**Embodied Historiographies: Affect and Realism in the "Medal of Honor" and "Call of Duty" Franchises after "Saving Private Ryan"**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Germanic Languages and Literatures and Screen Arts and Cultures)
in The University of Michigan
2018

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## DEDICATION

To all my students from whom I had and will have the pleasure to learn.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT


This dissertation examines the representation of World War II in First Person Shooters (FPSs) and the shift in their perception after the release of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). It argues that the release of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) allowed the genre to unhinge itself from a popular discourse critical of immersive video games and attach itself to a discourse that regarded embodiment as a privileged way of representing history realistically.

The first chapter analyzes the PC game *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) to establish the genre's state of play before the release of Spielberg's film. It lays out the limitations faced by the game genre: due to the perception that FPSs engage the players' bodies more directly than other media, they found themselves unable to function as fact-based historiographies. As a result, they approached representations of WWII by combining them with the genre inventories of science fiction and horror.

Chapter II introduces the term "visceral realism" to analyze the impact of Steven Spielberg's 1998 war film *Saving Private Ryan* on representations of WWII and their perception. It argues that the highly physical opening battle scene in particular shifted the perception of such representations from associations with horror and the 'body genre' to the idea that bodily experienced WWII historiographies offer a privileged access to the hardships and struggles of the 'Greatest Generation.'

Chapter III analyzes the first FPS to react to this shift, *Medal of Honor* (1999), and argues that it unhinged the genre from public controversies in the wake of the Columbine High School

Massacre by alluding to accepted genres like the spy thriller and ideologies like the celebration of the 'Greatest Generation.'

Chapter IV discusses the 2003 FPS *Call of Duty* and its use of cinematic conventions and portrayal of historical artifacts to establish a U.S.-centric narrative of war from the perspectives of the U.S., U.K. and USSR troops. I argue that this shift in national subjectivities during the game serves as an extension of Cold War ideology by constructing a moral hierarchy between the United States, Great Britain and Communist Russia.

Finally, the conclusion considers the historical and cultural environment of this dissertation's analyses and, using postwar Germany as an example, shows the wide variety of possible readings of these games.

INTRODUCTION


Over the course of the 2011 *Futurama* episode "Overclockwise" (S6E25), the narcissistic

robot Bender and his friend Fry play the fictional online shooter *World of World War II 3*. With a

setting modelled on the representation of D-Day in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*

(1998, see Figure 1), Bender's pixelated US-soldier representation brutally annihilates three

blasé Nazi officers, who were just "eating some Spätzle and listening to some *Kraftwerk*."

Rewarded with the graphics of an enormous American flag (Figure 2), and the words "Allied

Victory," Bender boasts to his friend: "Did you see me? History came alive, and I killed it!"

At the risk of appearing to trivialize the serious subject matter of historical representation,

I chose this parody of WWII shooter franchises (which also references the 2004 online game

*World of Warcraft* in its faux title) because it exemplifies how deeply the combination of virtual

violence, WWII, and displays of American patriotism in video games are engrained in the

consciousness of the episode's writers. The nearly flawless virtual recreation of Bender's

metallic frame, and the comically hyper-masculine virtual representation of Fry's scrawny body

as a muscular Army grunt (Figure 3) addresses, if humorously exaggerates, common

assumptions about shooter games' abilities. In public and industrial discourse, shooters immerse

their players into violent events of the past and allow them to participate in fantasies of power by

taking the role of the "Greatest Generation" heroes made popular by contemporary depictions of

WWII. Finally, the anachronistic reference to the German postwar Krautrock band *Kraftwerk*

touches on the simultaneous presence of two distinct historical periods—past time and play time (Chapman, 90)—that occur when playing these immersive treatments of the past.


*Figure 1: World of World War II 3 (I)*


*Figure 2: World of World War II 3 (II)*

*Figure 3: World of World War II 3 (III)*

Historically, immersion into virtual violence and the treatment of emotionally charged historical events were far from an obvious combination. What struck the writers of *Futurama* as a cliché worthy of mockery had developed over the course of the 1990s. At the beginning of that period, the First Person Shooter (FPS), a genre of computer and console games which in 2011 was perceived to be a uniquely immersive medium, lacked the cultural capital to represent anything but the most fictionalized battles with monsters and aliens.

This dissertation surveys the development of FPSs as a vehicle for popular historiography between the early 1990s and 2003, using the WWII themed FPS, as an example. The suggestion that FPSs constitute a uniquely immersive genre has remained a constant in the language of advertising, public perception and, to a lesser extent, academic discourse. During this time period the genre's subject matter dramatically shifted from the explicitly fictional to historical non-fiction. As examples of historiographical rhetoric, a concept I borrow from the late Hayden White's 1973 publication *Metahistory*, I analyze the FPSs *Medal of Honor* (1999) and *Call of Duty* (2003), and their difference from the 1992 game *Wolfenstein 3D*, to illustrate the change in subject matter for which immersive gameplay came to be known. In each chapter I argue that

this shift exemplifies an alteration in the genre's cultural capital and a general epistemological change in perceptions of viscerality and immersion in American culture.

Throughout this dissertation I trace the production of FPSs' perceived ability to immerse the player by means of enacting violent virtual acts, which at first created concern from parents and educators. Later this aspect of the FPS served as a guarantor of realism and potential mediator of knowledge in the representation of violent historical events. While recent publications (Baron 2014; Ramsay 2015; Chapman 2016; Allison 2018) have greatly enhanced the academic discussion of video games representing history in general and WWII more specifically, a narrative of FPS' move from controversial genre to an acceptable representation of emotionally charged historical events remains to be written. My project traces how perceptions of immersion in FPS shifted from primarily causing alarm and condemnation to producing commendations for using realism in representing the WWII battles of the "Greatest Generation."

My project, with its focus on immersive representations of history, opens up an important discussion of how the body contributes to public perceptions of truthfulness, authenticity and trustworthiness by analyzing the relationship between the body and realism in digital games and the films upon which they draw, in addition to the discourse they generate. The topic of trust in representations has already yielded a highly productive and well-researched academic discourse pertaining to questions of digital images and their relationship to photographic indexicality. This line of inquiry has produced a number of publications that evaluated digital culture through the eyes of early film theory (among others, the excellent 2007 collection of essays in a special issue of *differences* named *Indexicality: Trace and Sign*). However, my attention to immersion expands this discourse with a focus on corporeal issues by using immersion and its relationship to perceptions of authenticity/historical realism as central topics. Recent political and social

debates and the troubled relationship between U.S. leadership and journalism have infused the issue of trust with heightened importance. It is crucial to widen the field of this discourse, and to ask how engaging the body—beyond the eye—relates to confidence in a particular ideology or a representation of the world. More than a mere semantic play on words, exploring how trust relates to our bodies is crucial at a time in which politics overtly speak to our "gut."


## The First-Person Shooter (FPS) – Major Elements and Style

In order to understand the FPSs central to this dissertation, a basic knowledge of the formal properties of the genre, including its aesthetics, facilitations of gameplay, and history, is needed.

The FPS is marked by an interactive representation of conflict, which, due to its violent aesthetics and presumed immersive nature, has been controversial since the video game genre became widely available. Although their roots trace back to the 1970s, FPSs rose to popularity with the id Software PC game *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), and its successor *Doom* (1993). Repeatedly at the center of public controversy, the assumption that FPSs and their representations of violence engage the body to a higher extent than their counterparts in other media (such as film and literature) or other types of digital games has led politicians, media and political activists to decry it as a cause for school shootings and other violence.

When it was widely reported that Eric Harris, one of the two shooters involved in the 1999 Columbine High School Massacre, had been an enthusiastic player of the *Doom* series, that game, among other FPSs, replaced the fighting game *Mortal Kombat* (1992) as the primary target of public concerns over media's influence on teenage violence. Immersion, a term the game industry still uses to suggest the games' ability to physically and psychologically engage players to the extent that they become absorbed in their virtual worlds, was seen as a cause for

concern in the aftermath of Columbine,[1] since it allegedly left the player with no clear distinction between virtual and 'real-life' violence.

In my dissertation, the controversial genre of the FPS serves as a representative example of the mainstreaming of physically engaging media, which is directly linked to the question of trust. In public discourse, as well as in its own marketing, the genre was and still is largely assumed to provide an immersive, and thus bodily engaging, experience. Digital media scholar Timothy Welsh (2016) correctly points out that "[v]ideogame companies consistently market their products as so intuitive and immersive that they overcome the burden of interface. In other words, videogames are sold on still-prevalent assumptions about the immersivity of virtual environments" (7). As I will show, until the late 1990s, FPS' subject matter largely paralleled film's body genres[2] by representing highly violent subject matter in a physically engaging fashion. While its aesthetics aimed for perceptual realism in recreating physical space and the wounded human body in combat, its subject matter focused on overtly fictional narratives clustered around the genres of horror and science fiction.

While a majority of FPS gameplay features had been present well before the historical period of my focus, this project is not primarily invested in providing a narrative of technological progress and general stylistic changes. Rather, the period between the early 1990s and early 2000s represents an ideal time to investigate the way a shift in subject matter can reveal an evolution in public attitude surrounding immersive representation of violent conflict. Far from arguing that computer games are merely an extension of film, I will still employ several terms

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[1] However, as public concerns in the 1980s over pen and paper roleplaying, and the *Dungeons & Dragons* games specifically showed, concern over immersion is by no means a phenomenon of digital media.

[2] I borrow the term "body genre" from Linda Williams' 1991 essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess." See my discussion on realism below.

used in formal film analysis, primarily building upon film studies' and game studies' established vocabulary, and only creating my own terms when established discourse has not yet provided appropriate expressions. This will allow me to employ common terminology and a shared methodological framework when discussing both FPS and the films from which they draw a great part of their aesthetics and narrative.

## **Space and Perspective**

The name "FPS" alludes to the central aesthetic element of perspective. The game space is encountered via a long take (i.e. an uninterrupted sequence) from the point-of-view of the player-character, the player's primary point of identification (for a seminal work on the analysis of media across different platforms, cf. Jenkins 2008). The game only disrupts this angle to announce the end of the level, or when the player fails a mission, usually by the death of the player-character. Such a representation of space attempts to recreate human three-dimensional vision. Over the years, programmers have used several strategies to achieve this perspective.

Early games of the 1970s and early 1980s that featured a first-person viewpoint suggested depth via linear perspective (*Night Driver*, 1976), using scalable sprites to allow objects to change size in relation to the player-character's point of view. In the late 1970s, the use of vector graphics brought a more realistic representation of space, which then led to wireframe graphics that were rendered on-screen in real time. Figure 4 shows a screenshot from *Battlezone* (1980), an example of wireframe graphics. With crosshairs in the middle of the screen, the vectors draw a horizon, a moon, a mountain range, abstract obstacles and an enemy tank, while a 2-D Head-Up-Display (HUD, see below) informs the player of game elements, such as enemy proximity, remaining lives, score and high score.

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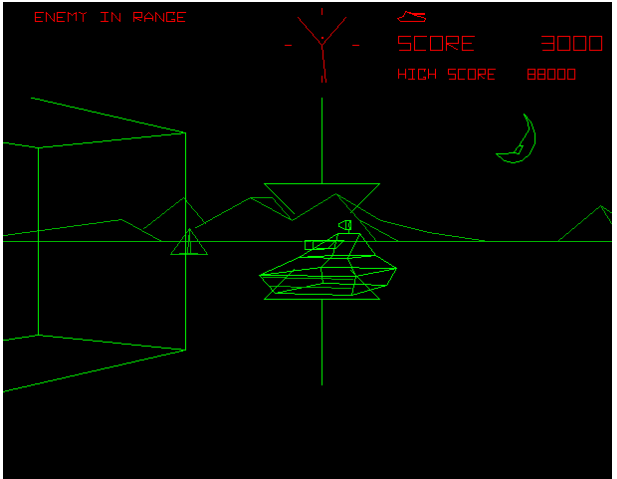
*Figure 4: Battlezone (1980)*



*Figure 5: Driller (1986)*

In the early 1990s, games began using real 3-D computation, and employed filled polygons (two-dimensional plane shapes) that made wire-frame graphics appear outdated. An early example of filled polygon graphics is Driller (1987), released for the ZX Spectrum (Figure 5). Not merely outlined with vectors, the polygons suggested plastic objects by using color that differentiates them from the background.

While it is not necessary to understand all the computational strategies, such as ray casting,[3] used to suggest three-dimensional space over the history of the FPS, it is important to note that it is still central to the genre in the present day. As the image of the 2017 FPS *Call of Duty: WII* (Figure 6) shows, the genre's investment in perceptual realism (as opposed to other genres' more abstract graphics), fuses the view of the player with that of the virtual player-character, which reveals an interest in what would later be named immersion.

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[3] For an overview of these strategies, as well as an industrial and hardware perspective on the evolution of 3-D gaming, cf. Arsenault et al. 2013.

*Figure 6: Call of Duty: WWII (2017)*

## Head-Up Display (HUD)

Figure 6 exposes another central element of the modern FPS, which can be traced back for several decades and originates in military vehicle interfaces: the Head-Up Display (or HUD). This system communicates important information about the state of the game to the player. It is a (usually two-dimensional) non-diegetic graphical (and/or numerical) interface overlaying the visuals of the game space and includes "[s]ome combination of icons and numbers on the screen, showing health and ammunition levels and so on" (Jones, 75). Depending on the game, HUDs can feature rudimentary information, such as that mentioned above, or more elaborate feedback about the player-character, their physical stance (i.e. crouching, crawling, standing, etc.), and the enemy's position.

In *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies* (2008), digital humanities scholar Steven E. Jones compares HUD's conventional function to that of the helper-non-player-character, or helper-NPC (see below), since both provide supportive or necessary

information about the game to the player (75). Jones pushes back against the common assumption that a HUD constitutes a distraction, which not only hampers immersion, but also the suspension of disbelief (see also my discussion of Taylor (2003) below). He finds that such a non-diegetic display highlights the centrality of gameplay: "[The HUD] is an essential part of the particular kind of engagement (not immersion) a player experiences, . . . a reminder that gameplay is in the foreground, literally and figuratively" (75). According to Jones, while not in service of immersion itself (its presence indeed introduces an element that belongs neither to the world of the player, nor to that of the player-character), the HUD facilitates easier play and also foregrounds engaging competitive play, rather than immersive pretend play.

I go further than Jones and suggest that the HUD can, in fact, be in service of immersion. Especially given its origins in military technology, and participation in what has been called the military entertainment complex (Lenoir and Caldwell 2017), this interface between player and ludic space in many ways recalls the military interface of soldier and battle. While the HUD was, of course, absent from the infantry soldier on which WWII FPSs usually focalize, the games anachronistically overlay two historically disparate military experiences. If we allow immersion to consist of a multiplicity of factors—some of which might be more present than others at different times during the experience—the fact that the HUD ruptures the unity of past time and play time does not necessarily negate its use in the immersion process. Rather, the immersive experience occurs via a recognizably military, if not temporarily specific, experience represented by the HUD.


**Non-Player-Characters (NPCs) and Persistent Non-Player Characters (PNPCs)**
While Non-Player-Characters are by no means exclusive to the FPS, my chapters explore their function in representing history and their relationship with the player's experience as

constituted by the genre's aesthetic and narrative framework. This makes it necessary to explain

the concept and its function in some detail. Experimental game designer and game scholar Dan

Pinchbeck (2009) defines NPCs as agents with some form of individuality that are recognizable

as separate characters from the background population in games. To him, this individuality

reveals, particularly outside of cut-scenes, "a greater investment in terms of diegetic and system

resources" (262). Dynamic, visually represented NPCs require a far greater amount of labor and

more sophisticated technology to create due to their "capacity to independently interact with the

world [which is] substantially more costly than a static cut-scene character . . ." (267). The

additional cost, i.e. labor intensity, can be observed by the fact that the overwhelming majority of

NPCs are represented via mere audio or cut-scenes in most games (ibid.). Thus, when NPCs

appear outside of cutscenes they have a heightened importance, as they illustrate one avenue

where the designers' have committed a considerable amount of their limited resources. This

makes them remarkably suited for my analysis of how design concerns reflect the game's

investment in a particular player experience.

