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Documentary games: an investigation into the amalgamation of the filmic mode of 'documentary' and the gaming medium through the case studies on the film Bowling for Columbine (2002) and videogame, Super Columbine Massacre RPG (2005)

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Documentary games: an investigation into the amalgamation of the filmic mode of 'documentary' and the gaming medium through the case studies on the film *Bowling For Columbine* (2002) and videogame, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* (2005).

By

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of Master of Arts by coursework in the field of Digital Animation at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination.

KELLY HARDING _____.

_____day of_____2012.

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Abstract

This research report investigates the concept of documentary games, an amalgamation of 'reality' (documentary) and 'escapism' (gaming), and the way in which these games have evolved into a new, emerging and widely used of storytelling and art. A comparison will be made between two case studies from different mediums: a film, *Bowling For Columbine* and a videogame, *Super Columbine Massacre* RPG. By exploring the differences and similarities of these two mediums and how they are defined, I intend to demonstrate how gaming has progressed and merged with documentary (film) to create a new art form.

The aim of the research report is to determine whether videogames can in fact be viewed and categorised as 'documentary' games by specifically analysing the documentative aspects of one videogame, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* created by documentary filmmaker, Daniel Ledonne.

Introduction

Although they utilise different mediums, the film *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and the game, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* (2005), they both make use of the genre, documentary. These texts approach and represent the same historical world and event (the Columbine High School Massacre that occurred on 20 of April 1999) from different perspectives/ mediums. *Bowling for Columbine* has been critically acknowledged as a documentary, winning various awards in the categories of nonfiction and documentary film. *Super Columbine Massacre RPG,* on the other hand, although referred to as a 'documentary game' has been slandered by the general media and society for being highly controversial for its re-enactment and simulation of the historical event. Videogames with documentary characteristics have evolved to form a new genre of gaming in accordance with Ian Bogost's categorisation of 'serious games' which are labelled by theorists as art games. Serious games tend to focus on issues within society which are represented through the medium of videogames.

Chapter 1 of this research report investigates the concept of the 'documentary' in its earliest form of cinema and tracks its movement between two mediums, film and gaming. It includes a discussion on documentary film form, realism, preconceived notions of pure realism, followed by the animated documentary and, finally how the use of an alternative medium can influence the concept of this genre.

Chapter 2 focuses on videogames as a medium and the way in which it operates within the paradoxical relationship between the idea of 'play' and 'serious games'. Here we analyse detail the terming of 'videogames' and the definition of such a medium. An overview of the history of the development of this medium is essential in reviewing how videogames have

transgressed to focus more on serious issues rather than just escapism and entertainment. This progression has led to serious games/critical play and to the introduction of documentary games.

Chapter 3 discusses documentary games' controversial content and theorisation as many theorists have dismissed the labelling of the videogames as 'documentary' and question the possibility of shifting genres between multiple mediums. This is a theoretical overview of the concept 'documentary games' and an introduction into the next chapter which will demonstrate how the theory is practised, through the videogame, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*.

Chapter 4 is a comparative analysis of the two case studies, *Bowling for Columbine* and *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* This chapter compares the two different mediums which cover the same event/situation in the representational form of documentary. The result of the analysis will lead to a determination of whether this type of videogame, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* is able to earn the title 'documentary' in its establishment of a genre or if this labelling is just an attempt at "aspirational pre-naming" (Fullerton, 3).

Although this report may focus on documentary games as a whole, it investigates only one game in particular as this game has deemed a documentary game. Many videogames experiment with the genre of documentary games, as discussed Chapter 3, but this report focuses on *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* as a case study and its validity as a documentary game.

Chapter 1

Concerns around existing theories have surfaced on the concept 'documentary' and these incompatible and differing opinions on the meaning of documentary have made it difficult to define. Technological advancements continue to influence and alter the concept in accordance with the historical period in which the films were/ are produced (Nichols, np). It is therefore necessary to discuss documentary in terms of its original medium, film, and to take a retrospective view on its origin and history before focusing on its variable and shifting state.

Firstly, film is a type of medium. The Free Online Dictionary defines the word 'medium' as "a means of mass communication, such as newpapers, magazines, radio, or television" (1), and is a type of forum for communicating idea. Film and television, literature, radio and videogames are all different types of mjjediums, as they communicate through the specific use of either cameras and televisions, computers or through print. These mediums can overlap and borrow from each other, as newspapers have borrowed from photography to display images amongst printed text. There are three different modes of film, which are separated by their content: narrative fiction, experimental and documentary. One can also refer to documentary as a genre. In videogames, the documentary game is referred to a specific genre of games.

In order to establish a working definition for the use of this report, I will first explain the origins of documentary, the history of documentary and the elements that influence change in definition. From this history and a combinations of theories that followed it, we are able to establish a working definition that will assist our analysis of documentary videogames.

Documentary origins

In a 1926 *New York Sun* publication, John Grierson coined the term 'documentary' to describe Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* (1926) as a "creative treatment of actuality" (Ellis, 4). The film takes an ethnographic stance by observing of the everyday life of inhabitants on a Samoan island. When Grierson used the term 'documentary' to describe the film, he was referring to its 'documentary value', meaning that even though the film was transparently fiction, it had the characteristics of 'documentary'. Although not considered the first documentary, the film Moana was viewed as the first 'docufiction', a hybrid of two filmic modes, documentary and fiction. (Rosenbaum, 1). This resulted in the categorisation of such films and a long standing debate ensued on the definition of the term 'documentary' and the issue of the 'real' versus the 'image'. The image refers to the visual product of the film, i.e. what the filmmaker "allows" the audience to see. The image is highly important as it is the representation of what the filmmaker aims to depict and must allow the filmmaker's voice to come through their choice of the image.

Nanook of the North (1922), was created by Robert Flaherty and seen as the first feature length documentary revealing the lives of Inuit Eskimos. Even though some may argue that the fictional elements outweigh the documentative elements in *Nanook of the North*, Flaherty *consciously* decided on recording the historical world with real locations (true to the events) and real people (non actors). Flaherty's work has been criticised for its fictionalisation of the characters and events portrayed in the film, but is still renowned for its use of documentative elements.

Whilst *Nanook of the North* is perceived to be the first documentary ever made, one can trace documentary back to the birth of film with the film *Workers Leaving the Lumière*

Factory (1895) produced by the Lumière brothers. *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* was unintentionally recorded in documentary mode. Although simplistic in its content (it revealed exactly what the title implied, workers walking out of a factory), *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* may still be considered an 'observational' documentary since its main purpose was to record a specific time and situation, however uneventful the situation may seem. Shot with a Cinématograph which the brothers invented- a three-in-one device which recorded, developed and projected films, the film consists of one long shot, with no cuts or edits and was projected to an audience on the same device (Bordwell; Thompson, 347). Even at this early stage of cinema, the film foreshadows characteristics of the movement of cinéma vérité with its 'objective' attitude.

The concept of documentary changed with the emergence of a new movement, cinéma vérité, in the 1950's and 1960's. Cinéma vérité is a French term meaning 'cinema truth' (Bordwell; Thompson, 314). Many cinéma vérité filmmakers claimed that their films were more objective than documentaries as the films consisted of raw footage placed together with simple editing to ensure a seamless flow of the film. The cinéma vérité films chose to differentiate themselves from documentary's 'subjectivity' by refusing to use documentary conventions such as voice-over commentary, music for mood and tone implication and editing techniques that helped verify a specific point of view, to further establish evidence or evoke emotion from the audience. There was a certain neutrality to the films containing and portraying an observant nature, attempting to make the filmmaker and the film itself become 'invisible' as the audiences could voyeuristically experience the lives of real people who inhabited the world and forget about the filmic aspect of this observation.

High School (1968), directed by Frederick Wiseman, is a film that tried to accomplish the crucial objectivity which filmmakers' of the cinéma vérité movement struggled to portray. With its 'fly-on-the wall' style, it enabled the viewer to look into the world (seemingly objectively) of Philadelphia's Northeast High School. Although this may be the closest a film can get to objectivity it still will never be rid of its medium's predisposition of subjectivity created by the lens and the filmmaker. As Bordwell and Thompson explain, "Through selection and arrangement, the cinéma vérité filmmaker utilizes film form and style no less than does a filmmaker who stages action for the camera" (315). Wiseman made a conscious decision to film that particular situation, with certain shots and movements directed by him and these choices are what the audience views. If it was to be completely objective, it would have to be open for the audiences' choices and this becomes an impossibility for this specific medium unless it hybridizes with another form to adapt to this aspiration (Bordwell; Thompson, 314). This would also become subjective as the choices that are made would shift from filmmaker to audience and therefore still be subjective. As cinéma vérité demonstrates, nothing can be completely objective with regards to the film medium.

Many films, documents and recordings gradually gravitated towards fiction, playing into fantasy, drama and tragedy; and film evolved to become the alternative and more accessible theatre, a new medium used to 'transform' the world (Bordwell; Thompson, 314). Different film forms emerged and so gave rise to categorisation due to demands and preferences of the audience. This produced the main creative categories/modes of film we recognise today, namely: narrative fiction, experimental/avant-garde and documentary (Ellis,1).

Narrative fiction refers to fictional characters in an illusory world with an imagined and constructed story and plot. These fictional films are predominantly for entertainment purposes and fall into the more commercial and mainstream culture. They focus on the general human condition and the ideologies surrounding the films are generalised and strive to relate to any audience member as the emotions and ideas represented within these films attempt to access the universal audience.

Avant-garde and experimental films break the mainstream conventions in order to provoke, reveal and question issues in an attempt to generate an understanding of the subject. These types of films are usually thought-provoking and their purpose is to reveal experiments conducted by the filmmaker, rather than entertainment.

Documentaries fall in-between these two categories of narrative fiction and experimental film; revealing the concurrent need to entertain and to provoke and to formulate an understanding of the subject, the audience and the filmmaker. Documentaries focus on more than the general human condition; they delve into on specific issues and conditions that occur with specific people, events and periods (Ellis, 1).

'Documentary' is described by the Online Oxford Dictionary as an:

adjective

- 1. consisting of or based on official documents.
- 2. using pictures or interviews with people involved in real events to provide a factual report on a particular subject.

noun (plural documentaries)

- a film or television or radio programme that provides a factual report on a particular subject.

(Oxford University Press, 2011)

'Document' is used in the actual word as well as its definition of documentary and documents serve as evidentiary material as they record certain information in a factual form (Oxford University Press, 2011). Documentaries provide fact or evidence in the form of a report which may differ from the typical medium of literature and instead is represented in the film medium. The use of the term 'factual' recurs, allowing for the idea of realism. Rooted in this specific definition is the medium of film and television, implying a source of the concept. The emphasis and implication of realism and actuality in the definition of documentary may draw attention away from the filmic definition of documentary and its core idea. Definitions of the term documentary in film are variable and subject to change due to four major influences, namely: institutions, film makers, successful films, and the audience. These influences merit further discussion in order to help understand documentary's interchangeable and progressive nature.

Influences:

Institutions supporting documentaries in their productions and reception are able to influence how documentaries are produced and distributed (Nichols, np). These institutions influence through funding and distribution, and they specialise in the field of documentary and support the creators of documentaries. Institutions have the authority to label films as documentaries and their decisions are rarely questioned. For example, if the *Discovery Channel* labels one of its programmes or films as a 'documentary', then the text is

considered a documentary because of institution's reputation of factual and reality broadcasting will overshadow any doubt.

Filmmakers influence the evolution and change of documentaries as their need for creative expression and egotistical quest to differentiate themselves from other filmmakers causes them to experiment with innovative techniques to provide a unique quality for their films. They ignore hegemonic conventions and prefer to deviate from the norm in order to emphasize their auteurism. John Grierson's films were deemed documentary by his own affirmation and understandably, with his background as a world renowned critic, filmmaker and producer, his films remained unquestioned as he was the first to deem these types of films as 'documentaries'.

Success breeds success and the techniques and storytelling of successful films are often emulated by aspiring filmmakers. As each period has its own context, films will often follow similar patterns of those in the same period. Successful films may have their techniques regurgitated by new filmmakers, as they also want to bask in the same/ similar success. Successful films may inspire upcoming filmmakers and some intertextuality or parody may occur.

The audience is influential in their ability to sway films to change their course and adopt new ones. The audience demands fresh ideas that need interpreting and filmmakers must thus be aware of their market. The filmmaker constructs a film for a specific audience and their expectations or needs influence the manner in which the story is told or even what story is told. As discussed later in Chapter 3 on documentary gaming, audiences of present may expect more interactivity which has led to a growth of the digital game market and the amalgamation of different mediums is referred to as remediation.

Remediation: as a medium grows it allows itself to lend techniques to other mediums, as Nichols states, “related media trade conventions and borrow techniques from one another” (Nichols, np).

Documentary, as a mode or ‘genre’, began revealing itself within mediums other than film, i.e. the documentary radio of the 1930’s with the BBC broadcasts, non-fictional literature, documentary and the new journalism of the 1960’s and 1970’s, however, medium of film offers a greater variety of aural and visual stimulation for the documentary to prosper and evolve (Ellis, 4).

Definition

Notwithstanding the variability of the definition of documentary, many theorists continue to use Grierson’s phrase (“a creative treatment of actuality”) as a point of departure for establishing meaning as it transcends the shifting nature of the form. ‘Creative treatment’ and ‘actuality’ are paradoxical if viewed together, however, separating them gives us clues into Grierson’s logic around his infamous phrase. By breaking the phrase down, one is able to understand how these two words may coexist and play on each other to make an interesting form of expression for not only the film medium, but other mediums such as animation and gaming.

According to Nichols, “the documentary form balances creative vision with a respect for the historical world”, (Nichols, np). Thus ‘creative’ can be interpreted as fiction or a permission to use fictional elements to enable the fulfilment of the filmmakers’ artistic needs in the film. With consideration to the worlds created in film, “documentaries address *the* world in which we live rather than *a* world imagined by the filmmaker” (Nichols, np). ‘Actuality’

refers to authenticity, showing the tangible world which the audience can relate to and inhabits that world and co-exists with all the issues or content raised by the filmmaker.

The documentary tradition is dependent on the notion of authenticity (Nichols, np). This idea of authenticity is also prominent in Stella Bruzzi's text:

> Continuously invoked by documentary is the idealised notion, on the one hand, of the pure documentary in which the relationship between the image and the real is straightforward and, on the other, the very impossibility of this aspiration.
>
> (Bruzzi, 3).

In this context, the 'image' refers to what the audience views. How the filmmaker decides to frame certain actions and his/her choices for the mise-en-scène. With photography or film, the 'image' is constructed and reality obstructed by a camera lens, a filmmaker and computer generated/tampering of imagery. There is a definite relationship between the human and mechanical eye (natural eye of the human being and the camera lens which is mechanical and fully constructed), and film's primary function is "to show what the human eye could see but not record" (Bruzzi, 11). In a way, the human eye may be allowed to see more through its ability for peripheral vision and the choice of the human, but the mechanical eye can transport the human into a different setting and show the human what the camera can see.

Still, film as a medium tricks the eye into perceiving the image as an aspect of reality and there is a certain fidelity to the real world brought upon the idea of 'recording' by capturing the life before it. As Nichols points out, "It is a powerful impression, made possible by some basic qualities of moving images in any medium" (Nichols, np). The filmic image once

compiled from frames to seconds illustrates movement that the human eye is able to interpret and understand. This appearance of movement allows the viewer to engage with the text as it has some connection with the real world in the form of basic movement.

As Bogost and Poremba point out, “We no longer possess an unwavering faith in factuality of the photographic image” (8). With regards to the photographic medium, there are no longer questions of reality as there is a general consensus of understanding that the image is a factual representation of the real. Before film, the only ‘image’ based medium was that of photography, so when movement revealed itself through film, people found it convincingly similar to their own historical world. However, as photography gradually became ‘realistic’, the film medium emerged and was questioned for its fidelity. The movement within combined frames that made up films was understandable to the audience and became an accepted form of the ‘real’ but only in the sense of ‘movement’, meaning the combination of images to produce movement were real and natural to the human eye.

