlightening. Stebbins is a strong advocate of serious leisure as a means for members to fulfil their ‘human potential’; for his analysis he devises eight ‘durable benefits’ and a number of ‘personal rewards’ gained through serious leisure that will provide a foundation for my own comparisons and criteria in regards to the gaming community: What psychological rewards are gained through participation? Can there be a true sense of social attraction and group accomplishment in something as diasporic and
disembodied as online gaming? Stebbins' ruminations on the communities created by amateurs find particular resonance in the culture of videogames, 'Because of the previously mentioned qualities, amateurs… tend to develop broad subcultures that are manifested in distinct ways in the “idiocultures” (Fine 1979) of a local group’s special beliefs, norms, events, values, traditions, moral principles, and performance standards' (1992: p.7).

As we will see, my study of one of these idiocultures illuminated various idiosyncratic beliefs, norms, morals and behaviours. For example within the group, if a member won three games in a row, they would be made to pass the game controller to another player, to keep everything fair and to keep the lesser players involved, whilst in another group the very mention of this idea was looked down upon, as the reasoning was that if the player is not good enough to provide competition, they were not welcome within the community; this also touches upon Crawford’s findings (2004) of an elitist vein running through the more advanced members of the footballing fan community. As discussed in chapter one, these ‘superior’ members would use their experience and understanding of the televiual games (FIFA and Pro Evolution Soccer) to exclude these ‘lesser’ users from their group and in discussion would seem to attribute their heightened ability in playing videogames to a naturalized, innate talent, a strategy deployed to legitimize their gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007) within the community.

**Stars, Avatars and the Global Game**

Whannel’s inspection of sport celebrity (1998, 2002) is an enlightening study focusing upon the cult of celebrity, the relation between sport and celebrity, and finally the relation between sports star and celebrity. A crucial aspect of almost every
sports simulation is how they incorporate the sport celebrity, from physical and mental
statistics to corporeality (including physics and animations) and the general aesthetic
(FIFA Street for example exaggerates the celebrity’s looks in a caricaturist manner,
whilst FIFA and Pro Evolution Soccer strive instead for photorealism). This focus on
the relationship between celebrity, sport and videogames is something which, to my
knowledge, has not been studied by videogame academics. Of course, their
representation within the world of the videogame will form the essence of my analysis
of sport celebrity, and therefore a perspective for clearly structuring my investigation
of the game’s avatars is practical.

Daniel Kromand’s paper, titled Avatar Categorization (2007), is particularly
well-suited to this purpose. Firstly defining avatars along two interweaving axes,
Open/Closed, Central/Acentral, Kromand goes on to create four categories of avatar:
Open-Central, Open-Acentral, Closed-Central, Closed-Acentral. Open avatars exist in
games where character creation is allowed, thus the gamer creates their own avatar;
closed avatars are those with a personality/appearance already installed by the
designer (Lara Croft, for example). Central and Acentral answers the question of
control, Central avatars are directly controlled by the operator (again Lara Croft is a
good example), Acentral are outside of the player’s direct control, and must be guided
by the player, this is visible in games such as Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991) or The
Sims (Electronic Arts, 2000). The separate uses of these avatar types by the football
videogame sub-genres has a crucial impact on both game aesthetics and the play
experience, as discussed in chapter eight.

Many scholars of the sporting arena have commented on the efforts by clubs,
organisations and multinational companies to turn their particular endeavour into a
global sport (Horne, 2006; Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006; Maguire 1999),
acknowledging that improvements in technology have made the globalization of sport a possibility (Rowe, 2004). Yet the inverse is also true; as sport has become globalized, globalization has infiltrated the very content of sport. Games such as the *FIFA Street* series provide diverse locations spanning the entire globe, from the derelict streets of London to the beaches of Sao Paolo. They contain music from Germany, Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom among others, adding a truly pan-national aesthetic to proceedings, e.g., Argentina playing France in Mexico as United Kingdom hip-hop dominates the music playlist.

**Game Studies**

In terms of Game Studies methodologies for the text, though the field is nascent and still struggling to define its own core concepts, there is much academic work available. As I mentioned in the section on play, Huizinga’s work is invaluable and Rodriguez (2006) attempts a loose integration of *Homo Ludens* into the sphere of videogames, though he focuses more on interactions between player to player (multiplayer), or player and (idealized) designer than player and game, creating an article that does not fulfil the potential of its premise.

Considered a seminal text for Game Studies, Aarseth’s *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997) introduced various ludocentric ideas and terminologies that are effectively built upon in some of Aarseth’s later work (1998, 1999) whilst the concept, and now theoretical branch of ludology, arguably pioneered by Aarseth (along with others such as Frasca), remains an important facet of Game Studies today (Frasca 2003a, 2003b; Jarvinen, 2007; Konzack, 2007; Pearce 2004, 2005).
Ludology is, simply, the notion that gameplay and design should be placed above narrative, character and cut-scene when analysing (and indeed designing) videogames, as ludologists feel, to quote Markku Eskelinen, that 'stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy' (2001: online). Thus Aarseth’s introduction of the term ‘ergodic’ was an attempt to focus the analysis of videogames (and New Media generally) on the possibilities of play offered by interaction, as one ‘works’ their way through one of many ‘paths’ offered by the text; the effort involved must also be extranoematic as explained by Aarseth:

In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text. If ergodic literature is to make sense as a concept, there must also be nonergodic literature, where the effort to traverse the text is trivial, with no extranoematic responsibilities placed on the reader except (for example) eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages.


Perhaps as a consequence of the ergodic nature of the digital game text, methodologies for textual analysis seems one of the least agreed upon segments of the field; how can one analyse the text if it is inherently dynamic and reactive to an individual's input?

As mentioned in the introduction to this literature review, as a technology spawned of convergence (between various technologies and also cultural practices), videogames invite approaches to analysis from a broad range of disciplines and

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Extra (Latin prefix: “outside of”) noema (Greek: “thought/idea”); non-trivial extranoematic effort requires the user physically interact beyond movement of the eyes and turning of pages.
perspectives; aesthetics, communications, psychology, interaction, sound, game
theory, sociology, and the list can be even further sub-divided. Amongst these, general
viewpoints for understanding and interpreting computer games can be attributed to a
selection of key authors.

Henry Jenkins has covered a mass of topics during his career, and an
assortment of his work will be constructive for my dissertation. His adaptation of
Gilbert Seldes’ theory of ‘The Lively Arts’ (Jenkins, 2005) is an intriguing
investigation on the distinction between the ‘great arts’ (which seek to portray
universal and timeless values) and the ‘lively arts’ (which seek to give shape and form
to immediate experiences and impressions). Whilst the great arts pride themselves on
complex and, to a degree, esoteric interfaces (for example, requiring a comprehensive
knowledge of art history to fully appreciate modern art), the lively arts pride
themselves on being accessible and intuitive to the newcomer.

As videogames obviously find themselves within the latter bracket, they, along
with other lively arts such as the cinema, struggle to gain widespread recognition as a
proper art form, being dismissed upon inception (and still to this day) as frivolous,
shallow, and exclusively for the younger generation (as opposed to the stereotypically
more discerning adult demographic). This is particularly relevant to the televisual
genre, being a fusion of two lively arts (television and videogames), in an attempt by
the developers to create an instantly recognizable and visceral experience for the
consumer.

Related to this is Aki Jarvinen’s historical argument (2001) dissecting ‘popular
art’ from ‘fine art’; again describing ‘fine art’ as something which prides itself on an
obscure and demanding interface, whilst popular culture, much like videogames,
prides itself on usability and accessibility. Whilst the 'great arts' pride themselves on
creating a sometimes impenetrable, sophisticated or labyrinthine hermeneutic, videogames in arcade settings were designed to be as accessible as possible, normally consisting of a joystick and a single button. Making the interface as simple as possible was always key to succeeding in making this unfamiliar form of media popular, as Nolan Bushnell discovered in his early years establishing Atari as a major arcade videogame manufacturer. Alongside this, sport itself is another ‘popular art’, providing visceral immediacy as opposed to considered reflection; though it could be argued that the management genre has reversed this trend, encouraging cogitation, slow deliberation and utilising an often complicated, hypermediated interface.

Genre is another highly contested area within Game Studies (Whalen, 2004). Due to the interactive, multi-modal nature of the medium, there are various ways of categorizing; narrative content (drama, adventure, horror), gameplay (puzzle, karaoke, real-time strategy [RTS]), perspective (first-person shooter, ‘god’ game, third-person), game platform (PC, Xbox, PS3, Wii), social setting (single-player, multiplayer, Massively-Multiplayer-Online-Game [MMOG]), intensity of engagement (casual, leisure, hardcore), and so on.

Krzywinska and King’s (2002) breakdown of genre into Genre, Mode and Milieu, where Genre describes the core game mechanics (Puzzle, Platform, Action etc.), Mode describes presentation and interface (First-Person/Third-Person, Single-player/Multi-player etc.) and Milieu describes narrative (Horror, Sport, Military etc.), is an understandable starting point as it clearly illustrates the broad differences between certain game designs. Yet there are still other categories to consider when devising such a list, for example, context. Is it played in private or public? With friends or strangers? Is it an official ‘clan match’ or a casual game? Again platform (PC, Xbox, Wii etc.) seems to be ignored, yet the control system for each platform
varies wildly; PCs use keyboard and mouse, Microsoft’s Xbox 360 uses a game
ccontroller pad with twin analog sticks, whilst Nintendo’s Wii control system is based
upon a motion-sensitive controller.

Questions such as these remain vital in deciphering genre, and must be asked
when attempting to fully understand the audience’s reception of a text. As Zach
Whalen notes (2004), there remain stark contrasts between the academic and
commercial communities when it comes to views upon genre, as gaming platform
(PC, Xbox360, PS3 etc.) is indeed the primary label offered to the consumer by
gaming websites and e-sellers, presumably due to the cardinal necessity of hardware
and software compatibility when purchasing a new product, which must first be
established before deciding upon any of the other factors listed above.

One vastly underrated aspect of videogames is the auditory dimension.
Perhaps due to the first commercial videogame console, 1972’s Magnavox Odyssey,
not having an onboard sound processor, any and all forms of audio involved in games
production have been consistently ignored by the gaming press and marketing
industry, instead highlighting and championing the evolution of ever-more
photorealistic visuals. Yet as with the mediums of cinema and television, sound
remains a crucial aspect. Within the sports simulation, the need to provide spectacle
within the extreme and televisual genre is displayed aurally through the licensing of
conspicuous music for the non-diegetic menu screens and introductory videos, such as
EA Sport’s famous use of Chumbawumba’s ‘Tub Thumping’ for FIFA World Cup 98
(1998), whilst the FIFA Street series utilizes a diverse array of music from across the
globe in the hip-hop and electronic genre, to highlight its alternative and
contemporary approach to the sport. Diegetically, the player is allowed in the Pro
Evolution Soccer series to select his or her own fan sounds and chants, whilst every
sound, from passing to shooting to slide tackling, is acoustically represented and differentiates according to weather conditions (e.g. rain).

To analyze such a broad spectrum of disparate sounds I have incorporated Huiberts and Van Tol’s (2008) IEZA framework. This structure separates between diegetic and non-diegetic on one spectrum, and activity and setting on the other (creating the categories of zone, affect, effect and interface). Such clear differentiations between the separate areas of sound allows for a concise and complete analysis.

Baerg’s work (2007) has highlighted the innate bias of certain developers towards certain aspects of sport, or indeed a consistent ideology in approaching their subject matter, exposed through design choices vis-à-vis gameplay mechanics, reward systems and visual stylistics. As Baerg mentions in analysing EA Sport’s *Fight Night Round 2’s* (2005) control interface:

> [the interface] renders attacking offensive fighting natural and transparent while readily ignoring the defense and protection of the body. It appears impossible to succeed in the game by imitating a successful defensive fighter like Pernell Whitaker given that EA’s patented control set clearly privileges the pleasure of punching as opposed to that of deft defense.

(Baerg, 2007: p.30)

This is also noted by Bogost (2007) in discussing the ‘procedural rhetoric’ of the game’s design, and is further detailed by Dovey and Kennedy (2006) as the ‘preferred performance’ of the game:
This refinement of tactics becomes the 'preferred performance' that the game seems to demand of us. A perfect level run in which every activity is perfectly timed and economically executed is as pleasurable as hitting the sweet spot on a forehand drive or a carefully plotted checkmate. The desire to achieve this preferred performance goes some way to explaining the extraordinary phenomenon of repetition in gameplay - no other kind of cultural consumption requires this kind of repetition. Instead we find it in cultural activities where musicians or sports players are called upon time and again to repeat actions in order to achieve a preferred performance or a kind of virtuosity.

(p.115-116)

In analysing the preferred performance, one can comprehend the dominant values of the digital representation of sport, and perhaps reveal the wider bias of the sport’s culture and community that is being echoed by these products.

To analyse the ludic qualities of these games, their core gameplay mechanics, methodologies such as Geoff Howland’s ‘hooks’ (2002) are a good starting point. Howland describes a collection of gameplay features that ‘hook’ the gamer into the game ('for the purpose of furthering their playing' [p.78]), and proceeds to place them under certain categories for analysis. For example marketing hooks are 'designed to attract the player to buy the game, or from the style or gimmick hooks that may entice initial play' (p.78), whilst ‘gameplay hooks’ are the central mechanics of the game that keep the player returning to the text when the gloss of ‘marketing/gimmick hooks’ fades away. He identifies gameplay hooks in four groups (p.78); ‘action hooks’, which involves any direct interaction with the gameworld through use of the control pad
(punching, shooting, selecting); ‘resource hooks’, which involves the careful balancing and use of assets (ammunition, avatars, finances); ‘tactic and strategic hooks’, the planning of how to use action and resource hooks to attain victory conditions; and finally ‘time hooks’, which is any time constraint placed upon the achievement of a task.

The most obvious application of this methodology is to genre, as one can identify the sub-genres of the sports simulation through their adherence to certain key hooks. The televisual simulation is recognized due to its balancing of action and tactic/strategy hooks, whilst the management simulation provides various resource and tactic/strategy hooks, and finally the extreme simulation aligns with the traditional arcade hooks of action and time. Within these games are also ‘supporting hooks’, used to differentiate one game from another within the same genre. So for example you have ‘bullet-time’ in *Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment, 2001), allowing the gamer to slow-down time, increasing their offensive capabilities, which creates a markedly different game experience in comparison to another action-adventure game such as *Tomb Raider* (Eidos Interactive, 2006), with the supporting hooks being puzzle sections.

Bernard Suits’ (1978) description of game rules is incisive, describing them as ‘unnecessary obstacles’ (p. 34) devised to make play possible by forbidding efficient means of performing an activity, e.g., not allowing outfield players to use their hands in football to catch the ball. Applying this to the sports videogame genre, it is interesting to note what is allowed and disallowed by the game alongside the straight translation of game rules. For example, in *Football Manager* it is perfectly possible to access all statistics concerning other teams’ formations, injuries, player condition et cetera, even though in the real world managers continuously bluff, lie, or obfuscate
the facts concerning formations to be used, player conditions, and even players expected to be fit for the match. This neutrality towards data forms the analysis of such extra-mechanical differences in chapter five.

Describing narrative in terms of space instead of character and story (Jenkins, 1998; Fuller and Jenkins, 1995) is also paramount to understanding how meaning is created through interactivity, as King and Krzywinska describe:

The challenge offered to the player includes realizing the pre-existing narrative structure and making sense of the narrative context in which gameplay occurs. It involves an experience described by Julian Kucklich as akin to 'the hermeneutic process of reading a literary text, by challenging the player to make predictions about what is to come, or to reconstruct the events that led up to the present situation'. In *The Thing*, for example, the player often comes upon scenes of death and destruction. Damaged, blood-spattered interiors and the remains of carcasses from which shape-shifting aliens have emerged provide both evidence of recent events, as constructed in the narrative past, and warning about the likely kinds of events to come. This invites a process of hermeneutics of the kind suggested by Kucklich, even if rather limited and obvious in the conclusions it supports… Narrative usually functions to string together sequences of gameplay activities of the kinds outlined… making contextual sense of smaller, more local cause-and-effect-based actions. Games with overarching and developing narrative frameworks such as the examples cited above might be reduced to a basic three-act structure of beginning, middle and end, but, as Craig Lindley suggests, with a
highly extended second act in which gameplay activities dominate over narrative development.

(2006: p.45-46)

In relation to this, Celia Pearce’s ideas (Pearce, 2004) on narrative in terms of interaction suit the multiplayer mode of gaming perfectly. Breaking down the narrative into six inter-related categories (Experiential, Performative, Augmentary, Descriptive, Meta Story and Story System), a method of comprehending the game narrative as created through interaction and experience of a dynamic system is presented.

In terms of defining how ‘realistic’ the aesthetics and mechanics of the analyzed text is, one can refer to work by Bell (2003), who describes reality in gaming as a perception of an evolving games production aesthetic that has been naturalised by the industry, and also as a carefully crafted fabrication by the designer that hides the means of production, giving the consumer the illusory power of agency.

Critically, Bell bemoans the lack of ‘real’ choice in gaming, stating that 'interactive game play is not a dialogue between player and game but a script to be read and followed by the player' (Bell, 2003), a charge that has been repeated elsewhere (Charles, 2009). Of course, this is a logical deduction concerning the medium; there is indeed a limit sanctioned by the designer on what can and cannot be achieved within the gameworld, through level design, game mechanics and the varied implementation of physics engines.

Yet in applying such a statement to sports digital games, the central argument becomes specious. Of course, as Bell points out, there are limitations, rules and regulations that must be abided by the user of a sport videogame, yet these are
modelled on the same restrictions placed upon players within the physical world, whether this is the offside rule, weather conditions, or the laws of physics. Indeed, the restrictions of the physical world may be more severe than the game world, owing to a user’s physical disabilities, skill level or fitness.

Galloway’s (2004) description of what ‘social realism’ is in terms of videogames, as distinctive from ‘realistic’ visuals and contingent on the socio-political context of the gamer, is worthy of investigation in relation to the sports simulation, though perhaps his distinction between ‘realism’ and ‘realistic’ would be better served if clearly and stringently defined; perhaps sub-divisions that divide aesthetics and content, ‘realistic’/’fantasy’ and ‘fiction’/‘non-fiction’.

Galloway’s most recent contribution to Game Studies (2006a) provides a concise schematic for analysing videogames. The author devises a framework of gamic action, anchored by four fundamentals that compose two interweaving axes: operator versus machine, and diegetic versus nondiegetic; operator being the human player, machine being any action undertaken by the software, with diegetic being the virtual world and nondiegetic being any aspect (mostly configurational, ‘Start Menu’ et cetera) existing outside this. By segmenting input in such a manner (Diegetic Operator Action, Nondiegetic Operator Action and so on), Galloway’s method allows a clear, systematic analysis of interaction.

For example, focusing on nondiegetic actions, both machine (such as the introductory video sequence that can accompany a videogame) and operator (navigating the start menu) can provide a wealth of information concerning the intended experience offered by the developer. As we will see, the start menu of the televisual genre, such as *FIFA '08* is graphically spectacular and uses informal sport entertainment vernacular such as ‘kick-off’ and ‘live’ (online multiplayer mode),
whilst the menu of a game such as Football Manager 2008 contains very simple, static graphics, and instead uses terms such as ‘new game’ and ‘network’ to denote its status as digital media; it should also be noted that all televisual and extreme simulations studied contain an introductory video, whilst there is none present in any management genre, distancing itself once more from the immediacy of the extreme and televisual products.

Such small details, both inclusions and exclusions, contribute to an understanding of how each genre conceptualizes and presents the sport culture it claims to model itself upon, and thereby reveals its conception of the 'ideal' sport consumer. Though again, as with ‘realism’ and ‘realistic’, Galloway’s hesitance in clearly and rigidly defining his use of terms such as diegetic and nondiegetic can, as he himself admits, create confusion and misapplication, considerably so in a field where there is a frequent merging of such spaces.

A clear instance of this is Lexis Numerique’s Evidence: The Last Ritual (2006), a game that freely and consistently strafes between diegetic and nondiegetic. For example the game will send an email to the player’s proper email address with diegetic clues, whilst the user must also investigate non-fictional websites alongside the fictional texts created by the developers. This form of verisimilitude and blending of the diegetic and nondiegetic can create novel and immersive experiences, but from an academic standpoint, if using Galloway’s structure, such games can prove an analytical nightmare if applying such a rigid taxonomy.

**Adaptations**

To perform a textual analysis will require not only an extensive understanding of game aesthetics and function, but also the capability to adapt previous cultural
theories on ‘the text’. Barthes (1975, 1977), though not often cited within Game
Studies, is essential to understanding our enjoyment of videogames, and his concept
of ‘plaisir/jouissance’ finds a particular relevance within the sports simulation, the
‘jouissance’ of the goal, the ‘plaisir’ of a technically-gifted team, a well-worked
manoeuvre; Aarseth’s (1999) notion of ‘aporia/epiphany’ within game design
complements this astutely. Describing the method of progress through games as
‘aporia’ (from the Greek word for impasse/puzzlement) and ‘epiphany’ (a sudden
realization), Aarseth constructs an argument that cites the pleasure of a text as
dependent upon the quantity and quality of these aporia.

That is to say, a puzzle game such as Tetris (Pajitnov, 1985) would be a game
constantly regurgitating aporia and epiphany, whilst the sports simulation presents no
inherent aporia (a user familiar with the sport of football will know exactly what is
required to complete the objective, e.g., score a goal). Thus the pleasures of a text can
be described in terms of their abundance, or indeed lack of aporia and epiphany.
Though not mentioned within Aarseth’s paper, this concept in combination with
Csikszentmihalyi’s psychological conceptualization of the ‘flow state’ (1988) would
create an interesting study, as Csikszentmihalyi’s work contends that a primary
principle of pleasure is that the user have a perfect understanding of how to complete
the task, and also that the gamer’s skill and the game’s challenge be a perfect match;
something clearly undermined by the constant presence of aporia in certain puzzle
videogames.

Baudrillard’s notion of the simulacra (1983) has been considered recently
within Game Studies academia (Giddings, 2007), yet there has been no attempt to
apply the concept to the various simulacra found within the sports simulation, from
perfectly visualised virtual stadiums that meld various features from physical-world
stadiums into one, to the high-definition next-generation graphical engines that illustrate the medium’s power to undermine the message (Baudrillard, 1997). As discussed in the 'simulation' section of the thesis introduction, Baudrillard’s concepts have had an enormous influence upon this project.

Flynn’s (2003) adaptation of cultural historian David Harvey’s (1997) framework for seeing space as cultural artefact is informative; her focus on ‘environmental architecture’ and ‘play action’ (Flynn, 2003) within these spaces as opposed to Jenkins’ focus of plot and narrative (2004) is misguided in terms of a holistic view of game design, but is perfect for describing the invention of sport simulation spaces, expressly created with a focus on player engagement with architecture and, ultimately, one another; this is also noted by Bryce and Rutter (2002).

As Nieborg describes (2005), whilst single-player games maintain architectures that are asymmetrical, unbalanced, and are configured to aid in storytelling (spectacular maps designed to showcase the game, aid narrative unveiling or to set cinematic cut-scenes), multiplayer maps are symmetrical, balanced, and constructed to cater for a healthy frames-per-second (fps) on the median machine. This is also why Galloway’s ‘signifier free world’ (2006b) argument vis-à-vis MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Games) is fundamentally flawed; the imperceptibility of such signifiers is as much due to technical limitations as it is to aesthetic decisions. Heather Logas and Daniel Muller’s (2005) inspection of mise-en-scene in games is also noteworthy for exhibiting how certain methods borrowed from Film Studies can undoubtedly serve a purpose in Game Studies, and indeed their analysis provides an intriguing review of the survival-horror mise-en-scene. Nitsche (2005) also adapts cinematic technique to analysis of the digital game text, using the
concept of montage to understand the first-person point-of-view (POV) in texts (also covered in Galloway [2006a]), though categorizing the ‘sniper view’ as its own cinematic perspective betrays its implementation as function over form in gaming; it only exists to accentuate the user's ludic capability.

All of the above and more will be vital to my dissertation as I seek to gain a deep understanding of not only videogame culture, or sport culture, but also the complex, trans-medial interaction between sport, media and audience that continually inform, challenge, and reinvent one another.
Methodologies

Contemporary media is an increasingly inter-connected, multi-cultural and
dynamic entity, and as Marshall McLuhan would no doubt contend (1964: p.208-209),
videogames are a reflection of this, as Jenkins elucidates:

Games represent a new lively art, one as appropriate for the digital age as
those earlier media were for the machine age. They open up new aesthetic
experiences and transform the computer screen into a realm of
experimentation and innovation that is broadly accessible.
(Jenkins, 2005: online)

This thesis is concerned with the digital game as an expressive and popular
socio-cultural product. It approaches the videogame artefact as a pervasive and
affective object within contemporary culture. 'Affective' is a particularly pertinent
term for the digital game complex (McAllister, 2004), as not only do videogames
have the power to affect, they have the power to be affected; there is no clear
separation between person and artefact as in other media, as Newman describes:

The On-Line relationship between primary-player and system/gameworld is
not one of clear subject and object. Rather, the interface is a continuous
feedback loop where the player must be seen as both implied by, and
implicated in, the construction and composition of the experience.
(Newman, 2002b: online)
It is this ergodicity that makes digital games a unique prospect in comparison to other mediums requiring, as discussed, non-trivial extranoematic input from the user to progress through the text; it is this fact that unites much of what we call ‘new’ media. In fact, the continued use of the terms 'media' and 'medium' in relation to videogames is perhaps an error in and of itself. As Salen and Zimmerman mention (2003: p.86), and Frank Lantz observes (Irwin, 2009: online), whilst it is convenient to simply collate videogames as one medium alongside many others since they all use the same technology (the DVD drive, the television et cetera), labelling the computer game as a specific medium is specious; games existed before computers, and games will exist when computer processing becomes merely one feature of many within the box - they are simply the newest branch of the ludic tree (Smith, 2006b: p.19).

Yet this designation as singular media form persists, and whilst it can often provide productive analysis, it has also had many negative consequences for our understanding of digital gaming, encouraging the straight, often unthinking transfer of ideas, terminology, methodologies and concepts from other media directly into the study of videogames, seen as simply another entertainment medium. This deleterious effect comes not from the labelling of digital games as media, as this argument maintains some merit (Wolf, 2001); it is more the uncritical transference of assumptions and ideas engendered by such convenient categorization (for example the incompatibility of concepts such as the fourth wall to videogames (Conway, 2009b)).

It is this very issue that can be seen as the core of the over-popularized, and to a degree exaggerated schism between the narratologist and ludologist perspectives within Game Studies; indeed as Copier notes (2003), this division is more political than it is theoretical.
Formally, the narratologists believe analytical approaches used within other media can be adopted for games, whilst the ludologists think the unique aspect of games, play, requires a completely new form of examination. I conceive of the optimal solution as lying between the two perspectives, as this thesis will illustrate through integrating ideas, methods and viewpoints from a selection of disciplines, whilst also incorporating various elements of ludological theory where appropriate. Dogmatic adherence to any particular concept or system of ideas is I believe antithetical to the aims of cultural studies, which by necessity must maintain a degree of flexibility if it is to be effective in scrutinizing something as dynamic and multiplicitous as contemporary culture; this is well articulated by Longhurst et al (2008):

Richard Johnson (1986) has pointed out the dangers of academic codification in regard to cultural studies, suggesting that its strength lies in its openness and hence its capacity for transformation and growth. He argues that cultural studies mirrors the complexity and polysemic qualities of the object of its study, culture ... In summary, we suggest approaching cultural studies as an area of activity that grows from interaction and collaboration to produce issues and themes that are new and challenging. Cultural studies is not an island in a sea of disciplines but a current that washes the shores of other disciplines to create new and changing formations.

(p. 23)

This leads to my own thoughts concerning the study of the digital game. The ergodicity of the videogame text, the ability to choose, to manipulate, to have effect
within the gameworld, is crucial to the understanding of the digital game experience; one must remember that the oft-lauded feature of this medium, *gameplay*, is not simply a feature inherent in the product - it can only occur when there exists a user to interact with the game, someone to create the *play*.

Thus, in a very literal manner, the text is incomplete without the user. To this end, I have, out of necessity, broadened this thesis beyond a strict textual analysis of sports videogames, fruitful as such an approach can be. Whilst the majority of this dissertation is a close textual examination of the three sub-genres of the sports simulation, it, like the videogame, remains incomplete without the perspective of both constituents of the cybernetic loop; the game, and the user. Though I believe there to be an inherent preferred reading of the text embedded by the producer, making a textual analysis invaluable in ascertaining the dominant values propagated by the videogame text, I also acknowledge that such readings are not the only ones made by the consumer, who can alternately resist, subvert or reject such meanings; as John Fiske outlines in recommending certain approaches to popular culture:

> Textual analysis may be able to identify a text's popular potential, but it can only speculate about if or how this potential will be actualized ... they can never pass beyond the illustrative, they can never be exhaustive, for they will always be taken by surprise by some of the practical, contextual uses to which the text will be put ... Ethnographic analysis of specific instances of a text's use can help us toward understanding under what conditions and in what ways the progressive potential may be actualized.

(1989: p.189)
Therefore the largest chapter of this study is dedicated to an exploratory case study of the football videogame player, asking what cultural and social needs are met by the product, whilst also questioning the relationship between the user, sport culture, and the digital game. Such an approach will also permit a degree of triangulation, where the product’s dominant discourse illuminated via the textual analysis can be studied in terms of consumption, and not simply production, thus many potential absences or breakages that could occur between the meanings identified in the textual analysis and the consumer’s reception of these meanings has the opportunity to be acknowledged and evaluated, and therefore the contrast provided by the alternating perspectives serve partially to ameliorate one another (Longhurst et al, 2008: p.99).

The reasons for privileging the textual analysis over the observer-participant case study are many. Firstly, within Game Studies there is no obviously agreed upon methodology for studying the digital game player. Whilst many approaches have been proposed and indeed undertaken, there seems to me to remain many blind spots, inaccuracies, and misinterpretations that are primarily symptoms of an inconsistent or restrictive methodology.

Indeed, comprehending the audience has often been, and indeed remains a disputed issue within Media Studies, from Horkheimer and Adorno’s dismissal of the audience as cultural dupe (2002 [1947]) to Hall’s more reader-centric model of encoding and decoding (1980) and beyond, there exist numerous disagreements on both the nature of the audience, and how best to understand their consumptive practices. Even then, numerous issues confront the analyst; can the audience suitably articulate themselves? Can you be sure they are telling the truth? Are they withholding certain information? This is further complicated when investigating the pleasures of
the text, as the cognizance and expression of pleasure remains staunchly within the realm of emotion, which is by its nature much harder to articulate than an aesthetic appreciation, trained as it is as a certain cultural discourse.

Leading on from this, there is also no agreement as to what should be studied; does one focus on social or solitary play? Console, PC or handheld? Competitive or casual? Private or public? Online or offline? The list is almost endless, and I felt prioritizing one over the other would be to create a flawed analysis from the beginning.

When contrasted with the ontological stability of the product, which is infinitely probeable and accessible, it seemed sensible to focus the greater part of my thesis upon the many levels of the text, whilst allowing for an experimental observer-participant study that, though not extensive, provided substantial enough space to formulate a hybrid approach examining the gamer not only as member of a sub-cultural niche, but as consumer of the wider culture of sport and leisure. It is hoped that this study, whilst limited in scope, provides a clear overview of the connections between the videogame text and operator, and further, what relation this has upon the user’s wider social and cultural uses and interactions.

Secondly, to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the videogame player in all guises (private, public, online, offline) would be to stretch my resources too thinly across too many areas, and leave no room for any form of textual analysis, which is of at least equal importance to our comprehension of the medium.

Whilst I consider it essential to study the videogame player, we must not forget that the instigator of the gamer’s behaviour remains the game itself. Thus room must always be made to provide a meticulous, encompassing examination of the text
detailing both its ludic and representational qualities, so that we may more easily
decipher the relationship between the actor’s performance and its instigation.

This leads to the last reason, which is that though there have been many
textual analyses of videogames, I often find that the game can still evade proper
scrutiny at certain levels, as I describe in the later section on methodology. Whilst
some take a narratological approach, others may constrain themselves with a purely
ludological viewpoint; whilst one focuses on the characters, another focuses on the
environment; one examines graphics, another audio. Yet my aim for the textual
analysis was to cover as many areas as possible, giving preference to no aspect in
particular across the three sub-genres, yet providing coverage of each.

Hence this research utilizes a multi-level critical qualitative textual analysis to
provide an evaluation of the football digital game genres, comparing and contrasting
the representational and ludic features of the three sub-genres identified. To clarify
what is meant through the term 'multi-level', this articulates the above-mentioned
representational and ludic levels of the text. Whilst other media such as film are
representational, they are not ludic; you cannot change a film’s characters, narrative or
universe, you cannot play traditional literature.

Videogames do indeed function through representations, in that every game
requires the game pieces to be represented visually or at the very least audibly, yet
they are also systems of rules and regulations that require and generally allow the user
to change characters, the narrative, and the universe through interaction with the
game’s geography and populace (human or AI). To unpack these terms specifically
from the perspective of digital games, firstly we can describe the representational
layer as consisting of anything within the game system (including associated
peripherals) that appeals to the gamer’s senses, that is to say graphics, audio, haptics
(force feedback et cetera), and the numerous ways these converge to create characters, plot and the general mise-en-scene of the game universe; it should be noted that these secondary features are not an inclusive characteristic of all videogames, Tetris for example has no characters or narrative.

Secondly, the ludic aspect of the game resides in its mechanics, the rules and possibilities provided by the game’s ergodic architecture. In this area we may observe the game interface, i.e. the way in which one finds agency within the gamespace, the world rules (kinetics, gravity, elemental physics), avatar rules (movement, speed, abilities) and object rules (generally the level of interaction allowed between world rules and avatar rules, e.g., can an avatar kick a ball? What effect will it have upon the gameworld?).

This methodology closely adheres to Krzywinska’s definition of a textual analysis in relation to Game Studies:

Any game has a set of ‘textual’ features and devices; a game is a formal construct that provides the environmental, stylistic, generic, structural and semiotic context for play. Images, audio, formal structures, the balance of play, the capabilities of in-game objects and characters are all features that operate ‘textually’. The concerted action of a game’s textual strategies facilitate, at least in part, the generation of emotional, physical and cognitive engagement, shaping the player’s experience of gameplay and making it meaningful. To understand design, the way it seeks to shape the player’s experience, and to evaluate the values of a game, it is important to conduct a detailed textual analysis.

(Krzywinska, 2006: online)
Whilst Krzywinska’s call for this detailed textual analysis focuses upon the diegetic space of the gameworld, this thesis will challenge such assumptions that the diegesis of the videogame is the primary semiotic structure through which the operator makes meaning, illustrating how the non-diegetic aspects of the product, introductory sequences, start menus, edit functions and so on, all contribute to communicating the producer’s idiosyncratic perspective on football and game culture.

The videogame emulation of football has been chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, football is, in contrast to nation-centric sports such as American Football or Cricket, a sport with global popularity, understanding, and media coverage (Foer, 2004; Giulianotti, 1999; Sandvoss, 2003). In terms of videogames, this is evidenced both by distribution and sales charts; whereas *Madden NFL 08* (EA Sports, 2007) sells well in North America alone (vgchartz, 2010b), and does not even see mainstream release in Japan, football games such as the *FIFA* series (EA Sports, 1993-present) are distributed and bought in all regions (vgchartz, 2010a), across all popular digital gaming platforms (Personal Computer, Xbox 360, Playstation 3, Nintendo Wii, Playstation Portable et al). Thus relative to other sports, football provides a fertile landscape for investigations into related issues of globalization (Giulianotti, 1999), social usage (Crabbe et al, 2006), convergence and trans-medial practices (Jenkins, 2006).

Secondly, in maintaining three sub-genres with distinct representational and ludic traits, the football videogame allows for a broader comparative analysis than other sports, for example, American Football videogames have televisual (*Madden NFL 08*) and extreme sub-genres (*NFL Tour* (EA Sports BIG, 2008)), yet have no
management games. A comparative analysis of two genres provides neither the depth nor variety currently present in the catalogue of football videogames.

Following Yates and Littleton’s (2001) assertion that digital games, like other media, maintain inherent ‘preferred readings’ devised by the author, and Kline, Dyer-Witherford and De Peuter’s claim that these preferred readings “contribute to the construction (and sometimes subversion) of an everyday ‘common sense’, ‘a repertoire of assumptions and premises about how things are in the world at large’ (2003: p. 43), this thesis seeks to discover precisely what the assumptions and premises of the preferred reading are, and what they mean for the player and associated culture.

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8 Though it should be noted that EA Sports have included a lightweight management simulation, NFL Head Coach 09 (2008), bundled with Madden NFL 09 (EA Sports, 2008).
The Football Digital Game – A History

The eclectic approach taken by various developers to the sport of football has led to the birth of three distinct sub-genres; televisual, extreme and management. The games selected are the most popular examples of each of the three sub-genres listed. Firstly, the televisual genre is one that remediates (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) various aspects of television in creating the play experience (explained in further detail below). Analyzed from this genre are the FIFA series and the Pro Evolution Soccer series.

Secondly, the extreme genre is the newest sub-genre of the football simulation, being a decidedly contemporary illustration of sport realised in the ‘concrete jungle’ of the modern metropolis, and has much in common with other extreme genre games such as the Tony Hawk’s skateboarding series (Neversoft, 1999-present). In this genre EA Sports BIG’s FIFA Street series is investigated.

Thirdly the management genre is analysed mainly through the Football Manager series (Sports Interactive, 2004-present), though reference will be made to other management and strategy games. This form of digital game attempts to simulate for the gamer an interactive structure that parallels the experience of being manager of a football club, from tactical, transfer and career decisions to relationships with the club hierarchy (from the board of directors to players, staff and opposing managers).

As will become clear, each sub-genre of the football digital game provides a remarkably dissimilar experience for the consumer, on both levels of representation and play. Representationally each sub-genre adheres separately to one of the three dominant schools of style that Jarvinen (2002) has identified as historically dominant within the videogame industry: photorealism, caricaturism and abstractionism.
Photorealism attempts to mimic as closely as possible a sense of 'realism' that one can identify as correlating with their visual experience of everyday life; bodies are in proportion with appropriate colouring and shading, in-game objects will generally have a real-world referent on which they base their appearance, whether this be weapons, buildings, cities, or natural landscapes. Of course, the use of the term 'photo' immediately assigns this sense of realism an aspect of mediation, a second-order signifier (King & Krzywinska, 2006), thus many games attempting photorealism also incorporate optical features such as lens flare, motion-blur, broadcast perspectives and so on; this is of course most relevant to the aforementioned televisual genre, where the audio-visual features of television sports broadcasting are meticulously integrated into the gameworld, and in many instances improved upon through a simulacral *excess* of its conventions (Merrin, 2005), such as being able to move the virtual camera freely through space-time within instant replay segments.

The extreme simulation in its modern form (from the EA published *Need For Speed: Underground* [EA Black Box, 2003] franchise onwards) began as photorealism, but in further iterations moved towards caricaturism as a way to distinguish itself from the televisual genre, and also add to what film scholar David Bordwell terms 'expressive amplification' (2000: p.232), a method originating from cinema whereby impressive choreography, special effects, sound editing, set design and cinematography all merge to amplify the action within the scene, to invoke a more pleasurable response in the audience:

> These films literally grip us; we can watch ourselves tense and relax, twitch or flinch. By arousing us through highly legible motion and staccato rhythms, and by intensifying their arousal through composition and editing and sound,
the films seem to ask our bodies to recall elemental and universal events like striking, swinging, twisting, leaping, rolling.

(2000: p.244)

The caricature appearance of the gameworld in the FIFA Street series makes each movement exaggerated, each shot spectacular through the addition of inflated sounds and impossibly colourful settings; in line with its arcade heritage, the game is designed as spectacle first, sport second. The grotesque embellishment applied to the character models of well-known players (AC Milan’s Gattuso is impossibly barrel-chested, Tottenham Hotspur’s Peter Crouch is preposterously thin and long-limbed) also speaks to the subversive quality of the product and its appeal to a younger demographic, as Fiske (1989) illuminates:

Bakhtin (1968) suggests that the grotesque is linked to a sense of earth realism; indeed, he talks about "grotesque realism." The realism of the grotesque is opposed to the "aesthetics of the beautiful" (p.29) represented in sport's vision of the perfect body. The grotesque body is "contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man" (p.25); cleansed of, or liberated from, the social construction and evaluation of the body, it exists only in its materiality. If the body beautiful is the completed, formed social body, then the body grotesque is the incomplete, the unformed. Its appeal to children (whose heroes, such as the Incredible Hulk or Mr. T, often have grotesque bodies) may well lie in the relevances they see between the grotesque body and their own childishly incomplete, unformed ones. The grotesque allies their incompleteness with adult strength. There is a sense, too,
in which principles of growth and change are embodied in the grotesque, for it is in direct opposition to the stasis of the beautiful. The grotesque is properly part of the vernacular of the oppressed.

(p.88)

Finally the management genre maintains the abstractionism long ago abandoned by the televisual genre (limited until recently by technical capabilities). This form of representation can be ingeniously simple or startlingly complex. The management simulation is an abstract representation of the world of football management, and veers towards the latter in terms of its visual template, providing a highly intricate interface, firmly entrenched in New Media graphic-user interface design, through which the user must negotiate his or her avatar (in this instance, a cursor serves to provide the player’s agency within the gameworld).

All such representations of course create certain expectations concerning play; complex visuals invite anticipation for complex action. The photorealism of the televisual product means the gamer expects ‘realistic’ play, with accurate physics, tactical options and avatar controls. The extreme genre, through its caricaturism, illustrates its simpler, less formal and more spectacular form of engagement, whilst the informatic, abstract graphical style chosen by the management genre (at times mimicking a website aesthetic, at others a chequers board) communicates to the player that the actions required by the game mechanics are comparatively nuanced and sophisticated. A distance is created between player and game through the interface, inculcating in the player a sense of considered, critical thought in approaching play; if the televisual and extreme genres rely on the user’s body (through hand-eye coordination, ‘twitch’ reflexes and constant involvement), then the management genre
relies on the user’s mind (careful evaluation, strategizing, nuanced interpretation). As mentioned earlier, this is reminiscent of Kant's distinction (2004 [1790]) between vulgar and pure taste, as summarized by Bennett (1981):

Kant's *Critique* is a work of philosophical aesthetics which seeks to establish a 'pure' taste as distinct from 'vulgar' (in the sense of common) taste. On the side of vulgar taste are those activities involving a 'pleasure of the senses' or 'immediate sensations'; on the other side of 'pure taste' are experiences which are reflective, which establish a distance between spectator and object, which do not involve corporeal or carnal sensations. For Kant, the spectator must be the aim or the end of aesthetic experience, not its means: there must be no 'involvement'; a distance must be maintained between subject and object.

(p.20)

This was given further credence by those involved in the observer-participant case study, for whom engagement with the management genre signified a mature, ‘connoisseur’ approach to football culture, whilst the other products were seen as less sophisticated on a descending order of perceived difficulty, with the *FIFA Street* series as least well-regarded by the group.