Other than their representation (i.e. whether they appear in cut-scenes or in-game–see

above), Pinchbeck organizes NPCs, or PNPCs,[4] according to the functions they serve within the

game's diegesis. Their main function, according to Pinchbeck, lies in their ability to serve as

"goal-communication and manipulation devices," broken down into the following categories:

> explicit instruction ("go here and do that"); virtual expansion of opportunities for action
> (i.e., allowing the player to perform an action by proxy, which the player-character itself
> is unable to perform); and finally, offering contextual support and continuity by fulfilling
> a vital role in ensuring that the player's actions are successfully supported by the
> environment.

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[4] Pinchbeck defines a subcategory of NPCs, *Persistent* NPCs (PNPCs), as NPCs "presented in the diegesis who
appear repeatedly or have a definable role in the world and plot" and which are, to an extent, "defined by diegetic
significance rather than representation" (ibid.).

The presence (or absence) of NPCs in the FPSs I explore constitute a crucial element of contact between the player, the player-character and the game's diegesis.


## Review of Literature
### FPS and the Representation of History

The FPS as a means of representing WWII began attracting scholarly attention in the mid-2000s, when Eva Kingsepp published her seminal essay "Immersive Historicity in World War II Digital Games" (2006), in which she argues that popular memory has not only collapsed historical events and its filmic representations, but that it, due to the hyperreal edge of Spielberg's images over the black and white documentary footage that they recreate, imagines them as the 'proper' referent.

Kingsepp's term "immersive historicity" indicates how referencing the spaces of popular war films and including historically authentic materials and events constituted the player's feeling of 'time-travel.' As a first interrogation of the relationship between historicism and immersion, I owe a great deal of my methodological framework to Kingsepp's writing. Both my attention to historical material culture and immersion can in part be traced back to her essay.

I have not been the only scholar influenced by Kingsepp, for following her influential and well-researched article, several writers applied her focus on the connection between material culture and a resulting feeling of authenticity in WWII FPS to their own analyses. One of these, Brian Rejack (2007), compares the act of playing these games to becoming historical reenactors, a group which notoriously evidences an obsession with historically authentic materiality. His comparison appears to be somewhat inapplicable to the other media discussed in his study, i.e. televisual representations, in particular productions on the History Channel. Equally problematic, Rejack appears to claim that the central (if not only) possibility of identification rests on the

recognition of historical artifacts. He does not account for narrative and suspense-building as major factors in identification. However, while I disagree with Rejack's intense focus on historical artifacts as agents for identification, he is certainly right in pointing out that they do color the FPS playing experience in meaningful ways. Especially given my focus on viewing digital historiographies as rhetoric, the idea of analyzing their employment will be useful in identifying how games construct a certain understanding of authenticity and historical realism and how this in turn influences a kind of virtually embodied gameplay experience.

On the other hand, De Groots offers a needed nuanced view of narrative in his 2007 book *Recycling Culture*. He examines certain games' combination of historical and military "authenticity" with the rhetoric of Hollywood narratives. In particular he focuses on the focalization via the common citizen-soldier and argues that the encounter of player and game results in a dialectic of 'experience' and 'authenticity.' Recalling Kingsepp's interest in immersion and historicism, an analysis of experience and authenticity reveals de Groot's attention to a similar yet more broadly defined subject matter. Two factors—the experience of *immersed* gameplay and its relation to questions of historical authenticity—constitute a major framework for my analyses of historical realism in FPSs. I, too, argue that these games' claims to authenticity are communicated via an immersed state of gameplay, which partly constitutes my methodological basis for statements about historiography and the represented historical events themselves.

In his discussion of the psychological dynamics in player/player-character identification, Campbell (2008) focusses on the nostalgia for WWII created and tapped into by these games. He argues that they ludify historical conflict via the imposition of rules, while at the same time

eliminating chance and the possibility for player-characters and NPCs[5] to produce human error. As a result, the games create a controllable, nostalgic remediation of the portrayed events. Secondly, he argues that the games draw heavily on Hollywood films like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), as well as on the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers* (2001). They thus simulate a World War II film, rather than the 'real' World War II. His convincing point is echoed in several later publications (Ramsay 2015; Allison 2018), including a productive critique by Harrison Gish.

In "Playing the Second World War: *Call of Duty* and the Telling of History" (2010), Gish complicates Campbell's methodology by arguing that the *Call of Duty* series fundamentally differs from cinematic representations of WWII by opening up "multiple histories, memories, and potent interpretations" rather than providing closure. His work joins a growing number of writings in the late 2000s and early 2010s which, not unlike early academic writing on digital games in general, formed a conversation that sought to redeem these games as useful by commending the complexity of the experiences, and the informative exposure to history they can provide.[6]

Stephanie Fisher's 2011 essay "Playing with World War II: A Small-Scale Study of Learning in Video Games" exemplifies this tendency in scholarship, as she seeks out the pedagogically useful aspects of these games. She dismisses concerns grounded in an underestimation of the player's ability to differentiate between genre-driven representations of history and the events themselves. In a desire to redeem the FPS' obsession with material

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[5] Non-Player-Characters, see below

[6] The tendency to justify the discussion on recently emerged media, of course, traces back much farther than this, including Münsterberg's (1916) writings on the photoplay.

culture, she finds value in learning about the artifacts and weapons, and she observes that initial contact with history through these games can serve as a "hook," prompting players to seek out more conventional and scholarly accepted sources. While I strongly empathize with the impulse to counter dismissals of recently emerged media by identifying their potential contributions to education, I enter this discussion with less interest in the politics of usefulness than a greater investment in the games' immersive rhetoric.

Debra Ramsay's "Brutal Games: *Call of Duty* and the cultural narrative of World War II" (2015) emerges partly from the redemptory wish of discovering the ways FPS exposes aspects of warfare obscured in other media. Her essay is, however, a far cry from a knee-jerk reaction to public anxieties. Instead, it features an impressively creative approach to the age-old question of medium specificity. "What happens," she asks, "when the three elements that define the cultural narrative of World War II – the citizen soldier, the "good war," and the war as a visual construct – are translated into a series of contested environments explored primarily through the use and deployment of military hardware?" (96). Particularly the idea of the citizen soldier and the "good war" noticeably connect the games in my dissertation to the larger popular discourse on WWII, including film representations, and reading Ramsay's work has allowed me to focus on these elements.

Adam Chapman's *Digital Games as History* (2016) follows Ramsay's desire to find a productive use for the way digital games provide unique representations of history that differ from those in other media like the written word. Using an openly stated formalist approach, Chapman analyzes the games' content as it relates to the formal structures of creation and reception. While his knowledge and use of theory is truly impressive, it is mostly his attention to formal structures that resonates with my own work. I use formal analyses in every chapter.

Indeed, my interest in cultural capital and the body is intimately linked to both FPS' creation—the intentions in designing the game—and its reception—how the style and subject matter of these games contributed to a discourse on immersion and cultural capital.

Recently, a series of books that partly address video games' approach to the representation of history have emerged, including Ramsay's *American Media and the Memory of World War II* (2015) which originated from her 2015 article, and Tanine Allison's *Destructive Sublime. World War II in American Film and Media* (2018). Allison focusses on the aesthetics, rather than the narrative of the World War II combat genre across several media, including film and digital gaming. Not unlike Gish, she calls for a reevaluation of the genre, arguing that its "messages about war are far more ambiguous and contradictory than previously imagined" (4). Similar to Chapman, Allison's close attention to the games' visuals and their stylistic interconnection with Hollywood war film has helped me develop my own categories of analysis by tracing the construction of a virtually embodied game experience back to war films like *Saving Private Ryan*.

However, not all recent works on the FPS concern themselves with the representation of history. In his 2016 book *Playing War*, new media scholar Matthew Thomas Payne analyzes what he terms 'ludic war,' "the pleasurable experience of playing military-themed video games alone or with others" (11). His particular interest lies in the ways this experience feeds into a culture of gaming that establishes the subject position of the "ludic soldier" (10). According to him, it does so through design choices of the game text itself, its social contexts like gameplay communities, and paratexts like advertising campaigns. In spite of using terminology like 'pleasure' and 'identification' that originates in psychoanalysis, he is equally indebted to the fields of game studies and war studies (in particular Jesper Juul's (2005) idea of "half-real" and

Robin Luckham's (1984) "armament culture" respectively). Payne situates the pleasure produced by ludic war within the systems of the military-entertainment complex, late capitalism and their historical environment of post-9/11 America. Invested in "how cultural mythology is expressed as gameplay during an era of political unease," (30) he maps the affect produced by the terror attack onto the games' production and reception.

My own objects of study, while also military shooters, significantly differ from those of Payne. The *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* games in my analyses fictionalize historical events of WWII within the cultural context of the late 1990s' and early 2000s' discourse of the 'Greatest Generation.' Payne also devotes a chapter to the *Call of Duty* franchise, yet, he focusses on its *Modern Warfare* trilogy published between 2007 and 2011 and set in the near future. These games' fetishism of weaponry is thus not connected to the representation of historical arms but establishes an ideology of U.S. dominance via high-tech equipment and futuristic gun attachments. His chapters on the Tom Clancy-brand shooters and Obama-era drone warfare similarly show little overlap with my own focus on U.S.-centric WWII nostalgia. In fact, Payne establishes his project's cultural context as one in which "[a]udiences for contemporary war films have been diminishing steadily. . . Even the perennially popular World War II genre has not fared as well over this same period . . ." (36)

It is, however, in his methodology and theoretical framework and his investment in a-synchronous affect (nostalgia for the past or hope for the future respectively) that his book exhibits deep relevance for my own body of research. By way of Henry Jenkins' (2006) concept of media convergence, in which consumers of media construct a personal mythology within themselves and through social interaction, Payne frames ludic war as a process that expands well beyond the medium itself. His inclusion of social practices and his framing of games as

processes (Galloway 2006) avoids falling into the trap of neo-formalist analyses which misapply

to video games a tendency of film criticism to analyze films outside of their social context. As a

result, Payne is able to track how the games in question interact with the gamers' political and

historical setting and analyze the marketing materials that establish a first contact between

commodity and consumer.

The author's analyses do not hinge on WWII nostalgia, however, similarly to my own

methodology, and by pointing toward the future rather than the past, he connects 'ludic war' and

the games' mythologies to affective "pre-mediation." Departing from the trauma inflicted on the

U.S. on 9/11, he claims that the games' reimaginations of the 2001 attacks attempt "to give

players hope that these reimagined 9/11s can have different outcomes than their horrific ur-text"

(29). Like my own interest in these electronic texts' ideologies and their calls to proper civilian

conduct in the face of sacrifice, Payne analyzes how the franchise makes "the stomach believe"

(74), or in my words, uses the mode of "visceral realism" by sacrificing player-characters and

shifting subject positions throughout the trilogy.

Payne cites games going back as far as *Missile Command* (1980), but still his project is

not a historical one. Rather than exploring a discreet historical period, he draws parallels between

his analyses and the Obama administration. In an (auto-)ethnographic chapter, he even shares his

field notes from participating in networked game parties, as well as interviewing other players,

cataloguing different play styles and means of acting within this social group.


Immersion

Janet Murray's article still functions as a definitive text that investigates how users

interact with virtual spaces. It is widely cited by other seminal writings on new media, which

merits a longer discussion of her thesis.[7] Murray's concept of immersion is explicitly based on

and therefore limited by the word's literal meaning—submerging something in a liquid—which

results in an "ontological binary" (Welsh, 26) that produces a false dichotomy between physical

and virtual reality. According to her, immersion constitutes:

> [t]he experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place . . . the
> sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water
> is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus . . .
> [I]n a participatory medium, immersion implies learning to swim, to do the things
> that the new environment makes possible. (Murray, 98-99)

Murray's definition emerges from analyses of reading literature and casts a wide

net that extends beyond the study of video games to include a consideration of

participatory storytelling. Her conceptual framework strongly hinges on the body

experiencing sensory overload, and thus being transported to a different place entirely.

Despite the critiques, this argument has undeniable merit, which has without a doubt

contributed to the work's status as a classic.

Applying Murray's ideas to video games, however, requires attention to medium-

specificity. The scholar needs to make sure not to misapply inapplicable aspects of literature to

games. This issue led Welsh to entirely dismiss the concept of immersion in favor of creating

new terminology. Emphasizing the constant overlap between both, not-so distinct, "states" of the

physical and the virtual, Welsh opts for the term "mixed realism." I strongly agree that "mixed

realism" constitutes a welcome corrective to naïve assumptions that downplay the participant's

agency in dealing with virtual worlds. I am, however, concerned that the term, with its use of the

past participle, is less useful in describing the ideological labor performed by the medium to pull

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[7] in Wolf and Perron 2003: Wolf and Perron, "Introduction"; Holland, Jenkins and Squire, "Theory by Design";
Filiciak, "Hyperidentities"; Grodal, "Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles"; Consalvo, "Hot Dates and Fairy-Tale
Romances"; Perron, "From Gamers to Players and Gameplayers"; Juul 2005; Manovich 2001.

(i.e. immerse) the participant into the other state it offers. Above all, my problem with the term hinges on the fact that the concept of "mixed realism" describes a state one encounters, rather than its inception and dynamics.

Welsh is right when he critiques "the still-prominent description of media-generated environments as 'immersive', a metaphor that castes these virtualities as 'a completely other reality'," as "falsely dividing art from life and the virtual from the real . . ." (19). However, given my interest in ideology, Murray's term "immersion" remains highly useful to my analyses. My definition differs from hers slightly by regarding "immersion" not as a total and uncontrolled loss of awareness of the physical world, but as a player-driven mediation between forces that exist on either side of the screen. My sense of immersion indicates a creation of a third state between the world of the player and that of the game. Yet, maintaining Murray's terminology will allow me to highlight the body and the visceral in a way that "mixed realism" could not. Not breaking with established terminology carries the risk of uncritically adopting assumptions from both the term's use in academic discourse and, even more problematically, the promises of the gaming industry. It is thus important to approach "immersion" from a point of view that attaches no value judgment to it. I also do not want to imply a binary of either a total state of immersion or one of no contact with the medium at all. Considering it as an always-partial framework in which the player actively negotiates the pull of the virtual and the physical, allows me to build on existing discourse without uncritically adopting its problems.

My understanding of immersion does not postulate a total state of being. Rather, I find that several factors are always at play during the immersed gaming experience in different intensities. First, Kingsepp's idea of time travel constitutes a major factor for immersion in WWII FPSs. The player's encounter of artifacts perceived to uniquely represent the historical

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setting of the game (most notably weapons, but also photography) or antiquated language function as catalysts for immersion. Jamie Baron (2014) found that the inclusion of historical materials in other media triggers what she names the "archive effect." Using popular historiographies from sources like *The History Channel* as evidence, Baron identifies a rhetorical strategy of appropriating preexisting media from various sources to produce trusted narratives of historical events. In the temporal disparity between production and (repurposed) exhibition, these media serve as 'evidence', as they suggest meticulous research and historical 'truths' to the viewer. This "archivalness," as she refers to it, is brought about by explicit temporal disparity and claims of rarity.[8] This, in turn, suggests the experience of an evidentiary revelation. In my use of immersion, it is exactly this trust that facilitates the suspension of disbelief in the player and allows them to become immersed in the time period represented in the game.

