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# The presence of classical Hollywood narration in video games: a study of Grand Theft Auti IV

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# RESEARCH REPORT

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the field of Digital Animation

## The Presence of Classical Hollywood Narration in Video Games

A Study of *Grand Theft Auto IV*

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**ABSTRACT:**

While a film-viewer watches a movie from beginning to end without the ability to manipulate aspects of the environment on screen, video games are constantly being altered through the player's interaction. Some games however, can be identified as having strong cinematic narratives that detract from varied outcomes and limit game design to a point of closure that cannot be altered. These games have a predetermined script that mimics the formulae used in filmmaking. Typically in game design there are rules that govern what a player is permitted to do within the final product. The presence of these rules form part of what is known as "gameplay". This research essay is concerned with how such rules can restrict the interactivity of games, limiting them to a linear narrative. This premise will be investigated by applying what Bordwell terms a "classical Hollywood narration" model to an analysis of the game *Grand Theft Auto IV* (*GTA4*).

**DECLARATION**

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

WILLIAM JOHN MABIN_____.

_____day of _____2010.

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## INTRODUCTION:

This research essay is concerned with the study of the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV* to assess whether or not it has a pre-fabricated plot that subscribes to the classical Hollywood narrative. Initially *Grand Theft Auto IV* appears to allow, through the interaction between the player and protagonist, another form of narration setting it apart from the film audience's passive processing of events on screen in the Hollywood cinema. As the player has, to an extent, control over the central character and the environment, this allows for the potential to steer clear of a classical Hollywood narrative in which the ultimate story cannot avoid a conventional ending. After playing the game several times, however and pointedly making different choices for the protagonist, it became apparent that there are indeed elements of the Hollywood narrative embedded in the core plot of the game. Grand Theft Auto IV is defined as an open-world sandbox game. Such a game's environment is the representation of a real life setting in which the game character can partake in an array of activities aside from the game missions. This means that the player has the ability to avoid the narrative in the mission mode of the game by completing the missions at his own leisure or perhaps avoiding them entirely.

"Classical Hollywood narrative" refers to a skeletal framework that comprises numerous Hollywood film scripts. This type of script will often make use of Aristotle's interpretation of tragedy, where the narrative consists of three acts or parts, namely the beginning, the middle, and the end, with a master plot or narrative that is of central importance to all other components of the film dominating each of

these acts. The script will also follow a linear time-line and will ultimately culminate in some sort of resolution, or point of closure that will resolve the central conflict; vital to the main plot of the film. Classical Hollywood narrative uses composition and style to manipulate a representation of the real world. In an attempt to force the viewer to make a decision, one that relies on the viewer's response to stereotypes about what is being portrayed on screen, the genre also contains normalised options for handling semantics. The videogame *Grand Theft Auto IV* will be studied here to determine whether the presence of any or all of these qualities mean that this video game conforms to a classical Hollywood narrative, or if the player actually has a more active role than the passive viewer of a film. The purpose of such a study is to determine the resulting implications for the game and for the player himself, and thus for gaming in general as an alternate method of communicating human stories.

If the plot of a video game follows a rigid framework that cannot be avoided no matter what conscious choices the player makes, then the player's interaction with the game has become irrelevant because he has not been able to change the outcome of the game and might as well be the film spectator who can only watch, receive and interpret what is already in fact made or fixed. Contemporary video game developers often utilise the classical Hollywood narrative to retain the player's attention and offer psychological pleasure to the player through the emotional fulfilment of the protagonist, yet this confines the narrative to a single outcome and in turn threatens to make video games redundant sources of entertainment as Hollywood already provides such rigid stories. The fact that the player cannot alter the conventional structure of the game means that the game is entirely

predictable or pre-determined. Regardless of how much the player changes the game environment, or plays the game in a different way from another participant, the game is still designed according to an existing formula, which is well established in the popular realm of entertainment. The formula used is in fact meant to be overtly obvious and predictable to the player, which would defeat experimentation in game narrative. Yet perhaps *Grand Theft Auto IV* (*GTA 4*) is not following a rigid framework simply to draw in an audience, rather, it will be argued, it is consciously referencing a Hollywood style narration to satirise, parody, and ultimately upset the very foundations on which the genre is based. By exploiting the concept of the American Dream in its ultimately tragic conclusion – regardless of the choices the player does make - *GTA 4* disputes the happily-ever-after ending of Hollywood and provides a different way to perceive and to narrate human stories.

"To show that we understand a game ,all that we have to do is play it well." (Aarseth 5) The theorist Espen Aarseth indicates in his article *Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis* that it is better to structure an analysis of a particular game rather than to solely address the limited literature on game analysis. Thus the primary source of information for this research report will be the game *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The game will not only be played, but an acute understanding of classical Hollywood narrative will be used in a framework analysis of *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

*Grand Theft Auto IV* has been referred to by popular sources[1] as "*The Godfather*" of video games. This is not only because of the epic, cinematic quality of the game, but also references the game's dark side. The game borrows conventions from movies such as Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather.* For example, *GTA4's* protagonist, Niko Bellic and his actions are akin to the Michael Corleone character from *The Godfather* or Henry Hill in the film *Goodfellas*. Like these films and the characters in them, the game seeks to explain gangsterism and its effect on society (Monaco 295). Along with these film characters, the protagonist of *Grand Theft Auto IV* can be seen as a hero because he also conforms to some of the conventions of the classical Hollywood narrative. Further, *Grand Theft Auto IV* uses the conventions of classical Hollywood narrative to create the illusion of realism.

The game is, however, satire – the gratuitous violence and excessive use of stereotypes is an exaggeration of the paranoia, xenophobia and violence in the "real" world. The game also uses heightened cartoon humour to emphasise the violence and create a comedic effect (Kalning and Booker). These elements of the game make it ideal to study in terms of a classical Hollywood narrative.

The term "classical Hollywood narrative" derives from David Bordwell's discussion of the structure of contemporary mainstream film:

> In Fictional filmmaking, one mode of narration has achieved predominance. Whether we call it mainstream, dominant, or classical cinema, we intuitively recognize an ordinary, easily comprehensible movie when we see it. (6)

[1] See *Grand Theft Auto 4: The Godfather of Video Games*; '*Grand', but no 'Godfather'* and *Why Critics Want Grand Theft Auto IV to be the Godfather of Video Games*, WEB.

Bordwell’s contribution to the theory of “classical Hollywood narrative” is integral to the understanding of this genre and thus will be a primary source within this paper. This will not be the first time that “classical Hollywood narrative” has been used to analyse a video game however. Jeremy Warner used classical Hollywood narrative to analyse the video game *Final Fantasy X*. Warner’s focus was predominantly on the three act structure proposed by the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his definition of tragedy: the “beginning” as an introduction to characters, the “middle” as a point of conflict between characters and the “end” as a point of resolution (Warner 2-3). In this research essay, however, the study will be expanded beyond this interpretation of classical Hollywood narrative, and employ a thorough analysis of *GTA4* according to the framework provided by Bordwell.

A mainstream Hollywood film could in many respects be labelled predictable because it is based on a number of conventions that cause the viewer to anticipate the fulfilment of the goals of the protagonist. Typically the hero of such a film will fulfil at least one primary goal: that of completing some kind of mission or quest. Often a secondary plot will conclude in a successful union or a heterosexual romance. The spectator is aware of this and needs to be aware of this because the classical Hollywood narrative is based on the psychological fulfilment of the viewer’s expectations and desires, usually rooted in the ideals of the American Dream.

“Rockstar Games”, the company that created *Grand Theft Auto IV* acknowledges that there is a message in the game. Vice president of product development Jeronimo Barrera says: "Niko's background is that he comes from a war-torn country. And he's brought over with the

American dream. But it ends up being almost as violent as a war-torn country. There's a bit of message going on in there" (in Totilo). In a sense, then, the game is using the conventions of the classical Hollywood narrative to create a situation where the American dream has become the American nightmare. By doing this, the game subverts the tools of the classical Hollywood narrative to create a darker, satirical plot. The implications of this for gaming, for the player, and for the entertainment industry will be discussed in this paper by looking at a detailed case study of the game *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

In order to create a better understanding of the aims of this research report it is necessary to acknowledge previous studies of games regarding gender, race and narrative. It is also important to address the ongoing theory regarding how video games should be studied. Inherent in the discussion about how video games should be analysed is the feud between theorists that advocate the use of existing narrative theory brought across from the study of other media (literature, theatre, films, hypertext etc) in video game analysis, and those who reject narrative theory in favour of rule-based or aesthetic orientated study. Theorists that want to study video games in accordance with other narratives are referred to as “narratologists” whilst those who prefer to focus on the shifts in the mechanics of game play are known as “ludologists”. (Jenkins 1)

Henry Jenkins helps to define the attitudes of the ludologist school in his article *Game Design As Narrative Architecture*. He quotes Ernest Adams:

Interactivity is almost the opposite of narrative: narrative flows under the direction of the author, while interactivity depends on the player for motive power. (in Jenkins 1)

Above Adams defines the type of interactivity found in video games as different to the type found between the viewer of the film and the reader of a novel. His contention is that the player of a game is far more involved in the authorship of the game as he manipulates the dynamics of the world which he is presented while the viewer is a passive observer, unable to change what has already been written. Such a theory is extremely relevant in the context of this research report that explores this player-game relationship in the world of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Central to the aim of the argument found here is how relevant it is to apply classical Hollywood narrative to this specific game, in order to provide clues about how much power the player really is given, in a game of this nature, to become the author or architect of the game world.

Jenkins himself offers an interesting argument for why narrative should be used in order to study games. While he acknowledges the problem with applying what he calls “heavy-handed, literal” narrative to certain games he states that the narrative vocabulary that has formed from decades of theory is too important to disregard entirely. Jenkins offers understanding to ludologists that feel that strict application of narrative frameworks that so not include a consideration of the aspirations of the storyteller and of game designers as artists in the specific medium that incorporates the design of an entire virtual space. He refers to *tetris* a game to abstract in its design to be logically studied by narrative, at least alone, saying that studies of

aesthetics and game design would have to be used in that particular case. Jenkins dismisses the idea that narrative can be disregarded entirely saying that this cause "conceptual blind spots" in both their argument against narratologists and in their study of video games. (Jenkins 3)

As a type of mediation between ludologists and narratologists Jenkins attempts to address the concept of space in his discussion of how he thinks video games should be studied. Ludologists prefer to study the sculpted virtual worlds that game designers create. He claims that it is these spaces that are remembered by players of games and not the narrative motivation for them. Jenkins traces the narrative hooks present in games back to board games that have very little plot development but embody the type of narrative quests written by the likes of JRR Tolkien, Jules Verne, Homer and found in *hero's odyssey.* He states that games broadcast space that is influenced by science fiction, horror and film. (Jenkins 4) In this way Jenkins indicates that game spaces are at a minimal level inspired by such narrative conventions.

Jenkins cites a literary example, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in order to further explain his notion of space. He refers to the last section that he calls "dead weight" in the context of the rest of the novel but notes how the ideas in this last part of the book still inhabit the space that Tolstoy has created in the preceding words. (Jenkins 5) Jenkins also refers to the Disney company's "environmental storytelling", headed by Don Carson or Disney Imagineering. This regards how theme park Disneyland makes use of images embedded in its films and books to present a story to visitors. Thus a person can embark on a mythic

journey very easily because of his preconceptions about where he is supposed to be. In video games this would hold true for previous films seen that present the notion of a hero saving the day or allow the player to understand the dynamics of a game world because of what he has learned through watching action films or reading adventure novels. Once again ludologists would reject the very evidence that Jenkins uses here to make his argument stating that a book or a theme park ride is something that the user has no control over where as the player would have the ability to change certain things and be involved in a different type of way than that of a reader or an amusement park visitor.

A more relevant example provided by Jenkins is perhaps Mcgee's *Alice* as it is a videogame. The game assumes that the player is familiar with Lewis Carroll's classic novels *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass.* The videogame however recreates Carroll's same world but as a nightmarish world that the protagonist, Alice must return to in order to confront in order to maintain her own sanity. The game takes the form of an action game in which Alice must battle with the demon-like inhabitants of Wonderland but it still presumes that one is aware of the previous narratives in Carroll's books that act as a sequel for the events as they unfold in the game world. This is evidence that at least it is true that in some games designers blatantly use narrative from sources in other forms of media to create stories. (Jenkins 6)

Jenkins also cites ludology critic Jesper Juul, "You clearly can't deduct the story of Star Wars from Star Wars the game". Juul is referring to

the original 1983 game based on the film franchise of the same name. In the game one took command of a vessel that was to destroy the infamous Deasthstar featured in the second film in the series *The Empire Strikes Back*. Juul's argument is that if one were to remove the title from the game then the player would not comprehend the game as having anything to do with the film franchise. The game takes the form of quite abstract lines and shapes and would not clearly represent the characters or objects as seen in the film. This aside, however, the game does have the title *Star wars*. Taking this title away would be completely nonsensical in a study of the game. Even without the title the game would still tell a story about some kind of vessel that must shoot other objects and eventually a square shape until it is destroyed. These factors make it relevant to consider narrative in game studies. At completion, the game reset itself and the player must defeat an untold number of Deathstars of which there was only one in the film. This aspect makes other aspects of the videogame dynamic necessary to study. Thus this research paper does not favour either ludological or narratological studies but tries to mediate between both theories in order to ascertain a specific set of answers about if classical Hollywood narrative can correctly be applied to the videogame *Grand Theft Auto 4* specifically.

Another way that Jenkins makes it appear logical to apply narrative theory to game studies is through defining game spaces as places that use the mise-en-scene that mimic real world places in film as a rule that push all of the game designers' work toward a common goal. (Jenkins 5-6) The *Grand Theft Auto* series has always striven to present a world of gangsters, stereotype and mise-en-scene that is used in certain Hollywood films, moreover in the more recent games

where cut-scenes have allowed for more detailed cinematic sequences. The mise-en-scene in *Grand Theft Auto 4* is thus an important clue to the relevance of applying classical Hollywood narrative to a study of it.

Jenkins explains the mise-en-scene are capable of telling "spacial stories" which enable the player to understand a set of aesthetic rules that "privilege space exploration over story-telling". (Jenkins 7) Through the spaces that are explored in a videogame "micro-narratives" are created that Eisenstein would call "attraction" and popular sources and game designers would call "memorable moments". (Jenkins 7) Jenkins makes reference to a Jackie Chan action film in which there are certain narrative hooks and basic narrative vocabulary that always points to the major plot but that it is the memorable moments or fighting scenes in the film that viewers want to see. In the same way he is arguing that a game might provide an excuse for the action that occurs within it. This premise is investigated in the analysis of *Grand Theft Auto IV* in order to determine if the plot is just an excuse for the game world to exist or if it were an intrinsic part of the game's design without which it would not exist.

Jenkins cites Kristen Thompson in an argument about which is more important in a videogame- the fabula world that the game exists in or the plot, "the structured set of all causal events as we see and hear them presented". (Thompson in Jenkins 9) He describes how in films the viewer creates a mental mapping of narrative events as well as the contextual world. In video games, he goes on the player must test oneself by using what he knows about the preceding story or game elements. Jenkins also makes a reference to how in videogames one

can often experiment or rehearse with the fabula world in a pre-game trial mode. (Jenkins 9) In *Grand Theft Auto 4* the free-roaming aspects that are discussed later are a clear example of this type of free-play leaning that benefits the player. This process of learning is perhaps a narrative within itself; of course an entire study of different types of narratives in this study is too vast to cover in this research report. Videogames also allow saving that allows the player to retry what he has previously failed allowing for different narratives to emerge for the player.

Continuing with this assessment Jenkins also says that game designers have to implant game cues in games that alert the player as what to do, whether these take the form of cinematic cut-scenes or basic hints such as "You require the red key card to open this door". (Jenkins 9; Doom) This redundancy created through the constant telling the player what to do is compared by Jenkins to the three-act structure of the classical Hollywood film itself. Jenkins's discussion around this redundancy is useful in understanding how there is a difference between what he terms "embedded narrative", what is unavoidable in a game and "enacted narrative", which is achieved or altered by the player. (Jenkins 9) Once again Jenkins refers to Jesper Juul, specifically his analysis of the videogame *Quake* created by id software in order to demonstrate the difference between these two types of narrative. Juul describes *Quake*, a first-person shooter as being incapable of flashbacks or cut-scenes. Thus, he claims it has no capacity to be studied through the application of narrative because it does not privilege plot above the illusion that the player is the author or in-game character within the game world. (Jenkins 10) It is true that the

player in the character is free to enact his own narrative to a certain extent although the character still exists within the confines of the game's rule bound world. This enacted narrative is accompanied by a very present embedded narrative that is broadcast to the player in the form of the background story (whether present in-game or on the game packaging). Aside from this background story there are many parts of the game that contain small, embedded narratives. The presence of a dead marine serves to tell the player something about the gameworld. It composites details reinforcing the presence of an overall narrative, a spatial context for these on-goings and reminds the player that he is on a quest. (Quake)

As Jenkins would have it the costume design/ textured characters, art direction and lighting choices define how the player is informed about the game world and its narrative history. Jenkins refers to embedded narratives as a system of clues that gave rise to the entire detective genre of videogames, in which a player must sift through clues in order to understand the game world and therefore attain the power to solve the puzzles that lead to winning the game. (Jenkins 10-11) Aside from what is pre-programmed or pre-structured into the game Jenkins describes as "Emergent narrative". For this he refers to the legacy of Microsoft games that allow players to control a whole city like in *Sim City* or a family as in *The Sims*. *The Sims* allows a player to create characters almost from scratch. Players must modify character's skins (textured appearance) to suit their own preferences. Such videogames have no grand pre-written narrative but allow players to create their own narratives through the creation and management of these characters. Aside from having obvious resonance with classical

Hollywood narrative *Grand Theft Auto IV* also allows players to roam free from story mode and customize their own character, which would still be a type of narrative according to Jenkins.