**A Brief History**

*The Televisual Genre*

The televisual simulation has existed in various permutations throughout the history of the videogame, and due to technological advances in computer games, in various forms. The televisual sub-genre began as an abstract representation of
football, such as the ‘coloured-dots’ representing footballers in \textit{Pele's football} (Atari, 1981), gradually moving towards a ‘stick man’ aesthetic borrowing from Subbuteo or table-top football. Minimalist graphics and animations were partnered with sparse music and sound effects, the star of such games being the ball itself, as individual players were indistinguishable from one another, with limited, arcade-style controls also privileging the movement of the ball over the player; this ludic bias towards the attacker is discussed in chapter seven.

Games such as \textit{Match Day} (Ocean Software, 1984) were among the first to portray fully-formed 2-dimensional players, whilst games like \textit{Sensible Soccer} (Sensible Software, 1992) pushed the genre forward with innovative game mechanics and features such as fully editable national and club teams (features which still draw customers to series such as \textit{Pro Evolution Soccer}).

The sub-genre’s next major evolution was through EA Sports' \textit{FIFA} series, substituting the traditional top-down/side-on viewpoint for a more graphically demanding isometric stance, also gaining official endorsement from the FIFA governing body, allowing EA Sports to market their game on the two major features they still rely upon today (graphical photorealism and officialdom). The ‘televisual’ moniker stems from these consistent movements towards a certain style of visual fidelity, with the \textit{FIFA} series leading the way in remediating the consumption of televised sporting events into computer games, offering the consumer a familiar perspective from which to interact with their chosen team (this viewpoint is commonly named the ‘broadcast angle’ by the in-game menu), with action replays and audio commentary from established football personalities becoming expected elements of the product.
Competing against FIFA was Konami’s International Superstar Soccer series (1995-2003), eventually eschewing its arcade presentation and mechanics for a more accurate simulation based on player statistics and accurate ball physics, renaming the series Pro Evolution Soccer.

The televisual simulation gives the player direct control over the actions of a team of eleven players on a football pitch, stressing the immediacy of the experience, erasing a complex interface (such as the Heads-Up Display (HUD) familiar within first-person shooters) for direct and intuitive interaction between player, avatar and ball. These idealistic replications of football stress physical realism in terms of graphics (stadiums, players, pitches) and gameplay (accurate ball physics, weather, player statistics, controls); all of which come together under a televised aesthetic so common to the gamer that it has replaced our culture’s everyday experience of football (Crabbe et al., 2006a), something the audience take for granted as ‘real’ and ‘normal’, even though its very inclusion is worth warrant significant in and of itself.

The Management Genre

The management simulation made its debut in 1982, when Addictive Games released Football Manager, though its representational and ludic heritage can be found in earlier process-oriented games (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008) such as Utopia (Daglow, 1982), prioritizing complex, abstract interfaces and statistic-based mechanics.

The genre attempts to recreate for the player an interactive experience that parallels the experience of being manager of a football club, from tactical, transfer and career decisions to relationships with the club hierarchy (from the board of directors to players, staff and opposing managers). Contemporary management simulations
such as *Football Manager 2007* (Sports Interactive, 2006) have recently began to incorporate the media as an essential component of the managerial experience, as a communicational tool to manipulate relations between the player and other managers, clubs, footballers and fans, selecting from a list of statements to affect a desired state in the recipient, such as their morale, willingness to join your team, fan loyalty, and so forth; recent features even allow the gamer to engage in ‘mind-games’ with the opposition manager.

This mechanic of manipulation is the cornerstone of the gaming experience, as the player experiments with the gameworld through management of information, normally in the exhaustive list of statistics provided by the text, attempting to find the game’s in-built ‘preferred performance’ (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006); that method of playing that is sanctioned by the game’s designers.

Whilst the televisual simulation strives for physical realism in its presentation, the management simulation aesthetic prefers to reinforce notions of strategy and tactics embedded within the gameplay through efficient, abstract representations of the game as played. The graphical user-interface (GUI) borrows much from New Media and web browsers such as *Internet Explorer* (Microsoft, 1995-present), providing hot-links, database searches, an in-game email client and a general web page aesthetic.

*The Extreme Genre*

The extreme videogame is the newest of the sub-genres. A decidedly contemporary illustration of sport realised in the ‘concrete jungle’ of the modern metropolis, the extreme genre incorporates the modern informal use of sport as a verb into its design: ‘Informal. to wear, display, carry, etc., esp. with ostentation; show off:'
to sport a new mink coat”. As will be shown by the textual analysis, extreme simulations thrive on ostentation. If televisual simulations are utopian, idealised, timeless replications of the sport, then the extreme simulation is its antithesis; dystopian, aggressive and modern.

The extreme simulation has been present since as early as 1986, with the release of Atari’s skateboarding game, 720 Degrees, alongside Electronic Arts’ multi-platform Skate Or Die! (1987) released the following year. It can be argued, however, that the extreme genre was truly instigated through the success of a wave of ‘Extreme Sport' computer games such as the Tony Hawk’s series, which finally brought the genre into three-dimensions (though certain arcade games had accomplished this, Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater was the first for home consoles), and ‘Extreme’ racing games such as Need for Speed: Underground which used the success of other media products (notably films such as The Fast and the Furious [Cohen, 2001]) as both springboard and design document for their own product.

All such games maintain a set of features that distinguish them from other sport simulations. A reverence for lawlessness in regards to the previously-established rules of the sport (or in some cases, such as Tony Hawk’s American Wasteland [Neversoft, 2005], you are actually encouraged to break the law by stealing): this normally manifests itself in game mechanics advocating extremely aggressive acts, FIFA Street 2 (EA Sports BIG, 2006) rewards the player for barging, dangerous slide-tackling and humiliating the opponent, whilst an essential skill for Need for Speed: Underground is timing when to smash your vehicle into fellow competitors.

Across the entire Street series, from NBA Street (EA Sports BIG, 2001) to NFL Street (EA Sports BIG, 2004) and back to FIFA Street, there are no referees, no fouls and no adjudication by a governing body (which is paradoxical considering the

official FIFA endorsement). Secondly, the player is located within a contemporary urban locale; *FIFA Street* utilizes various garbage and graffiti-strewn outdoor 5aside courts. The ‘modification’ aspect of the *Need for Speed: Underground* and *Tony Hawk’s* series is adapted; players in *FIFA Street* can buy new clothes, footwear, and footballs along with emblems to spray upon clothing.

Each game also provides a modern soundtrack that features a mixture of independent and major label artists, from alternative rock band ‘Lostprophets’ (who also feature in *Need For Speed: Underground*’s soundtrack) to independent Jazz/hip-hop from English band ‘The Herbaliser’ in *NBA Street: Homecourt* (EA Canada, 2007).

Play consistently involves exaggeration, both representationally and ludically, as the avatar performs superhuman leaps, or the ball takes on alien properties (such as being able to knock players down in ‘gamebreaker’ mode in the *Street* series), or the entire representational patina takes on a decidedly spectacular form, such as psychedelic colouring or the sudden invasion of fireworks upon the screen. Many of these features find tradition in the first arcade sports games, seen as early as 1993 with Midway’s basketball arcade game *NBA Jam*. Players illustrated superhuman prowess upon the court, the ball (if the player was skilled enough) would become a fireball to denote the user’s special ludic status (as will be discussed in chapter seven), and again there was no jurisdiction, thus fouling and shoving were a natural part of the game.
1 - Flow Junkies: A Case Study of the Player of Football Videogames

1.1 Introduction

The experience of playing a digital game does not simply take place upon the screen, in the gamer’s mind, or in many cases even just between player and display. The experience can be, and often is (Lin & Sun, 2008; Sall & Grinter, 2007; Schott & Kambouri, 2006; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004) as much about the setting, social scenario, control interface and group dynamic as it is concerning the relationship between gamer and technology. This chapter will investigate the social role of the player as onlooker, advisor, competitor, friend, antagonist and participant, as being a crucial aspect of the culture and community surrounding digital games as Schott and Kambouri describe:

The culture surrounding the games is an important means of establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationships - from the swapping of games, advice and 'cheats', through to participation in the more public culture of games shops, arcades, magazines and TV shows. The culture of gameplaying involves the ongoing social construction of an 'interpretive community' (cf. Radway, 1984) - and in this respect, as Jessen (1999) argues, it may be better suited to the pattern of children's play than older media such as books, which one is alone consuming. (2006: p121-122)

This notion of lone consumption, as noted being regular within other media, is singularly attacked in the realm of computer games as something unequivocally anti-
social, alienating and unhealthy (Berger, 2002); yet as this chapter will show, the videogame console often acts as a site of social contact, bonding and networking; similarly to Jansz and Martens’ exploratory survey (2005), it seems the primary use of certain videogames (especially first-person shooters and televisual sports games) is first and foremost social (whether offline or online).

This section was partially inspired by Goffman’s work (1973, 1986), describing social relations as symbolic interaction, as a person presenting a version of themselves they find most appropriate or advantageous within the current social context, whilst their acts of communication can hold meaning beyond the message itself; a symbolic act. This conception developed into what Goffman would later call Frame Analysis, describing the individual’s comprehension of the social order and organization of culture as dynamic and dependent upon context, that is to say the individual will act differently dependent upon the location, circumstance, and group dynamic they find themselves within; something Goffman articulated quite suitably as a collection of frames that adapt, interchange and overlap throughout day-to-day social interactions. The suitability of this theory to Game Studies is articulated well by Fine when discussing Role-Playing Games (RPGs):

Games seem particularly appropriate to the application of frame analysis because they represent a bounded set of social conventions, namely a social world… frames of experience may be conscious. Unlike dreams or madness, these worlds have a logical structure, recognizable as parallel to the mundane world. Games are quintessential examples for frame analysis because of their capacity for inducing engrossment. That is, voluntarily cutting oneself off from other realms of experience distinguishes this world of meanings from
those primary frameworks (or the paramount reality) that individuals
“naturally” inhabit.

(1983: p.182)

In other words, games (and consequently the gamers) maintain the potential to
create such distinctive, alternative realities away from the 'natural' reality of everyday
life that the participant’s behaviour within this frame creates a contrast that is suitably
unique, allowing for a productive analysis. Though often seen as standing in
opposition to the symbolic interactionist perspective, the notable observation within
social exchange theory (especially Homans, 1961) to perceive social interaction as
also an economic exchange of often immaterial goods (notably social status), is a
notion that has provided an enlightening influence upon the proceeding analysis;
though I hold similar reservations to Ekeh (1974) concerning social exchange theory
as a viable sociological perspective in and of itself, it is clear there exists a ‘meta-
game’ above the game being played, where social status is wagered, earned and lost
using numerous strategies and tactics by opposing players.

In line with this, I will also utilize Huizinga’s (1949 [1938]) concept of the
‘magic circle’, discussed in the Literature Review, introducing the notion of a
mentally-induced barrier between those involved in a specific activity together
(football, poker et cetera) and those outside this activity, creating a separate set of
rules, behaviours, and local norms (Smith, 2004), alongside accompanying notions of
the spoil-sport and the play community. This is not to say that play is completely
disconnected from 'ordinary' life, as a formal reading of Huizinga (1949 [1938]: p.8)
would suggest, but that the magic circle is 'a robust and knowing, socially
collaborative, cultural construct that affects and is affected by material reality' (Jones, 2008: p.15).

In doing so I hope to highlight the dynamic, multifaceted and situated nature of the gamer persona, illustrating how setting, control interface, social party, and even game genre have an immediate and important affect upon the both the way the game is played, and the experience the player takes from it, as Crawford and Gosling argue:

We advocate adopting an audience research approach, which allows for a consideration of how gaming is located within patterns of everyday life, and how gaming is frequently drawn on as a resource in social interactions, identities and performances… how sports-themed games facilitate the development of gamer narratives, and also often act as a resource in social narratives constructed around both video games and wider sports-related themes… video games, for many, are an important component of their everyday lives, narrative identities and social interactions, and in particular sports-themed video games provide an important resource and cross-over with associated sports fan interests and narratives.

(Crawford & Gosling, 2009: p.63)

As discussed, in opposition to other literature and mediums such as film, videogames require a level of interaction above reading, watching and interpreting, as Galloway succinctly phrases it:

If photographs are images, and films are moving images, then video games are actions. Let this be word one for video game theory. Without action,
games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book. Without the active participation of players and machines, video games exist only as static computer code.

(italics in original, 2006: p.2)

Thus, for any full analysis of the videogame medium, it is essential to not only examine the text, but also how the text is *enacted* through play by the user.

### 1.2 Methodology

The principal method of data collection for this chapter was participant observation (as outlined by Giddens, 1993b) within domestic spaces, supplemented by interviews and discussions both offline and online with both the members of the participant observation group and wider members of the relevant game’s fan community; in particular the fan websites [http://www.pesgaming.com/](http://www.pesgaming.com/), [http://www.pesfan.com/](http://www.pesfan.com/) and [http://winningelevenblog.com/](http://winningelevenblog.com/) were the main hosts used for observation and engagement with the community through the associated forums.

During interview excerpts the author will be referred to as S. The locations for the offline participant observation studies were varyingly S, C and P’s home living rooms; I was also invited to an LGI (Learning Games Initiative) ‘Game Night’ study (McAllister, 2004) whilst attending a media conference in Arizona, and insights gathered from my attendance form the basis of certain sections of this analysis.

The group size varied between two and eight, whilst the number of players varied between two and four (1vs1 and 2vs2 being the only acceptable mode of participation agreed upon by the group), play times averaged at approximately 2 hours (each match lasting roughly 20 minutes); the total time for observation was
approximately 50 hours. The groups were uniformly male, and between the ages of 16-31; six were Caucasian, one identified himself as Indian and another as of African heritage. Socio-economically the participants identified themselves as middle class (7) and working class (2). Also interviewed and observed for a shorter period over two days was a group of four professional game players from UK professionals ‘Team Dignitas’, between the ages of 18-24, all self-identified as Caucasian and middle class.

In regards to the lack of female representation, it is informative here to once more consider Dovey and Kennedy’s (2006) concept of technicity. This perspective on identity is heavily influenced by cybernetic and cybercultural theory, postulating that there is, in contemporary Western culture, an inherent symbiotic relation between person and technology, so much so that a person is now partly defined by the technology they own and operate, rather than their ethnicity.

Dovey and Kennedy describe the dominant technicity of videogames as ‘deeply gendered’ (p.75), as technology that is associated with masculinity from an early period, and the continuation of this masculine connotation renders ‘the other’ (in this instance, females) often invisible within the gaming landscape, as Dovey and Kennedy describe in their experience with female Quake players:

These female players who take pleasure in the mastery of game, which is seen as requiring skills that are clearly demarcated as masculine, are aware of the transgressive nature of their pleasure. Respondents will describe themselves as having always ‘been tomboys’ or never liking ‘girly stuff’. They demonstrate a full awareness of the fact that playing these games is not something ‘good girls’ should do and also resolutely reject the discourse of appropriate
feminine behaviour, simultaneously aware of a discourse that positions them as abnormal whilst also insisting that they are normal.

(2006: p.119)

This is also supported by Taylor’s findings (2009), where the women present within the North American professional videogaming scene were uniformly illustrated to be working in a service capacity (food, drink, hardware and software sales) or as ornamental adornments for sponsorship campaigns (Dr. Pepper models and so forth); in this way the largely homosocial space of the professional videogame player exhibitions and tournaments was given a heteronormative legitimacy through the presence of heavily objectified women; this is of course similar to the presence of cheerleaders at American sports such as Basketball and American Football.

During my research I was able to locate two women, acquaintances of T and P, who were by all accounts regular game players. Yet upon enquiring as to whether they would like to participate, both attempted to render themselves invisible by downplaying their involvement in games culture, as not taking games ‘seriously’ and “not really playing them”, nor with any frequency; this was contrary to my own and others observations yet provided a clear example of how, in identifying themselves as incompatible with the dominant technicity, they attempted to conform by belittling their own involvement in what they considered a masculine culture, as extrapolated by Williams (2006):

For males, technology has long been an empowering and masculine pursuit that hearkens back to the wunderkind tinkerers of the previous century… The effects of such social constructions are very real: The connection between
video game play and later technological interest has become a gender issue in early adolescence and persists throughout the life span. Females are socialized away from game play, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for technology use: Girls who do not play become women who do not use computer technology (p.206)

This is of course not always the case, and many ‘outsiders’ offer staunch resistance to the dominant technicity, most visibly in the aggressive ‘grrl gamerz’ community (Schott & Horrell, 2000). Yet in this research, perhaps due to its specific location in not only the culture of videogames, dominated socially by males (Janz & Martens, 2005), but also within the highly-gendered world of sport (Whannel, 2002; Schott & Horrell, 2000), a double exclusion if you will, I was unable to find willing female participants.

The game, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* (Konami, 2007) hereafter referred to as *PES2008*, was chosen for a variety of reasons, chief among them being the availability of hardware and software, the ease of using a multiplayer mode (multiplayer is very complicated for games in the management genre), the familiarity and popularity of the series for the players, and also the conviction held by those interviewed that Konami’s series was the most ‘elite’ football simulation; ‘elite’ being qualified by the players as needing specialised knowledge (of the sport, the game, and the control interface), providing ample opportunity to also situate my research in relation to concepts of cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), fan progression (Crawford, 2004) and behavioural setting theories (Blanchard, 2004).

The outcome of this research was to spawn five categories of examination, here labelled as Dress, Custom (routine actions, conventions and rules set by the
Body Language and Proxemics (proxemics being an analysis of the distances between actors, first introduced by Edward Hall (1966)), Argot (specialised language used by a certain group), and Themes of Discussion.

### 1.3 Dress

The dress code amongst participants was uniformly casual, informal, and often sport-related. For example, on regular occasion there would be one or more members of the group wearing a football jersey. This would serve two primary purposes, firstly to separate and distinguish themselves as part of a particular group, as Crawford (2004: p.42) notes, such apparel separates the ‘general public’ from the ‘devoted’, and secondly this also conveyed the user’s game-based team selection and favouritism, for example one player wore an AC Milan ‘Kaka’ shirt to signify his specialised and (in terms of the social group) notorious use of the AC Milan playmaker in *PES2008*.

There was also evidence of attendants wearing shirts to either gain or conspicuously illustrate their cultural capital vis-à-vis football culture in general. This is what Zahavi would call an 'investment in the advertisement' (1977: p.603); whereas a conventional signal, such as a participant remarking “I am an authority on anything to do with football” could be distrusted, the speaker could *invest* in their signal by proving their expertise materially, in the form of an obscure team shirt and/or having a foreign star player’s name printed on the back, as Jonas Heide Smith elucidates, 'Merely telling someone “I’m rich” would be a conventional signal.- as opposed to an assessment signal, a proof of truth, i.e., showing the amount of money in his pocket' (Smith, 2007: online).

Thus players would routinely wear the shirts of teams in Spain’s *Primera División*, Italy’s *Serie A*, or international teams (normally South American; Brazil and

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10 Though Kaka’ now plays for Real Madrid, in *PES2008* he plays for AC Milan.
Argentina being most fashionable) with names such as Messi and Zidane printed on the back; an added caveat was the additional cultural capital accorded to those wearing older shirts with now retired superstar’s names, e.g. as above the Juventus football team shirt with the name of French star Zidane printed upon the back was worn by one member in particular, who was then seen as something of an expert on the Italian football league. This tendency to eulogize and mythologize past players as almost supernatural beings (it would seem akin to the ancient Greeks discussing the past exploits of heroes such as Theseus, Perseus and Odysseus et al) is also supported by the game’s inclusion of these former champions as powerful relics of a utopian past; through winning certain matches these hidden superstars are ‘unlocked’ for use in the game, and the one factor they share in common is that their accorded attributes and special abilities are all extraordinarily high in comparison to the modern footballers included in the product (this is further discussed in chapters eight and nine).

This form of attire and general attitude also illustrates how closely related the participants consider the football videogame to the wider football culture. For example, during an interview T explained how *PES2008* is considered more ‘football’ than ‘videogame’:

S: So you don’t wear a World War 2 helmet when playing *Call of Duty*, why do you think [members of the group] wear football shirts?

T: (laughs) Well it’s, I think when you play Pro Evo it’s like playing football, more than other videogames.

S: What do you mean?
T: Well when I play *Mass Effect* or *Call of Duty*, I do get carried away a bit in the moment, but I always know it’s… fiction, if that makes sense (laughs). With Pro Evo it doesn’t feel like fiction, it feels serious.

S: Right ok. I think you’re saying that it feels like an authentic sporting experience, like watching football on TV?

T: Yeah definitely. It feels serious, like the results matter, and you get the usual stuff being shouted, and it feels like a real football match.

The ‘authenticity’ seems to initially stem from the representational aspects of the televisual genre; the broadcast camera angle, action replays, slow-motion edits, highlight reels, lens flare and commentary teams. Such verisimilitudinous visual stylistics appears to give the game greater gravitas in relation to the sports fan community, as more ‘real’ than the extreme genre (*FIFA Street 3* (EA Sports BIG, 2008) etc). This claim to ‘reality’ is also seen in the players’ discussion of the gameplay mechanics, detailed further below.

### 1.4 Customs

There were numerous rituals involved in both the playing and spectating of *PES2008*. The first and most important rule for a spectator was simply not to cross the gamers’ line of sight with the television screen. Doing so was considered a grave faux pas and indicative of a non-serious attitude or amateur experience with videogames; it was a fundamental breakage of the magic circle and would interrupt the player’s flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 2002, 2004) which as we will see, is one of the fundamental attractions of play.
At the beginning of every match there would be a certain amount of time allocated to the ‘formation screen’, where the team configuration could be manipulated, alongside numerous tactical options and swapping of members of the starting eleven players. Though time was always allowed for these changes to be made, moaning would be incurred if a user was deemed to be taking above the time allowed, or being too meticulous in their preparations. This scenario had many intriguing parallels with the social norms and general etiquette of the schoolyard:

S: Why do people moan about the time taken in the formations screen?
C: Well some people don’t take it seriously.
S: To me it seems like everyone seems to at least pretend they don’t take it seriously, even if you can see they do.
C: [laughs] That is true. It’s kind of similar to being back in school, you know like how it’s not “cool” to be seen reading a book, or to take a class seriously.
S: [laughs] Right yeah. So you feel that maybe people will think you’re a geek or a nerd the longer you take on the formations screen?
C: [laughs] Yeah pretty much! So you pretend that you don’t care to fit in!
[laughs again]

Interestingly, the less experienced players would always be the first to complain, as they were also the first to be finished, with self-confessed amateur P explaining that he did not think the formation screen “really mattered”. Again, this mirrors the behaviour of the schoolyard, the stereotype of the bully belittling the smart student to compensate for not understanding the material to the same degree (Lowenstein, 1977).
Yet, between more experienced players, time taken in the formation screen would instead be a forum for discussion, as tips were exchanged, settings were explained, player statistics were scrutinized, and tactics were noted for their advantages and disadvantages. In this manner they were reflective of Blanchard’s (2004) notion of the ‘Information Leader’, a ‘provider of expertise and knowledge about a topic’ (online), gaining social standing by providing information and guidance on subjects pertaining to the text.

Another ritual was the half-time discussion (the content of which is given closer analysis in the ‘Themes of Discussion’ section below). At the end of a half, the Pro Evolution Soccer series displays a panel of information noting score, shots on target, disciplinary cards received, and ball possession. Such data would normally be used as material for banter amongst the group, as the relative merits of each statistic would be used to prove one player’s superiority over the other, discussed in common football slang, usually aggressive metaphors for physically dominating your opponent, e.g., “60% possession, I’m all over you!” and “10 shots on target, I should be battering you!”

Again, the emphasis of the televisual genre’s status as ‘football’ more than ‘videogame’ to the players explains this form of evaluation and subsequent banter, as similar discussions can be observed watching pundits provide their professional views at half-time or listening to normal pub repartee.

Also evident were local norms; an ‘implicit rule’… dependent on players reaching a mutual understanding on how the game should be played' (Smith, 2004: p.5-6). Rules such as these are not algorithmic but social, and thus have the potential to be highly variable between groups. Within the group studied, there were two cardinal local norms, the first being if a player wins three games in a row he/she must
pass the controller over to a new player (explained as keeping things fair and making sure everyone gets to play), and secondly that pausing (pressing the ‘START’ button to freeze the game) during play is not permitted unless absolutely necessary, this was explained to be disallowed both as an anti-cheating measure (repeated pausing can disrupt an attacking move), and as a method of keeping the magic circle coherent (pausing breaks the ‘flow’ of the game).

The first cardinal rule (passing the pad after three wins) seemed to emerge particularly from a requirement of the game to act as social lubricant; if people were not given opportunity to be involved in the game, they were not seen as part of the group, and thus allowances were made. This contrasted starkly with an online group met, to whom giving up playing privileges in the name of fairness was absurd. Seeing themselves as accomplished players, this community believed in setting a minimum skill level as criteria for entry above any kind of social factor. This is reminiscent of Crawford’s findings (2004) in studying football fans:

However, it is likely that some of the more 'dedicated' supporters (i.e. devoted and professional) are more willing to attribute their understanding of their sport or enthusiasm, and position at the very centre of the supporter base, to their 'experience' and 'expert' knowledge - rather than as the result of a process of tuition and development... In many respects, the attitudes of devoted and professional supporters reflect those of elitist opinions towards art and high culture as considered by Bourdieu (1984) - where individuals are more willing to attribute their 'expertise' to an almost 'natural' ability, rather than as a result of tuition and learning. In this way, devoted and professional supporters often seek to assert their legitimacy and position (and distinguish themselves from
other supporters), on the basis of either their 'natural' understanding of the
game, or superior knowledge and experience.

(p.48)

Thus this group of players willingly ostracised themselves from any casual or
more beginner-friendly communities, creating a more elitist, dedicated collection of
users to whom expertise and knowledge of the game were paramount. Parallel to this,
the group of professional gamers interviewed professed their reticence in playing with
the “pub player”\footnote{Public Player – a player logged on to a public server (accessible by anyone playing the game). This is
in opposition to private servers, where a password is required for entry, and is generally populated by
players in the same ‘clans’ (teams).} during their own time, stating their clear preference was to play
with familiar people of a similar level, who knew the game's intricacies and were
aware of the common etiquette and behaviour expected by those of an advanced level;
as we will see, this is symptomatic generally of the gamer’s desire to reach the flow
state, no matter what their rank, the interviewees (both offline and online) preferred a
comfort zone containing familiar people of a comparable skill level.

It was also evident in discussion that most players (especially those seen as
leaders of the group) believed their skill at the game, and the videogame milieu in
general, to be an innate, natural capability, as something felt but not learned, as
something not to be taught but to be born with, a specific genetic coding that gave an
apparent preternatural aptitude to playing videogames. In many ways it was an
attempt at legitimization, as if the advanced players were declaring their skill as a gift
that not everyone is capable of, creating their own source of cultural capital that they
hoped would translate to symbolic capital; to be seen by the larger community as
expert players worthy of admiration or indeed aspiration, which would then finally
lead in certain instances to economic capital, as the player gathers enough cultural
and/or symbolic capital to be recruited as a professional player by one of the nascent industry’s teams.

This is clearly illustrated in a forum conversation where a new player is asking for advice but the better players, believing their ability to be natural and thus not transferable as knowledge, dismiss the player outright:

PT (new forum member): He has faster players in Machester [sic] than I have in Barcelona. He plays defend and counter attack [sic]. We have different game styles. We have been playing for 5 years and in the total ranking he is 4 games ahead. The issue is that in PES 2009, Manchester United seems to be unbeateably [sic]. That is why I am asking for some help and advice.

SG (old forum member): I stick with your friend being better at the game than you. Doesn’t matter what players he has. I can play my friend as any random team against Man U and 9 times out of 10 I will win...... why?.....because I’m a better player.

There was a hierarchy to the earlier discussed local norms, and though they were never spoken of whilst playing, seemingly being taken for granted amongst the group, all participants would seem to be in complete agreement as to what rule breaks were the most severe:

S: So is breaking one rule worse than breaking any other? So for example, would walking in front of the television be the same as turning off someone’s controller?

M: Yeah. You would never turn someone else’s controller off would you.
T: Not unless you were joking about. I’ve had it done before as a joke when I left the room before the game started. If it was being serious, like he turned my controller off and carried on playing when I had to answer the phone or whatever… It’s never happened because that’s taking it too far if you’re being serious. You’d probably get everyone shouting at you.

M: Yeah you’d be spoiling the game. I mean, it’s not like it would cause a fight or anything [laughs], but you would definitely get on everyone’s nerves.

L: When you walk past the screen it’s not meant anyway.

S: So the intention of the person has a bearing on how bad it is?

M: Yeah. If someone really is trying to get away with cheating. Like one time [person] took a few of my best players off when I left the room, then started the match. I clocked on of course, and he was laughing, so it wasn’t that serious because he was messing about. But if someone did that seriously, and tried to keep it secret if I wouldn’t have noticed, then that’s probably the worst kind of cheat.

S: Right, so someone intentionally trying to ruin the game, that’s the worst?

All: [Gesture in agreement]

Again as noted by Smith (2004), there are two forms of conflict in multiplayer games, intra-mechanic conflict (arising from the rules of the game) and extra-mechanic conflict (the consequence of games being played in social spaces). Whilst the intra-mechanic conflict described earlier (in terms of referee decisions and player statistics) was regular, it was, to borrow a term from history, a ‘cold’ conflict. In other words, the conflict never actually became a cause for social disruption amongst the group. This is simply because the player is offered no form of recourse against
decisions made by the computer-controlled referee, and thus the user must simply accept refereeing decisions or stop playing. Of course, again imitating the conventions of modern football culture, the user would still shout and debate with the unflinching virtual referee on many occasions as noted in the section on discussion; indeed there seemed to be a certain pleasure in this for the user, a combination of catharsis and also perhaps a satisfaction found in the mimicry, in playing the role of the aggrieved footballer/manager (Caillois, 2001: p.19).

In terms of player statistics there is a large degree of agency afforded within the product’s edit feature, allowing kits to be edited, transfers to be made, and player attributes to be manipulated; of the three, the last was by far the most controversial. Whilst the group sanctioned and indeed encouraged edits to be made to either increase the authenticity of the club strip, or update a team’s roster to include January transfers for example, the changing of a player’s characteristics was outlawed due to the differing opinions on each footballer held by each member of the party; it seemed universal that each person held a higher opinion of their favourite player’s statistics than the game provided. Thus the developer’s rating of each squad member was seen as law, as objective fact against which everything else was held as subjective and inferior, as C explained:

S: Do you think it’s ok to edit Player Statistics?
C: I guess if I was playing alone I might do it, but I don’t think you’d be allowed to when playing multiplayer. I think the game actually resets all the stats if you play online. I remember I had an argument with [friend] about changing the height of a player, because I remembered on the club website he
was this height, and in the game he was a few centimetres shorter. But he said I was trying to cheat.

S: [laughs] Cheat?

C: [laughs] Yeah he said I wanted the extra centimetres so he could get to headers!

This form of argument was relayed a few times by users, how they had wanted to edit something yet the other player/group had decided against it as cheating because it was not packaged with the stock game. If any alterations to player statistics were agreed upon by the group, it was only through official patches released by Konami. This is simply a reflection of the wider way in which fans of Pro Evolution Soccer and other sports videogames seem to assimilate their knowledge of the videogame into wider football culture (also noted by Crawford (2005)), as illustrated by a conversation with T:

S: Do you think your experience with Pro Evo affects your perception of the real-life player?

T: I think I’m definitely quicker to judge a player I know from Pro Evo. Like if he’s got bad stats, if he makes a mistake I’ll be quicker to think he’s crap.

S: So you mean if in Pro Evo he’s not good, and you’re watching him play and he makes a mistake, your impression of him as bad is cemented quicker than if you’d never heard of him?

T: Yeah… And also the other way round. If like a young player is rated in Pro Evo and then I see him play on TV and he scores or makes a good run, I’ll be quicker to think he’s a quality player.
An interesting tangent related to this reciprocal cycle between sports videogames and the wider sports-media complex was the fact that a few interviewees acknowledged that games such as *Pro Evolution Soccer* either made them take a new interest in the actual sport, or reinvigorated a previously lagging interest; a small number also became interested in sports such as American football firstly through their videogame incarnations. This is similar to Crawford’s findings (2004):

Furthermore, my own research (Crawford 2000) suggests that not only can an interest in sport help stimulate an interest in the digital version of these, but also, digital gaming can likewise help generate interest in sport. This, I suggest, may be particularly true for many ‘imported’ sports... For instance, British ice hockey fan ‘Larry’ (male, aged mid-30s) suggested it was his interest in digital games that first attracted him to watching ice hockey.

(p.151)

The majority of conflict, as illuminated by the earlier excerpt discussing the hierarchy of local norms, arose from discussion on the extra-mechanic conflicts, categorized by Smith (2004) as cheating, local norm violation and grief play. Cheating usually involved the use of non-diegetic features such as the pause function, turning the hardware off or being in the way of the television, but the notion of cheating was also contested over diegetic features that were built into the game, such as the tactic of intentionally targeting certain star footballers for injury. For example, the aforementioned AC Milan player Kaka’ was normally targeted for “assassination”;
this is where the opposing user aggressively tackles the player until he is injured, then requiring substitution.

The contentious nature of these tactics arose from both sides having seemingly valid arguments; the ‘assassin’ would argue that the ability exists to do it in the game, and thus it must be sanctioned by the developers; the avatars have a fatigue rating\textsuperscript{12} for a reason and they are simply taking advantage of that fact, whilst the victim would contend that it is against the ‘spirit’ of the game.

Again parallels could be drawn; this time to the common debate in professional football against those club teams who are accused of playing boring, defensive “route one” football (“route one”, i.e. direct, means to hit the ball up the field as far as possible in the hope that your forward players will gain possession and score), with the accuser normally being a wealthy club maintaining a roster of talented stars, the accused regularly being a relatively poor team struggling lower down the division, with their manager’s retort usually consisting of a “doing what I can with my meagre resources” line of argument to contrast their position with that of their wealthier decriers. Another evident parallel is the fact that the user of the tactic is reluctant to identify themselves as purveyor of it; much like Stoke City’s manager is unlikely to admit his team play ugly football. In the following excerpt the discussion was focused upon these innovative methods of levelling the playing field (or ‘griefing’ depending upon the user’s perspective):

T: Yeah [P] always hacks players until they’re taken off, he’s always cheating.

P: [laughs] Piss off do I!

M: [laughs] You blatantly do!

\textsuperscript{12} Every avatar within the game has a ‘fitness’ and ‘injury’ rating, lesser ratings for either means a higher chance of injury after an aggressive challenge, and subsequent substitution from the field of play.
S: So why do you do it?

M: [imitating false outrage] I’ve never done it before in my life!

All: [laughter]

Defusing what could be a tense debate through mirth was prevalent throughout discussions on the nature of these tactics; indeed as Haddon (1992: p.87) has noted, humour is often an integral part of the wider Information and Communication Technology (ICT) culture. The defendant would playfully fill the role of the wrongfully accused, with the accusations being provided in a similarly light-hearted manner. It would seem the casual, jocular nature of the group meant such issues would never be seriously confronted; the humour acted as a barricade to protect the often porous membrane of the magic circle, as McLuhan acknowledges, 'the cultural strategy that is desperately needed is humor and play. It is play that cools off the hot situations of actual life by miming them' (McLuhan, 1964: p.40).

The conversation then led to how context affects such matters:

S: Do you think you would react differently to this kind of cheating if it was online against someone you didn’t know?

T: Yeah sure. Especially if he kept doing it I would get really pissed off.

P: I did it actually online a few months ago.

T: [fakes shock] No you P?

P: [laughing] No not really cheating, but I annoyed someone because I kept just passing the ball around my defence and he couldn’t get to it. I lasted about 85 minutes [note: 85 minutes of game time translates into roughly 15 minutes].
S: Right. Well yeah that’s not cheating, but it’s definitely grief play, trying to upset or frustrate the other player. So you think you would definitely react different to someone doing this to you online than with your mates? Would you be angrier? Would you stop playing?

T: Well… I wouldn’t stop playing if it was the hacking, I would definitely get angry if he kept doing something like he [gesturing to P] did, then I’d just not play again, find a new match or whatever.

M: I’d just get fucked off and quit the match [laughs].

Obviously the context within which these gamers find themselves playing the game has a vast influence upon their behaviour, a consistency Goffman (1986) would perhaps describe in terms of separate frames, between private and public, offline and online, competitive or casual, and so on. Though something of a cliché, it seems the primary explanation for the differing conventions of acceptable behaviour in offline and online play remains the problem of identification and communication when online. As T explained when I asked in an online interview how he would react to blatant attempts at cheating, “My reactions feed off of how the person committing the act reacts”. Hence without the ability to read the other person through face-to-face communication, a hostile environment is easily created and then perhaps perpetuated through misunderstandings in translating each player’s/group’s local norms, and then the continued lack of communication throughout the match serves to heighten and crystallize these mistakes and hostilities. Added to this are numerous technical deficiencies engendered by the network code, including lag,\(^{13}\) ghosting\(^{14}\) and disconnections; all-in-all the online experience’s asocial design is predisposed to

\(^{13}\) A delay in time between input and output, caused by poor network code/connections.

\(^{14}\) Generally a symptom of lag, this is where avatars seemingly disappear and then reappear at separate locations due to the network being unable to keep pace with the gamestate.
creating antagonistic and suspicious encounters to a degree unseen in offline encounters.

The debating of these ‘cheats’ seemed in essence a debate on whether or not they were local norm violations, as some local norms (passing the controller over after three straight victories) were agreed upon by everyone, whilst others such as injuring the star player were debated. There was also consternation evident concerning a form of grief play, known as voiding the match. This basically occurred when one gamer, being on the losing team, would deliberately perform dangerous fouls to get their avatars sent off by the referee, as once the gamer has less than 6 players on the pitch the match is automatically voided. This is performed in a much more efficient manner online, where the losing player, not needing to explain his or herself to the opposition in the same room, simply pulls the plug on the network connection or turns off their console, aptly giving them the nickname of ‘pluggers’ within player communities; such tactics are now tracked by in-game statistics, so online players can avoid known pluggers (Moeller, Esplin & Conway, 2009).

These forms of severing were seen as grief play as it both robbed the winning user of their victory and also cut short the autotelic satisfaction of playing the game; what Stebbins described as ‘self-gratification’ and ‘self-renewal’ (1992: p.94), the pure enjoyment of the game (in the former) and using the product as a diversion from other problems (in the latter, and as we will see this again finds a corroborator in Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow (2002)). In a basic sense, the group’s revulsion at such tactics seemed in part due to the spoilsport shattering the magic circle, as Huizinga describes:
The spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its illusion - a pregnant word which means literally “in-play” (from inlusio, illudere or inludere). Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community… A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over… the feelings of being “apart together” in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game.

(1949 [1938]: p.11-12)

The fragility of the magic circle is no better emphasized than in the anxiety experienced during the continued maintenance and enforcement of these extra-mechanic rules (Smith, 2004). As decidedly local customs, these anxieties and tensions are amplified in the placelessness of online play, where local customs and etiquette are negotiated, resisted, or simply broken. Many interviewees when discussing online play would highlight their resistance to online versus offline in terms of their anxieties in confronting hostile players, cheats, or those who didn’t understand how the game “should” be played. In other words, they feared the regular breakage of the magic circle, and the subsequent inability to enter a stable flow state.

The concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 2002, 2004) is also applicable to a unique practise discussed amongst the group when playing certain games; this being the playing of music (the television would be muted in such instances). This was not observed during video recordings of the group as the audio would be overwhelmed by
the music played to the degree that individual voices could not be heard, but often the

group would play music alongside their games before or after the recording session.
This seems to tie into the notion of flow as it was explained that the presence of music
would help concentrate and relax the participant:

S: So what’s the reason for playing music when you’re playing *Pro Evo*?
C: It helps relax you.
M: Yeah and it blends well with the game. After a bit it just feels natural and
you enjoy playing along to the music.
T: You even start… Playing in rhythm a bit I think?
M: Definitely, you find yourself kind of playing to the beat like you’re playing
*Guitar Hero* or something.
C: It’s much more enjoyable than the shitty commentary, because it’s so bad it
can be distracting. With the music you can get in the zone.
T: Yeah the commentary is just awful sometimes.

This mention of “the zone” was often used identifiably as a synonym for flow,
appropriately enough in interviewing the group of professional videogame players,
they all agreed that their main motivation aside from earning money in playing was
to attain the sensation of “being in the zone” for as long as possible, something they
described as having a direct connection with the game, a feeling of peacefulness, of
forgetting about problems and being completely focused on the game; all things
which align perfectly with the description of flow.
The experience is also habitually labelled as such by sports stars, as mentioned in an
article from *The Sunday Times*:
Michael Phelps could not have made Olympic history without Lil “Weezy” Wayne: “Every time I walked to the pool, I was blasting my music to put me in the zone, listening to artists like Jay-Z, Young Jeezy and that giant they call Lil Wayne”… In the age of the iPod, music has become almost as important as the huddle in the pregame build-up.

(The Sunday Times, 2009: online)

It seems the custom of playing music alongside the game would help the user reach the flow state in an accelerated time, and also would improve the duration, as the commentary (the Pro Evolution Soccer series’ commentary is renowned for being of a poor and often bizarre quality (Irvine, 2008)) would be muted, removing any distraction or the breaking of the suspension of disbelief through completely inaccurate reporting of the gamestate that sometimes occurred through commentary (this is further detailed in chapter four).

1.5 Body Language and Proxemics

To firstly clarify, this section will often merge observations of body language with the concept of proxemics, being, in Edward T. Hall’s words, 'the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture' (1966: p.1). Thus in observing the group, I not only took note of how they used their body’s posture to communicate, but also how they positioned their bodies in relation to one another, as such decision-making is clearly an act of communication in itself.

The body language of participants during play sessions was extremely distinctive depending upon the member’s role. For example, a seated spectator would
normally sit relaxed, backwards on the furniture, eyes wandering around the room at regular junctures. For those actively playing this posture was reversed; leaning very much forwards towards the screen, the entire upper body tensed with the eyes completely focused upon the television. The game controllers were also held in a distinctly forward manner, as the user seemed to consistently hold their pad as far in front of their body as comfortably possible, resting their elbows upon their thighs with the gamepad the closest object to the visual display. This was discussed with T:

S: Have you got any idea why you sit forward when playing *Pro Evo*?
T: I feel it helps with my concentration. If I am laying back I am too relaxed to play properly.
S: I see. Do you feel more, it’s an awkward way to put this, but immersed in the game?
T: I feel a better connection with the game. More in control, if you like.