The intention to immerse the player directly into a past event is less common in WWII FPS than immersion by proxy of cinematic representations of that same period. I agree with Kingsepp when she says that these games represent popular war films, rather than WWII 'proper'. For example, she claims that the aesthetics of *Saving Private Ryan* have become such a pervasive trope in the representation of WWII that alluding to them leads to an experience closely resembling the experience produced by a direct allusion to the historical battle itself: "I would propose that in [the games], it is primarily a simulation of Spielberg's film that we are experiencing, not one of occupied Europe – although in popular memory this may account to just about the same" (68). I understand meeting the expectations of the player by referring to the

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[8] Such as the claims that Saving Private Ryan offers a uniquely authentic representation of WWII no prior films have achieved, which were widespread among critics and were made by the director himself.

aesthetics of films—which have come to signify authenticity—to constitute another possible

source of immersion and to occasionally overlap with the archive effect.

Meeting expectations, however, does not only occur with references to material culture

and its accepted representations. References to familiar narratives about WWII, including

differing ideologies, similarly contributes to a sense of historical authenticity, and immerses the

player in the game's diegesis by suggesting trustworthiness. A celebration of the "Greatest

Generation" is as much part of this mechanism, as a clear hierarchy between different allied

forces (the Americans outshining their fellow allies, in particular the Russians, in terms of morals

and military prowess), and a clear good-vs-evil narrative of the war effort. While I do not by any

means seek to relativize the crimes of Nazi Germany, my suggestion here is that the games'

tendency to present an undifferentiated view of the Wehrmacht feeds into accepted narratives of

WWII that are likely to confirm the player's existing ideas about that war.

Psychological identification with the player-character constitutes another immersive

factor. As I will show in my analyses, providing a back story that explains the player-character's

motivations, conflicts, and social background make them a better gateway into the game's

diegesis for the player. Digital Humanities librarian Laurie Taylor claims that FPSs, in their

adaptation of the player-character's vision, are not well-suited to letting the player experience a

virtual kind of "embodiment," a concept that strongly hinges on character identification. In her

attempt to wed Lacanian psychoanalysis and a player-focused reading of game space, she claims

that not controlling an on-screen player-character (the paradigm of a Third-Person Shooter), but

playing "as me" in the FPS hinders spatial immersion:

> Taking in my own actions does not allow me to pass through the screen, but only to act
> on the screen because the screen acts as a divider until I can find a way into the game
> space—a way which an active image provides for and which an icon in a control panel
> does not. Essentially, from a position alone the player cannot enter into the game space as

part of that game space because of the lack of context which embodiment, in third-person point-of-view games, provides. (n.p.)

This inability to gaze at the player-character, according to Taylor, limits character-identification.

All of the games examined in my chapters use several strategies to counter this immersion problem. However, while hindering psychological immersion to a certain extent, playing "as me," that is experiencing the game diegesis through the world of the player-character, leads to a great amount of perceptual, especially visual identification. Berys Gaut, a scholar of philosophy whose work includes writings on aesthetics and emotions, points out that "the point-of-view shot is (…) the locus of perceptual identification (the viewer imagining seeing what the character fictionally sees), and it does not follow that the viewer identifies with the character in all other respects" (265). I share Gaut's view that perceptual and psychological identification are different mechanisms, and I argue that both of these can be present in different intensities during an immersed gameplay experience.

As I suggest, the mechanisms of immersion are to a large extent linked to the body. So is the different post-*Saving Private Ryan* mode of realism featured in *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty*. I call this mode "visceral realism." I develop this term based on the treatment of viscerality in feminist film scholar Linda Williams' seminal essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" (1991). Williams explores the genres of melodrama, horror and pornography and examines the way their portrayals of bodily excess physically engage the viewer. She argues that the spectacle of the body in these genres, in particular via displays of fear, sexual pleasure and sadness, engage the viewer's bodies and thus lack the cultural capital of less engaging films: "[W]hat may especially mark these body genres as low [in terms of their cultural status] is the perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen" (4).

I also link physical engagement to cultural capital in this dissertation, and argue that the connection becomes less defined when, after the release of *Saving Private Ryan*, the immersive genre of the FPS changes its style and subject matter. In fact, the newly established connection between viscerality and realism resulted in a redemption of the body, allowing immersive genres like the FPS to represent 'highbrow' scenarios like emotionally charged historical events.

## Chapter Structure

My dissertation will offer a narrative of radical changes in the FPS genre over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s, which has resulted in its general perception as an immersive vehicle for patriotic WWII historiographies. These changes, as I argue, indicate a more general shift in the perception of the body's place in trustworthy accounts of the past across several media.

I will first establish the FPS's low cultural capital in the early 1990s by analyzing its settings and narratives, both decidedly genre-driven and marked by science fiction and horror tropes. I also examine how, at the same time, their representations of space and physical violence pursued as much realism as technological constraints allowed.

In chapter I, I will use aesthetic, ludological, and narrative analyses in the representative example of *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) to establish a status quo for the violent FPS, from which later games will be shown to depart.

In chapter II, I explore my concept "visceral realism" in a close reading of *Saving Private Ryan*, and its opening battle sequence in particular. Tracing that film's horror aesthetics and comparing audience reactions to Linda Williams' descriptions of bodily engagement in horror film (1991), I argue that Spielberg's film contributed to the visual and narrative inventory of the Hollywood war film and its tropes of historical realism with an intentionally physically

overwhelming viewer experience. I argue that Spielberg redeems this experience by attaching it both to his own cultural capital and that of the American war movie genre. The film's public reception and accolades reframed an engagement with the viewer's body by means of immersion as a desirable mode of reenacting the myths of the "Greatest Generation's" war efforts. Reports spoke of patrons leaving the theater and WWII veterans experiencing PTSD during screenings. As a result, the film's highly immersive portrayals of battle also established its embodied style as a not only acceptable, but desirable mode of realism in public discourse that respectfully represents emotionally charged violent history.

Chapter III will trace the aesthetic and thematic shifts in WWII FPSs after the release of *Saving Private Ryan* by comparing *Wolfenstein 3D* to *Medal of Honor* (1999). Spielberg had some involvement in the latter game, which was heavily promoted. *Medal of Honor*'s aesthetics and narrative share little with *Saving Private Ryan.* Rather, it was based on the Nintendo 64 game *GoldenEye007* (1997), which in turn was based on the 1995 James Bond thriller *GoldenEye*. *Medal of Honor* retained much of the fictionalized genre and arcade-based style and narrative of its predecessors and remains heavily indebted to genre-driven narratives of the spy thriller and the style of the *GoldenEye007*. The countless reviews that still hail the game as an interactive version of *Saving Private Ryan* reveal how this link with a "star" *auteur* influenced the game's reception. As I compare the discourse surrounding *Medal of Honor* and *Saving Private Ryan*, I reveal significant changes in FPSs' subject matter and claims of historical realism: as a result of its association with Spielberg's movie, *Medal of Honor*'s immersive nature is understood to confirm, rather than undermine its claims to this mode. Together with *Call of Duty* (2003), *Medal of Honor* established WWII as a primary setting for FPSs and created a feedback loop in which immersion emerged as a trustworthy mode of engaging with WWII

narratives. In turn, FPSs began enjoying a higher cultural capital by evolving as the primary digital representation of WWII.

Focusing on an analysis of the 2003 FPS *Call of Duty*, Chapter IV will then show how in the years following *Medal of Honor*, the WWII FPS consistently moved away from overt genre-mixing and playful treatment of history to allegedly neutral portrayals of historical events. In these later years, the FPS emulated quasi-educational history television programming and Hollywood representations of WWII, such as *The Longest Day* (1962), rather than spy thrillers and horror. As the first major post-9/11 representation of American history in video gaming, *Call of Duty* responded to anxieties over convoluted political alliances in the wake of U.S. military engagements in the Middle-East by structuring the WWII narrative around the allies' pan-national effort. At the same time, it infused this narrative with Hollywood tropes of American heroism that established a clear hierarchy among the U.S. Army, the United Kingdom and the Russian military, contributing to immersion by confirming the public discourse.

Finally, the conclusion considers how other national contexts would redefine the meaning of these representations of history. Using the example of Germany, I show how a different attitude to media censorship changes the political content of *Wolfenstein 3D*.

**CHAPTER I**

*Wolfenstein 3D* **(1992)**

In order to historicize the growing acceptance of bodily engagement as a mode of representing history in the 1990s, I will analyze the 1992 FPS *Wolfenstein 3D*. Its overtly fictional content, free play with tropes taken from Hollywood history film and genealogical connection to competitive arcade play will serve as a baseline to establish the genre's move towards attempted representations of historical authenticity after the release of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Both media studies and other publications have predominantly highlighted this early example of a First Person Shooter for its contributions to the deeply connected areas of game technology and aesthetics[9] (Poole 2004, 124; Klevjer 2005; Arsenault et al. 2013). Doing so, they have focused on its creation of a perceptually (in particular visually) realistic scenario. However, as the same company's 1993 FPS *Doom* dwarfed *Wolfenstein*'s[10] contributions to the genre due to its introduction of multiplayer gaming, a vastly improved graphics engine, and a greater number of copies sold,[11] major academic work in game studies that focuses on *Wolfenstein* in its own right, rather than framing it as a stepping stone toward *Doom*, is scarce. German-language writing that addresses the game specifically tends to use it prescriptively as a

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[9] Only in the rarest of instances is it cited as an early example of a *narrative* convention, i.e. 'player vs. Nazis' (Fisher, 2013).

[10] In this paper, I use both the names *Wolfenstein* and *Wolfenstein 3D* to refer to id Software's 1992 release, rather than to *Wolfenstein* (2009).

[11] While official numbers are unavailable, this is confirmed in Kushner 2003, 163.

negative example to illustrate effects of media violence (Ladas 2002; Möller 2006; Lehmann et al. 2009) or to highlight its popularity among Neo-Nazis (Wieser 1998). While the game's graphics indeed lack the verisimilitude of id Software's later releases, a closer look at both *Wolfenstein*'s visuals and its mechanics does reveal the genre's investment in establishing a sense of presence in the game space, a concept that hinges on notions such as perceptual realism (Lombard and Ditton 1997) fostered by the illusion of real space and movement. The focus of North American academic writing, framing *Wolfenstein 3D* as a milestone toward *Doom*, which downplays the game's mediality to establish a sense of presence even more successfully, is thus comprehensible, yet remains lacking. In this chapter, I will acknowledge the labor of the textual and formalist elements that serve *Wolfenstein*'s immersive pull, creating and meeting expectations via genre,[12] as well as fostering engagement via the competitive traditions of arcade gaming (Kurtz 2002; McMahan 2003).[13]

*Wolfenstein 3D* allows the players to physically feel presence by creating a sense of perceptual realism through the simulation of three-dimensional space (Arsenault et al. 2009), which frames the avatar's perspective as an extension of that of the player, the evocation of quasi-historical culture, and the genre of the Hollywood war film. This sense is balanced with formalist elements that emphasize the textuality of the game, such as the heads-up display (hereafter HUD), an on-screen device that provides the player with important information about the avatar's state and inventory, and familiar generic elements of the arcade game (Klevjer, 2). Those elements increase playability via familiarity and allow a higher degree of engagement by

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[12] As I will show, however, genre can also contribute to the sense of presence in specific instances.

[13] McMahan derives her definition of immersion from Murray 1997, although she distinguishes between immersion and presence.

stressing the game's competitive qualities. Tropes of the sci-fi horror (Garin and Pérez 2009) film, another textual element, allow the game to engage the player psychologically by mobilizing the genre's narrative inventory, and thus providing a sense of a rich back story with only minimal written narration.

I also argue that within the German context, the game's generic elements allude to photographic images of Nazi violence and war crimes even more clearly than for a North American audience. German studies and related fields have addressed realistic images of Nazi crimes by critiquing their effects on the spectator (Adorno 1966; Schulz 2004), discussing their readability by German audiences in the wake of WWII (Brink 2003), analyzing their uses in fiction films (Didi-Huberman 2011), and researching them as a culturally structured and symbolically charged inventory of images that Knoch calls 'visiographies'[14] (2001).

These investigations into realistic images and their emotional responses will allow me to approach the writing on *Wolfenstein 3D* and its newly technologically established ways of immersing the player more vigorously via realistic spaces from a new angle: similar to current German historical films, the allusion to Nazi crime performs the labor of purging the guilt those images carry by othering both Nazism and the Jewish genocide from the German player. At the same time, this process also detaches the Holocaust from its original historical context, rendering it less readable. The balance of creating presence by evoking realism and immersing the player by decreasing the labor of playing and making sense of the game through the introduction of formalist elements, which also 'guiltlessly' allude to Auschwitz in the context of Germany, are what facilitates the "active creation of belief" (Murray, 110) in *Wolfenstein 3D*.

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[14] "Visiographien". If not noted otherwise, all translations of German materials are mine.

**Analysis**

      In my analysis, I will first provide a description of the game's opening sequence, and then analyze it in its employment of movie opening tropes and the genre of the Hollywood war film in order to find out how the game creates presence through a sense of realism. Following this, I will take a closer look at the opening theme and explore the different hermeneutic labors it can perform either as an "authentic" quotation from Nazi culture, or as a generic marker.

      Evaluating the gameplay itself, the element of the HUD, and perspective, I then connect description and analysis more directly: I will first inquire into the HUD's rupturing role within the immersive gamespace, its connection to arcade gaming and engagement, and identify which other elements of the game support this connection. I will show how the avatar's face located on the HUD provides an identificatory figure for the player that can potentially alleviate some hindrances for presence due to the perspective of the constant POV shot. Genre and referentiality are then given a closer look to present how allusions to the body genre of horror and to thematically similar films work within the game.

      Finally, I will take the specific German context into consideration, pointing out how the graphic killing of Hitler and references to starved prisoners in the game space can evoke images of Nazi Germany's war crimes that have been highly controlled and politically and emotionally charged up to the present day. I argue that as the game links those images directly with the assault on the highly othered Nazis acted out by the player, they yield the accusational function they have acquired throughout postwar German discourse.

**Description of the Opening Sequence**

      After the opening screen that presents the player with the available memory, sound devices, and optional interfaces (i.e. mouse, joystick), and which is closed by pressing a key, a

pale blue background with a white mock-disclaimer appears, stating that "This program has been

voluntarily rated PC-13 (Profound Carnage) by id Software" (Figure 7). Simultaneously, the

Horst-Wessel-Lied is played in a military-march version,[15] and continues to do so until either the

"Options" screen, or the game demo appears (see below): a tuba walking bassline[16] of alternating

quarter notes serves as the basis for two trumpets, one playing the song's melody, and the other

doubling it to fill in the harmonies, mostly in thirds and sixths. A snare drum provides the

straight marching rhythm of eighth notes and groups of two and four sixteenth notes at

approximately 97 beats per minute, which approximates the tempo "moderato."[17]



*Figure 7: Loading Screen*



*Figure 8: Title Screen*

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[15] This requires a sound card. Using PC speakers for sound effects, etc., did not allow for a rendition of the Horst-Wessel-Lied. To maintain a level of coherence in my analysis, I will, if not mentioned otherwise, use the full original 1992 PC version with the "Nocturnal Missions" pack, rather than refer to any of its many official and unofficial ports, and assume that the player has the best possible setup (such as a sound card) anticipated by the game. This will allow me to address the immersive features unavailable by alternative configurations (e.g. PC speakers) or versions (e.g. shareware version).

[16] All mentioned band instruments are synthetic renderings, not recordings.

[17] While there is, of course, no 'original recording' of the Horst-Wessel-Lied, in 1939, the Reich Music Chamber instructed musicians to play it faster than 80bpm (Wulf 1963, 128) and the 1934 public rendition captured by Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935) was performed at 89bpm, so the song's tempo (of course, not the computerized instrumentation) as heard in the game is a realistic rendition of its musical practice during the Third Reich.