In her study of hypertext, or virtual textual stories *Narrative as Virtual Reality* Marie-Laure Ryan is highly supportive of bringing narrative techniques from other media in order to study these worlds. She makes the point throughout her book that computer games may be considered virtual stories and thus her theory is critical in an understanding of narrative as it is applied to virtual worlds. Ryan writes that language remains rooted in reality and truth and that virtual worlds make use of this language and thus is irrevocably tied to the narrative of other media. (Ryan 163)

Ryan draws up several models in order to explain both the different kinds of digital storytelling that she thinks exist and in order to demonstrate different types of interactivity. She defines three different types of interactivity in her book with such models. The first is likened to the Ancient Greek theatrical stage in which observers were in close proximity to the actors but did not impact on the happenings on the stage itself. The second would be like the viewing of a film in which a viewer is shown a story on a screen but does not exist within the same world as the film as there is a physical separation between the film and its audience. Her last model reflects what occurs between the reader and hypertext or the player and a videogame. In this model the player inhabits the game space in the form of an avatar or game character. Ryan draws on the idea of the carnival for this model illustrating how the player becomes akin to an actor who has some sort of presence and therefore impact on the game world. (Ryan 298) This last model is

central to the discussion of *Grand Theft Auto IV* regarding how the ability of the player to alter the game world can be hampered by the presence of a type of narrative that is designed to be separate and informative from a viewer, who although actively engages mentally with a story can not change events or the outcome of its plot.

Ryan discusses the importance of people's narrative understanding across a range of media in making sense of virtual space and worlds. She says that the critical viewer of film, painting and narrative understandings in far more likely to be able to understand the structure of an online story and to become immersed in it. (Ryan 128) She states that the formation of stereotypes across different types of media is a shortcut to informing readers and players with a world that they have never visited before. Ryan also notes that the name of a place in a narrative creates a stereotypical understanding of that place. (Ryan 128, 129)

While Ryan describes how a hypertext creates an impression of a place or space that declares to the reader "this is the real world" (Bathes in Ryan 130), it also makes use of "referential mobility" (Ryan 121), which allows the reader to transcend space and time, in order to reference what he has learnt about narrative or certain genres of media prior to reading a specific work. Ryan defines two types of time that allow the player to do this in the reading of a virtual world. There is discursive time, which is the time and place that a story is taking place. Then there is temporal time that allows the reader or player to exit the discursive time window through mental escape that allows a person an intertextual understanding of created spaces. (Ryan 121) It is this temporal time that allows the player of *Grand Theft Auto IV* to

make sense of the game world through an understanding of other stories told in other forms of media, such as classical Hollywood narratives.

Ryan debates the term "linearity" (Ryan 123) in plot, stating that a text must succumb to the dynamics of narrative while she says that virtual worlds are panoramic and can be explored in a multitude of ways. Ryan argues that narrative conventions do not bind authors even in texts. In fact she goes so far as to say that modern literature is transgresses narrative conventions while in a game rules must be followed that can bind a player to certain outcomes. (Ryan 181) She refers to Roger Caillos definition of the four different types of game in *Men, Play and Games* implying that if games are limited by Callois's proposed genres of games. An understanding of a game's rules prior to playing that game would be similar to predicting how the narrative of a certain genre of film would play out. The meaning achieved through reading or playing a game can be used to further an understanding of narrative or of game rules. Ryan cites Wolfgang Iser to describe how this meaning achieved through a reader or player's interaction or maintaining freeplay is the causal link between reading literature and playing a game. (Ryan 182, 183) In *Grand Theft Auto IV* the free roaming mode acts as a space where the player can further explore the game environment building an understanding not only about how the game world exists and functions, but also about how other similar games would operate.

Ryan describes games as literature that uses narrative to inform the player about his character's situation in the game world that in turn allows him to defeat opponents and progress in the game. (179) She

alerts one to the era of Post-modernism in which one becomes free from signs through an awareness of their presence. (Ryan 175) Thus the better one understands the conventions of the narrative the more successful a player can be in a game. Fiction, Ryan says can not really be accountable for truth (186-187), yet through temporal immersion, created by discovery through narrative as well a spatial immersion, which involves mapping space and emotional immersion the player forms a conception of space. (Ryan 259) In *Grand Theft Auto IV* it is the movement of the character by the player that creates this understanding. Thus if the storyline is not followed or the player plays the game in a certain way the player will have a variable degree of this perception of space.

"The purpose of interactivity is to discover the plan set up by the system and to overcome the hurdles along the way". (Ryan 245) Ryan defines numerous models that define the different types of outcomes and interactions in hypertext and effectively games. Her "tree" model branches out as more decisions are made, while the "vector" model allows one to visit sub-stories on route to the final ending as in a museum. "The directional model" or "flow chart" provides many different options to the player while having the same ending and the "maze" model could lead the player either to death or victory in different outcomes depending on what decisions he makes. "Action spaces" allow for "epic wondering" through a game space but a player's abilities are hindered by a grand narrative that ultimately pushes the player in a certain direction. A "network" model does not make use of causal time and place and a character can die and then the player can return to a point in time before this occurrence. (Ryan 247-250)

*Grand Theft Auto IV* incorporates aspects of the different models described above. On the one hand there is an action space that the player can freely explore but if one embarks on completing the story side of the game the player's abilities are affected by the presence of a classical Hollywood narrative. One can visit different locations and complete side-missions as in Ryan's vector model but essentially there is one ultimate conclusion in the narrative of the character Niko Bellic that can only be found in pursuing the story mode in the game. As in the maze model a character may end up dead, arrested or at a different conclusion in the ending of the story mode depending on choices that the player makes. Saving in the game, however allows the player to cheat death and time in the game world returning to an earlier point in the game as in Ryan's network model. The videogame has varying degrees of interactivity that change as the player engages with cut-scenes and character dialogue in the narrative charged story mode or decides to participate in other free-roaming aspects of the game.

Jesper Juul is an advocate of the school of Ludology in studying games. In his article *Games Telling Stories? – A brief note on games and narratives* he outlines the reasons that theorists that are eager to use narrative as a form of study: people use narrative for everything, most games feature narrative introductions and back stories and that games share traits with narratives. Juul says that the problem with using narrative in game analysis is that it is not neutral, that it uses an existing framework and forces it on something that is not part of the media ecology of movies, novels and theatre. He states that time works differently in games and most importantly that there is a

different relationship between the reader or viewer and the player of a game. (Juul 1) While Juul certainly is right about the different type of interactivity between readers or viewers and the players of games he is so desperate to discredit narratology that he blatantly ignores the forced presence of narrative in games. In *Grand Theft Auto IV* there is a story mode that progresses at least somewhat in the style of the classical Hollywood narrative. The cut-scenes and character dialogue through which this narrative is presented to the player is important because it informs the player about the game environment and may motivate certain players to continue to play the game.

Juul cites two examples of games that narratological theorists assume are narrative driven *Space Invaders* and *half-life*. In *Space Invaders* a back-story was present on the game packaging involving how the player is earth's last line of defence that Juul declares suggests an initial state of affairs as in folklore. He, however, rejects the study of the game by using narrative because he says that it does not embody an ideal state of events as the player must continuously battle progressively harder levels that contain representations of aliens until his game character is destroyed. In *half-life* the player as Gordon Freeman must proceed along an epic storyline broadcast to the player through in game occurrences and character dialogue. (half-life) Juul, however suggests that the many saves that it takes for a player to complete such a game causes the disruption of time, segmenting the game in such a way that narrative frameworks can not be successfully applied to the game. (Juul 1-2) As there is a back-story, a title and a game separating games from narrative, as Juul says is "untenable". (3) His problem here is more with the simple application of narrative frameworks than a study of narrative in certain games entirely.

Juul refers to the films *Mortal kombat* (1993) and *Tomb Raider* that is both based on games of the same names in order to demonstrate how narratives have emerged out of games. In midway's game *Mortal Kombat* the player must choose a fighter with a specific set of abilities. He then must fight an array of enemies before he completes the game and it resets. Juul claims that in Anderson's 1995 film adaptation of the game the characters suddenly had vast personalities, personal histories and games and proceeded along a narrative that never existed within the game. In *Tomb Raider* the film the game character Lara Croft was suddenly expanded upon in the same ways. Juul does not believe that these narratives exist within the games themselves and rejects the application of what one knows about the film characters to studies of these respective games. Juul does not mention here that the games themselves did contain narratives themselves. In *Mortal Kombat* text at the beginning and end of the game alert the player to who characters are, what their aims are and what the Mortal Kombat tournament is as well as what each character does after winning the tournament. Lara Croft has always had a personality and storyline broadcast to the player in the form of cut-scenes in Tomb Raider. Thus well Juul is right about the expanded narratives in the films, there were existing film narratives in the games themselves that could be examined. Juul is somewhat aware that games contain narratives. He does not want theorists applying irrelevant narrative theory to videogames as he sees them as a new medium that does not simply mimic the types of narratives found in other media. (Juul 10) It should be noted that *Grand Theft Auto IV* has been specifically chosen for this study because there is evidence of it containing classical Hollywood a narrative specifically. This research report is not

concerned with discrediting or accrediting narrative theory in the study of games in general as games vary in design. Rather it takes a popular, contemporary game and sees how relevant it is to apply classical Hollywood narrative to a study of it, while bearing in mind the differences in player-game interaction and reader or viewer interaction.

Another theorist Markku Eskelinen find that the problem with the application of narrative frameworks in game studies is that they tend to use "a very limited knowledge of mere mainstream drama or outdated literary theory" in "an attempt to skip the 20th century altogether and avoid intellectual contact with it". (Eskelinen 1) In his article *The Gaming Situation* Eskelinen discusses game play as well as the study of other media by the likes of Espen Aarseth in order to answer the question of how games should be studied.

Eskelinen examines Aarseth's notion of "cybernetic sign production". He acknowledges that there are two parts of a game that can be found within its "scriptonic events" or a "string of signs as they exist in the game". (Eskelinen 2) Of course Eskelinen is not seeking to describe these aspects of games in narratively based terms. These two types of scriptonic events are prefabricated and completed the events presented to the player. Completed being the combination of what the player can do to the prefabricated events according to his actions. Ironically Eskilinen who follows a more rule based school of thought agrees with Jenkins intertextually by stating that it is the interpretation of games that allow one to configure videogames, this being the opposite of how books are composed in order for a reader to

interpret. (2) His notion of prefabricated and completed are in ways similar to Jenkin's embedded and intrinsic forms of narrative.

Eskelinen uses two terms "events" and "existents" in order to separate the parts of a videogame that are inherent and those that can change. (4) Events include aspects of games like cut-scenes that the player can either benefit from in terms of understanding narrative and thereby creating an understanding that allows him to play the game in the correct way in order to win or to proceed to another type of situation. Existents are defined as "dynamic characters (that) transforms into a more complex continuum of combinations, alterations and middle terms". (Eskelinen 4) These existents are different to static parts of the videogame that a player cannot change. Through interaction with these characters a player can alter the game environment, whether this is a minor change, like killing a non-playable character that will not affect the outcome of the game or the outcome of the game.

Eskelinen, like Jenkins speaks about spatial relationships in videogames. As a rule based theorist though he is concerned with the idea that space defines the game world in terms of what a player is allowed to do in it, what capabilities a player has or gains and whether or not there is a division of labour through a multiplayer network. He is not concerned with Jenkin's idea that spatial clues such as mise-en-scene create narrative clues. He proposes that games present the player two different kinds of space: closed such as storyline in cut-scenes and open, dynamic that the player can interact with and presumably change certain facets of. In Eskelinen's view there are various factors that limit what the player can do in these dynamic parts of the game.

"Causal relations" or the representation of physics and real-world behaviour have the ability to create rules that limit what a player can do in the virtual world. This also has to do with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its limitations. If the player is dependant on AI for support and the AI fails the player it prevents the player from achieving what he has set out to (Eskelinen 5-6) "Spatial relations" concerns both sonic space, where sound builds up suspense and space within the virtual world. For example certain sound effects could alert the player to the fact that enemies are approaching and a confined hallway would make it hard for the game character to move around a lot. (Eskelinen 6) There are also certain "conventions" such as a 2D map provided to a player who is playing in a 3D environment which could be a disadvantage, or cameras that the player can move but does not have to be conscious of like a real-world camera man which would be an advantage. (Eskelinen 6)

Eskelinen says that videogames should be studied in terms of their "unreliability". (6) He determines that:

In narratives and many other kinds of fiction it is acceptable and sometimes even preferable that users are misled by being given wrong instructions. But in games the deliberate frustration of action seems clearly an intolerable. One might think of unreliable maps giving false information about the location of the player or objects he's seeking. (7)

What is problematic about Eskelinen's presumption here is that it discredits the hiding of secrets from the creation of successful game

titles. Many videogames such as *Grand Theft Auto 4*, *half-life* and *Dead Space* might disclose information from the player. It is the revealing of the betrayal of the protagonist later on in the narrative of the game that creates a progression of events that the game uses to set up different segments of the game in which new events occur. In videogames there is often the discovery of a piece of evidence or an artifact that allows one to progress to a new place in the game world and this is a type of storytelling or narrative.

Eskelinen also states that videogames should be studied with regard to interface, which is how the player is interacting with the game world. Beyond the physical interaction he begins to talk about temporal relations between the player and the gameworld. Mainly he feels that videogames communicate to the player in terms of order, speed, frequency, duration, simultaneity and the time of action. He also speaks about goals and sub-goals as being central to the progression of the game: Motivating the player to experience the feeling on winning. He cites Roger Callios who notes four broad types of games: agon (competition), alea (chance), mimicry and iynx (vertigo). This he feels accounts for player motivation and how active a player is in each type of game. These more scientific principles might become very useful for studying the parts of a game that are abstract or free roaming but ignore that in many videogames today there is strong resonance with classical Hollywood film narrative in the design of games.

The chosen method of research embodies the playing of the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV's* story missions from start to finish and applying Bordwell's concept of the classical Hollywood narrative to

these parts of the game. In addition to this a textual understanding of Ludology will be used to study the free-roaming aspects of the game. It is necessary to justify this research method, as a textual analysis can be problematic, as it does not consider the study of gameplay itself.

Ben DeVane and Kurt Squire investigate the effects of violence in video games on so-called "at risk" children in *The Meaning of Race and Violence in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.* The article describes how critics say that the game provides young adolescents with "negative role-models". (Devane and Squire 266) It also notes how fixed narrative frameworks are insufficient research in understanding videogames because understandings of the socio-political and socio-economic surroundings of players need to be considered as well.

In the study three groups of "at-risk" adolescents were chosen for interview and discussion around whether or not they themselves thought that *San Andreas*'s content induced violence in teenagers. The three groups were divided into "the Casuals", a group of nine to twelve year-old predominantly African American, non-school affiliating children; "the Athletes" a group of thirteen to fifteen year-old African Americans; and "the Gamers", a group of sixteen to eighteen year-old European American players. (Devane and Squire 271).

In the first study with the Gamers Devane and Squire found that the players found the game "gory" and immediately declared that they would never "grab an Uzi and run around and shoot some cops". (272) "Gamer 1" said that he thought that there was something wrong with the home environment of children who had access to the game. Later

in the study the Gamers were able to acknowledge that the characters in the *Grand Theft Auto* series were obviously stereotypical. "Gamer 2" declared that he found *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* to be the game version of the film *Scarface*, saying that it was the "same movie, same city". (Devane and Squire 276). The subject then went on to say that *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was inspired by the film *Menace II Society* because all of the characters names were from that film.