Animation also realised the potential of the ‘illusion of movement’ and implemented this idea into still images that had the ability to trick the eye into believing and seeing movement instead of just a quick succession of still drawings. This trick turns a stagnant television set into a window into another world and enabled people to view more than a snapshot of life in the past or present.

In fiction, however, life is staged, the image is manipulated whether it be the actors, the staging, the props and the stories. With documentaries, the film is not a reproduction of reality, but rather a representation. As Nichols states,

> We judge a representation by the nature of pleasure it offers, the value of insight it provides, and the quality of the perspective it instils.
>
> (Nichols, np)

A representation provides a little more than a reproduction, it offers the audience, something that has not yet be discussed or shown through a new perspective created by the auteur. Documentary not only offers the reality we inhabit, it reveals that reality by representing it from an alternative view from our own. A reproduction is quite simply a duplication or replica of the historical world, whereas documentary or a representation offers more insight into the world that is more expressive and subjective than a reproduced copy. A representation provides more freedom for a filmmaker to represent the historical world in such a way that it reveals the authorial 'voice', the filmmaker's view on the subject. A representation allows for the audience to view the film in a new light and re-evaluate their predisposed understanding of the subject. With documentary there is a clear indication of the subject that exists and one is able to access the event or remains of it in their natural world. This makes documentary's image in film become 'real'.

There is some fantastical need of many documentary filmmakers and/or theorists to create and define documentary as complete and absolute realism. Filmmakers may only provide a certain amount of realism as was established in the previous discussion of cinéma vérité. Documentary films have certain characteristics that help audiences believe and interpret them. Bill Nichols refers to these as 'documentary assumptions'. There are four assumptions established by Nichols that are essential in identifying a documentary.

Four Assumptions of Documentary:

First Assumption:

The first assumption of documentaries is that they refer to or speak about real situations or events and respect known facts (Nichols, np). The world portrayed in the documentary is a referral of the real world and so new, imaginative facts and situations are not introduced. Fictional narrative, on the other hand, depends on allegory as worlds/contexts are created for the story and situation or vice versa. Documentaries, in essence, already have a predetermined story established by the historical evidence of the real world. This story is chosen by the director or writer to be recorded and the reason for choosing what story is told is essential for understanding the film itself. Here the filmmaker must provide evidence to allow the audience to access the link between the film and their recognisable world.

Certain fictional films, supposedly based on true stories or events, use the typical clause presented as text at the beginning of the film to notify the audience that this particular story has occurred within their historical world, thereby making the story seem 'real'. A recent local example is *The Bang Bang Club* (2010) film, which bases its story on the real lives of the journalist/ photography group who were active in the media portrayal of South Africa in the period between 1990 to 1994. Here the film is based on people and a period that occurred within the natural world- "based on a true story". The film relies on re-enactments and staging to represent the real. Although this film encompasses many attributes inherent in documentary filmmaking, it cannot be labelled a documentary, as a documentary does not represent a story through fakery. Fakery refers to parts of the film that are complete fiction and a story that is not relevant/ true in history. There was specific sensationalization of the story and characters that made the real become fictional. The film was a hyperbole of the Bang Bang Club and the purpose of portraying the film was to draw emotion out of the

audience, rather than inform the public of the situation. This is a typical use of fictional storytelling which goes against the documentary initiative.

There are also films that portray accurate historical events. Is *Pearl Harbor* (2001), a film based on the historical event, a documentary? According to *Rotten Tomatoes* and other critics, the film (rated 25%) lacked honour with regards to the historical facts of the actual event. There was a complete disregard for accuracy in the film, its correlation to the history of the event and minute details, including the type of bombs that fell. The film leans more towards fiction than documentary. It also introduces new imagined facts that cannot possibly be a part of documentary (Nichols,np) such as the characters who were fictional and the film tended to focus more on the emotions and love lives of the characters which drew attention away from the event itself. One could argue that the film romanticised the event with the fictional characters and love stories. This can also be said of the film *Titanic* (1997), as one would remember Jack and Rose and their love affair, rather than the historical facts of what actually happened that tragic day. The film's emotive language steered the story away from being informative and towards the tale of two lovers who could never be together in a perfect world. Documentary filmmakers focus on fact rather than fictitious speculations of what 'might have happened'. If documentary filmmakers provided speculations in their film, this would turn fact into fiction as their films do not represent and record the real world in the documentary tradition. *Pearl Harbor* uses imagined alternative storylines, focus on general human condition and disregard for the historical world which makes this film fictional. Even docu-fiction cannot be used to define the genre/mode of *Pearl Harbor* as the fiction dominates the facts. The film makes use of trained actors, who are stand-ins' for the real people who inhabit the historical world. So the first assumption of

documentary is that the film will refer and represent real events and a respectful way- meaning that these facts are not altered to follow a new story. A documentary must stay true to the facts and provide evidentiary material to substantiate claims made in the film. These facts must not be altered or changed in any way, but the facts can be represented in any way.

Second Assumption

Nichol's second assumption of documentary is the use of non-actors/real people, further proving *Pearl Harbor*'s fictional mode, as the film makes use of well known celebrity actors who do not play themselves but rather an alternative character. 'Non-actors' or 'real people' refer to people who play themselves in the film. In fiction, actors take on the role of an imagined character and act/perform in order to portray that character so to provide that character with life (Nichols, np). Once actors are finished with their surrogate roles, they return to their own lives and portray themselves. In documentary, it is imperative to present the self. There cannot be fluidity of character unless the historical world's situation determines it and it is not influenced by the filmmaker or by script. The people, who permit the filmmaker to record them, open up their real lives to the filmmaker and public. There is a certain change in their behaviour due to their own awareness of the camera, such as nervous tendencies and in particular, overacting of their own personality and character. Although these people may seem to 'perform' in front of the camera they are still legitimately acting as themselves. They are confronted with a new situation (such as being recorded) and their behaviour differs due to the new and unnatural edition of a camera within their natural world (Nichols, np). This awareness of the camera, even though it may

cause them to alter their normal behaviour slightly, also allows for more realism within the documentary as both the non-actor and audience member are aware of the lens. The filmmaker and the subject's reaction to the camera are both natural and understandable and this enhances the sense of realism.

> The division of documentary from fiction, like the division of historiography from fiction, rests on the degree to which the story fundamentally corresponds to actual situations, events, and people versus to which it is primarily a product of the filmmakers' invention.
>
> (Nichols,, np)

Reality shows may seem to exude all these characteristics of the documentary (showing the 'actual world' inhabited by non-actors), but the difference is that these shows are heavily influenced by the producers. Reality shows such as *Survivor* or *Idols* are treated as fiction (or docu-fiction) because the producers need to provide entertainment value for the audience. These people may be referred to as social actors as they are staged in predetermined roles exaggerated by the producer's script and by the influence of editing (Nichols, np). As a result, reality shows are situated between fiction and non-fiction, but can never be considered documentaries. These actors as well as the world shared by them and the audience, reveal a story that is not plausible and is staged by a producer wanting more entertainment and less reality.

Some films make it difficult to define 'documentary' in terms of its counterpart 'fiction' since both modes borrow aspects of filmmaking, storytelling and traditions from each other. Fiction uses 'continuity editing' (seamless editing - the cuts provide the illusion of real time) to masquerade the construction of the imagined story and world. Handheld cameras, nonfactors, commentary, found footage and other techniques of documentary filmmaking

have been adapted by fiction films to further push the boundary between reality and fiction. Documentaries may also adapt fictional principles such as re-enactments, performances, rehearsals and scripting. This further blurs the boundary between what is real and imagined and ultimately fiction versus documentary.

Films like *Forest Gump* (1994) rely on the very basics of documentary. The story is told chronologically through periods of time that are recognisable to the audience as the historical world. Using stock footage, the filmmaker inserts his own story into the natural historical world (Nichols, np). Forest, the main character, is superimposed and cleverly edited into stock footage to give the impression that he is part of the historical world, interacting with historical figures and events and in real life, this could have never happened but this interesting technique seems to offer the audience proof of his existence however fictional he may be This film also uses Tom Hanks to act as Forest Gump, a character that is completely fictional and alternate to his own character.

The Blair Witch Project (1999) has a similar reliance on the documentary mode as the film was shot with natural lighting, a handheld camera and uses the effect of black and white imagery. All these conventions imply 'realism' of the film. But not only did the application of the documentary tradition pertain to the film but to the other mediums that surrounded filmmaking such as the internet and websites. The filmmakers created a website that illustrated a fictional history of the story, providing false evidence for the existence of such a story in the historical world, coaxing the audiences into believing aspects of the story. The film then leaves all understanding between documentary and fiction up to suggestion (Nichols, np). The reason for this was to scare audiences, by making something tangible and real, the events become more scary because they 'exist'. The film used actors to portray the

characters in the film and each event was staged and scripted and therefore was complete fiction.

Documentary tradition can be used cleverly in fiction films as a gimmick to further the commercial needs of the film or to provide establishments of stories. Using documentary tradition does not qualify as documentary. These films do not provide fidelity to the historical world and its tangible stories and they change the understanding of the history and thereby subconsciously oppose the basics of documentary. The second assumption of documentary is the use of non actors, real people whose lives were/are affected by the event being represented.

Third Assumption

The third assumption has to do with story. With situations and real actors, comes the crux of any film: story (Nichols, np). For a film to be classified as a documentary, the story of the film must have occurred or be occurring. The story must have evidence and be a representation rather than an inventive interpretation of what may have transpired (Nichols, np). The story must be represented in such a way that it retains respectable fidelity to the real story.

Documentaries provoke 'discourses of sobriety', as they find ways of speaking directly about the historical and social world (Nichols, np). Documentaries can focus on any story that pertains to issues or events within the historical world but these representations must respect the characteristics of the documentary tradition as these are the roots for any documentary film. Documentaries are a form of informal education, recording our world

from a different perspective and revealing the world to better our understanding of the situation/subject and expand our interest which may result in the audience taking action. Ellis argues that the purpose of documentary is to extract what is already there (by recording) and arranging this to fulfil the vision and intentions of the filmmaker (2).

Fourth Assumption

Nichols argues that the fourth assumption pertains to the audience. Assumptions audience members bring to documentary are that:

> ...individual shots and sounds, perhaps even scenes and sequences, will bear a highly indexical relationship to the events they represent, but that the film as a whole will go beyond being a mere document or record of these events to offer a perspective on them (Nichols, np)

Indexical quality is another important element to documentary. Nichols argues that "The indexical quality of an image refers to the way in which its appearance is shaped or determined by what it records" (np). The content and story of the documentary will determine the form of representation. Indexical quality refers to how this film came to be, the real documented aspects of the film and the stories the film created and vice versa. This means that the indexical quality of an image is the relationship between what was filmed to the film itself, the relationship between the film and the reality is what indexical quality refers to. The audience is able to understand the relationship between what is filmed and the film itself, because over the years, the understanding of documentary has become easier to recognise and categorise. As Bruzzi argues,

> ...the spectator is not in need of signposts and inverted commas to understand that a documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other.
>
> (Bruzzi, 4)

Audiences are able to identify documentaries and distinguish them from other modes such as fiction, without having to delve into film theory. The world that is represented is the historical world which the spectator inhabits. A connection is drawn by the realism of the representation, and an understanding of limited reality between the film and the spectator is created. This allows filmmakers to put forward their own views of the world and to project their intentions by making films in a certain way.

> Documentaries stimulate epistephilia (a desire to know) in their audiences. At their best, they convey an informing logic, a persuasive rhetoric, and a moving poetics that promises information and knowledge, insight and awareness (Nichols, np).

This 'absolute desire' that Nichols refers to, does not only provide indexical quality, but reveals something unknown or an alternative view of the historical world, educate the audience on this chosen subject and offer a solution or stand. Though the documentary may seem to be a passive 'discourse of sobriety', its influence affects an active audience. This does not mean that documentaries are so influential that the spectator loses control but rather that the audience member is informally educated about something in their own historical world and they therefore have the choice whether or not to look into that subject once the film has ended.

To recap on defining the documentary, documentaries can be said to be records originating from the medium of film that try not only to record the historical world as it is, but to also

inform the audience of their own world through substantial facts and evidence. The amount of realism within documentary is limited to the medium that utilizes the genre of documentary. Within the documentary genre, there are essential guidelines that must be followed in order to provide documentary quality. As stated by Michael Renov, there are four rhetorical and aesthetic functions attributable to documentary practice (27). These four are as follows:

1. to record, preserve, or reveal (to document reality as it stands)
2. to persuade or promote (persuade or promote a certain fidelity to the historical world)
3. to analyse or interrogate (to delve deeper into the issues and try come to an understanding of how the occurrence came to be)
4. to express (here the filmmaker makes their mark in the film, allowing for the filmmakers own views-the voice- to filter through the film) (Renov, 21-25).

These four functions tie in with Nichol's assumptions as they all contribute to the meaning of documentary. Documentaries need to engage all these aspects as they are essential to the evaluation of the mode. Documentaries must stick to undisputed and substantial facts. To increase the realism of these films techniques such as handheld cameras, the use of natural lighting, archival and found footage, black and white imagery (a convention built upon historical stock footage, surveillance cameras and home movies) , interviews, jump cuts and montage need to be employed (Nichols, np).

Nichols' Six Modes of Documentary

Bill Nichols created a set of six principal modes to classify the different types of documentaries. These modes can be called sub-genres of the documentary genre and are all based on films that have been labelled 'documentary'. Not only are these modes essential in the discussion of documentary but Ian Bogost, the gaming theorist, also refers to these modes and adapts them to the medium and genre of documentary games. Many theorists and filmmakers have embraced these modes and some films have followed the conventions and specifics of these modes down to a tee. Yet there are some flaws that make these modes seem contradictory and weak. Bruzzi argues that the modes are redundant as each mode can only be understood by what it is not in relation to the other modes (2). The categorisation of these modes also limits documentaries as they must abide by the conventions set up by obsolete and outdated labels which were based on periodic movements (2). Nichols extracted these modes from existing documentaries, named and explained them.

Expository mode

The first mode is the expository mode, referring to documentaries that rely on argumentative logic from verbal commentary or text. An example of this mode is similar to the technique used by the typical televised news that holds a facade of being objective and straight forward. Robert Faherty's film, *Nanook of the North* can be considered an expository documentary as it makes use of observation and narration- the audience is dependent on the 'voice of God' to guide them through the story. However, journalism and news reporting such as CNN and Sky News, cannot be considered as documentary as they report on a script influenced by media and producers. Documentaries are alternative to news reporting and provide an antithesis to the thesis provided by mass media.

Observational mode

The observational mode makes use of a technique referred to as the 'fly-on-the-wall' whereby the camera seems hidden and is the unobtrusive yet voyeuristic as the subject is presumably unaware of the camera's presence. *High School,* although considered to be cinéma vérité, can also be considered an observational documentary, however, the story is not prominent and there is a lack of the filmmaker's voice.

Participatory mode

The participatory mode refers to the interaction between the filmmaker and the subject, for example in interviews or conversations and couples these conventions with archival footage.

Reflexive mode

The reflexive mode is when the filmmaking process is exposed. There is an "awareness of the constructedness of the films representation of reality" (Nichols, np). This type of documentary not only records the subject of the documentary, but the process of recording. The film brings attention to itself and therefore creates an augmented reality.

Poetic mode

The poetic mode is highly interpretive, dealing with the historical world in a metaphorical way. Unlike fiction it consists of visual associations, poetic rhythms and is more personal and experimental in form and style. *Waltz With Bashir* (2008), directed by Ari Folman, is a poetic documentary as it represents the Lebanon War (1982) through animation- the purpose of the animation is to reconstruct the images set out by real interviews.

Performative mode

The performative mode is subjective and expressive, it has a social impact on the audience and deals with opinions and content. This mode can be identified in animations like the *Battle 360* series broadcasted on the History Channel. The animation in the series, ironically enough, has the look and simulation of a video game (Nichols, np).