In aid of this players would often take primary position in relation to the television, ‘primary’ position qualifying as directly facing the screen so as there was no (or at least minimal) distortion of the image, and no obstructions. If all such seating was occupied, then any spectator located within the primary location would often give way or swap seats, as the view provided to spectators was seen as irrelevant by the group. In this way it became easy to identify players and spectators separately without even looking at whether or not they held a gamepad in their hands; players would normally be seated centrally in front of the television, with the spectators gathered along the periphery, at sometimes uncomfortably acute angles.
It seems as if this method of optimal positioning, combined with the distinctive posture noted above, allowed the player to more readily enter the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), where his or her autotelic experience and concentration on the task at hand reach their peak levels, concluding in benefits Csikszentmihalyi categorizes as, 'A sense of ecstasy… Great inner clarity… A sense of serenity' (2004: online). These psychological states were corroborated by my interviews, for example with C:

S: [explaining the concept of Flow] So if I just ask you about these kind of categories, you can let me know whether that sounds close to your own experience.
C: Right.
S: Ok so do you feel a sense of ecstasy? By that I mean do you feel a sense of total involvement with the game? As if there is no separation?
C: Yeah definitely. I kind of, well yeah I completely forget that the pad is in my hands, or that I’m looking at a television. It’s just like it’s me.
S: Yeah, I see what you’re saying. So do you feel a sense of clarity? Kind of a clear knowledge about what you need to do and how to do it?
C: Yeah I guess. I mean I don’t get anything from that but yeah.
S: Yeah it’s not for enjoyment, it’s more that you feel completely comfortable and assured in what you’re doing.
C: Definitely.
S: Do you feel a sense of serenity? Basically do you stop worrying about things outside the game, for example work, paying off the car or whatever.
C: Yeah yeah. Well… Maybe not at first, but if not straight away then after a minute or two I’m completely lost in the game. Like a good film… Or being drunk.

This mention of other mediums and forms of experience illustrates how the flow state can be present in all forms of practice, independent of the object, as Csikszentmihalyi extrapolates (2004: online), if the person’s skill is perfectly met by the challenge, regardless of context, the optimal scenario for entering the flow state is achieved.

Opposing players would, if sitting on the same couch or sofa, often unknowingly move away from one another (upon questioning no user ever seemed conscious of this movement), creating a space that symbolically communicated their oppositional status. Conversely, a conscious effort was made to sit alongside the partner if in a team situation (2vs2), so much so that people would verbally agitate and negotiate until each pair were seated together. This served no functional purpose, as the players were all still seated so closely that the slightest whisper was still perfectly audible to the entire group, yet it served an important social and symbolic role. Again the rivalry between pairs was figuratively invoked by the use of space (it is no coincidence that sports teams are often referred to as “sides”), whilst socially this helped encourage a sense of camaraderie, with the accompanying dual sense of inclusion and exclusion.

Often each pairing would invent its own specialized celebratory gesture to increase this sense of solidarity (and to ostentatiously flaunt it to the opponent), such as unique ‘high five’ celebrations (one pair became famous for using only two fingers, making it technically a ‘high two’) or long-winded ‘secret’ handshakes (enacted in a
parodist manner). All rehearsed celebrations had an obvious comedic nature and seemingly served as an ironic commentary on sports fandom, yet there were also spontaneous celebrations (most often performed upon the scoring of a crucial or unexpected goal) that displayed a genuine sharing of the euphoria or *jouissance* (Barthes, 1975) of the text; these would normally take the form of hugs or genuine high fives and handshakes, comparable to observing the sports fan celebrating their team’s goal.

When engaged in conversation, the users would often refuse to redirect their eye line in the direction of the conversant, instead remaining staunchly centred upon the television. In talking, the players would appear distracted and brief with their input, utilizing *argot* that functioned as shorthand for the message they would otherwise have to long-windedly convey. This of course highlights the importance placed upon playing the product; everything else is secondary to the requirements of the videogame, even eating and drinking; it was noted especially by the professionals that upon entering 'the zone', they could go hours without even realising they were hungry or thirsty, until they subsequently “snapped out of it”, as one participant phrased it.

The spectator would also engage with other media whilst watching the match, mobile phones, laptops, personal computers and so forth, normally in pursuit of or in relation to a subject of discussion they had started. They would also eat snacks or take a drink much more frequently then those involved in playing, who only ever performed such actions when there was a pause in play, the reason for which is explained by P, who was clearly bemused by the question:
S: I noticed no one eats or drinks whilst playing, why is that?
P: Why would you? Wait til after the game for a drink! (laughs)
S: Why not have one during?
P: Because you have to take your hand off the pad!
S: Can’t you pause?
P: (laughs) You could but people would get pretty pissed off.
S: Why?
P: It interrupts the flow of the game; everyone would say you’re cheating.

Again, any diversion from the game playing experience is seen to be irrational and, perhaps worse, to initiate such distractions is to be seen as a spoil-sport (Huizinga, 1938).

The only notable changes in body language by the users come when, as mentioned above, there is a break in the game (pause, half-time, game over et cetera), or when a pivotal event occurs, such as a close chance, a one-on-one situation (goalkeeper versus striker for example), a refereeing decision, or a goal. Such situations regularly incite flurries of motion, as gestures are made to express relief, frustration or joy. This is most evident when matches end in a draw and must go to penalties, taken in alternating turns until five have been taken by each side; if both sides are still even then sudden death penalties are taken. During these periods there would be frequent movements, taken it would seem as both precaution against the opponent cheating and because of the player’s anxiety; again both users/teams would distance themselves from one another spatially.

A strange custom would be for the gamers to place a cushion (or anything else suitable) over their hands if available, obfuscating the controller from view so that
each player could not spy on the other; the cushions would also serve an incidental secondary purpose of allowing the penalty-taker to bury their heads if they missed a shot. Much like the fan observing their team in a televised penalty shootout, the players would nervously chatter, cheer on their avatar to hold his nerve, or express hopelessness over a particular avatar’s renowned real-world aversion to penalties e.g. as one member exclaimed, “Oh shit Saha, he’s crap at penalties!”; the user was clearly both player and spectator in such moments.

The scoring of a goal is particularly notable for a selection of reasons. Firstly the extreme and often referential nature of the celebration is revealing, by loud shouting and cheering, banging of nearby furniture, or even invoking a number of famous football celebrations of the past (pulling the shirt over the head, various parodies of the ‘Klinsmann dive’ and so on); again the user illustrates their trans-medial consumption of sport, as an inherently intertextual process whereby they recycle and seamlessly employ content from various sports media, contexts and eras as a language through which they articulate their response.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, whilst it was often normal for the gamers to celebrate as typical sports spectators if playing on the same team (high fives, handshakes and so forth), playing as individuals (1vs1) allowed the player to assume the role of sports participant in their celebration, as the need to negotiate a celebration with their fellow team-mate was absent. Sometimes amongst veteran players a lack of celebration was evident, an absence of any overt expression, as they instead sought to communicate their expertise of the game: “Scoring is nothing special for me”. Also the form of celebration is a reflection of the player’s introverted or conversely extroverted social persona; this is touched upon by T:
S: When scoring it seems some people like to celebrate, whilst others remain quiet, or at least don’t show emotion?

T: That is down to the personality of the person. As I am quite shy and timid I tend not to rub peoples face in it for fear of repercussion; I don’t want it to be a big deal. Unless it is P, then I feel I have to rub his face in it.\textsuperscript{15}

S: A bit of tit-for-tat? You do it to counter his big celebrations?

T: Yes.

So whilst there is visible in the user’s celebration a demonstration of their reserved or outgoing personality, this can change depending upon the numerous variables of context; opponent, setting, group, format, and so on. For example, as P was infamous within the group for his theatrical celebrations, it seemed that anyone who played him would rise to a similar level of celebration, to match this form of masculine contestation, similar to opposing sports fans attempting to out cheer one another; in this way social status within the group is also challenged.

Conversely, if playing in an unfamiliar group or against people of a skill level clearly unequal to their own, celebrations would appear relatively muted. In fact when watching veteran users play a match against new users, sometimes their body language and tone would seem almost embarrassed and apologetic upon scoring, this was explained by M as a fear of “taking it too seriously or being a bully”, as if their unequalled prowess at the game would make them a spoil-sport for the lesser players, as T expanded upon:

S: When you play someone you think is worse than you at Pro Evo, do you celebrate as usual when scoring?

\textsuperscript{15} P tended to perform extremely extroverted celebrations.
T: No I don’t.
S: Interesting. Why not?
T: Because I don’t want to deter the person from playing it just because I have had more time on the game.
S: Ah right, you’d feel like a bully?
T: Yes certainly.
S: So why do you think you’re ok with making fun of someone and celebrating when they’re of a similar level?
T: They can take it. And I think I assume that if they’ve played the game long enough they’re used to the banter, and they won’t get discouraged. I have to know them too; I wouldn’t ever rub it in the face of someone I don’t know.

As is obvious, there are a plethora of criteria involved in the decision-making process of how to behave during the social playing of the game, and each opponent, location, format and setting can illuminate (and conversely cast a shadow) over certain aspects of the gamer’s behaviour; there was never simply one stable, predictable user identity, but multiple depending upon circumstance, depending upon the subject’s understanding of the current frame (Goffman, 1974).

The third notable feature of scoring is that it is the only occasion where all players will be seen to relax, sit backwards and engage in discussion, as interaction during the replay sequence of the goal is optional and inconsequential. This pattern again shows similarities to Barthes’ (1975) notion of jouissance, as optimal pleasure is reached within the text upon scoring, the ‘orgasm’ of the game so to speak (not only extra-textually for the user’s psychological state, but inter-textually the gamestate explodes in a cornucopia of colourful visuals and sounds), and afterwards relaxation
and relief is felt as the gamestate recedes back to equilibrium (denoted in-game by the sombre, unheralded relocation back to the centre spot for kick-off).

Another interesting dimension to the ‘beginner versus veteran’ matches was how the veteran would often take it upon his or herself to tutor the beginner in the most effective ways of playing the game. Whilst this advice was sometimes shared between veteran players as a flaunting of gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007), the advice given to the beginner seemed to be motivated by an altogether different objective, related once more to the concept of the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). To enter the flow state requires a suitable matching of skill in relation to the challenge; too high a skill for a challenge concludes in boredom, too low a skill for a challenge results in frustration.

Therefore, it seems in these instances of veterans versus beginners, the veterans would attempt to offer advice and guidance as a way to increase the challenge the beginner presented to them, so that they would not become bored, and conversely, so that the beginner would not become frustrated, and thus both are more able to readily enter the flow state; this perhaps also serves as an explanation for the existence of the handicap rule in games such as Golf.

At the end of each match, the users would normally assumed a relaxed posture whilst exchanging controllers, as the player becomes spectator and spectator becomes player, before the transformation is complete and the once-spectator is now sitting forwards attentively eyeing the television, and the once-gamer is now sitting slouched and playing with their phone. M explained it as akin to the sporting custom of the half-time intermission:
S: I noticed once people stop playing one of the first things they do is look for their phone and check their messages, or hop on the computer. Is that something you do?

M: Yeah definitely, I’m always checking my phone, it’s become a habit.

S: But you don’t do it when playing?

M: No, you’d get pissed off and everyone would moan wouldn’t they.

S: Would they?

M: Yeah when you’re playing you need to focus on the game for the entire match. But once you’ve finished you can do what you like until you’re playing again. It’s like a half-time break.

S: [laughs] Right so it’s like you’ve got fifteen minutes to cram in as much stuff as possible before the game starts again?

M: Yeah exactly.

Thus in many ways this adheres to and propagates the etiquette of the traditional sports spectator, leashed to their seat by the moral code of the ‘proper’ fan; turning up in time for kick-off, with half-time allowing a brief respite in which to do everything that needs to be done before placing yourself back in your seat before the second half begins, and staying until the very end of the match, as rule number one of ‘Rules of Being a Sports Fan’ states in exclusionary, gender-specific terms, '… It may be a little extreme to get hit in your man region for being late to a game, but you're collectively slapping your favourite team in the face by not showing up on time'

(oneanddonesports, 2009: online).

1.6 Argot
The specialised language of the group was very informal, masculine and jocular. There was an abundance of quotes used from both film and television media that would appear mystifying to anyone on the outside of the group or without knowing the context. As mentioned previously, the continuous use of quotes would act as a communicative shorthand between the participants to exchange the maximum amount of information in the briefest time possible, a crucial utility in avoiding distractions whenever possible in playing the game, and thus the quotes were employed most extensively by those currently engaged in playing, being hesitant to talk for anything more than a few seconds at a time, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

T: (attempting to foul player one-on-one with goalkeeper) Wildcard bitches! (quote from television sitcom *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia*)
P: (laughing) Hooch is crazy! (quote from television sitcom *Scrubs*)

Such use of film and television catchphrases and characters again speaks to this trans-medial interpretation of the product, and is an example of the postmodern audience as identified by Jim Collins (2009), the knowing bricoleur who derives pleasure from their agency within the postmodern text, for example intertextual recognition and other kinds of bricolage. A main source of the group's social cohesion and enjoyment came from a sharing of this intertextual recognition; it was sometimes a competition amongst them to see who would first recognize and identify the obscure film/television reference quoted by another. This also served the secondary purpose of ostracising anyone not familiar with this esoteric use of idioms, and helped cement the
boundaries of the magic circle as limited to those who could comprehend this use of slang.

Whilst this use of argot aided in further bonding the group, it was also crucial to initiating new members, who would occasionally ask where such phrases originated; these shows would then be discussed and re-narrativized as a highlight reel of the group’s favourite quotes and moments, a montage of various comedies condensed and reformulated into a linguistic guide to the community argot. Intriguingly a fundamental part of this use of jargon, especially in humorous comments, was the employment of a separate accent to denote the jovial nature of the statement, usually an exaggerated American accent, taking on a predominantly Southern slant for self-deprecating, consciously idiotic comments, for example after C used his avatar to accidentally dribble the ball off the pitch:

M: Haha why didn’t you shoot?!
C: (in a heavy Southern USA accent) I jus' kep’ on runnin’!

Again, the knowing bricoleur is evident in what would otherwise be seen as a schizophrenic adoption of fictional personas (imitating Forrest Gump (Zemeckis, 1994)), instead being a continuous play with cultural stereotypes and well-known fiction, as Collins notes, 'This foregrounded, hyperconscious intertextuality reflects changes in terms of audience competence and narrative technique, as well as a fundamental shift in what constitutes both entertainment and cultural literacy in [post-modern culture]' (2009: p.460).

Also of note is the varying usage of subjective pronouns by the group, moving between first, second and third person in certain contexts. For example, in positive
moments, such as upon the scoring of a goal, it was common to observe a predominantly first person use of pronouns, “I took it into the box and slammed it!” whilst negative moments would cause the player to frequently employ second and third person pronouns, e.g., “You idiot!”, “He’s so slow!” et cetera.

What this seems to indicate is that the player uses a fluid form of identification to maximize their status within the group as *PES2008* player; when something goes right, the gamer takes the accolades, when something goes wrong, it is the avatar’s fault. The player’s shifting identity in such situations acts as a semi-permeable barrier, allowing the good moments of play to be attributed to the self, whilst the bad moments are externalized as being the fault of the virtual footballer.

The use of masculine, agonistic language reaches its peak at the most tense moments of the match, most obviously illustrated in a penalty situation, especially a penalty shoot-out at the end of a draw. During shoot-outs, it was ordinary for one or both of the players to begin chanting “big balls”, a heavily-gendered metaphor used to question the opposition’s bravery and inherent masculinity. This was used as both shorthand for needing the traditional ‘nerves of steel’ required for a penalty shoot out (‘Have you got what it takes?’), and also the in-game tactic of shooting the ball straight down the middle of the goal, thereby humiliating the player who dives the wrong way; if the gamer does indeed shoot down the middle and scores, the chant would culminate in a loud cheer of the catchphrase. Of course, the vulgarity of the mantra would also often have the desired effect of causing laughter, helping to diffuse the tension felt.

1.7 Themes of Discussion
Discussions amongst the group would usually centre upon football culture, whether this is current transfer speculation, player performance or general cultural trends. Throughout the discussions monitored the group would exhibit a distinctly ‘post-fan’ attitude to the sport and surrounding culture, as described by Giulianotti, following from John Urry’s (1990) classification of the ironic, reflexive identity of the emerging ‘post-tourist’:

Football’s ‘post-fans’ share this reflexivity, irony and participatory outlook. They represent an epistemic break from older forms of fandom, in particular the passivity of the ‘supporter’. Post-fans are cognizant of the constructed nature of fan reputations, and the vagaries of the media in exaggeration or inventing such identities. They adopt a reflexive approach in interpreting the relative power positions of their players and club within the political structures of domestic and international football. They maintain an ironic and critical stance towards the apologetic propaganda emanating from their board of directors, and against the generally sympathetic relationship that exists between the latter and the mass media. The comments of post-fans on their favoured club and players often slip into parody or hostility… post-fans recognize their influence remains very limited within football’s corridors of power.

(Giulianotti, 1999: p.148)

This ironic attitude was most evident in the continuous application of the term 'serious' by the group, in downplaying their own involvement with the game or exaggerating another's. In a post-modern culture and society, rife with epistemological
and ontological uncertainties, accompanied by the breaking down of various meta-narratives, to take anything 'seriously' is to play a fool's game, as what is certain today may not be tomorrow. Thus to commit yourself to something is seen as foolish and distinctly naïve by the group.

Of course, this emerging requirement noted by Giulianotti for fandom to be in a way ‘participatory’ is a need precisely met by the videogame text, acting as a digital extension of the ‘fantasy football’ media made popular by *The Daily Telegraph* in the 1990s, allowing participants to actively test their own perceived managerial prowess within a realm of reassuring statistics and charts, something most obviously remediated by the videogame’s management genre. The reflexivity and irony of the group would be most pronounced in discussions centring upon economic matters, such as player wages and transfer fees, or upon how these enormous sums affected their general lifestyle. Comments were regularly made concerning Ashley Cole, a left-wing back for Chelsea Football Club who acrimoniously left Arsenal Football Club when he was offered a £30,000-a-week wage increase, believing such an increase to be “a slap in the face, not a pat on the back” (Cole, 2006: online).

The most common crossovers between the real footballer and their digitized avatar occurred in conversations where direct comparisons were made of the footballer-in-discussion’s current performances and virtual representation’s statistics, for example upon playing against Manchester United, C remarked on how Ryan Giggs is “nowhere near that fast in real life”. This would regularly occur as users scanned the formation screen before a match, noting player statistics and team formations, as in this exchange:

S: (playing as Israel) Who have I got who’s good?
T: Benayoun.

S: Yes! Oh… (looking at statistics) He’s not very good. He’s shit. Oh God they’re all shit.

T: (in mocking American accent) Ohhhh yeah!

S: Has anyone got any good stats?

T: (mockingly) Benayoun! That’s why he’s first choice for Liverpool!

All: (laugh)

S: But he’s still shit!

T: Did you read that he was threatening to leave Liverpool because of a lack of first team games?

C: Yeah I know!

All: (mock terror)

C: I bet Benitez is terrified! Pennant is better!

S: (mockingly) Hmmm Gerrard or Benayoun? Gerrard… Benayoun?

This then led to further comparisons between players in the Liverpool squad, wider reports read in the media, and the relation to their statistics in Pro Evolution Soccer.

This form of comparison also extends to referee performance. Seemingly a universal feature of football culture (Wilcox, 2007), abusing the referee has always been a cathartic release of tension for the fan, and this catharsis transfers neatly into the televisual genre of the sport digital game; it was interesting to note that referee abuse was entirely absent when observing players of management and extreme genre videogames. Of course this is most likely due to the visual articulation of the avatar, in the management genre the referee does not have a visible presence, whilst the
players, being circular two-dimensional pieces, cannot enact any kind of overt foul animation; in the extreme genre the referee simply does not exist.

Abuse shouted towards the virtual referee in *PES2008* was in line with previously-mentioned football vernacular and consisted mainly of expletives expressing the player’s disbelief at the decision, or pleas of innocence. Admissions of guilt would only be used in a joking or mock confrontational manner, “Oh no look what I’ve done…” or “Just warming his shins up!” were common phrases.

As mentioned in the section on body language, the spectator is noticeably more aloof and mobile than their game playing counterpart. In terms of discussion this materializes as the spectator being the instigator of most conversational topics and also providing humorous commentary on the game underway. The more experienced players would tend to give advice, suggesting certain tactics or moves, again positioning themselves as knowledge leaders (Blanchard, 2004); this was also evidenced by the advice provided at the beginning of the game concerning preferable control schemes, button configurations and team selection. The self-identified beginner or inexperienced players would be much more vocal in questioning how to perform certain moves, what players, formations and tactics to use, or what button configuration was optimal; optimal would here be defined as that which allowed the most efficient, accessible utilization of those moves that were required to achieve the preferred performance of the game (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006):

This refinement of tactics becomes the 'preferred performance' that the game seems to demand of us. A perfect level run in which every activity is perfectly timed and economically executed is as pleasurable as hitting the sweet spot on a forehand drive or a carefully plotted checkmate. The desire to
achieve this preferred performance goes some way to explaining the extraordinary phenomenon of repetition in gameplay - no other kind of cultural consumption requires this kind of repetition. Instead we find it in cultural activities where musicians or sports players are called upon time and again to repeat actions in order to achieve a preferred performance or a kind of virtuosity.

(p.115-116)

These repetitions hinged upon the ability to change quickly between normal dribbling and the ‘special skills’ button (allowing the performing of various unique movements to trick the opposition, e.g., step-overs, the Mathews’ feint etc.), and the shooting and ‘accurate shot’ combination (requiring the pressing of two buttons simultaneously). The superior mapping of these moves to specific buttons was often debated over and advised upon by experienced players both online and offline.

This form of group tuition amongst videogame players extends back to the first coin-operated machines situated within arcades across the United States of America, where users, often bedazzled by this new interactive technology, would actively observe and question one another so as to make their next playthrough of the game more efficient, as Newman observes:

While the home console game is likely to be played if not alone then among a group of family or friends known to the player, coin-op play is likely to take on at least an element of public performance as observers crowd around the machine. This crowding does not merely signal vicarious pleasure, but is one of the many ways in which techniques and tactics are learned (Livingstone
Moreover, as coin-op machines require money per play it makes sense to learn from somebody else's mistakes, at their expense.

(Newman, 2004: p.15)

The inexperienced user would also be far more likely to create a tangential topic on the latest film, music or television show, illustrating their lack of vested interest in the game and their subsequent desire to turn conversation towards a topic they have more knowledge of; this would also act as a safeguard against any form of humiliation, as the inexperienced user would create the impression they were not that interested in the game to begin with (‘I lost but I don’t care anyway’), thus losing held little embarrassment whilst winning held a much larger amount of embarrassment for the more experienced gamer, as being obviously invested in the game.

The negotiation of such social risks invested in playing against one another are examples of an interesting meta-game involving its own strategies and tactics; the meta-game being based upon gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007) and prowess, and its relation to the social standing of each member of the group, also noted by Sherry et al (2006) in a study on videogame uses and gratifications:

Results show that the game experience focuses on personal and social gratifications. Players enjoy the challenge of “beating the game”, but also of beating friends. For many, it is not enough to win the game; one’s exploits must be known amongst one’s friends… game players can establish a place on a peer pecking order by being the best at a game. Focus group data suggest that competition is most acute amongst sports and fighter genres – games in which players compete through both agility and knowledge of the game…
Like the real world, games are used as a source of social interaction, particularly for males… frequent game play appears to be highly social with focus group participants describing the experience as being very similar to a group of friends shooting baskets in the park. The ritual is the same; only the location has changed.

(p.222)

Such forms of this social meta-game can be found across many social groups in one’s life, a 'stratification system, mostly along the dimension of prestige', as Polsky (1967: p.70) terms his discovery of a similar organization of group status established amongst pool hustlers. It is a game based upon the demonstration of proficiency, the expected skill of the player at the game, and it is this proficiency which is the capital exchanged through competition for reputation and standing within the community, the quantity of which all participants will be fully aware of; everyone involved will know who the veteran is, who the beginner is, who is supposedly the best and worst, who has the most gaming capital, and who possesses the least; thus certain expectations are pre-installed and expected to be met.

This form of social agonism can be observed within many groups; from the lawyer performing in court alongside colleagues, to the freestyle rap battles common within American hip-hop (popularized by films such as 8 Mile (Hanson, 2002)), to students playing drinking games. Numerous phrases, strategies and tactics are applicable, and perhaps spawned from this interaction; “saving” or “losing face”, decrying one’s performance before others have the chance to criticize (thus lessening the weight of their criticism), explicit demonstrations of disinterest or distraction (“I was not trying my hardest and therefore cannot be judged”), and so on.
In terms of the videogame, the contest normally proceeded as such: the best player of the group would have the highest social standing, with the beginner having the least. Visualizing the standing as a form of tangible capital, it is fair to always assume the veteran has the largest amount of capital, whilst the beginner has little. If the beginner played the veteran, the veteran would risk a large amount of their status within the group, whilst the beginner would risk none and have the opportunity to gain a large amount if they somehow triumphed.

This economy is actually digitized when playing the Pro Evolution Soccer series online: veteran players, having played and won many matches, are at the top of the online scoreboards and have many points, whilst beginners have none. If a beginner plays a veteran, they take many more points for winning than a beginner versus beginner match would extract, whilst the veteran, even if they win, is awarded a minimal amount at best. Thus veteran versus beginner games are extremely rare online, as the veteran sees a rather large, risk-laden investment as unsatisfactory against relatively small potential recompense.

The professional gamers were extremely aware of this social meta-game, to the extent that they all admitted to using false names if forced to play online in public servers in case their fame made them targets for challenges, or they risked a loss to their standing within the community; they felt they could not relax if made to don the mask of their professional gamer persona.

Motivationally, they also shared a trait that was at odds with more casual players. The professional players discussed how, whether single or multi-player, they refused to give up playing until they had beaten the challenge, whether that is the computer AI, or the other human opponents. It was revealed that the root of this drive was both to keep their self-conception (Stebbins, 1992) intact (‘I am a professional – I
am the best’), and also so that they may enter 'the zone', and get the associated pleasures of the flow state (a sense of serenity, a loss of worry, and so on).

Offline, the avoidance of beginners by veterans, and vice-versa, was often impossible, and to refuse playing was seen as unsportsmanlike or disruptive to the social experience. Thus, when forced to play a beginner, the veteran would often initiate conspicuous actions to illustrate how they either did not take the game seriously, or were purposely not playing to their full ability, thus limiting their investment and reducing the risk to their social standing, for example they would turn around and talk to others whilst playing (‘I am not focused’), or they would attempt novel play strategies, such as using the goalkeeper to try and dribble the ball from one end of the pitch to the other and score, or try audacious skills or goals in the knowledge that this is the only way they would impress their fellow veteran players and onlookers, who, through their knowledge of the veteran’s expected skill, would already be requiring triumph as a minimum outcome. Yet the veteran, acting as representative for the entire group of veterans, would be encouraged to push above and beyond normal victory conditions with the abovementioned ‘showboating’, as it was termed by the participants, to fully illustrate the gap of prowess between advanced user and novice.

In a separate analysis of gamers in collaboration with the LGI (Learning Games Initiative) using the ‘Game Night’ mode of inquiry (McAllister, 2004), it was noted how newcomers to the gaming group would sometimes ‘fake’ or minimize their proficiency at videogames so that the investment of their capital was lessened, with the added (and no doubt planned) effect that upon beating the well-known, better players of the group, their small investment reaped larger rewards in terms of social status; as every football manager knows, though you lose the same amount of points
either way, it is much more damaging to lose to an unknown minnow than it is to Manchester United. In this manner certain players can be considered, and indeed used many techniques comparable to the aforementioned hustlers focused upon within Polsky’s work (1967), though the capital gained in this instance is social status, as opposed to the material or financial gains commonly won by Polsky's pool players.

As mentioned in the section on customs, the half-time break invokes a tradition of comparison, analysis and debate. The content of these debates usually consisted of the gamers utilising the statistics provided (shots on goal, possession, fouls et cetera) to assert their superiority over their opponent, or to make claims about the opposition’s playing style, as this half-time discussion demonstrates:

S: It’s been a battle in midfield!
C: Yeah it has. What’s your formation?
S: 4-4-2 I think.
C: With no wingers you’ve just kept them all in central midfield!
S: (laughing) Yeah! (looking at match details) Yeah come on two on target!
C: None on target that is depressing.
S: Yeah that is depressing. More possession. Look at that for your possession I would not be happy with your team I’d give ‘em a bit of the hair-dryer treatment!
C: Done that! Without you hearing, we don’t need to share what goes on in the locker room…
S: Not doing a Dallas, not revealing what’s going on in the locker room?
C: I’ve gone to a French paper.
Again, references to the wider culture and history of the sport are implicated. Sir Alex Ferguson’s infamous 'hair-dryer treatment' is parodied, as is the tendency for foreign sports magazines and papers to publish controversial quotes from interviews with footballers, such as Arsenal Football Club Captain William Gallas causing unrest by admitting to French publication *L’Équipe* that tensions are rife in the dressing room (Sturtridge, 2008).

1.8 Chapter Summary

The playing of the televisual genre is a highly social, intertextual and authentic footballing experience for the user. Whether alone or in a group, public or private, online or offline, the game-playing event is defined not only through what happens in-game, between teams, but also in what happens between the players, the spectators, the wider games-playing community, and the culture of sport. The game console itself acts first and foremost as a point of socialization, as Thornham (2009) outlines:

The technology is brought into the realm of functionality where it offers a useful service that men can utilize… as an important public and social service… When gamers insist on social gaming as normal gaming, they are also, it seems, positioning the technology within the social… within the temporal structures of the social in terms of the way gamers narrate gaming as a social activity – they understand and position it within the same ideological and temporal structures through which they understand the social.

(p.154-155)
Whether conspicuously demonstrating their prowess, their lack of ability (or feigning deficiency), their knowledge of the videogame, or their knowledge of the sport, each action speaks as a socially-motivated communiqué ("I should be respected", "I am not taking this seriously therefore I should not be judged", "I am an authority in the group", "I am an authority on sport") that allows the user to accumulate social status or conversely to subtract another’s; a meta-game existing above the videogame itself that spawns numerous strategies in approaching play as a site of social contestation.

Often the mode of dress can reflect this, the wearing of team shirts, especially older shirts, those of famous players, rare players and up-and-coming stars can allow the wearer instant access to symbolic currency within the group through an invested signal (Zahavi, 1977), a tangible expression of their knowledge.

The customs of the group examined were, on reflection, mostly tailored towards one end; providing everyone with access to the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), epitomized by the ‘three wins then pass the pad’ rule, whilst all other rules (e.g. no walking in front of the television, no pausing) were observed to extend the flow state for as long a period as possible. Other customs, such as the half-time discussion, exchanging of tactics and player tips, berating of the referee et cetera, were all intertextual, extracted from the gamers’ wider experience of football consumption, with the videogame being legitimately viewed by the users as an authentic extension of this culture.

The body language of the user supported this immersion in the game, as the player’s posture was oriented to be as close to the television screen as possible, to be ‘in’ the game as opposed to ‘watching’ the game. The spectators, much like those who attend real football matches, would illustrate lively behaviour, initiate discussion,
offer advice (much like the fan who shouts down to the players on the pitch, or
manager on the touchline). Those who had just finished the transition from player to
spectator would display distracted behaviour at first, using other technologies, taking
in refreshments, much like a half-time break, before morphing back into the focused,
purposeful countenance of the gamer when match time was again upon them.

The *argot*, appropriately enough as a form of play (Huizinga, 1949 [1938]),
would imitate the dominant features of videogame play, being socially-inclusive
(whilst of course being simultaneously exclusive) and highly intertextual, referencing
film, television and print media continuously in numerous adaptable, contextual, and
playful ways. The continued use of particularly humorous phrases and quotes acted
both as social lubricant and also to defuse any tense situations arising from
competition and if perceived cheating was to occur. The masculine, aggressive nature
of statements concerning the gamestate further closed off the magic circle against the
‘other’ of football culture (Giulianotti, 1999: p.155) whilst concordantly strengthening
the bond between those present, as ‘being “apart together”’ (Huizenga, 1949 [1938]:
p.12).

The focus of discussion was varied over the weeks of observation, yet
there was a clear supremacy concerning certain topics. The constant discussion
surrounding game tactics, formations and avatars allowed the group to give, exchange
and absorb knowledge concerning the text whilst also improving their own status as
‘information leader’ (Blanchard, 2004) within the social group. The comparisons
between the real-life player and their digital counterpart highlights the televisual
genre’s status as more than simply a videogame to be played and experienced; it is
seen as an authentic extension of football culture. This perspective is solidified by the
regular conversations observed concerning footballer’s lives, current team news
(normally intrigues and disruptions), the analysis of statistics, and other topical sporting issues.

In conclusion the football videogame acts not only as a point of socialization for the player, but more specifically as a nexus for the merging of various cultural, social and psychological interests and pleasures; game culture, sport culture, social interaction, bonding and contestation, catharsis, gratification, and escapism. Through engaging with the text, the user enriches their cultural, social and gaming capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Consalvo, 2007), improves their confidence through self-actualization and conception (Stebbins, 1992: p.94), indulges in catharsis, and takes pleasure and finds ample distraction from their problems through entrance into the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004).

Speaking to the sociological community within Game Studies, one lesson apparent from this case study is that we must attend to the varied, trans-medial and recreational nature of the videogame; it does not exist in a cultural vacuum, as is evident in analyses such as Taylor’s sometimes myopic discussion of online game culture (2006). Rather, the videogame exists parallel to and in relation with various other media and cultural experiences; it is trans-cultural, trans-medial, and increasingly accentuated by social interactions either built into the game or created separately by an enthusiastic fan community.
2 - Game On: Starting at the 'START'

2.1 Introduction

Though consistently present in the majority of videogames, it seems the very ubiquity of the ‘start menu’ (and to a lesser extent, the introductory video sequence)\(^\text{16}\) has undermined any form of thoughtful examination, as something so common is consequently seen to be mundane; as Marshall McLuhan was said to remark, 'I don’t know who discovered water, but I’m pretty sure it wasn’t a fish' (McLuhan, 1966: p.70).

Whilst the majority of Game Studies scholars seek to understand the diegetic world of the videogame, whether this be narrative conventions (Carr 2006a; Jenkins, 2004; Pearce, 2004), ludic aspects (Aarseth, 2003; Consalvo and Dutton, 2006; Kucklich, 2007), or representational characteristics (Flynn, 2008; Giddings, 2007; Jarvinen, 2002), there is far too little analysis or consideration of the non-diegetic space, seen instead as obstacle to entering the ‘real content’, as something to be navigated through instead of ruminated upon.

The non-diegetic arena of the digital game is something seen separately as marketing device, option list, ornament, or obstacle to the gaming experience. Yet features such as the introductory video and start menu are much more than simple decoration or crowd attraction. Indeed when videogames first entered public consciousness through American mall video arcades and children’s restaurants (Kent, 2002), perhaps accusations of adornment and exhibition could be fairly levied, as the introductory videos and start menus of arcade games were (and still are) created firstly to attract curious punters. However, as videogames migrated into domestic spaces the

\(^{16}\) ‘Introductory video’ is the full-motion video (FMV) sequence initiated by the machine upon the first loading of the game, whilst the ‘Start Menu’ is the option screen that greets the operator upon loading the game, or sometimes by pressing the ‘Start’ option within the graphical user-interface (GUI).
purpose of the introductory videos and start menus became less about selling the game (as the gamer must have already purchased the product), and more about creating aesthetic and ludic expectations, introducing themes and narrative, and allowing customisation and configuration.

As noted in the Literature Review, whilst there has been some effort to understand the sport videogame by certain scholars, all investigations of the text focus upon the diegetic space of the videogame, the game as played, whether this be a discussion on the relationship between narrative and identification (Crawford, 2008), the varied systems of play used in sports videogames (Kayali and Purgathofer, 2008), representation and the positioning of the user (Baerg, 2007), or the pleasures and social uses of these products within a community (Crawford, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Crawford and Rutter, 2007). None discuss non-diegetic devices such as the start menu, or the highly-stylized introductory videos, which are by design the first features encountered by the gamer, and thus crucial in forming initial perceptions of precisely what football ‘is’ in these New Media products.

The object of this chapter is to comprehend and evaluate the non-diegetic space of the football videogame, as an entity that offers idealized subject positions (Grimes, 2003) for the player, by invoking certain features and competencies common in sport culture both representationally (each genre has a unique use and preference for icons, indexes and symbols of the sporting world) and ludically (by allowing specific actions), and also by providing certain technological and cultural affordances. Following from this, my evaluation questions whether the dominant culture of football is confronted by these texts, discussing whether the values and beliefs contained within are compliant with the broader sporting ideology espoused by the
global media-sports complex (Maguire, 1999), or influenced by other cultural industries (Tinajero, 2008).

In doing so this section highlights the different socio-cultural and ideological values of each sub-genre, and the resulting relationship between sport, the videogame industry, and the player, questioning how such media influence the audience’s experience and conception of the sport (Wenner, 1989).

2.2 FIFA 08

Introductory Video

EA Sports’ *FIFA 08* is the latest release in a long line of extremely successful football videogames, with this latest iteration selling over one million copies on its first week of release in Europe alone (Business Wire, 2008). As official product of football’s governing body, *FIFA 08* has the unique permission to incorporate official team and player likenesses not possessed by other football videogame franchises. To this end it is not surprising that EA Sports capitalises on this unique selling point through a plethora of iconography; detailed reconstruction of numerous stadiums, club and national team kits, and well-known player’s physical features, all propagating this sense of ‘officialdom’ throughout the text, to establish itself as the only ‘authentic’ football videogame. To render the teams, players and stadiums in increasingly spectacular detail obviously requires a powerful graphical engine, which is EA Sports’ other main selling point, visual spectacle, achieved through their adherence to televisual convention.

The introductory video for *FIFA 08* is created using the game engine, immediately impressing upon the viewer the product’s high production values. The sequence begins with the virtual camera panning across the ground of a full, large
stadium, before fading to black and re-emerging with a similar pan of the upper tier of England’s distinctive new Wembley stadium (Fig. 1); visual spectacle and officialdom, the FIFA series’ two enduring traits, are thus established. Irish indie band La Rocca’s song ‘Sketches (20 Something Life)’ gathers momentum during this sequence before the first gameplay footage is shown, and again, EA Sports invoke officialdom through the conspicuous licensing of established artists for the soundtrack (Konami, for example, create their own music for the Pro Evolution Soccer series, which has a tradition of being heavily criticised (Bolas, 2008)).

The ball is launched from a corner, before the editing segues to a Chelsea footballer playing the ball forward in slow-motion, then fading into Barcelona’s Ronaldinho performing a similar volley. The screen fades to black again. Suddenly the song vocals erupt in an informal, sport-like cheer (“YEAH!”) as a player is shown charging towards the opposition with ball at feet, deftly executing tricks and feints. This is abruptly followed by the violent clash of two opposing players as they slide towards a loose ball. Immediately the ‘yin and yang’ of British football are fulfilled; the British grit, and the foreign flair (Whannel, 1992).

This motif of contrast (skill versus work-rate) repeats through the next few seconds, until Robin Van Persie of Arsenal Football Club is shown to take a shot on goal. The screen immediately splits vertically into two sections as Van Persie is shown to miss the shot in both screens, the decisive nature of the miss being emphasized by the overt editing. The next shot, with a sepia-tone and circular lens overlay, shows Van Persie throwing his head into his hands, completing this accentuation, as Christopher Lasch laments (1991), that sport is increasingly dependent upon the scoreline rather than the performance.
Rapid successions of clips are then initiated, all showing attacking, flamboyant manoeuvres. Again, the vertical split-screen is invoked for particularly close shots on goal. The montage continues to accelerate with evermore panache; audacious flicks and tricks are now illustrated to clearly communicate the sheer quantity of visual spectacle available in the product. The entire sequence revels in the five qualities of ‘utopian entertainment’ noted by Richard Dyer (1978):

ENERGY: Capacity to act vigorously; human power, activity, potential.
ABUNDANCE: Conquest of scarcity; having enough to spare without sense of poverty of others; enjoyment of sensuous material reality.
INTENSITY: Experiencing of emotion directly, fully, unambiguously, 'authentically', without holding back.
TRANSPARENCY: A quality of relationships-between characters (e.g. true love), between performer and audience ('sincerity').
COMMUNITY: Togetherness, sense of belonging, network of phatic relationships (i.e. those in which communication is for its own sake rather than for its message). (p. 4-5)

The ‘energy’, displayed by these virtual athletes is never less than ‘vigorous’, in part due to the player animations that have been designed to recreate the athletes’ movements in a technically perfect manner. The ‘abundance’ is provided by the consistently full crowd, the pandemonium of sound, and the vibrant visuals, all of which remain paramount to the marketing of the Televisual genre. The ‘intensity’ is provided by the cybernetic system, allowing the gamer to take control of the team they are usually limited to watching on the same screen, the immediacy (Bolter &
Grusin, 1999) provided by the control system is crucial to conceal the technology and
suspend the disbelief of the operator through intuitive, accessible, immediate control.
‘Transparency’ is obvious for any sporting event (as zero-sum game, the motive is
clearly to win), and ‘community’ is provided by the phatic crowd noise and the team
dynamic of football.

Tied to the presentation of this utopian entertainment, remediation (Bolter &
Grusin, 1999), in terms of reconstructing the televisual experience, is summoned
through the continuous use of slow-motion and broadcast angles, before going further
into the realm of simulation by providing viewing angles only possible through digital
reconstruction; a ‘bullet time’ perspective is invoked that allows the camera to roam
freely through time-space.

Finally the ball is shown to reach its target through various shots on goal. Both
a free kick and an elegant lob shot are inter-cut in slow-motion to bring the
introductory film to a close, as the ball bounces joyfully into the back of the net on
both occasions; delayed until the last moment, it is the climax of the entire text, the
‘jouissance’ (Barthes, 1975) of the football match for both avatar and player, as
described in chapter one. It is the pornography of the football world, also discussed by
Easthope (1989) in his intriguing psychoanalysis of television snooker. As Whannel
notes (1993), it is surely no coincidence that young British men refer to sex as
‘scoring’.

The EA Sports emblem alongside the FIFA ‘officially endorsed product’ logo
then come to the fore, the FIFA 08 title taking centrepiece within an austere white
design incorporating a shimmering silver lining; technology and brand approval
(visual spectacle and officialdom again) connoted in one swift animation.
One should note that absent from the introductory video is any reference to the jurisdictional body of the game: curiously enough for a FIFA certified product (and even more so in the officially licensed *FIFA Street* series), the video gives no mention to regulation or refereeing. Also, and more predictable considering the game’s FIFA heritage, any examples of fouling, violence or cheating are absent. This highlights the utopianism of the FIFA series, and more widely, the entire televisual genre.

**Start Menu**

In looking at the images included for *FIFA 08*’s start menu, one would immediately assume they portray two completely disparate aspects of the game, one the game being played, the other the start menu, yet they are both part of the same section; EA Sports have managed to cleverly meld diegetic and non-diegetic action. Whilst, traditionally, games have the non-diegetic section first (configure your game, *then* play), EA Sports have created a blend which fulfils both representational and ludic goals: the graphical system is immediately demonstrated to flaunt visual spectacle, whilst ludically, the opportunity exists to experiment freely with the game mechanics in a practise, anaesthetized environment: no crowds, no opposition, no rivalry or contestation, no pressure.