Whereas the Gamers found the game gratuitously violent the Athletes group did not find the game's content realistic at all, perhaps because they were exposed to real-world violence on a daily basis. (Devane and Squire 274). When it came to their perception of race and acting out the violence, however, the Athletes thought that the game characters were an accurate portrayal of African Americans, although not from their living areas but those of Los Angeles (the city in which *San Andreas* is based) and the south side of Chicago. Perhaps this was due to their exposure to films and education that would allow this group to acknowledge the presence of satire and stereotyping in the game as the gamers did. (Devane and Squire 278)

In the Casuals group the player named Havoni claimed to not like the violence in the game, preferring to customize cars in the game-world as this was his desired profession. This had to do somewhat with the fact that he had limited access to the game interface, which he made use of at a friend's house. (Devane and Squire 275) Later Havoni claimed to enjoy the violence in the game when his friend enthusiastically spoke about it, presumably an attempt to bond with his friend as he later denied enjoying the violent aspects of the game once more. (Devane and Squire 275)

This study yielded important clues about how players play the game as well as how they perceive the on-goings in the game's narrative. The poorer African American groups failed to recognise film reference and a system of satire that is embedded into the game while Havoni also lacked access to the game and thus played it in a different way. In another article by David Leonard *Not a Hater, Just Keepin' it Real: The Importance or Race- and Gender-Based Game studies* the author is the player who chooses to focus on perceptions of race and gender in games such as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* rather than focus on narrative. In the article Leonard cites the example of Arische Ritter, a white supremacist who took the game literally and says on his website that *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was good because it "blatantly shows how negroes have corrupted our society". (Ritter in Leonard 87) Leonard gives an example of theorists who see the game as a "high-tech blackface" that allows its "participants to try on the other, the taboo, the dangerous, the forbidden, and the otherwise unacceptable". (Rogin in Leonard 86)

Eskelinen uses examples of videogames in order to state that some games are without narrative. Like Jenkins he uses *Tetris* as an example of a videogame that clearly does not have narrative in it and requires a different type of study. *Tetris* is a videogame in which abstract brick shapes fall from the top of the screen and the player must fit in sequence, by rotating the puzzle-like pieces before they hit the already rising structure of brick shapes. In order to slow down the rise of the structure the player must connect a series of bricks, eliminating part of the rising structure. If the player allows the bricks rise to the top of the screen the game is lost. Eskelinen also states

that in a soccer game “a goal is a goal is a goal”, meaning that there is no story in it. This however in the context of videogames is greatly dependant on who it is that is playing a certain game. *Tetris* can have a narrative structure as long as the player cares to formulate a story in it as will be demonstrated later. A soccer videogame such as one in the *Fifa* series allows players to manage players and teams through which one is developing a narrative. Players are most certainly drawn to videogames in order to assume the identity of famous footballers and this is left out of Eskelinen’s equation.

Eskelinen has this to say about a theorist Janet Murray who is studying *Tetris*:

She’s quite content to interpret this soviet game as “a perfect enactment of the over tasked lives of the Americans in the 1990s- of the constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into out overcrowded schedules and clear off our desks in order to make room for the next onslaught”. It would be equally far beside the point if someone interpreted chess as a perfect American game because there’s a constant struggle between hierarchically organized white and black communities. (7)

In his attempt to ostracize Murray for her attempt to apply narrative to the game of *Tetris* Eskelinen ignores the player-game relationship that occurs during play. Players of all races, cultures, economic, social and political circumstances will play videogames and to discredit one players interpretation is to ignore why that person plays that game to begin with. All of the above people are examples of people that have played the game in different contexts following certain agendas. For

the purposes of this research report it is important to recognise that it is the writer who is the person who played the game in a certain manner, with unlimited access to the game interface. The writer is also a scholar who is involved in deciphering different academic theories in order to make a specific argument, also having wide access to literature on the subject and to other media that informs his opinions.

## CHAPTER ONE

Historical Overview:

The use of classical Hollywood narrative in video games has evolved over the thirty-five to fifty year history of the video game (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 21). As the industry grew over the years, it became necessary to develop both the narrative structure and the technological aspects of games in order to appeal to the public. Together with enhancing the visual aspects with improving technology, film narrative in digital games assisted in the development of this form of entertainment. The scope of this paper is limited to only a few examples, but hopes to show how the advancement of games over time "gives a flavour of how we moved from a dot on the screen, to games which share the style and technology of many Hollywood blockbusters" (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 21). It also gives us a sense of how we moved towards a point where studying a video game is a logical way of establishing how the Hollywood tradition confines narratives, and thus how the players of these games are perhaps themselves confined to repeat the same predictable stories.

Yet the history of video games is complex as their very origins are contested. No one appears to agree on when the very first game was introduced, and thus when the art was pioneered. For instance the exact point at which the Japanese company Nintendo changed from being a developer of analogue playing cards to one of the early video game console giants is unclear. The Tokyo Telecommunications Laboratory started to use transistor-based technology as early as 1956. It only began to make video game consoles in the 1990s however, under its new name Sony. This kind of historical uncertainty

makes it hard to define when exactly video games were first made because the definition of what constituted the first early game is not entirely clear (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 22).

It should be noted that video games erupted out of a two existing mediums: games that have existed for thousands of years before digital technology and computer-based technologies that have been accelerating from the beginning of the twentieth century. Combining a human past time with the newest technologies became a viable way of expanding the entertainment industry.  A video game that could take credit for being one of the first to emerge from this new industry was developed by Alexander Douglas, a PhD student at Cambridge University. Douglas successfully created a version of *Noughts and Crosses* or *Tic Tac Toe* in 1956 that ran on the EDSAC – the world's first stored-programme computer (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 22).

It is usually William Higinbotham, a psychiatrist at Brookhaven National Laboratory who created a tennis simulation that ran on a laboratory oscilloscope who is credited with producing the first game six years after Douglas (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 22).  Although it is relatively hard to analyse Douglas's Tic Tac Toe prototype using the type of classical Hollywood narrative that will be used to analyse the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV*, in Higinbotham's early simulation there is evidence of the components of a basic film narrative - there is a player who takes the role of a tennis champion. While this character has yet to form recognisable features and likeable attributes, clearly even in the early days of video game development, the inclusion of a basic story was considered of some importance.

The next two landmarks in video game invention contributed further to the type of narrative that will be discussed in the case study. In 1962 a team of researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) led by Steve Russell created the game *Spacewar!* (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 22) The game consists of two representations of space ships each manned by a separate player. The aim of *Spacewar!* is to shoot at each other until one destroys the other. This early video game had taken narrative a step further from Higinbotham's tennis simulation. Now there was a definite setting for the protagonist, adding to the atmosphere, and thus to the sense of a coherent story. One could go so far as to say that there could be an antagonist in this competition between two people, even if limited to the players' imaginations. The plot, however, is still diluted by the format of the game, heavily reliant on the graphics technologies that existed at the time (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 22).

In 1967 *ADVENT* (short for Adventure) further developed narrative in games.  This original text-based game was later adapted to the Atari video game entitled *Adventure* in 1979, noted for being "the progenitor of the entire action-adventure genre" (Camper in Perron and Wolf 174). The early abstract video game carried in it the essence that would encourage subsequent game designers to use classical Hollywood narrative in their game design: there is a protagonist in the form of a sword wielding character that asserts his powers over various agents in order to resolve a crisis in a particular setting. It is easy to see that *ADVENT* was one of the earliest video games responsible for the type of narrative that occurs in "RPG's", or Role-Playing Games, that are still being produced today such as the *Final Fantasy* franchise or even *World of Warcraft*.

The Magnavox Odyssey*,* released in 1972, was the first commercial home video game system. It made use of transparent screen overlays that created a unique context for each video game that was played on it. For instance the tennis video game that was made for the system is accompanied by an overlay that gave the appearance of a court and its respective markings (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 23). Although limited by graphical representation, the game is given a setting through these overlay screen sheets.

In 1972 Nolan Bushell formed the company Atari, perhaps the most well known company in the history of the video game (Kirriemuir in Rutter and Bryce 23). One of the company's first inventions was *PONG*, another tennis simulation modification. What is notable about *PONG* is that it offers a modification of the early tennis simulations and for the first time had an illusion of depth. The white paddles that move up and down the screen, and the white ball that the players hit in order to stay in the game, appear to be located in front of their black background. These representational graphics allows games to reference their "real-world" counter-parts. Another way that game designers were able to capture the sensations of the masses in *PONG* was through the use of sound. The sounds in the game successfully imitate the sound that a ball makes when making contact with the paddles and the sound of the cheering crowd. Through subsequent development from this point, "classical Hollywood narrative" in games has become reliant on sound. In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, audio allows the presence of dialogue that contributes to the plot by setting up a series of cues that guide the player.

Atari also began to build on their graphics in subsequent games, such as *Tank* (1972) and *Night Driver* (1976) (Wolf 152). These developments were a significant advancement for video games because they displayed the ability of graphics to mimic reality, which along with plot, would eventually contribute to the strong classical narratives in video games such as *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

In 1978 Midway distributed a game from Taito called *Space Invaders* (Wolf 55). The game is similar in many respects to *Spacewar!* The background is the most convincing the Atari system was capable of portraying at the time. Space is shown as a black background with the inclusion of white dots to indicate stars (Peron and Wolf 44). Like *PONG*, *Space Invaders* is able to convey each action with a sense of immediacy and urgency as it mimicked real-time (Wolf 55). The video game features the player's character, a spaceship, on the bottom of the screen. The player has to defend the ship by blasting a series of objects representing aliens that slowly creep down the screen. The video game is in fact impossible to win, thus denying the classical Hollywood narrative convention of the protagonist engaging in a conflict with an agent of evil and ultimately triumphing over it. Defying this convention, *Space Invaders* simply becomes more and more difficult with each new wave of aliens. Despite the amount of time spent on playing the game, because there is never a triumphant end for the player, the only conclusion is the ultimate destruction of the player's character. The player eventually has to give up because his physiological needs take precedence over the game. Here then, perhaps, is the first hint of a video game seeking to disrupt the norms of a traditional Hollywood narrative.

*Breakout* was one of the first games with a decisive background story. In the story, while travelling in space, the player encounters an alien force, immediately marked as the enemy. When they are shot, the aliens vanish from the screen and it becomes clear that the player is destroying them in order to defend, not only the on-screen character, but humanity itself. This game is part of classical Hollywood narrative as in such a style, the beginning of a film is not necessarily the beginning of the character's life. Rather, the genre requires the suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience or, in the case of the game, the player, that the on-screen characters have a history prior to the beginning of the film or game. While still lacking an end to Aristotle's three-act sequence in traditional Hollywood narratives, *Space Invaders* has an off-screen introduction to the protagonist's predicament, at least fulfilling the first-act requirement, while the game itself is the middle of the narrative: the epic battle between antagonistic forces that needs to be resolved. Subsequent video game narratives would build on simple stories such as this, eventually leading to the dominance of Hollywood-style narratives in many video games.

Id software's John Carmack, their game-engine designer, was able to create fluid game engines that drew the player into their games by using computer graphics that mimic how objects and surfaces look in real life. (King and Krywinska 128) At the same time Carmack's colleagues at id software and fellow game designers John Romero and Kevin Romero were adding a fantastical element to the games that the company created (King and Krywinska 22). Notable in their game development was *Wolfenstein 3D*, a video game that combines historical references with fantasy (King and Krywinska 22). The video

game is set during World War II with the player taking the role of an almost super-human character who is on the side of the Allies. The character's mission is to escape from a Nazi castle called Wolfenstein. In order to do this the character has to kill many German soldiers, and eventually Hitler himself. The game was designed to follow a first-person perspective, intending to make the player feel as if he is in fact the in-game protagonist. Thus, the player is no longer merely watching a character on screen but was told explicitly that he was in control and inside and involved in the game.

Like *Space Invaders, Wolfenstein 3D* has an off-screen introduction. Unlike many of the video games of the Atari era, *Wolfenstein 3D* has an ending. The player can defeat Hitler at the end of the game and escape certain doom, resolving the external struggle presupposed by the off-screen introduction. *Wolfenstein 3D,* however, still does not necessarily conform to the standards of classical Hollywood narrative. Its first person perspective creates the illusion that the player exists within the game environment and sees through the eyes of its central character. The exclusion of dialogue, cut-scenes and the limited background story allows the player to forget that he is assuming a pre-programmed identity. The personality of the character can only be broadcast through the actions of the player, thus making him the central protagonist of the overall plot and discrediting the presence of another preset prototype that could take his place. This means that the illusion is created of the player determining the narrative structure of the game, despite it really being other factors such as the cut-scenes that determine the plot in later games such as *Grand Theft Auto IV*. As in id software's subsequent title *Doom*, the player can often define the in-game character as being an extension of himself

quite easily. He, however, has limited options in these video games. Players of the game are granted some capabilities – opening of doors, collecting health, keys weapons and ammunition. One can decide if he wishes to continue playing or fighting enemies in these games. But the only other choice, in *Doom,* for example, is to allow the Marine character to die.

*Doom* contains text at the end of each of its "episodes". This text tells the player what their current position is after completing each phase of the game, and what action one would have to take in order to progress further in the game (Ultimate Doom). This was an attempt to add to the storyline of the game. Cut-scenes would facilitate this mechanism in later games in a way that would embody classical Hollywood narrative.

John Carmack was fascinated with how computers could be programmed and how solutions could be reached in video game design (King and Krywinska 128). He therefore posted his programming code for the game engines that he produced on the company's Internet forums so that other game designers could build on his designs. One company that built on Carmack's designs was 3D Realms, a division of the company Apogee. The company developed Carmack's *Doom* engine to the point where the character became capable of doing more than that of the *Doom* or *Wolfenstein* 3D characters. The video game that 3D Realms produced was designed so that the player experiences the game world from a first-person viewpoint. It is titled *Duke Nukem 3D*. Duke Nukem, the game's protagonist, has been compared to the character played by Arnold Schwarzenegger's character in the film *The Terminator.* Duke is shown in the game as having bulging muscles, a

square-top, military-style haircut and has one-liners that are very similar to those used by Schwarzenegger in that movie (King and Krzywinska, 178). According to Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, this is an intentional parody where the Duke Nukem character mocks the typical male chauvinist and his actions. (178-179).

Using such parody, the character Duke Nukem is able to transcend the status of being a background character that is easily lost in the mind of the player of *Doom* or *Wolfenstein*. One of the other ways that 3D Realms made this happen was through the use of in-game speech. By pressing a combination of keys on the keyboard, Duke can utter phrases such as, 'Come get some' and 'I'll be back', making him more human-like than previous game characters (King and Krzywinska, 179 and Duke Nukem 3D).

Another innovation in Duke Nukem was the introduction of cut-scenes. "Cut-scenes are a common storytelling technique used in digital games. They help define the fictive world of a game, as well as fulfil a number of game play functions." (Salen & Zimmerman 419) Each cut-scene has distinct phases that make it a "building block" in the course of the game's narrative structure (Bordwell 158 and *GTA4*). In classical Hollywood narrative the structure of a scene is much like that of the overall structure of the narrative itself. First there is an exposition that specifies the time, place and the relevant characters. These character's spatial positions are established and the spectator is aware of each character's state of mind as a result of being conscious of their actions in the previous scene. (Bordwell 158) In the middle of a scene the character acts in pursuit of their goals: choices are made and struggles occur. Appointments and deadlines are set up each time a scene ends

in order to open up new causal lines, one of which must be left dangling in order to work toward the progression of the narrative. Often this is done by a dialogue hook that directs the viewer's, or in this case player's, attention towards the central plot. (Bordwell 158)

At the time of development for Duke Nukem, cut-scenes were still used only to define the character in the game, rather than contribute to the overall plot or narrative of the game. An example of a cut-scene in the game is when, after the player manages to defeat the final boss character, Duke kicks out the eye of the alien-monster. As the eye flies through the air it becomes more like a football than a bodily organ. The arena for the fight is in fact a football field and the eye flies over the posts indicating that Duke has made the goal. Duke is seen celebrating his triumph and makes no attempt to conceal his lack of modesty (*Duke Nukem 3D*).

These cut-scenes add little to the narrative of the game aside from asserting the type of, "hypo-macho figure found in and highlighted in many different texts" in the character of Duke Nukem (King and Krzywinska 179). The use of cut-scenes, however, would gradually progress so that in *Grand Theft Auto IV* they add both to the in-game characters and to the overall narrative of the game, and like Duke Nukem was a definable character, so Niko would be later in *Grand Theft Auto IV,* with catch phrases and definable attributes.

Jesper Juul defines games such as *Wolfenstein 3D, Doom* and *Duke Nukem 3D* as "games of progression" (in Peron and Wolf 127). This means that a series of consecutive tasks must be completed in order to fulfil the requirements of the game. In all three titles the player

must find a certain colour key in order to open a door, defeat a specified number of enemies and then progress from level to level until the video game ends. All three of these games were designed with linear plots, meaning the player could play the game until it was finished, stop playing or allow the game character to die. Alternatively the user can transcend being just a player and adapt or modify games in order to create their own versions of the games or 'mods'. This allows players to create their own narratives while the games retained their formats.

The video game *Grand Theft Auto IV* strives to create a realistic feel that was first pioneered by people such as John Carmack. Realism is obviously ultimately defeated in most video games by the fact that the protagonist is involved in an entirely fabricated world and is often immortal, as he can never truly die. The game can always be reset and the character can "respawn" or be regenerated in the game environment. Through using in-game cut-scenes and dialogue, however, the game designers at Rockstar Games were able to create a complicated classical Hollywood narrative in which our own disbelief is suspended despite the obviously constructed nature of the game. Interestingly, there are a multitude of options available in *Grand Theft Auto IV* - one does not have to simply point, shoot and kill in the game, but can visit an Internet café, go bowling, and through choices on the part of the player, can to a certain extent change certain points in the game (*GTA4*). This allows *Grand Theft Auto IV* to break away from being strictly controlled by classical Hollywood narrative, despite having its foundations rooted in a strong history of video game development that once veered in the direction of Hollywood storytelling.