The blue screen fades to black, and the black screen fades to the title screen,[18] which shows a representation of a man hiding behind a wall with a gun in his hand, waiting to charge at a patrolling Nazi soldier (Figure 8). The man, wearing baggy gray sweat pants and a gray sweatshirt, appears in profile at the very left of the image. He is the element of the picture that is closest to the spectator, allowing for a detailed view of his angular facial features, grim eyebrows and anticipatory smile. The approaching Nazi soldier, who is walking towards the spectator, is too far off in the distance to allow for such detail. As his uniform —black boots, brown pants and shirt with two large breast pockets, black collar with silver stripes, black belt with silver buckle, silver helmet and black gun sling with metallic buckle—resonates with the uniform of the paramilitary Sturmabteilung (SA), he is easily identified as a Nazi. He is not holding a weapon, casting a small shadow towards the man, and looking to the right of the image, i.e. the place where the armed man is not hiding). The scene anticipates the general scenario of the game with its medium blue brick walls and medium sky-blue doors, gray floors and ceilings with two green lamps. The silver and red title, with a chrome-like metallic sheen, reads "Wolfenstein 3-D" in an old-style font with extremely pronounced serifs, with hooks and bows reminiscent of blackletter types, hereafter called 'title font'. With a line break after "Wolfenstein," the right-justified two lines bracket the scene just right of the soldier's head. On the bottom right, the stamp "an id Software inc. production" references the game's designers in all red letters and their blue and yellow "id" logo. Providing that the player does not hit a key to advance to the selection menu, an artless credit screen with a black and red background acknowledges the id Software inc.'s staff by name and position, while the following screen contains the game's high score list, which is headed "High Scores" in the title font. The list comes preloaded with most of id's staff names,

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[18] Every transition in the opening sequence consists of a swift fade to black, directly followed by a fade in.

and every one of them having reached Episode 1, Level 1 and an identical score of 10,000 points, which is easily beaten even by beginning players. If the player still does not press a key, a computer-driven gameplay sequence of a bonus level, overlaid with the word "Demo" in the title font will begin to play.


## Perceptual Realism

Employing tropes from Hollywood filmmaking (fades, opening montage with non-diagetic soundtrack, and text), as well as presenting a mock rating of PC-13, referencing the MPAA rating of PG-13, *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) hints at conventions that resonate, while highly constructed in nature, with the narrative verisimilitude and visual realism of Hollywood. The first screen's verbal anticipation of "profound carnage" is translated into visual anticipation in an image that shows the moment just before its eruption, building up tension for the upcoming violent game.[19] Similarly, the PC-13 'rating' screen evokes in its bleakness the disclaimers shown in movie theaters before trailers, and as a result is associated with narrative film and its conventions.

While it may seem counterintuitive to argue that using generic markers of the Hollywood war film evokes a sense of realism, Kingsepp (2006), a media scholar working on Nazi Germany in contemporary popular culture, argues that popular memory has not only collapsed historical events and their filmic representations like Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, but that it, due to the hyperreal edge of Spielberg's images over the black and white documentary footage that they recreate in *Saving Private Ryan*, imagines them as the 'proper' referent:

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[19] For a contemplation of visual art suspended in the moment before the outbreak of violence and its effects, see Lessing 1766. However, it is important to note that, while Lessing praises Timomachus for painting Medea during the moment before murdering her children, rather than during the act, as this leads to its emotional anticipation, he does not imagine this anticipation to be of a sadistic nature.

I would propose that in [the video games] *Frontline* (and *Allied Assault*) it is primarily a simulation of Spielberg's film [*Saving Private Ryan*] that we are experiencing, not one of occupied Europe – although in popular memory this may amount to just about the same . . . The similarity is mainly experienced through the use of visual elements: you can see the same things that appear in the film and, most importantly, in the same hyperrealistic way. I would say that this shared hyperreal quality is what makes the game scenario connote the *Saving Private Ryan* version of Omaha beach rather than the well-known documentary images that are almost exactly replicated in the film. At work is a most intriguing process where our audiovisual conception of history seems to be subject to change. (68, 71)

While *Wolfenstein 3D* is six years older than *Saving Private Ryan*, and the available war films of 1992 would have had a different aesthetics, the underlying principle of realist filmic images that attach themselves to memory exists independently of it. German studies' interest in memory and trauma in connection to Nazi Germany makes it an ideal reference point to enquire about the relationship between memory and fictionalized accounts of the past; in their 2002 study "Opa war kein Nazi" ('Grandpa was no Nazi'), Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, German researchers with respective backgrounds in cultural studies, sociology and psychology, show that both the memories of German WWII veterans and the way their children and grandchildren repeat their stories are heavily mediated by narrative film, including films like *Die Brücke* ('The Bridge', 1956), *Das Boot* (1981) and *Schindler's List* (1993). They conclude that it is feature films' lack of an educational agenda that makes them appear as historical truth:

The insight that particularly narrative films and novels, i.e. explicitly fictional products, are regarded as sources for historical truth might not be especially surprising. Yet, what is interesting about this is that especially those fictional sources are experienced and interpreted as such, that recreate reality directly and with no apparent agenda. Especially the feature film's evidentiary quality of narrating stories and processes without didactic tendencies apparently makes it more attractive and objective compared to the purposeful forms of mediation in memorials, documentaries, etc. While during the interviews, the pedagogical portrayals of history are regularly subject to inquiries about who generated the source with which intentions, whether the account was tendentious, boring or impudent, the accounts in films and novels remain largely non-valuated and, as a result, stay in their consciousness as documents of how it really was. (133, my translation)

Of course, fiction films are not any more neutral in their presentation, just because their "educational" agenda[20] is less openly addressed- in fact, this latent ideology became one of the very reasons Siegfried Kracauer redefined the "Task of the Film Critic" as that of cultural, rather than aesthetic critique in 1932: "Certainly the typical film . . . appears to strive for the absence of any identifiable tendency; but that in no way denies that it does not represent specific social interests indirectly" (634). However, it is clear to see that their denial of an agenda resonates with the people interviewed by Welzer et al.

Both Kingsepp's and Welzer et al.'s findings suggest that assuming stylistic features of the narrative film will create a sense of perceptual realism, since the genre resonates more strongly with its contemporary conceptions, and since, as opposed to much nonfiction, it does not overtly or implicitly address its agenda. Murray hints at a connection between realism and presence when she writes that "[b]ecause of our desire to experience immersion . . . we use our intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the reality[21] of the experience" (110). References to the Hollywood war film and its specatorial situation in the theater thus serve to give the opening the authority of the genre's realism, contributing to presence.

Historical Music: Realist Allusion or Genre Reference
The soundtrack for this opening sequence is provided by the Horst-Wessel-Lied, a political fight song composed 1929 by the *Sturmabteilung* member of the same name, which was appropriated as an alternative anthem of Nazi Germany during the rule of the Third Reich

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[20] On the didacticism of particularly the German television documentary on Hitler and the Third Reich, see Stutterheim 2012.

[21] Of course, I am aware that reality and realism do not connote the same concept, however, Murray's quote usefully underscores the connection between what she calls immersion, and an experience similar to physical reality, an end typically served by the conventions of realist aesthetics.

(Broderick 1995). While the players are unlikely to be familiar with the contents of the song, its evocation of fallen SA men killed by communists in the street and its call to one final battle, the use of a historical Nazi song contributes a realistic aspect to the film-like intro. Art historian Didi-Huberman (2011) explores the particular contribution of silent documentary footage, taken 1945 during the liberation of the Falkenau camp, to the 1980 war movie *The Big Red One*, identifying several acts of "readability," one of which can help us understand the relevance of the Host-Wessel-Lied. He describes how the images make the gap between reality and its filmic reproduction apparent by showing soldiers' sickened reactions to the "unbearable smell" of "gangrenous flesh," a smell neither captured, nor reproduced by the recording, however, still carrying its visible evidence.

> [T]his 'evidence' does not actually provide us with any direct access. For the ordeal itself exceeds proof, and the images' *atmosphere* (both *Atmosphäre* and *Stimmung*) exceeds visible evidence. The *Atmosphäre* relates to the fact that the corpses and bodies of the sick seen in the 1945 film emitted an unbearable smell that invaded the whole area . . . (106)

With the use of a digitally reproduced instrumental version of the Horst-Wessel-Lied, a gap between reality and its own digital reproduction is also informing the relationship between the viewer[22] and the game's introduction on the screen. One the one hand, it is an exaggeration of the gap between physical reality and the analogue silent film, whose claim to evidence still rests on the common assumption of its indexicality, reflecting nature with little or no human interference (Bazin 1960): unlike the images, the song is recreated digitally, without any unmediated connection to an original analogue sound recording. On the other hand, this instrumental version does not evoke the cultural and historical context of the song's lyrics, but merely allows access to its musical qualities. It is thusly, in the words of Didi-Huberman, "unreadable" as evidence, but

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[22] As the introduction is not interactive, and attempts to recreate cinematic tropes, it appears more appropriate to frame the situation at that particular moment as that of a viewer, rather than that of a player.

just like the soldiers' reactions to the smell indirectly recorded the scene's *Atmosphäre* without being able to reproduce it, the song in its reference to a historical Nazi song that is unclear in its specific meaning points to a real past, yet is unable to make it meaningful. Just like the formalist conventions of the Hollywood cinema evoke its realist claims, the digitally reconstructed, decontextualized song evokes the imagination of its original context.

This analysis, of course, assumes that the viewer is able to recognize the Horst-Wessel-Lied. However, even without this knowledge, the music serves an immersive purpose, but, as player comments online suggest, rather than evoking historical presence via a reproduction of historical music, they are likely to be of a directly genre-driven nature. Depending on the viewer, the song can both facilitate immersion via a decontextualized allusion to Nazi history, and allow for a far more general reading. Indeed, the snare drum-heavy marching rhythm resonates with Frank DeVol's "Main Title" of *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), Maurice Jarre's "The Longest Day March" (1962), or Lalo Schifrin's "Kelly's Heroes" from the 1970 film of the same title.[23] If genre is to be defined in what Rick Altman would identify as a semantic approach, focusing "on a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, set, and the like" (219), then the soundtrack as a generic element of the war film might as such also support the immersive quality of the introduction's affinity for—pre *Saving Private Ryan* and thus experienced as mediated—Hollywood war film.

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[23] for a recent, if a bit hasty introduction to the current research on the different functions and codes of film music, see the introduction in O'Brien 2012, 3-18.

**Formalist and Realist Foundations for Immersion and Presence in *Wolfenstein*'s Gameplay**

Movement, Game Space and HUD

Using the mouse, a joystick, or the keyboard, the player can move the avatar forward, backward, have it spin around its left or right axes, or strafe left or right (i.e. move laterally to the left or to the right). Moving across objects, such as treasures that raise the player's score, weapons and ammunition, keys, extra lives, or objects that restore a certain amount of the avatar's health (first aid kits, puddles of blood, dog food, or food made for human consumption) also serves the purpose of collecting them. The other options are using the currently chosen weapon, switching to a different weapon,[24] and interacting with the environment, i.e. opening doors and secret passages or operating the elevators, at the end of every floor, except the last of the episode, which is usually finished by killing the "boss," a hostile character linked to the narrative that is particularly hard to kill and survive.

*Wolfenstein* returns to "scientific" (McMahan, 71) or "linear perspective" (Wolf 2009, 152), marking objects as distant by rendering them smaller and having them increase in size as they approach the player's point of view. This perspective was particularly popular with arcade games in the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike earlier uses of this view, however, the game neither restricts itself to the mere outlining of objects ("wireframing") in an open space, or a monochromatic color scheme, but puts "the player into rooms, separated by doors, with walls receding realistically into the distance and populated with bots that took the form of Nazi soldiers for the player to destroy" (McMahan, 71). Using the spectrum of 256 colors (Kushner, 97) further contributed to the realistic rendering of the space and the objects shown. However, the player's enemies are drawn two-dimensionally with pixels that merely increase in size when they approach ("Pseudo-3D",

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[24] Provided a different weapon is available.

Klevjer), making them appear less and less realistic the closer they are to the player. What is more, the walls and the floor are perfectly flat and highly similar, making it harder to make sense of the maze-like floors, especially given that it is not possible to view the environment from different angles by looking up or down, crouching or jumping.

The HUD (Figure 9) is located below, and entirely disconnected from the window that contains the diegetic game space. From left to right, it indicates "Floor," i.e. the segment of the game the player is currently playing); "Score"; "Lives," indicating how many times the player can restart from the beginning of the level after his health reaches 0% before having to restart the game from the last save point or the beginning; an animated graphic representation of the avatar's face that indicates its health via bruises, blood, etc. (Figure 10) and its heightened mood in the moment the player picks up a powerful weapon; "Ammo," indicating remaining available bullets for the currently selected weapon; two slots that indicate whether one or two of the keys potentially needed to proceed within the level's space are currently held by the player, and the black outline of the weapon currently chosen.

*Figure 9: Wolfenstein Gameplay with HUD*



*Figure 10: The Player-Character and his various stages of health*

The presence of the HUD itself constitutes an issue for perceptive realism, as it not only ruptures the continuum of the player's and the avatar's vision by introducing an abstract ludic element, but also forces the screen showing the game space to be smaller and delineated *within* the

main window of the screen. Art historian Oliver Grau, who published *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (2003), one of the field's seminal works on immersive art, singles out the visible frame as the central hindrance of immersion, calling immersive visuals vastly different from: "images or image spaces that are delimited by a frame that is apparent to the observer…In their delineated form these image media stage symbolically the aspect of difference. They leave the observer outside and are thus unsuitable for communicating virtual realities in a way that overwhelms the senses" (13-4). While the notion of overwhelming the senses is not part of our definition of immersion (see Introduction), the disruptive effect of the frame (and the HUD) can productively be understood not only symbolically, but perceptively staging difference.

In order to fully understand the dynamics at work during gameplay, we also have to frame *Wolfenstein 3D*, and the HUD in particular, within the context of arcade gaming, and the expectations connected to it. The elements inherited from arcade gaming machines do not only allow for a steeper learning curve when playing for the first time, as it makes use of elements that are deeply familiar with North American gamers through this 'bloodline.' The element of competition they introduce also presents another textual element that contributes to the feeling of presence, which works against the HUD's disruptive element of the frame.

In his investigation of "ideological and interpellative processes" (Kurtz 2002, 107) in video games, Andrew Kurtz points to this genealogy:

> As in the most venerable of arcade games, *Space Invaders* (Atari 1978) and *Pac Man* (Bally/Midway 1980), the general thematic of *Wolfenstein 3D* (and almost all subsequent first-person shooters) was quite simply, kill or be killed, with the litmus test of expertise being based upon one's ability to withstand the onslaught of baddies coming in ever-increasing waves of speed and complexity. (112)

While the sheer mass of pre-1992 video games on the home console market with a similar

thematic center[25] renders Kurtz's relation via "kill or be killed" less convincing, it is the mention

of "expertise" that rightly establishes their connection. The social competitive nature of the

gaming arcade, in which the player shows off their expertise by beating out their competition is

most clear in direct "two play," as described in Linda Meadows's 1985 dissertation

"Ethnography of a Video Arcade":

> These games attract large crowds, primarily boys, who yell, clench their fists, give the
> high five, strike victory poses and otherwise behave as though they were in the arena.
> The sports games simulate the playing fields of life where physical skill is a measure of
> overall competency." (111)

The quote suggests that the elements of *Wolfenstein* that evoke the arcade game would contribute

to what McMahan terms 'engagement,' enjoying a game not primarily at a narrative, but "at a

nondiegetic level—at the level of gaining points, devising a winning (or at least a spectacular)

strategy, and showing off their prowess to other players during the game and afterward, during

replay" (69).