The practise environment also includes a gigantic television screen mounted on the wall behind the goal. This screen acts to reinforce elements of visual spectacle and officialdom, allowing the user to watch and take control of action replays upon scoring a goal, thereby once more remediating the experience through the dominant media form of sport consumption (Whannel, 1992).

In providing this practise screen the game is also self-reflexively acknowledging its status as computer game; though the sport it tries to emulate in an
authentic manner is a team sport, the practise screen is single player, provided for the player to familiarize his or herself with the game system, and to also exhibit itself first and foremost as computer simulation, as showcase for the spectacle of the graphical engine.

Linked with this is the sense of ‘placelessness’ or ‘blankness’ attributed to contemporary sports stadiums (Sandvoss, 2003), as can be seen in both images, the setting perpetuates this loss of social, cultural or geographic importance in sport consumption, a dismissal of heritage and locality as unimportant, as Ronaldinho, wearing a Barcelona shirt, seems to be practising within a locale that is identifiably not the Nou Camp (Barcelona’s home ground), instead being situated within a bland urban backdrop familiar to the average gamer. Thus tradition and place within sport culture is further undermined, as it is not the club, country or even fans shown as crucial to this environment, but instead the player and the media take central importance, reflecting a common theme in modern football, as Sandvoss notes:

Television has set the pace for the transformation of stadia into placeless environments which seek to emulate the televisual representation of football, not shape it. Consequently, to many fans football on television has replaced the actual game as the point of reference… Thus football’s historical, social and cultural referents, upon which participation and citizenship are exercised in football fandom, are increasingly eliminated and standardized, universally applicable discourses – in other words simulated connotations. (2003: pp.173-174)
In line with this, not only is the setting not the Nou Camp, it is not identifiable at all. The perfectly realised urban setting is so highly defined and so perfectly realised that it becomes a dilution of reality, as Baudrillard explains, “Virtual reality” is at the antipodes of the real world. As for ‘high definition’, it is synonymous with the highest dilution of reality. The highest definition of the medium corresponds to the lowest definition of the message. The highest definition of information corresponds to the lowest definition of the event’ (1997: p.26, emphasis in original).

The menu itself provides further information as to the importance of officialdom, and the correlated notion of ‘brand’ within the sport simulation. The ‘EA Sports’ logo is clearly definable, anchored in the bottom left of the image, whilst upon the ‘ticker tape’ bar that scrolls along the bottom, ‘EA Sports’ is visible once again with the ‘FIFA’ brand occupying the right side of the image.

Tellingly, the first option presented to the gamer, ‘Kick-Off’, reiterates the directive of the televisual genre, which is to eliminate the barrier of the computer interface to provide the gamer with an expeditious, intuitive experience; one button tap and the operator begins a match.

The combinatory effect of the introductory video and start menu in FIFA 08 is to provide the player with a specific comprehension of football culture as professional spectacle, as corporately driven and commercially branded, and above all, as discussed by Boyle and O’Connor (1991), to consume and derive pleasure from football as a mediated experience similar to other dramatic televisual content.

2.3 Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

Introductory Video
Konami’s *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* (hereafter referred to as *PES2008*) is a direct competitor to EA’s *FIFA* franchise, and prides itself on providing a more intense, detailed simulation of football that thrives on the *joga bonito* (literally ‘play pretty’) style of football, emphasized by South American teams such as Brazil and European teams such as Portugal; as the back cover of *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* remarks 'Express Yourself!... Pro Evolution Soccer 6 enables you to play the Beautiful Game' (Konami, 2006).

The introductory video uses CGI (computer-generated imagery) rather than utilising the game’s graphical engine as *FIFA 08* does. In doing so Konami have opted to instead use analogy and metaphor to communicate their game’s ludic and aesthetic qualities. It should be noted that the palate for the CGI sequence is restricted to a spectrum of dull greys, only enlivened by sporadic bursts of colour unleashed through possession of the football. The avatars themselves are coloured with a fluid, mercurial silver, immediately connoting the futuristic technology of science fiction cinema.

The FMV (Full-Motion Video) begins with the gamic first-person perspective (Galloway, 2006) of walking down the stadium’s player tunnel, symbol for the ‘beginning’ of the sporting event, the threshold between private and public, stillness and movement, containment and explosion, the ‘calm before the storm’. Solitary footsteps are heard (as opposed to the usual clatter of multiple feet), at once meta-textually referencing the operator (as a single-player controlling an entire team) whilst highlighting the contrast between the calmness of the tunnel and the pandemonium of the football pitch; accordingly the music, provided by British group *The Kaiser Chiefs*, begins to play at a low volume. Only when the previously anonymous avatar touches a football with his foot does the ponderous sound of the footsteps suddenly stop, replaced by the now booming music, as if the player has suddenly come alive,
his feet lightened by the touch of the ball as effervescent bubbles of colour begin to erupt from his head; he is portrayed to be quite literally in the 'other world' of Huizinga’s magic circle of play (1938 [1949]). Again, visual spectacle and officialdom remains crucial to the video’s impact.

Missing from the video are any references to the team aspect of football; indeed if it was someone unfamiliar with the sport they would surmise that it consisted of matches between single opponents. The entire sequence is comprised of single avatars battling against one another for control of the ball; again, the singularity of the gamer is acknowledged. Much like *FIFA 08*, any illustration of authority or hierarchical control is discarded, replaced by the spontaneity and ad hoc appropriation of an urban environment by the avatar/s.

The character is then shown performing various tricks with the football as the footage moves in and out of slow-motion. Bubbles of vivid orange and red colours continue to float away from his scalp, contrasting with the monochrome palette of the setting, suggesting the fan proverb, “football is life”.

The video then switches to two players opposite one another, representing attacker versus defender. Exaggerating the typical movements enacted by attacker and defender in a one-on-one situation, they are shown to be performing a symbiotic dance regulated by a rhythm and movement known to them alone. The defender ends the dance with a stylized slide tackle that segues into a break-dance spin, following the trend within mainstream sport to assimilate and commercialise youthful sub-cultures (Beal & Wilson, 2004).

Various players are then shown running around numerous graffiti-strewn streets, the absence of grass and any traditional football pitch both acknowledging the urban plight of the modern football fan whilst also reinforcing Henry Jenkins’ notion
that adolescent boys form notions of masculinity through domination and contestation of their immediate environment:

Video games did not make backyard play spaces disappear, rather, they offer children some way to respond to domestic confinement… Modern-day boys have had to accommodate their domestic confinement with their definitions of masculinity, perhaps accounting, in part, for the hypermasculine and hyperviolent content of the games themselves. The game player has a fundamentally different image than the “bookworm”… In video game culture, children gain recognition for their daring as demonstrated in the virtual worlds of the game, overcoming obstacles, beating bosses, and mastering levels. (Jenkins, 2007: pp.189-193)

In line with this, the avatars are shown to leap and run across the surroundings in a style strongly reminiscent of urban sport ‘parkour’ (also known as ‘free-running’), climbing and jumping along various urban constructions.

The players then move into a flowing, canyon-esque setting where gorges are opening and mountains are growing and receding from the ground. The avatars are shown to dominate this plethora of dangerous obstacles, acting as metaphor for the challenge awaiting the gamer, whilst again speaking to boyhood notions of nature as test, as something to be dominated (Jenkins, 2007).

As the view pans across the valley women are shown cheering and dancing with their gaze presumably set on the players in the distance. The only male spectators visible actually become involved in the action, heading the ball on to one of the footballers. Immediately connotated is the historical paradigm of man as doer and
woman as observer, the paradigm’s existence being no more obvious than within the already highly segregated world of sport.

Start Menu

The *PES2008* start menu, though placed within the televisual genre alongside the FIFA series, maintains a wholly separate approach to its menu design; yet the key concepts that thrive within the televisual genre (spectacle, control and remediation) are equally exhibited.

In the foreground, a swathe of emerald-green grass serves to signify the sport. Yet common components of a football match such as stadium architecture, players, team logos, even white lines on the grass to demarcate the boundaries of play are thrown aside to illuminate the core of the game experience: the playing field. Various important connotations are instigated by this: amateurism, sportsmanship and equality, a ‘level playing field’ so to speak, as sport can be viewed symbolically as the direct opposite to any culture based on inheritance and privilege (Ohl, 2005).

Other more ludocentric ideas are insinuated by the inclusion of the grass in such an informal, unregulated manner; the ad hoc creation of a match amongst friends on any patch of grass they can find within the modern metropolis: also like the *FIFA 08* start menu, the metaphor works on a meta-textual level, identifying with the urbanization of the modern gamer’s environment, perhaps communicating to the gamer the social potential of the product as both multiplayer and online-capable videogame.

Juxtaposing the casual, spontaneous attitude invoked by the foreground is the technological spectacle of the background. Spotlights scan the sky as symmetrical
lights flicker in pre-set patterns, communicating the mediated, spectacular nature that assists the presentation of modern football; it is clearly ‘showtime’.

The first option, though identical to FIFA 08’s in terms of function (launching the player into a solitary match), is labelled ‘exhibition’ as opposed to ‘kick-off’. This reflects Konami’s rhetoric in developing and marketing the Pro Evolution Soccer series as authentic simulation of ‘the beautiful game’; ‘Exhibition’ implies that the player is ‘in for a treat’, mirroring what is noted by Whannel (2002) as the ‘gift rhetoric’ utilized by presenters on sports programmes such as the BBC’s Match of the Day; “We have a feast of football for you today” and so on.

Whilst FIFA 08 creates a determinedly professional, mediated version of sport, the non-diegetic segments of PES2008 communicates football as an avenue of self-expression, self-gratification and social attraction (Stebbins, 1992: p.94-95).

2.4 FIFA Street 2

Introductory Video

The introduction video for FIFA Street 2 begins with a collection of ‘street ballers’ running through various urban locales performing impressive skills and tricks with a football, all recorded in an amateurish style that emphasizes the rawness of the footage through the bleaching and burning of the film, alongside the diegetic ‘movie reel’ sound as the projection recalibrates itself upon the screen; this also references the documentary motif that is present throughout extreme sports media in documentary films such as DogTown and Z-Boys (Peralta, 2001), and the user-created content prevalent on Internet sites such as Youtube. Throughout the opening, the movie flickers between real footage and virtual emulation within the FIFA Street 2 engine,
for example a man staring at the camera is suddenly transformed into his virtual self before reverting back to the original footage.

Such blatant comparisons made by the developers between real world and virtual indicates the investment that has been made into moulding *FIFA Street 2* as a visual spectacle; the talent and panache with which the footballers execute their moves is a spectacle all of its own, and indeed trickery is the centrepiece of both *FIFA Street 2*’s visual spectacle and dominant game mechanics.

The non-diegetic music is well-known hip-hop artist *Coldcut* featuring *Root Manuva*, performing the track ‘True Skool’; the hip-hop influence upon the game extends not only to music but also aesthetics and game design; unlocking new street wear and gameplay challenges such as ‘beat battles’ are clear allusions to hip-hop culture, a culture that thrives on spectacle and conspicuous consumption (Kellner, 2003), components that are increasingly incorporated into videogames (Molesworth & Denegri-Knott, 2007).

Towards the end of the FMV the film ebbs away and now the virtual representations of these footballers present themselves to the viewer, performing similar tricks and skills, yet now within the virtual realm of the *FIFA Street* universe. Whilst *FIFA 08* presents a professional, traditional emulation of football players within its introductory FMV, *FIFA Street 2* revels in portraying a low-budget, amateur, unconventional perspective on football culture that emphasises flair, amateurism and independence, trademarks of alternative sport as opposed to mainstream, as Beal (1995) writes on the fundaments of alternative sport, 'a desire to individualise the sport as standing apart from corporate sponsorship and thus being a symbol of self-determination and definition' (p.253).
Start Menu

The clean, professional aesthetic of the televisual genre (in both its diegetic and non-diegetic representational systems) is juxtaposed by the modern, gritty aesthetic of the extreme genre, clearly displayed by the *FIFA Street 2* start menu.

The representational system devised by EA Sports BIG for the *Street* series is a smorgasbord of elements synonymous with ‘urban culture’, from the prominent presence of hip-hop and rap music to the garbage-littered streets substituting for the televisual genre’s grand football stadiums. It should also be noted that *FIFA Street* series is the only cycle of games within the football genre that consistently removes the emblematic theme of grass from its start menu.

As can be seen, the background of the menu is chaotically splashed with paint, posters, plaster and graffiti over a red brick wall. Whilst aligning itself with the iconoclastic nature of the main content, this backdrop again speaks to Henry Jenkins’ (2007) notion of boys forming their masculine identity through the domination and customisation of their immediate environment.

In the bottom-left of the image can be seen a pop-up notifying the gamer of the current music selection (appearing and disappearing seamlessly with each new music track); music is an intrinsic part of the extreme experience, as witnessed when viewing any ‘extreme sports’ video or channel, the fusing of these ‘extreme’ actions with music serves to increase spectacle and transform the event from sport demonstration to entertainment product; this is markedly dissimilar to the standardized use of commentary in other sport genres, though both fulfil the same role of enhancing drama and filling ‘gaps’ in play with entertainment (Comisky *et al.*, 1977).
‘Play Now’ is the first option presented to the gamer, and again uses different
lexis from the previous two games analysed. Distancing itself from the notion of
professional sport and instead aligning itself further with an informal, impromptu
approach, ‘Play Now’ illuminates the arcade roots of FIFA Street 2’s gameplay, much
like the ‘play’ option illuminated on an arcade machine.

Regardless of the sport portrayed, extreme genre games all display overt traces
of narcissism, whether it be the flamboyant customisation of your vehicle in EA’s
Need For Speed series (1995-present) or the attention-grabbing game mechanics of
Activision’s Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater: FIFA Street 2 obliges in this narcissistic
indulgence in various ways, but the most obvious within the start menu are the
‘Creation Zone’ and ‘Rewards’ options; ‘Creation Zone’ allows you to create your
own character, replete with scars and tattoos, whilst ‘Rewards’, as mentioned above,
permits you to purchase new branded clothing to further customise your avatar
through conspicuous consumption.

In summary, the non-diegetic space of FIFA Street 2 presents football culture
as a juxtaposition of creative expression, urban aggression, social rebellion, and
fervent consumerism.

2.5 Football Manager 2007

Introductory Video

Considering the tradition of introductory videos in football videogames, it is
strange to note that Football Manager 2007 does not contain an introductory video;
nor do any football management games. Through a visual style of hypermediacy
(Bolter & Grusin, 1999), the management game seeks to emulate the experience of the
modern football manager, creating an ideal subject position that encourages players to
be meticulous, logical and shrewd. Visual spectacle such as an introductory video would detract from this mindset, connoting instant gratification and constant interaction; immediacy instead of hypermediacy, which would be misleading as the management genre is stubbornly entrenched as a hypermedia experience, one that revels in its construction as a technological product, and seeks to draw attention to itself as technological obstacle to be overcome in a very deliberate manner, as product for the cerebral operator.

The management simulation is extremely long-winded in comparison to its peers, requiring hours of play sometimes before you even arrive at your first match day, whereupon interaction will be minimal and regulated at certain junctures. Thus the absence of an introductory video actually reinforces the management simulation’s idiosyncratic identity, as game for the ‘mature’ gamer, who above all is patient, dedicated and systematic.

Start Menu

The *FM 2007* start menu is one full of symbolic allusion. As the management genre contains no grandiose graphical engine to flaunt visual spectacle, it instantly makes this plain to the operator through extensive figurative reference and absence, something used consistently throughout the genre.

Immediately noticeable when looking upon the start menu is the prominence of green. Not only the symbolic ‘striped’ pattern of the grass featured in the background of the image (alluding to possibly innumerable football pitches across the globe), but even the colour of the unknown manager posing on the right-side of the image, saturated with green as if a part of the very pitch itself.
This manager, though unnamed, is instantly recognizable to any football fan as reminiscent of Jose Mourinho, up until recently the outspoken, charismatic manager of London’s Chelsea Football Club. The hallmarks of Mourinho’s pitch-side attire are all present: the Armani grey wool coat with the collar turned-up, the Windsor-knotted tie pulled slightly down for the top collar of the white shirt to be unbuttoned, even the five o’clock shadow regularly sported by Mourinho; all ask the gamer to take on the role of the exciting, brash, youthful manager with their own ideas on how the sport should be played.

Again the opening option is different from all previous, ‘New Game’ distancing itself from the lexis of the televisual and extreme genres, which is rich with connotations of informality, accessibility and spontaneity. Instead, ‘New Game’ designates a whole new beginning, a larger-scale task than the simple ‘kick-off’ or ‘play now’ indicates. The symbol used, a classically-styled football, again references the core of the experience without any spectacle or officialdom. Folders are used for icons representing the user’s previous game saves, again evoking a more formal mentality than the other genres: the game is play, but it also requires a mature, work-like attitude for success.

Thus the introductory video and start menu of Football Manager 2007 present to the player a particularly industrious perspective on football culture, as a rational business model that is measurable and predictable, but only to the consummate follower of football.

2.6 Chapter Summary
In conclusion, what do these non-diegetic aspects of football videogames have to tell us about the relationship between consumer and sport, between user and videogames, between sport and videogames?

The televisual genre conveys a symbiotic relationship between sport and technology, naturalizing the association and positioning the audience as regular consumer of televised football. The ‘instant action’ mantra propagated through the introductory videos and start menus aligns itself with the modern placement of football as part of the entertainment industry; a direct, continuous and mediated spectacle.

The extreme genre attempts to break with these cultural norms by situating itself as alternative to the global sports-media complex (Maguire, 1999), suggesting a grassroots, amateur and individualist aesthetic that incorporates other cultural industries, such as hip-hop and extreme sports. It presents a perspective on football that, to use a New Media term, is a ‘mashup’\(^{17}\) of numerous cultures and practices, assimilating various assets of popular culture to provide a decidedly metropolitan ideology of football for the player’s consumption.

Finally, the management genre presents both breaks and continuities with the contemporary version of football culture. By articulating itself as complicated, laborious process to be undertaken by the dedicated and knowledgeable player, it positions the user as a football ‘connoisseur’, as intelligent, discerning and committed, a modern inheritor of the ‘fantasy football’ tradition instigated by newspapers and propagated in the world of New Media through football websites and discussion forums. Yet it also breaks from the modern conception of football by

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\(^{17}\) A mashup is the combining of multiple data sources into one GUI (graphical user-interface). The term originally stems from music culture, and the mixing of separate songs into a single track.
refusing to include spectacle, dismissed as frivolous and shallow entertainment for the uninitiated.

Yet what do these non-diegetic spaces of the football simulation have in common? The answer is very little. Football is a multifaceted, polysemic and globalized product. If, as Sandvoss comments, the modern iteration of the sport is ‘semiotically open’ (2003: p.156), then the videogame medium has capitalized on this ‘emptiness’ by taking a DIY approach to the sport; picking and choosing amongst the sport’s various components to create what they believe to be the definitive representation of football, whether this be mediated spectacle, narcissistic expression, or laborious industry, all provide a unique sporting ideology and subject position for the player to consume and occupy.

The only thing these sub-genres clearly and consistently have in common are their absences; what is left out of the product. The non-diegetic space, in both the menus and videos, refuses to show violence, crowd trouble, illegal moves, or unsporting behaviour. Instead they all to a degree 'clean-up' the sport, sanitising it for mass consumption.
3.1 Introduction

The above diagram is the IEZA framework for game audio analysis devised by Huiberts and van Tol (2008), separating the realm of videogame sound into four distinct areas: zone, affect, effect, and interface. The areas are created through interactions between the two interweaving axes: diegetic and non-diegetic, setting and activity. Whilst there have been other proposed methods for investigating game audio (Friberg and Gardenfors, 2004; Whalen, 2004; Stockburger, 2003), Huiberts and van Tol have created a concise, simple, yet sophisticated framework for comprehending the auditory environment of the videogame. Before applying this framework to the football genre, we will briefly consider what each term designates and how it applies to the videogame medium.
Diegetic and Non-diegetic: As discussed in the previous chapter, diegetic refers exclusively to what occurs within the fictional world of the product, for example the noise made when an avatar kicks the ball, whilst non-diegetic refers to that which takes place outside the virtual world, e.g., the start menu.

Setting and Activity: ‘Setting’ describes any game audio that sets the mood or tone of the game world, such as crowd noise in *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008*, which is a diegetic/setting combination (‘Zone’), as opposed to music accompanying the game’s introductory video (non-diegetic/setting, ‘Affect’). ‘Activity’ conveys game audio instigated in real-time by operator actions, such as taking a goal kick, a diegetic/activity (Effect), or clicking on a non-diegetic menu (non-diegetic/activity, ‘Interface’).

Therefore, to use Huiberts and van Tol’s own summation (2008):

The Interface category expresses the activity in the non-diegetic part of the game environment. In many games of today this is sound that is synced with activity in the HUD,\(^\text{18}\) either as a response to player activity or as a response to game activity.

The Effect category expresses the activity in the diegetic part of the game. Sound is often synced to events in the game world, either triggered by the player or by the game itself. However, activity in the diegetic part of the game can also include sound streams, such as the sound of a continuously burning fire.

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\(^{18}\) Heads-Up Display, sometimes also referred to as the GUI (Graphical User-Interface).
The Zone category expresses the setting (for example the geographical or topological setting) of the diegetic part of the game environment. In many games of today, Zone is often designed in such a way (using real time adaptation) that it reflects the consequences of game play on a game's world.

The Affect category expresses the setting (for example the emotional, social and/or cultural setting) of the non-diegetic part of the game environment. Affect is often designed in such a way (using real time adaptation) that it reflects the emotional status of the game or that it anticipates upcoming events in the game.

(online)

Videogames are comparable to films in their use of audio, there being three primary categories; speech, effects and music. Football simulations present a particularly complex selection of sounds as they must generate both iconic noise, for example Zone (crowd chanting) and Effect (the noise of a slide tackle), whilst also formulating that which is distinctly non-iconic and alien; the ‘Interface’ audio regularly consisting of digitized clicks and beeps for instance, an onanistic reminder of the presence of computer hardware.

Within the football genre the speech section of audio is, asides from one particular game mode, only ever enacted as commentary, and thus is a discourse formed through remediation, which is analyzed separately in the next chapter. Therefore this section will focus on the issues of sound effects and music, comparing and contrasting how each genre integrates and utilises their auditory resources.
3.2 Affect

Affect describes audio which is non-diegetic/setting, and thus is perfect for beginning the analysis as this configuration is precisely the use of game audio for the introductory video and the start (and options) menus. As was noted in chapter two, the introductory video is an important tool for both the marketing and structuring of the game experience, used as an ostentatious flaunting of the game’s visual/simulational capability, whilst also setting the tone for the entire experience (offensive or defensive, fast or slow, contemporary or traditional, and so on); the Affect category functions in a similar manner.

The televisual genre has a long and successful history with Affect game audio. As part of EA Sports’ legacy as publisher of official videogame product for the sport's governing body (no matter which sport they interpret; football, basketball, American football, hockey, all maintain an official license agreement with the sport's regulatory organization), the product capitalizes upon this by radiating officialdom from every possible avenue, and considering the televisual genre’s mimicking of sports broadcasting conventions, the non-diegetic auditory environment provides ample opportunity to express high-production values through conspicuous licensing and remediation; the latter is perceived as so crucial to the product's success that EA Sports’ American football videogame, Madden NFL (EA Sports, 1989-present), is named after the player-turned-commentator John Madden.

All of EA Sports’ titles use officially licensed music from international artists, whether it be British band Chumbawumba (whose single ‘Tub Thumping’ was used for FIFA World Cup ’98 (EA Sports, 1998)), or NBA Street Homecourt (EA Sports, 2007) featuring a remix of Jackson 5’s ‘I Want You Back’; certain well-known tracks will often serve as a ‘title track’ of sorts for the product’s advertisement campaign within
audio-visual media, or through the advertisements become well-known songs, a postmodern condition commented upon by Storey:

[I]t is now possible to buy CDs that consist of the songs that have become successful, or have become successful again, as a result of being used in advertisements. There is a wonderful circularity to this: songs are used to sell products and the fact that they do this successfully is then used to sell the songs.'

(Storey, 2009: p.12)

Such popular music feeds back into the officialdom of the product whilst enhancing the spectacle of the game through acoustic means in the same way that an accurate recreation of Wembley stadium enhances the spectacle visually. As Huiberts and van Tol discuss, the music dynamizes gameplay, ‘making the gameplay experience more intense and thrilling’ (2008: online) by creating expectation and excitement in the audience.

As can be viewed on the FIFA 09 (EA Sports, 2008) website, there is a section labelled as ‘EA TRAX’, allowing the viewer to listen to all 42 tracks from the latest game 'from 21 nations across multiple genres to create an unprecedented global music event' (Electronic Arts, 2008: online) before the actual videogame itself is released. Such rhetoric approaches the user not as football fan, but as media consumer, offering the soundtrack as part of the entertainment value of the product; it is not just a football game, it is a media event.
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 (Konami, 2008), as with all previous versions, maintains its own internally produced music,\textsuperscript{19} licensing only the UEFA Champions League Anthem (Britten, 1992) for the ‘UEFA Champions League’ mode newly created for the 2009 product. The tracks themselves mimic various genres popular within football culture, such as rock and dance. This form of production aligns itself much more directly towards football culture and the fan experience than the FIFA soundtrack, as the Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 soundscape is reminiscent of the stadium music that plays before a match begins at a live event, such as the famous United Road song played at Old Trafford,\textsuperscript{20} or You’ll Never Walk Alone at Anfield,\textsuperscript{21} and of course the abovementioned UEFA Champions League Anthem. This situates Konami’s home-grown, ‘authentic’ populist music, made for the football videogame, directly against the mass culture of EA Sports, licensed and incorporated into the game in part due to the song's/artist's global popularity.

The creation of such expensive soundtracks also provides the product with not only the instant appeal and gratification detailed above through officialdom and spectacle, but also vital information for understanding the game’s stylistics and mechanics. The prominence of hip-hop and rap within the football simulation’s extreme genre highlights the aggressiveness, urbanity and conspicuousness of the visuals and game mechanics, as Joe Nickolls, EA’s Line Producer for FIFA Street 3 (EA Sports BIG, 2008) remarks:

While playing football in the streets and parking lots isn’t really underground, it is off the “beaten path” when it comes to music. You won’t

\textsuperscript{19} Though in Pro Evolution Soccer 2008 (Konami, 2007) they licensed a song by well-known British band The Kaiser Chiefs for the introductory video.

\textsuperscript{20} Based on John Denver’s Country Road.

\textsuperscript{21} Taken from the 1945 Broadway musical Carousel, and later popularized by Gerry & the Pacemakers.
be hearing top 40 songs while you’re performing a bicycle kick on a Portuguese rooftop... Like skating and snowboarding culture, street football also has a style all its own... I love the way that the music compliments the gameplay instead of competing with it. It’s an unwritten rule that good audio and music makes games LOOK better.

(Nickolls, 2008: online)

Indeed, the use of music is central to the FIFA Street experience, illuminated most obviously through the aforementioned 'EA TRAX' feature, contained within the FIFA Street series' start menu. This option list allows you to browse the entirety of the game’s musical catalogue, sampling each track, playing a single track in its entirety, or constructing a customized playlist. In no other sub-genre or EA Sports product is this feature included, once more highlighting the vital position that music holds within street cultures and their artistic output (Keyes, 2004).

Conversely, the absence of any music from the management genre, such as Football Manager 2008 (Sports Interactive, 2007), connotes the seriousness and work-like mentality required for comprehending the numerous and exhaustive features and mechanics. It should be noted however, that in the console version only, the Championship Manager series (Beautiful Game Studios, 2003-present) contains a ‘soundtrack’ option, allowing the console gamer to select music from the hard-disk drive (HDD) that would seamlessly integrate as background music whilst the game was played. Such a concession reveals the common stereotyping of console owners as a young, impatient and easily-distracted consumer in relation to their serious, adult PC-playing counterpart, a fallacious perspective illuminated by the Entertainment
Software Association’s (ESA) research that found the average game player to be thirty-three years old (ESA, 2007: online).

3.3 Interface

The interface (generally the sounds incorporated for navigating the plethora of menus) is, as Huiberts and van Tols note, 'the part of game audio that is the most likely to remind the player that he or she is playing a game' (2008: online). As part of the non-diegetic world of the game, and being neither music nor speech, the Interface has, as noted above, traditionally maintained the computerized noise of configuration that pulls the operator out of the diegetic experience. More recently such problems have been sanitized by incorporating iconic sounds into the sphere of the Interface, for example in a first-person shooter (FPS), clicking on the menu would initiate the sound of a gun firing, yet within the football genre the Interface audio seems surprisingly reticent in modifying its method to create a direct link between the audio of the non-diegetic and diegetic worlds.

The televisual genre’s Pro Evolution Soccer 2008 contains a strange selection of reverberating dings, whooshes and beeps in navigating the assorted menus, stark reminders that you are in fact playing a videogame even though all other audio-visuals are manufactured to convince otherwise. FIFA Street 3 reveals a similar approach, emitting futuristic, metallic clicks and bleeps in searching through the range of options. Yet, asides from once more dynamizing the experience (Huibert and Van Tols, 2008: online) of navigating the menu, these noises intend to break the suspension of disbelief, as mentioned, they draw attention to themselves as hypermediacy in opposition to the remediated immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) of the play experience. Thus the contrast provided by the Interface audio intends to
ostentatiously impress upon the player, in the transition from non-diegetic to diegetic, a sense of awe for the fidelity of the technological emulation of the sport.

Again the management simulation refuses any noises that would detract from or enhance the levity of the game environment. The absence of an auditory environment communicates that the game should be viewed as an occupation, the play as labour, therefore no Interface sound is present. Any attempt to dynamize the experience would be misleading in positioning the user as consumer of, to use a term from McLuhan, 'hot' media (1964), a text that fills a particular sense with information, leaving little room for reflection and interpretation. The management genre is decidedly 'cool', requiring the user to interpret and fill the object with information.

3.4 Zone

The Zone consists of diegetic/setting sounds; as mentioned above, this is where the football spectator becomes digitized in a highly remediated manner. The Zone game audio is dynamically processed so that it accurately reflects the state of play, accordingly there is a large crowd cheer upon a goal being scored, booring when there is a foul, and silence for a penalty kick. Within the televisual simulation these auditory effects are enhanced by the graphical precision with which the crowd is rendered; painted faces, novelty hats, scarf and shirt laden with team colours, a cornucopia of conspicuous fandom.

Also included are chants, jeering for overly-defensive play (or on occasion the away team holding possession), and within this a spectrum of cheers and boos for the various actions taken within the game. Of course, no offensive chants are sung by the crowd (such as those involving racism and/or profanities), no witty rhymes concerning the referees, or referencing particular teams/players; in fact the chants
included are uniformly unintelligible, the ‘chant’ being a chorus of noise from the crowd that lacks any clear articulation asides from common words such as ‘united’ and ‘club’. Thus the tradition of football chants, much like any feature that contains the potential for controversy in the football simulation, is sanitised and reduced to adornment for the fidelity of the televisual experience, replacing the sometimes offensive reality of the sport chant.

If playing the ‘Be A Pro’ mode recently incorporated into the *FIFA* series (where the user takes control of a single avatar throughout a campaign, detailed in chapter eleven), the soundscape changes dramatically to centre upon the experience of the player as opposed to the experience ‘from the stands’, as EA’s Audio Director Jeff Macpherson describes, ‘rather than giving you the experience of being in the stands we’re trying to give you the experience of being the pro, you can hear the footsteps, the cloth of the kit… the grunts and the exertion sounds… and a lot more contextual intelligence’ (EA Sports, 2008a).

Hence the Zone sounds for ‘Be A Pro’ undergo a fundamental transformation, from creating a spectator-centric auditory environment to avatar-centric. Removed are televisual inclusions such as professional commentary (included only as reward for scoring), and included are sounds such as shirts being pulled, shoulders clashing, the stampede of feet, the clash of boots, and the movement of the kit cloth as the player changes direction at pace. In place of the televisual commentary is instead the continuous and fluctuating shouts of the user’s team mates; demanding the ball, alerting the player to danger, pointing towards an advantageous run and so on. The culmination of such alterations is an added immediacy and intensity to the play experience (EA Sports, 2008a), shifting from a form of representation hinging upon
conventions borrowed from television to a re-envisioning of the sport from the perspective of the player on the pitch.

As a way of increasing the control the user has over the product, a principle central to the pleasure of the televisual genre, if creating a new team the player is given the option to select the tone of the zone noise, vis-à-vis the fans.

By selecting the option to ‘edit team’, another option appears in the list, ‘cheering stance’. Sixteen stances are then provided, beginning with geographical areas (‘Asian’, ‘British’, ‘South American’ for example), continuing to stances based upon sound and rhythm (‘Applause Based’, ‘Drumming Based’, ‘High Tempo’ etc.). Here cultural stereotypes are present and accounted for; the South American crowd instigate musical, rhythmic cheers, whilst the British crowd make loud, aggressive noises.

The referee’s whistle is a continuous presence throughout the diegetic environment, frustrating the operator with his persistent adjudication throughout the match. The noise is, as Baudrillard would predict, excessive in its fidelity, and resonant in its reproduction; the shrill, high-pitched shriek momentarily overwhelms all other diegetic noise within the soundscape, leaving the user in no doubt as to who has ultimate authority within the gameworld, and consequently the sport itself.

The extreme genre, again highlighting its foundation as part of street culture, and also aligning with its arcade videogame roots, simply takes the Affect soundtrack and places it within the Zone environment, creating a carnivalesque, festival atmosphere that thrives on energy and improvisation, as Nickolls (2008) comments, 'Keeping in mind that FIFA Street 3 is an arcade football game, we strike a balance between authenticity and fantasy – and the audio is a huge part of that' (online).
Thus rap, hip-hop and dance music all blare loudly over the diegetic action, providing a vitality and rhythm to proceedings. As the track changes, a visual pop-up overlays the bottom-left of the screen in the form of speaker cones, signifying the ‘boom box’ (a large, often heavy portable audio player) that is synonymous with urban cultures such as hip-hop (Keyes, 2004: p.x).

Accompanying the rap/hip-hop soundtrack within the Zone audio of \textit{FIFA Street 3} (EA Sports BIG, 2008) is an assortment of instructions, assertions and exclamations that further ground the experience as urban and amateur, as opposed to suburban and professional. The comments, spoken with a differing accent depending upon the team nationality, provide an ad hoc and decidedly informal commentary for the match, as shouts from “Oi defence get back!” to “Go on son! Go on!” and the lad-like “Waaaahheey!” pepper the audio when using the England squad. Of course, in accordance with the hyper-masculine, amateurish ad hoc environment of the extreme genre, this is a lawless place, and therefore no referee whistle is ever heard as no rule is enforced within the diegetic game space.

The management simulation’s only notable game audio takes place within the Zone. The crowds roar, cheer, boo and hiss to the flow of the game as circular pieces move across the two-dimensional pitch like a game of chequers. The crowd noise incorporated into the management simulation works on two levels; firstly it \textit{dynamizes} the match (Huiberts and van Tol, 2008), and secondly it reinforces the notion of grassroots football and fandom. The absolute lack of audio commentary is highlighted by the insertion of thunderous crowd noise, presenting the sport as pure, unmediated and idealised, which is again furthered by the developers’ refusal to move towards a three-dimensional, televisual graphical engine.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} The 2009 version of \textit{Football Manager} was the first to boast a full-3D graphical engine, released too late to be incorporated for analysis (Bolter & Grusin, 1999).
The referee whistle deserves special mention as part of the management simulation, as the volume (especially evident in Football Manager 2007) and pitch of the whistle is again far above any other sound contained within the game. The result is an omnipotent authority not only loathed for perceived unfair, sometimes match-altering decisions, but also for the unrelenting irritation caused by the din that signifies their presence. In implementing such an abrasive auditory element the producers communicate football’s historical hostility towards the referee (Johnson, 2008).

3.5 Effect

The Effect game audio is crucial in creating an authentic experience for the football simulation, as most operators are likely to be aware of the various sounds emerging from a game of football by playing it themselves, attending a match day, or watching the sport on television. Obviously the televisual genre’s assimilation of these noises is the most crucial, purporting as the genre does to represent the ‘reality’ of the sport. Henceforth all actions, from crosses to barges to pile-driving volleys, have their own verisimilitudinous sound, as do inanimate objects such as the crossbar when the ball strikes it (or animate objects such as the referee when the ball strikes him). Of course, other aspects of the game can trigger an expected transformation in the Effect sounds, such as the weather, for example if raining, performing a slide tackle makes a distinctly slicker noise than normal, or holding the ‘shoot’ button for longer creating a louder noise as the avatar throws his entire body into the shot. All such attention to detail, combined with the simulational physics engine, lubricates the mimesis of the televisual genre.
In keeping with its arcade heritage, the extreme genre’s Effect audio is exaggerated, remixed or completely non-iconic. Taking a shot on goal provides a *whoosh* noise as the ball flies through the air, reminiscent of a fighter jet’s roar. Initiating the ‘GameBreaker’ mode (activated after the ‘GameBreaker bar’ has filled through successful tricks/flicks and goals) enhances this further, as the movement of the ball is followed by a tail of psychedelic colours, and any shot creates a crater in the concrete, the ‘shot’ sound becomes filled with bass and thuds like a lead weight crashing into the back of the net, again dynamizing the play. As Nickolls explains:

> We also have special treatments of music in both our menu system and while you’re in GameBreaker mode… We also used localized recordings of different environments as well… Kicking a ball against a wooden fence sounds a lot different than kicking one against a chain link fence. We make sure that the sounds you are hearing while you’re playing are the sounds you SHOULD be hearing when you’re playing. Of course we have some cool special effects when you’re taking shots and making saves as well. (Nickolls, 2008: online)

Due to the design of the management simulation, the Internet browser aesthetic that anchors the experience, the Effects game audio is predictably similar to the Interface game audio, as they are to all intents and purposes one and the same; the already blurred line between diegetic and non-diegetic is completely eclipsed by the management genre. On ‘Match Day’ the operator is still restricted to indirectly influencing the team’s performance through subtle manipulation of various menus, formations, and drop-down instructions. Again, the developers refuse to dynamize
(Huiberts and van Tol, 2008) the experience through the inclusion of any kind of peripheral noise that would distract from the focus on meticulous analysis and decision-making that is the foundation of the game’s mechanics and preferred performance (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006).

3.6 Excessive Noise

The diegetic sounds of the televisual genre are all created to represent the sport in a distinctly hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1990) manner; no matter the noise of the crowd or the ferocity of the weather, every contact with the ball provides clear Effect audio, every slide-tackle the perfectly realised replication of a bass-filled crunch as legs collide; the sound is excessive in its fidelity. The Zone audio provides atmosphere and dynamism (Huiberts and van Tol, 2008) without ever including the associated, real-world experiences of danger and hostility generated through taunting songs, or homophobic and racist chants espoused by sections of fandom (Crabbe, 2006a; Crawford, 2004; Foer, 2004).

Though the auditory environment consistently and thoroughly recreates the sound of the ball, the genre remains faithful to its televisual inspiration regarding player vocals; in fact, where hearing player vocals is a rarity on television (mostly due to the overbearing crowd noise), player sounds within the televisual simulation are wholly excluded. The absence of any player vocals is an omission that would notably detract from the diegesis of the simulation within any other medium.

Yet within the ergodic (Aarseth, 1997) architecture of the videogame, this absence of avatar ‘personality’ functions to allow the operator to impress their own personality upon the team, as is common in avatar design, the operator is given the opportunity to ‘complete’ the avatar (Poole, 2002). For example, upon scoring a goal
the avatar will enact a celebratory animation sequence as he runs screaming towards the cheering fans, yet no sound will come from the avatar’s mouth. This sound, by design, is to be filled by the user celebrating noisily; the same applies to fouls and contentious decisions, though the animation shows the screaming in pain, or yelling at the official, it is the operator’s duty as football fan and videogame player to provide the sound of disgust, outrage or joy.

Conversely, and appropriately, the extreme simulation, in the guise of FIFA Street 3, fills certain gaps left by the televisual genre. The sound of the ball can take on various non-iconic noises, and the players do talk and shout amongst themselves, goading one another, encouraging violent challenges, and impressing their own personality upon the operator. This is mainly because of the vastly different manner in which the extreme genre’s experience is structured: to begin the game, you create your own personalized avatar, a hyperrealized you, a virtual body forged of signification. Yet, though visually distinctive, the avatars (within all genres of the football simulation) have no sounds of their own to distinguish one from another, illustrating the bias towards visuals propagated by the videogame industry since the first console was produced, as mentioned in the introduction.

The management simulation’s absolute lack of sound both increases the labour-like mentality whilst highlighting the game’s ‘Match Day’ as special occasion, being the only feature in the game to include any audio in the form of crowd cheers, jeers and booing, highlighting once more the management genre’s disdain for televisual mediation, instead championing fandom experienced from the stands (of which the genre itself is an extension) as the authentic site of production and reception for traditional football culture, a nostalgic imagining of the sport still rooted in the working class community, as the people’s sport before it became a global business.

23 Asides from the generic crowd cheer as the game first begins loading.
3.7 Chapter Summary

Both the diegetic and non-diegetic audio of the football digital game communicate much concerning the developers’ articulation of the sport, and their intentions for how the product should be comprehended. Whilst the televisual genre’s non-diegetic music is suitably conspicuous, discrete and conservative, in line with its adherence to a remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) of the televisual, the extreme genre directly challenges this as its antithesis; encompassing, apparent and determinedly anti-populist, it demands incorporation as a core feature of the play experience. The management simulation of course omits non-diegetic music entirely, refusing to pander to the vulgarity of such emotional stimuli; again to invoke Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (2004 [1790]), if vulgar taste is feeling, pure taste is thought.

The diegetic sounds of the gamespace are similarly dissonant in their implementation. Whilst the televisual genre again strives for that simulacral perfection of the crowd noise without a concrete articulation of what is actually said, the extreme genre once again offers opposition by locating itself within the grassroots footballing experience of a ‘kick-about’ across the park, with the avatars informally shouting, jeering, and encouraging one another. The management genre’s diegetic audio is overwhelmingly ‘from the stands’; loud, almost overbearing crowd chatter that rises and falls with the events on the pitch.

Yet what can be said of the football videogame’s use of sound is that all are instructive and indeed formative aspects of the gamespace that attempt to create certain impressions, to generate expectations, and to encourage certain styles of engagement. This is of course true of the videogame medium as a whole; though often conspicuous by its absence in regards to the discourse of industry marketing, the
auditory environment of the digital game medium acts as a crucial component of the player experience, configuring expectations, positioning the user, enhancing the action, and highlighting what is perceived as important to the sport; fans, play, and the law.