Video game design has taken a variety of different paths that have lead to many different genres in the industry. One such genre is referred to as the “sandbox” game (Juul). Examples of this type of game are *Prototype, Mercenaries* and the primary case study for this research report, *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The term sandbox refers to an “open world” in-game environment that mimics the real world and that can be interacted with in a variety of ways. (Juul)

A video game that can be used to define the parameters of a sandbox game is *Postal 2: Share the Pain* produced by the company Running With Scissors. In the game the player takes control of the character known only as “Postal Dude”. The premise of the game is that the player must live for a week in this character’s shoes, completing mundane tasks such as returning a library book or going to buy a carton of milk. The player has the option of completing these tasks in a civilised way or through the use of excessive violence. For example, you might choose to stand in a queue at the bank to cash the character’s paycheck or go to the shop to buy some milk. Alternatively, you can choose to take the milk from the shop without paying or rob the entire bank. During the game the player encounters many places that he might find in real life, for example a hospital, a video games arcade, an office block or a nightclub (*Postal 2: Share The Pain*).

The *Grand Theft Auto* series was produced with a similar idea and all the games take place within a huge urban environment. The game character would exist in a vast in-game world that could be explored in different ways. The first two games in the series feature an overhead, birds-eye view that displays the character, or character’s vehicle. This

viewpoint was supposed to be a solution to the problem of the depiction of depth that occurred in the displaying of movement through a detailed, real-time environment (Wolf in Wolf and Peron 165).

In the early titles the character takes the form of a tiny representation of a man. In the original *Grand Theft Auto* one can choose a character and in *Grand Theft Auto* 2 the player is a man dressed in black garb. The character has the ability to wander the streets freely, but this free-roaming mode is limited by the activities in which the game character can partake. He can steal a variety of vehicles and arm himself with a number of weapons while earning points by killing the virtual civilians that populate the game. He could only save the game at points where he had earned enough money or points to do so. This forces him to continue playing until saving is possible. (*GTA* and *GTA2*).

In order to progress in the game the player has to either attain a certain number of points through destroying vehicles and killing people, or by completing missions for two of the three gangs that the player is presented with over three stages. Although the game missions have to be completed in chronological order, unlocking the next town one after the other, this spatial progression does not further the narrative by way of character or plot development. The character development in these earlier games is limited. All that the player knows is that he was a gangster for hire (*GTA2*). In *Grand Theft Auto 2* the player gains "respect" from a gang by demonstrating loyalty to that specific gang, losing if he favoured another clan (*GTA2*). These limited choices add to the gameplay in these early titles but does little to further the overall narrative or develop characters.

By the time that *Grand Theft Auto III* was produced in 2001 the graphics capabilities of systems had extended to the point at which the player could see more detail along the z-axis plane[2]. This creates the illusion that one is looking into the distance (Wolf in Wolf and Peron 165). *Grand Theft Auto III* has been referred to as adopting a "kitchen sink" approach to game design (Fernádez-Vara in Wolf and Peron 268). This means as many mechanics and features are crammed into the game as is possible. This game took advantage of the same kind of cut-scenes as would later be included in *Grand Theft Auto IV* in order to create a narrative. The series promotes character development, although the main protagonist remains voiceless and nameless[3], and the setting for its characters is clearly a representation of New York, although it was dubbed Liberty City[4].

Subsequent releases in the series include *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* for the PC and the Playstation 2 console*; Grand Theft Auto*: *Liberty City Stories* and *Grand Theft Auto*: *Vice City Stories* for the Playstation Portable Console (PSP); *Grand Theft Auto*: *San Andreas* (PC and Playstation 2), as well as the subject of this paper, *Grand Theft Auto* IV (played both on PC and Xbox for these purposes), and, most recently, *Grand Theft Auto*: *China Town Wars* (Nintendo DS and later PSP). These games consist of massive environments and narratives that are too vast to discuss in this research report in depth. *Grand Theft Auto*: *San Andreas* however is interesting to examine briefly as a precursor to the study of *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

2 The z-axis is an attempt to represent three-dimensionality. It lies perpendicular to the picture plane.
3 Later in the series in Grand Theft Auto San Andreas the character's name is revealed when "CJ" must collaborate with "Claude"
4 GTA and GTA2 used real cities.

Since their inception, the *Grand Theft Auto* games have developed strong techniques for story telling. *San Andreas* makes use of the cut-scenes that emerged in the creation of *Grand Theft Auto III* to create a narrative that starts out like that of a Hollywood gangster film and ends with the classical Hollywood narrative of an action film. The player takes the role of the character CJ tasked with reuniting his friends in the gangster setting of Southern San Andreas (a parody of Los Angeles' South Side). What is notable about the game is that it is filled with activities for the player to engage in while not partaking in the central storyline of the game: one can take on the role of a "vigilante" and pursue criminals for money in a police car, date girls, play pool, swim, work out at one of many gyms and learn new fighting techniques The character's physique changes according to fitness and food consumption (*GTA: San Andreas*). These activities allow the player to deviate from the mission mode part of the game for numerous hours. During this time the character does not progress along the linear plot line provided by the game, but does gain certain skills that enhance his ability to complete the storyline missions. It is these activities that are also embedded in the design of *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

These aspects of the game will now be studied in more depth in order to determine the role and function of Bordwell's Classical Hollywood Narrative.

## CHAPTER TWO

*Grand Theft Auto IV* as a Place of Exploration:

> As emotion theorist Keith Oatley's insight illustrates, one of the key forms of enjoyment that games offer originates from how games impose goals on players: by setting up goals in stylized, fantastic, temporally limited, and/or larger than life form, games condense features of routine nature of everyday life for entertaining purposes. (Järvinen in Perron and Wolf 86)

In *Grand Theft Auto IV* the central 'goals' that the player is emotionally motivated to complete are the various tasks that the player must achieve in the mission mode of the game. The player is encouraged to complete these errands by a range of "events, agents and objects". (Järvinen in Perron and Wolf 86). There are, however, aspects in the non-mission side of the game that emotionally motivate the player to complete numerous tasks without having to proceed along the classical Hollywood narrative that is the story mode of the video game.

Aki Järvinen sites the emotion theory of Nico Frijda as being useful for game analysis (in Perron and Wolf 87). Frijda suggests that emotions are phasic: First there is "appraisal" or the "recognition" of an event; this is followed by a context evaluation that allows one to prepare for a decision about how this problem will be dealt with; this leads to "action readiness" or one's willingness to engage with the event. (in Perron and Wolf 87)  Finally there is a psychological change that allows the body to act in a certain way with regard to a particular emotion. The fundamental agent that occurs in Frijda's process is an action tendency

that results in one establishing, maintaining or disrupting one's relationship to the surrounding environment. (in Perron and Wolf 87)

This type of challenge and the way that the player accepts this emotional confrontation is prevalent through aspects of the free roaming part of the game. The elements of the game that are being referred to here are a number of side-missions or activities that the player may partake in: the player's character, in this case the identity that the player assumes as separate from the pre-written characteristics of Niko Bellic, can go drinking, bowling or racing with other in-game characters. The player can also apprehend a police car and embark on a series of "vigilante" side-missions or steal an ambulance and proceed on missions in which the player must work for the hospital as one can do in the later games in the series (*GTA4*). Interestingly gaining weight, muscle mass and new fighting techniques, which one could do in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is not a feature of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, which limits the extent that the player can alter the physical appearance of the game character.

When the player considers the context of Liberty City as a video game environment it is easy for the player to either exit the vehicle or pursue criminals under the assumption that the game has no great impact on the real life of the player involved. This idea could lead the player to choosing to pursue a criminal in order to complete a task, which would maintain the harmony with the environment. Perhaps the player would decide to fail at this task in order to test the repercussions of doing so. This disruption of the environment would cause the player to experience anger, frustration or aggression (Järvinen in Perron and Wolf 87).

These psychological determinants could be used to account for the actions that a player might take throughout the free-roaming mode of the game. *Grand Theft Auto IV* is a game and in the context of it being a game the player may take a variety of actions that will either cause him to progress in a certain sub-mission or to disrupt the order of the generated virtual world. If a player chooses to kill NPCs or, destroy vehicles, one is ultimately forced to deal with the simulated police force. In a sense this 'polices' the player into completing the mission side of the game because, although he cannot be killed entirely, he will re-spawn without money or weapons if he is killed or arrested (*GTA4*). This punishment aspect ultimately persuades the player to continue missions or sub-missions in order to feel content. This view, however, disregards saving where the player could return to a point before he was arrested or killed. Saving and loading furthers the invulnerability of the game character and thus the true, unrealistic nature of the game itself.

There is also a certain level of satisfaction that is obtained through killing as many law enforcement agents as possible. As it is highly challenging to do the longer that the player can remain alive the more he achieves pleasure from his virtual crimes. As Jesper Juul states in his article *Fear of Failing? The Many Meanings of Difficulty in Video Games*:

> It is quite simple: When you play a game, you want to win. Winning makes you happy, losing makes you unhappy. If this seems self-evident, there is nonetheless a contradictory viewpoint, according to which games

> should be ‘neither too easy nor too hard,’ implying that players also want not to win, at least part of the time. (in Perron and Wolf 237)

In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, when a player in seen committing a crime by the bountiful police force of Liberty City he gains a star. There are six stars. Each time a player gains a star Niko Bellic’s wanted level increases. Eventually the secret service (here called the FIB a parody of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI) will pursue Niko. At this point in the game the player can choose to run away from the police, to stay and fight, or choose to be arrested by the agent of the law. An additional option is that one can have a car spray painted, sleep or complete a mission (which is also the method of saving a game) in order to completely remove a wanted level (*GTA4*).

If one chooses to flee, strategic hiding can erase a maximum of two stars. If a player has three stars hiding will not work, as there are too many police to evade. If one chooses to take a stand, his character will eventually be killed, as the player cannot take on the police without adding to the star system, and is never a match for the armed mass that represents law enforcement in Liberty City. If one chooses to give up and be arrested one will lose money the first time and weapons the second time. If one manages to reach a saving point, complete a mission while being pursued by the police or have one’s car sprayed then one will earn money. This last option is however quite difficult when being pursued and one often ends up being run down and shot by police.

Ultimately this police system encourages the player to engage with the in-game missions or sub-missions, as they are easier to complete. As Juul states, the negative connotations of failing are such that the player would rather succeed in the easier parts of the game - those that subscribe to a classical Hollywood narrative, than to battle with a force that punishes the player for acting outside the confines of designated missions. Juul in fact terms the type of punishment that the player experiences in death and after being arrested as "*Setback punishment"* or losing one's abilities in this case the player's weapons or funds. (Juul in Perron and Wolf 237-238) Of course this type of punishment could motivate a player to win but it encourages the player to fulfil a more purposeful role.

The balance between the purposeful and free form elements in *Grand Theft Auto IV* is discussed briefly by Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska where they examine the game's predecessor, *Grand Theft Auto III*. The word ludus is used by game theorists to refer to parts of a game that a player can find purpose in through a system of gaining or progression (King and Krzywinska 15). In *Grand Theft Auto IV* these elements would be primarily the in-game missions, then the sub-missions and side activities such as bowling would also allow the player to experience a sense of progression and thus motivate the player to continue playing (King and Krxywinska 15-16). The freedom to 'play-around', to explore, or to act violently is known as the paidea element in the game. King and Krzywinska argue that there is a demand for games exhibiting more paidea rudiments than ludus ones (16). The free-roaming elements in *Grand Theft Auto IV* are limited by the fact that the police force is too over-bearing and powerful however there

are side activities that make the paidea element in the game more appealing.

These activities include bowling, getting drunk, racing, boating, viewing a cabaret show, visiting a strip-club, surfing the Internet, watching television, playing video games, dating and of course stealing cars or boats. Each of these simulated experiences adds to the realism of the game while also extending the paidea aspect of the game. The bowling activity acts much like a sub-game. One competes against another character and must win the game according to the rules of real-world bowling.

The video game works in a similar fashion. Getting drunk results in the screen tilting from side to side while the character becomes a worse driver and loses balance until one jumps into water or sleeps. As has already been discussed the player can also make the in-game character steal numerous vehicles and can disrupt society through violent killing and vandalism. The player can also participate in street races in which one earns money and can organise dates on-line that typically consist of having to complete one of the previously listed activities. Aside from these cases most of the other actions that the player can engage with are principally based on viewing a certain spectacle or in other words the player watches an on-screen performance which he/she can not alter - whether it be a stand up performance, lap-dance at a strip-club or pre-programmed television show (*GTA4*).

These above listed activities allow for a more convincing representation of the real world to be arranged. The player can indulge

in these activities until such time as he becomes bored of these activities and either stops playing the game or returns to the mission mode of the game. (Juul in Perron and Wolf 247) It will be the mission mode of the game that will now be examined in terms of the traditional Hollywood narrative, as this is the part of the game that is designed to be completed by the player in a logical sequence of events, much like a movie is designed to be watched chronologically by the player.

## CHAPTER THREE

An Introduction to Narrative

The purpose of this section is to determine if the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV* contains the elements of a classical Hollywood narrative, and to establish if the game has a linear plot appropriate to such a genre. Such a scheme would create a causal, logical point of closure where the player would ultimately end up, regardless of his interaction with the game. In this section four cut-scenes will be examined and analysed using the framework established and outlined by David Bordwell. These cut-scenes will be looked at in depth, while reference to other parts of the game will be made to address the fundamental idea that while the game conforms to some established modes popularised in Hollywood film, there are reasons for incorporating aspects of the classical narrative within the game, while simultaneously undermining or re-writing them. Certain aspects of the gameplay will also be discussed here in order to facilitate this argument further. The following chapter will look at *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s free-roaming mode and analyse how certain parts of the game allow the player to stray away from the linear plot of the mission mode, and why. In order to discuss the participation of the player and his impact on the game's narrative, certain theories from those who elaborate on Bordwell's framework, such as Monaco, Warner and Bragnian, will also be discussed.

Essentially Bordwell's definition of classical Hollywood narrative is based on the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle's interpretation of poetry:

> The poet may imitate by narration – in which he can either take another personality as Homer does or speak in his person unchanged – or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us.
> (Bordwell 3).

Bordwell embraces these two types of storytelling as "diegetic" and "mimetic" modes of communicating narrative. (Bordwell 3). A diegetic mode of conveying narrative is a literal, verbal telling of a story. "Mimetic theories take as their model the act of vision: an object of perception is presented to the eye of the beholder." (Bordwell 4) Thus, the mimetic deals with the visual spectacle and its associations, while the diegetic is the literal telling of the story. In the case of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, one could presume that this is done through dialogue, music and sound. Both these forms of communication create a series of connotations and denotations that allow for the smooth flowing of the classical Hollywood narrative.

Bordwell redefines Aristotle's interpretation of tragedy in his definition of classical Hollywood narrative. The narrative must still contain a three-act structure: a beginning, the middle and the end. Bordwell summarises the primary events of the first two acts as follows:

> The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances.
> (Bordwell 157)

The first act would be the presentation of these "psychologically defined individuals", while the second would involve the character entering into some sort of conflict. The third act would be the end, or the conventional triumphing over evil that is ever present in the classical Hollywood narrative. The body of this research essay will demonstrate how *Grand Theft Auto IV* has three such acts embedded within its narrative structure.

Bordwell emphasises that these "psychologically defined individuals" are immediately recognisable within the audience of a classical Hollywood narrative. This is because the spectator makes immediate associations with the conventional characters of literature, theatre, melodrama and other forms of popular fiction. These forms of fiction define character prototypes and determine what is attributed to a certain type of person. (Bordwell 157)

The most specified character or that which is the most defined would be the protagonist. This is because he or she is the chief object and the player must be able to identify strongly on some level with this central character. According to Bordwell, the "hero" of a classical Hollywood narrative has "narrational restriction(s)". (Bordwell 157) In this sense, the protagonist cannot do anything that results in him compromising his identity, which would prevent the viewer understanding the motives of the main character of the film from a rational viewpoint.

Instead of attempting to shift the way in which people are perceived stereotypically, the classical Hollywood narrative strives to uphold what is considered "normal" in contemporary society. (Bordwell 157)

"Normal" in this case meaning "a canonic pattern of establishing an initial state of affairs that gets violated and must be set right." (Bordwell 157) This trend in classical Hollywood narrative is not too far removed from the narrative structure of the nineteenth-century short story. (Bordwell 157) In fact Bordwell relies on theories from much further back than this to further explain the three-act structure that Aristotle defined in ancient Greece. Bordwell describes the initial phase of the classical Hollywood narrative as if it were a peaceful dream; the second stage is the disturbance from this dream and a struggle to return to harmony. Finally there is the elimination of this disturbance and presumably the spectator can return to everyday life psychologically undisturbed. (Bordwell 157)

In Bordwell's description of what constitutes a classical Hollywood narrative, he mentions the clichés that have been laid down in film theory. He refers to elements of film such as "transparency", "invisibility", "seamlessness", "the concealment of production" and "*discours* posing as *histoire.*" (Bordwell 6) "Transparency" refers to the way in which this type of film has a chronological series of events leading to a causal or logical closure point. All events point toward the ending, making it entirely predictable or transparent. "Invisibility" refers to the way these film narratives create a story, without suggesting that the filmmaker was conscious of the conventions of *mise en scene*. This contributes towards the concealment of production where the viewer is never explicitly told that he is watching a movie. "Seamlessness" contributes to this by creating the illusion, through editing, that the narrative is an uninterrupted procession of events.