 *Wolfenstein 3D*'s most obvious inheritance from the arcades is located in the high score

list, as mentioned above, preloaded with very low scores that can be 'beat' with little skill,

allowing for a number-one-high score as early as the player's first game. The score itself is in

large parts disconnected from the goal of successfully traversing the game's deadly maze. While

killing enemies also contributes between 100 and 2000 points to the score, the existence of the

large amount of "treasure" objects (crosses, chalices, treasure chests and crowns), whose entire

function lies in raising it by between 100 (cross) and 5000 points (crown) lies outside of the

game's narrative. The convention of multiple lives that are prominently displayed throughout the

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[25] To mention just a few of countless examples that were (at least originally) not released as arcade systems:
*Castlevania* (1987), *Cyborg Hunter* (1988), *Batman* (1990), *Double Hawk* (1990), etc.

game, also harkens back to the remaining "credits" in arcade games that indicated how soon the player would need to feed the machine more quarters, although it had already become a common trope on home consoles and PC games by 1992.

These elements, which neither contribute to an experiential continuum of player and avatar, nor foster the illusion of engaging with a social actor in the game, open up a space for competition and a direct quantitative comparison of expertise (how many enemies were killed, how many treasures were found) between different players, directly reflecting McMahan's concept of engagement. The player's engagement, while it is the result of extra-diegetic mechanisms that highlight the game's mediality, of course, does not reduce the sense of presence, but rather leads to what Lombard and Ditton call 'presence as psychological immersion'. If we adapt Münsterberg's useful description of attention, in which "all the other sensations become less vivid, less clear, less distinct, less detailed" (84), this connection between presence and engagement via competition becomes even clearer, as the goal of beating her friends contributes another ludic element on which the player can focus. However, the HUD not only contributes this textual catalyst for presence, but, as I will illustrate now, also compensates for some immersive shortcomings of the game's constant POV shot.

## Display and Gameplay

Being hit by a bullet or cut by a knife damages both the avatar's and its adversaries' health, causing more damage with guns fired from a close distance than from further away. The weapons that the player can employ, are, in order of their damage (from lowest to highest), the knife, which does not need any bullets and is thus always available to use, the Walther P38

pistol[26], the machine gun, and the chain gun. The weapon is located in the middle of the bottom edge of the avatar's point of view, allowing the player to aim by lining it up with the enemy and firing. McMahan does not acknowledge this function, and believes that it is, in fact, the *player's* hands that are depicted: "*Wolfenstein* made another innovation, which was adopted by the genre, which was to include a representation of hands (the player's hands) clutching a gun at the bottom of the screen. The gun is not used for aiming, but it does make the player feel more like they are incorporated into the space" (71). Whenever the pistol is fired, the hands tilt up to reveal sleeves of the same color as worn by the avatar's representation on the title screen, but if we accept that the player becomes "incorporated into the space," the hands can indeed be those of the avatar and the player at the same time, as she is actively involved in the creation of her belief to be the avatar. In Martti Lahti's "As We Become Machines" (2003), where the author examines how games address the body in their creation of a gaming experience and identity, he stresses this very point:

> As a representation of the player's hand (and/or weapon) as a sort of imaginary prosthesis, it links the player's body into the fictional world, again emphasizing a continuum between the player's world and that of the game. . . [C]haracter and player are unified into a first-person movement through the virtual space. One effect of this unification is the creation of a stronger experiential homology between the fictional world of the game and the real world, where virtual space begins to seem continuous with the player's space, rather than sharply delimited by the frame of the monitor . . . (Lahti, 161)

This "experiential homology" is further stimulated by other parts of the game, in particular the death sequence. Whenever the avatar is successfully attacked, the entire screen, including the HUD indicates this by briefly flashing red, and in the moment its health drops to 0%, the imaginary camera pans around to show the enemy that delivered the killing attack, and small red pixels take

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[26] Cloud, 39.

over the game screen, until it is entirely filled out. The death of the avatar and the simultaneous loss of vision of the game world might at first appear as an aspectual unification, and thus as 'presence as transportation' (since the avatar is not in the physical space of the player), as well as presence as perceptual immersion, as the blood gradually blinding the avatar gradually blocks the player's view. However, only the avatar's view bleeds over in the moment of its death, and the HUD remains fully visible to the player, suggesting a perceptive rupture between both parties (Figure 11).
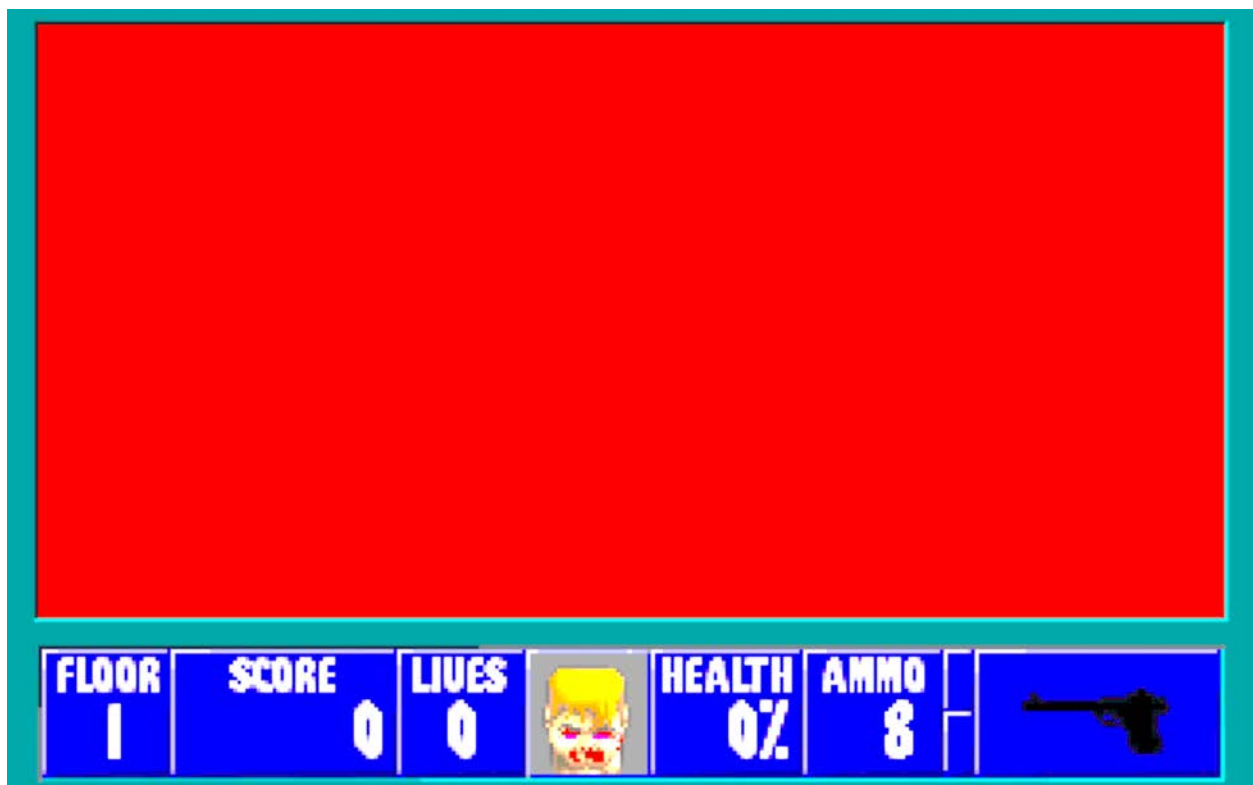


*Figure 11: Game over*

What is more, the moment of death presents an intertextual allusion that highlights the constructedness of the game experience. The cliché of the POV shot, increasingly blinded by blood, has been a staple of the James Bond franchise since 1962's *Dr. No* and alludes to the spy movie genre all the more powerfully, since the world of the game (indiscriminate violence caused by a superior protagonist in an extremely hostile space with one central enemy at the conclusion)

resonates with the series' premises. The fact that Timothy Dalton's notoriously brutal embodiments of Agent 007 were the last to be released (1987, 1989) before *Wolfenstein 3D* further emphasizes this connection. When it is channeled through an allusion in another medium, such as a video game, it would seem obvious that this contact is not fostering the unification of player and avatar. Rather, by referring to the non-interactive medium of film in the moment the player ceases to have agency within the game space, it highlights the end of this unification.

The 3D perspective in *Wolfenstein 3D* with its representation of the player's or the avatar's hand thus serves the purpose of establishing an experiential (i.e. visual) continuum through perceptive realism, while the expressive close-up of the avatar's face, which, as part of the formalist HUD, disrupts this continuum, performs the labor of overcoming the issue of not being able to 'pass through the screen' by offering an empathy-driven 'way in', a "presence as social actor with medium" (Lombard and Ditton).


## Referentiality: Genre, Images of Nazi Crimes and the German Audience

Rick Altman observes that "the horror film and the thriller—[are] designated by terms describing the spectator's reaction rather than filmic content, for it is precisely on heightening viewer sensation that generic logic depends" (153). His corpus-based findings resonate with "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," the seminal essay of film scholar Linda Williams, in which she makes the claim that the success of the genres of pornography, the "woman's film," and horror is often measured "by the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen" (4). Unlike that of Altman, Williams' work is not based on research into historical practice, and is deeply informed by feminist film theory. It hinges on psychoanalytic concepts like perversion and originary fantasies and attempts to understand these genres in their relation to sexually charged conflicts between bodies that leaves women as the objects of pain. She argues

that "[i]n horror a violence related to sexual difference is the problem, more violence related to sexual difference is also the solution" (9-10).

So, how do we approach *Wolfenstein* and its virtually embodied gameplay, which is almost completely void of virtual female bodies? And how is a discussion of embodied film genres relevant to understanding presence in a video game? I argue that the presence of generic markers for horror, e.g. copious amounts of gore, in Wolfenstein does not function as a trigger to elicit fear in the player, but rather constitutes a self-aware reference to the genre and other representations of Nazism in popular culture that use horror tropes. In her analysis of *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), German Studies scholar Sabine Hake discusses Quentin Tarantino's generic mélange and comes to the conclusion that his "appropriation of existing works, genres, and styles operates against one of the core assumptions shared by filmic realism and classical narrative, namely, that film either provides access to the real, therein serving critical functions, or that it creates a convincing illusion of reality, therein having affirmative effects" (Hake 2012, 177). Similarly, *Wolfenstein* contributes to presence by appropriating the body genre of horror; however, not having the player experience its typical sensation, but rather evoking its semantic catalogue, giving the game the sense of a more fully developed backstory than it explicitly provides.

Noël Carroll (1999) gives a useful list of semantic elements that are part of the horror genre, as they elicit the type of emotion it typically provides--fear:

> Harmfulness, of course, is the criterion for fear. Thus, the depictions and descriptions in horror films are criterially prefocused to make the prospects for harm salient in the world of the fiction. The relevant harms here take the form of threats - generally lethal threats - to the protagonists in the horror film, and the locus of these threats is standardly a monster, an entity of supernatural or sci-fi provenance whose very existence defies the bounds of contemporary scientific understanding . . . But they are also disgusting, and the emotive criterion for disgust is impurity. (227-8)

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Let us take a look at one of the game's "bosses," the final enemy the player has to defeat before

ending the episode, beginning with Hitler, the final boss of episode 3, "Die, Fuhrer, Die!". Upon

walking into the room housing the "Fuhrer," he is housed in an enormous metallic body suit

(Figure 12), resembling Batman villain Mr. Freeze (Figure 13).



*Figure 12: Mecha-Hitler (Partial Screen Shot)*
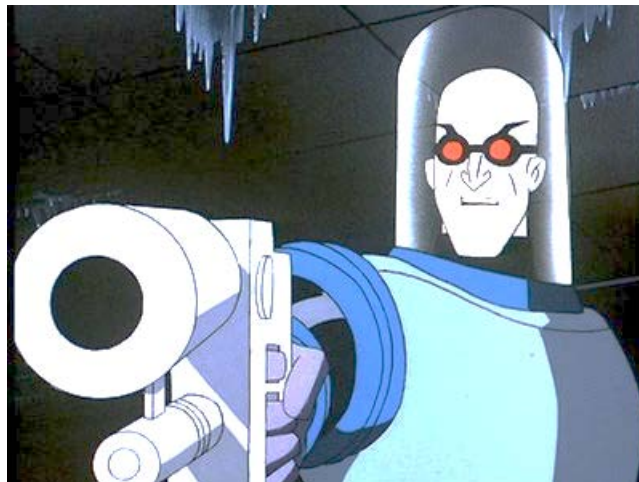


*Figure 13: Mr. Freeze in "Heart of Ice" (1992)*

*Figure 14: Hitler without Robot Suit (Partial Screen Shot)*

Mechanic engine noises and their volume allow the player to guess his proximity during the

battle. After the player successfully attacks him, Hitler strips down to his uniform (Figure 14),

and finally, after more successful attacks, collapses into a pile of guts, accompanied by

appropriately 'wet' sounds. An intertitle appears, declaring "Let's see that again!" in a military-

inspired font, and Hitler's collapse into a gory mess is replayed with a flashing "DeathCam™"

disclaimer (Figure 15).



*Figure 15: Death Cam (partial screenshot)*

In its comically exaggerated violence, this final scene strongly resembles the death of villain

Arnold Toht and his fellow Nazis in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981),[27] whose faces melt and

heads explode in medium close-up shots towards the end of the movie. But on top of this direct

connection between two texts, we can easily find the generic markers as laid out by Carroll,

namely the threat to the protagonist by a harmful monster "whose very existence defies the

bounds of contemporary scientific understanding" (227). What is more, the monster's profoundly

bloody (and replayed) "impure" death not only dehumanizes it[28] even more than the moment it

wore a robotic suit, but aims to disgust the player, contributing to its monstrosity and dovetailing

even more with the horror genre.

Reducing the fetishistic violence exclusively to a generic marker misses its potential

functions of not only granting the player the sadistic pleasure of punishing the ultimate criminal

for his atrocities, but of also alluding to the images of fascist genocide without explicitly framing

them as such. German studies and psychoanalysis provide us with the tools to tend to those

questions of disavowal and substitution. Habbo Knoch analyzes the rhetorical practices of the

Holocaust's photographic representations in postwar Germany, and the codes by which they are

regulated. He finds that:

> up to the present, the crime's images have unfolded within a restrained pluralism limited
> by the originary factors of displacement, opposing imposition and coming to terms with
> the war's aftermath. The perception of the Third Reich has always been subject to
> sensitivity to politicization, whose actual reference was not the crime itself, but its
> representation and the potential for blame attached to their respective degree of (visual)
> concretization. (922, my translation)

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[27] The collectable items of a religious nature (crosses, etc.) within the game also allude to this film and its treasures of Christianity as illegitimate objects of desire for Nazis.

[28] With Hitler's emasculating cry for his partner Eva Braun in the moment of death, questions of gender also become relevant here.