Once more, it is informative to look towards the absences within the audio to understand the congruences between genres. Across all three sub-genres, the crowd are enthusiastic, yet never abrasive, insulting, or overwhelming. The Affect soundtrack is continuously upbeat and welcoming, extolling the virtues of the sport in the lyrics of the Pro Evolution Soccer series music, whilst the management genre grounds the sound in a nostalgic past. The players scream and shout, but always in an encouraging or celebratory manner, and never is an angry word exchanged during the cut-scenes often instigated by a foul. The entire audio environment is sanitised, made clean for the user's reception, and as we will see, this is symptomatic of the football digital game providing not a re-creation of sport, but a euphemism for sport.
4 – Virtual Motson: Commentary in Football Videogames

4.1 Introduction

Commentary, in one form or another, is a longstanding component of sports videogames, either as an act of remediation, or as providing permanent, analyzable data, or in the extreme genre’s case, as an aspect of mediation which opposes and transforms the conception of the sport, thus highlighting its own position as alternative, sub-cultural and ‘authentic’. Asides from these factors, as Comisky et al note, when performed correctly commentary heightens the ‘entertainment quota’ of the product, ‘Not only does dramatic commentary affect perception of play, but it is apparently a factor in the enjoyment of televised sports as well' (1977: p.153), and as Bryant et al discuss, emphasizes the drama on offer by fully and thoroughly communicating the atmosphere ‘on the night’ from the actual stadia, ‘it may be that dramatic embellishments from professional television commentators may more than substitute for the "human drama of athletic competition" that the television spectator misses by not being in the sports arena’(1977: p.140-141).

Within the three sub-genres of the sport simulation, commentary obviously finds a natural home within the televisual category. Though the manner in which sports commentary is utilised by the televisual simulation is paramount to this analysis, its subversion and/or replacement within the management simulations and extreme simulations also hold much to say in terms of expressing their perspective on the auditory tradition within sports broadcasting.

Though seen as merely descriptive and hence, to a degree “natural” by the average sports fan, an analysis of the rhetorical techniques present in these digital games’ interpretation of commentary allows us to understand the always constructed
nature of the commentary; how it consistently attempts to impose a narrative in direct opposition to the non-interruptive tradition of naturalism. This conflict is noted by Whannel (1992) as present even at the inception of broadcast commentary:

The first four outside broadcasts suggested by the BBC in 1925, but rejected by the press, illustrate also that from the start the conflicting aims of naturalism and construction were present. It proposed a running story of the first half of the England v. Scotland rugby match, a ‘coded narrative’ of the Boat Race (the key to the code along with a plan of the course having been published exclusively in early papers that day), a ‘coded narrative’ of the Cup Final, and broadcasting of various sound impressions of Derby Day (Briggs 1961: 264).

(p.26)

In Marie-Laurie Ryan’s book *Avatars of Story* (2006), Ryan focuses on narrative and how it relates to various media formats, one of these being sports commentary. Firstly, the author outlines the three main components of narrative; the chronicle, the mimesis, and the emplotment of events:

As a chronicle, a narrative enumerates events and satisfies the audience's curiosity for *what* happened in the reference world. As a mimesis, the text focuses on the *how* and immerses the audience in the action by conferring presence and vividness to the narrated. As a plot, finally, it organizes the narrated in a global design that makes events intelligible to the audience and satisfies its demand for the *why* of the events… mimesis establishes a world
and individuates its members; chronicle describes events that make this world evolve; and plot suggests the connections and motivations that explain these events. Mimesis, however, can also be used for the expansion and mental visualization of the materials that fill my second dimension.

(Ryan, 2006: p.80)

To summarize, the chronicle is the listing of events, mimesis extrapolates the manner in which these events occurred, and emplotment explains the inter-relation between these elements to give a comprehensible motivation for them taking place. Of course, in terms of popular sports, emplotment is mostly unnecessary due to the sport’s historic place in education and culture as ritual and/or leisure; the viewer is normally familiar with the practice and therefore does not need the motivation to be explained, though explanations for the actions undertaken will occur frequently in cultures unaccustomed to the sport, for example prior to (and during) the United States of America’s hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 1994, leaflets were handed out at stadiums explaining the basic rituals and rules of the game, and these customs and regulations are still frequently explained to the viewer by American commentary teams in football broadcasts. One particularly notable difficulty with emplotment is that the real-time nature of the majority of sports commentary makes it impossible to plot as the narrator is, as Ryan notes, in the odd scenario of being uninformed of the plot they are tasked with narrating (Ryan, 2006: p.87).

In one section of the book Ryan analyses a baseball broadcast with particular focus upon the commentary, and it is this method of analysis that I adapt for my own investigation of the football simulation's adaptation.
Ryan begins by pinpointing which of her three dimensions are of most importance within the baseball commentary:

[T]he chronicle is the dominant one in the baseball broadcast. Mimesis may be embryonic, plot may be nonexistent, but chronicle is a mandatory ingredient. As a largely nonselective enumeration of events, the chronicle presents a special affinity for the real-time situation: it requires no retrospective point of view, no global design, and consequently no teleological principles. (2006: p.81)

Yet, though it would seem by this account that sports commentary is less of a story than of a chronological listing of events, Ryan perceives the creation of story through ‘three basic operations’:

1. The retelling selects a hero and an opponent, and it adopts the side of the hero in its presentation of facts.
2. An event is put into focus as the key to the play: Walton reaching base or Thompson bobbling the ball.
3. The text suggests an interpretive theme that subsumes the events and links them into a meaningful sequence. The theme of the Thompson story is "near success despite unfavorable circumstances"; the theme of the Walton story is the opposite: "near failure despite a lucky break."
   (Ryan, 2006: p.85-86)
The commentary of the football videogame enacts such operations on a regular basis, with the ‘hero’ of the narrative consistently being the team controlled by the human operator, as the commentary team outline the operator’s challenge at the beginning (“The manager will need to win this to stay in the competition” etc.), offer advice at half-time and, if the narrative concludes with the user winning the match, provide unmitigated praise of the gamer’s performance. Interestingly this creates an unfailing commentarial bias that would be extremely unprofessional in other media, as Whannel (1992) describes in regards to early BBC guidelines:

You should build partisanship, but do not be partisan yourself. It should be “England’s chances are brightening”, not “our chances are brightening”…

Two elements can be seen in uneasy combination: the concept that the picture tells the story, and the dictum to build in suspense and partisanship. This produced a need to manage the contradiction between partisanship and the journalistic code of neutrality.

(p.28-29)

After describing her three dimensions, Ryan goes on to list five dominant themes that are constructed through their interaction:

*Do-or-die:* They have to win to keep it alive.

*Fatal error:* He better have an answer to that one-why didn't you pull them down?-if it has anything to do with the winning or the losing of the ball game.

*Wasted opportunities:* Too many opportunities lost

*Redemption:* Mitchel kind of redeeming himself
Doom (of the Cubs): [Giant's victory] almost seems a fait accompli the way things have been going for the Cubs.

It ain't over till it's over: Don't go away, it's still alive.

(Ryan, 2006: p.92)

Through investigation of the conventions, consistencies and absences of each genre’s commentary, we not only expose the underlying assumptions of the producer in terms of sport commentary, which as Whannel found was 'distinctively male, rooted in masculine values and patriarchal exclusiveness' (1992: p.31), but also their assumptions in regards to the operation of the wider sports-media complex.

4.2 The Televisual Genre

The televisual simulation’s commentary appropriately begins in the same manner as the medium it attempts to impersonate; as the teams line up in the stadium tunnel Pro Evolution Soccer 2008’s commentators, consisting of ITV’s Jon Champion and the BBC’s Mark Lawrenson, welcome the gamer with ‘gift economy’ language typical of televised sport (Whannel, 1992), e.g., “Welcome, we have in store for you what promises to be a feast of football!” and so on, all such statements supporting the pretence that the user is being awarded a rare opportunity, to witness the sublime spectacle of sport that awaits.

This mode of rhetoric fills three purposes within the sport simulation. Firstly, such conventions help lull the gamer into this verisimilitudic environment, convincing the operator that what is being viewed is a live television broadcast of a sporting event, attempting to further cement its fidelity thus enhancing the suspension of disbelief.
Secondly, as Ryan notes, the ‘entertainment quota’ must be filled when there is little action taking place. ‘The main narrative problem to be solved by the real-time broadcast is to create appropriate relief in the reported action by compressing time during events of little importance and expanding time during the decisive events’ (Ryan, 2006: p.83). The constant chatter accompanying the relative non-action of the event’s opening sequence provides relief from boredom.

Thirdly, and most importantly for the sport simulation as computer program, it obfuscates the processing and loading of the game to be played. In earlier versions of the televisual simulation, before such cinematics could be surreptitiously kneaded into the genre’s representational paradigm, there would simply exist a static ‘Loading…’ screen with both squad lists displayed as the computer program processed the data required to present the graphical complexity of the gameworld; indeed this was a common occurrence until very recently within the televisual simulation’s history, where the power of the latest generation of consoles (specifically Microsoft’s Xbox 360 and Sony’s Playstation 3) finally allowed such cinematics to be processed in parallel with the main content being loaded.

As mentioned above, the game, and the televisual simulation in general, employs a two-man team for the commentary, being a professional commentator (PES2008 uses ITV's Jon Champion, FIFA ’08 uses Sky Sports’ Martin Tyler) and a ‘football personality’, also known as the ‘colour commentator’ (PES2008 features the BBC’s Mark Lawrenson, FIFA ’08 has Sky Sport's Andy Gray).

To use the terms set forth by Ryan (2006) and her three dimensions of narrative, the commentator informs in a broad manner on all three categories, relaying the events in chronological order as they happen (“Jones passes to Richards”, “The ball is back with the goalkeeper”) the manner in which they happen (“That’s a
tremendous sliding tackle by Jones!”, “He’s really struck that well!”), and finally emplotment, most often employed after a key event (“Well they’re really in trouble now, they need to get a goal before half-time”) or in retrospect, after the match has ended (“A fantastic performance and the manager will be celebrating with his squad tonight!”).

Conversely, the ex-professional, curiously termed not as commentator but as ‘coverage’ in *PES2008*, will never provide the chronicle but will frequently engage in mimesis and also serve to create a frame of emplotment through exploiting their professional opinion (‘professional’ qualified as having experience as a professional player or manager, purportedly affording unique insights into the game not available otherwise); for example if the player misses a free-kick shot on goal the ‘coverage/ex-pro’ will remark in *PES2008* “Well he never really had the skill to make that shot, his team-mates won’t be happy as they were in a good position”, or “the manager will be furious with the defence for letting that in, they’ll receive a stern talking-to at half-time”.

If a few goals up (or down), the ex-professional may create plot expectations, “Well knowing the manager even though they’re a few goals up they are a team that loves to attack and I don’t see that changing”, or “The situation looks hopeless for them now but the game is far from over”. Thus with one relaying the chronicle, and the other adding emplotment, they fulfil both the requirements of information and entertainment that are often opposing sides of the commentator’s discourse, as Whannel discusses, ‘there is on the one hand the impulse to describe the scene, show what’s happening, give the audience an accurate picture, and on the other the impulse to get people involved, keep up the interest, add suspense, shape the material and highlight the action’ (1992: p.26).
Of course, such talk is familiar to any regular sports fan and all of the above fit into one of the five themes proposed by Ryan (2006: p.92); the ‘do-or-die’ and ‘it ain’t over till it’s over’ theme is consistently evoked when the gamer is losing, the ‘fatal error’ invoked often when a goal is conceded, and the ‘wasted opportunities’ if a shot is missed. Yet, due to the algorithmic nature of the digital game, such invocations are sometimes completely mistimed or irrelevant; even though the criteria set forth by the producer within the computer program has been met to instigate the specific soundbyte, it sometimes makes little sense within the gamer’s empirical knowledge of sports broadcasting.

Thus the ‘fatal error’ dialog can be initiated by an unstoppable 25-yard shot from the opposition, even though there is clearly no squad member at fault, or the ‘wasted opportunities’ speech being incited by both a shot that hits the corner flag or a guilt-edged chance that grazes the post; the neutrality of the computer code as unthinking and uncritical processor is revealed, and the suspension of disbelief is in danger of being undermined.

Though occasionally flawed, such dialogue again helps fulfil the entertainment quota by filling actionless moments with information, as Ryan describes:

Rather than staying with an empty present, the broadcast may escape towards the past - either the past of the game in progress through recaps... or the past of the players through background information... Both of these strategies present the advantage of killing time while fulfilling another function in the economy of the broadcast: recaps update the listener who joined the action in progress (for, unlike literary narratives, the broadcast welcomes those who want to
begin in the middle), while the use of background information serves the purpose of character presentation.

(Ryan, 2006: p.83)

Of course in repeatedly referencing the non-existent ‘manager’ the game is talking directly to the player, laying down a challenge and also revealing the partiality of the producers and sports-media complex towards attacking, high-scoring football; not once is the player encouraged to sit back and hold on for a 1-0 win, instead the commentary seems to always be cheering further attacks and attempts at goal, demanding that the player win in style, as the product blurb reads for *Pro Evolution Soccer 6*, to play the ‘beautiful game’ (Konami, 2006).

In terms of a goal being scored, the televisual genre’s commentary correlates with Ryan’s observation:

When a decisive play is chronicled in the present of real time, the emphasis is placed on the outcome, not on the description of the play. The main clue to the importance of the play is the rise in the tone of voice - the only type of signal that does not result in a loss of time. Once the audience is informed of the *what*, however, a curiosity develops for the *how* and the *why*. For the spectators at the stadium, this curiosity is satisfied by instant replays on the scoreboard. In the radio broadcast, the replay is performed by retellings in the past tense.

(Ryan, 2006: p.84)
Thus the commentary team are tasked with recording certain sequences in a multitude of tones; in *PES2008* Jon Champion’s phrase “possibilities here…” is recorded as both a patient rumination and as ecstatic goal-related yell (“possibilities here… POSSIBILITIES!!!”) which are separately instigated by the computer program depending upon a related set of gameplay criteria.

When a goal is scored, the action replay commences, and as mentioned by Ryan above, the audience is then informed of the *how* and *why* through comments by both the main commentator and the ex-professional/coverage voice from various aspects: passing, movement, technique, dribbling, and so on. In this way the sport simulation reflects the results fetishism nurtured by professional sports, namely the business ethic engendered through increasing commodification (Lasch, 1991), accompanied by numerous magazine programmes with their various goal-related replays, highlight reels, and ‘goal of the month’ competitions.

If a plot is at all mapped out within the football videogame product, it is through the commentary of the televisual genre. By focusing on a single character, a hero (the user), the commentary is able to construct a sense of plot over the fluid and unpredictable nature of the sport itself, by customizing the plot to the operator’s performance. Thus if a goal down, the ‘fatal error’/’it ain’t over till it’s over’/’do-or-die’ themes are mobilized, if a few goals ahead opposing themes will be generated by the algorithm, what I will call ‘the beautiful game’ (“Oh he’s really turning on the style now”/“This team is built to attack”) or ‘the master tactician’ (“Well he’s really got his tactics spot on here”/“He made the substitution, and it’s worked beautifully”).

Yet what of the avatars themselves, the players controlled by the operator? As noted by Bryant *et al* (1977), much of sports commentary focuses upon the game as individual against individual, *In the networks combined, the sports announcers*
relied most heavily on intrapersonal conflict to create the "drama of sports." (p.146, bold in original). As Ryan articulates, the players can also be further
categorized as superstar/rookie/hot prospect/veteran and so on, shaping the structure
of the game’s narrativisation:

The acceptability of an emplotment is not simply a matter of truthfulness to
the chronicle but also, and perhaps more, a matter of conformity to baseball
lore and to the loyalty of the audience. This is why most game-stories are told
from the point of view of the home team, casting the local players in the role
of protagonists. A defeat of the home team is much more likely to be presented
as a case of futility of the protagonist than as a heroic deed of the opponent,
unless the opposing pitcher is officially recognized by baseball lore as a future
Hall of Famer. These biases suggest that cultural norms and the values of the
recipient community are no less influential on the emplotting of baseball
games than on the interpretation of literary texts.

(Ryan, 2006: p.93)

Therefore the computer-generated commentary must fulfil two criteria; it must
be general and broad enough to be adaptable to any match played by the operator,
whilst also specific enough to conform to our expectations in terms of unique players
and their renowned abilities.

The televisual games accomplish this through a form of quantitative research
conducted by the artificial intelligence (AI) then expressed through the digital
commentator as qualitative. Since each footballer is ludically represented through
various statistics relating to his ability, the commentary algorithm can call upon this to
present the commentator as informed and perceptive through initiating specialized soundbytes relating to player skill; a player with good dribbling (for example, in *PES2008* above 85/100 in dribbling accuracy) will sometimes trigger the commentator remarking “we know he’s dangerous with the ball at his feet”, or if gifted at the long ball, “we know he’s good with his delivery”, and so on. In this manner the product is able to be both general and specific, by allowing the soundbyte to be applied to anyone with the suitable skill, it is both inclusive and exclusive: potentially any player can activate the sentence, yet they must fulfil certain criteria, thus well-known players (who as we will see in chapter nine, are provided with higher statistics than the ‘unknowns’ due in part to their stardom) are more likely to receive frequent praise. Again the celebrity sportsman, through his vaunted preternatural ability at the game, is placed upon a pedestal above his peers by the media, further circulating the contemporary individualized, narcissistic approach to team sports (Whannel, 2002) articulated most fervently by the extreme genre.

4.3 The Management Genre

The management simulation’s use of commentary is an oddity that can only be truly understood when contextualised as part the management genre ideology: as Juri Lotman is credited as saying, 'information is beauty' (Eagleton, 1996: p.88). The entire management videogame, as a programmatic allegory of the information economy, is an informatic framework that must be comprehended and manipulated by the gamer in an effort to put this data to work efficiently and effectively.

Consequently the dynamics of the included commentary are based upon this initial principle: information, both for the user’s consideration and application, is paramount. Thus commentary firstly is text rather than audio; permanent and recorded
Rather than transitional and ephemeral, so that the player may rewind and review each sentence carefully. Secondly, the text takes centre stage upon the match day screen, as a large colourful bar flashing constantly with updates as the abstract ‘chequers’ representing players move around the two-dimensional game board of the pitch. Thirdly, the speed of the information is completely under the control of the user; it can be sped up to find the important sections, or slowed down/replayed to analyse the crucial moments of the game.

Fittingly, for a computer program, the tone of the commentary for the management games analyzed exists in a binary state: crucial (capitalized) or incidental (lower-case). Naturally the capitalized text exists for pivotal events of the match day, the majority being for a goal or penalty. After the event there is sometimes an action replay, shown from the same strategic aesthetic (top-down perspective as if looking at a board game), with the game pieces simply being slowed down so each segment of the text flashing upon the screen can be read and understood fully, secondary details being communicated in lower-case until the decisive moment of the goal, penalty, or sending-off et cetera, whereby the words become capitalized.

Again by refusing to conform to the conventions of sports broadcasting the management genre distances itself from the modern conception of football as entertainment, as spectacle to be enjoyed by the transient consumer; again it is informative to consider Kant’s (2004 [1790]) separation of pure and vulgar tastes. By distancing the user from the experience, the management simulation encourages in the user a sense of detached evaluation and appreciation, instead of the ‘vulgar’ corporeal pleasure of the loud, excited and involving commentary. Games such as the Football Manager series use such features not to involve the user’s emotion, but to present challenges to his or her mind, akin to the general receiving intelligence from the
battlefield; the prudent player is asked to evaluate the information before taking
decisive action based upon this data, again similar to the worker within the
information economy (Bower, 2005: online).

4.4 The Extreme Genre

The commentary within the extreme simulation is notable by its absence. In
place of detailed commentary from recognized personalities/professionals, there is
instead a radio station, sometimes hosted by a star DJ (BBC Radio One’s Zane Lowe
is the major personality in FIFA Street 2). In FIFA Street 3, the only commentary, if it
can be termed as such, is a disembodied electronic voice announcing the scorer of a
goal, which furthers the sense of modern spectacle and arcade game mechanics. As a
mix of indie, rap and hip-hop music, the radio stations pride themselves on opposing
the mainstream, aligning with the ‘Extreme’ ethos: unofficial as opposed to official,
street instead of stadium, ad hoc party instead of produced spectacle, amateur instead
of professional.

The user is encouraged to select their own tracks and make their own playlist,
to create a festival atmosphere when playing the game, taking the operator away from
the self-styled ‘serious’ and ‘authentic’ simulation of the televisual and management
genres to the arcade fundamentals espoused through both the representational and
ludic system, and much like the spectacular light-filled arcades of contemporary
entertainment venues, the music accentuates the atmosphere of modernity and
spontaneity that stands in direct contrast to the other genres of the sport digital game,
predicated as they are upon a timeless depiction of the sport both ludically and
representationally.
4.5 Chapter Summary

The commentary feature is one of the ways in which the representational system of the football videogame clearly delineates itself into distinct sub-genres. Whilst the televisual simulation relies upon digital mimicry of its broadcast counterpart, the other sub-genres expressly design their commentary to serve other purposes. The management genre, being as we’ve discussed the gamic embodiment of the information economy, consequently transforms the tradition of commentary into an informatic resource. By using text, the communication retains permanence in opposition to the ephemeral, fleeting nature of speech, whilst the chronicle and mimesis (the what and how) take centre stage, so that the cultured player may discern an effective counter-strategy to their antagonist’s tactics, or accentuate their already successful play with further modifications.

The extreme genre focuses upon heightening the ‘entertainment quota’ (Comisky et al, 1977) of the product through incorporation of contemporary, high-tempo alternative music; this is of course in line with the arcade tradition of immediate gratification and sensual bliss. As we’ve mentioned in previous chapters, this is one more example of the separation of sub-genres through attention to cultural tastes (Kant, [1790] 2004), the ‘vulgar’ corporeal pleasure of the extreme genre’s flow-inducing music (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) standing in stark contrast to the ‘purity’ of the management genre’s focus on the detached mind and intense rumination concerning the constant bombardment of data.
5 - The Neutrality of the Machine

The prevailing image of the computer represents it as a logical machine and computer programming as a technical, mathematical activity. Both the popular and technical culture have constructed computation as the ultimate embodiment of the abstract and formal. (Turkle & Papert, 1990: p.128)

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the methodologies section of the thesis introduction, Salen and Zimmerman (2003) discussed how computer processing is simply one feature amongst many that makes the videogame a possibility; 'computer hardware and software are merely the materials of which the game is composed… digital games are systems, just like every other game' (Salen and Zimmerman 2003: p.86).

Quite simply, videogames are just one subset of the wider game family. Whilst in other forms, such as role-play or board gaming, the rules are adjustable and negotiable, the strict binary language of the digital system allows no such ad hoc negotiations; true or false, on or off. Though this is extremely advantageous in creating mathematical simulations to a degree not capable in, for example, role-play or board games, the necessary closing of the system’s rules from negotiation or manipulation on the player’s behalf can have certain deleterious effects upon both the user’s play experience and their suspension of disbelief.

For example, not being allowed to jump in Bionic Commando Rearmed (Grin, 2008), though central to maintaining the balance of the core game mechanics, caused many complaints as such artificial limitations, strictly imposed by the machine, cause what Poole refers to as spatial incoherence (2000: p.65). The sophisticated representation of a human avatar invites expectation for sophisticated actions, such as jumping, running, crawling et cetera, no matter what the game genre. Unlike the human game host, the digital host is terminally blind to such inconsistencies and
player innovations of mechanical weaknesses such as glitch exploitation (the manipulation of game rules and glitches to achieve unexpected, advantageous outcomes).

The opening quotation from Turkle and Papert offers an extremely common perspective on the modern computer: logical, technical, mathematical. The processor makes no value judgements on what it processes, whether this is immoral, unethical or illegal. To a computer, all information is numerical (Manovich, 2001), and thus all information is equal in the eyes of the machine, as Flew outlines:

[D]igital information carried across networks is indifferent to what forms it represents, who owns or created them, or how they are used. A passage from the Bible, an academic paper, a pornographic image, and a video news segment streamed from CNN Online or the BBC World Service Online are all simply a combination of zeros and ones in the digital media environment. (2005: p.3)

Yet what does this mean for computer games? Obviously the computer maintains no preference in loading the pornographic *Lula: The Sexy Empire* (CDV Software, 1998), the hyper-violent *Manhunt 2* (Rockstar Games, 2007) or the sophisticated *BioShock* (2K Games, 2007). The computer is a neutral technology, a tool for processing data, no matter the form this data ultimately assumes.

In terms of the football digital game, this chapter illustrates how the ideology of digital information, specifically the value-neutrality of computer processing, embeds itself within the play experience, providing an unrealistically dense and
accessible source of information for the operator to utilise in their objective to overcome the AI opponent\textsuperscript{24}.

As the computational, informatic aspect of the football digital game is most obvious within the management genre, I will firstly discuss how it is embedded within this genre before moving on to the televisual and extreme branches.

\textbf{5.2 The Management Genre}

'Mind games’ is a term now so common within British football culture that it has become a frequent gameplay feature of the management simulation. Informing the opposition manager that you “hope the best team wins” or that “[your] team are really up for the fight” will have varying affects on the opposition, ever weakening or galvanizing their morale depending upon factors relating to the manager’s and player’s mental qualities (available to the operator as part of the detailed statistics concerning every opposition team, player and manager included in the game).

Obviously, to engage in mind games with an opponent is to play a game of deception, to leave the opposition uncertain as to your precise resources, tactics and strategy. Yet, in the digitized version of the mind game, there is one crucial area left unattended by the developer: the bluff.

One can of course lie in terms of qualitative opinion, “I don’t think we’ll have any problems winning today”/“We’ve got a really tough test and I’ll be happy with the draw”, but what about lying in terms of quantitative fact? Many times a manager has lied about playing or resting a certain player, using a specific formation, or not having a particular player back from injury.

\textsuperscript{24}As in multiplayer games the information is equally available to all human players, the advantage is nullified and thus multiplayer features will not be considered.
This ability to conceal, to protect your gambit from verifiability is undermined through the neutrality of digital information. For example, if Arsenal’s manager mentions how influential midfielder Cesc Fabregas will be unfit for the following game, the opposition manager will have to make a judgement on the truth of this statement, weighing various factors in his decision; the manager’s history of such statements, the benefits of the lie succeeding, the player’s injury history, and so on.

In terms of the management simulation, all of this is removed from consideration. Following the modular (Manovich, 2001) and impartial quality of digital media (Flew, 2005), the statement can be proven either true or false. Due to the computer’s impartiality in processing information, it perceives and applies no ethical judgement in providing data to the operator; the program database is consistently transparent.

If the gamer wishes to know which of their rival’s players are injured, they merely click the relevant team name, giving access to every last statistic available: injuries, form, condition, physical and mental attributes. The operator can review the opposition formation, the manager’s preferred attacking style, defensive style, and tactical approach (‘adventurous’, ‘defensive’, and ‘mixed’ are some of the labels applied).

The ability to conceal information, to be able to execute a convincing bluff concerning the team squad, is completely undermined and thus absent from the product due to the transparency of digital data. This provides a great strength for the player whilst also acting as great weakness for the simulational credibility of the product. Whilst the player can see that the opposition’s star forward is operating at 60% condition, and therefore target him with ‘hard’ tackling to injure and thus remove

25 Though certain versions of the game, such as the Sony Playstation Portable iteration, allow a “fog of war” mode to obfuscate particular data.
him from the equation, this directly undermines the suspension of disbelief aspired to by the videogame, as the player is stripped down to mathematical algorithm awaiting deletion from the database; the ludic system’s allegorization of the information economy becomes unavoidably luminous and the user is subsequently distanced from the experience.

The sheer lucidity of the data, in terms of teams, players, tactics, strategies and statistics also unintentionally amputates the joy of *alea* (Caillois, 2001) from the videogame; the excitement of the unknown, of gambling upon a player’s potential, of risking a high or low bid, on chancing an injury. With all the statistics and percentages clear for the user to see, such pleasures are prematurely nullified by the consummate accessibility of information.

### 5.3 The Televisual Genre

The line between diegesis and non-diegesis is extremely hard to locate in many contemporary videogames. Galloway broadly speaks of non-diegetic actions as 'actions of configuration… In *Final Fantasy X* the process of configuring various weapons and armor, interacting with the sphere grid, or choosing how the combat will unfold are all executed using interfaces and menus that are not within the diegetic world of the game' (Galloway, 2006: p.12-14).

Yet I believe this to be far too narrow a definition, as it seems to rest precariously upon techniques of presentation. What if the menu is embedded within a character’s clothing? For example in first-person shooter *Goldeneye 007* (Rare, 1997), the menu is located upon the character’s watch (pressing ‘START’ will draw the character’s wristwatch towards the screen). Though a menu that offers configurative acts, it is still very much within the diegetic world of the game. Similarly, the
management simulation’s entire experience rests upon the configurative act, and all that is offered are lists upon lists of options and menus. Therefore this representational system, labelled non-diegetic in any other genre, becomes the diegetic world of the game, as the world the player inhabits.

In terms of the televisual simulation, the diegetic world exists in two aspects: the three-dimensional, fully-realized photorealism of the match day, and everything else that, quite simply, is not. The match day is the fundamental component of the genre, playing a match against the AI or between friends. Yet when playing single-player, as a team within a league, there also exists the time between match days, which allows you to also take on mantle of manager/owner. This combination of manager and owner is possible as there is no dynamic of submission similar to that in the management simulation; there is no boardroom to appease and no powerful, game-affecting fan base to mollify. The time inbetween match days allows the player to engage in player training, set formations and tactics, broach transfer negotiations, and evaluate data concerning other teams. Obviously this shares many similarities with the management simulation, and suitably, it is also where the neutrality of the machine is most obvious.

Again the database format reveals its impartiality (Flew, 2005) by allowing access to all information equally, regardless of the operator’s partisanship. The gamer can access the statistics, injury and disciplinary records of each opposing player, also being given an overview of their formation and team selection for the upcoming match; the user can even view graphs showing the player’s statistical progression (in terms of ability) throughout his career, from start to finish, so that you can sell a young player, knowing his abilities will lessen instead of increase over the years, or buy an old player who has a high, stable progression for many years to come. The
data’s clarity achieves a hyper-transparency, a transparency through time, allowing the user to see the data of the future; not a projection of what *could* happen based upon the data available today, as is the basis for the rational gambler placing a bet, but instead a concrete illustration of what *will* happen in *x* amount of time.

Such details, the latter of which is obviously impossible in the physical world, would never be so openly revealed to the opposition in the world of professional sport, indeed for important matches the guessing of the ‘starting line-up’ traditionally fills the columns of various British tabloids until the day of the match.

Yet in striving for the perfect simulation, the televisual genre has culminated in an explosion of the Baudrillard-esque hyperreal, as Merrin illuminates, ‘This 'hyperreality' is itself a semiotic effect, being marked by the eclipse of original symbolic experience by the elevation, excessive realization and technical perfection of its semiotic replacement' (Merrin, 2005: p.53). As we can see, this elevation and excess is not only evident in the representational system, e.g. the broadcast angles and commentary teams et cetera, but also in the ludic system; the intense, overbearing articulation of play made possible through an exhaustive accumulation of statistics, categories and processes.

On match day this articulation is pushed to an even further extreme, as the HUD (Heads-Up Display) that overlays the action provides the user with further specific information concerning both teams. Stamina bars and strategy markers appear for each side’s avatars, providing for the user concise information concerning the fitness of the footballer, their proneness to injury (the stamina bar will turn from green to red to signify the danger), and their current strategic setting (attacking, balanced, defensive); such aspects are simply not conveyable within the real-world referent.
Whilst the symbolic can be disruptive, violent, and often obtuse, the semiotic recreation is expressly designed to clearly convey meaning, as Baudrillard mentions, the symbolic is replaced by 'the smooth and functional surface of communication' (2003: p.27). Indeed Baudrillard’s accusation of the semioticization of society is partly based upon a fetishistic approach to the sign, to meaning-making, and it is in this spirit of pure meaning that the language of the machine finds an accommodating partner.

5.4 The Extreme Genre

The extreme simulation, focusing as it does on the visually spectacular and ludically exaggerated experience of football, is sparse in providing examples for the neutrality of the machine, as the program database has been purposely designed for simplistic and ephemeral interaction. Opposition data is easily accessible, in line with the other genres, yet the emphasis placed upon a player’s physical skill with the control hardware (knowledge of moves/skills, button combinations/sequences, timing etc.) combined with the relative bareness of the statistics, removes much of the advantage gained in the management and televisual genres by studying such information.

In this way the extreme simulation is a more traditional test of athletic ability in the physiological sense of hand-eye co-ordination, response time and muscle memory. Indeed a player can become wholly competent and even advanced in the extreme genre without any prior knowledge of the sport and its history. The neutrality of the machine is instead used most often in multiplayer games as virtual handicap; the better player can select a team demonstrably worse (statistically) than his
opponent, and vice versa. In this way the computer’s impartiality is a balancing mechanism, maintaining a transparency between all human players.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The neutrality and manipulability of digital information has many consequences for the football videogame. Whilst this technology in many ways provides adequate solutions for the recreation of the physical sport (accurate physics rendering and so forth), it also presents new problems. As Neil Postman postulates:

[A]nyone who has studied the history of technology knows that technological change is always a Faustian bargain: Technology giveth and technology taketh away, and not always in equal measure. A new technology sometimes creates more than it destroys. Sometimes, it destroys more than it creates. But it is never one-sided.

(1990: online)

Whilst the latest technology can evermore accurately recreate the architecture of Wembley Stadium, Cristiano Ronaldo’s free-kick posture, or even the affect of a strong north-eastern wind on a football’s flight trajectory, its all-encompassing, unbiased approach to data can in fact work against its accuracy, by resolving and thus discounting the influence that ambiguity, elusiveness and imprecision can have upon sport. In other words, the presence of alea (Cailllois, 2001), of believing in luck, fortune or destiny, of taking risks and placing bets, in not knowing, can provide much enjoyment that is prematurely severed by the transparent, objective ideology of digital information.
A distinction needs to be made between perceptual immersion - limited by the technological basis of conventional arcade settings - and psychological immersion in gameplay activities... One involves immersion in the game-world, the other immersion in the game itself (the latter might best be described as 'absorption' to make clear the difference between the two)... Gameplay activities are likely to be as immersive - very often more so - than devices designed to create an impression of sensory immersion or presence. Psychological immersion can be very strong even where no great sense of sensory presence is involved, as is often the case in management and strategy games... A number of factors other than those related to impressions of sensory presence, including compelling and well-balanced gameplay activities, can contribute to the extent to which players experience a state of being immersively 'wrapped-up' in a game.

(King & Krzywinska, 2006: p.118)

The analysis of digital games needs to take into account the interdependency of player and game. Games, from Minesweeper to Halo, come into existence through a feedback loop between hardware, software, screen and player. Terms such as 'feedback loop' derive, like simulation, from the language of computing, and suggest that we might think of the relationship between player and digital game as not only 'interactive' but also 'cybernetic'.

(Giddings & Kennedy, 2006: p.142)

6.1 Introduction

The above quotes describe, firstly, the crucial differences between perceptual and psychological immersion, and secondly, the central importance of the player to the text, as their agency, defined by Janet Murray as ‘the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices’ (1997: p.126), literally brings the game into existence.

Immersion is a suspension of disbelief on the operator’s behalf, believing in their sensory presence as entity within the gameworld, as Murray articulates, immersion is 'the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality' (1997: p.98), or as Biocca & Delaney describe, an immersive environment is one that 'submerges the perceptual system of the user in computer-generated stimuli. The more
the system captivates the senses and blocks out stimuli from the physical world, the
more the system is considered immersive' (1995: p.57).

Obviously, whilst agency can be achieved through even the most basic of
interfaces, a sense of immersion requires a certain level of visual fidelity; the more
‘realistic’ the graphics the more believable the gameworld, whilst haptic feedback
such as vibrating pads can also help immersion. As mentioned in the thesis
introduction, realism is here defined as the increasing move towards photorealism
within computer graphics (as opposed to the two other common graphical styles in
videogames, abstractionism and caricaturism (Jarvinen, 2002)), alongside the
increasing implementation of real-world physics simualtional engines such as that
devised by Irish software company Havok.

Thus games such as The 7th Guest (Trilobyte, 1992) can provide a strong sense
of immersion through the first-person perspective and live-action video, with the
segmentation between exploration and gameplay sections also providing ample time
to gain a sense of inhabiting the gameworld. Also a game such Project Gotham
Racing 4 (Bizzare Creations, 2007) can induce a sense of immersion through
photorealistic graphics, a kinetic camera system, 5.1 surround sound, and a fully
implemented physics model.

Conversely, games such as Tetris fail entirely to provide sensual immersion,
due to abstract representation and an objective perspective, opting instead to
psychologically engage the gamer through pure gameplay, offering agency as
immersion through a balanced cybernetic system.

This chapter focuses upon the 'absorption' offered by the game mechanics,
whilst also referencing the perceptive immersion offered by the audio-visuals where
appropriate. I will now provide an overview of what I describe as the cybernetic
system before providing an analysis of each sub-genre's implementation of this ludic principle.

### 6.2 The Cybernetic System

An example of a balanced cybernetic system is most obviously demonstrated by Nintendo's motion-based *Wii* console. Moving the remote controller left directly corresponds with the game avatar moving their racquet left in a game of tennis on *Wii Sport* (Nintendo, 2006); this is a perfectly balanced cybernetic system, between input and output. If I were to press one button on the gamepad and my avatar were to perform ten movements, then that would be an unbalanced cybernetic system, as quantitatively the input does not directly correspond to the output.

Yet such an imbalance can be a pleasure in and of itself, as Klimmt and Hartmann (2006) discuss, the input-output ratio being skewed is an attractive proposition vis-à-vis the user’s perception of their efficacy within the environment:

Most games allow players to modify the game world substantially through only a few inputs. For example, in a combat game, players often need only a few mouseclicks to fire a powerful weapon and cause spectacular destruction. The ability to cause such significant change in the game environment supports the perception of effectance, as players can regard themselves as the most important (if not the only) causal agent in the environment… As White (1959) argued, the resulting feelings of efficacy are very pleasurable and rewarding. Therefore, effectance is valuable for explaining the enjoyment of playing computer games.

(p.138)
Efficacy, or in game terms, the degree of agency allowed by the ludic system, is crucial in determining the nature and extent of pleasure offered by the product. The viability of Chinese gold farming\textsuperscript{26} (Dibbell, 2007) as a business practice emerged from this desire by the consumer to cause the maximum amount of change in the gamestate, to acquire a form of hyper-ludicity\textsuperscript{27} that allows much more effectance than the average player. Though the rare weapons and elite abilities in *World of Warcraft* often have a pleasing representational veneer, their true value to the gamer lies in their enhanced ability to affect the gameworld; whether that is other players, the AI creatures, or the the capabilities of the avatar (such as acquiring a faster form of transport), as Bryant and Davies (2006) muse:

> Generally, in virtual time and space the relationship between an input and its outcome is overstated, as compared to inputs and outcomes in the real world, and users may experience an exaggerated sense of efficacy. Thus, there is an element of control in video games that is not found in the stories in films, books, or television programs—and certainly games offer players a degree of control that is rare in real life (p. 186)

To have a degree of control and efficacy within the virtual world satiates the operator’s psychological need to meet and overcome challenges, whilst also improving self-esteem and self-conception (Stebbins, 1992), 'When a player

\textsuperscript{26} This is a business whereby players of MMOGs can hire companies to level-up their game character during the hours the player must be at work, with the vast majority of these companies being based in China.

\textsuperscript{27} This concept is the focus of the next chapter.
experiences and eventually masters these situations in a video world, it seems reasonable to expect that confidence to be able to do so in reality someday would be a natural consequence' (Raney, Smith & Baker, 2006: p.169). It has been argued that the very concept of play was born from this psychological requirement for challenges, an evolutionary trait that allows the organism to safely practice and refine skills that are or will become necessary to survival in later life (Ohler and Nieding, 2006).

If we consider the football videogame's use of perspective and balancing of the cybernetic system, and how this influences the player’s sense of sensual immersion and psychological absorption, it becomes clear that such design decisions combine to offer particular pleasures to the user, pleasures that help create and delineate the specific attractions of the sport’s sub-genres. We will also discuss the oft-labelled ‘learning’ or ‘difficulty’ curve associated with games in general, and how these terms are in fact misnomers for what I refer to as the ‘effectance’ curve, a measurement for how effective one is within the gamespace, correlating directly with skill, challenge and the associated pleasure of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

6.3 The Televisual Genre

The ‘broadcast angle’ is, suitably enough, the default perspective for the *Pro Evolution Soccer* and *FIFA* series, labelled as such within both games as it accurately remediates the side-on viewpoint commonly used in football broadcasting. The reason for the televisual moniker extends beyond perspective though, as many other kinds of representation synonymous with the televisual experience are implemented, as we have discussed previously (commentary, replays et cetera).

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28 The default angle is the ‘broadcast’ angle, though the user can use the options menu to choose from a selection of perspectives.
Such a strategy is of course implemented to enhance the suspension of
disbelief; to fool the gamer’s eyes and ears into believing they are viewing a live
match broadcast. Yet this attempt at furthering the suspension of disbelief is also why
the impression of sensory immersion is diminished, as the gamer has acculturated this
mediated experience to be one of watching someone else play, as opposed to playing
themselves. Whilst the operator may be tricked into believing the visual fidelity of the
game, they will concurrently separate their own sense of immersion from that of the
avatar, as they now comprehend that avatar to be part of a televised broadcast, whilst
they themselves are situated by the product as both audience and gamer, and thus
crucially, they are not always synonymous with the avatar as in many other
videogames. This was highlighted in chapter one where third person pronouns such as
'he' and 'they' are commonly directed at the avatars, marking a clear distinction
between user and avatar not evident in genres such as the first-person shooter.

The cybernetic system of the televisual simulation is balanced, though as I
illustrate in the following chapter, upon closer inspection of its hyper-ludic and
contra-ludic features there is clearly an ideological bias operating within the core
mechanics. This balance of input/output ratio allows for immediate accessibility and
comprehension. For example pressing left on the control hardware concludes in the
avatar moving left, pressing the ‘pass’ button once results in the avatar kicking the
ball once, and so on.

Such an interface helps with both the sense of immersion and agency, as both
output and subsequent remediated visuals accurately reflect the operator’s input, and a
balance between sensory immersion and psychological focus is offered, as the
immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) of the product’s representational façade envelops
the gamer’s senses in a way the hypermedia environment of the management
videogame consciously avoids. Something else the management genre evades, which is consciously embraced by the televisual (and extreme) videogame, is the immediacy of the cybernetic loop of input and output.

If we refer once more to the above example, there is no temporal delay in the user pressing the left direction on the game controller’s analog stick, and having the avatar move left; it is instantaneous. This furthers the user's sense of efficacy as Klimmt & Hartmann (2006) summarize:

If there is no delay between a player’s action and the game’s response, the temporal congruency between action and result provides a very strong sense of effectance, as the outcomes of one’s own actions are transparent and easy to comprehend. The importance of temporal congruency between action and effect has been stressed very early as factor in the perception of causality (e.g. Hume, 1739/2003). The immediacy of response removes ambiguity from the perception of causal agency, making the experience of effectance intuitive and requiring little cognitive effort.

(p.138)

The removal of ambiguity due to the direct and immediate relation between input and output stands in direct contrast to the management interface, where the cybernetic system’s ambiguity is one of the foundations of its lasting appeal; the optimal relation between input and output is shrouded by the developer, so that the player is never given clear feedback as to what has been successful and what has been ineffective, whilst the relation between input and output is often delayed. The
discovery of an efficacious method of input by the user through repeated playing is the core of the ludic experience for the management game.