Bordwell continually places emphasis on how the three-acts, each making use of transparency, invisibility and seamlessness, are unified by causality. (Bordwell 157) The classical Hollywood narrative demands that the viewer gain gratification from expected outcomes, and thus is predictable and constrained by the boundaries of reality. While analogies are sometimes present in classical Hollywood narratives, they are subordinated by how the narrative is shaped by cause and effect. (Bordwell 157) Cause and effect are of primary importance because they inspire anticipation in the viewer of a Hollywood movie. In a similar way, if the player of a game does not have a cause and effect relationship with the seemingly causal world then his interaction with the game might become meaningless or irrelevant as the game has a linear plot that can be predetermined. This is of central importance to this research essay. The "morality choices" that the player is given in the game will be assessed in order to determine what effect the player can have on the outcomes of the game's plot, if the game does conform to the cause-and-effect requirement of a Hollywood film.

In a classical Hollywood narrative the scene follows on from the previous one, it allows the viewer to consider what has just happened and why this scene is happening based on the goals of the protagonist. There is a struggle towards goals that constantly sets up new developments that leaves the viewer in suspense until the one and only, final ending occurs. (Bordwell)  In *Grand Theft Auto IV* this idea is in one sense violated because the player can continue playing after the missions have ended, and as has already been mentioned he can change the structure of the plot to a certain extent.

*Grand Theft Auto IV* also has cut-scenes however, that in a sense mimic the setting of a mainstream Hollywood film. "Spatially and temporally a segment is closed but causally is open" (Bordwell 158). The cut-scenes in *Grand Theft Auto IV* open up new developments within the game's narrative, yet spatially they remain separate from the parts of the game that the player controls. During the fading in and out of the playable missions and cut-scenes, players are reminded that both are temporally linked and that therefore there is a causal progression of events. It is the entering or exiting of characters that indicate the beginning and end of a segment and this characteristic is shared with the scene of a classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell 158).

David Bordwell's critics do not so much oppose his theories as add to them. Edward Bragnian, one such critic, states that the screen is not blank and echoes Bordwell's notion that the spectator has preconceptions about what is going to happen in the classical Hollywood narrative. Thus he confirms that this type of storytelling is entirely predictable and predetermined. Bragnian, like Bordwell, is an advocate of the theory that Freudian psychology is of primary concern when examining a classical Hollywood narrative and philosophy is secondary. Bragnian does however state that physics, which would embody Bordwell's logical, causal point of closure are also less significant than the idea that the classical Hollywood narrative is used to create satisfaction by fulfilling the expectations of the viewer. (Bragnian 105) Bragnian is more an advocate of the fact that there are multiple viewer reactions that can develop from narrative conversations in other genres, and that the viewer may board one of many "causal trains" in order to derive meaning from the classical

Hollywood narrative. (Bragnian 106) In *Grand Theft Auto IV* a classical Hollywood narrative is used to create this satisfaction in the viewer. The highly predictable nature of this type of narrative weakens the ability of the player to alter what is on screen to a certain extent. The player engages in an interaction with the game character where the player controls the character, allowing him to change certain aspects of the game environment.

Whereas art cinema blurs the lines between objective, diegetic reality and character mental states or narrative commentary, the classical Hollywood narrative provides an unambiguous presentation of these states. In the classical Hollywood narrative there is an illusion that characters have a subjective thought process because the narrative is already defined by certain conventions. (Bordwell 162) In *Grand Theft Auto IV* the player, like the actor has his own points of view. The conventions of classical Hollywood narrative cannot fully control the player's interaction with the game but they can, to a certain extent determine the outcome of the plot through unchanging cut-scenes.

An important aspect of the classical Hollywood narrative is that the spectator is not passive in the sense that he has an array of cognitive processes that prepares him to acknowledge plot and the goal-orientated, casual determined activity of the characters. (Bordwell 163) The two factors that allow viewers to comprehend the classical Hollywood narrative so easily are that they are "realistic" and that they can easily make associations with the generic conventions on a trans-textual basis. (Bordwell 163) Bordwell's definition of realistic is based in the common opinion of the viewer. People, he says will assume what a person would "naturally do" in a certain situation. (163) The

spectator forms a “viewing hypothesis” that is created from what he knows about conventional Hollywood films and through various “warning signals” that are brought across by music and the repetition of action. (Bordwell 165) Bordwell emphasises that of primary importance to the classical Hollywood narrative is suspense and that future suspense is far more important than past curiosity.

Unlike the viewer of a film, who can consider the narrative structure of the film cognitively but cannot change the goings on in the film, the player of *Grand Theft Auto IV* does have the ability to reshape some of the game world. The extent to which this ultimately affects the conclusion of *Grand Theft Auto IV* is limited, making one consider the fact that the classical Hollywood narrative stifles the ability of the player to change an already fixed storyline. This makes the fact that the player can take control of a character somewhat irrelevant, as however many times he plays the game he will always arrive at the same outcome. This idea is central to this research paper and will be discussed through the analysis of *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

Studying Narrative in a Video Game

In an article that debates the validity of studying video game, Henry Jenkins argues, “The relationship between games and story remains a divisive question among game fans, designers, and scholars alike”. (1) He cites various critics who deplore such a study, arguing that “There is a direct, immediate conflict between the demands of a story and the demands of a game. Divergence from a story's path is likely to make for a less satisfying story; restricting a player's freedom of action is likely to make for a less satisfying game.” (Jenkins 1)

Jon McKenzie notes in his response to Jenkins, "The application of film theory to games can seem heavy-handed and literal-minded, often failing to recognize the profound differences between the two media. Yet, at the same time, there is a tremendous amount that game designers and critics could learn through making meaningful comparisons with other storytelling media." This is due to the obvious fact that "Many games *do* have narrative aspirations", and as will be argued here, do in fact limit the possibilities for the player (McKenzie 3) Like the traditional narrative of a Hollywood film, games "want to tap the emotional residue of previous narrative experiences. Often, they depend on our familiarity with the roles and goals of genre entertainment to orient us to the action, and in many cases, game designers want to create a series of narrative experiences for the player. Given those narrative aspirations, it seems reasonable to suggest that some understanding of how games relate to narrative is necessary". (McKenzie 3)

In this light studying the narrative of *Grand Theft Auto IV* seems relevant because it is a game that definitely tells a story, and where the possibility of choice within this story is questionable.

The Seamless Nature of *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s Cut-scenes:

Kay Young discusses David Bordwell's *Film Futures* in his article "*That Fabric of Times"* and calls Bordwell "the Aristotle of film"; a compliment that implies that Bordwell's theory is paramount in understanding the classical Hollywood narrative. (115) Young agrees with Bordwell's notion of the "forked-path" that ultimately eliminates

all alternatives and resolves itself in one, logical closure point. (115-116) Young also says that a film that makes use of the classical Hollywood narrative can reference other genres, reminiscent of Bordwell's theory that the spectator makes cross-textual readings when watching a film that determine his pre-determined understanding of a film with a limited amount of choice. (Young 117-118)

Young specifies that the classical Hollywood narrative is a "monolithic form of presentation" that is massive, uniform, seamless, and slow to change its characteristics. (118) For the case study of this paper, four cut-scenes have been chosen for analysis against the backdrop of these ideas. These cut-scenes best explain how the game contains the three-act structure and the forked path of narrative in Bordwell's theory. In studying them closely one can see that the game may proceed in varied ways but follows a causal structure along a chronological line, ultimately ending in a tying-up of all loose ends, much in the style of the classical Hollywood narrative. In *Grand Theft Auto IV* each cut-scene is preceded by a title that appears at the bottom right-hand corner of the screen, giving a name to the mission that the player is about to embark on. The cut-scenes that will be examined in chronological order are: "The Cousins Bellic"; "Weekend at Florian's"; "That Special Someone" and "Out of Commission". (*GTA4*)

The plot of the video game will be explored in its totality by breaking it into three specific stages. The first of these is the introduction of characters, the second is the violation of a normal state of affairs that

must be set right, and the final stage is a resolution, logical wrap-up, pseudo closure or the happy ending that occurs at the end of the film.

Each of the cut-scenes examined in the game will be studied individually as having a sequential, cause and effect relationship that leads to this point of closure. This central plot refers to the parts of the game that the player must complete in order to unlock the full game environment. It proceeds from the introduction of Niko Bellic and his cousin, to a point at which the player discovers Niko is in the city in order to find somebody who betrayed his Red Army regiment, killing eleven of his friends. Finally the player determines the outcome of the game by choosing either to exact revenge on his enemies, or to strike a deal with them. The choice the player makes changes the ending. This is possibly one of the most interesting parts about this game, as the player may determine the game and in a limited capacity, its outcome. Yet whether or not the plot of the game follows a classical Hollywood narrative must still be discussed as both endings offer logical closure points that secure this genre of storytelling. (*GTA4*).

The application of Bordwell's theory to the video game is an important point to consider. Bordwell states that there are only three ways to study narrative: in terms of its representation, or how the narrative signifies a world or body of ideas (the semantic approach); with regards to its structure, or how the components combine (also known as the syntactic approach); or by studying act, the dynamic process of presenting a story to a perceiver. In "act" there is a source or character that is affected by the "temporal progress" of information and action. (Bordwell in Rosen 17) James Monaco's *How to Read a Film*

gives a clearer idea of how best to go about analysing a medium in terms of classical Hollywood narrative.

Although he does not reference Bordwell, Monaco's description of the mainstream film narrative is virtually identical. Monaco emphasises how the *mise en scene* of a mainstream film is always subordinated by the classical Hollywood narrative. Special effects and camera movement never interfere with the clarity that is necessary to communicate plot and its progression with the viewer. Monaco informs us that film was originally praised for its scientific portrayal of an objective reality, although, as Bordwell argues, this is only an illusion of reality that attempts to make the viewer believe that the plot is causal and logical because it is based in the so-called real world. (Monaco 76 and 91).

Monaco states that the *auteurs*[5] of Hollywood cinema were concerned with perpetuating the Western myths that embody the frontier: individualism, with law and order triumphing over anarchy upon which the national psychology of the American depends. (Monaco 249) Like Bordwell, he states that these films are mainstream and subsequently dominate film history. He agrees that these films present themselves as unconscious of the constructed narrative, that they remain realistic, in order to bring across unity of all plot elements at the end of a script. (Monaco 243, 247, 249) The clash between the artist's sensibilities and the desirable popular elements of classical storytelling will be examined later in this paper. (Monaco 249).

[5] The "*auteur* theory" relates to authorship in cinema. The *auteurs* followed "recurrent themes and generic innovation" in their work. (Bordwell 203)

Monaco states that, “Anyone intending to read semiotics should be forewarned: just because you can’t understand it doesn’t mean it means nothing.” (340). He defines semantics as a language that represents the world using a variety of devices as its vocabulary. Monaco uses the semiotician Christian Metz’s terms to define this vocabulary of semantics. Narrative, he says makes use of both “syntagmatic” and “paradigmatic” structures. (Monaco 341). The syntagma of a film represents its linear narrative structure or “what follows what”. (Monaco 341).

The paradigmatic structure is the vertical array of objects and occurrences in a scene that create a specific moment in the classical Hollywood narrative. Monaco speaks about the codes in film. He defines “non-specific codes” as what one can identify from what one already knows about the film genre. (342) For instance the *mise en scene* of Alfred Hitchcock’s notorious shower murder scene in *Psycho* might be repeated in a subsequent film to illustrate that a murder is about to take place. (Monaco 342). Monaco is adamant that anyone can understand the language of a film to a certain extent stating, rather comically, that even cats and infants can interpret a film. (Monaco 352, 122, 126). This is to enforce his point that anyone that has seen a film will understand the language that the classical Hollywood narrative is using to tell its story: “It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories”. (Monaco 127). In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, cinematic devices are borrowed from films in order to bring messages or memories across to the player that informs him about how he should be feeling about a particular scenario.

Monaco talks about syntax as the grammar of a film's language. Composition, camera angles, camera movements, lighting and sound all create a point of view that Monaco says create a preordained plot through the increasing awareness of this language of film that is brought across to the viewer by the repeated use of ritualistic elements of drama across the genre of the classical Hollywood narrative. (Monaco 14, 29 and 140-182). These cinematic devices will be further discussed in the body of the essay to show how classical Hollywood narrative exists within *Grand Theft Auto IV.*

The principles that will be used to analyse *Grand Theft Auto IV's* cut-scenes efficiently using classical Hollywood narrative derive from a document developed by the School of Literature, Communication and Culture at Missouri Western University, detailing the aspects of narrative. It is this framework that will be used as a summary of Bordwell and Monaco's principles of classical Hollywood narrative.

In the game the player takes control of the protagonist whose name is Niko Bellic, a Russian immigrant who at first appears to be pursuing a happier life in the United States of America. When Niko Bellic arrives in Liberty City (which bears a close resemblance to New York City) he discovers that a life of crime is probably going to be the easiest way to get money. Bellic's past career as a Red Army soldier makes him the perfect candidate to perform a gruesome series of tasks for the major crime families in Liberty City. Throughout the mission parts of the game the player must complete jobs for the Russian mob, the McCreary Irish crime family and ultimately the Italian mafia. Niko also encounters a series of other people from whom he can obtain money. The characters Playboy X, Dwayne, Manny, Elzabetta, Brucie and Little

Jacob are some of the more prominent characters that Niko works for in the course of the central plot of the game. (*GTA4*).

The first cut-scene, The Cousins Bellic, acts as the introduction to the narrative. In it the player is introduced to the protagonist, Niko Bellic and another central character in the plot of the game, Roman Bellic. (GTA4) In the first scene the player is confronted with a shot of a man, tied to the posts of a bed being whipped by a girl wielding a riding crop. This rather seedy scene, edged with a dark sense of humour, immediately sets the tone of the game. This sleazy mood is heavily dramatised in the early stages of the game, displaying Bellic's own sordid characteristics. Later in the game however, the player realises that Niko is in fact capable of change. This points to the ability of the protagonist to adapt to his surroundings and make logical decisions and resolutions, an inherent characteristic of the classical Hollywood narrative. (Bordwell 157)

The second shot in the scene allows the player to learn a bit about the protagonist of the game's narrative, Niko Bellic. Niko is immediately shown as not a wholly unsympathetic character. He is seen hammering on the door that contains the couple described in the first shot, as he does not want the man inside to be left on board the ship when they arrive on the shores of the United States shortly (*GTA4*). Perhaps this is an early hint of Niko's capacity for caring for others, a premise that will be discussed later as this argument unfolds.

Niko is soon stopped by someone telling him to not concern himself with the couple in the room. As the characters talk, one can hear from their accents that the two men are foreign and possibly Eastern

European; and indeed they turn out to be Russian. (*GTA4*) The two characters leave the hallway, revealing that the room seen in the first shot is actually a cabin located on board a large ship. The ship is seen from a low angle as the upbeat theme music for the game starts to play. As the ship passes the "camera", the credits are situated around the vessel in a style similar to the opening of a Hollywood film. The camera pans around the ship to reveal the ship's destination: a city that looks strikingly similar to that of the New York City skyline. (*GTA 4*)

The ship that the player sees in this opening scene is easily recognisable. The "Platypus" cargo ship that Niko arrives on is displayed in much the same manner as the ship that brings the character Vito Corleone to New York in the film *The Godfather 2*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. This inter-film cross reference informs the player that Niko is to be much the same type of person as this protagonist in the sub-plot of Coppola's film. Vito Corleone was responsible for setting up the Corleone crime family in New York in the film and Niko Bellic becomes accountable for the revival of the Italian mob towards the conclusion of the game. This is also a reference to the same theme of the Coppola film. Niko, like Vito arrives in America seeking prosperity which he sets up through illegitimate means, yet the game, like the film, ignores what is illegal by making the law breakers the heroes in a world in which crime pays. It is through the association with these films that Rockstar Games, the developer, parodies the very essence of the classical Hollywood narrative itself.

The ship also forms another function: The name of the ship, "Platypus" stands behind Niko and Roman as they have their first discussion on

the docks of Liberty City. This ship stays docked throughout the game and the player must return to it at the end regardless of whether he chooses to take revenge on or strike a deal with Dimitri. At the end of the mission part of the game Niko tells Roman via phone that "it ends where it began". This is the ultimate shape of the classical Hollywood narrative that never strays too far from the original establishment of the central character's goals and aims. The player is separated from the character and can see him, as in the playable parts of the game from a third-person viewpoint. This style constantly creates awareness that the player is assuming the role of the character Niko Bellic, but that the game character is by no means the player. This system of enforcing point-of-view eliminates the possibility of the player ignoring the presence of Niko Bellic as the protagonist, and thus "interaction" as Jenkins defines it is subservient to the classical Hollywood narrative.

"Symbolism" refers to an important set of signs and symbols that constitute the language that the classical Hollywood narrative uses to tell a story. The more obvious signs connote and denote things that the player is familiar with and that he can make sense of from the literal and also associate the meaning of an object in a particular room. "Symbolism" will be regarded as the language that the classical Hollywood narrative uses to tell a story but also how Rockstar Games subverts this language to serve its own dark sense of humour and parody.

The symbols in this first scene have many literal associations. The ship bringing the immigrant to America who hopes to prosper can be associated with the arrival of Vito Corleone in the film *The Godfather 2*. This sets the tone for the game: the struggle to begin anew, the repeated history of America from its earliest white settlers. "Tone" is

how the game designers create irony and humour and develop attitudes toward the idea of family, society, religion and politics.