> The technology here is responsible for simulation of the same elements found in nature, but without the presence of a material device (the camera) at the place of the events.
>
> (Martins, 1)

The filmmaker's choice to use animation was motivated by the content of the film, an animator in search of his role model. The recorded interviews provide voice over's and a soundtrack for the film and also act as evidence allowing the audience to find correlation between this constructed animated world and their own historical world.

The Animated Documentary

Some documentaries may use re-enactments as a *simulation* of an event especially when documenting an event using a different medium. Re-enactments may come in the form of animations or actors acting out situations. The animated film *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) is considered an animated documentary, even though the entire film is based on re-enactments of battles and events. The events are told by real people through interviews conducted by the filmmaker and thus interpreted and represented through animation. The interviews make the animation and story plausible. Live footage at the end of the film presents even more evidence, forcing the audience to believe that these events, people and the world exist/ed.

Some people may see representation as highly subjective, which contradicts the aspect of realism that the documentary tradition strives for. According to Stella Bruzzi, within documentary there seems to be an "eternal conflict between objectivity and subjectivity" (Bruzzi, 7). Documentary's 'objectivity' always comes into question when people view it as a constructed medium that is directed by a filmmaker with their choice of camerawork that is edited and then distributed by an influential institution. Certainly, these factors come into play. What exactly is objective? Everything that you, as an individual, see, hear and speak contains certain amounts of subjectivity, as you interpret the signs and signals that come to you and your delivery of these is also subjectively.

With documentary "any manipulation of images/sound is confined to what is required to make recording possible" (Ellis, 3). The filming process can be seen as a form of manipulation and may contain some subjectivity to accompany the objectivity, but this should not avert the realism away from the medium. Some sacrifices to realism have to be made in order to capture the world. As Bruzzi points out, "truth comes into being only at the moment of filming". Filming provides an element of truth of its own, sometimes the non-actors are influenced by the camera, the camera is aware of itself- with the handheld technique and the addressing of the audience the camera brings attention to itself no matter how observant the film claims to be.

Animated documentary films are still contested as their authenticity comes into question when all elements of the historical world are completely reconstructed. Some see animations as mere reproductions of the historical world. India Mara Martins provides his own view on the animated documentary and its purpose in choosing animation as its medium for representation:

> The animated documentary may be defined as a film of real situations and facts recorded with electronic support utilized as a basis for subsequent intervention with animation that is often computer generated.
>
> (Martins, 1)

Martin expresses that documentaries are not just re-enactments, but due to their medium, are also highly poetic and expressive in their representation. They are authentic as they use genuine recordings and documents of the historical world within their films. Animated documentaries films are usually extremely personal and therefore animation as an artistic representation works well for the documentary mode. Brian Winston, a leading theorist of documentary and ethics argues:

> It is not hard to imagine that every documentarist will shortly, have at hand, in the form of a desktop-personal-video-image-manipulating computer, the wherewithal for complete fakery
>
> (Winston, 4)

Here Winston expresses concern for documentary in a culture that grows with technology. 'Fakery' refers to documentaries that are not true to the world they represent and there are no relative aspects of the film to reality. There are issues with digital generated images and films. Winston argues that documentary is doomed to fail as the filmmaker's vision to expand contaminates idealised reality (Winston, 4).However, reality of an image is determined by its referral, and so the event, subject and story must be completely accurate for realism to occur- and so a computer generated representation of the event can pass for reality. Pure reality through this medium and any other that follows is idealistic and extremist and can never be achieved. There must be realism within the boundaries set up by the medium, which is demonstrated by Martins:

> The animated documentary may be defined as a film of real situations and facts recorded with electronic support utilized as a basis for subsequent intervention with animation that is often computer generated.
>
> (Martins, 328)

An example of such a documentary is the film *Ryan* (2004), directed and animated by Chris Landreth, focuses on the life of the filmmaker's life-long role model Ryan Larkin who influences Landreth to follow his career path. The film is a "virtual representation of an event that took place in the historical world" (Martins, 327). The filmmaker influences the categorisation of the film and with *Ryan,* Landreth categorises his film as an animated documentary. The documentary depicts Larkin's current state of alcoholism and drug degradation. This animated film is proven to be a documentary as it encompasses all documentary attributes except it substitutes live action for animation. The representation of animation is vital as it is the subject of the documentary that refers to it. The film is practically disproves Brian Winston's accusations of technology altering reality- the reality is the event, the people, and the story (as Nichols pointed out earlier), the representation can vary and be open as long as it stays in the boundaries stipulated by the documentary tradition.

The most common assumption of documentary films is that they represent a plausible world that is recognisable by the audience as it is not imagined by the filmmaker/ scriptwriter. Real people represent themselves and the story has historical credibility. The purpose of creating these films can vary as some choose to informally educate the audience and others may even try persuading the audience to embrace a different opinion whereas some documentaries may go as far as to initiate action within the audience member. Now that

documentary has been established in the film medium to the point that the typical audience member can recognize its form, other mediums such as animation and gaming have adopted this mode and are using the documentary mode in many new and exciting ways of representation. This way of though and progression of representation is evident in Nichols statement: “The emergence of these new digital forms typically represents something akin to a process of cross-pollination with the documentary tradition” (Nichols, np). Digital forms are expanding and growing due to the progressive nature of technology. Only in the recent decade has the ‘documentary game’ emerged to form a new hybridized version of this mode. The mode of documentary seems to stray and find new mediums for representation, first film, radio and literature tested it or a while, then animation altered it to fit its medium, and now, most recently video games (particularly computer games).

In an interview with acclaimed documentary filmmaker, Peter Wintonick, he describes the contemporary documentary:

...there is hybridisation of the forms -- doc-comedies, web docs, animated documentaries -- so we may think we're talking about the truth and all those ethical things documentaries used to talk about, but we're transforming the idea of pursuit of truth into all these other platforms. We aren't making films for one screen anymore. (Wintonick 1)

Documentaries are opening up to various mediums to further explore different forms of documenting and storytelling. The basic definition and function of documentary is sound but the form is transforming to accommodate demand and exploration. A new medium has adapted the mode of documentary, namely video games.

Chapter 2

The videogame medium is a new mode of representation, allowing for a fresh platform for creativity to flourish and evolve. Videogames have been closely associated with film as it has borrowed many techniques from this medium, in particular, documentary as a genre of videogames. The popularity of the growing medium is revealed by Mark Wolf, film and videogame theorist:

"In less than four decades videogames have gone from simple bouncing block graphics to a global industry of enormous proportions" (Wolf, 2008, 1). The videogame industry has grown remarkably, making a record $12.5 billion in 2006 alone (1). This medium has flourished due to rapid technological advancements, consumer demand and other media influences. Grant Tavinor explains that "digital artists and craftspeople have explored the artistic potential of this new medium and are now producing results arguably equal to the other representational arts" (Tavinor, 1). Videogames have evolved from a purely entertainment based medium to a new and ranged art form. Offering visual and aural stimulation, interactivity and a window to an alternative world, the videogame is seen as a new medium for artistic expression.

Tavinor states that "defining gaming is like defining art" (16). Unfortunately like art, differences in opinion on the meaning of the concept makes it difficult to define. Although videogames are closely associated with cinema; Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer point out that "videogames arose from the histories of recreational play and computing", (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 63). Jesper Juul states that there is much debate around whether to define videogames with the roots of traditional gaming in mind, or through electronic/digital

games (Juul, 4). By having both these roots in mind, one is able to come to a complete understanding of videogames and their functions, because without traditional games and the idea of 'play', one cannot find meaning in the idea of play within videogames. A focus on traditional games (non electronic games) is essential to establish why these video games are referred to as 'games' and not just interactions. In traditional games, the object is to 'play'.

Play

Brian Sutton-Smith, in Mary Flanagan's book *Critical Play*, a renowned anthropologist specializing in the idea of 'play', states that 'play' is referred to as "an activity that is fun, voluntary, intrinsically motivated, incorporates free choices/free will, offers escape, and is fundamentally exciting" (Flanagan, 4). 'Play' is pure escapism, an activity that allows for a momentary relapse and relief from the natural world we occupy. It is an activity offering entertainment, an opportunity to learn and provides a stimulation of creativity as Johan Huizinga assumes that "all art derives from 'play'" (Flanagan, 8). Sutton argues that "play is the way children work out social and cultural norms" (Flanagan, 5). Learning is a huge result of playing as it offers entertainment as a disguise to teach. Whether it is hand-eye coordination or lessons learned, play offers the opportunity to inform the participant. Mary Flanagan says that 'play' offers challenges that are bound by rules of the activity that must be abided by, which are rarely fought and are accepted when entering into 'play' (5) and that "play is recognised as one of the most fundamental aspects of the human condition" (4). Playing allows the human race to break away from natural life and dive inside play spaces, where people are able to experience real stakes where play may be taken seriously as in gambling and sports. There is also a sense of community through multiple players who bond through the common activity of 'play'.

Johan Huizinga focused on adult play and famously coined the term “magic circle” which refers to a space separated and closed off from the real world marked out for play (5).

> Games, functioning as an ordering logic- a machine, or a technology- for creating social relations, work to distill or abstract the everyday actions of the players into easy-to-understand instruments where context is defamiliarized just enough to allow Huizinga’s magic circle of play to manifest.
>
> (Flanagan, 9)

The magic circle is where the game space lies, a subset of the natural world. A diagram example of the magic circle was formulated by Jesper Juul in his book *half real* (165):

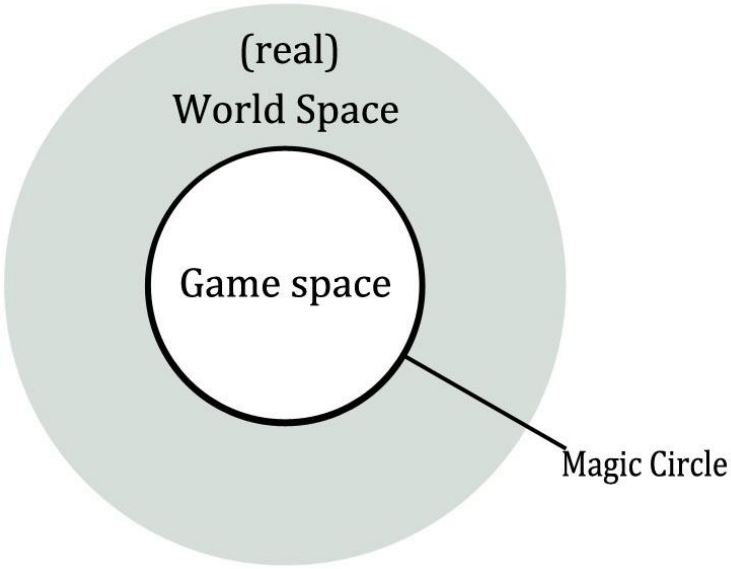


Figure 2.1- Practical idea of Johan Huizinga’s Magic Circle from *Half Real* by Jesper Juul.

The magic circle helps separate the play from the real. With video games, the magic circle is clearly demarcated by the screen, controller, or input device.

According to Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, play can manifest in three instances:

1. Game play- playing that is restricted or refined by a set of game rules and understands the system of the game by doing so. (Salen and Zimmerman, 303).
2. Ludic Activities- *ludus* is the Latin word for play. This includes games/ game play and other playful behaviours such as tossing a ball against the wall and catching it (303).
3. Being Playful- being playful can refer to word play, making something ironic, common actions/ behaviours are played with (303).

Now under the idea of Ludic Activities, Salen and Zimmerman outline anthropologist Roger Caillois' model used to organise form of play (307). Caillois' model uses the idea of Salen and Zimmerman's definition of play being a "free movement with a more rigid structure", as it stays in that frame of understanding (304).

	Paida	**Ludus**
Agôn (Competition)	Unregulated athletics (foot racing, wrestling)	Boxing, Billiards, Fencing, Checkers, Football, Chess
Alea (Chance)	Counting-out rhymes	Betting, Roulette, Lotteries
Mimicry (Simulation)	Children's initiations, masks, disguises	Theater, spectacles in general
Ilinx (Vertigo)	Children "whirling," Horseback riding, Waltzing	Skiing, Mountain climbing, Tightrope walking

Figure 2.2: Roger Caillois' model used to categorise various forms of play taken from Salen and Zimmerman's text *Rules of Play* (308).

Caillois' model provides an outline to help assess the types of experiences offered/ results in various play activities such as playing games. Although the categorisation seems vast, perhaps a computer game could embody a lot of Agôn (competition) but lack a certain amount of Alea (chance) and so the insertion of another play form, could help 'spice' up the game to create a more dynamic play experience for the player.

Salen and Zimmerman refer to games as a "subset of play", which means that play can come in any form and games rely on the element of play (303).

Games

David Parlett, a game historian states that many languages do not distinguish between 'play' and 'games' as they have the same definition (Salen and Zimmerman, 77). An advantage of the English language and an assistant to this report, we shall investigate what games are in relation to play. In a complex relationship investigation, Salen and Zimmerman state that on the one hand, games are just a subset of play, and on the other hand, play is a part of gaming (73). Play's relationship alters with gaming, revealing to us that not only is it a larger umbrella term for gaming, simple activities and other forms of play, but can also be under game's components- its status is shifting from a large term to small term depending on the use of the term. Mary Flanagan states that nowadays games "refer to those instances of more-or-less constructed scenarios" (Flanagan, 6). Play is more 'free flow' on its own, and with games, there is a certain amount of structure and rule application. With games, the objective is clear, initially stipulated and a goal is determined. This goal can cause competitiveness which may make a game fun or more serious as a player tries to proceed to the end point of the game and determination overrules entertainment. Games, according to Greg Costikyan, are non-linear as they depend on the player's decision making, which

influences alternatives that become plausible due to the cause and effect aspect of these choices and decisions (Flanagan, 7). This may be disputed as rules can 'guide' decisions in a certain direction and limit non-linearity- this would have been predetermined by the game's design (7). There is also a distinguishable difference between puzzles and games. Puzzles demand logic and problem solving skills, and games (although they too require logic and problem solving skills), can evolve as rules shift and alter through a player's choice of actions (7).

Karen Salen and Eric Zimmerman refer to games as "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, which results in a quantifiable outcome (Salen; Zimmerman, 81). They outline six key concepts of games: the game as a system, its artificiality, the fact that it has players, conflict, it has rules, and it has a quantifiable outcome/goal, an ending state in which players can either be considered the "winner/s" or the "loser/s" (Flanagan, 7).

In figure 2.10, Jesper Juul displays the classification of games and what criteria would constitute games to be classic games and how they can be considered 'not games'.

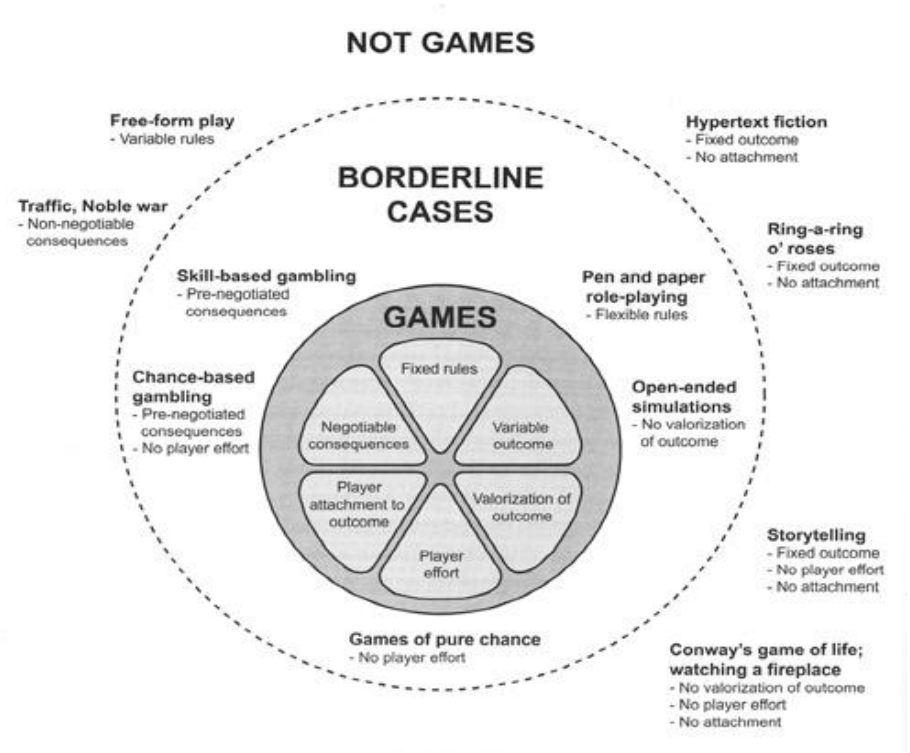


Figure 2.3: Jesper Juul's classification of games and other activities in his text *Half Real*.