The highly mediated and limited circulation of those polysemic photographies ("comparable to reading poetic texts," 34, m.t.) and the labor invested in displacement suggest that the violent nature of Hitler's death in *Wolfenstein 3D*, and its emphasized representational nature through the idea of the "Death Cam™" would readily attach themselves to said images, or fantasies that have stood in for them due to their unavailability.
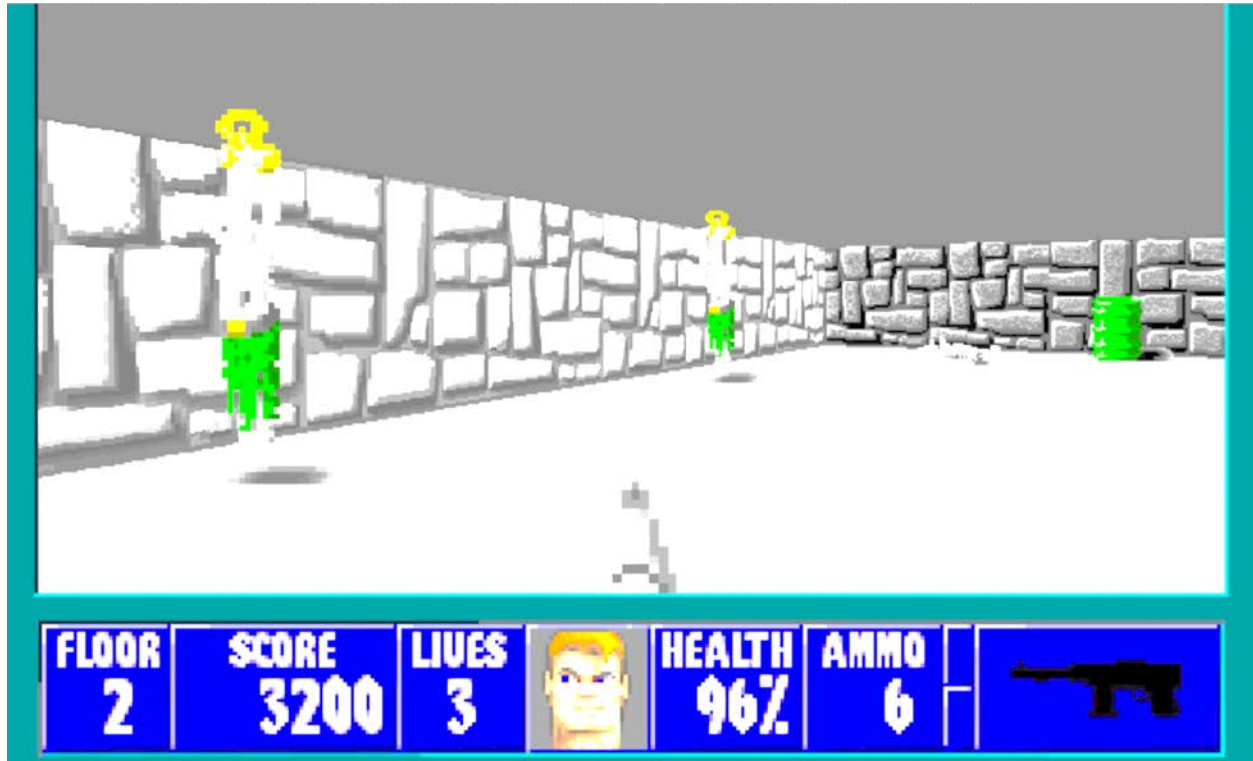


*Figure 16: Allusions to the Holocaust*

Of course, the game not only punishes Nazis, but also alludes to their crimes more directly, albeit in much less graphic ways. The very first visual of gameplay (Illustration 4) frames the protagonist as a prisoner who has just managed to shoot his guard with his own weapon (the Walther P38 gun he is holding is indeed a weapon used by the Wehrmacht), and throughout the game, the player comes across skeletons suspended from the ceiling or piles of bones on the floor (Figure 16), often in small prison cells with rations of food in them. Those

images of victims restage the images referred to by Knoch in a non-photographic way, and the game allows to instantly punish the clearly identified villains for their crimes.

Hitler is othered by several strategies within the game. He is given the clear role of the super-villain via his concluding position in the episode's narrative and his robot suit, as well as by generally touching on the horror genre's syntactic slot of the monster. Containing Hitler and the 'official' perpetrators of the Holocaust safely within their own world via historicity[29] is also a common trait in recent German historical dramas. Sabine Hake finds their functions to be similar to those I have found Hitler as a super-villain to perform. They

> approach the Third Reich as a distinct historical period, an integral part of post-fascist identity construction . . . As a performance of incomprehensible otherness, the Nazi past can thus be purged of the rhetoric of collective guilt and integrated into the heterogeneous narratives that today constitute German identity within the discourses of the post-national. (Hake 2012b, 102)

While Hake carefully situates her analysis within German media culture and ascribes an intentionality to the texts by pointing out that this culture has "since 1989 provided legitimizing narratives for the new Berlin republic" (101), such an intentionality would not be sensible to presume for the makers of *Wolfenstein*, given the game was not produced or even localized[30] for the German market. Yet, the mechanics at work are similar. The game is capable of othering the Nazi past and distancing the German player from the alluded images' baggage of guilt. Rather than disavowing the transgression committed by the avatar, as Douglas Thomas's work on racism in online games (2008) might suggest, the German players can embrace the violence as an othering act that frames her within a position, in which the images of the camps are not evoking their guilt, but the guilt of their antagonists and, by extension, their other.

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[29] For a general discussion of historicity in film and its distancing function, re: Rosenstone 1995.

[30] Re: Jayemanne 2009; Consalvo 2012.

Adorno rejected photorealistic representations of Nazi crimes due to their emotionally distancing and jading effects on the viewer (1966, see also the introduction in Knoch). Approaching their content indirectly through the highly mediated and fictionalized genre-driven Hitler-killer *Wolfenstein* might at first seem like a productive way for German audiences to engage with the past.[31] However, this perspective frames postwar Germany as the 'actual' victim of the Third Reich, and uses the representation of victims to overcome this guilt, overwriting their potential usability to commemorate and understand. In his study of post-*Schindler's List* films on the Holocaust, Matthias N. Lorenz, strongly critiques the trend of what he calls "meaningless allusions to the holocaust" (274, m.t.), and points out that, indeed, remembering the victims is not the purpose of these references. He rather claims that "the prosecution of the Jews, the events in the camps and the gas chambers have by now denigrated into a versatile code. This code . . . serves to emotionalize, not to inform or commemorate." (ibid.)

It would be problematic to celebrate *Wolfenstein 3D* as a renewed subconscious access to images of Nazi crime for German audiences. Current writings in German studies rather suggest that it functions similarly to narrative film by separating them from a useful historical context. Its potentially cathartic effect of killing the highly othered Nazi villains also anticipates the German media culture's present trend of purging audience of guilt and drawing clear lines between those that committed crimes and those that built what is now the Berlin Republic.

## Conclusion

With my analysis, I have contributed to the current writing on *Wolfenstein* by highlighting not only its new contributions to video gaming that resulted in a heightened sense of

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[31] For the sake of the argument, let us disregard the obvious point of Adorno's rejection of Germany distancing itself from its guilt.

realism. I also acknowledged the many ways its creation of presence hinges on its textuality, mediality and referentiality, also taking into account the particular situation of Germany and the local status of images of Nazi crimes.

Film studies can complement this analysis with a rich set of tools to critically evaluate perceptual realism and to challenge its allegedly neutral status. Formalist Eisenstein describes "absolute realist perception" as an ideological construction (Eisenstein 1929), while realist Bazin reads cinema as both indexical and conventional "objectivity in time" (Bazin 1960, 14), as it reproduces reality without human interference, but also "a language" (ibid., 16). An analysis of the man-made reproduction of real space in digital images according to generic conventions and technological limitations in *Wolfenstein 3D* deserves even more scrutiny than photorealistic film. However, Jean-Louis Baudry (1970) arguably offers the most aggressive vehicle for a critique of the game's potential for immersion and presence and the technology, or "apparatus," behind it, bringing movement to the center of attention. Film that seemingly empowers the subject by freeing the eye from the body, he argues, in reality exchanges the indeterminate world with images whose meanings have already been assigned to them for the viewer. Movement through and interaction with the virtual space can already constitute a pleasure in itself (Murray, 129) and is of central importance to presence in FPSs (Morris 2002, 87-8), as is agency (McMahan, 69) or at least its perception (Murray, 126-8). As a result, Baudry's idea of the spectator, duped into believing that man-made images inscribed with external meanings actually constitute an access to reality unburdened by her body, can regain some of its significance that has been so heavily critiqued in film studies (Carroll 1988; Bordwell and Carroll 1996) to address questions of realism, agency, and the ideological implications of *Wolfenstein 3D*'s game space.

First Person Shooters of the 1990s and early 2000s are based on historical and perceptual realism both by the industry and the genre's fans. Identifying textuality as a major source for presence and its engaging pleasures not only casts doubt on the direct access to history suggested by many of those games, but it proposes that this directness might not even be serving the enjoyment of these games as vigorously as is often assumed. Ideology, no doubt, stands between much of what is to be found in the games and a more useful narrativization of the past. However, my analysis also suggests that hiding such an ideology to foreground directness might not even lead to a greater sense of presence or more enjoyment. Players might, in fact, be ready to embrace their games as works of fiction.

# CHAPTER II

## Between Comforting Familiarity and Physical Discomfort: *Saving Private Ryan*'s (1998) Visceral Realism

Near the beginning of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998),[32] the film's titular character James Ryan, in a flash forward, walks across a war cemetery by Omaha Beach. As he, now an elderly man, breaks down crying in front of a grave, his family rushes to help him, while a solemn orchestral score underlines the moment's gravitas. Ryan stares off into space, the camera tracking toward his eyes before a cut to 1945's D-Day. This opening scene closely follows the conventions of narrative cinema, especially those of the melodrama or male weepie—a focus on the victim, the nostalgic evocation of an ideal past of respectability, and the use of the flashback itself (Hayward 239-243). Strategies of continuity like eyeline-matches, a solemn orchestral score and a visual inventory that includes close-ups of the American flag and the presence of fallen veterans establish a familiar viewer position to the audience and frontload the film's ideology that celebrates the Greatest Generation by allowing the viewer to experience their struggles and heroism.

So reliant on conventional narrative clichés was this scene, that it was critically panned, with reviewers calling it "superfluous to the story" (Carson), "dully ceremonial" (Denby),

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[32] Hereafter frequently abbreviated as *SPR*.

"conventional" (Doherty 69), "a bad idea badly executed," and "at once ham-handed and patronizing" (Jameson 23).[33] While the formulaic opening may have understandably frustrated critics, it is effective to examine as a tool for the film's ideology: it sets up a contrast between narrative conventions and the 'honest' directness of the following scene's documentary mode.

The flashback that follows the opening sequence clashes with that scene's narrative conventions and introduces documentary techniques into the film. A lack of establishing shots leads to no clear communication of the profilmic space, the shaky hand-held camera does not efface its own presence, blood frequently splatters on its lens. The scene exclusively uses diegetic sound and no score.

However, the battle transcends conventional documentary style by combining it with elements that viscerally engage the audience. Similar to what Linda Williams (1992) calls body genres and to the immersive video game genre of the First Person Shooter,[34] the battle scene's techniques realistically portray the events of D-Day by emulating the emotions experienced by the on-screen characters, rather than on neutrally portraying the unfolding events, as would be typical for most documentaries. This viscerality suggests an experience of witnessing, and performs the rhetorical labor of inscribing the film's ideology onto the viewer's body.

Combining the documentary's rhetoric of disengaged objectivity with the subjective immediacy of body genres and the FPS, *Saving Private Ryan* strives for a mode which I call visceral realism.[35] The body genre and the FPS have been subject to criticisms due to their

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[33] Alternatively, many critics chose to negate its existence altogether by referring to the subsequent battle scene as the film's opening (Alleva 29; Major 63).

[34] Hereafter frequently abbreviated as FPS.

[35] While "visceral realism" has been casually employed to describe South Korean action cinema (Yoo 2012), my usage within a discourse of historical representation follows a different understanding of the term.

presumed ability to viscerally engage the viewer. The mode of *visceral* realism, on the other hand, serves as an element of authenticity by foregrounding the physical challenges of the portrayed subjects whenever the film's ideological discourse requires it. In the case of *SPR*, the portrayal of physical stress via a tense viewing experience was perceived as realistic, in part, because it reiterated both the tropes of extreme hardship endured by The Greatest Generation and their nostalgic celebration. The glorification of The Greatest Generation had been particularly present in U.S. discourse around the 50th anniversary celebrations of D-Day in 1994 and remained a recurrent theme during *SPR*'s 1998 release. The film opened around the time that a popular discourse highlighted the soldiers' sacrifice and heroism, as well as their effect on today's standards of living, as central elements of D-Day remembrance. President Clinton's remarks at D-Day's 50th anniversary celebration referred to Omaha Beach as a "hallowed place," calling it "the least ordinary day of the 20th century." He asked the audience to honor the soldiers' sacrifice with their own lives: "How will we build upon the sacrifice of D-Day's heroes? Like the soldiers of Omaha Beach, we cannot stand still. We cannot stay safe by doing so. Avoiding today's problems would be our own generation's appeasements . . . They struggled in war so that we might strive in peace" (Clinton 1994).

While it was most noticeable shortly before and after the 50th anniversary celebrations, this sentiment was still prevalent at the time of *SPR*'s release in 1998. In June of that year, Michael Ollove of Baltimore's *The Sun* reported on the creation of a $12 million memorial in honor of D-Day. An interviewed veteran proudly connects the past battle to the present: "The sacrifices of D-Day . . . were warranted. Freedom . . . is not free" (n.p.). In the *Seattle Times*, an anonymous letter to the editor warned that the sacrifices of D-Day must not be forgotten, cautioning the reader to:

"[R]emember how many lives were lost over the centuries just so the rest of us can be the privileged recipients of these sacrifices!" (n.p.)

This chapter argues that, while the *Saving Private Ryan*'s narrative offers a familiar cast of characters that engages the audience by highlighting the struggles of the citizen soldier and using the stardom of Tom Hanks, the mode of visceral realism, which was popularized by *SPR* and is particularly present in the film's opening battle scene, fundamentally reconfigured popular conception of historical realism. It does so by positioning the viewer's physical reactions, and—by proxy—immersion into the world of the film, as markers of authenticity by confirming common assumptions about the nature of the G.I. experience. Both familiar narrative techniques and visceral realism nostalgically participate in the celebration of the Greatest Generation by embedding claims of authenticity in a combination of viscerality and an emulation of the visuals of war photographer Robert Capa who was physically present during the invasion of Omaha Beach and the sounds of historical recording technology.

As I will show in Chapters III and IV, this introduction of viscerality to the representation of WWII contributed to a shift in FPSs in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which began to focus on World War II settings. Ultimately, the use of visceral realism in *SPR* led to an even greater association of historical accuracy with physical engagement and immersion in both film and video game genres.

In this chapter I will first explore the film's narrative and show how its cast of characters fits into the conventional ideology of the heroic citizen-soldier. I will then define the idea of visceral realism and embed it the context of its academic discourse. By analyzing the filmmakers' intentions, the discourse surrounding the film, experiential narratives of filmgoers, and, most

importantly, my own analyses of the film's style, I use *SPR* to document the formal properties of

visceral realism, as it participates in the ideology of the Greatest Generation.


**Focalization between the suffering Hero and the Star: The Case of Corporal Upham and Captain Miller**

*Variety*'s Andrew Hindes points out that, while "newly minted heartthrob Matt Damon"

might attract female audiences, "[*Saving Private Ryan*'s] biggest opening draw will likely be

Hanks" (Hindes 6). Advertising decisions confirm this observation: on the film's promotional

tour, Spielberg was joined by Hanks, Damon and WWII historian Stephen E. Ambrose (Ibid.),

while Jeremy Davies, who plays the struggling soldier Upham, was as absent as he is on the

film's promotional poster.

I will now analyze the conventional roles of the characters Upham and Miller in the

film's narrative. I pay special attention to how these characters offer the audience a spectrum of

identification. I also show how the familiar character tropes represented by these two men

suggest an important counterpoint to the overwhelming and disorienting aesthetics of the

opening battle scene. By doing so, I anticipate my later explorations of the subject position in

WWII First Person Shooters, which are constructed on a continuum between the heroic player-

character and the player. This discussion will help me establish the categories of analysis used in

these later chapters.