Niko Bellic is Russian and this would traditionally make him the perfect stereotype for a villain within the structure of a classical Hollywood narrative. Stereotype here refers to Bordwell's "prototype schemata" which involves "identifying individual members of a class according to some posited norm." (34) In Bordwell's study, he makes use of the example of the movie of notorious robbers *Bonnie and Clyde* to show how certain stereotypes were used to portray their story, such as "lovers", "bank robbery", "small Southern town" and the "depression era". By using stereotypes in *Grand Theft Auto IV,* the player can identify "agents, actions, goals and locales" through generalised preconceptions about "the other". Niko's story becomes a study of "the other" and uses previous depictions of Russian thugs to illustrate a radical new interpretation of pursuing the American Dream. (Hall)

The morals of the classical Hollywood narrative, the ideals of family and prosperity are meshed with the criminal element in the game. The name of the ship on which Bellic arrives, "The Platypus", could denote the animal's peculiarity, serving to denote the humorous undertone of the game that is reinforced by the game dialogue. The duck-billed platypus is widely regarded by evolutionists to be utmost evidence of adaption in mammals. Perhaps the intentional name choice for the ship forecasts the development of Niko Bellic as one who must adapt to survive in Liberty City.

Ultimately Niko must return to the Platypus to make a decision about the future of his life at the end of the game. In this way the game's

narrative demands that the player make a choice to be either a man of principles or a man obsessed with revenge. This is perhaps the subtle way that Rockstar states that it is conscious of the simplification of themes at the end of the classical film. Like the platypus, the game culminates in a crude merging of the idealism on which the classical Hollywood narrative is based and the warped interpretation of the American Dream: money as the material identity of happiness. Perhaps it is no accident that Niko must kill his final opponent on the island of happiness, a place taking the appearance of Liberty Island with its statue symbolising freedom and justice.

Returning to the opening scene and Niko asks the other man what he will do once they arrive at Liberty City, the name given to the central setting in the game. At this point he man states, 'I always wanted to make it big - Own a nice place, the dog, house - live the dream' (*GTA 4*). This 'dream' he is referring to, is specific to the 'American Dream'. This ideal has long been entrenched in the minds of people who live in the United States of America. The term goes as far back as the nineteenth-century at which point many immigrants arrived on the shores of North America and particularly in New York. The central idea behind this ideology is that anyone who comes to America can succeed, as it apparently is a land that disregards the class structure that was so entrenched in Europe, which is of course idealistic. (Cullen 6-7).

The characters portrayed in the game do have doubts about the validity of the American Dream, but this does not prevent the pursuit of the values embodied in the American dream; a typical component of the classical Hollywood narrative. In *Grand Theft Auto IV* the manner

in which the protagonist is constantly surrounded by death, destruction and the ultimate result of ineffective law and order, resulting in anarchy, undermines the pursuit of the ideals of the American Dream, which become perverted when Niko Bellic equates money and revenge with happiness. In this way the game takes the capitalist foundation of America and exaggerates how one must climb the hierarchical ladder by leaving others behind, and thus violated the basis of the classical Hollywood narrative. Through following classical Hollywood narrative, the game appears to conform to the American standard while at the same time, poking fun at the results of capitalism and money grabbing that is the extensions of frontierism. (Bordwell and *GTA4*).

The idea that the two characters are misled pursuers of the mythological American Dream is entrenched in the player's mind when Niko talks about the emails that his cousin, who has previously immigrated to America, sends him. Niko has been convinced that his cousin Roman is living 'the dream'. Niko describes his cousin as having all the characteristics of a man living the American Dream. This is all a pretext leading to the anti-climax at the end of the cut-scene when Roman's true character is revealed, for in the next shot the player is confronted with a violent change of scenery. A man is seen from a high camera angle. Juxtaposed with the notion of the American Dream is now a man who holds a diamond between his forefinger and thumb. As the camera pans down one sees that the man is stirring mixture for what is later revealed to be a cake. He drops the diamond into the cake mixture and one instantly realises that the characters on board this ship are involved in a smuggling operation, (*GTA 4*). *Grand Theft Auto IV* exaggerates prototypes to create a dark form of anarchism

that challenges the notion of the American dream or the thesis of the classical Hollywood narrative.

*Grand Theft Auto IV* typically parodies the capitalist society, reinforced by the American Dream, by referencing money as a source of prosperity and contentment and showing how Niko confuses money for the American Dream in a society actually fuelled by economics. At the end of the game however, the player has to decide if it is money or family that will constitute happiness for Niko Bellic. He ultimately needs to eliminate the forces of evil in order to return to the pursuit of happiness, much like a conventional Hollywood dilemma (Bordwell 157).

Despite being presented as an outright criminal as well as an illegal immigrant, it is later revealed that Niko has in fact arrived in America to work for a taxi business and wishes to begin living as a law-abiding citizen. Niko's friend's comment seems to complicate this dilemma of conscience: 'We all do dumb things. It's what makes us human.' (*GTA4*) After this sentiment the camera lingers on Bellic as he contemplates what has just been said. This sentiment is important as it establishes a dilemma for the player as well as Bellic: the player will subsequently learn he has the ability to limit the number of people that Bellic kills by choosing to 'strike a deal' rather than kill a character (*GTA 4*). In this way the game allows the player to uphold the values of a classical Hollywood narrative by giving Niko Bellic a level of moral understanding by choosing to either continually take revenge and money in place of emotional contentment and family values. Niko, however, must often kill NPC's (non-playable characters) in missions and thus the player does not have complete control over how ethical

Niko Bellic turns out to be. The player also has the option to go against the morals of classical Hollywood narrative further in the free-roaming aspect of the game through the killing of further NPC's or non-playable characters.

This constant pushing of the narrative in one specific direction is known as "linearity" that is defined as, "a growing awareness of absolute truth". (Bordwell 158) At the end of a classical Hollywood narrative the linkage of causal lines terminates what has become the overall plot of the film. Bordwell defines the end of such a narrative in two ways: The linkage of a string of events or the final effect of the initial cause. (Bordwell 158) This cause refers to an initial revelation of truth that leads along a scientific, logical, causal line that must end in resolution. This type of linearity separates the classical Hollywood narrative from that of the art film, which does not simplify the entire film to one logical wrap-up. As David Bordwell says the classical Hollywood narrative is an, "arbitrary readjustment of that world knocked awry in the previous eight minutes." (Bordwell 158)

After the title is shown the stage is set for the first appearance of the character Roman Bellic who is Niko's cousin - the same cousin that Niko thinks is living in wealth and prosperity. Roman is late to fetch Niko. Roman has to swerve to avoid the car that is only just reaching the dock floor. When he appears he is seen to be overweight. Classical Hollywood narrative often makes use of stereotypes in order to create an opinion about a particular character (Lindsay and Münsterberg in Monaco 326). Roman's physique already tells the audience that he is slovenly, while his late arrival displays incompetence. Niko is surprised to see that Roman is not driving a sports car but a cab. This is the first

hint that Roman has not been honest with Niko about his financial status. Later the player sees the squalor that Roman in fact lives in and learns that he has a bad gambling addiction that often leaves him in debt (*GTA4*). Despite this, Niko and Roman are immediately shown as respecting family. They disregard the fact that they have not seen each other for ten years and embrace. Family values are therefore upheld by the classical Hollywood narrative and the fact that Niko respects family tells the audience that he could be capable of fundamental morals (Bordwell in Rosen 29).

*Grand Theft Auto IV* constantly addresses two specific ideals that are needed at the happy end of the classical Hollywood narrative. The first of these is family – Niko constantly defends his cousin from a variety of criminals including Vlad, an early employer who sleeps with Roman's girlfriend, debt-collectors who seek to do harm to the gambling addict who has not paid his dues to them and Dimitri, the head of a Russian crime organisation who burns down Roman's place of residence. The second ideal is money. Niko often does jobs solely on the basis that he will get paid for his work. The validity of these two ideals are tested at the end of the game in which the player must choose to either make a deal with those who have harmed his family, thus betraying his family for love of money or to exact revenge on them through violence and murder.

Alongside these two ideals is a parallel plot that often occurs in the classical Hollywood narrative – the heterosexual romance. The notion of Bordwell's "forked path" or two plot lines comes into the analysis now. This refers to the primary plot line, the mission of the protagonist, and the secondary plot line of his heterosexual romance.

The classical "syuzhet" of a classical Hollywood narrative is that of a double causal structure. (Bordwell 157) The primary course of the narrative is therefore guided by some type of mission or quest. There is often a second "line" or sub-plot that runs parallel to the central story. (Bordwell 157) These two plot lines must converge at the end of the film to create a harmonic resolution of a causal nature. Both plot lines have characters with goals, obstacles that they must overcome to reach these goals and a climax that culminates in the fulfilment of the characters' goals. (Bordwell 157)

The secondary plot line in *Grand Theft Auto IV* is Niko's relationship with the character Kate McCreary. If the player chooses to strike a deal with Dimitri then Kate gets angry with Niko for betraying his morals and says that she never wants to see him again, while Roman, who the player has known since the beginning, is murdered. After the credits roll however, Kate seems to open-up the opportunity to rekindle the romance with Niko, but after several attempts to contact her, she remains unreachable. If the player chooses the revenge option Pegorino, one of the last employers of Niko in the game who tries to get a deal made between Dimitri and the protagonist and takes revenge when Niko does not do this, kills Kate in a drive by shooting at Roman's wedding. Neither of these endings appears to conform to the classical Hollywood narrative.

In the traditional Hollywood narrative, as Parker Tyler states, the endings are in accordance with "infantile logic". (Bordwell 159) He calls them "purely conventional" and "formal". (Bordwell 159) The ending of a classical Hollywood narrative is in fact entirely a romantic cliché- the logical wrap-up of the plot and the way in which it ends happily serves

as a form of poetic justice that does not always exist in the world outside of film and video games. This "pseudo closure" of events must culminate in the most coherent ending possible. (Bordwell 159) If the heterosexual romance plot ultimately ends badly, then this "pseudo closure" does not exist in the game.

Despite this defiance of the traditional plot, Niko Bellic is indeed the hero (even if he is an anti-hero) of a classical Hollywood narrative in the sense that his personality is constant. Despite the fact that Niko Bellic is a gangster who will do anything for money, it is discovered at a later point in the game that he has the foundation for values that exist within the traditional Bordwell hero. He has three primary motivating factors – the need to make money, the desire to protect his family and the desire to exact revenge on people who harm his friends or family. Moralistic family values perhaps redeem Niko Bellic most strongly in the game. Niko often risks his own life in order to save his cousin, for instance he attacks a warehouse in which heavily guarded Roman has been kidnapped by Dimitri's accomplice. It is also a fact that he embarks on each mission aiming to make money for both him and Roman Bellic. Niko displays this trait forcing the player to make a hypothesis about the type of person Niko is. Here the game borrows from the classical Hollywood narrative, making Niko a hero solely through his affiliation with the values that are embedded within it. (Bordwell in Rosen 29)

It is these values that will develop throughout the game and eventually Niko will be seen as a champion and not as a thug. The fact that the player assumes the identity of the protagonist also encourages the player to find sympathy for the gangster. As the viewer

watches the film for psychological fulfilment that is supplied by the success of the protagonist who overcomes his goals, so too does the player of *Grand Theft Auto IV* enjoy the ability to complete the game missions. Niko is the hero of the game because from the player's perspective he is the most important character in the game. If there is no Niko Bellic then there is not a cinematic succession creating plot development.

The purpose of the plot is to lead the player along a string of logical cues that guide him toward an ending. In the classical Hollywood film narrative nothing is left unexplained. "During the course of the story information is accumulated, until at the end we know everything". (Bordwell 160.) In this first cut-scene, however, there are still aspects of Niko that are unknown – mainly the real reason that he is in Liberty City. It is perhaps this factor that creates room for the outcome of the game to be unpredictable.

There are clues, however, which allow the player to follow a predictable path and expect what is coming. In this first cut-scene, the "Setting" contributes toward the narrative of the video game through the use of both visual and audio devices. The ship that Niko is aboard is a vessel that embodies an alien world that lies outside of the peripheral vision of the player. Niko's sordid past is echoed in the sexual act that the player first witnesses, the diamond and car smuggling and a history of poverty and unhappiness. The ship is contrasted with the promise of the lights in the distance of Liberty City and Niko's discussion regarding 'the dream'. The theme music for the game is buoyant and fast paced and is seems to be building up to a

climax that is to be Niko's arrival in Liberty City and the narrative that unfolds throughout the course of the game.

Yet we must keep in mind that the game uses the exaggeration of stereotypes, drug abuse and violence to make satirical points about the way in which people view the real world and how they feel about it. The cartoon-like cars that can survive incredible damage, the way that characters can take excessive injury before 'dying' (the protagonist is virtually invincible as he just reappears outside a hospital), all emphasise the point that this seemingly realistic world is as supernatural as a videogame in which the player has to confront an array of aliens. The way that the player is introduced to the game's geographical composition is crucial to a deeper understanding of it as a work of satire.

Through this description of the game environment the player is explicitly told that this world is based in the same type of scientific rules that govern people's physical nature in the real world. This is portrayed through the implication of gravity and the logical flow of conversation that is formed by a direct response (reaction) to the previous statement (action). Obscure camera angles or warping of fabric and colours does not interfere with the fabula[6] world that Rockstar Games is constructing for the player right from this early stage in the game. The level of realism that is attained through the use of the classical Hollywood narrative is fundamental to *Grand Theft Auto IV* as it exists as a work of satire: the player does not immediately notice how the game world is a fabrication, an

[6] Bordwell's word for the construction of a "story". (49)

exaggeration of society that parodies attitudes toward crime, paranoia, terrorism and xenophobia that exist in contemporary society.

Bordwell speaks about *mise en scene* and its role in the special organisation of what the viewer sees on screen, stating that three-dimensional depth is represented by overlap, familiar size, size diminution, lighting effects and line. Perspective is the element that binds the "object" or depicted world with the "subject" (viewer or player in the case of *Grand Theft Auto IV*). (Bordwell 5)
Bordwell draws on two types of perspective that are derived from the Renaissance period in painting: "linear" and "synthetic" perspective. Linear perspective is created through the convergence of orthogonal lines to one, two or three vanishing points. The most commonly used type of linear perspective is termed "Albertian" in which all lines converge to a single vanishing point. (Bordwell 5) Synthetic perspective is created through making parallel edges into curves on the picture plane. (Bordwell 5) The most important implication concerning these types of perspective in a classical Hollywood narrative is that they are "Both 'scientific' systems (that) presuppose a rule-governed, measurable scenic space organised around the optical vantage of an implied spectator". (Bordwell 5)

The representation of the real through laws of science is paramount in Bordwell's description of classical Hollywood narrative as it allows for presumption to occur in the viewer regarding the outcomes of the plot, which allows him to derive pleasure from the fulfilment of his desires. Thus perspective is a used in *Grand Theft Auto IV* as it mimics the perspective of a classical Hollywood narrative.

As the player takes control of Niko Bellic for the first time, when he must drive Roman home, what becomes immediately apparent to the acute observer is that this game is not based in reality at all. On the drive from the harbour to Niko's house, the player first experiences the cartoon-like behaviour of the motor vehicles. If he drives into street lamps, pedestrians, fire hydrants, newspaper dispensers and other game objects, the car will knock them over, completely destroying them, whilst sustaining only minor damage itself. Cars also tend to roll over three-hundred-and-sixty degrees and arrive back on their wheels, allowing the player to drive on. Furthermore, if the police pursue the player, he often escapes easily by racing to the edge of a flashing area on the player's 'radar' device, or later after saving the game, spray-painting a car in the game, or contacting a friend on Niko's cell phone. These are all huge exaggerations of what is possible in real life, for instance, cars would be damaged and Niko would be dead after numerous bullets and not miraculously reappear outside a hospital fully cured.

Another extension of this parody is that in the early stages of the game one can listen to the radio with its host of stations that cover the arguments of Liberty City's residents. The conversations are often absurd – people advocating the use of drugs being a notable factor in the game. The grotesque level of damage and physical violence that the player can inflict on the characters and vehicles in the game without being imprisoned warrants an element of fantasy. The overstated stereotypes in the game, such as Little Jacob the Rasta or Niko Bellic the Russian gangster, defeats the real-world notion that people are different on an individual level. Of course the game is using stereotypes to appeal to the game audience on a mass level. It is also

through the use of stereotypes that *Grand Theft Auto IV* becomes a parody of society in general.