As mentioned before, a complex visual environment creates expectations for complex actions. This in turn creates expectations that to perform more complex actions requires a deeper knowledge and expertise concerning the cybernetic system and the control interface, a ‘learning’ or ‘difficulty’ curve that, if perfectly suited to the gamer’s skill level, can greatly enhance the probability of the gamer reaching the flow channel:

A game, or part of a game, that is too challenging for the player is likely to cause anxiety; one that is too easy is likely to create boredom. In between lies… the ‘flow channel’, in which the skills of the player are just sufficient to meet the challenges of the game

(Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: summarized in pp.48-67).

Yet in labelling this process, and many other association processes, the ‘learning’ or ‘difficulty’ curve, the industry is propagating an empty term. Though the curve requires both learning and generally maintains a degree of difficulty, what is truly being learned is efficacy; increasing skill (learning) at an activity measurable through an increased capability within the game environment. The more a player learns to have effect within the gameworld, the more control they have, the more able they are to meet the game’s challenges, and ideally, the better equipped they are to locate the above-mentioned ‘flow channel’. Therefore I would propose the more direct term 'effectance curve', to articulate the proficiency and ability one has within the gameworld, and to provide the analyst with a useful term for understanding the
lasting appeal of the product in relation to other videogames with shallow effectance curves.

The televisual simulation is designed to offer a deep, broad effectance curve through providing a plethora of advanced attacking moves (including many hidden moves for the veteran player to discover), all of which required a dexterous manipulation of the gamepad, many times using three or more controls simultaneously, whilst also pushing the directional pad/analog stick in the exact correct sequence.

For example, one of the simpler dribbling techniques, such as the ‘V Feint’, is explained in the game manual as such, 'From a stationary position, hold the RT (right trigger) button down and press the directional pad in the opposite direction to that of the player’s run, then press the directional pad in a 45 degree diagonal towards the player’s strongest foot' (Konami, 2007: p.7); success, as in any sport, also requires correct timing, and thus tricks and skills are much more effective if performed at precisely the right moment, something else used to distinguish the veteran from the beginner.

Thus we can describe the effectance curve as deep and broad as the more advanced gamer has the ability to initiate many intricate manoeuvres that require a precise blend of skill, knowledge and timing for truly spectacular moves, whilst the beginner is also provided with enough basic functionality to play the game at an acceptable level and to appreciate the skill of the more accomplished operator.

Yet, generally speaking, a veteran has more agency than a beginner due to their knowledge and proficiency with the game system and perhaps the associated hardware; controller, button configuration et cetera. This combination of visual fidelity and and a deep effectance curve is perhaps why the Pro Evolution Soccer
series is such a popular videogame for professional competitions; similar attributes were also recognized by Jakobbson (2007) as making Nintendo’s *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (2001) popular with console game clubs.

### 6.4 The Extreme Genre

The extreme simulation’s default perspective is a slightly lower, closer viewpoint than that utilised by the televisual simulation, mainly due to the smaller 5-aside teams used and consequently miniature pitch. Whilst the *FIFA Street* series seeks to subvert many aspects of the traditional televisual sports broadcast with a more amateur, carnivalesque approach (urban music instead of commentary, exaggerated visuals and sound effects), the standard camera angle presented is similar enough to the televisual genre’s to draw resemblance and thus psychologically separate the operator once more from his or her avatars.

The extreme genre’s cybernetic system is, characteristic of its arcade leanings, an unbalanced experience revelling in effectance. Arcade games come from a history of spectacle and novelty (Swalwell, 2007), commonly competing against pinball machines and fairground attractions for punters’ money (Bryce & Rutter, 2003: p.10). From *Pac-man’s* (Namco, 1980) colourful visuals to *Dance Dance Revolution’s* (Konami, 1998) novel floor-mat controls, arcade games have thrived on the ability to attract consumers through spectacular visuals, instant gratification, and novel interfaces. Consequently this means the cybernetic system exists in a binary state; balanced, or unbalanced. An example of a fully balanced cybernetic system would be *Virtua Cop* (Sega, 1994), where the operator would use a ‘light gun’ (a laser-emitting pointing device shaped in the form of a gun) to shoot assailants appearing on the screen. The input/output is of course equal, you point and pull the trigger, and a single
virtual bullet is fired in that exact location. Along with the first-person perspective, the pleasure comes from the absorption and perceptual immersion offered by the three-dimensional graphics, first-person perspective and realistic interface.

Unbalanced cybernetic systems are more prevalent where games with conventional control interfaces (as opposed to novel interfaces detailed above), that seek to redress the balance of novelty through offering spectacular graphics and efficacy to draw the punter in. Thus games such as Street Fighter (Capcom, 1987) became popular due to the colourful martial arts graphics and a frantic, almost random (to the uninitiated) style of play which would come to be known derogatorily as “button-bashing”, a style now synonymous with and indeed colloquialism for the beginner (button-basher), as columnist for Idle Thumbs Ben Andac wrote in a tirade concerning the difference between 'true' gamers and button-bashers, 'button-bashers suck. You ruin the arcade scene. You should all go and suicide' (Andac, 2004: online).

This is another instance of a group protecting their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) from devaluation, much like the veterans in chapter one being ostentatious in their 'unserious' approach to playing beginners. If any beginner can win by button-bashing, then the cultural value attributed to expertise at the game dropped dramatically, thus button-bashing was attacked on an ideological level as the opposite of 'true' gaming.

Yet button-bashing was, and remains, a very effective tactic, as the unbalanced cybernetic system allows for random button presses to become a viable strategy; a system of small inputs consistently producing large outputs invites exploitation. In such games the pressing of a single button in collusion with a direction can in certain circumstances invoke extraordinary moves, such as the ‘Hurricane Kick’ in the abovementioned Street Fighter, where the character will leap into the air rotating with one leg stuck out, resembling a helicopter rotor. One button press does not equal one
kick, but instead multiple, if not hundreds of kicks, and effective play strategies can often involve the random “bashing” of buttons in the hopes of keying an efficacious input sequence, which, due to the unbalanced input/output loop, can often conclude with victory.

As successor to this tradition, the *FIFA Street* series suffers a similar disparity. Using the ‘Trick Stick’ interface, the player can perform anything from a *panna* (pushing the ball through the defender’s legs and running around them) to something fantastical such as scooping the ball over the opposition before using his shoulders to somersault over his entire frame, ball connected to foot the entire time. Neither move requires any more game knowledge than the other, or expertise with the game pad, but instead rely on the exact same dynamic; moving the trick stick in a particular direction. Thus the output can vary in regards to the input, as the player can push the trick stick in the same direction twice and achieve two entirely different stylistic outcomes. The effectance curve is terminally shallow, as there are no moves that require particular ‘hidden’ knowledge, or an evolving mastery over the control device. To relate back to the widespread use of the televisual simulation in professional gamer competitions, the lack of a broad or deep effectance curve resulting from the superficial gameplay in the *FIFA Street* series is perhaps why the extreme simulation is never used for professional tournament play.

### 6.5 The Management Genre

The management simulation has only one perspective, and that is of the informatic, hypermediated (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) abstractionist style. If the televisual and extreme perspectives can be termed the *spectacle* view (constructed in such a manner as to provide maximum enjoyment of the hardware's graphical
capabilities), then the management genre provides an informatic view, one created purely to act as an interface for accessing data.

If the viewpoint can be at all compared to the corporeal taxonomy invoked most famously by the first-person shooter genre (with ‘third-person’ also commonly used as a genre distinction), then the management genre would also be identified as first-person. In terms of immersion, the effect is not to make the player believe in the gameworld, but instead to become immersed in the data, in the game mechanics. The user has, in theory, limitless time to prepare their team through the manipulation of hundreds of parameters, and can spend hours before each match simply altering tactics and strategies.

This of course means that for the operator, the cybernetic system is never balanced. The gamer can opt to use the default formation and tactics preset by the developers, meaning that a few clicks of the mouse can conclude with a 10-0 victory. Conversely, hours of careful alterations, instructions and selections could result in a 10-0 loss. Plainly, the gamer is not up against the other team, but up against the cybernetic system itself, attempting to decode and grasp the ‘preferred performance’ (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006) of the program, to understand the best method for structuring the numerous statistics (formations, tactics, player abilities, morale, condition et cetera) that culminates in a winning combination, as Manovich articulates, ‘[Games] demand that a player can execute an algorithm in order to win. As the player proceeds through the game, she gradually discovers the rules that operate in the universe constructed by this game. She learns its hidden logic – in short, its algorithm' (2002: p.222).

As Bogost (2006) would describe it, the gamer must analyse the individual ‘unit operations’ that act independently yet cohesively to form the game’s overall
ludic system, and then deploy them accordingly. As commented upon in previous chapters, the management genre is quite literally an information economy, in both its representational and ludic design, and its cybernetic system insists on being played as such.

6.6 Chapter Summary

None of the football digital games analyzed prioritize sensually immersing the user. They instead strive to make the player believe in the verisimilitude of the product; this should be recognized as a key distinction. Attempts at immersion are common in other genres through manipulation of perspective and utilisation of haptic feedback technologies such as Sony’s 'dualshock' control pads, vibrating in time with suitable events on-screen. If the first-person view in videogames is analogous to the aesthetics of naturalism, then the football sub-genres are, to different degrees, its antithesis. These products consciously separate player and game in a highly stylized manner, attempting instead to inculcate a sense of fidelity through open acknowledgement of the artefact’s mediation.

The televisual genre does not strive to immerse the user within its fiction, quite the opposite; it attempts to convince the player of its non-fictional status, through the broadcast angle, action replays, commentary teams, and a balanced cybernetic system with a broad effectance curve.

It strives in its technical perfection of television broadcasting to dissolve that medium into its own, to make the signifying ‘reality’ of broadcast sport become part of its simulacral rendition, as Baudrillard (1998) notes, 'the more closely the real is pursued with colour, depth and one technical improvement after another, the greater does the real absence from the world grow' (p.122). I would contend that this is one of
the reasons those interviewed within the observer-participant case study did not see the televisual simulation as simply a “game”, but as authentic extension of football culture, as one contributor remarked, “it feels like a real football match”. Real in this instance, as in so many others, is photorealism.

The extreme genre simultaneously adopts and subverts the features of the televisual simulation. It adopts them to parody them, and subsequently to highlight its own differences. It bases its claim to authenticity in its invocation of ‘street’ style, from the graffiti-strewn environment to the music playlist; its claim is not to non-fiction status, as the televisual genre attempts, but instead as a re-imagination and expression of extreme sport culture. The cybernetic system supports this, allowing for creative, outlandish play, whilst the representational facet pulls the user closely towards the bombastic action, stressing the immediate gratification of the arcade-like experience.

The management simulation’s hypermediated perspective and cybernetic system allegorizes the modern information economy, as elaborated by Galloway (2006a) when discussing Sid Meier’s work:

To win means to know the system. And thus to interpret a game means to interpret its algorithm (to discover its parallel “allegorithm”). So today there is a twin transformation: from the modern cinema to the contemporary video game, but also from traditional allegory to what I am calling horizontal or “control” allegory. I suggest that video games are, at their structural core, in direct synchronization with the political realities of the informatic age. If Meier’s work is about anything, it is about information society itself. It is
about knowing systems and knowing code, or, I should say, knowing the system and knowing the code.

(Galloway, 2006a: p.91)

To play the management games is to adopt the mindset of the information economy; everything is reduced to data, codified and quantifiable – personality, race, national identity, age. All are as much a part of the representational system as they are the ludic. It translates the management experience into a mathematical model, in the same way that a factory manager’s spreadsheet translates labour; costs, production, output, profit, efficiency. The end goal in both instances is to find a way to maximize output, profit and efficiency whilst minimizing costs of labour and production. To play the game one must not understand the opponent (whether that be human or AI), one must understand the system.

In allegorizing the information economy, the management genre asks the player to adopt key aspects of the knowledge worker mindset:

- Works with ideas and manages teams
- Wants to be able to develop and improve processes and forms; encourage collaboration; create workspace environments
- Needs to create, consume, transform and analyse data
- Works in an unstructured, free-form way, maybe starting with a set of ideas which are collaborated on and built into a new document/report/form/business process.
- Examples of this type of worker include middle/senior managers, consultants, marketing execs.
This is an infiltration of middle-class labour practices into the realm of popular entertainment, something once rejected by the culture, as Fiske describes:

[A]esthetics is a disciplinary system, an attempt by the bourgeoisie to exert the equivalent control over the cultural economy that it does over the financial.

"What is at value in aesthetic discourse ... is nothing less than the monopoly of humanity” (Bourdieu, 1984: 491). Aesthetics is naked cultural hegemony, and popular discrimination properly rejects it.

(1989: p.130)

The aesthetic design of the management genre is positioned distinctly towards the middle class knowledge worker, and its mass appeal speaks to the changing tastes of an increasingly affluent society (Galbraith, 1998).
7 - ‘The Beautiful Game’: Hyper-Ludicity and Contra-Ludicity

Express Yourself! With over 150 individual moves, techniques and tricks at your disposal, Pro Evolution Soccer 6 enables you to play the Beautiful Game in any way you see fit... From slick passing moves to hard tackling, crowd-pleasing exhibitions of individual skill to dogged, desperate defending, no other game can rival its ability to capture the essence and atmosphere of the real-life sport.
(Konami, 2006)

Top Flight is too defensive... Premiership football is “boring”
(Scott, 2005: online)

Serie A being a boring, defensive league?
(Martha, 2007: online)

7.1 Introduction

The diegetic world of the videogame (and the sports videogame in particular), has moved adroitly from abstraction to simulation in the past fifty years (Turkle, 1997). Arguably the first ever American electronic game, and certainly the first to simulate an athletic sport instead of remediating a board game, William Higinbotham’s Tennis For Two (1958) incorporated a simplistic physics engine and control scheme to bounce a ball back and forth over a net (though it was easy enough to manipulate the direction of the ball such as though it may just bounce back-and-forth eternally without touching the ground). The sports simulation has moved rapidly from these early days of abstraction to extremely detailed, photorealistic representation. As the visual world of the computer game became increasingly multifaceted and intricate, the audience naturally expected the manner and form of interaction to similarly progress.

Higinbotham’s game had two functions: rotate angle of shot (a full 360 degrees were available through rotation of the knob) and then press a button to activate the shot, propelling the ball in that direction. Thus the only ludic element of
Higinbotham's game was the ball itself. Early football games such as 1980's *Pele's football* (also known as *Championship football*) were much the same way: control the ball, then pick a direction before passing or shooting. The common theme between the two games is the dominance of the ball in terms of gameplay; if one was in possession of the ball, the system of play was varied and continuous, without the ball, interaction became extremely limited, by today’s standards practically non-existent.

Quite simply, the ball itself acts as the harbinger of ludicity; with it the ludic system expands, and becomes open to the possibility of *hyper-ludicity*, where the prospects for play go beyond the regular limitations of the game mechanics, as especially effective actions become available to the user, or the game objects, sometimes even the environment itself increases in ludicity. Without the ball, the ludic system retracts, and moves towards *contra-ludicity*, allowing fewer interactions and possibilities for play. An extreme example of contra-ludicity would be *Tetris*, as play progresses, the tetrominoes fall faster and faster, until the user, no matter their skill level, can no longer play at all, and the game must end. This is a gradual movement to complete contra-ludicity, as the ludic system finally and totally resists play.

Coming back to the football digital game, such interface design illustrates a gross bias towards the offensive style of play; the gamer should always be in possession of the ball, always passing and shooting if they are to be successful, or indeed enjoy the experience on any autotelic level. Defensive play is opposingly designed as ludic punishment, as a lack of ludicity that teaches the user that defensive play is inherently *wrong* and offensive play inherently *right*. Thus offensive play provides more ludicity (and as will be discussed, hyper-ludicity), and defensive play uniformly allows less (resisting play, contra-ludicity). In articulating this we should
remember that play is a structuring activity whereby we come to comprehend certain principles (Hans, 1981), as Rollings and Adams state:

[W]hen [designers] tell a player that he must perform certain actions to win the game, we are defining those actions as good or desirable. Likewise, when we say that the player must avoid certain actions, we are defining them as bad or undesirable.

(Rollings and Adams, 2003: p.77)

The attacking design-ideology, the ‘procedural rhetoric’ of the game mechanics as Bogost terms it (2007), is visible in today’s football videogames through the implementation of both sport and interface rules (Frasca, 2003) that instruct the user in how to comprehend and play not only the videogame, but the sport itself, as McAllister remarks, 'More troubling is how computer games may be exerting instructional force at the quotidian and implicative levels, defining the logic by which players interpret the real world... since instruction necessarily reveals the values of both teacher and student' (2004: p.55).

This offensive bias is also present in other sports genres, such as EA Sport’s boxing simulation *Fight Night Round 2* (2005), as Andrew Baerg notes in analyzing the control scheme (known as the ‘Total Punch Control’ system):

[the interface] renders attacking offensive fighting natural and transparent while readily ignoring the defense and protection of the body. It appears impossible to succeed in the game by imitating a successful defensive fighter
like Pernell Whitaker given that EA's patented control set clearly privileges the pleasure of punching as opposed to that of deft defense.

(Baerg, 2007: p.30)

In this chapter I build upon previous scholars' work on the relationship between semantics and the system of choices offered by the game, such as Zagal's recent analysis of the 'ethical framework that is procedurally encoded in the game' (2009: p.3). Yet where Zagal leans towards an analysis of narrative, I provide a perspective firmly entrenched within the ludic, focusing on how the play mechanics position the user not as sports participant, but as media consumer.

Though presenting itself as neutral and transparent, play will be shown to be ideologically loaded (Rehak, 2003), with particular, sanctioned ways of successfully enacting the game; the ‘preferred performance’ (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006) demanded by the program code for successful play, a performance that necessarily acculturates the player into a particular understanding and appreciation of how the sport should be comprehended and enacted.

7.2 The Televisual Genre

In the Pro Evolution Soccer 2008 manual, the ‘Controls’ section lists twenty-eight methods alone for dribbling the ball, ranging from pressing a button to perform a jump over an opponent’s incoming slide tackle, to the ‘Matthews trick’, requiring a precise, rapid manipulation of the control stick in a selection of directions to achieve a misleading shoulder drop one way before pushing the ball the other, named after legendary England winger Stanley Matthews’ famous deceptive manoeuvre (Schreiner, 1999: p.48).
Importantly, only avatars with a rating of 70 or above in their ‘dribbling’
statistics can attempt to perform this manoeuvre, highlighting the offensive bias of the
televisual genre, as the more defensively-oriented avatar with a lower dribble value is,
to all intents and purposes, ludically disabled, not allowed by the game’s mechanics to
even attempt such a feat. Again, the role of defence within the game is contra-ludic,
removing many possibilities for play from the product.

Alongside these tricks and skills are the ‘hidden’ moves (not stated within the
product manual), covertly embedded by Konami within the game to await discovery
by expert players, such as the rabona, where the avatar swings one leg behind the
other to chip the ball, effectively crossing his legs in an audacious display of
technique. Information such as this becomes a valuable form of gaming capital
(Consalvo, 2007), whereby veteran players can gain esteem and privilege within
gaming communities (online or physical) for their role as informational leaders
(Blanchard, 2004), seen as respectable fonts of knowledge concerning the game.

It is also symptomatic of the game developer’s increasing trend to keep a
product ‘open’, something pioneered in Japanese game design, as outlined within the
Literature Review. An 'open' product, as described by Masuyama (2002), is a game
without a formal end, allowing the gamer to continue play, maintaining all he or she
has unlocked or earned in previous playthroughs, using those resources to play in new
and novel ways to keep the game interesting. Such tactics not only increase the
longevity of the game, requiring multiple playthroughs to build significant resources
and unlock numerous items, but of course also increase the social potential of the
product, acting as a point of socialization for players to discuss, trade, and search for
hidden features; they are developed with 'metagame' features in mind, as Garfield
(2000) would term it.
Of course, this inclusion of secret offensive moves (there are no secret defensive moves) also propagates the superiority of attacking football whilst reducing the capability for one to be successful in deploying a defensive strategy; the hidden moves reward the gamer with a form of hyper-ludicity, allowing them to be more effective within the game environment than is standard. Not only are special offensive moves hidden within the ludic system, but also, in alignment with the nature of the ‘open’ product (Masuyama, 2002), the Pro Evolution Soccer series has a longstanding tradition of including legendary avatars that can be discovered and unlocked through achieving certain feats.

For example winning the ‘Division 1’ title in Master League mode unlocks the following collection of players: Denis Law, Roger Milla, Kenny Dalglish, Dejan Savicevic, José Mari Bakero and Emilio Butragueno. The link, which any fan or historian of the sport would immediately notice, is the attacking disposition of the group, consisting exclusively of either strikers or attacking midfielders, some of whom maintain their own special dribbling tricks and shots above the commonplace hidden moves, whilst their statistical attributes are far beyond that of the average avatar. They are an elite group of enhanced ludic possibilities, again offering the user a form of hyper-ludicity within the gameworld as reward for successful, prolonged play.

Conversely, against the many, many offensive moves possible, there are just three moves listed for defending within the game’s manual; ‘tackle’, ‘close down’, and ‘sliding tackle’. There is no input available for countering the Matthews trick, no ‘shoulder barge’ option to unbalance a player attempting a Marseille turn,\(^{29}\) or shirt-pull option to subtly slow-down an accelerating attacker.\(^{30}\) Thus whilst three options

\(^{29}\) Spinning 360 degrees over the ball.

\(^{30}\) Though shirt-pulling has been integrated as an automatic feature into the latest iterations of both the Pro Evolution Soccer and FIFA franchises.
are all that is available within the defending operator’s contra-ludic armoury, they are made to contend with an attacking user who has access to at least (including all hidden moves) ten times the amount of input options. The ergodic possibilities (Aarseth, 1997) for the offence greatly outnumber the ergodic potential of the defender's ludic system, and henceforth, as is often lamented (Anonymous, 2007: online), the game is slanted grossly towards attacking play.

*FIFA 08*, much like its EA-cousin *Fight Night Round 2*, contains an offensive system that hinges on the manipulation of the controller's analog stick. Whilst *Fight Night Round 2*’s ‘Total Punch Control’ system uses the analog stick to punch in a somewhat iconic, logical manner relating to the motion of the avatar’s fists (moving the stick downwards then up will instigate an uppercut, for example), *FIFA 08*’s ‘trick stick’ system is a polysemic interface that has no correspondence with the physical world action, the relation between the movement of the stick and the movement on-screen is completely arbitrary, maintaining no logically deductive relation.

Positioning the trick stick system as a crucial aspect of the control interface is in itself a statement of intention made by the producer, informing the user immediately of the specific ludic expectations set forth by the product; tricks, flair and attacking play is a natural part of the game, whilst the contrary defensive techniques and tactics are dismissed by the culture of *FIFA 08* through their omission, viewed as boring, negative and ignoble. As demonstrated by the quotes opening this chapter, such dismissal and contempt of defensive play is a perspective generally shared by the wider sport-media complex.

Henceforth, the operator is required to memorize as many different trick stick moves as possible, similar to an experienced gamer memorizing fighting moves in a beat ‘em up such as *Street Fighter*. Again, as with other forms of specialized gaming
information, knowledge of trick stick moves can act as gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007) within a community, providing one avenue for the dedicated fan to begin their journey across a form of career progression as detailed by Crawford (2004: p.42), beginning as ‘general public’ (reading game websites/forums, playing the games) to ‘professional’, an enthusiast who earns a living participating in the many game competitions held both online and offline across the country, or ‘apparatus’, an active contributor to the culture, commonly as administrators of fan/competition websites or writers of instruction manuals, such as one gamer who compiled a well-known guide to performing tricks within FIFA 08 (JayD, 2007: online).

By only sanctioning the use of the trick stick system when in control of the ball, the videogame reveals its bias towards offensive play; illustrating it as natural, essential and productive. By stripping the capability of the budding defender, the product demands conformity to an attacking mindset encoded by the developer, a particular way of seeing the sporting world that champions flair, individuality and joga bonito at the expense of teamwork, tackling and blocking. The in-game rewards provided, as consequence of the open design of the product, unanimously offer hyper-ludicity embodied as attacking, offensive manoeuvres and avatars, whilst the defensive aspect of the sport is wholly neglected.

The recent inclusion of diving into the Pro Evolution Soccer series is also of interest. Whilst not even provided as an input option within the FIFA series (due no doubt to its status as official product of the governing body), diving is implemented within Pro Evolution Soccer to serve as a ludic lesson in ethics. Whilst one can attempt to dive, they are consistently booked for such simulation. Similarly, handball is not something incorporated into any of the sub-genres, as a tactic it is wholly neglected as even existing within the sport.
The product thus ludically illustrates absolute respect for and deference to the laws of the sport, the opponent, and fair play; the old proverb 'cheats never prosper'\footnote{From the 17th Century epigram 'Treason doth neuer prosper, what's the reason? For if it prosper, none dare call it Treason.'} is here cemented as fact within the game mechanics. This utopian view is starkly contrasted with the uncertainties of the real-world sport where, as detailed in the thesis introduction, cheaters can and often do gain advantage.

### 7.3 The Extreme Genre

The extreme genre’s ludic system is markedly less biased than the televisual genre, retaining its ludicity whether in attack or defence. Yet as we will see, the representational system, through its deployment of spectacular visuals and sounds, maintains and rewards an attacking bias.

Of course, being an EA product, the control interface is conspicuously similar to \textit{FIFA 08}’s; the controls are mapped in an identical manner, and the trick stick control system features prominently, even more so than in \textit{FIFA 08}. Yet crucially in the extreme genre, the trick stick is not simply an offensive interface. Whilst \textit{FIFA 08} only allows the trick stick to be used when the gamer has the ball at his feet, \textit{FIFA Street 2} uses the trick stick in a defensive capacity, to counter every move made by the offensive player. If the attacker performs a certain move with the trick stick, the defender can perform the same move to steal the ball, or knock the opposing avatar to the ground in humiliation. Not only does this balance ludicity, it also balances strategy, as using defensive tactics is in no way punished by the ludic system, all options remain open to the defensive player and they are as equally capable, ergodically, as their offensive counterpart.
Also of note are the icons appearing above the avatar’s heads, used to connote their role within the team. A steering wheel image lies above the head of a player skilled in passing and dribbling (they are the playmakers, steering the team in the right direction), a hypnotic spiral connotes the role of certain avatars as trickster (hypnotizing the opposition with their advanced technique), a bullseye qualifies the footballer as a finisher (hitting the target), and finally a hammer illuminates the avatar’s status as an enforcer (hammering the opposition into submission). By doing so the developer clearly and concisely designates the footballer’s role within the team, a ludic instruction manual based on symbolism, informing the user where to place the footballer and how to use him (a hammer should be placed in defence, a steering wheel in midfield, a bullseye in the forward position et cetera). Such an addition is an evolution of the tradition seen within arcade videogame cabinet design, where the instructions in how to play the game were and frequently still are etched next to the controls; these instructions are visually-oriented with the minimum of accompanying text so that the gamer can comprehend the basics of the game in as little time as possible.

It should also be noted that each symbol, the hypnosis spiral, the bullseye, and the hammer, are all common aspects of American travelling carnival games and sideshows as represented in popular culture; the hypnotist sideshow, the target games, the hammer ('high-striker') test of strength. This feeds back into the representation of the extreme genre as alternative, carnivalesque, spectacular and fun.

One fundamental concession to an offensive mindset is the inclusion of the ‘gamebreaker’ mode, a hyper-ludic feature triggered by the user after filling the gamebreaker bar through goals and dribbling past opponents. Upon activation the gamebreaker mode instigates a specialised aesthetic to signify the hyper-ludicity of
the new environment; all colours within the setting become fluid and transitory whilst a psychedelic trail follows the player; the ball makes cracks in the pavement and knocks down any avatar unfortunate enough to be in the way of a shot on goal. If the operator manages to beat every opposition player with the trick stick before scoring a goal, they automatically win the match. In this manner attacking play is illuminated as something spectacular and special, a form of play whose qualities allow transcendence beyond the usual limitations imposed by the rules and regulations of the sport; fundamental aspects of the game, namely the scoreline and the stopwatch, are rendered inconsequential by this hyper-ludic mode. To beat every opponent and score the perfect goal is shown as the game’s ultimate objective, providing the decisive reward of winning the game outright, as prize for the perfect display of attacking football. The ball, which has always been the fundamental ludic feature of the digital interpretation of football, becomes itself hyper-ludic, smashing the environment and opposition into submission, further accentuating its paramount importance.

Whilst the ludic features of the extreme genre show a slight privilege towards offence, representationally the imbalance is obvious. When in control of the ball, the player’s avatar illustrates an extraordinary athleticism and aerobatic aptitude, whilst defensively this form of spectacle is immobilized. This is shown through the inclusion of various extreme sport techniques; when with the ball the player can run up walls or use the wall to project themselves over the opposition in a manner consciously reminiscent of 'parkour' (also known as “street running”), or they will flip over an aggressor in any number of ways that closely mimics numerous skateboarding and rollerblading postures. Yet the control interface itself privileges no particular strategy, allowing for equal defensive and offensive controls, creating a much more impartial
ludic environment than the televisual simulation. In doing so the developers create a comprehensible, intuitive mode of engagement where tactical and strategic considerations (such as maintaining possession) are diluted by the system’s balance; whether in control of the ball, or in defence, one is equally effective within the gameworld, thus nearly all forms of play are equally accessible, enjoyable and potentially less frustrating. Yet with inclusions such as the gamebreaker mode, along with the spectacular audio-visuals afforded by offensive manoeuvres, the genre still maintains a clear prejudice towards attacking play as innately superior.

7.4 The Management Genre

The management genre lacks any direct control over the avatars, limiting the gamer’s capacity for effect to a list of selections based within certain groups; strategy, formation, team talks and individual instructions.

Within the ‘tactics’ menu screen of Football Manager 2007 are various manipulable bars that influence the team’s playing style; mentality can veer between ‘ultra-defensive’ and ‘all-out attack’, closing down can be ‘rarely’, ‘mixed’ or ‘often’ along with tackling which can be ‘easy’, ‘normal’ or ‘hard’. The gamer can also define the defensive line, select from various marking strategies, and provide individual instructions to each player in terms of attacking, dribbling, passing, off-the-ball movement and defensive duties. The preferred performance (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006) is in this manner indecipherable, as the ludic system merely presents a series of options, refusing to provide clear input/output indicators.

The rhetoric utilised for the beginning, half-time and full-time team talks, however, illustrates clear prejudices. At the start of a match, five options are
commonly presented, with statements such as ‘tell the players you expect them to win the match’ and ‘tell the players that they can win this game!’

The emphasis is again on offensive football, refusing to mention defensive tactics extolling caution, or providing the ability to instruct the players to ‘play for a draw’ for example, as is any rhetoric of corruption such as instructing the squad to lose the game. Instead the message is that the team must play to score, to entertain, even allowing customised messages for each player, encouraging them to win the game, whilst no options exist that spur the player on to defend well, to keep possession or perhaps foul a certain opposing star player out of the match. In such a way the management videogame sanitizes the football manager experience, extolling pure sporting virtues and an entertainment ethos centred upon the necessity to play attacking, media-friendly football.

The final match day menu is the opposition instructions screen. This display provides a list of the opposition players, with four options listed alongside their names; tight marking, closing down, tackling, show onto foot, with the binary ‘never’ or ‘always’ being the parameters for the first two, ‘easy/normal/hard’ for tackling, and ‘show onto foot’ obviously allowing ‘left/right/weaker’. Such instructions are heavily disposed towards defensive tactics, allowing the gamer to carefully select who to follow, who to neutralize with many defenders, and of course, due to the impartiality of the game database, there is complete transparency in terms of statistics and information, thus the user can view the conditioning of every opposition player expressed as a percentage, then target the players with low condition percentages for hard tackling, knowing that they are more likely to become injured and thus forced out of the match.
In opposition to the offensive character of the team talk menu's ergodics, the approaches encouraged by the tactics screen are highly defensive. Absent are any instructions to use any offensive measures against particular opponents, for example, to run at a certain defender on his weaker side, or to consistently attempt dribbles past certain defenders whilst passing when confronted by others. In direct contrast to the team talk options, any opportunity to balance your defensive instructions with offensive is eliminated by the tactics screen through its absence; offensive play is viewed as comparatively ineffable.

Thus whilst defence is seen as a tactical, team-oriented strategy requiring careful instruction, offensive play is addressed as mainly from the manager’s motivational talk with the team and specific stars, and thus attacking play is seen as inarticulable within the realm of strategy and tactics, as instead intuitive, arising from the preternatural talent of certain inspired footballers, and the best the manager can do is to hope to provide this inspiration through selecting the correct speech. Simply put, defence is shown as part of the ordinary, offence as part of the extraordinary.

Also of note is the positionality hard-coded into the management genre. Quite simply, the female user is ignored not simply by the game's marketing campaign, but within the game itself. This is evident in the opening section of the product where the player must create their manager persona. Up until the 2007 edition of Football Manager, gender is not an option, though age and minor details like previous footballing experience is. Upon beginning play, the user's persona, in match reports and media communiques, is consistently referred to in masculine pronouns, “He was said to be angry with Neville's performance” or “Word is that he is interested in Brazilian Kaka”, and so on. Using a female name does not change the phrasing of
such sentences, e.g., “Emma commented that he was delighted with Ronaldo's performance”.

In this manner the possibility for not only the female gamer, but the female manager to exist, is pre-emptively excised, as obviously too ludicrous an idea to be included. The series thus hails the user in a direct manner; if you are a girl, this game, and more than that, *this sport*, is not for you. As was noted in the observer-participant case study, such perspectives are widespread enough to have a definitive impact upon women's interaction with technology and sport, their technicity (Tomas, 2000), as the few female players found quickly distanced themselves from both the use and understanding of the digital game medium, afraid of being viewed as socially deviant (“this is not what girls do”).

7.5 Chapter Summary

As we have seen, the ideology of 'the beautiful game', a term synonymous with football since the 1950s (if sports commentator Stuart Hall is to be believed in coining the term (Hall & Mayo, 2009)), has thoroughly permeated the ludic and representational system of the digital game imitation; indeed even the current developers of the *Championship Manager* series (1992-present), taking over from Sports Interactive in 2003, are named Beautiful Game Studios.

The televisual genre follows its media counterpart in highlighting and exaggerating offensive play through action replays and slow motion edits, whilst ludically the mechanics maintain the historical tradition of the sports videogame by privileging possession of the ball, and include hyper-ludic agents to be discovered within the open product, incarnated as attacking heroes of football’s golden past, whilst the defensive mode of play is contra-ludic, disabling ludicity, and therefore the
user's ability to take action. The genre is thoroughly utopian, in its vibrant representation of stadia and pitches, to its integration of unsavoury aspects of the sport such as diving, used as ethical instruction instead of ludic tool.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the extreme genre balances the cybernetic system to allow instantly accessible, Gratifying play that dilutes the need for tactics, patience, or an in-depth knowledge of the sport. Yet the representational system still rewards offensive play with increasing spectacle, culminating in the gamebreaker mode where the ludic becomes hyper-ludic and the representational facet reaches its colourful peak; perform the perfect attacking move to end the game prematurely and win outright, all the while being wrapped up in a unique psychedelic aesthetic expressing the integral superiority of *joga bonito*. Quite simply, the game’s procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007) stresses that the attacking user deserves to win.

The management videogame is significant in its exclusion of detailed instruction for offensive play, instead opting for exhaustive options designed to organize defensive coherence. The offensive play is instead contained within the pre-match strategy and on match day only within the rhetoric of the team talk menu. Attacking football is therefore seen, in contrast to defence, as something requiring stimulation, inspiration and innate ability. To this end the user can only encourage his or her gifted individuals to display their attacking genius, and in this way introduces a degree of *alea* (Caillois, 2001) into the mechanics, to a degree overriden by the computer's neutrality exposed in chapter five, as the user cannot know but only hope that the chosen speech will galvanize their mercurial superstar into action. Once more, the puzzle to be deciphered lies not in the opposing team, but in the system of information itself.
Within this world of data, of reassuring numbers and statistics, of logic and calculation, there is literally no place for the female, conspicuously ostracised by the game's insistence on masculine pronouns in referring to the user.\textsuperscript{32} The world of sport, already perceived as the domain of the male (Whannel, 2002; Schott & Horrell, 2000), is combined with the aesthetics of technology, steadfastly dominated by masculine discourse (Williams, 2006), to doubly exclude femininity.

\textsuperscript{32} Though in the latest iteration of Football Manager, feminine pronouns are included.
The Avatar

**Definition**

*av·a·tar (ə-və-tər)*

*n.*

1. The incarnation of a Hindu deity, especially Vishnu, in human or animal form.
2. An embodiment, as of a quality or concept; an archetype: the very avatar of cunning.
3. A temporary manifestation or aspect of a continuing entity: occultism in its present avatar.

A graphic identity you either select from a group of choices or create on your own to represent yourself to the other party in a chat, instant messaging (IM) or multiplayer gaming session. An avatar is a caricature, not a realistic photo and can be a simple image or a bizarre fantasy figure.

### 8.1 Introduction

Whilst both the American Heritage Dictionary and PCMag.com give standard definitions of the term ‘avatar’, neither is particularly applicable to the football simulation. The first definition combines theology and metaphor, whilst the second dismisses the avatar as a ‘caricature’, a deliberate misrepresentation or exaggeration, when the developers of the football genre strive to represent the featured footballers in as realistic a manner as possible in terms of visual fidelity and ludic ability.

Daniel Kromand, in his paper on *Avatar Categorization* (2007) offers a useful definition, 'An avatar will be any game-unit that has action possibilities and that answers to the player' (p.400). Simply put, an avatar is any component within the diegetic game world that is under the player’s influence, whether that be a banana, a tank, a footballer, and anything beyond.

Kromand uses four defining aspects across two axes (open/closed and central/acentral) to create four categories of avatar. ‘Open’ or ‘closed’ defines the avatar’s creation; an open avatar allows the gamer to manipulate appearance, ability

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34 Definition of ‘Avatar’ from PCMag.com - [http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=avatar&i=38293.00.asp](http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=avatar&i=38293.00.asp) (accessed 30/07/09)
and personality traits, whilst closed avatars have such features pre-installed. For example, Lara Croft is a closed avatar, with her own appearance, skills and motivation, whilst an open avatar would be one created by the player for use in *World of Warcraft*. A central avatar is one under direct control by the player, such as in *Sonic The Hedgehog* (SEGA, 1991), whilst an acentral avatar is one indirectly controlled through suggestion and manipulation of the environment, such as in *The Sims*.

This concludes in the aforementioned four categorizations; central-open, acentral-open, central-closed, acentral-closed. By analyzing the football genre’s use of these groupings, we can comprehend the unique utilization of the avatar in sport videogames, through qualities unavailable and often inconceivable in any other genre, and what form of attraction these experiences offer to the player.

We will also discuss the ludicity offered vis-à-vis these avatars, touched upon in the previous chapter. Whilst some, such as the televisual genre, offer varying degrees of hyper or contra-ludicity based upon both the avatar's abilities and the user's proficiency with the control pad, the management simulation provides an alternative form of agency, whereby the avatar acts independently of the user, merely taking the player's instructions into account before deciding upon a course of action. Thus the hyper-ludic avatar is a much desired commodity in such ludic systems where a player's proficiency with the interface is of much less importance.

### 8.2 The Televisual Genre – Central-Closed and Central-Open

The central-closed avatar is one directly controlled by the player, with the appearance and abilities pre-installed by the developer. Famous examples would be the Master Chief from the *Halo* series (Bungie Studios, 2001-2007) or Gordon Freeman from the *Half-Life* series (Valve, 1998-present), and are, due to their fixed
appearance, the most used avatar category for film adaptations; *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996), *Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1983), *Mortal Kombat* (Midway, 1992) and *Doom* (id Software, 1993) to name but a few games translated to film, all used central-closed avatars.

Yet, whilst the above examples maintain a common fictional basis, the televisual simulation continually attempts to present itself as decidedly non-fiction, and in the area of the avatar this is particularly crucial. Details that are ludically arbitrary, from David Beckham’s latest haircut, to Roberto Carlos’s free-kick posture, are painstakingly detailed in both the *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* series, in fact there is even a popular website, *PESfaces*, dedicated to providing downloads for the PC version of *Pro Evolution Soccer*, so that gamers can modify player appearances in an attempt to create a perfect resemblance between avatar and the real footballer.

The closed avatar of the football genre is not just pre-installed by the developer, it is pre-installed by the wider sport-media complex and community through continuous coverage of the footballer’s lives, both professional and private, and to a fan a downturn in form, or even a new hair style, can make the previously accurate televisual simulation model now appear markedly inaccurate; the mercurial nature of the professional football media environment has culminated in the above-mentioned practices of edification, whilst certain games, such as the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series, incorporate a powerful edit function into the product.

This edit feature allows the user to manipulate various components of their chosen footballer, for example increasing the height of AC Milan’s Kaka’; the erroneous height of 183cm (Kaka’ was listed as 186cm on the AC Milan website) in the 2008 edition of *Pro Evolution Soccer* caused consternation amongst the online

35 *Faces for Pro Evolution Soccer*, PesFaces, [http://pesfaces.co.uk](http://pesfaces.co.uk) – accessed 02/05/08
community, as did various player’s statistics, the perceived “gimping” (a communal term for the developer undervaluing a certain avatar, item or ability) of Arsenal Football Club’s Cesc Fabregas, or the favouritism shown towards Japan’s national team statistics; postulated as a light-hearted show of patriotism from Japanese developer-publisher Konami.

The user can modify any current player’s statistics, from the aforementioned height statistics, to special abilities and dribbling speed, and then to aesthetic choices, such as free-kick posture, running style, and boot design. Though central-closed is the primary category of avatar used in Pro Evolution Soccer, there also exists central-open avatars, as there is within the edit mode the option to create a player, allowing the gamer to create an avatar in their own image to insert into their favourite team, or perhaps to produce an accurate model of a footballer missed by the game, for example there were many requests for an accurate build of upcoming Brazilian star Alexandre Pato within the Pro Evolution Soccer communities for the 6th game in the series; though Pato was through popular demand inserted into the next edition of Pro Evolution Soccer, his statistics are still disputed by the fan community.

This disputation largely emerges from the community’s enjoyment of the product stemming from the ludicity of their favoured players. If the avatar of Cristiano Ronaldo is representationally perfect, yet ludically mischaracterized (that is to say his attributes are undervalued; he is slow, has poor dribbling et cetera), then the user’s feeling of competence and control within the gameworld is undermined, both due to the inconsistencies between the real player and his virtual representation, and as White (1959) discusses, because the pleasurable and rewarding sensation of being

37 centred around www.pesgaming.com
38 A ‘build’ is a complete set of statistics, measurements and style options provided by a user to create a particular player.
39 Padaporra, What have they done with Pato!!?!, Gamespot, http://uk.gamespot.com/forums/showmsgs.php?board_id=m-1-940564&topic_id=m-1-40871331 – accessed 03/05/08
an effective agent within an environment is a key factor in why we enjoy computer
games (Klimmt, 2003; Landauer, 1995), less effect means less enjoyment.