The criteria is based similarly on Salen and Zimmerman's six concepts and the 'not games' seem to fall under the realm of just 'play'.

Video games exhibit all the factors of 'play' and 'games'. Traditional games, although simplistic, are still strong roots for gaming and today traditional games are converted into digital form and can be played as videogames against other human players or the artificial intelligence developed to stand as opponents or allies for the game. So what exactly is a *video*game and why is it so different from a traditional non-digital game? How has come to establish itself as a new medium separate from any other?

Defining 'videogame'

According to Mark J. Wolf, the definition of the term 'videogames' can be determined by the technology used to develop the medium, which has been ultimately used to influenced the terminology. Even though we have determined what 'game' stands for, the term 'video' requires some understanding and identification. 'Video' first stood for the analog brightness signal presented on a CRT (cathode raytube), a picture tube contained within a computer monitor or television set which produced raster-based imagery (Wolf, 4). Ralph Baer created *The Magnavox Odyssey* (released in 1972), the first home game system that utilized television sets as its main display device. This game system was referred to as a 'video game' as its primary image display was on a television set.

> So while video games began as games played on a television screen with raster imagery, advances in imaging technologies, the porting and adapting of game titles to hardware with a variety of imaging technologies, and commercial marketing which tends to use the term video game to describe all of these things have resulted in a broad, popular definition of the term, the boundaries of which remain as blurred as ever as new software and hardware continue to appear.
>
> (Wolf, 7)

As technology progressed and transformed, so did graphics, and a shift came when vector graphics were introduced. Vector graphics use a different signal and method of producing screen imagery and although they are different from raster-based graphics, they fell into the same terminology of 'videogames' (5). Different imaging technology was released later on with LCD (liquid crystal display) and LED (light emitting diode) which influenced questions raised about whether these types of electronic/ digital games should be referred to as

*video*games (5). Some called these types of games *computer* games as they depended on a microprocessor. But by the mid 1980s, the general term to describe this medium was *video*games influenced by its historical referral and the companies that controlled the marketing of such games (Wolf, 5). Theoretically, some may attempt to dispute the term *video* but the majority agree on the term, videogames. For the purpose of this paper and to follow in the majority of understanding, these types of games will be referred to as videogames.

"There is a lack of concern to define video games" (Tavinor, 16) .Finding a concrete definition of videogames is difficult and explaining the medium even more so. As implied above with the history of the word 'video', theorists differ on whether the games should be referred to as video, computer digital or electronic games which diverts attention away from producing a sound definition of these games and reaching a consensus on this matter seems impossible. "Video gaming is essentially a manner in which these traditional forms of entertainment have been implemented in a new technologically derived medium" (Tavinor, 29). Videogaming was derived from and influenced by other media. From photography, literature, radio and theatre, film adapted many techniques such as storytelling, filming, producing, sound and others to fully access the public demand. Like film, videogames have adapted this 'borrowing' technique. Using aspects of sound, visuals, introductory narrative shorts and storytelling techniques, the influence of film on the new medium is very prominent.

> X is a video game if only it is an artefact in a visual digital medium, is intended as an object of entertainment, and is intended to provide such entertainment through the employment of either rule and objective game play or interactive fiction. (Tavinor, 32)

A personal attempt will be made to define videogames based on the information provided above and from a collection of theorists. Videogames started out as (arguably) a console system and are essentially digital in form. There is a certain input required to *play* the games and obtain entertainment value out of the game. The player is bound by a set of rules that must be abided by and followed in order to reach the objective stipulated when first entering the game. The videogame requires a certain kind of skill, which must be mastered in order to progress in the game world and provides learning and development for the player. Once the objective is reached or not through the players' ability to fight the virtual conflict, a reward of 'winning' or 'losing' respectively provides the player with a type of satisfaction. Rules sometimes 'limit player action' (Salen, Zimmerman; 9) but Juul says that although they may seem like limiting aspects of game play, rules just help the player stay in the design of the game and therefore enables certain affordances. They may limit actions but are not limitless. They offer much of what the objective asks for and side aspects that allow for more game play and freedom (Juul, 58).

Every videogame includes certain aspects of the traditional game (board game, chess) in some way or another except it is the computer/processor that keeps score, generates game play and personifies itself by controlling the oppositional forces, "becoming a participant or referee" (Wolf, 3). It became its own medium as it grew, providing a platform for genres to develop and this development was rapid in comparison to its other medium counterparts. Going back to printing press which has a long history, television's history dates back to one hundred years, and videogames has a history of only forty years, making video games one of the youngest mediums around (Juul, 3).

History

Mark J. Wolf provides a history for video games in his book *The Video Game Explosion*.

- He states that videogames began in 1958 with William Higinbotham's *Tennis for Two* where on-screen game play was controlled interactively.
- *Spacewar!* was created in 1962 on a mainframe computer at MIT. This inspired Nolan Bushnell to create the *Computer Space* game in 1971.
- Ralph Baer then writes his theories on playing interactive games on television sets in 1966. His theory transpired into the practical game *Magnavox Odyssey* in 1972.
- In the same year Nolan Bushnell's second game *PONG* materializes in the arcade and it is argued by many to be the first video game (xvii).
- The arcade industry flourishes from here, and many companies begin developing arcade games (1973). Games begin to develop with technology, having the ability to be stored on ROM chips, use microprocessors.
- Just when the game industry starts blooming, in 1977, the gaming industry crashes. Consoles are suddenly released (Atari's VCS and Nintendo) open up the industry once again. The early 1980's were the age of the arcade and console games, the industry boomed.
- Another crash occurred and a reinvention of the medium began with experimentation of laserdiscs that proved to be innovative but impractical due to the expensive nature of the technology.
- Nintendo Entertainment System in America revives the industry once again by releasing games such as *Super Mario Bros.*(1985) which in essence becomes one of

the best sellers of all time. *Tetris* is released in the same year, another ground breaking game.

- *Driller* (1986) accomplishes 3D graphics in the home computer. *Assault* (1988) uses a 32-bit processor for the first time in gaming.
- In 1989, arcade games come back in a big way with *Hard Drivin'* and *S.T.U.N. Runner.*
- The first game to use digitized imagery for its backgrounds is *Exterminator.*
- In the same year consoles reduce in size to the handheld Nintendo Game Boy and Atari's Lynx (Wolf, xviii).
- In 1990 *SimCity* comes out which leads to a big following and consumption.
- *Final Fantasy II* is also released in the same year (xix). More computer, console and arcade games are released further improved by technological advancements as well as growing demand for evolution of games.
- In 1994 Sony Playstation is released in Japan and later in America in 1995. In 2001, Xbox by Microsoft has released a competition for Playstation.
- *The Sims* in 2002 overtakes *Myst* (1993) as the best selling game of all time.
- This year, the online gaming industry has flourished with Xbox. The Nokia cell phone company has moved towards gaming by creating the N-Gage handheld video game system.
- Nintendo Wii, a breakthrough in home interactivity was released along with Playstation 3 in 2006.
- In 2007 *World Of Warcraft* was recorded to have approximately nine million players worldwide (xxi).
- Android and other tablet/cell phone software were released in 2007 providing applications of games that are easily accessible and downloadable. These systems

also gave the users of the software chances to make simple game applications to sell.

- More computer games and consoles are being released feeding off their previous success.

Film versus Videogames

Mark Wolf states that "as video game graphics increase in resolution and rendering speed, and film and television move into the digital realm, the gap between them continues to close" (6). Film and television are very similar to video games as they are both audiovisual mediums with narrative techniques, escapism ideals and embedded video clips. However there are significant differences that help one distinguish between the two mediums.

Video games require interactivity (input based system to cause a reaction) and a more active role in playing, whereas with film, the role is that of a spectator and not a player. Film requires a more passive role of engagement. In video games, instead of watching, the player must act and react accordingly, providing more input to the events that occur through the game. Wolf refers to the player as a 'surrogate character', able to control (to a certain extent) the actions of the character (Wolf, 2).

Unlike film's spectator, the player in games must become attuned to the setup of the games, its design and algorithms in order to achieve success (Wolf, 2). Games consist of a certain formula: conflict, rules, player ability and valued outcome. Each of these are quite straight forward; the player is presented with a conflict/problem. They follow a set of rules stipulated by the game and its world. They need to have the necessary skills developed by

the game in order to achieve the outcome/ goal which can be anything from simple to complicated.

Many games make use of the film and literary technique of narrative to help the player feel more like a participant than just merely interacting. Games such as the *Medal of Honor* series incorporate narrative in the game to keep the player interested and engaged and therefore more immerged in the world the game has created. (The narrative is usually extradiegetic- "Games adapted from movies, television shows, novels, comic books, or other sources have the advantage of referring to a diegetic world in another medium that may already be familiar to the player" (Wolf, 101). Here I tend to agree with Wolf, but would like to take it further and say that during the time that digital games were being developed and evolved, everything became a referral to something, everything became intertextual. In a sense, nothing is original, it is a copy of something of the past; with the era of postmodernism comes a new post- post modernity in which everything seems to refer to something that has already been referred to. This reflects post modernism as a whole, not only the digital game medium (101).

Narrative and Genre

Narrative in the case of video games emerges before the start of the game, with mainstream videogames typically opening when a back-story is revealed in the form of a video clip/ animated sequence and the player gets an idea of the established world, the objective and their surrogated character. Whereas with film, the back-story is implied through character, dialogue and action the digital game immerses the player right into the general digital game leaving nothing to implication. Games contain limited animation, rendering and processing speed, little memory and limited graphics. Wolf argues that

videogames rely on extradiegetic narration as the story needs more explanation that cannot be exposed with through interactivity, this is to compensate for limited graphics and processing speed (Wolf, 103). Although this view of Wolf's is very outdated it holds true in a later discussion in the research report of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* where the graphics, sounds and basic design are minimal and actually add to the narrative as it takes focus away from the design and forces the player to divulge themselves in the narrative.

According to Wolf, "it would seem that interactivity and a predetermined story would work against each other" (107). Wolf outlines one of the questions of this report, questioning how an event, that already occurred and that is embedded in the player's memory, is still played through and meets expectations of surprise and emergence into this digital world. Wolf states that although during play there is knowledge of the predetermined world, the player still has a need to reach goals within the videogame world. The linear narrative assists the illusion of a development of time within the world, but the videogame can also break linearity as it uses repetitive strategies to enforce a need for success and achievement of a goal. In a videogame, you may replay a stage until all requirements for passing the stage have been met and this repetitiveness breaks the linearity. Although the fate of the videogame may seem predetermined, the programming and design of the videogame allows for alternative shifts of the story, and alternative outcomes (109). The narrative changes and shifts at times, as situations change and the level of difficulty changes. Thus the mindset of the player continually shifts to accommodate new game play and issues. "As the size, complexity and graphical capabilities of video games grow, their diegetic worlds' grow larger and more detailed, allowing for greater potential for storytelling"(110).

Independent scholar on games and literature, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that narrative in the digital comes in three basic designs. The embedded story is the first design whereby the player is a member of the interactive world, but their impact on the story to change or alter is minimal (Ryan, 267). The emergent story is basically the opposite of the embedded story as the player is not a member of the world, but can control many members of the world and their actions, therefore altering the story (269). The interactive drama is the third design, where the first two designs are combined to produce a prescripted, yet variable story (272). An example of the interactive drama can be the *Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011) or *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), where the player is a specific character but has influence over the game's course as they are able to choose certain paths and therefore altering the narrative. These are two role playing games but many genres of videogames can incorporate this amalgamation of narratives into their games.

Videogame genres differ from literary, film and television genres, as they demand "direct and active...participation of the audience" (Wolf, 259). As with most genres, games are categorized by their content, i.e. war or racing genre and both the mode of play and content determine the genre and conventions. This makes the determination of genre a little blurred especially when these genres are mixed into one videogame (Wolf, 159). As with most mediums, genres expand, evolve and engage with others to form completely new genres and ideas making the identification of genres interesting to depict and accept. There are many genres in the videogame medium, each one determined by the objective, the type of game play and the companies that market these products. An example of a specific genre is the 'adventure' genre which is a videogame set in a 'world' connected by different rooms and the objective is not simple and quite laborious to figure out and achieve (261). The main

objective is not to shoot but to rather discover things to further your character's path to finish the goal. Another genre is 'platform' games which have a primary objective to move through a sequence of levels and this movement may involve climbing, running jumping and other types of locomotion (273).

Role playing games are seen as both a mode and genre of video games. A role playing game (RPG) usually consists of a fantastical quest (273). The movement required can differ but it is mostly based on exploration, problem solving and small battles to reach objectives that bring one closer to the goal. The game is usually viewed from the top with a third person character being controlled although with contemporary videogames, the RPG has incorporated the view of first person (a point of view of the character is allowed). An example of the typical RPG game would be *Dragon Age* (2009) and *World of Warcraft* (2004), which is a massively multiplayer online role playing game enabling people all over the world to connect to the videogame and interact with specific characters and progress through skills acquired in the game.

Super Columbine Massacre RPG (2005) the documentary game case study I will be unravelling later contains all the genres mentioned: adventure and platform but the role playing game is its most prominent focus.

From Entertainment to Reality

David Myers argues that videogames and "all forms of play transmit a self-referential message: *this is play* or alternatively, *this is not real*" (Myers, 46). With videogames it may seem that the only reason to play is to escape the world in which we live in. Although most videogames apply this need for escapism, some games reject the notion of pure

entertainment and amalgamate it with content that we recognise to be the real world or a representation of the real world. Videogames are changing in their content and design. This may be due to the demand of the players themselves. David Skelly points out that "the average game 'player' is now 33 years old and has been playing games for 12 years" (Perron & Wolf, xiii). Video gaming has been growing alongside its players, and the game designers and players are taking this growth and maturity into consideration. Lars Konzak argues that "game worlds should not be simple, fanciful ideas without any real content" (Perron &Wolf, 33). Games are being produced where the objective is more than just finishing/completing an objective but to learn more about the world outside of the 'magic circle' and, sometimes, not reaching the games objective may be the main objective. Take for instance the video game *Kabul Kaboom* (2001) by Gonzalo Frasca. The player plays a mother who must move to avoid bombs. In this game, burgers also fall down but they do not provide the character with any points or sustenance. The object of the game is to avoid the bombs, but there are no rewards for surviving, no levelling up and no real point to playing the game because if hit by the bomb, the character dies and the game is over. This game comments on the irony of the US and Afghanistan war where the United States bombed areas in Afghanistan whilst simultaneously dropped food and health packages. Adding to the irony is the fact that these packages dropped from planes, also end up destroying houses and small buildings. The game comments on the fact that the inhabitants of Afghanistan, like the character has no chance of survival. Although the food is purported to sustain the people it doesn't serve the purpose. The objective of the game is to teach people about the war and comment on society outside of the world that the game 'created'. This game is referred to as a 'political' video game by Frasca.