David Leonard found in his study Not a Hater, Just keepin' it Real: The Importance of Race- and Gender-Based Game Studies that video games are played in a white-centered space. (84) He attributes games such as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* with promoting dominant ideas of race and gender. (85) In two extremes he finds that some players use *Grand Theft Auto* as a space to enact the other while others take the game entirely literally. Leonard cites Adam Clayton Powell III as describing videogames as a "high-tech blackface" that white players use to try on the persona of the other as they act as a violent, black gangster from the safety of their suburban homes. White supremacist Arische Ritter was entirely satisfied with the game *San Andreas* because he felt that it reflected the truth about how black people have made society violent and dangerous. A group of European American players in a study conducted by Ben Devane and Kurt Squire understood that the game was satire, while another, African American group took the stereotypes as being an accurate representation of African Americans South Chicago and Los Angeles. (Devane and Squire 276 277)

Like the stereotypes used to convey meaning in a film *Grand Theft Auto IV* uses stereotypes that are not accurate to how different people act and behave in real life. The player, like the viewer of a film interprets these stereotypes in many different ways, however the game is a work of fiction that implants stereotypes to feed the player's understanding of the classical Hollywood narrative in it. The grossly exaggerated characteristics of stereotypes in *Grand Theft Auto IV* and

across the *Grand Theft Auto* series serve to poke fun at these stereotypes themselves, at the same time creating a convenient basis for a story as it would be told in the language of the classical Hollywood narrative.

Whilst driving a car the player can listen to a number of pre-programmed radio stations. The adverts, interviews and the speech of the DJs in-between music tracks are embellished to the point of absurdity. A woman might be heard saying that she has decided not to quit narcotics and this is presented as a good thing on a particular station in the game (*GTA4*). Other outlandish sentiments will be heard on these stations. In the various safe houses that the player acquires as he/she progresses in the game one can also watch television that has a number of channels that are rife with the same kind of satirical humour (*GTA4*).

All of these elements in the game serve as satire that allows the player to consider if these ideas are true to real-world society. In doing so the player will decide if the game is merely an exaggeration of these aspects of society or indeed a harsh statement on the validity of stereotypes and crime in present-day civilization. In either regard the player must find ways to come to terms with these foundational rudiments of the game in order to progress in the game. In doing so the player is learning to grapple with problematic design in ordered society that may lead to crime and ideas about race or stereotypes although these things may be broadcast more subtlety in the real world (*GTA4*).

The radio also offers an excuse for the blockade of bridges, a direct assault on the paranoia and xenophobia in New York after the infamous 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre. Niko Bellic himself is an immigrant who takes the role of a terrorist, so the player is, in a sense, playing a terrorist, and for all intents and purposes supports the actions of a terrorist, something most people would not do in a real-world situation. One must realise that this game, although realistic on the surface is an exaggeration of violence, while the super-human fashioning of the protagonist, who can be said to be invulnerable, is highly unrealistic. Rockstar uses the classical Hollywood narrative to parody attitudes enforced by the media, such as mainstream film. Niko is a hero, yet a criminal shrouded in violence. Thus Rockstar seems highly conscious of the inclusion and subsequent parody of the classical Hollywood narrative in the game.

Niko Bellic's cartoon like powers and the satirical mood broadcast by the dialogue in the game parody the mafia film genre as much as it parodies the real world itself. Rockstar knows that the real world is not the space of a classical Hollywood film. The hyper-real scenes and accentuated stereotypes – like Niko himself, the Russian immigrant living behind an iron curtain, unaware of the progress of the Western world – are not meant to be a safety net as they are for the audience of a Hollywood movie, but rather a comment on these stereotypes.

There are still ways in which these opening scenes fulfil the standards of the traditional Hollywood narrative without parodying these aspects: "Interactivity is almost the opposite of narrative; narrative flows under the direction of the author, while interactivity depends on the player for motive power". (Adams in Jenkins 1) This first cut-scene excludes

the player from exacting influence on the progression of the game's plot. Immediately the player is told that he is assuming the identity of a protagonist whose personality, history and goals are defined, fixed and unchangeable. The "programmatic music" or theme music that plays during this cut-scene defines the epic narrative style of the game that is an inescapable aspect of the mission modes of the game. All of the other sounds in the cut-scene are "synchronous" or can be sourced from what is seen within the image. No "asynchronous" sounds displace what the viewer is seeing or distract him from establishing the game's narrative components.

Monaco says that he has a very specific idea of what constitutes this language of the classical Hollywood narrative. He defines the signifier as a collection of objects and sounds that create an image. What this image represents is known as the signified. (Monaco 127). In this language of narrative the scene is a sentence, the shot a word and the sequence a paragraph that are all arranged in ascending order in order to create a climax that is ultimately resolved at the end of a film's plot. (Monaco 129).

Like Bordwell Monaco views the classical Hollywood narrative as seamless; that is the shots and scenes strung together in order to silence the awareness of the viewer that he is watching a film. Monaco is aware however that the symbolism of signs can reference other aspects of life with infinite possibilities. (Monaco 129 and 133). Monaco refers to a sign that represents the signified in through its likeness as the "icon"; the sign that represents a quality because of its inherent relationship to it is the "index"; and the "symbol" is an arbitrary sign that is given meaning through the conventions of its use.

(Monaco 133). *Grand Theft Auto IV* exists within an entirely fabricated world. The environment is created by an array of digital artists, sound designers and musicians but yet its "spatial configuration" is motivated by realism like the setting of a classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell 157). This realism, as discussed, is often used to lure the player into a parodic situation, however, some of the game's conventions give it a realism that is not so much a parody, but a mere copy of the world as presented in Hollywood.

The second cut-scene to be examined is, ironically as it turns out, entitled "Weekend at Florian's". This title is an obvious parody of the 1989 film *Weekend at Bernie's* directed by Ted Kotcheff in which two business colleagues are invited to their boss's holiday beach house. In this way the game acknowledges its referencing of a mainstream Hollywood film. This cut-scene acts as a central contributor to the narrative of *Grand Theft Auto IV* for two dominant reasons. The first reason is at this point the player has become aware that Niko Bellic has an ulterior motive for coming to Liberty City. Bellic believes that his Red Army regiment was betrayed by a man by the name of Florian Cravic. In this cut-scene the Bellic cousins have been tipped off about Cravic's whereabouts and it opens with the two trying to find the man. The second reason that it is useful to look at this cut-scene is that on encountering Cravic, Bellic realises that it was another man who betrayed his army regiment (*GTA4*). At this point in the game's narrative the protagonist Niko Bellic is faced with a crisis that he must overcome in order to proceed to a point of closure that would be considered logical in the script of a classical Hollywood narrative. (Bordwell 7).

The scene opens with an aggressive Niko Bellic who marches down the corridor towards Cravic's apartment. Tension mounts as the aggressive tone in Niko's voice reveals, as he demands that Florian open up his door. Niko's tone is contrasted with Roman's pleas for Niko to calm down. Niko proceeds to kick in the door to Cravic's apartment. At this point the stage is set for what the player is meant to anticipate - an all out battle between the former military counterparts Niko Bellic and Florian Cravic. When Cravic first emerges from his hiding place behind a wall however the perception of the man immediately changes. Cravic runs across his bedroom arms flailing and screams in a high-pitched voice, 'Ah! Go Away!' (*GTA4*)

As Cravic slowly emerges from behind the bed, the player views an over the shoulder shot of Niko who enters the room armed with a handgun. At this point the viewer can see a poster of a man dressed in gimp garb on the wall of Cravic's room. It is soon revealed that Florian, who now calls himself Bernie Crane is an effeminate homosexual. This stereotype serves to add humour to this cut-scene as it is a parody of such stereotypes. In Judith Gardiner's study *Why Saddam Is Gay: Masculinity Politics in South Park- Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* the author seeks to interpret how the film makers of the animated film *South Park* create satire and irony through the use of homosexual stereotypes. Gardiner finds that the film makes use of the conventions outlined by Rick Altman's definition of a classical Hollywood musical as it uses a traditional music score. (51)

Gardiner determines that the film makes use of homosexual characters to radically disrupt the conventions and create satire in a number of ways. (54) Gardiner describes how the character in the film Satan is

an effeminate homosexual that must free himself from the bonds of his domineering partner, a representation of Saddam Hussein, in order to regain his masculinity. (54) She also discusses the homosocial bonding that occurs between the four main characters, as heterosexual relationships are quite scarce in the film.

In *Grand Theft Auto IV* Bernie Crane, who becomes a friend of Niko mocks the conventional relationship between heterosexual men in films and Niko becomes the more masculine man, who must later protect Bernie from a "gay-basher" who is stalking him. (GTA4) When Niko kills this gay-basher in a subsequent mission Bernie is liberated through conventions of asserting masculine authority as Satan is at the end of the *South Park* film. (Gardiner 61) The game mocks stereotypes of masculinity by creating a soldier who is in fact homosexual. This mocks the patriarchal and imperialist culture found within the American military that would never support gay troops. For Rosemary Hennessy, a feminist theorist this would be purely an attempt to naturalise social inequalities as Niko is far more masculine according to conventional readings of a film hero. (Gardiner 54) According to Hélène Cixous, however, this occurrence is not asserting a particular kind of masculine dominance in society. Rather it disrupts universal ideals about conventional male relationships in order to upset the way that reason, agency and order are traditionally broadcast to the viewer in classical Hollywood narrative. (Gardiner 57)

The relationship between Bellic and Cravic disrupts the Freudian notion that boys are socialised into mature heterosexual masculinity in ordered society, a typical classical Hollywood narrative norm. (Gardiner 59) Gardiner points to the age of the four protagonists of *South Park*

as being a representation of the childishness of ethics and agency in American society. Here, perhaps, the game is self-referential. The Freudian notion that immature boys are not fully masculine echoes the fact that in popular society *Grand Theft Auto IV* is considered a game. People that criticise it for its violence and sexual content ignore deeper sarcasm and satire that is being broadcast to the player. The people that criticise the game as such are people that confirm the existence of similar stereotypes in the real-world. Thus the videogame uses stereotypes in a seemingly normal way, but in fact subverts the structure of the classical Hollywood narrative through the use of the homosexual stereotype in order to poke fun at the structure of this type of story-telling itself.

Ultimately the game shifts away from heteronormativity while remaining masculist by using Niko for this purpose. It is misogynistic but also ambivalent about two of the major industries in the world-war and entertainment. In the game war becomes entertainment, through absurd acts of violence and entertainment war, through the debate between subversions in the norms of the classical Hollywood narrative and theorists such as Altman that lament the death of the classical musical. (Gardiner 54) At the same time the game champions sexual liberation and free speech. (Gardiner 61)

Cravic professes to be in love with a male government minister. Cravic's exaggerated mannerisms add to the anti-climax that it was not him who betrayed their army regiment. The poster in Florian's room of a semi naked man is meant to poke fun at the stereotype that is embodied by Florian himself. Florian Cravic's appearance is anti-climatic as the player expects some kind of thug, and then the person

who has been set up as Niko's arch nemesis, lives in similar squalid conditions to the protagonist. Florian tells the player that he is now a 'lifestyle coach' and that he 'teaches an aerobics class'. Florian is shown as hardly being the type of person capable of sabotaging Niko's army regiment.

This leaves the character Darko as the only one who could be responsible for the betrayal. A disgruntled Niko leaves the apartment, as Cravic tells the two cousins, "We must do brunch", further building upon the stereotype of a pseudo-intellectual homosexual man. This is meant to act as a point of humour. At this stage the protagonist's attention turns to the real traitor, Darko (*GTA 4*).

The next point of discussion is the characters as they appear in this cut-scene. When Niko Bellic first appears in the first cut-scene "The Cousins Bellic", he is shown as weak and without a legitimate job. He is described as a drifter who arrives in America in hope of prosperity. As already discussed, this is meant to obtain sympathy for him. By the time the player views "Weekend at Florian's", Niko is clearly established as a man displaying homicidal tendencies, having completed numerous missions in which the player must kill and steal in order to progress further into the game's narrative (*GTA4*). In the cut-scene itself Niko is shown as aggressive, he yells, kicks open the door to Florian's apartment and threatens the man at gunpoint.

Niko Bellic believes Cravic's story that it was in fact Darko that betrayed their old military unit and he therefore does not kill Cravic. This is a demonstration to the player that Bellic is capable of having some moral values and he does not kill purely based on compulsion.

He in fact befriends the man now known as Bernie Crane and must complete a few missions for him in order to progress. This is an indication of Niko's complex personality. He is rather fickle.

This point in the plot acts as the middle of its cinematic narrative (Warner 7). The player learns that the protagonist has in fact come to America to seek out the killer of his military comrades after Niko asks employer Ray Boccino to help him find "someone". After completing jobs for Boccino, Niko is finally given the whereabouts of the man who supposedly killed Niko's friends in an army betrayal in Russia prior to the start of the game. Niko believed that by killing Florian Cravic, he would be resolving his angst by exacting his desire for revenge. Of course when Niko encounters Florian the scene is anti-climatic. This introduces a point of conflict for the player and protagonist. (*GTA4*) At this point in the plot, Niko has killed Vladimir Glebov and Mikhail Faustin which then leads to Dimitri Rascalov burning down Roman's flat early on in the game. The repetition of Niko Bellic taking revenge on his adversaries serves to reinforce his character and thus offers an easily understandable protagonist.

At the end of the plot the player must choose to either strike a deal with Dimitri or to take revenge on him. If the player interferes with Niko's need to take revenge then Roman, who Niko has always defended through vengeance meets his demise. If the player strikes a deal then Kate McCrery dies, but this is the causal reaction of Niko's actions throughout the game – there will be a loss through his violence. Thus the game uses the cause-effect methodology embodied by the classical Hollywood narrative.

This cut-scene contributes to the narrative structure of the game by displaying Niko Bellic's character development. Bellic has been in Liberty City for a while now. A number of simulated days have passed, depending on how many times the player has saved (which advances the time of day) or how long the player takes to visit mission points. If the player has played the missions up to this point then Niko will be defined as a murderous man driven by his desire to obtain money and revenge that he confuses with happiness, but empathy is created for the protagonist because he is displayed as a misguided man who needs assistance in forming principles that will guide him to happiness. The player must decide if money or family are more important at the end of the game. Ironically the player cannot avoid taking revenge on characters throughout the game, resulting in either tragic end to the narrative. This is a linear plot that seems inescapable.

Bellic's desire to avenge his friends' death shows him as a vigilante, wishing to exact a type of justice on the antagonist for taking an action that in a classical Hollywood narrative would be portrayed as bad. (Bordwell in Rosen 29). In this light, Niko is a tragic hero, left in a state of "emptiness" as he describes in the final mission of the game. (*GTA4*).

The setting of "Weekend at Florian's" creates a tense mood that inspires a sense of urgency in the player to seek out and exact revenge on the person that is responsible for the loss of lives of Niko's comrades. Niko's aggressive shouting builds up the initial air of hostility in this scene. The crash of the door as it comes off its hinges adds to the atmosphere. Niko's violent actions and speech are juxtaposed with the high-pitched squeal of Florian's voice as he runs

foolishly across the room. Florian's appearance and his effeminate mannerisms are juxtaposed with the rigid pose that Niko assumes with his weapon pointing forward. The fact that Florian is not the person responsible for Niko's comrades' death creates further anticipation within the player. The player becomes impatient, and cannot wait for the phone call that reveals Darko Brevnic's location. The classical Hollywood narrative constantly pushes the viewer's attention toward the future and this procrastination mimics this style.

The "point of view" at this point in the game is important. Perspective is a key factor in distancing the "omniscient narrator" (the player) from the game's protagonist. (Monaco 173). As the game is shot primarily form a third-person viewpoint the player is aware that he is in control of someone rather than if a first-person viewpoint were used which would indicate that the player was in fact the protagonist. (Monaco 173). It is worth noting that this can be changed in the game. For instance the player looks at the protagonist's cellphone in the first-person and can change the camera to a first-person shot whilst driving cars or travelling in taxis or trains.

In the cut-scenes, the player is shown the protagonist interacting with other characters in the third person. The player has lost his control over Niko Bellic once more, and the character's speech guides the narrative of the game closer toward a point of closure. The ritualistic elements of drama that define the classical Hollywood narrative are exaggerated here in order to create suspense and push the plot toward one of two preordained endings. (Monaco 14, 182).

Gone is the programmatic music from the first cut-scene. Instead only synchronous sounds are heard in the scene, simulating what the player expects to hear from action and conversation. The camera does, however, show certain shots of Florian as if Roman or Niko are looking at him. In this way the player becomes involved with the action as he sees Florian through the first-person viewpoint. When this happens the player's authoritative presence disappears. Not only is the player no longer in control of Niko, but also his protection by the protagonist's body is temporarily stripped away and the viewer must encounter the characters face to face.

The tone evoked by the scene again starts as a serious one. As Niko storms through the hallway towards Florian's room he is angry and is out to kill the man. The humour that comes out of Florian inviting the cousins for 'brunch', his confession to be in love with a married minister and his absurd high pitched pleas for Niko to 'go away' serve to eliminate this point of conflict in the narrative. At the same time another point of conflict is created as Florian suggests that Darko is behind the betrayal of the Red Army regiment. The classical Hollywood narrative is primarily woven from the central mission or quest of the protagonist.

The man who Florian is having an affair with is the deputy mayor of Liberty City, who Roman describes as a strong advocator of "family values". (*GTA4*). The family values that Roman describes contradict the homosexual romance. In most states, American law still prohibits the act of gay marriage and the classical Hollywood narrative would never propose that its protagonist was homosexual. Family values here are associated with the traditional American family: father, mother and

children. The fact that a politician is engaged with Florian in such a romance is part of the way that Rockstar creates an anarchic sense of disorder in *Grand Theft Auto IV* in order to disrupt the norms of American ideology.