Thus the avatar must meet certain expectations installed by the media-sport
complex (Maguire, 1999); certain players must be capable of changing games single-
hededly, through superior dribbling skills, extraordinary passing ability, extremely
powerful shooting, or a combination of all of the above. As discussed in the previous
chapter, and as we will see in the chapter on the virtual celebrity, the avatar of a star
player must contain a form of hyper-ludicity that goes above and beyond the ludic
characteristics of the regular avatar, the capability to impact the gamestate to a degree
that marks them out as an extremely valuable and rare collection of unique ludic
possibilities. This is further extended by the inclusion of secret legendary players
whose abilities surpass even the contemporary sporting celebrity.

The comprehensive editing facilities offered by the Pro Evolution Soccer
series has resulted in many fans spending hundreds of hours updating team kits,
player abilities and names, and some fans even go to the extremes of updating
advertising boards, league logos and theme music (though this particular form of
editing is not available in the packaged game and does in fact require certain illegal
software programs to be used).40

FIFA 08 offers its own version of editing software, but in alignment with the
series’ official, professional and altogether contemporary approach to the sport, the
product’s edit feature shows marked differences in comparison to the complete control
offered by the amateur-enthusiast, DIY ethic of Pro Evolution Soccer:

Whilst in Pro Evolution Soccer the user can alter anything about the player,
from their name to their facial features to their special abilities, FIFA 08 immediately

40 Agimar, Agimar’s XBOX360 Superpatch!, PESGaming Forums,
http://www.pesgaming.com/showthread.php?t=57758 – accessed 04/05/08
curtails such freedoms. Identificatory qualities such as player names are greyed out, a classic interface design colour indicating a disabled option; the capability to change physical features, such as height or free-kick posture is completely absent. Only ephemeral traits can be changed, such as how the player wears their shirt (tucked or untucked), or the type of boot worn. A selection of ‘EA SPORTS’ boots are offered, with real sports brands boots being available to buy in the ‘fan shop’ (a sub-menu within the main menu) with points earned through playing the game. This highlights EA Sports’ commitment to the officialdom of the product; the players’ physicalities are painstakingly recreated within the *FIFA* graphical engine, the fidelity of the avatars themselves communicate the quality of the *FIFA* videogame brand, a quality that would be vastly undermined by allowing extensive edits. The user can create their own avatar, but are limited in the amount of points that can be spent on player attributes, though they can upgrade the limit by earning points to be spent in the fan shop.

If *Pro Evolution Soccer* approaches the player as a fan, then *FIFA* approaches the user first and foremost as a consumer. Thus, whilst *Pro Evolution Soccer* allows the gamer to edit the avatar’s ludic characteristics as much as desired, from shooting power to aggression and so on, *FIFA* requires that the player “purchase” these upgrades with experience points. As mentioned these experience points are garnered either through playing the videogame using the desired footballers over many matches, or by acquiring a package of points through the fan shop; either method requires a direct exchange of labour for goods, demanding of the player a brand loyalty mentality, saving points up by playing *FIFA 08* for hours on end so that the gamer can afford the special features bequeathed to only the most devoted of users, positioned now by the product not as fan, but as sport consumer (McPherson, 1976).
8.3 The Extreme Genre – Central-Open

The central-open avatar is much more common in role-playing games (RPGs) such as *Fallout* (Black Isle Studios, 1997). The user is given complete control over the avatar, from the creation process to actions taken within the diegetic gameworld. The *FIFA Street* series, in alignment with the *NFL Street* and *NBA Street* series, requires that you use the ‘create-a-character’ function before beginning the single-player ‘campaign mode’, a requirement only ever made in the extreme versions of the sport genre, with games such as the *Tony Hawk’s* series and *Need for Speed: Underground* also boasting this feature.

As mentioned in the overview of the history of the football digital game, the dominant visual style of the *FIFA Street* series is caricaturist, thus the avatars have grotesque physical features; barrel chests, extraordinarily thin and long limbs, enormous hands and so on. Relying on the user's cognizance of this art style as synonymous with cartoons and comic books, the developer aims to connote the ludic quality of the product; exaggeration, spectacle, playfulness, simplicity.

In common with the RPGs that are the heritage of the central-open avatar, the gamer not only creates the general appearance of the character but also spends a limited amount of points on abilities, such as power, speed, and special tricks that can be activated with the trick stick. In this manner the extreme genre purposely demotes the *team* portion of the sport, giving the player supreme focus on a single avatar to upgrade, modify, and ultimately identify with.

This creates a vividly different experience to the management simulation, as the gamer’s aim is to develop a single avatar as opposed to an entire squad, and the addition of ‘unlockables’ such as the latest brand name trainers or jackets furthers this
customization and fetishization of avatar appearance so ubiquitous in the grassroots world of the extreme genre, upgrading and spray-painting your vehicle in *Need For Speed: ProStreet* (EA, 2007) or your snowboard and character clothes in *SSX On Tour* (EA Sports, 2005); in many ways, these customization options are a hyper-masculine version of the conspicuous consumption evident in games such as *Barbie Fashion Show* (Vivendi Universal, 2004). In the *FIFA Street* series this implementation of fashion acts to distance the user from traditional notions of sporting attire, whilst also drawing them closer towards the extroverted ethos of extreme sports; they are at once both unique individual and group member, expressing simultaneously their independence and affinity with the extreme sport community, as Sapir suggests, ‘fashion is custom in the guise of departure from custom’ (1931: p.140).

Of course, during gameplay, the user must take control of five avatars (the player can build a reputation and gain respect through repeated success on the field, recruiting ever more famous footballers into their squad, such as Ronaldinho and Cristiano Ronaldo), elevating themselves to a comparable level with their favourite superstars. Thus the implementation of the central-open avatar into the extreme genre invites the player to fulfil their dream of being the gifted footballer, the iconic superstar, the fashion model. They are provided the opportunity to take on the guise of player, model, celebrity, fan and consumer all in one.

Yet in also incorporating the central-closed avatar in the form of superstar players, the developer once more adheres to the design of the ‘not closed’ product (Masuyama, 2002), as the user attempts to collect his or her favourite celebrity players from the various teams scattered across the gameworld.

Thus the developers of the *FIFA Street* series have borrowed from the boyhood culture of trading cards and stickers, where one attempts to fill their card collection or
sticker album with a complete squad; the rarer or more well-known the player, the more social status afforded to the collector within the community.

**8.4 The Management Genre – Central and Acentral-Closed**

Within the management genre exist two types of avatar; that of the manager and that of the virtual footballer. The user exerts the majority of his or her agency not through the eleven avatars upon the pitch, but through the systems of menus and options that exist before, during, and after the 'match day' event. To do so, he or she utilizes the same avatar present since the inception of the mouse in 1963; the arrow-shaped 'pointer'.

Indeed, if the manager persona can be said to 'exist' within the gamespace, it is in the ubiquitous arrow icon so synonymous with the personal computer. Again, the product aligns itself with the information economy and the world of work, as the cursor used in *Football Manager* is the same used for *Excel* spreadsheets, *Word* documents, and *Powerpoint* presentations (Microsoft, 1990-present). The management game thus instantiates itself as a legitimate extension of the knowledge worker's everyday experience, as a familiar interface that embellishes the perceived 'authenticity' of the product in the same way that lens flare operates in the televisual genre. Though both should speak to the mediation and thus artificial construction of the gameworld, in a media-saturated culture such as our own these features actually achieve the reverse; they make it *more* believable.

Whilst the manager avatar, in the guise of the pointer, is central-closed (under the direct control of the player), the virtual footballers under the user's control are acentral-closed, not under his or her control directly, whilst the avatar's visual design (quite simply a two-dimensional circle upon the pitch), attributes and personality is
pre-installed. This is a distinct rarity, existing in a handful of titles such as the pornographic *Lula* series (CDV, 1998-2005), the handheld *Tamagotchi* phenomenon (Bandai, 1996), and the best-selling *Nintendogs* (Nintendo, 2005). The player, being neither in direct control of the avatar’s creation or their current actions, must instead assume the role of environmental influence, manipulating various parameters, items or objects to achieve the desired effect upon the avatar.

In the management simulation, the avatars under the player’s control, the squad, are both closed (in terms of physical/mental attributes and personality) and clearly identifiable as being acentral: separate to the gamer both in terms of control and decision-making. As the gamer does not have direct control over the footballers in their squad, they can only suggest and advise through a selection of formations, tactics and pre-supplied statements. As Daniel Kromand outlines:

> [T]he avatar with a pregenerated personality is a *Closed avatar*, since the player has no control over the avatar’s mind, and change is only possible through a predetermined narrative progression… it is called acentral identification whenever the viewers see the character – emotionally – as a third person

(2007: p.401)

One must challenge here Kromand’s notion that change is only possible through a ‘predetermined narrative’, as this is paradoxically far too narrow and far too broad a definition; he dismisses any games without a predetermined narrative structuring (the football simulation being a prime example), whilst also failing to
quantify ‘change’ with any suitable representational or ludic criteria. Kromand goes on to criticize the ludic utility of the closed-acentral avatar:

It has some inherent weaknesses, which from a ludological point-of-view makes the avatar type useless. The obvious weakness is that the avatar leaves little room for player ergodics, since the acentral aspect reduces motoric control and the closed aspect reduces emotional control. The player’s role will be minor and only has some control of actions or physiology. A game with an acentral-closed avatar will have very limited outcomes, since the avatar forms the possible worlds internally. The usefulness of these avatar types appears marginal and can hardly compete against the more flexible acentral-open avatar.

(2007: p.404)

Asides from seeming wholly ignorant of the existence of the strategy and management genres (as each version of Football Manager continually enters at number one in the sales charts [Orry, 2007] this is quite an oversight), Kromand also dismisses the potential pleasures afforded by such avatar design. This reduction of motoric control has a long-standing precedent in many other forms of play, mainly those existing under the classification of alea (Caillois, 2001), 'all games that are based on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary' (p.17); simply put, games of chance.

Hence the pleasure derived from this mode of avatar is directly related to the lack of control, a pseudo-masochistic sense of gratification (Bergler, 1970) where the
pain of defeat is directly correlative with the ecstasy of winning. Related to this, the
pleasure lies in mastering the system to minimize loss and maximize wins;
comprehending and applying the various statistics and avatar permutations in a
successful manner, understanding what works best for the avatar's listed 'personality
type' (there are various types: ‘professional’, ‘temperamental’ et cetera) in terms of
team talks and media relations, and finally where his physical and mental attributes
make him best suited to play, in regards to formations and tactics.

As mentioned, though Kromand limits the ability of the acentral-closed avatars
to change as part of a pre-determined narrative structure, the management genre
allows the player to influence an avatar’s mind through multiple interactions; with the
media, opposing managers, contract negotiations, and team talks. For example, if the
gamer publicly declares interest in a footballer from another team, that footballer’s
state of mind (outlined within the avatar’s mental statistics page) may change from
being committed to his club, to considering his options, to being determined to join
another team.

If we consider this notion of change in ludic terms, then this narrative change
of the avatar-character is also demonstrably ludic as it has gameplay repercussions in
terms of performance: through user guidance, by way of training regime, team talks,
formations and tactics, the gamer can indirectly manipulate the avatar’s commitment,
abilities, and general statistical evolution.

Thus the acentral-closed avatar offers the user a unique experience that
combines the pleasures of alea with the agon (Caillois, 2001) of the challenge
inherent to any game; in the management genre, the task is to build the perfect title-
winning team, whilst also relying on the alea, the degree of chance, to fall in one’s
favour. In this way the acentral-closed avatar follows the long tradition of games that
combine strategy with chance, from rolling the dice in the classic Prussian war game of *Kriegsspiel* to modern gambling games such as the numerous variants of poker where one can only hope to receive an advantageous selection of cards, and part of the pleasure comes from, as Caillois (2001) succinctly states, the winner feeling as though they are 'more favoured by fortune than the loser' (p.17).

8.5 Chapter Summary

The videogame avatar is a multifarious, versatile and ultimately crucial feature of the medium. The sport genre maintains the unique position of having to incorporate often thousands of readily-identifiable sports personas into their products, both representationally and ludically. The type of avatar, as detailed by Kromand (2007) has immediate implications for the game’s ergodic system; the ability to affect change within the virtual environment is dependent upon the capabilities provided to the avatar.

Whilst the televisual simulation’s central-closed avatars offer the fantasy afforded through verisimilitude and the empowerment to take control over the televisual representations one is accustomed to passively spectating, the extreme genre’s central-open avatars illustrate a uniquely individual, contemporary and celebrity-obsessed approach to the sport.

The management product self-consciously aligns itself with the world of the office worker in its use of the central-closed mouse pointer, an icon associated with information production. The virtual footballers, existing as acentral-closed avatars, remove the sense of control provided by the televisual and extreme genres, providing a masochistic form of play that attempts to conjure the ‘pressure cooker’ management experience so often articulated in contemporary sport (Daily Mail, 2006: online).
Yet what all of these avatars have in common are the idealized, utopian recreation of their virtual selves in regards to their physical counterparts. Representationally, in the *FIFA Street* series Wayne Rooney is not prematurely balding, in *FIFA 08* Darren Fletcher does not show signs of acne, whilst the *Football Manager* series sanitizes the avatar entirely by evoking a boardgame aesthetic, the footballer becomes a flat, circular game piece akin to *Draughts*. Ludically, in the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series Rooney has a high aggression rating; yet this translates into better endurance, and a greater chance of winning the ball in a shoulder-to-shoulder encounter. Excised from his avatar is the risk, as World Cup winner Pele stated, that his temper is 'destroying his talent' (McDonnell, 2008: online). Thus the attributes of the footballer, both physical and ludic, are made more agreeable, mild and consumable within the digital game, as sanitized simulacrums that neglect the real footballer's often conflicting characteristics, in an attempt to make the the end product a more palatable, mass consumable commodity.
9 - The Hyper-Ludic Celebrity

The hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero is a big man [sic]; the celebrity is a big name.
(Boorstin, 1992: p.61)

Modern sport, however, with its star system and individual focus, provides pressures that mitigate against team spirit. As products of the commercialisation of sport since the Second World War, modern sport stars are young, fit, glamorous and internationally mobile… The economic structure of elite sport offers greater rewards for individual effort than for representing a country.
(Whannel, 1998: p.25)

9.1 Introduction

Boorstin’s rumination on the difference between hero and celebrity is balanced upon an obvious and precarious fallacy; that hero and celebrity cannot be one and the same. Whilst, in the age of Big Brother (Endemol, 1999-present) and numerous other 'reality' television shows, Boorstin’s assertion is consonant with the public's view of the latest iteration of celebrity who is famous for being famous, it is a specious argument when directed against the category of sport celebrity. This form of star is created through an often extensive list of achievements before the eventual image or trademark becomes associated with them, fuelling their rise to celebrity; Beckham is indeed distinguished by his image and trademark, yet his initial trademark was his free-kick technique, and thus also (firstly) an achievement.

In the realm of sport, in opposition to the ‘media-made’ celebrity, one must first prosper in their chosen field before the limelight of fame is provided. As mentioned, Beckham created his trademark firstly on the football pitch, Tiger Woods on the golf course, Wayne Gretzky on the ice rink (Jackson, 2001). The celebrity status that followed was a result of these achievements, reward for their extraordinary ability within their discipline.
9.2 A Star is Born

For the sports videogame, the notion of fame maintains this reciprocal dynamic between hero and celebrity in reverse; the sport celebrity is given the ludic means to become the hero, instead of using his innate heroic abilities to gain fame. In the football videogame, this means endowing the football celebrity with heightened skills and special abilities that enlarge the user’s ludic powers to a state of hyper-ludicity. The ludic supremacy of the avatar, their capability within the gameworld, is enhanced so that they may prove themselves worthy of the ‘godlike’ mantle of celebrity (Rojek, 2004). In other words, as celebrity within football culture, the celebrity avatar must always be gifted with the resources to certify the hero status awarded by the sports-media complex.

Within the televisual genre, the celebrity’s hyper-ludicity is evident in various ways. Firstly, the footballer’s ‘ability settings' have been adjusted to exceptional levels. Ability settings are the basic capabilities of the avatar within the gameworld, for example, Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 maintains a list of twenty-nine abilities, from attack and defence (determining the avatar’s intelligence of positioning in attacking and defensive manoeuvres) to weak foot frequency (the likelihood of the footballer shooting with his weaker foot) and acceleration (the higher the value the quicker the avatar reaches his top speed rating).

Massaging these basic statistics are a further possible twenty-three special abilities, such as 1-on-1 shot (making it easier to score goals when 1-on-1 with the goalkeeper), outside of the boot (increases the player’s accuracy when using the outside of his foot) and long throw (the avatar is capable of extraordinarily long throw-ins).
A celebrity player such as Manchester United’s Wayne Rooney has very high ability settings combined with many special abilities (empirically, it is rare to discover a player with more than three special abilities, whilst Rooney has nine of the twenty-three). This means that not only is the avatar of Wayne Rooney gifted above the majority of his peers through simple abilities such as aggression and stamina, but in terms of special abilities, the affect he can have upon the gamestate is enormous compared to an unknown player, who in comparative terms is ludically disabled.

For example, Rooney has the shooting from distance special ability, meaning it is easier to shoot on target from over eighteen yards, whilst a player without the ability would be more likely to shoot the ball aimlessly over the bar. He also has the sliding tackle special ability, described in-game as 'able to slide-tackle well with less chance of committing a foul'. He is therefore, through this special ability, elevated above the rules of the sport, where other anonymous players would be penalized for the slide tackle, Rooney is probable to suffer no consequence.

Tied to this, there are also certain themes that emerge through the analysis of these attributes, in terms of the longstanding division between ‘British’ and ‘foreign’ player qualities, as explained by Archetti:

Two styles were thus contrasted, the british and the criollo. "Britishness" was identified with being phlegmatic, disciplined, methodical, and concentrated on elements of the collective, of force and of physical power. These virtues help to create a repetitive style, similar to that of a "machine". The criollo, due to the Latin influence, was exactly the opposite: restless, individualistic, undisciplined, based on personal effort, agile and skilful.

(2001: p.154)
Thus there is a tendency for the British celebrity, as symbolic of the British style of play, to have high stamina, body balance (the likelihood of them winning a shoulder-to-shoulder confrontation) and team work, with associated special abilities of strength and physicality (such as the sliding tackle ability), whilst the foreign celebrities have characteristics reflecting their individuality and skilfulness.

To compare, if we look at Rooney’s former Manchester United team mate Cristiano Ronaldo, a Portuguese player famous for his dribbling skills and sometimes ostentatious behaviour, whilst his stamina and team work ability are conspicuously low, his dribble accuracy, dribble speed, agility and technique ratings are almost at maximum (the ratings are illustrated as out of a possible 99, Ronaldo is above 95 in the latter four, whilst he is rated below 80 in the first two). He is given six special abilities, with two focusing on his 'personal effort' (ibid.); dribbling and tactical dribble, the first explained as such in-game, 'The player (when COM controlled) favours dribbling', with the outside of the boot special ability also given, again enhancing his individual prowess and general criollo style.

9.3 Pieces of Flair

If we consider the diegetic concessions afforded to the celebrity, the supposed preternatural talent of the sporting superstar, mythologised through the vortextuality (Whannel, 2001) of the modern media-sport complex (obsessively referencing the “golden moments” of their careers, their extraordinary skills and personality), we see how the idea of celebrity is appeased once more as the user is provided with rare or unique ludic tools in the form of exceptional moves, through which he or she can augment their agency within the gameworld.
In *FIFA 09*, the celebrity player is given special moves unavailable to many (and sometimes, any) other players, allowing the gamer to beat their opponent with the ludic advantage instilled by the celebrity moniker. These concessions have reached their current zenith in *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* where the star players will now automatically perform special moves without needing advanced input from the user, such as performing special turns, flicking the ball over an opposing player’s leg, or passing/shooting in the *rabona* style (the kicker wraps their kicking leg behind their standing leg, effectively crossing their legs to make the pass) in certain instances.

Of course, this kind of flamboyance translates into not only added ludic force within the gameworld, but also aesthetically the celebrity’s impact is more pronounced. World famous players such as Brazil’s Ronaldinho, France’s Zidane, and England’s David Beckham all have, through the intense media saturation as noted above, begun to maintain an almost mythological status within football culture, much as Muhammad Ali’s fame within boxing or Jesse Owen's within athletics (Whannel, 2002). Therefore you have the user attempting to buy Ronaldinho for his lauded playmaking and trickery, Zidane for his technique and leadership, and Beckham for his skill with dead ball situations.

The designers further propagate the exclusive status of the celebrity through unique visual allowances; hairstyles, animations and other minor additions that separate these supposedly godlike footballers from their peers. Hence you have Brazilian Roberto Carlos’s recognized running charge towards the ball for his free kicks, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo can perform the extremely rare *elastico* skill (which involves the flicking of the ball first outwards then rapidly back inwards with the same foot in an attempt to confuse the defender), Inter Milan’s Adriano
performs the redondo (flicking the ball upwards with one foot, and volleying it with the other).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, David Beckham’s haircut and dead ball animations have also become continuing obsessions for the producers; one of the Microsoft ‘Xbox live’\textsuperscript{41} updates for Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (Konami, 2005) even included an update to Beckham’s hairstyle, and the way he strikes the ball when taking a free kick is included as part of the game’s visual spectacle; Cristiano Ronaldo’s noted free kick technique (Vago, 2008) has been included in the latest Pro Evolution Soccer and FIFA products, and minor details such as these are of the utmost importance to the franchises’ fans, so much so that they are regularly monitored and commented upon by the gaming press (Gamespot, 2008: online).

Players with outstanding statistics also have minor stylistic touches that separate them from the less able; boots coloured in a rare manner (white, orange, red et cetera), and gloves worn during winter matches. Such additions are part of both the visual spectacle and gameplay, as visually distinguishing the players is made easier by such gestures, both allowing simpler identification for the gamer (immediately communicating which avatars are special players) whilst also appeasing the user’s demand for continued optical flourish.

A significant side-effect of this ludic elevation of celebrity is to once again advance the allure of the ‘open product’ (Masuyama, 2002), as discussed previously. The existence of these rare celebrity avatars creates for the player a form of metagame (Garfield, 2000), whereby they attempt to collect as many uniquely gifted star players as possible, to compare and contrast with fellow players. As detailed in chapter seven, Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 encourages this through the unlocking of ‘legendary’

\textsuperscript{41} An online service hosted by Microsoft that can be connected to by any Xbox with an Internet connection.
players such as Brazilian Pele and Argentinean Diego Maradona by meeting certain criteria (generally winning certain leagues and cups); in the famous vernacular of the *Pokémon* universe, “Gotta catch ‘em all!” (Nintendo, 1995).

9.4 Chapter Summary

Of course, whilst minor details of their appearance and abilities are given the utmost care and attention by the developers and press, the negative qualities associated with the celebrity in question are always conspicuous by their absence, the ‘anti-hero’ is not yet part of the football digital game's vocabulary. Cristiano Ronaldo has no predilection for diving and cheating, a notion widely held in the media to be one of his main traits (Norrish, 2008), Diego Maradona, once unlocked from the legendary set of players, does not have the capacity to perform *La Mano de Dios* (“the Hand of God”) to score a goal. Roy Keane is not prone to rash challenges or to being booked more often than any other avatar because of his volatile reputation, and so on.

As with the stadia, club history and fans, the football videogame wipes the semiotic slate clean and reconstructs a utopian presentation of the game, with the potential for any political, social or cultural subversion of the sport (as sometimes practised by the players and fans themselves) nullified. Again an idealizing design is evident, yet in this instance it should be appropriately attributed to wider cultural influences. By transforming the celebrity into a hyper-ludic game piece primed for heroic acts, the developers continue a form of cult worship symptomatic of the celebrity obsessed media and public (Maltby et al, 2002). In portraying these celebrity footballers as godlike, preternatural beings worthy of special concession, the digital game is simply perpetuating a dominant feature of postmodern media coverage (Storey, 2009).
10 - The Celebration

10.1 Introduction

Extroverted goal celebrations have steadily become something of a tradition within the sport of football, seemingly growing in extravagance in alignment with the proliferation of media exposure afforded to the game. As Ronay notes (2007), whilst a handshake and pat on the back used to suffice in the first half of the twentieth century, the introduction of television coverage provided the opportunity for any player to dominate the headlines with an original, funny or risqué celebration; thus you have Peter Crouch’s ironic robot dance, Jurgen Klinsman’s self-parodying dive, or Korean player Ahn Jung-Hwang’s politically charged imitation of speed skating, in response to the disqualification of fellow Korean Kin Dong-Sung from the Winter Olympics.

The sport digital game has responded to this elevation of the goal celebration in numerous, strikingly dissimilar ways. Due to technological limitations, the first iterations of the genre’s goal festivities were atypically sparse and low-key, such as the muted explosion of white pixels within the abstract graphical environment of 1981's *Péle's Football*, gradually moving to more photorealistic, mimetic celebrations such as Sensible Software's 1992 *Sensible Football*, where the scorer would celebrate by sliding on their knees towards the stadium crowd.

10.2 The Televisual Genre

The incorporation of celebrations into more recent games within the televisual genre has enhanced this photorealism and imitation noted in the introduction by adding aspects of remediation, so for example in *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* (Konami, 2006) upon scoring the camera angle will change from the ‘broadcast’ perspective to a
view almost ground level with the pitch, with various verisimilitudinous effects implemented into the perspective such as lens flare, a naturalistic unstable camera movement (in the tradition of cinema verité), and sometimes the celebrating footballer will even pick up a boom microphone and be seen to scream into it (though as mentioned in chapter three, the sound is always the same unintelligible shout).

_FIFA 09_ (2008) takes an innovative approach to goal celebrations. Whilst the representational form undertaken by these gestures has evolved (sometimes radically) alongside technological capability, the ludic character has remained constant; that is to say, there is none. Whilst these games purport to place the player as in control of what they must normally spectate (televised football), the celebration has always been an area in which the gamer must passively watch, with the only available interaction occurring after the celebration, whereupon the instant replay is instigated. Viewing the celebration was seen as reward for successful interaction, in a similar vein to Klevjer’s analysis of cut scenes in games, ‘The game also illustrates a significant gameplay-function of good cutscenes: reward by entertainment’ (p.5: 2002).

Thus pleasure is derived from observing the avatar of Ronaldinho performing the samba dance associated with his Brazilian heritage, or observing Real Madrid’s Kaka’ pointing both fingers towards the sky as a gesture of his religious faith. As instantly recognizable, ‘trademark’ celebrations provide a particular form of pleasure in the spectacle of technological mimesis; watching the digital sport attempt to recreate its physical world referent as closely as possible.

This remains true within the _Pro Evolution Soccer_ series, where, upon creating an avatar, the user can select two options from one hundred celebration routines for their virtual footballer to perform should they score, once more ranging from the
famous or trademark gestures, as mentioned above, to the routine and innocuous, such as waving to the crowd or high-fiving team mates.

Yet FIFA 09 breaks the traditional lack of engagement between player and game in such sequences, introducing new game mechanics pertaining to goal celebrations alone. Now upon scoring, the player must manipulate different sequences of buttons, combine analog stick movements with certain button presses, or simply press and hold a single button to have the avatar perform whatever celebration the player deems worthy, or is skilled enough to accomplish. Asides from keeping interaction between player and game constant instead of the rhythm of ‘on-line’ and ‘off-line’ sequencing (Newman, 2002) that affords the player a moment of relaxation before providing another cycle of interaction, this innovation also provides another avenue to pursue the accumulation of gamer capital (Consalvo, 2007) within the user’s social circle and wider gaming culture. A player who is capable of performing the most advanced celebration manoeuvres takes the role of information leader (Blanchard, 2004) within the game community, providing advice and guidance to those not yet expertly acquainted with the controls.

Of course missing from such celebrations is the potential for political action or statement, for example as noted above the celebration-as-protest by Ahn Jung-Hwang, or the breaking of regulation or taboo such as Joey Barton revealing his posterior to enraged Everton fans at Goodison Park, or Liverpool’s Robbie Fowler revealing a tee-shirt under his team jersey that communicated support for striking Liverpool dock workers. Again this absence speaks to Sandvoss’s notion (2003) of the modern football product being semiotically empty, allowing the user to fill the product with their own meaning; quite literally in the instance of FIFA 09 as the user creates his or
her own celebration that, at least in single-player mode, serves as meaning to no one but the player themselves.

10.3 The Extreme Genre

The extreme genre, offering fast, frenetic arcade gameplay, minimizes celebrations so that the player can resume interaction with the game as soon as possible. Upon scoring in *FIFA Street 3* (EA Sports BIG, 2008), the avatar’s name is announced in a reverberating, robotic voice as a splash screen emerges showing the avatar, arms crossed, staring back at the player, challenging him or her to score again. This voice, reserved solely for announcing the goal scorer, is a reference to the Bitmap Brothers’ influential 1988 videogame *Speedball*, which took elements of ice hockey and handball and fused them into a violent, extreme sport in a futuristic setting; many extreme genre games, including the *FIFA Street* series, have recycled elements from *Speedball* for both ludic and representational ends.

The background of the splash screen is extremely colourful and evocative of a graffiti style, with chaotic splashes of paint and curving colours representing the player’s team, e.g. for Steven Gerrard the splash screen would be dominated by red and white to represent his status as England player. As suitable for a work of graffiti, the screen appears scratched\(^{42}\) and certain colours have seemingly spilled inadvertently onto the screen. Sections of the background are semi-transparent, revealing a camera view that pans high above the five-aside court the avatars occupy, revealing the urban landscape the players find themselves within, normally in the guise of skyscrapers, street lights and housing estates.

The goal sequence will then quickly segue into an extremely limited replay. Whilst *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* (Konami, 2008) and *FIFA 09* provide a fetishistic

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\(^{42}\) *Graffiti* coming from the Italian word *graffiato* (“scratched”).
level of detail in their action replays (asides from regular functions such as pausing and rewinding, the gamer can focus the camera on any single avatar on the pitch, move the disembodied camera freely across the stadium, and save their replays for distribution and exhibition amongst their peers), the FIFA Street series gives minimum functionality to replays; change camera, restart replay, or end. This follows the arcade mantra of the Street series, keeping the matches simple, fast, and continuous, whilst also aligning with the hyper-masculine paradigm of the FIFA Street world. Any outpouring of emotion upon scoring would be antithetical to the notion of aggressive urban masculinity upon which the game is constructed.

10.4 The Management Genre

The management genre maintains the same level of abstraction in celebration that is evident throughout the entirety of its representational system. Instead of any ostentatious, spectacular celebration by the avatars, the commentary bar residing on the bottom of the screen momentarily flashes “GOAL!!” in multiple colours, as the avatars all move in the same direction towards a corner of the pitch, in an extremely figurative representation of the team celebrating with their supporters. The commentary bar will then update with a comment on either the goal or the player’s reaction to it, e.g., “Ronaldo scores a total fluke!” or “Ronaldo runs to the fans with his arms in the air!” then normally providing statistics relating to the player, for example “That’s his first goal for Manchester United!” or “That’s seven goals in eight games!”

A slow-motion replay will then follow, showing approximately 20 seconds of play, as the movement builds up to the goal. The entire structure of the Football Manager match day is compatible with Barthes’ concept of plaisir and jouissance, the
first being pleasure bounded by cultural norms, a 'comfortable practice of reading' (emphasis in original, 1975: p.14), the second an overwhelming sensation that breaks our conventional boundaries of either pleasure or pain, compared most often to a sexual orgasm. In observing the match day, the text scrolling along the commentary itself seems to explode with the euphoria of the goal as the letters take on capitalization and the background of the commentary bar flashes rapidly in a frenetic loss of order and rationale, a joyous acknowledgement of the player’s accomplishment.

Again, the management genre focuses on providing information to the player in an efficient and informatic manner, providing pertinent data to the user even during the celebration. Immediately after “GOAL!!!” flashes for two seconds on screen the commentary bar updates with facts and figures on the avatar’s status at the club, his playing record, and often his personal response to scoring (“He’s overjoyed with that one!”). All such information is supplied by the game so that the user can be informed in deducing their next move. Also, the instant replay, providing in slow motion the build-up to the goal, and providing a point by point commentary, allows the user to observe what facets of their team are performing well, and of course what sections are then under-performing; whether this be player, formation, overall strategy or tactics.

10.5 Chapter Summary

The goal celebration, whether being acknowledged by the media-sport complex for its political boldness (6th March, 2005, The Observer Sport Monthly, 2005: online) and humour (Wilson, 2009), or by academia for its effect upon crowd behaviour (Snow, Zurcher & Peters, 1981) or subsequent implications for injury (Zeren & Oztekin, 2005), remains an insistent and increasingly visible aspect of
football culture. The videogame industry has followed this evolution of the celebration firstly through abstraction, initially using visual allegories for the emotional response of scoring, such as the firework graphics included within the first-generation of sports videogames, to precise, simulacral enactments of famous celebrations within the current generation; this becomes a pleasure divided in two distinct ways, one being the jouissance of the goal, the other a plaisir concerning the technological capabilities of the videogame hardware to accurately model the physical world and its occupants.

Whilst the televisual simulations offer this mimicry in abundance, they have now advanced to the stage where the user must now express their joy at scoring not simply in the physical world through jumping or shouting in reaction, but also in the virtual, through playing the celebration mini-game included in FIFA 09; requiring concentration and focus that seems the antithesis of the spontaneity of emotional expression. Yet in this way EA Sports have managed to push the sports videogame to its logical extreme, by making even the sporting celebration a new ergodic challenge for the user to compete against his or her peers.

The extreme genre follows the arcade ethos of providing rapid, direct and uncomplicated enjoyment, thus the celebration is streamlined to provide a momentary lapse and opportunity for revelry before play begins once more, the in-game celebrations being muted to conform to the unemotional hyper-masculinity of the FIFA Street gameworld.

The management simulation elevates the celebration above the technological, objective aesthetic of the genre, allowing a momentary outburst of subjectivity and emotion as the match status bar erupts with rapid contortions of colour and “GOAL!!!” is screamed at the player symbolically communicating the joy and relief
of scoring; the neutrality of the status bar is briefly overwhelmed by its partisanship for entertaining, attacking football.

Thus, in a particularly McLuhan-esque moment, the medium, as extension of the user, is overcome with emotion, similar to the virtual camera shaking and refocusing during the FIFA and Pro Evolution Soccer celebrations; the medium reveals its symbiotic relationship with the user, reflecting their elation.

The entire football videogame genre follows the media-sport complex’s demand for exciting, high-scoring, consumer-friendly football, and the celebration is an extension of this demand. Yet this accordance with the requirements of the media consumer concludes in the sterilization of the celebration, as with many other aspects of the football digital game, being consistently inoffensive and consumer-friendly. Even within the supposed 'alternative' realm of the extreme genre, this is the mass consumable celebration, free of dangerous, volatile, violent or provocative content. Whilst the user has more ergodicity (Aarseth, 1997) than ever before, being able to choose from hundreds of celebration animations, their ability to truly create, to make new meanings, is as censored as ever. Again this follows the postmodern logic of mass customisation (Leadbeater, 1999) and the simulacrum, as the symbolic experience is gradually replaced by its imitation, which, by its nature, can only ever imitate, never create, only maintain, never transform; a semiotic stasis field.

Yet paradoxically, it is this infiltration of postmodernity into the televisual genre that also provides the foundations for new meaning to be created. Whilst the audience as textual bricoleur (Collins, 2009) is implicated in postmodern film and literature, within the televisual digital game this bricolage is concretized, as the user is given the materials and tools to craft their own experience. More than this, a form of meta-bricolage becomes possible, as the user's unique combination of these various
constituents may be understood by another user as ironic or intertextual play with the resources, instantiating further bricolage.
11 - The Single Player-Single Player

Be A Pro – Select a player. Master his position and receive real-time feedback and analysis of your performance. (EA Sports, 2007)

Become A Legend – Create your own unique character and guide him through a superstar career in professional football (Konami, 2008)

The cultural illusion is fostered that, one day, the “ordinary but special” individual consumer may realize his or her unique qualities, and join the ever-changing pantheon of celebrities. Sport has a particularly potent role to play within this ideological formation. (Giulianotti, 1999: pp.118-119)

11.1 Introduction

A recent addition to the televisual genre is a game mode known separately as ‘Be A Pro’ (in FIFA 08 and FIFA 09) and ‘Become A Legend’ (in Pro Evolution Soccer 2009). This mode fundamentally alters the team dynamic and ethic of the traditional mode of play within the genre; instead of taking control of the entire team (switching between players through a function on the control pad) the user instead takes permanent control of a single player on the pitch for the entire duration of the match; even including in Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 waiting on the bench for your (not always used) substitution onto the playing field. The user is no longer a single player controlling an entire team of eleven, instead they are now limited to being a single player controlling a single player (the online modes allow 10vs10 matches between groups in FIFA 09; the position of goalkeeper is not provided as an option).

As opposed to focusing upon winning the match, the gamer must now focus upon simply achieving a high performance rating so that his or her place in the team is guaranteed for the following match, as a poor rating provides the harshest of ludic punishments: demotion to the bench, the prospect of ergodicity (Aarseth, 1997) being
suddenly taken from the player, now forced to spectate within a genre and indeed medium that distinguishes itself through constant extranoematic interaction.

11.2 Astronomy

This paradigmatic shift from team to individual, from club to star, follows the model of sport coverage instigated within the arenas of both publishing and broadcasting (Whannel, 2002) that began with the abolition of the maximum footballing wage in 1961, consequently allowing the players of the time to garner enormous wages enabling them to assume the ‘style of the élite’ (Walvin, 1986: p.32), which in turn led to media focus upon those players who earned the highest wages.

The subsequent emergence of footballers such as George Best, arguably football’s first true superstar, ‘when he brought a pop star image to the game’ (BBC, 2005: online) fuelled and propagated this gluttonous public fascination that inevitably spread into investigations of the footballer’s lifestyle, relationships and problems (on and off the pitch); this form of celebrity surveillance has not only continued but quantitatively amplified since Best's era.

Such fixation eventually relocated the newly-born star outside of their native cultural milieu, and instead reconfigured them as signifiers of modern consumerism and celebrity, as iconic foci for more generalized pronouncements (Whannel, 2002). Inevitably tensions have risen between the identity of the individual, the group, and their relation to one another in sport, as Whannel explains, 'Modern sport, however, with its star system and individual focus, provides pressures that mitigate against team spirit. As products of the commercialisation of sport since the Second World War, modern sport stars are young, fit, glamorous and internationally mobile' (Whannel, 1998: p.25).
Thus the objective within these new modes offered is to create and evolve your promising teenage sportsman into a 'footballing superstar'. Such a primary shift in the play experience offered has significant effects on both the mode of interaction and the associated pleasures of play.

11.3 The Makings of a Star

The most immediate and obvious diegetic change, especially for the experienced consumer of the televisual genre, is the change in viewpoint instantiated by this mode within both the *FIFA* and *PES* series, from the standard broadcast angle to a decidedly gamic third-person viewpoint situated behind the avatar under control. The primary consequence of this is to undermine the overtly mediated presentation of the product, further enhanced by the removal of professional commentary or crowd presence in the numerous training matches the user must partake in before they are promoted to the first team bench.

In doing so the developers provide a more naturalistic, ‘authentic’ footballing experience that not only aligns itself as alternative to the televisual form of the other modes offered within the game, but also presents these conventions of mediation as indicators of success within the gameworld, as reward for achievement and career progression. Therefore upon moving to the first team bench (and then the first team starting eleven), the professional commentators and crowds return, the ‘build-up’ scenes (observing the player’s entrance onto the pitch from the tunnel, lining up for the champions league anthem et cetera) are once more instigated by the software; the player’s triumph is a re-entry into the world of television, the modern day avenue towards celebrity Godhood.

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This is the phrase used by Konami for the *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* blurb.
In both *FIFA* and *PES* modes you must first create your avatar, through an extensive list of options and parameters. Height, weight, eye shape, hairstyle, cheekbone structure, and numerous other options are included to aid the user in crafting a perfect replication of their physical self. If such an extensive list of variables is too overwhelming for the casual user, they can also connect a Sony or Microsoft certified web camera to upload an image of their face which can be convincingly modelled upon the avatar for a photo-realistic representation of the gamer’s visage in-game.

Thus the premise of fantasy or wish-fulfilment that can fuel the enjoyment of the televisual genre, to take control of that which is normally non-ergodic, to be the footballing hero witnessed weekly upon the television programme, is visibly enhanced through the seamless integration of image capture technology into the game software, reflecting the wider trend within consumer electronics towards extensive personalization and self-expression (Leadbeater, 1999; PR News Now, 2008), from mobile phones to facebook to the implementation of Sony’s *Home* online world for owners of the Playstation 3.

Even modern fashion trends are included in the customization, such as friendship bracelets, allowing the user to select which wrist the friendship bracelet adorns, and the particular colour. This speaks to the fetishization of visuals prominent within the televisual genre, taken to its furthest extent in the extreme genre; numerous shirts, shorts, socks, official football boot brands, types and colour selections, each option has numerous configurations that serve no other purpose than to express the visual fidelity of the product, to allow the user to more perfectly realise their ideal virtual sporting self. Importantly, it also allows the male gamer to indulge in the world

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44 Sony’s *Home* is an online world that allows the Playstation 3 user to create their own unique avatar and home that exists within the *Home* world alongside all other registered users.
of fashion, a typically feminine domain (Edwards, 1997), within the secure, masculine space of sport fandom, therefore making the stereotypically homosexual position of fashion-savvy male homo-normative.

11.4 The Scientific Athlete

In using the term ‘perfect replication’ earlier, I used it not to denote the degree of accuracy between real and virtual representation, but instead to express the idealized nature of the physiological parameters set by the program. For example in Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 the categories of height and weight are intrinsically tied: if your avatar is the lowest height available (148 centimetres), he cannot weigh less than 35 kilograms or more than 65; if the avatar is the tallest available (205 centimetres), he cannot weigh less than 70 kilograms, and more than 127. If analyzed using a statistical measurement such as the Body Mass Index (BMI), the maximum allowance would qualify the avatar as underweight or overweight, but never high enough to be within the three classes of obesity; even at greatest weight, the avatar is represented visually simply as a more muscular, stocky build than the average model.

In this way the videogame refuses to acknowledge the existence of obesity, though recent studies show approximately 27.7% of adults in England and Wales are clinically obese as of 2003 (BMJ Group, 2005: online), and famously obese sports stars, such as Baseball’s Babe Ruth, are wholly excluded by the program’s constraints, seen as incompatible with the rhetoric of the professional athlete. Thus the sports videogame expresses a scientific discourse in its approach to athleticism, a language which articulates the athletic body as a machine designed and maintained for optimal performance through particular diets, training sessions, and supplements, a regime
instantiated by the modern ‘cult of the perfect body’, as described by Edgley and
Brissett:

It carefully regulates its diet in terms of calories, carbohydrates, fats, salts and
sugars. It exercises regularly and intensely… It has the correct amount of body
fat… It has flexibility… It has proper muscle strength… It has appropriate
aerobic capacity… In short the perfect body is one that is biochemically,
physiologically and autonomically balanced.