Mary Flanagan uses another term to describe these types of games: 'critical play'. Critical play is "a careful examination of social, cultural, political, or even personal themes that function as alternatives to popular play spaces" (Flanagan, 6). These types of games question the world we live in, human life and aspects of life we struggle to communicate or are oblivious to (6). These types of critical play games may be called **serious games, games for change and/or social impact games**. Flanagan outlines the definition of 'serious games' to be educational games concerned with content/ experiences usually represented within the film or literary mediums and that the concern is not revolving primarily around entertainment but more towards the serious content being played out (Flanagan, 243). 'Games for change' or 'social impact games' are games that address issues within the socio-political economic realm. These games address real world problems or alternative views and focus on the educational value of the game by representing unconventional issues that other media/mediums may have consciously or unconsciously refused to explore. In accordance with Flanagan's definition, documentary games definitely fall into the category of 'games for change'/'social impact games' as they refer to real issues pertaining to the natural real world we live in. Documentary games also fall under the notion of 'serious games' as they use the film's idea of documentary and the way the issue is played out and they draw upon serious content.

'Critical play' refers to 'avant- game design' whereby certain games propose alternative ideas of play and rework contemporary practices of game design and play (Flanagan, 2). It is a critical engagement with the videogame focusing on design or content or both. These games offer not only awareness of real life situations but also comment on them through their representation and design. They can be described as a subversion of commercial

games and therefore deemed avant-garde. They experiment with game play and design and do not allow for simple game play. The player is asked to question the game and its content and formulate an interpretation and opinion. 'Playing' and interacting allows for deeper issues to be addressed and forces the player to be one with the action and allows the issues to directly address and influence the player.

Ian Bogost uncovers the notions around 'serious games' and the persuasive power games have to offer. "Games display text, images, sounds and video, but they also so much more: *games simulate how things work* by constructing models that people can interact with, a capacity Bogost has given the name *procedural rhetoric*"(Bogost, 6). Ian Bogost uses the term 'procedural rhetoric' (which is limited in his definition to computer based games but can apply to all games), whereby 'procedural' refers to processes that delineate the way in which things function. The 'rhetoric' refers to expression that may be influential. Together the 'procedural rhetoric' is a "practice of using processes persuasively" (Bogost, 3). His research has also been based on serious games including documentary games and more specifically the videogame *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*. Many of types of these specific games makes use of 'mods', which enable the developers/designers relief in designing a whole new game and could use a preset game and alter it for their own use.

Videogame 'mods' are types of videogames that differ from mainstream videogames are usually independent/experimental games and resort to using modulations (mods) of other commercial games (Wolf, 197). Brody Condon who has been quite an expert in using mods argues that "game mods were rapidly evolving into a new populist art form" (Mirapaul, 4). These videogames are usually distributed through free internet downloads and are easily accessible. Their main platform is the computer as its access to the internet and the creation

of the videogames is a lot easier. Mods "have this immediately accessible tool for cultural criticism, and it has an immediate method of dissemination which is the internet" (Mirapaul, 2). The graphics are usually poor or low quality if independently made but this is due to the focus of the game. The game designer is not looking to make an impact through graphics but rather through the content of the game. The game usually defies the conventions of the classic videogame so as to divert attention to the content and message of the game. The idea is still to 'play' and through this, the player is able to learn and develop an understanding and formulate an interpretation through such interactivity. At times both the content and message portrayed in the videogame are controversial and a taboo in society.

"Video games, like film and television, are sometimes criticized for having too much violence and sex, stereotypical characters, and an overall lack of edifying content. But when these similarities with other media are stressed, it becomes easy to overlook the new ethical and moral questions raised by video games" (Wolf, 283).

Videogames have been the subject of much controversy as playing these games have been linked to violence and stereotyping. Like television, political and serious video games are heavily criticised for its content, especially when trying to make serious statements about society and/or in the quest of informing the public.

Tavinor states that there is "a trend that sees video gaming eclipsing film and pop music, the predominant art forms of the twentieth century" (Tavinor, 7). Videogames, although, controversial and deemed 'immature', are highly artistic in their form as they derive from the idea of 'play' and offer an alternative medium for the exploration of representation and

expression and a new platform to learn from. Used mainly as an entertainment device, videogames have become part of the mass media and highly accessible to millions of people. This has enabled videogames that have 'critical play' to filter through the mainstream videogames, offering more than just entertainment and providing a platform for serious issues to be taught, to be viewed alternatively and enforcing discourse. One of these modes of 'serious games', is a documentary game.

Chapter 3

> As games begin to push past traditional boundaries and contexts, a new genre, of sorts, has begun to emerge, one which uses real people, places and subjects as its referents.
>
> (Bogost; Poremba, 1).

As Bogost and Poremba point out, videogames depicting real situations, people and subjects have surfaced, and much debate around their naming or labelling has taken place and many theorists have compartmentalised these nonfiction games into genres of newsgames, autobiographical games and documentary games to name a few (Bogost, Ferrari, Schweizer, 1). There have been concerns around the nature of these games around the issue of how can one 'play' out historical, emotional events that occurred in the natural world. If videogames enable the player to navigate through the historical world, how plausible is this world and its subjects? To what extent can games become 'real' and provide social realism through its representation of the natural world, by being a completely constructed medium? Many videogame designers/ companies, such as Kirk Ewing who designed *JFK Reloaded* have designed such games, self proclaiming them as 'documentary' games, based on the film mode of the 'documentary'. Although many mediums adapt and borrow styles, techniques, modes and genres from one another, can 'documentary' (a filmic mode dependent on the lens of the camera and idea of 'transparency') be transferred to a fully constructed medium that relies on the idea of interactivity, immersion and agency? These are the many questions raised by theorists, designers, players and society who are trying to determine where these videogames fit into the realm of 'play'. Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer question whether " videogames represent actuality in the way that cinema,

photography and nonfiction have done" (62). These questions are the crux of this research report as the mediums break away from each other to form new genres and modes.

Videogames are quite unique in their representation of subjects as their medium relies not only on spectatorship, but interactivity. Their construction of a whole digital world that has no sense of transparency (unless videogames include other aspects such as film footage) allows for questions of authenticity. Social realism took a long time to be present in videogames, but as "as media coexist more closely, they bleed into one another" (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 63). Film and literature have influenced videogame styles and techniques, with the use of narrative, structure and audio and video insertion and 'realism'.

Realism in Videogames

Realism in video games has been used to describe the graphical correlation to the real world, in essence, the way the game looks. The "continuous advances in real-time 3D graphics since the mid-1980s have made it possible to create immense, verisimilitudinous environments" (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 62). Videogames have evolved graphics through technological advancements, which causes the digital resemblance of the natural world to be uncanny. The visual verisimilitude that is slowly growing popular amongst mainstream games, is not social realism or 'documentary' because one of the elements of documentary is that it must refer to or represent something within the tangible world outside of the digital world and address it- the representation need not be visually accurate and highly detailed, but whatever the representation, it must be factual and correct.

Videogames rely on a complete construction of a digital world, so making a connection between the world in the videogame and the historical world would seem to be impossible.

Yet, in courtrooms, and forensics, digital simulations are used as evidence supported by facts that are used to produce such simulations. Fullerton looks back at the history of the simulation and points out that:

> As both judges and juries have become more accustomed to the concept of computer simulations, rules of evidence and admissibility regarding simulations have changed.
>
> (Fullerton, 6).

Fullerton reveals the reliance on simulations in court rooms as evidence and so the understandable link between realism and simulation is made and accepted. Simulations and animations are more specific and detailed in the facts that support them rather than only the visual verisimilitude. The simulations are no longer questioned on the believability and historical accuracy. Although the graphics in these simulations need not be pedantically, historically accurate, (as people are able to deduce a biped to represent a specific person without requiring detailed features to identify them) they rely more on facts that represent reality, not graphics. Vargas describes simulations as a "construction of a model that is meant to mirror the underlying regularities of selected phenomena, events and process in the world" (12). Simulations are fantastic ways to find out *how* events occur, going back to the original cause of the occurrence.

As Tracy Fullerton states, the recreation of the real world is not foreign to videogames and simulation is the core of many games (6). Videogames have the ability to represent the historical world through their recreations of that world and the subjects as long as the facts presented, correlate. Fullerton predicts an interesting future for videogames that take up this use of the simulation:

> We may someday embrace the possibilities of simulations which not only visually model, but behaviorally model aspects of history so that they may constitute "evidence" by that same "social, semiotic process" that gives us the concept of the documentary image...
>
> (Fullerton, 6).

Although Fullerton makes a good point, I do feel that during the time she wrote her article, many videogames had successfully provided the documentary concept or had at least explored it. Some videogames have investigated the idea of the historically accurate representation of an event, even gone so far as to try document it in the way that film's documentary mode has.

A couple of videogames seem to embody representations and recreations of the real world in an attempt to produce the documentary image. The documentary image refers to the accurate representation of a situation or event that is recorded by a medium. *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (2003) recreates certain battles and the historical world to unbelievable accuracy. The videogame's premise is of Pearl Harbor and the narrative follows the path of that specific period of war. Some levels of the game begin with digitally created 'wartime footage'/ animated sequence to provide insight of the event and establish the next level's narrative. *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* (2004) represents the Pacific War that took place during World War II. In this videogame, players can navigate through the world and when their cursor is over a specific object in the world, historical facts of the war and objects pop up over the object in text form to provide historical information for the player . Fullerton investigates *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assaul*t:

> The game uses its significant simulative powers to give players the persuasive, immersive personal experience of being thrown into the events of December 7, 1941, and while it does

> make claims to historical "accuracy" in terms of the effect of simulated weaponry and battlefields in its literature, it does not itself make any claim to the possibility of documentary games. (Fullerton, 10)

Fullerton considers these types of commercial games and others to be documentary games, even though the *Medal of Honor* series never claim to be such. She combines these videogames all into a category which includes games such as *JFK Reloaded*, a self proclaimed documentary game created in 2004 (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer 62). The *Medal of Honor* series and the mainstream games alike try to accurately represent the world, but their main concern is the value of entertainment. *Medal of Honor* does not strive to create realistic simulations, as stipulated by the Executive Producer of the series Rick Giolito (Fullerton, 10). As discussed in Chapter 1, these videogames share the characteristics of the film *Pearl Harbor* since they are based on an event but do not represent the event as accurately as possible as this is not their main objective. Despite Fullerton's assertion, these types of videogames cannot be considered documentary games as their main concern is with entertainment rather than an accurate representation of the world, informing the player of issues concerning that world and the investigation of an actual event.

Another reason for these games to be dismissed from 'serious games', newsgames and documentary games, is that they have generalized characters, characters that are fictional and can stand for anyone (an element of fiction). The event and character are not the central focus of the videogame, as the levels, objectives and entertainment values take first priority. The characters are flat (no rounded back story, aspects of behaviour are not one of the central focuses) and so there is no room to empathize with these characters and their situation. The situation is then sensationalised and epic in its representation which is a

characteristic of fiction. If one had to categorise these types of videogames according to genre specifications, the *Medal of Honor* series would fall into the 'wargames' genre. These games do, however, reveal the desire and need for players to enact the events that were initially inaccessible. This immersion into the historical world is a common demand for designers and players alike (Fullerton, 10). As this need for historical re-enactments popularised itself in mainstream videogames, new forms began to emerge, further pushing the idea of re-enactments. Matt Hanson argues that videogames are "finally going beyond the ability to play battles and create historical re-enactments in wargames and relate more to the areas of subjective documentary and to the biopic" (Hanson, 132). Videogames have delved into areas of the historical world and represent it in alternative ways other than the typical wargames genre and blur the boundary between entertainment and serious gaming.

Newsgames

Before discussing documentary games in detail, one needs to distinguish documentary games from other newsgames. Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer state that as news became more digital, with the ability to access information through the web, digital media flourished and different types of news representation was possible (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer,6) . Historically news came from literature and continues to and is processed and distributed quicker than newsgames (especially with the internet electronic format) as the production of these mediums differ, and therefore newsgames have to represent what the literature and television news tend to miss or choose not to represent. Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer use 'newsgames' as an umbrella term for videogames such as tabloid games, editorial games, reportage games, infographic games, and finally documentary games. "Usually larger in scale and scope, these games offer experiences of newsworthy events, something

impossible to capture in print or broadcast news" (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer 7). These games, although very similar to the documentary game, represent the historical world in the same mode as new reporting does and it is to inform and educate people on situations and the world in which they inhabit. "In the case of past events, they recreate times, spaces, and systems that one can otherwise only understand from archival film footage or imagination" (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer 7). In a way, Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer's definition could pertain to documentary, even though there is much more to documentary games than mere simulation or accurate correlation. For example, infographic games represent the real world in the form of diagrams, images and graphs to show certain statistics and inform the player of what occurred and the processes of that occurrence. An example of such a videogame is *Budget Hero* (2008), a game that allows the player to manage the United States' accounts and budget. This videogame is an infographic depicting an accurate representation of the United States debt situation. Represented through graphs, diagrams and charts, the game allow the player to manage where the citizens' tax go and this will create a cause and effect balance. *Budget Hero* is similar to the way *SimCity* works; if you raise the prices of the residential areas, the city folk will react by leaving the city due to the high prices. *Budget Hero* will allow the player freedom to pump money into the school systems, but then the justice system or some other areas that require money will suffer and become affected.

Film and Videogames

The news has shifted in mediums, from literature and photography to internet and film. Film has had quite an influential impact on videogames. Due to the origins of documentary, the videogame medium has adapted a film based mode to its genres and so the theorisation has become similar. The *Medal of Honor* series was created with the assistance of

Hollywood director Steven Spielberg who was approached to come up with the original concept of the videogame (Wolf, 294). At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, games began to incorporate film concepts into their videogames. Videogame theory has had a close correlation with other media and borrowed much of its theorisation from film (Wolf, 294). Due to the origins of documentary, the videogame medium has adapted a film based mode to its genres and its theorisation has become similar. In this respect, it is vital to initially investigate documentary games in relation to their filmic counterpart.

> By examining games in terms of documentary conventions, we investigate whether it is reasonable to call something a documentary game, whether such games expand the role of the genre, and if the title can shed light on the role and reception of these works.
>
> (Bogost and Poremba, 1)

Documentary games have adapted certain characteristics from film which is why the term 'documentary' is useful in their categorisation. Tracy Fullerton refers to the labelling of these documentary games, as "aspirational pre-naming" whereby the artists who brand these games hope to introduce a new genre without consideration for the medium changes. By investigating these games one is able to see the correlation between the film mode and the videogame genre and connect the two. Fullerton's definition of the genre (as shown previously) includes commercial videogames which cannot be included in the genre of documentary games. Documentary games make use of stock/ archival footage, audio interviews and sounds, literature and text, and 're-enactments' which are all conventions of the documentary film (Bogost, Poremba 7). Most importantly documentary games represent the tangible world virtually and reveal stories of worlds that have occurred or are

occurring. They represent real people that have inhabited the historical world and were part of the event recorded.

Like documentary's original medium, documentary games are not concerned with "visual fidelity" but with factual representation (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 62). Documentaries in film, resort to natural lighting, unsteady camerawork (handheld), archival footage and at times, spoiled sound which gives the effect of immediate recording and enforces further plausibility. The need to capture the historical world takes preference over visual beauty as retakes of the same action is near impossible. Documentary games have adapted this attitude for representation, in contrast to their commercial counterparts which rely on highly detailed graphics to create visual verisimilitude.

Documentary games, like most art games, are usually 'independents' and are not created by major videogame companies but by individual or group artists whose main priority is the videogame's content rather than its 'looks' (Frasca, 3). Some independent videogames come in the form of 'mods' which refers to modification of a previously established and designed game. In the case of mods, designers of these videogames utilize the 'mods' released by major videogame companies. A videogame such as *Unreal Tournament* (1999) has released 'mods' that allow players or artists to *mod*ify aspects of the game and run the game on the same engine. Artists do not need to focus too much on the design of the videogame as they can work with a predetermined template of the game and merely adjust it according to their content and needs. Mods are typically computer based games as they require a heavy amount of processing and modification to original data. The internet and accessibility also require computer access. These types of videogames are often visually simplistic and simple

to play and interact with. It is the subject and content that is detailed, complex and interesting.