This scene contains symbolism that serves to signify the stereotypes, a network of which the very fabric of the *Grand Theft Auto IV* world is constructed. His house has pink wallpaper. A colour that is typically associated with being feminine. This enforces the stereotype of the homosexual that is broadcast repeatedly in a range of media. His character is used as comic relief to the aggression shown by Niko's character. Niko Bellic is the stereotype of a masculine, chauvinist man himself. This clash of stereotypes creates humour and a twist in the game's plot that is subsequently built upon. (Bordwell in Rosen 29)

"That Special Someone" is the culmination of events that proceed from "Weekend at Florian's". In this cut-scene Niko locates Darko and once again embarks on a mission charged by his need to exact revenge on the person responsible for the death of his friends. Niko and Roman must be directed by the player to a yard and fling Darko out on the back of a black van, handcuffed (*GTA4*). Niko demands to know why Darko betrayed them, an act which leads to the death of their mutual friends. Darko responds by saying that he had 'other friends' that paid him the measly sum of one thousand dollars to kill Niko's comrades. This is another comment on the results of sacrificing friends or family for the sake of money.

It is revealed that Darko is a junkie who just wants Niko to kill him. He collapses to his knees and says, "Trust me. You'll be doing me a

favour". (*GTA4*) At this point in the game the player must decide if he wants to kill Darko or let him live in misery. This point in the game is pivotal in contributing to Niko Bellic's personality. If the player allows Darko to live, he suffers through his drug addiction, implied to be the ultimate result of his army betrayal. If the player chooses to kill Darko then Niko tells Roman that he still feels "empty". (*GTA4*) Both the act of Niko's revenge and Darko's army betrayal are hailed as being psychologically damaging to these characters. This morality choice and its consequences are the final cue to whether or no the player will take revenge on Dimitri and Pegorino for betraying Niko's family or if he will strike a deal with them, neglecting principles of family that are so entrenched in the classical Hollywood narrative and in the American ideal. (Bordwell in Rosen 20)

This part of the game offers the player the opportunity to develop the character of the protagonist Niko Bellic. If one chooses to kill Darko, Niko appears to be no better than Darko himself. As Darko says, Niko is indeed a 'hypocrite' as he has frequently killed for the sake of obtaining money. Darko's face also looks extremely similar to that of Niko's, especially when seen in profile. This indicates that perhaps the player should spare Darko's life based on their similarities. The player must choose at this point whether Niko will exact revenge or some kind of justice by killing Darko, or if he will respect the value of human life. Either choice can be viewed as heroism in the script of a classical Hollywood narrative. (Bordwell in Rosen 29)

The setting of this scene contributes toward offering reasons for the player to either kill or spare the life of the character Darko. The absence of music in this cut-scene allows the player to focus on the

dialogue that occurs between the characters Niko, Roman and Darko. Through the dialogue the player is told that Darko did in fact murder Niko's friends, and in fact, did it for very little money. This emphasises that he places very little value on human life. The value of human life is similarly emphasised in the classical Hollywood narrative, and the fact that Darko has killed many innocent people reaffirms the initial impression of his character as evil. (Bordwell in Rosen 29)

This fact encourages the player to exact revenge on Darko. The player is also told that Darko is a drug addict. He does not see value in his own life anymore and the fact that he is so heavily addicted to drugs makes him appear as if he is suffering enough in life. This fact encourages the player not to kill the character Darko. Roman also urges Niko not to kill Darko saying, "Let him suffer. He doesn't look as if he enjoys life too much anyway". (*GTA4*)

The tone in this part of the game is serious. The humour of the previous scene and some other areas of the game have been abandoned in order to create a mood in which the player must question his own moral values. The game questions the protagonist's own character at this point. It tests what type of person the player is by setting up various devices or cues that will demand a different response according to who is playing the game. The player however cannot alter the game to an unlimited extent. He has two options that lead to varied but similar outcomes. In both endings Niko will lose his girlfriend, Kate, bringing the secondary plot to a tragic close. The central difference is that either Roman or Kate McCrery will die regarding the player's choice at this point in the game.

“Out of Commission” is the final cut-scene in the game. It varies slightly according to whether or not the player killed or spared the life of Dimitri. The version that will be closely examined is the one the player views if he chooses to kill Dimitri after the previous cut-scene. Dimitri is one of Niko’s early employers. Dimitri uses Niko to kill his partner Mikhail Faustin and subsequently betrays Niko, burning Roman’s flat.

Right before this cut-scene, Dimitri manages to flee to Happiness Island, a representation of Liberty Island in real-world New York City. Niko must pursue him in order to exact revenge on him because he has killed Niko’s girlfriend Kate McCrery. Niko chases Pegorino in an air gunship accompanied by Roman and another friend called Little Jacob. Pegorino’s hired goons manage to shoot down the gunship and this is where the cut-scene begins.

The player sees the gunship on fire as it hurtles out of control. Niko lands the gunship and the three characters manage to disembark unharmed. The player must resume control momentarily in order to shoot Pegorino down after which the cut-scene resumes. Niko, furious about the death of his girlfriend, demands to know, “What did she ever do to you?” as Pegorino lies bleeding on the ground. The two are involved in brief conversation. Niko confesses that the “old families”, (here he is by implication referring to the Russian Mob) thought that Pegorino was a “joke”. Pegorino tries to shoot Niko at this point, but Niko manages to shoot and kill him first. Shortly after this, Niko is rejoined by Roman and Jacob. Roman states, “You did it…we won!” (*GTA4*) Niko, however, appears to be pessimistic. The trio are seen standing over the corpse of Pegorino from a low-angle shot as if they

have triumphed over some great evil. Niko declares, "Really? I don't know. What did I do?" (*GTA4*) This indicates that Niko may be sick of the constant killing. Throughout the game Niko makes comments that break the norms of the classical Hollywood narrative. In the cut-scene in which Pegorino insists that Niko reconcile with Dimitri, the mafia boss says, "Come on Niko, this is real". Niko responds by reflecting on the term real. "Real? What is real", he asks philosophically. (*GTA4*)

This comment is telling as it almost seems to be questioning the game's authenticity. As the game provides not only the ability of the player to control the protagonist, but also allows the player to determine the outcome of the game somewhat, the player has a definite type of interaction with the game. The player also has an emotional interaction with the game. As he follows the plot of the mission mode of the game, the player has a variety of responses to the way that the plot is structured and is able to make decisions in the game based on these emotional responses. These comments show that the game designers are conscious that *Grand Theft Auto IV* is a game. This strays from the convention of the classical Hollywood narrative and helps *Grand Theft Auto IV* be a more self-aware creation, more like an art film than a mainstream movie.

The three men leave the scene of the crime and the last thing the player sees before the game credits start to roll up the screen, is a shot of the Statue of Happiness, a replica of the real Statue of Liberty. This last shot serves to affirm that the actions of Niko in this particular instance were just. The presence of the statue denotes the 'happy ending' that viewers of the classical Hollywood narrative have come to expect. The cut-scene that appears if the player chooses not to kill

Darko is fairly similar, except of course Roman is dead so he does not appear in the cut-scene. Niko's motivation for killing Pegorino is the fact that he killed Roman, not his girlfriend, who is still alive, but has left him, in this version of the game.

Whichever version of the cut-scene is viewed, this is the third and final act of the narrative in the game *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Niko has been faced with the emergence of a massive crisis resulting in the death of either Roman or his girlfriend at the hands of Pegorino. At this stage in the plot Niko must engage in battle with this evil force- Pegorino himself. The act of revenge is not meant to be viewed as a bad thing. Even though Niko himself is a criminal and a murderer, the game continually reinforces the fact that he will do anything for his family and loved ones.

At this point in the game Niko's character has developed substantially. He values human life, as illustrated by his anger at the fact that Pegorino has killed his girlfriend, or in the alternative scene Roman, his cousin. Throughout the game Niko displays respect for his family, mainly his cousin. Niko is originally shown as a criminal and an illegal immigrant with very little hope for having a successful future, but throughout the game Niko develops several relationships with other characters that he cares for. At another point in the game, the player is offered another choice: Killing either the character Playboy X or the character Dwayne and at another he must choose between Derek and Francis McCreary. Whoever the player chooses to keep alive becomes one of Niko's friends. Niko also retains a friendship throughout the game with the character Little Jacob, the stereotype of a Rastafarian.

Through these strengthening relationships the player can see Niko has the foundation for moral values. These values are synonymous with the characteristics of a protagonist in a classical Hollywood narrative yet some comparatively smaller issues may be left unresolved (Bordwell 159). In this cut-scene Niko defeats Pegorino who has become a symbol of evil. The player must respect Niko's loyalty to his friends and family. The shot of the Statue of Happiness affirms Niko once more as a vigilante exacting a form of justice on the real evil in the world. Niko's scepticism about killing Pegorino also affirms that he questions the ethics of the real world and the way in which these morals are entrenched through the classical Hollywood narrative in the game itself. This signifies to the player that Niko is not in fact an agent of evil. Rather he is a man who has had to resort to violence to overcome a series of obstacles. He has had to save his own life, but those around him benefit from the killing of Pegorino as well.

The structure of the game can be seen as linear at this final point in the game. Although the player can resume playing after the credits are shown, there has been a story structure retaining the elements of a classical Hollywood narrative. There is a definite Beginning, Middle and an End that proceeds in a chronological order in the same manner as a script of a Classical Hollywood film.

At this point the three-act structure of the game's narrative becomes clearly defined with a definite ending to the part of the game that follows the classical Hollywood narrative. The absence of music and the busy city sounds that are heard throughout playing the game in this cut-scene serve to separate the protagonist and his predicament from the surrounding city. In fact the game *Grand Theft Auto IV*, like

its predecessors, places very little emphasis on the importance of people's lives besides that of the protagonist and those characters that he encounters. In a way the pedestrian characters in the game become simple simulations, with the carefully structured cut-scenes removed from the main narrative from the rest of the game. In this way Niko Bellic is the sole hero of the story.

The tone created in this last cut-scene embodies the value system of the classical Hollywood narrative. In the scene Niko is given a very authoritative tone. The player is meant to disregard the fact that Niko himself is a killer and is meant to accept him as a hero in this final cut-scene. Niko has finally triumphed over the man who has been threatening his life from an early stage in the game. He and his cousin are now free to live the American dream. (*GTA4*)

There is a much darker tone set by the death of Pegorino in this cut-scene. If the player has chosen revenge on Dimitri then Pegorino has killed his girlfriend as a form of punishment for being vengeful. The further execution of Pegorino immediately repeats the action taken on Dimitri. The two themes that are relentlessly repeated by classical Hollywood narrative in the game are money and revenge in the place of happiness and justice. This is the way in which Rockstar adds a critical viewpoint to the notion of the American Dream that is broadcast so strongly by popular, mainstream cinema: only becoming rich, and crushing whoever stands in one's way can make someone happy in a capitalist society. Roman is a man obsessed with money. He gladly advises Niko to strike a deal with their enemy, Dimitri in order to gain more finances, even though Dimitri has threatened the Bellic cousins' lives countless times and even been responsible for Roman

being taken hostage. His death when the character strikes a deal with Dimitri is a symbol of the demise of the constant cue encouraging the player to get money. Roman's worth expires if the player embraces money over family.

On the other hand, Kate McCreary advises Niko to stick by his principles, to defend his family's honour and not to accept money in family's place. She refuses to speak to Niko if the player strikes a deal with Dimitri, further proving that she is a strong advocator of the principles of love over money. Kate's death is not in vain, as she has succeeded in aiding the player to embrace the moral standards embodied by American idealism and the classical Hollywood narrative.

Niko however does continue to take revenge on people through murder, which damages his mental state and often causes him further misery by losing those close to him. Thus, regardless of what the player chooses to do somebody dies. This does use the classical Hollywood narrative's use of character cues to create tragedy and drama at the end of a story. A strong message is being forecast by either ending: that the world is not necessarily a place where moral values are as clear cut as they appear in Hollywood films or in idealistic viewpoints. Rockstar creates an anarchic feel by creating two separate endings in which the ultimate tone is depressing in either scenario. The player cannot escape the sense of disorder. Thus the ability of the classical Hollywood narrative to resolve itself in a simplified manner is being mocked here as two different actions lead to very similar reactions. In this way the game's narrative is highly conscious of its own conventions or subversion of them likening *Grand*

*Theft Auto IV* more to the structure of an art film than that of a mainstream one.

In this way the game calls attention to the very nature of the classical Hollywood narrative being anarchic itself. Haphazard endings that use warped moral logic in a pseudo-closure of events, here result in somebody dying regardless of the decision that the player makes. Although the player can take many actions in the game environment, have a varied level of responses with its environment on many levels and make such choices, the narrative still culminates in the loss of a central secondary character. Both of these possible deaths do not rectify the turmoil that erupts from Niko's action of revenge in the first place.

Perhaps if Kate McCreary dies then there is a closer return to the initial state of affairs with which the game begins, however this terminates the secondary plot line that is supposed to work with the central plot and emphasise a happy ending in the classical Hollywood narrative. Kate seems to merely be a narrative cue that expires once her cues are no longer needed. She attempts to encourage Niko to retain respect for his principles, to defend his family's honour instead of making amends with his enemies for the sake of financial gain. Once Kate has made this point she either dies, or in the alternative ending leaves Niko because he has forsaken his principles. The player cannot combine these two plot lines in a logical point of resolution that is advocated by Bordwell's notion of the "forked path". Thus the game does not necessarily follow the classical Hollywood narrative completely. Rather, it uses the subversion of its conventions – the twisted sense of morality and the inescapably depressing end to the

plot – to create a powerful satire of society: its attitudes toward the system of values that are challenged by the everyday world. Rockstar manipulates the direction that the player must follow in the plot in order to broadcast its message.

Symbolism within the game that furthers this message can be found in the credits that follow the shot of the Statue of Happiness. The romantic view of the Liberty City skyline creates an inviting atmosphere to a city that few people would want to live in the real world if it was as outrageously violent as in the game *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion:

"Video games remediate cinema; that is they demonstrate the propensity of emerging media forms to pattern themselves on the characteristic behaviours and tendencies of their predecessors" (Rehak in Wolf and Perron 104).

As has been discussed throughout the course of this research report, *Grand Theft Auto IV* has plainly reworked formulas of cinematic apparatus in order to address spectatorship in the way demanded by the popular audience. (Rehak in Wolf and Perron 104) In other words the game uses the cinematic language of the classical Hollywood narrative in order to communicate with its players. It offers a level of psychological satisfaction as the player completes the goals of the protagonist, pushing toward a causal, logical ending. The player can also derive satisfaction from the adrenaline raising side-missions and free-roaming aspects of the game, but ultimately the game culminates in one of two different endings that create the impression that the death of somebody close to the protagonist is unavoidable. The failure of the heterosexual union and the presence of the relationship between Niko and the homosexual stereotype embodied in Bernie Crane disrupt Freudian ideals that contribute to the conclusion of the classical Hollywood narrative.

The player completes tasks most readily when he is deriving pleasure from the game experience. It is navigation through the "contested spaces" of the game world and the violent and non-violent interactions with other game characters, through which the player derives

satisfaction or negative emotions if he fails to complete a task (Rehak in Wolf and Perron 104 and Juul in Perron and Wolf 247-248). The ending of the game is however depressing as although there are two possible outcomes a character close to the protagonist inevitably dies. This is a parody of the classical Hollywood narrative itself as all decisions by the protagonist (or in this case the player) are wrapped up in a pseudo closure of events no matter how many variables there are in this style of narrative.

The mission mode of the game can be readily analysed using the non-interactive framework of classical Hollywood narrative that was employed for the purpose of this research report. The game could, however, be studied using a number of different frameworks, but it clearly bears elements of the classical Hollywood narrative both stylistically and narratologically. The focus of the game *Grand Theft Auto IV* remains on the ludus aspects of the game.

Ultimately this results in the fact that the player can have little impact on the final outcome of the game's narrative. The game is designed to lead the player along a linear path which the player can indeed stray away from, but will still be drawn back into through the mission aspects of the game in order to achieve a sense of personal satisfaction and emotional gratification.

*Grand Theft Auto IV* makes use of the classical Hollywood narrative for several reasons. The central reason for its use is that it creates an epic storyline that has been readily compared to film classics such as *The Godfather*. The game allows the player to take authority over such a plot and thus allows him to achieve a level of satisfaction through the

logical progression of the plot. Through using the classical Hollywood narrative a certain level of realism is broadcast to the player, which is reinforced by the *mise en scene* with which the game environment is built. This realism is subverted by the exaggeration of violence and the immortality of Niko Bellic that create a cartoon quality in the style of the game, while the highly predictable nature of the classical Hollywood narrative is referenced in either of the two endings in the game.

In these endings lies the darker message that is embedded in the entire game. Niko's misinterpretation of the American ideal, that money and revenge will make him content are fundamental flaws that exist whilst perpetrating ideals in a society that often neglects the weak and is fuelled by greed and capital. It is in this way that Rockstar create a comment about society. At the same time they contribute to narrative theory by emphasising the futility of having varying choices but a fixed outcome, the formula of a mainstream film. Rockstar questions the relevance of the classical Hollywood narrative in video games by including it in their own work. It is in this way that *Grand Theft Auto IV* becomes a satirical statement and not just solely a game mimicking the formula of the classical Hollywood narrative.

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