In the film's narrative, translator and cartographer Corporal Upham is overwhelmed with

his duties as an active soldier. In spite of not having "held a weapon since basic training" (*SPR*),

he is recruited to join a group of six American soldiers under the command of Captain John

Miller (Tom Hanks) in Normandy. Their mission is to find and send home paratrooper Private

James Ryan (Matt Damon), whose three brothers were killed in action. This task is decidedly

unpopular with the troops, as they feel like it does not serve the overall war effort and unnecessarily puts them at risk. In this tense atmosphere, Upham is shown to struggle with unsuccessful attempts to befriend some of the soldiers, who reject him for his physical and class differences. His comrades consist of character types usual for the inventory of the WWII combat film: the charismatic leader Captain John Miller, rendered doubly attractive to the audience by the use of Tom Hanks' star persona; the cause-driven Sergeant Mike Hovarth; the rebellious Private Richard Reiben; Private "Fish" Mellish, whose Jewish heritage drives his strong hatred of the Nazis; Italian-American Private Adrian Carpazo, who loses his life while heroically trying to safe a French child; the devoted Christian Private Jackson from the American South, and Medic Irwin Wade, who will be fatally wounded when supporting the group during an attack.

This inventory of character types functions as a microcosm of the U.S.'s position as the World's melting pot, which is a widespread convention within the WWII combat genre. The group's ethnic diversity, also, is conventional for the genre. An assembly of different characters who often experience dysfunctional group dynamics is by no means exclusive to the WWII Combat Film, but the trope's sustained use within the genre reveals *Saving Private Ryan*'s reliance on its generic traditions.[36]

Melting Pot groups have been a popular trope in the American WWII combat film as early as *Bataan* (1943). *Bataan*'s narrative, set in the Pacific theater, features a multiethnic and multicultural[37] group of soldiers that differ widely.[38] The far more aggressively patriotic John

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[36]. Sidney Lumet's *12 Angry Men* (1957), George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977), and the majority of Quentin Tarantino's work are only a few of many possible examples in other genres.

[37] The film stars an African-American, a Mexican-American, and an American from the U.S. South, as well as many white Americans from north of the Mason-Dixon line.

[38] Among other character types, the group features an inexperienced and naïve trumpet player and a murderer.

Wayne-vehicle *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), also situated in the Pacific theater, similarly features a diverse inventory of character-types. These types range from the hardboiled Sergeant (Wayne) to a pretentious Colonel's son. The diversity of these characters, from which plot conflicts beyond the mission arise, can be traced throughout the genre's responses to its respective different cultural environments throughout history. As an example, Sam Fuller's Korean-War films like *The Steel Helmet* (1951) served as a metaphor for the state of post-integration U.S. troops, featuring different ethnic character-types to illustrate the need to overcome ethnically motivated issues for the common cause.

The pre-Vietnam WWII combat films of the early 1960s, many of which still enjoy considerable popularity on channels dedicated to American classics (Turner Classic Movies, etc.)[39] have sustained the idea of the motley crew of soldiers on a common mission with reruns of films like *Battle of the Bulge* (1965).[40]

Spielberg has attempted to frame these tropes as representational of historical squads, grounded on screenwriter Robert Rodat's and his own research, rather than common genre conventions.[41] However, reviews have commonly recognized *SPR*'s characters' predictability and their contribution to scenes that serve as grounding counterpoints to the film's disorienting battle sequences. Richard Goldstein of *The Village Voice* is right when he claims that the film is "tapping into the verities of combat films—right down to the fighting unit, with its harmonious order of ethnic types under a beloved WASP commander" (Goldstein 44). In *Commonweal*,

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[39] The reasons for their remaining popularity, likely in part caused by a yearning for the "just war", as most prominently opposed to the Vietnam war, could be argued to be fueled by similar circumstances as the nostalgia surrounding the release of *SPR* (and *Medal of Honor*).

[40] And the present day, for that matter.

[41] "[A]fter doing some research, I accepted the diversity of American representatives inside that squad" ("Saving Private Ryan" 68).

Richard Alleva notices that, other than Miller, most characters "seem based on the types usually found sharing patrols in Hollywood war pictures. There is the Tough Sergeant, the Wise Guy Malcontent (last done by Denzel Washington in Glory), the Four-Eyed Intellectual, the Hillbilly Sharpshooter now bagging Germans instead of possums" (Alleva). These and other reviews[42] highlight that the characters' conventionality was well understood. Doherty's reference to a "tension between familiarity and variation" (69), is also useful here, by framing this inventory of characters as a familiar, and thus unchallenging, access to the film's narrative. As I will show, such a familiarity presents a counterpoint to the disruptive battle scenes throughout SPR.

After a group of German troops kill Wade while the squad attempts to destroy a German machine gun position, Upham convinces Miller to let the last surviving German, nicknamed "Steamboat Willie," go free and surrender to an Allied patrol. Upham had moral issues with executing a POW, but the group reacts in a hostile way to this decision. They are unwilling to let the enemy go, and resent Upham for his unwillingness to execute the German. When the squad finally locates Private James Ryan to extract him, he heroically refuses to give up his position and the men agree to support his unit in defending a bridge. During this successful defense, Upham witnesses Steamboat Willie, who had not kept his promise to surrender and instead joined another German unit, shoot Miller to death. Miller's last words are "James [Ryan], earn this." Emotionally overwhelmed by Miller's death, Upham executes the unarmed German, who had surrendered by raising his hands in the air and addressing him by name. Together with Ryan and another comrade, Upham is one of only three survivors of the battle. Upham's toil to

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[42] "This is familiar ground in a war movie: the small group given a difficult mission with lots of time for characterization between episodic actions. But familiarity breeds cliché . . ." (Cohen 323); "In good WWII fashion, ethnic and religious colors shade in the character details" (Doherty 70); "Between . . . two bravura action sequences, *Saving Private Ryan* is merely a banal war movie with a forced premise and clichéd characters" (Tauben 113).

function as a soldier underline the Greatest Generation's heroic struggles, while the stardom of Tom Hanks connects his celebrity to the celebration of the American G.I.

## Upham: The Struggling Soldier

Upham's struggles highlight the physical and mental challenges faced by American soldiers during WWII. Being fluent in both French and German, he is a man of language, not of the body; both his issues as a soldier and his bookishness render him an outsider within his own squad. Ralph R Donald, a communication scholar interested in combat film and masculinity, points out that wordiness runs counter to one of the central characteristics of the war film's warrior. "Key . . .", he writes, "is that he should be a man of few words but mighty deeds, capable of stoically enduring privations and pain, and be able to pass the stress test that war imposes on these qualities" (176). As a result, Upham's comrades angrily resist his attempts at making friends through verbal communication and physical contact that displays a lack of military professionalism. As he playfully pokes Private Mellish to start a conversation, he is aggressively told off: "You want your head blown off, you fancy little fuck? Don't you ever touch me with those little rat claws again. Get the fuck back in formation." While this conflict also hints at issues of class and sexuality ("fancy"), the major issue consists of not acting professionally, and not being physically suited ("little rat claws") to be socially accepted by the group. The hateful, vaguely anti-Semitic, language used by Mellish both serves as a marker of class-difference (vs. the restrained white-collar discourse employed by Upham), and underlines his urgency to differentiate himself from the translator.

As these dynamics show, Upham lets the audience experience the story from the point of view of a man who struggles to perform his soldierly duties, overwhelmed by the events and troubled by being unable to fit in with his comrades. However, this focalization does by no

means constitute a single and rigid viewer position. Rather, the heroic figure of Captain Miller, played by celebrated actor Tom Hanks, adds the pole of identification via desire to the viewer. As a result, the film's narrative offers an identificatory continuum between these poles and allows for many different viewing experiences.

## Miller: The Star Citizen-Soldier

In the five years prior to filming *SPR*, Tom Hanks had won Academy Awards for his work in *Philadelphia* (1993) and *Forrest Gump* (1994) and played the lead character in the successful space drama *Apollo 13* (1995). His previously established stardom contributes to Miller's central position in *SPR*'s cast of characters and the viewer's potential experience of the film.

At the beginning of the battle sequence, Miller is the first troop member recognizable by face. In the absence of Upham, who only enters the narrative after minute 40, the scene's aesthetics privilege Miller by simulating his point of view (see below). Unlike Corp. Upham, who is set apart by lack of experience while still outranking most members of the squad, its leader Captain Miller is marked as superior by rank and character. This hierarchy is addressed when Pfc. Richard Reiben asks Miller whether he "don't gripe at all" about the controversial mission. Miller replies: "I'm a captain. There's a chain of command. Gripes go up, not down. . . I don't gripe to you. I don't gripe in front of you. You should know that as a Ranger."

Beyond his rank, Miller differentiates himself[43] by keeping his private life hidden from the squad for a large portion of the film, which gives him a quasi-mystical status within the

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[43] Unlike Miller, many of the troops openly discuss private matters. Reiben narrates that his former superintendent's wife accidentally revealed her breasts to him, giving him an erection "the size of the Statue of Liberty." Fighting back tears, technician fourth grade Wade shares his regret about pretending to be asleep when his mother returned from her night shift to speak about her day. Similarly, Religion plays a major part in the characterization of Mellish

group. The squad even places bets on his job at home, resulting in a $300 jackpot. "I've been with him since Kasserine Pass," Technical Sgt. Mike Horvath tells Upham, "and I don't have a clue [where he is from and what he did for a living]."

The troops jokingly address Miller's super-human status when bantering, especially Reiben: "I got a mother, all right? I mean, you got a mother, Sarge has got a mother. I mean, shit, I bet even the Captain's got a mother," he quips at the mission's beginning, adding "[w]ell, maybe not the Captain, but the rest of us got mothers." At a later point he informs Upham that "Captain didn't go to school. They assembled him at O.C.S. [Officer Candidate School] out of spare body parts of dead G.I.s."

When Miller finally reveals himself to be a married teacher of English Composition to distract two of his men from a fight that threatens to escalate into friendly fire, the squad is flabbergasted: "I'll be doggone," Horvath gasps, as the normality of Miller's life contradicts the squad's speculations. Literature scholar Cohen questions the cinematic logic of the reveal and the baffled reactions it caused, claiming that the film really depicts the audience's hoped for response to this humble citizen-soldier, while the troops' reactions make little sense. To Spielberg, he claims, the reveal "represents . . . the mystical citizen-soldier theme: the disgruntled soldiers are somehow supposed to feel this" (324). Miller, the mystical hero, is revealed to be an ordinary citizen-soldier, rather than claiming an essentially heroic nature of soldiers, which the scene suggests being an underlying assumption on the part of the surprised audience.

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(Jewish), and Jackson (Christian), both of which wear religious insignia, while Miller is never revealed to have any affiliation or shown praying.

Finally, a conversation between the ordinary, yet still heroic, Private Ryan and Cpt. Miller highlights the difference between the two men via the latter's unwillingness to share his private life. After losing several of his men to the mission, Miller hopes that "[t]his Ryan better be worth it. He better go home and cure some disease or invent a longer-lasting light bulb or something." However, after the squad finds Ryan, the latter tells Miller a story about mocking and humiliating a "girl who just took a nose dive from the ugly tree and hit every branch coming down" back home. Both his crass actions and misogynist descriptions reveal that Ryan is not the outstanding personality Miller had desired him to be. When Ryan then prompts him to share the story of his wife pruning their rose bushes that Miller had alluded to earlier, he says, "No, that one I save just for me." This portrayal of Ryan as a flawed man will motivate the film's final scene, in which he wonders whether he has fulfilled Miller's last wish.

Miller's dying words to Ryan are "James, earn this." As present-day Ryan travels to Miller's grave, he breaks down and questions whether he has earned Miller's death with the way he has lived his life. This establishes Miller, in spite of the many dead soldiers throughout the movie, as the story's martyr. Metaphorically, he represents the Greatest Generation's sacrifice that 1990s' audiences are encouraged to earn with their own lives.

## Analysis of the Scene

In a contrast to the film's conventional narrative and character tropes, the opening battle scene represents a mode of engagement unusual for previous WWII films. Using a mode of physical engagement, the opening battle scene offers a sense of directness and unmediated access to the D-Day participants' physical sensations. The scene's visceral realism represents its battle primarily in the mode of discomfort and confusion and establishes a continuum between the peacetime audience and the soldiers who had to endure this pain.

The viewer's discomfort during the opening battle was widely reported in film reviews and was a source of pride for DreamWorks, with reports ranging from the inability to talk to physical exhaustion. The *L.A. Times'* Bill Higgins reports that after the premiere screening, "the audience was too shell-shocked to talk. The intensely depicted war scenes, especially the first 25 minutes of kinetic carnage, tend to stun viewers into speechlessness" (n.p.). Adam Klinker from the *Daily Nebraskan* interviewed a veteran, who shares that especially opening Omaha landings moved him to the point that "I was in no shape to talk . . . [i]t literally put me down to my knees" (n.p.), and he had to be hospitalized for PTSD for two weeks as a result of watching the film. DreamWorks distribution chief Jim Tharp proudly noted that "in some cases, people exiting the theaters were crying. In other cases, they could not initially talk" (Weinraub, n.p.). As my analysis of the opening battle scene will show, these experiential narratives and Tharp's observations are a result of the film's style.

An antithesis to the narrative opening scene with an older James Ryan, the Omaha Beach battle offers a mode of embodied engagement that communicates its ideology by engaging the viewer's body. This engagement is characterized by a viscerality that renders reflection on its ideology more challenging. It features the aesthetics of fluid profilmic space, exaggerated or filtered sound, crowded blocking, erratic camera movement and expressionist framing. Aiming to overwhelm the viewer with disorientation and disgust, the affect is presented as an index, rather than as an abstract signifier for the hardship endured by American troops: the viewers are invited to respond to the plight of the soldier with a stressful experience of their own. The viewer's potential experience suggests historical authenticity by appropriately mapping the ideology of the great sacrifices of the Greatest Generation onto the audience's bodies.

The flashback gradually positions itself as a disorienting counterpart to the familiar comfort of the opening sequence's aesthetics. The first shot of 1940s Normandy in the flashback features a row of metal anti-tank obstacles (so-called "Czech Hedgehogs") in an oblique angle (Figure 17), which contrasts with the preceding scene's crosses and their orderly horizontal lines (Figure 18). The natural lighting of the opening scene is now exchanged for a heavily desaturated shot. Additionally, while a typically Post-Romantic influenced extra-diegetic orchestral score[44] dominated the film's opening, the flashback scene features only diegetic, often noticeably manipulated sounds, beginning with amplified wave noises. As the camera tilts down, the obstacle closest to the camera begins diagonally blocking the image's foreground. Captions announce the setting's date (June 6, 1944) and location (Dog Green Sector, Omaha Beach). The trope of establishing time and place by means of captions (Figure 17) recalls earlier war films like *The Longest Day* (1962, Figure 20) and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977, Figure 21), and functions as a connector to the opening scene's narrative conventions. The shot's oblique angle and amplified wave sounds, however, hint at the coming visceral mode of presentation, which aims to induce stress (a type of affect with which the players of FPSs are intimately familiar) in the viewer via disorienting visuals, sonic amplification and portrayals of physical excess. It sets up an aesthetic that, in contrast with the opening scene, disorients the viewer and reduces the distance between physical and filmic space by engaging the viewer's body in its framing (i.e. a disorienting oblique angle) and sound editing (i.e. startling amplified wave noises).

The second shot, a high-angle medium-long crane shot shows a landing craft filled with soldiers travelling in the camera's direction, splashing water toward the lens. This choice of

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[44] Composer John William's use of chromaticism and dissonance while maintaining Western tonality is typical for this period. At the same time, these conventions are typically adopted in Hollywood's orchestral film scores.

profilmic space (i.e. the craft's water splash coming directly at the viewer) serves to induce a feeling of immediacy.