These 'mods' allow one to create games that enable one to question the game and the world outside the game (Frasca, 3). According to Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, immersion needs to be balanced by interpretation (Frasca, 3). One can be immersed in artwork but must also consider the artwork itself and its representation. Therefore in a videogame, one can be immersed in the realm of play but must also analytically interpret not only what the piece is saying but the ways in which it says it. Mods are released through the internet as downloadable games which do not require too much storage space and use up less processing memory and power. Another reason for low graphics is the distribution method. Most of these videogames are only accessible through the internet and must be downloaded. Low quality graphics means- less data, which means quicker, easier, and in some countries, less expensive downloads, for example in South Africa where downloads from the internet is paid for per megabyte. Documentary games must engage in some sort of actuality other than merely providing evidence through low graphics and pixilation. The low graphics and need for perfect quality provides a link to the film documentary which also utilizes the lack of 'perfect' picture. The player is interacting with a completely constructed world, and so there needs to be more actuality in the representation.

Engaging with Actuality

Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer point out three ways in which videogames may "engage in actuality" (64):

1. **Spatial Reality**

Spatial reality refers to games which allow players to 'freely' (I use this term with caution as all videogames have limitations, especially independent games as the engines limit the world) navigate around the environment (64). The space is of high importance as it provides the player with context and understanding and situates the player into a known environment. The space must be faithful to the world it represents, and must remind the player of the historical world. Real-time video game engines allow for spatial exploration and this has become central to many videogames and in the natural world, we are able to discover spaces and are scarcely limited in navigation.

As an example, *Berlin Wall* (2008) is a game based on the player's objective to go over/through/around the Berlin wall onto the West side as the character is tired of being constricted to East Berlin.



Figure 3.1: Screenshot from the videogame *Berlin Wall*, (2008) a *Half Life 2* mod by Stene, Oskutin, SnakeFace and Dragonsdoom.

> This kind of game represents an historical issue through exploration, the conglomeration of factual sources, and a presentation style akin to our common notions of the documentary in film and television
>
> (Schweizer, 1).

The space of the videogame resonates as real because it represents the location plausibly and this videogame contains an aspect of documentary quality. Although this game is visually appealing through its architecture and representation, it cannot be labelled a documentary game and as it does not critically engage with the subject (65). The story is of a random character that is not specifically present in history whereas documentaries contain real people or representations of them.

This videogame highlights a type of exploration that is essential in understanding the meaning of the game. The importance of this exploration of the world and its contents is similar to film's emphasis of mise-en-scène. The inclusion of specific objects, placement and choice all play a part in the story of the piece, the navigation and the space. Some adventure videogames rely heavily on mise-en- scène as this is central to the game play. Discovery of objects advance the player in the game, for example role playing games require the player to search for hidden objects that are essential to the narrative and objective. Videogames offer more space and navigation than film does, as the camera in film is not controlled by the viewer, but rather the filmmaker, whereas the camera in many videogames can be moved around freely and the player can choose which part of the world to explore. This becomes more realistic and natural to the player who to a certain extent is free to explore their historical world. As Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer point out:

> From the perspective of social realism, it is less important to fill a space with photorealistic texture and high-polygon models than it is to fill a less technologically advanced space with meaningful, naturally arranged objects.
>
> (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 66)

The space must be filled with objects that existed within the real world and must be integral to the story. As established earlier, the need for high quality graphics is unnecessary due to the focus on content and distribution methods.

2. Operational reality

In order for videogames to portray aspects of reality, there needs to be some sort of guidance through the world, making the world operational (66). Instead of only exploring the world, the player must have the ability to enact the events. *JFK Reloaded* (a self proclaimed documentary game) makes use of space like *Berlin Wall* but is limited by the characters and event.

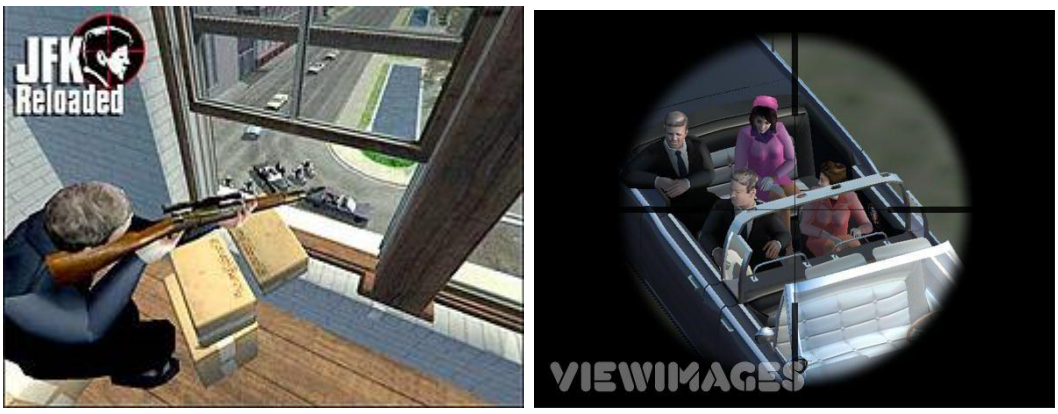


Figure 3.2: Screenshot from the videogame *JFK Reloaded*, game that simulates the historical assassination of John F. Kennedy.

In this videogame, the player takes on the identity of Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who allegedly assassinated John F. Kennedy during a Presidential motorcade. The

player must attempt to shoot the president. That this historical character existed in the real world helps avoid allegations that deem the game as fictional (67). The fact that the player's role involves taking over the role of a real person is operational as it pulls the player into the event and makes the player reassess their role as a 'player' and is able to look at the event with another's eyes and interpret that event differently. In this way, documentary games differ from the film medium because "unlike a cinematic rendition, these documentaries make their spaces operational" (67).

Although the navigation through the space in *JFK Reloaded* seems minimal, it is restricted by the situation which Lee Harvey Oswald was only focused on the motorcade and limited by the room in which he was in at the time. The player is unable to explore other parts of the world established in the videogame as this contradicts the reality it represents.

3. Procedural Reality

There much consideration and reliance on the processes of videogames and in particular, documentary games. The videogames use rules to form ideas around the behaviours of the situation and underlying the event (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 69). These rules provide information and understanding, revealing the process of the situation in order to establish reasoning. Many videogames may investigate the questions set up by the five 'w's, namely: what, when, where, who and why (69). These can be represented in commercial mainstream games like Fullerton stipulated with the *Medal of Honor* series (Fullerton, 10). However with documentary games,

> one must also use the procedural question to ask 'how' (Bogost, Ferrari, Schweizer, 69). "Good reporting should elucidate how a situation arose, not just uncover the actors, events, and consequences of that situation" (71). One must investigate how the situation came to be and the results of that situation including what behaviours established such an event and what behaviours followed (71). In the example of *JFK Reloaded* the vision of the designers (Traffic Games) was to recreate the event to further invalidate any conspiracy theories around who killed the president and why. The game was not based on the assassination (event, the five w's) but rather the proof of how the event took place and how the conspiracies were not plausible (71). The game reveals Oswald's position through the space it provides and shows how easy it was for him to assassinate the president. In a way, it may be a forensic simulation used to educate the player but it also has a firm stand as to how the event occurred.

Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer reveal the characteristics for evaluating a documentary game through these three engagements of reality. These realities are disputed by many critics and society as some believe that the videogame can never represent the historical world (78). Joost Raessens argues that the naïve misconceptions of documentary films have filtered through to the videogame medium and many people have adopted the ideal of documentary being 'objective' in its representation of reality (Raessens, 6). Documentary games, like documentary films, have a goal, i.e. to educate the player/viewer on a situation that occurred in the real world and to open up a discourse around the subject matter. This goal reveals that the creator/s takes a subjective stance. As established in Chapter 1, a documentary can never be objective, as everything is constructed and specifically chosen,

particularly in video games where the world is a complete virtual recreation. Everything, from the mise en scène to the rules, has been specifically set up and programmed by the designers of the game. Documentary games are designed specifically to send out a message or inform the player to take action or be swayed to consider another view on the situation (6). The stories that are represented within these types of videogames are usually alternative stories, not yet covered by or covered up by the media. They address issues not yet explored and/or bring light to issues unknown to the general public.

Documentary Games

"While labelling games as "documentaries" may establish a frame of reference, it can also obscure the way that games are expressive in different ways" (Bogost and Poremba, 3). Even though mediums share modes/genres, they remain separate mediums and their use differs. Videogames adopt many conventions and attributes of film, but there must always be consideration of the 'processes that games rely on (3). Documentary games provide alternative nonfiction representations, and could question its donor medium (film) and its 'transparency' because although the camera gives the audience a sense of being at the event, the videogame medium could do this in an interactive and closer way (4). Film and literature and other forms of media seem to undergo investigations of evidence, whereas "a videogame models the behaviour and dynamics of a situation, treating character, setting, and events as side effects of an overall logic" (Bogost, Ferrari, Schweizer, 71). All the products of the situation are just consequences of 'how' the situation occurred. The question of *how* is incorporated into the narrative.

Narratives work differently in diverse mediums, as Peter Brinson(developer of the documentary game *Waco Resurrection,* 2004) states:

> In a film documentary – (he says) -- the filmmaker's portrayal and delivery of the events is at the foreground of the experience … Often a viewer will agree with the film's subjective points as well as take the portrayal of events as historical fact. Perhaps the viewer will completely disagree or form a stance somewhere in between. This negotiation of the content is a result, an after effect of the film documentary's narrative. In a documentary game, the player's reaction to the content -- both within the game and in mind -- IS the narrative. It is part of the real-time, present tense experience of the game's portrayal, rather than a personal addendum to the grand narrative. The player's perspectives aren't formed in relation or objection to the game creator's construct. The player's agency is the
>
> Story.
>
> (Fullerton, 23)

As Brinson states, in film documentaries, the narratives are what the director chooses them to be, the experience of the audience is just a by-product of the set narrative. Yes, documentary games also have a set narrative, but the narrative is expanded and changed according to the experience of the player. The feelings, thoughts and choices evoked by the game, are then reciprocated by player action and the narrative is determined by not only the story of the videogame, but also the player's journey and content.

In documentary games, the narrative works differently. The interaction between the player and their agency, the videogame itself and the real world represented *is* the narrative as it is all part of a process that contributes to the idea of 'how' the event occurred. Agency here refers to "the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray, 24).

Documentary games have not yet had their own sub-genres or modes defined as their production is minimal and only few of these types of games exist. Ian Bogost and Cindy Poremba attempt to categorize them, using Bill Nichols' infamous modes as a template for videogames. They have altered the modes according to the videogames they have come across and envisioned.

1. **Procedural**

   This videogame mode encompasses the characteristics of Nichols' expository mode. There is a definite rule structure within procedural videogames providing the illusion of a 'sandbox' free world navigation.

2. **Interactive**

   The player becomes aware of the construction of the experience (14) and active in the videogame's situation. Interactive games allow entry in parts of the situation that were previously unknown to the player.

3. **Reflexive**

   This type of documentary game critiques itself and the medium. The game reveals a sense of self reflexivity to the player, opening up new meanings, not only about the content but how the content is represented (14). *Eyewitness* (2003) is a videogame that allows the player to take the role of a journalist/ photographer and capture the situation in their own way. The player's ability to construct their own representation of the event and situation allows them to reflect on their own subjectivity, choices and product (14).

4. **Generative**

This mode reflects Bogost and Poremba's ambitious attempt to create videogames or steer games towards this type of interactivity. These videogames are constructed by real life data, processed by the external world that constantly shifts and changes in process, rules and subjects (15).

5. **Poetic**

   These videogames are metaphorical representations of the real world (15). Their representations are usually abstract and fragmented. One of the main reasons for using this mode is to evoke a mood within the videogame. *The Cat and The Coup* (2011), a self proclaimed documentary game, uses metaphorical images and backdrops to evoke a specific ominous mood and the player embodies the role of Dr. Mohammad Mossadeg, the late Prime Minister of Iran's cat. The player is a quirky cat causing situations to move forward by finding clues and objects within the game (15).

Bogost and Poremba claim that using this model, adapted from Bill Nichols' original model, helps locate and evaluate these works by categorisation. Although some of the existing documentary games fall into specific modes, most have attributes belonging to other modes. These theorists use some of the modes as a suggestion for new games to use as a framework or template. Compartmentalizing games when a genre has not yet been fully developed fully and its emergence only recent can be limiting and constricting to the genre itself, as it has not yet had time to define itself as a concrete genre. Setting up conventions of these modes may also force designers to stick to these conventions, which limits creativity. These modes, like Nichols' are only understood by what they are not because there has not been much research on developing these modes by alternative theorists

(Bruzzi, 1). Bogost and Poremba seem to mistake the medium for that of film and videogames operate very differently to film. Considering Stella Bruzzi's criticism of Nichols' modes in Chapter 1 and the genre itself being young and still questionable, it is my opinion that Bogost and Poremba's early introduction of these modes limit the designer, the player and medium itself. The medium needs to advance and evolve without early categorization in order to let the games begin to establish their own modes.

As with film's development as a medium, videogames have been met with criticism, accusations, and bias, "the appearance of a new form of entertainment is often marked by multiple controversies" (Wolf, 227). Many of these documentary videogames have taken the brunt of social critique. As a medium of much 'controversy', videogaming has had to deal with being an alternative medium to mainstream society, a fate felt especially keenly by art games/serious games. When society began to tolerate games that included shooting, killing, bombing and stealing, serious games and art games began to filter through the mainstream.

In an interview with one of *JFK Reloaded*'s designers, Jeff Cole, he states that videogames "can often provide you with a perspective that you might not otherwise have been able to experience or imagine" (Fullerton, 24). Sometimes when critique on mainstream society or alternative opinions/representations on a subject are made, mainstream society may seem threatened and so become defensive (24).

."Games are not (popularly) expected or encouraged to reflect back on our real lives as is implicit in the popular phrase "it's just a game" " (Poremba, 4). The problems around videogames that make them different to film and other media is the idea of 'play'. Videogames allow a player to enact an event that was not previously available to enact and

experience. People are able to embody a character (an avatar) within a game and must complete that character's objectives. As Blomquist points out, there is a high concern in society as many believe that videogames influence external behaviour and enforce violence and crime; Jack Thompson, a US attorney, filed lawsuits against the makers of the videogames he deemed too violent and highly influential, however, these allegations did not hold up in court (Blomquist, 1). Although the player may be highly influenced and immersed in the character within the games, the effect of the game wears off as they exit the game world and enter the real world due to the understanding of the magic circle. As Blomquist argues, although videogames take up a lot of time and require much attention, the videogame is not necessarily dangerous or cause detrimental behaviour, it is a distraction rather than an addiction and has no lasting effects that cause people to go out and act as the characters within the videogame (1). The player is always aware of the real world, made possible by the instruments that separate the player from the game, a keyboard and mouse or controller, a screen and the content of the videogame itself.

According to Bogost, Ferrari ad Schweizer, "the most controversial documentary game by far is *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*" (Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer, 78). An in-depth discussion of this particular game and its use of the documentary genre or mode will follow in Chapter 4.