(1990: p.261-2)

Sporting victory is seen as deducible to a particular formulae contingent upon
the fitness level of the participant, as opposed to any innate skill or psychological
traits; sport is science, not art, and thus fat is not something tolerated by a regime built
upon supreme physiological efficiency.

11.5 The 'I' in Team

Upon entering the diegetic world of the simulation, the user is confronted by a
new meta-game that overlays the actual match underway, and supersedes it in terms of
gauging the player's success. For example, the gamer’s team can lose the match, yet if
the individual rating (scaled between 1 and 10) achieved is high enough, the player’s
performance is deemed successful and they will in all likelihood be rewarded through
extra experience points (improving their avatar’s statistics) and/or the offering of a
more lucrative contract, from either their current team or a newly interested party.

This plethora of performance measurements on match day is similar in
conclusion, yet noticeably different in execution between the FIFA and PES series.
The *FIFA* series guides the players through the utilisation of various hypermediated features; a two-dimensional map of the pitch appears in the top left, illustrating the position of the ball and your team mates, a performance bar illustrates the current worth of your performance in real-time, positioning arrows appear underneath the avatar’s feet directing him towards a suitable position on the pitch, threat arrows emerge in bright red to alert the user to any immediate dangers, offside flags appear above the player-character’s head to indicate his illegal positioning. All such information is displayed within the performance bar as constantly updated feedback in the form of plus and minus statements, e.g., after winning a ball ‘+tackle’, after losing out in competing shoulder-to-shoulder against the opposition ‘-jostle’, and so on.

This of course feeds back into the dominant rhetoric of the product, as every movement, play and decision is statistically quantified and processed into a definitive measurement of performance; the binary opposition of the ‘+’ and ‘-’ reiterating the scientific discourse of mathematics. Such an overt hypermedial interface also communicates the technical spectacle of the game, otherwise emphasized by items such as the giant television screen situated behind the goal within *FIFA 09*’s training pitch that displays your every move in real-time, in an extremely pixellated manner that communicates the fidelity of the game over the televised experience.

This overt use of technological notation impresses upon the player the spectacle of the *FIFA* product, as some form of augmented virtual reality experience that not only imitates the real sport, but is *better* than the real sport, a form of hyperreality that blends the actual with the virtual making the hybrid ostensibly natural (Tiffin & Terashima, 2001).

*PES2009* takes a separate approach to achieving this hyperreal experience, conversely hiding any overt hypermedia iconography, utilising only the offside flag
symbol above the player’s head to indicate when the player strays into an unlawful location on the pitch. Everything else that contributes to the final rating of the avatar’s performance is conducted incognito, none of the indicators or arrows present in the FIFA series are used by PES2009. Though Konami share the ideals of scientific rhetoric with FIFA in regards to the composition of the footballing athlete, this removal of display icons highlights Konami’s view of the playing of football (in opposition to FIFA) as something beyond logical analysis and calculation, as an intuitive performance that evades scientific deduction.

Konami also extend this naturalistic approach to the non-diegetic sections of the ‘Be A Pro’ mode, as noted above, stripping away various forms of mediation to both create a closer bond between player and avatar and also to construct a tangible, visible indication of career progression within the game mode, being the gradual reintroduction of fans, replays and commentary teams.

11.6 Chapter Summary

Whilst the pleasure of the traditional career modes offered by the televisual genre has focused upon taking your team to the top of the rankings within the game world, whether this be a recognized club such as Real Madrid or a fictional squad created by the user, the emphasis was always upon the team as opposed to individual, upon club as opposed to star player. By introducing the ‘Be A Legend’ and ‘Be A Pro’ modes, EA and Konami have followed this cultural trend in sport towards the narrative of the individual hero, to the singular superstar who, through his or her own preternatural ability and exceptional work rate, transcends the sport (Critcher, 1991: p.75) to become an international symbol of these ideals, as the antithesis of the culture of inheritance and privilege (Ohl, 2005).
In accordance with this, the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series does not allow the user to select a position for their avatar that lies outside the traditional attacking roles; that is to say, the gamer cannot select to play as goalkeeper or defender, they must play as midfielder, winger, or forward (with all the sub-divisions included such as Supporting Striker, Attacking Midfielder et cetera). In the *FIFA* series the operator is provided with the option to play as a member of the defence, but the goalkeeper is still a wholly neglected entity.

Indeed another core difference between the *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution Soccer*’s implementation of these new modes is the manipulability offered by *FIFA*, most notably through the option to change the avatar under control throughout the game. For example, you can start the game as a forward, score a hat-trick, and then switch to controlling a defender for the remainder of the game to ensure your team’s victory. Of course whilst this is discouraged through the possible generation and customization of a virtual ‘you’ within the game world, the option still allows for a certain mobility in terms of experience. Yet the complete disregard for the position of goalkeeper illuminates a traditional bias within the sport that sees the position as occupied by the schoolyard ‘last pick’; the unathletic, unpopular, or simply unskilled participant, as a Crystal Palace supporter articulates in typical fan vernacular ‘the fat kid at school… always got chucked in goal’ (Anonymous, 2006: online).

By excluding such opportunities, both the ‘Be A Pro’ and ‘Be A Legend’ modes provide an acculturation into a contemporary football culture dominated by the entertainment ethos perpetuated within the sports-media complex; focused upon the individual rather than the team (Whannel, 1998), privileging an attacking style (Critcher, 1991), embedding a symbiosis between sport, science and technology
(Miah & Essoms, 2002) that reinforces the concept of football as a results based industry (Lasch, 1991) primed for mediated consumerism.
Conclusion

As outlined in the thesis introduction, the sports digital game cultivates the pretence of reflection; of being a mirror held up to the sporting world. Yet it is, in essence, a carnival mirror, distorting the image; making certain features, aspects and themes larger, whilst diminishing others. Each sub-genre presents an entirely different mirror, accentuating and lessening the numerous constituents of the sport to provide its own manifestation as a particular, unique experience for the user.

Concerning the various methodologies used throughout this thesis in discussing the diverse nature of the digital game, Marshall McLuhan’s introduction to *The Mechanical Bride* eloquently summarizes my position:

The various ideas and concepts introduced in the commentaries are intended to provide positions from which to examine the exhibits. They are not conclusions in which anybody is expected to rest but are intended merely as points of departure. This is an approach which it is hard to make clear at a time when most books offer a single idea as a means of unifying a troupe of observations. Concepts are provisional affairs for apprehending reality; their value is in the grip they provide. This book, therefore, tries to present at once representative aspects of the reality and a wide range of ideas for taking hold of it. The ideas are very secondary devices for clambering up and over rock faces. Those readers who undertake merely to query the ideas will miss their use for getting at the material.

(p.22: 1995)

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45 Electronic Arts Ltd, ‘FIFA 10 Live Season 2.0 Tutorial Video’, Playstation Store, 2009 – accessed 08/10/09
Many books within Game Studies attempt such singular approaches in comprehending the computer game complex (McAllister, 2004), whether this be Galloway’s ‘Four Moments’ (2006), Taylor’s ethnography (2006) or Consalvo and Dutton’s call for qualitative analysis (2006). Each methodology supplies a solitary perspective, a single starting position through which one may begin their specific examination.

However the digital game, as a defining multi-modal product of our time, suffers more than most when reduced to a single essence, facet or feature. In studying the videogame medium, one must not only probe various levels (non-diegetic, diegetic, visuals, audio, game rules, simulation rules et cetera), but also seek to understand the relationship the product has with the consumer; one must not forget that without the player, video games exist merely as static code upon a screen waiting to be enacted. Accordingly, this thesis has used many concepts, ideas and approaches in conceiving the numerous aspects of not only the digital game, but also the symbiotic relationship demanded by the medium with its audience. To this end I have considered not only the text, but also in an experimental, exploratory sociological chapter, I have discussed the social and cultural affects of the game upon the player.

Chapter Summaries

In my opening section, I considered the history of the football videogame. I noted the progressive move from abstraction to simulation, from symbolic to mimetic, in terms of both audio-visuals and game mechanics.

Yet this representation remains highly stylized and utopian. Players known to have acne appear in the game with clean, smooth skin, Carlos Tevez’s substantial
scarring is significantly toned down; ludically players never trip, mis-kick or slip over, they never violently throw themselves into an injurious challenge. It is a flawless, ideal reality, minimizing negative aspects and enhancing the positive, both representationally and ludically; as we have discussed, players are consistently booked for diving (in the Pro Evolution Soccer series), or diving is simply not part of the product (as with the FIFA series), nor is handball, and so on. In the process of adaptation from real to virtual, the sport of football has been visually and ludically cleansed by the developer for inoffensive mass appeal.

The first chapter provided a participant-observer case study of the digital game player. Initially we must note that, from empirical observation, the player of sports videogames is overwhelmingly male. There exist various reasons for this, but chief amongst them would be the already masculine connotations supplied by football culture, as Gailey (1993) notes in her study of gender and class in videogames, whilst both boys and girls enjoyed certain genres more or less equally, only boys would play the sports games. In addition to this, as found through interviews with female players, and as argued by Kerr (2003), females were hesitant to classify themselves as “gamers” due to the expression’s relation with the heavy-using male gamer (known in gaming vernacular as “hardcore”).

We noted how the game was utilized as the anchor for particular social performances, as the users assumed a dynamic guise fluctuating between football supporter and player. At numerous points the user would switch between first and third-person pronouns; if playing well the pronouns tended towards “I”, if losing a match the operator would be keen to distance themselves through continued use of “he” in reference to the virtual footballers.
In this way the avatar became a permeable barrier for the gamer’s self-esteem, allowing them to bask in the glow of admiration for their achievements, whilst delegating responsibility to the avatar for mistakes and poor performances.

Of particular interest was the social meta-game that gave meaning to social interactions with the videogame and each other, as each participant enacted suitable strategies and tactics to enhance their social standing, or to subtract another’s. The objective was to gain the maximum amount of status amongst the group, whilst if possible diminishing the opponents’, so as to make the chasm in reputation that much larger.

Psychologically the playing of the sports videogame served many purposes. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) conception of the flow state was shown to have many correlations with games-playing. All users responded, when questioned, that when playing a game and enjoying it, they will lose track of time, lose a sense of appetite, forget their worries, and enter a sense of serenity (which many described as being dreamlike). I also found many parallels with Stebbins’ (1992: p.94-95) listing of ‘personal rewards’ enjoyed by participants of serious leisure (those who routinely engage in a particular hobby); self-gratification and regeneration were also noted by Csikszentmihalyi as the autotelic experience (the aspect of pure enjoyment in the flow state) and the aforementioned forgetting of worries, whilst other benefits such as self-realization were commonly found amongst the group, especially the professional players who realized their potential through games, and also improved their own self-conception, identifying themselves as professional gamers within their own privileged community. The playing of the videogame is not just escapism, or a form of cathartic release, neither is it simply an avenue for self-expression, self-gratification or regeneration; psychologically, it is all of these things for the regular player.
Culturally, the sports digital game exists not just as videogame, but as one constituent of the user’s regular consumption of sport. The boundary between virtual and physical has always been permeable, often transient, and sometimes blurred to a degree that makes clear distinction impossible; indeed the distinction is predicated upon an ontological fallacy, as Charles has discussed (2010). The gamer would often report their discovery of a new talent within the game who they now followed through other media, whether that is tabloids, television, the Internet, or all three; this would also happen in reverse, where a player would make a move to a well-known club, this previously unknown commodity would be researched not through the tabloids or the Internet, but through an examination of his statistics in the Football Manager games. Often the boundary was not simply blurred; for some users it did not exist.

The second chapter provided an overview of the often neglected non-diegetic space of the digital game. We noted how the televisual simulation presented an immediate, engaging experience, promoting intuitive controls and used common footballing vernacular to ease the user surreptitiously into their suspension of disbelief. The extreme genre’s non-diegetic space situates itself firmly within alternative and counter-cultural practices, romanticizing graffiti and hip-hop music as authentic self-expression undiluted by commercial values, implying the same of their unique brand of football. Conversely the management genre utilises its non-diegesis to revel in its hypermediated status as digital product, as information economy, invoking classic Microsoft Windows iconography such as beige work folders and a mouse pointer to connote the guiding principle of the management game as amalgamation of both work and play, a combination that is seeing increasing utilization within the management sectors of modern businesses (Fleming, 2005; Miller, 1997).
The lack of any explicit spectacle or introductory video further drives home this point: football is an industry, and you are simply middle-management, prey to both the fickle fans and capricious boardroom that you serve; the game is not here only to entertain you, it is here for you to work.

Chapter three focused upon another niche aspect of videogame culture; audio. Borrowing from Huiberts and Van Tol’s (2008) system for separating and analysing game audio in four discrete sections, the chapter illustrates the pivotal role that sound plays within the medium. A key effect of sound in digital games is to dynamize (Huibert & Van Tol, 2008) the gameplay, to accentuate the visual and haptic features, overloading the senses as a form of ilinx (Caillois, 2001) and thus making the play feel more exhilarating. Again, aligning with the utopian imagery, the sound is not simply a reproduction of what is heard from television sets across the globe, but is instead a perfectly-realized soundbyte of each kick, slide tackle, cheer and chant. The management genre’s refusal to include sound as part of the product is a decisive move by the genre to cement its role as the serious, exhaustive simulation of football; it refuses to provide extraneous thrills and gimmicks. Conspicuous consumption again plays a role, especially with any of the EA Sports products (the non-diegetic music even having its own category within the game and its marketing campaign, known as EA Trax), as chart-topping songs become associated with certain football events, so they are drawn into EA’s musical roster to heighten the perceived production values of the game and make it seem more authentic and grounded in football culture. Konami adopt a similar strategy in licensing the UEFA Champions League Anthem (Britten, 1992) for their latest Pro Evolution Soccer iteration.

Tied to this, the fourth chapter focused upon the use of professional commentary within these simulations. In a similar manner to Huiberts and Van Tol’s
dynamism (2008), these commentaries elevate the entertainment quota (Comisky et al., 1977) of the product. Utilizing Ryan’s (2006) analysis of sport narrative, we applied these findings to the simulational commentary to comprehend its numerous functions within the product. Again, we find the concept of remediation at work in the televsional genre, as the developers attempt to lull the gamer into the suspension of disbelief through instantiating another explicit link with television sports broadcasting. It also acts as ludic informant for the player, alerting them to players with special skills through particular soundbytes allocated to those with suitable abilities, e.g., someone with a high dribbling skill may trigger a commentary snippet eulogizing the player as “dangerous with the ball at his feet”, and so on.

The extreme genre discards this approach entirely. To further align itself with the ethos of extreme sport, the Street franchise includes urban music instead of commentary, as a playlist conducted by a virtual DJ accompanies the diegetic world. In addition to from accentuating the urbanity and alternative cultural values espoused by the product, music is often used in public spaces to block out other forms of reality, for example mundane noises such as traffic or construction; the music aids in the creation of a magic circle (Huizinga, 1949 [1938]), separate from the ‘outside world’, a particular frame (Goffman, 1986) through which the scene can be interpreted by attendants. Music has also been noted as a primary method of inducing the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) amongst participants in many sporting activities (Vlachopoulos et al., 2000: p.17), giving a temporal structure to their play defined through rhythm and melody.

The management simulation employs commentary as an addition to its informatic bombardment. The text-based observations constantly flicker with information on the gamestate, allowing the user to rewind and re-read statements at
will, to further complement their understanding of the game at hand. Again, information supersedes entertainment, as the player is encouraged to use the stream of updates as a resource to identify and nullify potential problems; to phrase it succinctly, information becomes entertainment.

In chapter five we exposed the limitations of the computer as game host. Whilst in other media and forms of play, the host is able to create, discard or modify rules to keep the game interesting, coherent or relevant, the machine limits any such innovation, acting instead as neutral mathematical processor for the simulational rules. Within the football simulation, this can weaken the verity of the replication in various aspects. Though the management genre includes a feature claiming to imitate the managerial practice of 'mind games' (comments made by the user-manager to the press in an effort to have an influence upon the opposing coach’s or footballer’s mental state), this exercise is undermined by the neutrality with which the computer displays the game’s database; any team, manager, or squad status can be viewed at any time, thus comments alluding to a star player being injured, a squad member being unsettled, or a manager changing his tactics can all be proved or disproved immediately through a scan of the database; the computer retains no capacity to bluff.

The impartiality and numerical basis of digital media (Flew, 2005; Manovich, 2001) replaces subjectivity with objectivity, to the detriment of the product.

Chapter six discussed one of the features crucial to the digital game medium; the cybernetic system of input and output. We considered how the cybernetic system altered the sense of control and effectance within the gameworld, and how this directly related to the pleasure of the product (Bryant & Davies, 2006).

We illustrated a heavy offensive bias within the system of the televisual genre, a disproportionate ratio between attacking and defending controls, highlighted by the
inclusion of the ‘trick stick’ feature, with no comparable defensive method. As we discussed in the next chapter, this encourages a *joga bonito* approach to the game, to play the exciting, high-scoring football demanded by the sports media complex; football here is firstly entertainment for the viewer, and droll defensive tactics are undermined by the very game mechanics themselves.

The extreme genre follows a similar schematic, yet the trick stick in this instance can also be used for defense; in mirroring the attacker’s manipulation of the stick the defender is able to take possession of the ball with a suitably violent animation. Yet, beyond these similarities the extreme genre offers scant ludic complexity, depending on the trick stick for the majority of its interaction and little variation is provided for both offence and defence. Whilst this makes the game instantly accessible, it also provides an extremely shallow effectance curve.

The cybernetic system of the management videogame is designed as occlusion, as something that can never be comprehensively grasped and understood by the player. Thus it is the challenge of deciphering the obscure formula of optimal inputs and outputs that makes the management game so alluring, in asking the player to gain victory not over the opposition, but over the cybernetic system itself.

The next chapter built upon the discussion of the cybernetic system, illustrating how the ideological bias of the digital game product can be understood through a methodical analysis of both the dominant game mechanics and the accompanying user interface.

The televisual simulation illustrates a gross bias towards attacking football, quantitatively providing far more agency for the player in possession of the ball than the player attempting to retrieve it. This creates for the user an unbalanced form of play, veering between two ends of the ludic spectrum, which I termed *hyper-ludicity*.
and *contra-ludicity*. In the football videogame, the ball itself becomes the signifier of hyper or contra-ludicity. With the ball at their feet, the interface becomes hyper-ludic, as the ergodicity of the game increases exponentially, and many actionable paths open for the user to enact; dribbling, tricks, passes, shots. When dispossessed of the ball, the game becomes contra-ludic, as these paths are closed to the user, and they are instead limited to an extremely small number of ludic interactions. Whilst one could claim that this is merely a reflection of the sport-as-played, the scale of ludic retraction is far beyond that of the physical world sport, and enormously disproportionate in relation to the ludicinity of the offensive player. Thus the user is positioned as media consumer primed for entertainment, rather than sport participant.

The avatar was the focus of chapter eight. I first confronted the shortcomings of the current definitions of the avatar, tending towards being perceived as embellished symbol or abstract metaphor, and noted how the televisual simulation attempts neither of these objectives, instead aiming for perfect mimesis of televised sport, representationally and ludically. Following from this, we approached the issue of the avatar using Daniel Kromand’s ‘avatar categorization’ (2007) hermeneutic. I illustrated how the avatar is incorporated into the sports digital game, both representationally and ludically, to present the player with all the positive aspects of the footballer without any of their acknowledged negatives, whether this be their appearance, temperament or ability.

This led to chapter nine, where I focused upon the sport celebrity. We first examined the fallacious contemporary separation of the ‘hero’ from the ‘celebrity’. Yet, if Socrates was correct that fame is the perfume of heroic deeds, then the sport superstar is the epitome of the heroic celebrity; the antithesis of the media-made celebrity, the famous footballer must first prove themselves worthy of their illustrious
mantle through extraordinary feats and accomplishments upon the pitch. Their fame is justified within all three sub-genres as maintaining talents and manoeuvres either restricted to an elite few, or in rarer cases, restricted to the single player, such as Cristiano Ronaldo’s unique avatar animation for taking a free-kick in *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009*. The famous avatar is always provided with the capability to prove himself the hero, a form of hyper-ludicity, including special abilities that give the avatar a higher possibility of scoring, or the ability to slide tackle with a lesser risk of punishment for fouling.

Such abilities, when analyzed quantitatively in relation to the avatar’s nationality, adhere to and reinforce the longstanding generalization of the British style of football as based on work-rate, mental determination and tackling, whilst the European style (especially the Latin countries) is demonstrably illustrated as individualistic and predicated upon flair and skill (Archetti, 2001: p.154); in this way the validity of such stereotyping is not only mused upon by the media (as in television and tabloid commentaries), but embedded within the core of the media product in absolute terms.

Chapter ten used the implementation of the goal celebration to anchor a discussion on the historical role and political impact of the celebration within sport. We noted firstly how goal celebrations had progressed in ostentation alongside concurrent increases in media attention; whilst the throwing up of arms or cheering used to suffice, players now see celebrations as an opportunity to create headlines, to communicate a message, and to increase their overall visibility within media; there are now commonplace trademark celebrations that can be either player-centric, such as Alan Shearer’s raising of one-arm to the crowd, or contextual, such as the sucking of a thumb or mimicking the rocking of a baby to celebrate their newborn child.
Of course, missing from the plethora of available celebrations are those that could be deemed offensive, discriminatory, or politically volatile. Sandvoss’s conception of contemporary football as semiotically empty (2003), awaiting the consumer’s filling of this void with their own meanings, is here taken to a Baudrillardian extreme; the product is so carefully emptied of meaning that it implodes upon itself, creating an idealized, sanitized reproduction of the sport that has the potential to be viewed as a satirical interpretation.

The final chapter considered the nascent trend within the televisual genre that allows the gamer to take control of a single player for an entire match, to create and build the statistics of a single avatar within the gameworld. This focus on the individual, as opposed to the team, follows the media-led model of sports coverage that increasingly focuses upon the single personality, as Whannel outlines, 'Audiences need to be won and readers attracted. Sport is presented largely in terms of stars and narratives: the media narrativises the events of sport, transforming them into stories with stars and characters; heroes and villains. In this process of construction the audience are characteristically positioned as patriotic partisan subjects' (1998: p.23). This narrative within the videogame thus becomes the story of the promising young player working his way through the squad, gaining fame, glory, and finally superstardom through achievements upon the football pitch.

Ludically this creates for the user an entirely new experience, one that sits almost in opposition to the usual televisual offering in both style and content, as the user is at first severely limited in his or her actions. Relegated to the 'old' medium of television if underperforming (having to watch from the broadcast angle without being able to interact), the iconography of mediation is also provided as reward for successful play; the non-diegetic realm of menus and options alters to include
television sets, whilst tabloid headlines and images of microphones and cameras surrounding the avatar begin to fill the page header. Within the diegesis, beginning on a training pitch, the player finds success reflected through the eventual reintroduction of mediation in the form of the broadcast angle (when viewing from the bench), action replays, professional commentary, and crowd noise\textsuperscript{46} provided to signify the importance of the match day.

We observed how, in creating the avatar, both the televisual and extreme genres express a scientific rhetoric in their approach to the athlete (Edgley & Brissett, 1990), an idealized physical subject whose physiology comfortably fits within parameters approved by the scientific community in terms of bodily efficiency, efficacy, and aptitude for the task; one is not given the option to make their avatar overly tall, or short, overly fat, or thin.

**The Simulation?**

As highlighted in the thesis introduction, in discussing the digital game many scholars refer to the product as a 'simulation' (Frasca, 2003; Kayali & Purgathofer, 2008; King & Krzywinska, 2006; McAllister, 2004; Poole, 2000; Scott & Ruggill, 2004), implicitly associating the program as the remodelling of an external referent, whether that be a flight simulator, a racing simulator, or even games such as first-person shooters that attempt to recreate various aspects of the physical world, from human bodies to geographical locations to the accurate rendering of certain aspects of physics.

If we look to the history of the simulational football game, to its pre-digital roots, we notice many features that have evolved and matured into the electronic

\textsuperscript{46} Crowd noise is of course not in and of itself evidence of mediation, but the manner in which it is included, cheers, booing, clear crowd chants, finds much similarity with the objectivity of televised audio, as opposed to the subjectivity of being immersed within the indistinct noise of the crowd.
simulation of today. Tabletop football, where player models are held in place by wooden or metallic bars across an enclosed wooden frame, shares many features with the first football computer games. As with *Pele’s football* (Atari, 1981), the players are semi-static (the bars only sliding marginally left and right to intercept the ball), abstract avatars (*Pele’s football* used dots to represent players, whilst tabletop football models are regularly faceless and armless), and primary emphasis is placed upon the football itself; scoring is so easy that one cannot hope to pursue a successful defensive strategy, much like even the latest televisual genre iterations, without possession of the ball in tabletop football, the game is contra-ludic.

Magnetic football (where the avatars are controlled through the movement of a magnet held under the board by the player) moved further towards simulation, allowing not only ball movement, but also the player was now free to move along two axes and the adjustment and invention of formations was a possibility. Sport board games such as 1990’s *Terry Venables invites you to be... The Manager* used special ‘risk cards’ to introduce the pleasure of *alea* (Caillois, 2001) so prominent within the contemporary management simulation. The extreme genre, created in many ways as the antithesis of traditional football culture, predictably shares little with these earlier products, instead borrowing from newer media conventions and cultural traditions such as urban music and art, street fashion, and of course extreme sports and leisure pursuits such as snowboarding and ‘parkour’. Can such features truly make claims to simulational veracity?

If we turn to King & Krzywinska, we find a productive definition of what 'simulation' means in regards to the videogame complex:
Games make claims to realism on the basis of comparison with what has gone before. But looking towards the ideal against which existing qualities are measured, the benchmark is as often set by other forms of mediation as it is by the ultimate real-world referent... [in] sports simulations, the primary point of reference is television coverage of the sport, rather than the experience of sport itself. Games often create their impressions of realism or immediacy precisely through their use of devices familiar from other media - as, in their own realm, signifiers of verisimilitude or immediacy - as is suggested by the use of the term 'photorealism', implying as it does a second-order of realism, an impression created through reference to another form of mediation.

(King & Krzywinska, 2006: p.136-137)

As we noted in the Literature Review considering Bell’s (2009) analysis of realism within the medium, the paramount measurement for 'realism' and the 'realistic' videogame is through comparison to the previous generation. For example, *Mortal Kombat* was much more ‘realistic’ than *Street Fighter* due to its perceived ‘photorealism’, implicating once more this second-order of reality that nonetheless is seen by the audience as maintaining some claim towards objective truth, as something that provides an honest depiction of reality; this claim is particularly prevalent in the medium of photography (Sontag, 1977), thus photorealism is strived for within the digital game industry as the pinnacle of realist representation, rendering the technological foundation of the image invisible.

*Half-Life 2* (Valve, 2004) is held as both representationally and ludically more ‘real’ than *Half-Life* (Valve, 1998) due to the incorporation of a physics engine and advancements in computer animation and artificial intelligence. Similarly, each
version of the Pro Evolution Soccer and FIFA games are lauded as more real than the last, with the blurb on the game case challenging the prospective buyer to try the 'incredibly realistic ball physics' of Pro Evolution Soccer’s latest iteration, and so on. As King & Krzywinska (2006) suggest, second-order signifiers, such as the broadcast angle, lens flare and dirt on the screen, are so inseparable from the consumption of sport that to include such mediation is paradoxically seen as more real than if it were excluded.

As demonstrated by the nascent augmented/alternate reality game (ARG) genre, the boundaries of the play experience, the magic circle (Huizinga, 1949 [1938]), is blurred with that of the mundane world, creating a pervasive game intended to 'enhance or enchant everyday life with hidden meanings' (Montola, 2005: online). Yet the merging of such borders may have deleterious effects upon the both the game and player not yet considered by the producers; such practices can set dangerous precedents inviting commodification and deceptive corporate manipulation, as noted by Stewart (2009).

In terms of the football simulation, this merging occurs with not only other technologies, but with other mediums and sub-cultures. As noted, all three genres of the football simulation absorb other sports media into both their non-diegetic and diegetic worlds as both textual and paratextual (Genette, 1997). The televisual genre obviously remodels the conventions of the television medium as a central component of its representational shell, whilst the extreme genre incorporates the sub-culture of 'parkour' as gameplay mechanic and the medium of radio as a paratext. The management simulation assimilates into its representational and ludic systems the British tabloid, the World Wide Web, and the email client, among others. This is to
ease the operator into the suspension of disbelief, to help them adapt to what may be an unfamiliar medium, as Genette explains:

The paratext provides an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much respiratory difficulty from one world to the other, a sometimes delicate operation, especially when the second world is a fictional one. Being immutable, the text in itself is incapable of adapting to changes in its public in space and over time. The paratext - more flexible, more versatile, always transitory because transitive - is, as it were, an instrument of adaptation.

(1997: p.408)

Yet as these reproductions of other mediums within the digital game product evolve in sophistication, their verisimilitudinous effects are correlatively enhanced. Thus, as shown within the observer-participant case study, regular users of the games make reference to how they use these simulations as part of a cross-medial experience, as one component of a larger engagement with football culture.

This Baudrillardian notion, the hyperreal simulation of the medium, is echoed by Giddings:

Electronic and digital screens, it is often argued in both academic and popular criticism, capture the surfaces of objects and phenomena, but their essence, their reality, their intangible and invisible operations (economic, social, political) are jettisoned. Indeed, the spectacular imagery of digital imaging does not so much copy the surface appearances as copy copies: the lens flare
and motion blur generated in CGI special effects are copies of analogue cinematography’s surface effects.

(Giddings, 2007: p.425)

Such assertions find particular poignancy within the digital sports game. The visual detail of Barcelona’s latest home shirt, the architecture of their home stadium, the Nou Camp, and their star players, from Xavi to Lionel Messi, are all captured with painstaking accuracy by the developers of these products, yet the racism prevalent in Spain’s football culture (Lowe, 2006: online) is unacknowledged. Celtic Football Club and Glasgow Rangers are likewise included with a similar degree of representational accuracy, yet ignored by the producers is the historical, sometimes violent rivalry between supporters as a microcosm of the wider schism between Protestantism and Catholicism.

To borrow terminology from sociologist Robert K. Merton (1957), these digital games reproduce the manifest functions of the sport, to provide entertainment, escapism and spectacle, whilst they wholly ignore the manifest dysfunctions of the sport; racism, crowd violence, cheating, inequality, and so on. Yet one of the most important latent functions of not only football, but many sports (in both their physical and digital incarnations), is included within every genre; the exclusion of females. As mentioned, the Football Manager series has only began to include feminine pronouns in its latest version, whilst female footballers are completely absent from any of the FIFA, FIFA Street, or Pro Evolution Soccer series, asides from their integration as supporters within the stadium.

Therefore, what is it exactly that these digital games “simulate”? What particular cultural, social and political ideologies, present in the source system
(Frasca, 2003) are propagated by these texts? Well firstly, and most prominently, is the perceived masculine domination of not only the sport, but also the digital game. From the introductory FMV sequences, to the character creation, to the diegetic world of play, the products are representationally entrenched in masculinity. The televisual genre permits the female to act in a passive capacity, whether in Pro Evolution Soccer 2008's opening cinematic, illustrating the woman as supporter, to FIFA's minimal allowance of a feminine presence within the stadium crowd. Such representations are completely omitted from the management and extreme genres, where the subject is strictly and unapologetically positioned as male consumer. This perhaps explains my findings in the observer-participant case study, as prospective female gamers would firstly shun the title of 'gamer', due to its anti-social, male connotations, and secondly would attempt to downplay and minimize the regularity of their interaction with the medium and also their proficiency in it.

Yet this stance taken by the producer of the digital game is at best outdated and at worst counter-productive. As Tams (2007: online) has surveyed, in the loosely defined 'casual games' sector, 51.7% of players were women, whilst 74% of paying casual game players were female. This is an enormous market share to disregard, and one ignored by the developers at their own peril. It is perhaps this claim to being 'realistic', of being a reproduction of the sporting world, a direct translation of not only its play, but its surrounding culture and fandom, that creates these discrepancies.

Other sport-based games, rooted firmly in fantasy and arcade play, have little regard for historical exclusions and inclusions of particular social groups and genders. Games such as Snowboard Kids (Racdym, 1997), SSX Tricky (EA Canada, 2001) and modern games such as the best-selling Wii Sports (Nintendo EAD, 2006) all involve the active participation of women avatars. Other televisual sports games, such as

47 Uniquely featuring a sportswoman as the game case's cover art.
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 (EA Tiburon, 2009) and Virtua Tennis 2009 (Sumo Digital, 2009), also include women avatars, but perhaps this is due to the celebrity and subsequent media visibility of some of the female athletes included (Maria Sharapova in Virtua Tennis 2009, upcoming star Paula Creamer in Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10); in fact many of the female players included are trans-medial, existing in television advertisements, music videos, and films, something not currently applicable to professional female players in football, who still exist within the confines of their chosen sport.

Perhaps it would be informative to ask what is, or can be, accurately simulated by these games. In analyzing the televisual simulation one must note that the play of the product (the rules, the ball physics, kinetics, weather et cetera) is simulated to an obvious hyperreal degree; officials’ decisions are always correct, the footballer never trips, and the weather is always an idealized incarnation; snow can be present but never heavy enough to cancel matches, rain is enough to affect the playing surface, but never floods, and so on.

The management genre does not accurately portray play; it calculates play. In alignment with its wargaming heritage, the management game takes the numerous statistics, strategic and tactical decisions and positions into account before combining them with a dose of alea (Caillois, 2001), much like the rolling of the polyhedral dice familiar to any wargame veteran.

In a very concrete way, the content of what is being simulated here, the representational façade of the simulation, is unimportant. What is important to the player is the underlying the system of rules, regulations and parameters, never revealed to the user but always presenting itself as obstacle and challenge; this stands in stark contrast to other forms of gaming, from Chess to Pictionary to Trivial Pursuit,
where the rules and parameters of play are clearly, and necessarily outlined before the commencement of play. In no other form of game is the 'interactive trial and error' (Jones, 2008: p.74) method of progress, championed by digital games, so central to the play experience. This is doubly true for the management genre, where gaining a complete understanding of the rules and parameters of the simulation would undermine the entire ludic experience, predicated as it is on the user’s incomprehension of the system’s consciously obtuse inner-workings.

The dressing of football culture, from the omnipresent media tabloid headlines to the team talk and match day procedure, is in many ways a narrativisation of the underlying system that makes it attractive to a certain demographic. As Koster points out, 'The stories in most video games serve the same purpose as calling the über-checker a ‘king.’ It adds interesting shading to the game but the game at its core is unchanged' (Koster, 2005: p85). In other words, whether it was football, American football or basketball, the system itself would remain unaffected and the gamer would play the product in the same manner, only the visage would change to attract interest from a particular group; again, digital media reveals its impartiality towards content (Flew, 2005), and its modular structure (Manovich, 2001), with the program's various components (graphical, audio, mechanical) allowing modification, addition, or deletion; indeed an editor comes packaged with each of the Football Manager series permitting precisely this.

Thus we can conclude that the management genre of the sports videogame does not simulate any particular sport, but instead creates a particularly complex structure for the user’s deduction, the basis being a remodelling of knowledge economy labour with the game rules based upon an industrial capitalist perspective (Thompson, 1967), of maximizing profit through heightening efficiency in all aspects;
using every allocated moment of time effectively, arranging your workforce to create
the highest degree of productivity, using rationality as the basis of your decision
making, and manipulating the market whenever possible to create the highest value
for your own commodities whilst lessening, or destabilizing the value of others’
goods.

The extreme genre also does not provide, or indeed attempt to provide a
simulation of professional football. As much as the *FIFA Street* series proclaims itself
to be modelled upon the sport of football, it can just as equally be cited as influenced
by 'parkour', hip-hop, extreme sports and modern urban space (LeFebvre, 1991); this
confluence is in no way a singular phenomenon in regards to the sport, as Nike’s
*Cage* advertisements for the 2002 World Cup illustrated many similar principles.

Directed by Terry Gilliam, the segments involved numerous stars playing
football confined within a steel cage based in an offshore cargo liner; music,
individual flair, aggressive challenges and a complete lack of officialdom were all
prominent features of the advertisements, as Nike’s press release for the commercials
boasted, 'only one rule… "First goal wins!"…With Monsieur Cantona at the helm,
you can be assured there will be no whining, no judgment calls, and no mercy'
(Stubbs, 2005: online).

In terms of play, the extreme genre simulates this ad-hoc, unofficial,
neighbourhood form of football ruled by informal local norms (Smith, 2004).
Dynamic weather is not featured, neither is the effect of different playing surfaces, nor
wind conditions, as would be true of the televisual and management genres. Instead
the ball and avatars take on added ludic importance; the ball not only bounces upon
the surface, but on walls, the players do not simply move across two dimensions, but
three, as they flip up surfaces and over their opposition. *Joga Bonito*, to play
beautifully, is embedded within the game structure as the ultimate offensive manoeuvre, to beat every opposition player and score, is awarded with an instant win; offensive play once more illustrates its hyper-ludic application.

The Euphemism

At the beginning of this conclusion, I asserted that the oft-proclaimed 'mirror' of the sport simulation, as heralded by developers, publishers, and most noticeably marketing materials, was actually presenting a distorted image, a carnival mirror reflecting certain attributes, exaggerating others, and minimizing many. Yet there is one important caveat missing from this analogy; even in carnival mirrors, nothing is entirely hidden from reflection.

The three genres of the football simulation all conceal certain aspects, features or groups that are otherwise prevalent in the play or culture of the sport: cheating, violence, racism, female participation, and so on. As so often happens with the unmediated presented through the kaleidoscope of mediation, the object is sterilized, made germ-free for the user’s consumption.

This is taken even further within the football videogame product, being as they are mediations of mediations. These games moves through Baudrillard’s (1988) four stages of the sign into the last, 'It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum' (p.170). They are simulations unto themselves, hyperreal images anxiously attempting to fabricate an effect of unbiased, asocial, apolitical “reality”, not through comparison to the physical world, as they claim, but instead in comparison to the previous iteration of the product. In clinging so feverishly to claims of objective truth and realism, the football videogame attempts a grand rhetorical trick: to hide the bias of its reflection.
Yet in a typically Baudrillardian twist, the attempt by the producers to hide mediation, paradoxically through adopting the camouflage of *other* forms of mediation, to hide corruption, violence and cheating, through omission and the morality of the ludic system, to hide female participation, through relegation to passivity, culminates in an excess of meaning where the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the source model are removed, and instead we are presented with the clarity of the digital system, of ones and zeroes, on and off, true and false.

In this utopian reality there is no corrupt football agent, no crowd violence, no handball, no 'mercenary' playing for the wages alone. The football digital game operates as a euphemism for sport; as a comfortable, safe, idealized version of the real event. It is at its core a surreptitious substitution for something that, at times, may be too offensive, divisive or vulgar. It excises, conceals, rephrases or repackages the provocative and unpalatable, so that the product may be universally accessible, welcoming, and ultimately saleable.

Yet the user, in engaging with these videogames, show no such concern for their artifice. They are viewed by the player community as legitimate extensions of the sport, as one more avenue for sports consumption. However, as expressed often by the participants in chapter one, they are adamant in their refusal to take these games “too seriously”, an attitude expressed concerning the majority of the group's consumptive practices. Quite simply, it is not that they are unaware of the game's artifice, it is that they have ceased to care, as Storey remarks, 'It is not, as some Baudrillardians seem to want to suggest, that people can no longer tell the difference between fiction and reality: it is that in some significant ways the distinction between the two has become less and less important' (2009: p.189).
As members of a postmodern culture which not only distrusts metanarratives, but express 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984: p.xxiv) alongside claims to epistemological and ontological stability, it is not that they believe these games to be real, it is that they see many aspects of their culture as equally fictitious, as equally unreal, as Baudrillard summarizes:

Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the society in its entirety, in its banal omnipotence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real.

(Baudrillard, 1983: p.25)

Thus the verisimilitude of the sports videogame is seen as just as authentic as the sports event, broadcast live on television, as authentic as the accompanying radio commentary, as the online match report and forum discussion, as the ritual of the pre-match interview. In such a mediated environment these digital games disregard the notion of presenting themselves as imaginary, as not reflective of reality, as the question could rightly be posed: in comparison to what?

The sports genre of the digital game, located firmly within the aesthetics of postmodernity, finds truth relevant only in relation to other, more pertinent questions,
'No longer will it respond to the question 'Is it true?' It will hear only, 'What use is it?'

'How much is it?' and 'Is it saleable?' (Lyotard, 1984: p.51).
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8 Mile (Hanson, USA, 2002)

The 7th Guest (Trilobyte, 1992)

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Big Brother (Endemol, 1999-present)

Bionic Commando Rearmed (Grin, 2008)

BioShock (2K Games, 2007)

Dance Dance Revolution’s (Konami, 1998)

DogTown and Z-Boys (Peralta, USA, 2001)
Doom (id Software, 1993)

Enter The Matrix (Shiny Entertainment, 2003)

Evidence: The Last Ritual (Lexis Numerique, 2006)

Fallout (Black Isle Studios, 1997)

The Fast and the Furious (Cohen, USA, 2001)

FIFA series (EA Sports, 1993-present)

FIFA Street series (EA Canada, 2005-present)

Fight Night Round 2 (EA Sports, 2005)

Football Manager series (Sports Interactive, 2004-present)

Forrest Gump (Zemeckis, USA, 1994)

Goldeneye 007 (Rare, 1997)

Half-Life series (Valve, 1998-present)

Halo series (Bungie Studios, 2001-2007)


Internet Explorer (Microsoft, 1995-present)

Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991)

Lula series (CDV, 1998-2005)

Madden NFL series (EA Sports, 1989-present)

Manhunt 2 (Rockstar Games, 2007)

Mario Bros. (Nintendo, 1983)

Match Day (Ocean Software, 1984)

The Matrix: Path Of Neo (Shiny Entertainment, 2005)

The Matrix trilogy (Wachowski Brothers, USA, 1999-2003)

Max Payne (Remedy Entertainment, 2001)

Microsoft Flight Simulator (Microsoft, 1982-2006)
Microsoft Office (Microsoft, 1990-present)

Mortal Kombat (Midway, 1992)

NBA Jam (Midway, 1993)

NBA Live series (EA Sports, 1995-present)

NBA Street series (EA Canada, 2001)

Need for Speed series (Electronic Arts, 1995-present)

Need For Speed: ProStreet (EA, 2007)

Need For Speed: Underground (EA Black Box, 2003)

NFL Tour (EA Sports BIG, 2008)

Nintendogs (Nintendo, 2005)

Pac-man (Namco, 1980)

Pele’s football (Atari, 1981)

Pokémon (Nintendo, 1995)

Pro Evolution Soccer series (Konami, 2001-present)

Project Gotham Racing 4 (Bizzare Creations, 2007)

Resident Evil (Capcom, 1996)

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Tennis for Two (Higinbotham, 1958)
Tetris (Pajitnov, 1985)
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