To conclude, documentary games are based on the mode of 'documentary' that the film medium has introduced. However, the two mediums differ in their representation and the players' and viewers' participation. Videogames work with models that influence behaviour through processes, whereas film relies on spectatorship. Documentary games can (like film) represent the real world through their presentation of plausible evidence and facts. Their

actuality depends on three realities: spatial reality, operational reality and procedural reality, all of which, together, contribute to the determination of a documentary game. The use of 'documentary' to describe these new emerging games has caused theorists to question the remediation problems of transferring a genre from one medium to another without consideration of the medium's attributes. As seen with many of the theories around gaming, the videogame medium provides a different experience for the player and therefore has to use processes to provide that experience and consequently, must adhere to the medium's requirements. Many documentary games have been deemed 'wrong' and 'immoral', but like any medium representing subjects in the real world, they still flourish and have the ability to teach and inform players of the situation presented and allow the player to fully enact the experience and formulate an interpretation based on the subjective design of the game. Documentary games, although new, have become an accessible platform for people to create games that address the world we live in, looking at issues not yet dealt with by other media. With 'mods' being released by mainstream companies, documentary games have an opportunity to flourish. Even though there is quite an abundance of theorisation of 'documentary games' the theories do not seem to correlate with the implementations. Videogames that are getting released have not necessarily been called documentary games or have released those games under the intention of contributing to the specific genre. However, the next chapter sheds light on whether it is viable to call controversial videogame *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* documentary game by comparing it to the documentary film *Bowling for Columbine* with special care to understand the use of separate mediums.

Chapter 4: Case study of *Bowling for Columbine* and *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*

Overview of Event

On the 20th April 1999, Dylan Harris and Eric Klebold committed suicide in their high school library after going on a rampage, resulting in the death of thirteen people and injuring twenty four students (Rosenburg, 1). With the event receiving so much media attention and documented stories, one must be aware of the event and the facts of the occurrence in order to determine that the case study, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, was reported or 'documented' successfully. Harris and Klebold had planned the attack a year in advance, obtaining knowledge of the school's security, acquiring arsenal and practicing weaponry and run-throughs (1). On day of the massacre, Harris and Klebold met up and gathered their weaponry and drove to the school parking lot separately. They deposited two bombs in school's cafeteria which had timers to go off at 11:17 am, but failed to go off as they did not set the timer properly or for 11:17 pm (2). The bombs the students set up in the open field did go off at 11:19 am. The two students walked inside the school and began to fire at random outside the cafeteria. Harris and Klebold continued through the school, shooting at students and throwing small bombs. At 11:29 am the two entered the library where they shot around the room and then turned to fire out the windows at the police and escaping students outside. Harris and Klebold then went to every desk under which a frightened student took cover, and fired at each person. The two gunmen then explored the school, shooting in classrooms, checking the cafeteria bombs and finally returned to the library for their fatal suicide attempt(3).

Harris and Klebold's abundance of documentation (blogs, journals, extracurricular criminal and mischievous activities, voice recordings and short films) were seeming preludes to the

attack, may have also influenced the media's representation of the event. The mass hysteria created by the mainstream media caused policies to be reassessed and changed in schools and gun laws and sales of arsenal more stringently reviewed and altered (1). The panic the media invoked made people focus on the margins of society with alternative dress codes, hair styles, habits and cultures. Screening of potential 'threats' in early development and school children and teenagers singled out students that were considered 'high risk' to society and anything alternative or different was deemed threatening. This panic sparked many theorists or creatives, to come up with an alternative representation of what happened at the event and how it came to be.

This shock to American society has spawned various representations of the massacre that delve into questions of what, when, who, where, why and how. Media reports from various journalists have reported biased reasons for the attack, jumping to conclusions that seem to follow the way senators and political figures have used the event as an example to consider alternative culture to be wrong (*Playing Columbine*, 2008). From mainstream media such as the news and press conferences, different mediums and genres of art films, documentary films and videogames have emerged, keenly representing this event and subject in an alternative way, exploring areas untouched by the previous investigations left behind by the general media.

Films such as *Duck! The Carbine High Massacre* (2000), *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Elephant* (2003), the videogame *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* (2005), and the film based on the videogame *Playing Columbine* (2008) are all texts that have one matching source, the Columbine shootings. In investigating the case study of this report, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, it is integral to explore other medium's use of the event, with a special

examination of the documentary by Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine* as the film and find specific correlation with the videogame in regards to 'voice' of creator, the type of representation and the storytelling modes used.

***Bowling for Columbine*:**

Bowling for Columbine won the Academy Award for "Best Documentary Feature" and the Independent Spirit Award for "Best Documentary Feature", proving by its production, conventions and reception that it truly embodies the form of the contemporary documentary. *Bowling for Columbine* uses the conventions of documentary filmmaking by conducting and showing interviews with non actors, utilising archival footage of the shooting and other factual information, location shooting, natural lighting and a handheld camera. David Hardy has heavily criticised the film for its use of editing techniques, juxtaposition of unrelated images and footage in trying to prove a case in point, in essence, a montage (Hardy, 1). However, Bordwell and Thompson remind us that social realism in the 1920's was heightened by the creation of montage, Sergei Eisenstein used montage as a means of exploring issues within society by using stock footage and archival footage to refer to the actual world (Bordwell, Thompson, 361). The primary use of archival footage was due to the lack of shooting and production equipment at the time period. The montage is an editing technique whereby unrelated shots and content are edited together to produce new meaning and interpretation (361). The implication of this amalgamation can be more powerful than a linear edit. Even though the footage is unrelated, deliberately placed and subjectively edited, it still applies to a social realist context and documentative context, as the footage remains real, the issue represented is real and the only fictional aspect of the sequence or montage may be the emotion it aims to convey or produce (362). Michael

Moore was criticised for his heavily opinionated and subjective outlook on the Columbine shootings and directly blames gun policies (Hardy, 1). Although his opinion may be highly biased, the fact that he reveals himself in the documentary in an interactive and performative way, allows for realism and we acknowledge his presence and control over the content and accept his influence on the film. *Bowling for Columbine* can therefore be considered a documentary as the audience identify with the world he reveals and are able to value his position within the film as clearly outlined from the start.

The film represents the history of the United States of America by using animation as an insert, a quick and satirical alternative to stock footage. It makes use of limited animation and has incorporated the style of the animated series *South Park* created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. The use of *South Park*'s animation techniques is based on the area which Moore investigates because the creators of the show grew up in Colorado the same state in which Columbine High School is situated. The *South Park* show was also controversial due to its content and this medium of animation became the new outlet for alternative views on society as the show (although fictional) occasionally refers to people and events that exist in the real world. The history represented in *Bowling for Columbine* is true, with some interesting metaphors and implications that are plagued with bias which may be the reason that the public or critics question the film's fidelity, but there must be a definite understanding between the type of representation and the facts and how they coexist to create new meaning.

Moore's voice is abundantly clear in the film; his point is to allow for audiences to reconsider the media reports of Columbine by re-evaluating their immediate need to blame alternative cultures of videogaming, music and gothic followings. He shifts focus to more

pending problems of the state's policies of weaponry and the accessibility of these weapons. The way he represents the content is through his own exploration of facts where he carries out interviews, searches the areas and directs the gaze of the viewer. Symbolism is used very well in the film, suggesting his voice and opinion such as shot-guns which are immediately associated with violence, crime and massacres. Guns are highly symbolic in their recklessness state from the protective policeman to the inexperienced youth. Acquisition of guns can be as easy as opening up a bank account as Moore demonstrates in the film by opening up a new bank account at the specific bank and receives a free gun. Moore's style of investigative reporting is similar to that of muckracking, a style developed by journalists which was condemned as overly provocative and implicational causing many people dismiss his claims, as he becomes more confrontational and twists much of what people say/ reveal to him.

Moore's film incorporates real people, a real event and real facts to establish his voice and narrative. His film embodies documentary tradition and allows for creative treatments of actuality by using techniques of montage, animation and symbolism.

Based on a True Story:

Many films such as *Duck! The Carbine High Massacre* and *Elephant* have used the event of the Columbine shootings as the basis for the story. Even though their stories are based on true events, these films do not factually refer to the event and use actors instead of real people. *Duck! The Carbine High Massacre* is the first film to be inspired and based on the Columbine shootings. The film is fictional as it does not respectfully stay true to the historical facts and suggests alternative outcomes. It was not well received which may be

due to its genre of black comedy and gore content but it did suggest alternative reasons of how the situation occurred without any factual base or valid evidence.

Elephant is an art film that uses the documentary modes of observation and exposition. Many long still shots are used, following certain characters with long takes. It implies the 'fly-on-the-wall' approach, providing some suspension of disbelief and allows for the audience to just look upon the situation without any persuasive subjective standpoint opening up the event to interpretation. The film is beautifully shot and well directed, but is completely fictional as it creates new 'facts' that may or may not be true. The film also uses actors to portray the event which is not a documentary element. There is also no clear voice to the film as it allows for the viewer to establish their own voice within the film. The narrative is disjointed, always jumping in time and space. Although these two films, (*Duck! The Carbine High Massacre* and *Elephant*) base their story on the event of the Columbine shootings, they are not documenting the event, but recreating it and altering the events that occurred for the purpose of fictional storytelling. The films use the event as a referral, but are not representing it to educate the audience about the event and they make use of actors and staging. Only *Bowling for Columbine* may be considered a documentary and a good template to assess the videogame *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*.

Super Columbine Massacre RPG!:

Bogost states that:

> Interactivity is one of the core features that differentiate games from passive media like film. In a game we play a role. Most of the time the roles we play in games are roles of power, space marines, world-class footballers or hero plumbers. Isn't it about time we played the role of the weak, the misunderstood, even evil?

(Vargas, 3)

Film was not the only medium that took an interest in the Columbine event. Videogames, due to extensive media accusing the gaming medium for prompting the attack, also sought to represent the event. In 2003, the planning of a videogame *Doom for Columbine* commenced, in which the 3D design team lead by Scott Leonard wanted to represent the event from the attackers' point of view (Mirapaul, 1). It was also based on the game the public blamed for the violence-*Doom* (1993). The video game planned to allow the player to confront and attack the school's bullies and the fears of adolescence (which were morphed into monsters and demons). The videogame was not released in 2004 as planned and there is no record of it ever being released. In 2005, Danny Ledonne released *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* anonymously. Similarly to the planned *Doom* mod, players could play the killers in *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* This videogame was referred to as a 'documentary game' and Ledonne explains how he created the videogame:

> They left behind many of their thoughts-some frightening, some deplorable, some comical, some deeply enraged. I collected all of them and assembled them into a role-playing game aesthetically reminiscent of those I would play in my own youth.

(Ledonne, 1)

Super Columbine Massacre RPG! is a videogame based on the Columbine shootings that incorporates many facts and creativity that Ledonne wanted to create based on videogames he played in his formative years.

Artist

Danny Ledonne's background is in film and television and more specifically wildlife documentaries. His interest in the Columbine shootings was sparked by his own schooling difficulties where he draws on the bullying and the difficulty he experienced with the majority of his fellow students (*Playing Columbine* 2008). As Vargas points out:

> Computer games are central in youth culture as well as popular culture more generally, and using computer games to interpret a high schools shooting seems, therefore, like a natural fit.
>
> (Vargas, 2)

As a filmmaker, one would expect him to create a documentary of the Columbine shootings, yet he chose the medium of videogames as his representational tool.

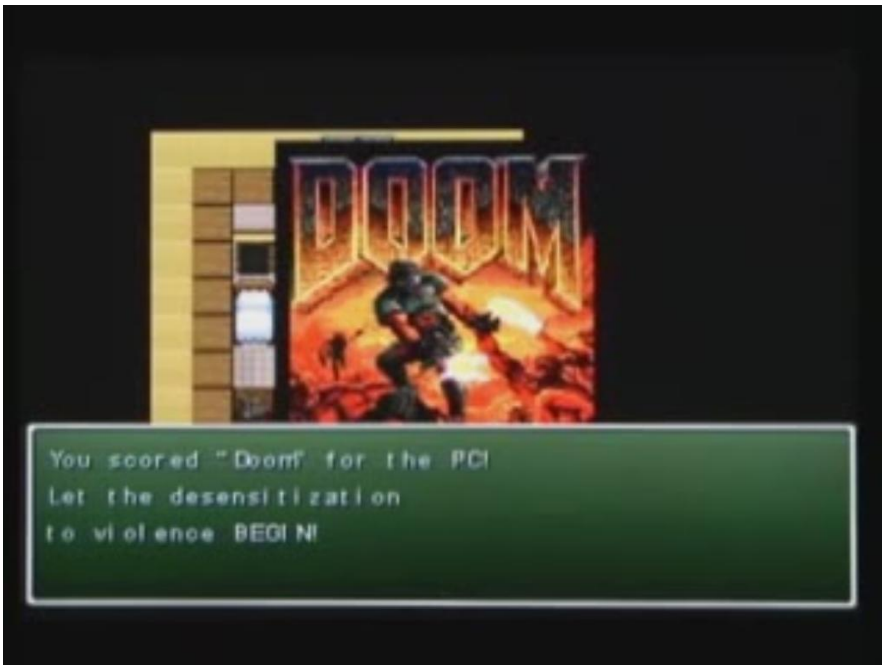


Figure 4.1. Screenshot from *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* videogame.

This screenshot from the videogame reveals Ledonne's need to shift focus away from videogaming and its controversy- in a satirical way. Since videogames as a medium received

much of the blame for Harris and Klebold's actions, Ledonne decided to use the medium as a device for social commentary. With no videogame design skills, he used the RPG Maker 2000 as a template for his game. After six months of designing the game, he released the videogame anonymously to avoid the controversy that he knew the game would create as the game dealt with highly sensitive content.

The game's design is simplistic as it has the stylized look of the old Japanese role playing games of the 1980s. It was created with a 'do-it-yourself' software called the RPG Maker 2000, which looks like the 8 bit Nintendo Entertainment games (Vargas, 5). Without much detail to visual verisimilitude, the game is very pixilated, simple in detail and uses midi music and the game may seem to be quite unappealing and simplistic in comparison to other mainstream games that were produced in 2005, however the focus was not fully on the design of the videogame but rather the content.



Figure 4.2: Screenshot from *SCMRPG!* from the library scene.

These types of RPG videogames have characteristics of mission objectives that need to be completed by collecting objects and puzzle solving. The game play can last from thirty to

two hundred hours (Vargas, 5). There is massive emphasis and detail laded on narrative, artwork, music and characterisation and this makes the videogame is highly emotional in its content and message embodies themes of betrayal, friendship and love (5).

Synopsis of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*

The videogame's start screen consists of a real background still image of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris taken from the school surveillance cameras on the day of the shooting. The image is black and white showing Klebold casually holding a gun. At the top of the screen *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*. is depicted in big bold red letters read:



Figure 4.3: Screenshot of the menu of *SCMRPG!*

This menu is striking and sets the mood and tone of the game immediately. When you click 'play' the screen goes blank and a quote pops up from Andre Breton (1898-1988) accompanied by the sound of a clock:

"The purest surrealist act would be to go into a crowd and fire at random" (2005).

The screen opens up to Harris's room where you are able to navigate (through Harris) around the room and discover items that relate to the media's assumptions and Eric's personal issues, for example, Luvox, with a caption describing the prescribed anti-depressant that prevented Harris from being accepted into the marines.

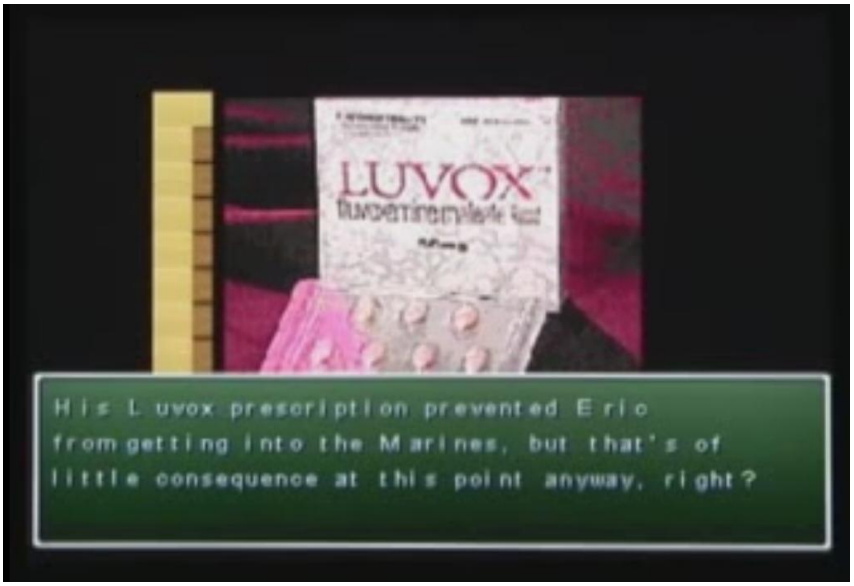


Figure 4.4: Screenshot from *SCMRPG!* videogame, revealing an item found (Luvox) and the information of the item.

The objects in this world are purposefully placed in a strategic way to further the narrative and voice of the designer. With the medium of videogames that has to rely on a fully constructed world, the artist must ensure that that world is plausible enough to be understood as 'real' and make use of the construction by inserting his/her voice through the facts and artefacts. Throughout the first part of the game (from Harris's bedroom to the planting of the bombs), Ledonne constructs validity through his application of facts through meticulous detailing of the event, the characters and the story. Almost every action the player engages in is respectfully true to the historical world. The verisimilitude engages the player in a world that is only accessible through films, the news and literature. Once Harris

meets up with Klebold in the basement, they collect their duffel bags filled with weaponry of every kind, record a message and leave for Columbine High School. Once they are in the schools parking lot, they collect the two bombs and set off through the school's hall to the cafeteria, evading the security camera's view, hall monitors and wandering students. At the cafeteria, they place the bombs under two tables next to the vending machines and return to the parking lot for their final words before attacking the students of Columbine with guns and bombs. This simulation of events runs in perfect accordance with the events that occurred that day.

When the player begins shooting at random, the fidelity of the story takes a turn. There is free range to shoot anyone and everyone. Thirteen people die and twenty four are injured in the historical world. The player, however, has no understanding or boundaries as this limit is not stipulated by the game. Specifically, in the battle modes the two shooters engage in are questionable as the victims of the attacks fight back, which cannot be representational of the event as the students of columbine were anxious, scared and unwilling to take on two unstable gunmen.

The player then slowly guns their way to the library where bombs are thrown and set off and finally they have the choice to commit suicide or carry on their spree. Once teenagers commit suicide, they find themselves in Hell. This cannot be related to any type of reality or occurrence. The two catch up with John Lennon, Pikachu, Bart Simpson and others. Fighting Satan (an intertextual Satan from *South Park*) the two win and then befriend Satan. They carry out a task for him and their mission is accomplished. Following this fantastical episode, reality kicks in with a press conference that consists of multiple opinions for

reasons of the shooting. Propositions for explanations surface and a fade to caption reading: "The Final Epoch has Begun: Mission Accomplished" and the videogame ends.

The Design:

Although the videogame looks outdated in comparison to its mainstream counterparts, the visual details of the game are unimportant as documentary games do not rely on state of the art graphics. The content and authenticity is valued over visual verisimilitude. Ian Bogost views the design as amateurish and mediocre but sees this as symbolism of the shooters inexperience of guns and violence (*Columbine RPG*, 1). The role playing game format is used well to a certain extent. The ability to discover objects that help forward the narrative is essential for the storytelling, interactivity and establishment of the situation. However, with role playing games, especially the template Ledonne used, certain characteristics do not fit in with the documentary style and the event the game addressed. For instance, when the player is engaged in the actual massacre, and is in battle mode, the students fight back (which is a default element of the role playing game, the levelling up of the shooters does not take into account anxiety levels of the individuals and the sustenance and the fact that the people were represented as highly skilled fighters and shooters, but in real life were inexperienced (Arthouse Games, 1). The victims of the attack were randomized, no individuality was given to the characters in the game as the characters were given stereotypical names like 'jock guy', 'church girl', 'pretty girl'. The artist adapted this naming from the shooters journals, where they provided no specific names of the fellow students but preferred to name them stereotypically, a choice Ledonne incorporated into the videogame, keeping in mind the mindset of Harris and Klebold. Some might see this

choice to be a use of fiction but since this story was told through the point of view of Harris and Klebold, it can possibly be seen as authentic as this is the way in which the two students saw the world.

Often with role playing games, the game play is tedious and repetitive, which is why the shootings and the event starts becoming too similar, an element of the situation that is not authentic. The role playing mode is not suitable for this type of game, but considering the background of the artist and his ability to create a videogame, one tends to overlook such decisions. As an independent game, it was self-funded and so limitations on graphics and engines are prominent in the videogame.

There are definite play elements offered in the videogame. The player is able to navigate around the world and has many objectives and tasks to play out in order to level up or move to the next stage. The combat scenes, where the player must shoot a student offers choices of which weaponry to use and if the wrong choice is made, the character can die and the game is over. In order to learn more about the event, the event needs to be 'played out'. However, can the videogame played out in the documentary sense?

Super Columbine Massacre RPG! **as a Documentary Game**

This videogame embodies documentary quality but loses it consistency in documenting after the first couple of scenes. Vargas refers to the videogame as a "documentary RPG" (6). He has multiple reasons for deeming the videogame a documentary. The game includes documentary imagery and incorporates photographs in the background and object descriptions as well as montage sequences. The videogame has a strong voice that represents Ledonne's view on the subject. The insertion of literature and recordings that are

used as dialogue helps the player understand the situation and are true excerpts taken from Harris and Klebold's writings. Animated scenes (flashbacks) represent the real and draw on animated documentary techniques. Inclusion of literature, films, music, games and philosophy allows players to refer to their own knowledge of these media (8-10). It seems to correlate well with Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* as all these aspects are apparent in the film and used similarly.

Even though Vargas applies 'documentary' as a genre for the videogame, he has a clause for the fantastical untrue parts of the game:

> While *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* is a game that clearly aims for a documentary's authenticity and legitimacy, it is no didactic simulation in a traditional sense; it is not the business of learning-by doing. What it gives us is expressive role playing, set inside a hypermedia landscape that is designed for empathetic exploration, a journey through the world according to Harris and Klebold.
>
> (Vargas, 11)

Vargas refers to the representation of the real world from Harris and Klebold's point of view and the possibility of what they wanted and what they achieved is represented within the game. The two prepared for a much more intense massacre, but with the bombs not exploding at the right time and their lack of skills as gunmen and fighters, they 'underachieved' in respect of achieving their goal which was established through findings in their writings (11). The videogame represents Harris and Klebold's own fantasy, creating a world in which they fulfil their attempts. This does, however, not justify documentary quality as the videogame represents the shooters' fantasy and attempts to recreate the events of the story. The film *Bowling for Columbine* does not make up aspects of the two

students lives after their death and imagine new facts in order to entertain or sustain a point of view. Here the videogame and the film differ.

The facts implied by the videogame do not correlate with the real event. If you lose in the battle mode against one of the students, you die and its game over; this is not reality as it did not occur since the two gunmen committed suicide. The victims fight back in the videogame, however, in reality, the intimidation of the guns and the two men made the victims cooperative and fearful. The dialogue in some of the scenes is questionable as there was no evidence to support when and what they said.

In accordance with Nichols' ruling of what a documentary is, a videogame must faithfully represent the event, situation and characters in the videogame must faithfully represent actual people that inhabit the historical world. The story needs to stay true to its historical occurrence. In *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*'s case, this establishment seems to be conflicting as the initial stage of the game embodies documentary quality, but the last stage of the videogame (the Hell sequence) then shifts to complete fantasy and philosophy.

Alberto Cairo points out "abstraction is necessary to preserve journalistic integrity when information is missing" (Bogost, Ferrari, Schweizer, 66). Therefore the abstract nature of certain scenes in the videogame can be forgiven as some information is inaccessible and the artist may have felt the need to represent what cannot be known. According to Cairo's argument, the hell scene may lend itself to abstraction and can be viewed as a poetic documentary whereby the abstract nature of the game is a comment on society and is represented by elements of that society. However, no matter how poetic a documentary may be, it still adheres to documentary convention of truth and fact and in the *SCMRPG!* videogame, the hell scene provides no facts to prove that any of the events occurred. If we

had to compare Moore's use of animation in *Bowling for* Columbine, it is poetic and holds the voice of Moore clear in its comments, but remains factual in its recollection or retelling of history. Heavily saturated by the voice of the designer, the game comments on the media's blame of the attacks on *Doom,* Marilyn Manson, and *South Park* (their animated Satan), but the validity of such claims is lost in the hell sequence.



Figure 4.5: Screenshot from *SCMRPG!* showing the last sequence in Hell.

In regards to documentary games, videogames engage in actuality in three ways: spatial reality, operational reality and procedural reality (Bogost, Ferrari, Schweizer, 64). *SCMRPG!* makes use of spatial reality since navigation is one of the conventions of a role playing game. The space of the world is limited by the historical story; the authenticity of the story constrains the freedom of the world. The play-out of the event correlates with the real story and so certain limitations are understandable and are not questioned. *SCMRPG!* utilizes space well, exploring only what the historical world allows. The space of the last sequence of Hell, however, does not fit into spatial reality as the historical world does not establish this. With spatial realities, the videogame must place importance on *mise-en-scène* and here

Ledonne is highly thorough, allowing the player to interact with objects and situations revealed in the scene. Each object is important and has a function and the simplicity of the design allows for object identification and retrieval. Spatially the videogame engages with actuality well, but only in the first sequence and perhaps later scenes. The hell scene is quite a downfall for the games' engagement of the spatial reality as it is for the videogame as a documentary as a whole.

Operational realities are navigational realities that are flexible, but can be limited in their interaction. Operational realities are apparent in the videogame as there are limits in navigation by others characters in the game and the security cameras which limit movement and areas. The videogame allows for an assessment of the character it portrays. The characters, Harris and Klebold are strongly portrayed from their point of view, through the use of writings, excessive dialogue and actions. Their characters were established by media that represented the shooters when reporting the event and now the characters are portrayed in an alternative way which makes the player reconsider certain preconceptions that were aided by the mass media. The player reassesses the mass media's interpretation of the event and considers the situation from Harris and Klebold's side, which is an unexplored interpretation.

SCMRPG! exudes procedural realities (the rules and system that brings upon the processes –the questions around 'how') as it focuses on how the event came about, the occurrence of the event and even attempts to establish possible causes. With an overview of key points in Harris and Klebold's lives, a semi-fragmented history of the situation is created, providing certain insight into not only what happened, but also why it happened and most importantly how the event occurred.

With regards to the characteristics of documentary games that Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer's outlined, one could argue that *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* does embody documentary quality but cannot be categorized as a documentary game. Although the videogame has certain characteristics of realism and evidence, the videogame unfortunately turns to fiction with the last scene and the games genre changes to a typical fictional RPG. "What if *SCMRPG* is supposed to be a fantasy rendition of the shooting as imagined by Harris and Klebold (Arthouse Media, 1). This rhetorical statement is interesting as there is no stipulation by the artist about whether this game strives for documentary quality and the videogame does emulate many fantastical qualities. In response to all the misconception about his videogame, Danny Ledonne created a documentary film, *Playing Columbine* that would put to rest all the misconceptions of the videogame he created. In the film, many interviewees refer to the videogame as a 'serious game' and a 'documentary game'.

***Playing Columbine*:**

Playing Columbine's outset was to present the game to the world through theoretical consideration and understanding. The film discusses the videogame and its meaning. Anthony Burch reviews the videogame:

> Playing Columbine claims to primarily be about the controversy surrounding the director's game, but it wisely opts instead to spend more time talking about the general demonization of videogames as an artistic medium, and the nature of school violence. Super Columbine Massacre RPG! is used as a jumping-off point to discuss much broader, much more interesting issues: for this, the director is to be commended.
>
> (Burch, 1).

The film focuses more on the general controversy of videogames, (diverting away from *SCMRPG!* itself) and how they represent violence; even mainstream videogames are considered. Little insight into *Super Columbine Massacre* is given. The fact that Ledonne created a documentary explaining the videogame gives way to many implications: either the public and the media are highly sensitive, they misinterpreted the videogame's intentions, the medium of videogames is still too young to be taken seriously or Ledonne's videogame did not portray the event as he intended. Whatever the case, the documentary film was created to shed light on some misconceptions of the game. In the film, Ariana Almajun describes *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* as a documentary (*Playing Columbine* 2008).

To make a comparison between *Bowling for Columbine* and *SCMRPG!*, the two delve into questions of how the situation occur by taking a closer look at Harris and Klebold's lives in detail. The two mediums both dispute mass media claims of the musical and videogame influences on the event and focus on societal issues that the students had issues with. The texts both make use of animated sequences and use these to further their voice in revealing Colorado's problems as a whole. The differences between the two texts is that Michael Moore performs in his documentary as a muckracker, trying to question people to develop a theory as to how the situation came about. In the videogame, Ledonne uses the characters of Harris and Klebold to find understanding in the events that occurred and how they occurred. The videogame delves more into the processes of the event created by rules of the game that reveal what happened and how it happened. With these points in mind, one could say that they both embody the mode/genre of documentary, however, *Bowling for Columbine* does not fabricate facts as does *SCMRPG!* in the last sequence of the videogame where the two students land up in hell after their suicide.

Although *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* begins with documentary elements and characteristics, it veers off into a fantastical direction in which fiction overshadows documentary. If Ledonne had cut out the Hell sequence, the battle sequence and the imagined sequences, the videogame would have qualified as a documentary game. Unfortunately it is overly satirical and the game shifts so heavily into fiction that it loses its poetic license to qualify as a documentary. With Ledonne's background in documentary filmmaking, his use of the documentary mode is an understandable choice and may have been an unconscious decision to implement certain techniques. He has, however, made a clear conscious decision to review all the facts of the event in an attempt to incorporate them respectfully into the game. The videogame has a similar message to Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* documentary and certain convention are used both within the film and the videogame. The difference, however, is that Ledonne does not sustain verisimilitude to the historical world. In review of the videogame as a whole, one cannot call this videogame a documentary game as constant inconsistencies of verisimilitude are apparent. Perhaps the videogame represents a progress of videogames into the documentary genre as it does have some qualities stipulated by the theories of documentary but it cannot be categorized as such because of its lack of fidelity and authenticity to the historical world even though it tried to focus on the procedural aspect of the game as to how the situation came to be; it lost this focus when the videogame moves into last Hell scene whereby no investigation occurs, no evidentiary material or facts are provided and ironic satirical notions replace the procedural reality of the videogame. With no procedural reality or consistency of this, the videogame cannot be deemed documentary.

Conclusion

Documentary as a mode focuses on the historical world, revealing true stories through records of real events and real people. The aim of documentary is to shed light on a subject in an alternative way that has not yet been fully expressed by the mass media. There must be verisimilitude apparent in these texts and they must have respectable fidelity to the historical world. These texts contain a persuasive edge elicited by the artist through their filtration of their voice within the text. The text usually comments on the subject in a subjective way but always remains factual with substantial evidentiary material to back the claims made. As media grows through technological advancements, institutional demand, artists need for fresh representation and audience demand, remediation occurs.

The videogame medium has emerged quite rapidly and shares many similarities adopted from the film medium. The videogame genre has now adopted film's genre of documentary and adapted it to suit the videogaming medium. This shift in mediums has caused a change in the definition of documentary. Documentary games operate on a different level as their medium requires interactivity that explores *how* rather than *why, who, what, where* and *when* situations occur. Although the realism aspect is questioned with regards to the medium's reliance on a full virtual construction, the medium can embody realism through its process of information- the *how*. This process is usually represented through simulations and has grown further into different forms of videogames. Much theorisation has taken place to determine whether certain emerging games are 'documentary' and yet a lack of analysis of the actual implementation of the theories pertaining to this subject.

Through the investigation of the film versus the videogame in my comparison of *Bowling for Columbine* and *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, the videogame does not seem to embody

enough elements of a documentary to adapt that genre. Although it may be a serious game due to its message and content, its fictional aspects override the realism and for this one cannot allow it to be labelled documentary. More videogames like this should emerge to allow for a practical framework to establish more theory around this subject and thus a pattern could be spotted. Until then, the documentary game does seem like a fantasy for the videogame medium, but not an impossibility.

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