*Figure 17: Czech Hedgehogs in SPR*


*Figure 18: Crosses on the War Cemetery*
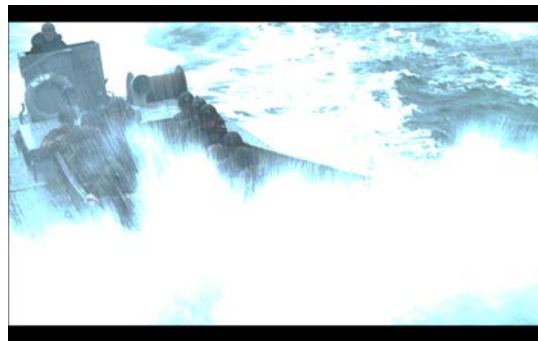

*Figure 19: Water splashes towards the viewer*


*Figure 20: The Longest Day (1962)*


*Figure 21: A Bridge Too Far (1977)*

The next shot, which tracks parallel along a set of landing crafts, features a shaky handheld camera (see below) that will remain the dominant form of recording during the battle scene, and adds the dimension of camera movement to the scene's disorienting framing, sound and profilmic space. Serving as establishment shots, the images, sounds and captions do introduce event, location

and time. However, and more importantly, by failing to establish a clear sense of space, they continue to establish a framework for reading the landings viscerally. By disorienting and overwhelming, the shot introduces a scene that attempts to represent the historical event by immersing the viewer in the soldiers' painful experience, rather than by neutrally documenting it.

In the following shots, acting and props begin to contribute to this disorienting mode of realism. Many anticipate the battle's viscerality by closely (close-up or medium close up) filming the cast as they reenact the breakdown of the soldiers' exterior and interior, inviting a sensation of disgust akin to witnessing the wounded soldiers open bodies a few moments later. These initial images show a soldier (later revealed to be Sgt. Hill) pushing a large chunk of chewing tobacco into his cheek (Figure 22) two soldiers vomiting close to and toward the camera (Figure 23) and a series of close-ups showing the labored breathing of GIs. While contributing to a sense of immediacy, the tight framing also adds a sense of claustrophobia. Like the first wave of the Atlantic in the opening shot, the vomit directed at the lens brings the viewer in close contact with this physical excess, likely inducing a feeling of disgust.



*Figure 22: Chewing Tobacco*              *Figure 23: Vomiting*

The second the landing crafts are opened (6:25), we see a medium-close up of a soldier being shot through his helmet and skull, followed by a graphic shot taken from the back of the

craft that shows the crowded men being gunned down, body parts flying through the air (Figure 24). Briefly after (6:53), the hand-held camera follows soldiers dropping over the side of the boat under water, as the audio suddenly becomes quiet. In this quietness, the sound of bullets that pierce soldiers (Figure 25) becomes muffled.



*Figure 24: Body Parts*



*Figure 25: Under Water*

As the camera jerks up and down, in and out of the water, the audio shifts back and forth between the exaggerated loudness of the beach and the muffled silence below the water surface. The camera's movements and sound imitate the experience of its subjects, the GIs that struggle to land on the beach while being weighed down by their backpacks. By emulating the GI experience, the entire scene engages the viewer with a stressful visual and sonic whiplash via camera movement and sound.

Contemporary reviews recognized the scene's realism and its ability to overwhelm viewers and suggest a continuum between the audience and the shell-shocked G.I. English scholar Milton Cohen reports feedback from both viewers and critics that describe their experience of the film's first 25 minutes "as one of spellbound awe for the enormous realism it gives to the D-Day landing and for the way the film locates the viewer in the visual action and especially in the deafeningly aural chaos of that first day's devastation" (322). Confirming Cohen's report, *Commonweal*'s

Richard Alleva writes that "[the film] almost physically assaults the viewer . . .", David Denby writes in the *New York Magazine* that "[n]ot just the violence, but the strangeness of [the opening battle], is overwhelming," and in *Film & History*, film and literature scholar Phil Landon claims that "the juxtaposition of brief shots from constantly shifting perspectives creates a sense of disorienting immediacy that places viewers among the foundering assault forces" (59). Importantly, the concepts of immediacy via disorientation (Landon) and immediacy via the battle's overwhelming violence and strangeness (Denby) is used to describe this widely praised scene.[45]

The emphatic acclaim of the battle's realism can thus not (only) rest on the authentic inventory of the profilmic space, such as props, natural sound and acting. Rather, it is precisely in the *formalist* distortions of its representation via unabashedly manipulated sound and image, rapid camera movements and expressionist angles that the scene establishes its claims to a realism that hinges on representing the soldiers' own subjective perception of the unique event. My concept of visceral realism is thus formalist, yet self-effacing, as it establishes a physical response in the viewer that appears appropriate and in its distorted aesthetics alleges to be a non-distorted access to historically experienced affect. Beyond disorientation, the battle scene engages the viewer by featuring an abundance of bodily excess that is likely to induce disgust.

Disgust

The battle sequence, which runs for over 20 minutes, is characterized by a large amount of blood and gore (Figure 26 and Figure 27) atypical for previous WWII films. Rather, it is reminiscent of 1980s' horror movies that engage the viewers' bodies with a portrayal of physical excess (see my discussion of Williams 1991 below). Figure 28, a screenshot from *Videodrome*

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[45] See Spielberg ("Saving Private Ryan"), Caldwell, Lane in this chapter's introduction.

(1983), and Figure 29, a screenshot from *Hellraiser* (1987), illustrate this generic heritage by showing similarities to Figure 26 and Figure 27, taken from *SPR*'s opening battle. All four images feature a display of the open and the violently deconstructed body respectively.


*Figure 26: Dying Soldier*


*Figure 27: An Exploding Body*


*Figure 28: Videodrome (1983)*


*Figure 29: Hellraiser (1987)*

More importantly for this dissertation, however, these images echo the aesthetics of 1990s FPSs, which, while featuring radically different settings and narratives, also use gore to engage their players. *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992, Figure 30) and *Doom* (1993, Figure 31) both feature killing hordes of enemies as the primary engagement with their violent spaces, producing a large number of on-screen corpses during gameplay. Although the FPSs mentioned take place in a highly fictionalized version of Hitler's 'Wolfschanze' bunker and on one of Mars' moons respectively, the level of gore in *SPR* is more evocative of those games than of previous WWII films.

*Figure 30: Wolfenstein 3D (1992)*


*Figure 31: Doom (1993)*


*Figure 32: Saving Private Ryan*


*Figure 33: Call of Duty (2003)*

However, it is not only the presence of gore in *SPR* that emulates the aesthetics of the FPS. The reverse shot from the point of view of Nazi troops (Figure 32) with a machine gun in the image foreground connects the off-screen shooter to the hostile on-screen objects of violence. In this, intentionally or not, the visuals of contemporary FPSs anticipate later WWII themed shooters like *Call of Duty* (Figure 33). As the subject of *SPR*'s POV long-take from the U.S. perspective never shows a gun, the hostile German troops represent the only shots that feature a personified weapon as the subject of a POV shot. This reverses the game genre's fantasies of violent power (see Chapter III), and instead aligns the viewer with the hostile subject-as-gun, emphasizing the technologically enhanced menace of the Axis powers and — like *SPR*'s opening battle — causing stress and anxiety.

The subjective long-take, which records the events via an embodied, constantly moving camera, performs a similar labor. Imitating the troops' strategic movements, the camera travels from cover to cover, switching between fast horizontal movements and vertical crouching motions. As both media attempt to emulate the experience of combat, it might not be surprising that they share a similar inventory of visuals and movements. However, given that this embodied camera is highly atypical for contemporary and earlier filmic representations of WWII, and that it a defining characteristic of the FPS, its use in *SPR* remains striking.

As the camera finds Miller, played by the film's star Tom Hanks, it offers the viewer a familiar face within the depersonalized chaos of bodies, once more inviting an identification with his character via close-ups (Figure 35).[46] Mimicking his state of shock, the audio is reduced to a soft hissing noise, while the camera is slowed down to 12 FPS, with every frame printed twice during post-production to achieve a jerky, staccato movement on the screen.[47] Eye-line matches alternately show Miller as he is splattered by blood, his view of soldiers desperately seeking cover, an exploding flamethrower that kills several troops, a soldier picking up his severed arm (Figure 34) and burning men attempting to save themselves by jumping into water. After Miller stares at a soldier silently moving his lips (Figure 36), the diegetic sound returns, revealing the dialogue and suggesting that Miller's state of shock has passed.

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[46] The close-up as a particularly powerful means for identification has been argued from theorists predating the formal inception of film studies (Bálász 1952) to the present (Macdougall 2006, 21).

[47] See *Daily Variety* interview with *SPR*'s cinematographer Janusz Kaminski (1999).

*Figure 34: Disembodied Arm*


*Figure 35: Miller in Shock*


*Figure 36: Miller POV*

Miller's shock, and his inability to effectively use his senses to orient himself on the beach, are portrayed by simulating his experiences with a sensory shift in the film's aesthetics. Rather than just visually representing Miller's state, the manipulated sound and conflict between sound (non-representational, quiet) and image (close up of yelling) lets the audience experience it (or at the least a visceral representation of it) for themselves.

The physical sensations the scene aims to induce retroactively come to represent the film's sympathy with and celebration of the hardships of the Greatest Generation by its narrative link to the opening and concluding flash forward scenes. The battle sequence is introduced conventionally by a shot tracking towards a character's (here: Ryan's) eyes, while a sound bridge (amplified wave noises) anticipates the sonic space of the flashback before the visuals change to match it. Unbeknownst to the viewer, the flashback scene, established by conventional narrative tropes, depicts an event—the Omaha beach landings—in which Ryan, who had parachuted to an

undisclosed Normandy location, did not participate. Why, then, does the film track towards Ryan's eyes, if it is not showing his memory, as the filmic conventions appear to indicate? The answer lies in the final scene, in which Ryan, back in the post-war present, asks his wife if he had lived up to Miller's plea for him to "Earn it," i.e. his death: "Tell me I have led a good life. Tell me I'm a good man." As the film's dialogue links Miller's plea to Ryan's self-evaluation at the end of the film, the portrayal of D-Day—and other events Ryan did not participate in—reveals itself not to be merely a flashback, but rather a representation of the film's primary message, located in Ryan's body, i.e. his physical intactness. By retroactively altering a potential reading of *SPR*'s opening scene—from conventional narrative bracket to a key to the ideological substance of the film's visceral experience—Spielberg highlights the Greatest Generation's hardships and sacrifices by echoing the contemporary discourse mentioned above. In my reading of the film, which was shared by many reviewers (see below), the final scene indicates that younger generations should appreciate their freedom as something that was hard won for them and has to be earned by living a meaningful life. The squad's effort to save Private Ryan becomes a metonymy for the U.S. military's effort to retain the liberty of future generations.

Thus, the ideology surrounding the Greatest Generation and its meaning motivate the film's representations of their struggles and achievements as portrayed in the opening D-Day battle sequence. The battle assaults the viewer with a stressful physical experience and establishes just how extreme these soldiers' sacrifices were by inviting the viewer to fluidly identify with both their suffering and their underlying heroism. As it strives to approximate an experiential continuum between audience and portrayed soldier, the realism rests on how well it can implicitly communicate Miller's request to the audience by conveying some of the physical sensations the soldiers experienced, even though this request is only made explicit at the end of the film.

Regardless of intent, the continuum, like all conceptions of filmic realism, constitutes an abstraction and an aesthetic language, rather than a neutral transmission of physical sensation from screen subject to film viewer. The viewer's physical discomfort *represents*, rather than neutrally transports the physical sensations of the soldier. As a result, it remains a system of signification: the signifier is located in the physical sensation of the signified battle experience within a system which performs its own ideological labor.

## **Visceral Realism**
Viscerality

Critics have praised the film's opening battle for a perceived directness in its representation of history, which appears as non-mediated reality, rather than as a formally constructed narrative work. Freelance journalist Christopher Caldwell speaks of a critical consensus of praise for "[its] brilliantly realistic depiction of the D-day invasion of Europe . . ." (48). Contemporary reviews confirm Caldwell's summary, as critics repeatedly praise *SPR*'s realism and directness, which they claim is located outside both the conventions of its genre and those of its production period. *New Yorker* critic Anthony Lane somewhat naïvely calls the film's opening battle a successful attempt in making a "film that doesn't look like a film" (77), while his colleague Hendrik Hertzberg declares in the same journal that *SPR* will "never be mistaken for an action-adventure film" (32), giving it a place outside of the conventions of genre filmmaking. Finally, in a *Film Comment* review, co-editor Richard Jameson describes it as "untainted by anything suggesting a Nineties sensibility" (21), untouched by its historical and cultural environment, rather than being an expression of its own time. These sources would suggest a consensus of critics who believed that Spielberg achieved his desired effect. The director explained in an interview with Andrew Levy

for the *Director's Guild of America* (DGA) magazine the he wanted to create a film with "violent honesty" (Spielberg, "Saving Private Ryan" 68).

Several statements about historical authenticity, realism, conventionality and immersion manifest themselves in the discourse surrounding *SPR*. Not unexpectedly, most important is the notion of a particular realist style that is tied to historical authority. However, its idea extends beyond the employment of the conventions of traditional realist cinematic style. Rather, this realism appears contingent on the idea that the medium of film, its operative categories like genre, and its formative processes influenced by its contemporary historical and cultural circumstances need to become invisible so that the audience can establish a more direct, and thus quasi-objective, access to the depicted events. In other words, this realist style can be understood as an immersion into the world of the film, or, as framed by the opening scene, into the ideology of celebrating the sacrifices of the Greatest Generation. The gory display of physical excess, usually associated with genre films, becomes "honesty" in this iteration of realist style. It now serves as a marker for *visceral realism* by striving for an experiential continuum with the military subject by using the excesses of what feminist film scholar Linda Williams has named the "body genres" (1991), rather than a style that attempts a less embodied reaction.

In this dissertation I use visceral realism to describe a mode in which a specific medium engages a viewer's (or player's) body. This mode allows to experience the medium in a virtually embodied fashion beyond visual and acoustic cues and, most importantly, with less opportunity for reflection. The mode of visceral realism epistemologically differs from those of other viscerally engaging genres (such as what feminist film scholar Linda Williams named the "body genres") in its context. Visceral realism's  use suggests that experiencing an approximation of the physical sensations that are portrayed on screen unlocks a type of knowledge that would be unobtainable

by other means of signification. In this way, the address of the body stakes a claim to a type of pedagogy. Its realism rests on its alleged ability to reveal a type of 'truth' (i.e. its ideology) not obtainable by less embodied representations.

Like Linda Williams (cf. chapter I), I am suspicious of this perception, a distrust which stems from the assumption that mechanisms of filmic identification are more complicated than—in the case of horror—a mere sadistic loss of the self in the killer's pleasures or a masochistic identification with the victim: "[E]ven in the most extreme displays of feminine masochistic suffering, there is always a component of either power or pleasure for the woman victim" (8), she claims, and argues that even the genre of sadomasochistic pornography offers "a strong mixture of [feminine] passivity and [masculine] activity, and a bisexual oscillation between the poles of each" (ibid). I find this nuanced view of analyzing bodily engaging media to be a more helpful tool for my framework of visceral realism. It allows for the multiplicity of viewer experiences necessary to read *SPR*'s opening battle scene and features many elements which, in other contexts, had been decried for their sensationalism or pornographic violence.[48]

However, the idea of a spectrum of viewer experiences also offers a broad range of identification—from the masochistic (if not exactly passive) suffering of the G.I. to the active (if not exactly sadistic) identification with their heroism. Here lies the relevance of the *SPR*'s opening sequence in the graveyard with its conventional inventory (flag, cemetery, etc.) of "Greatest Generation" ideology: the perception of realism rests upon the double-address of the soldier; both in empathy with their struggle and celebration of their heroism. Moreover, the physical experience of the depicted events hides its own ideological function—it suggests a moment of embodied witnessing beyond the coded cinematic language that engages us via vision, hearing, and touch.

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[48] In fact, even in Spielberg's film, some critics have found these elements to be

Film scholar Jennifer Barker suggests that an experience based on viscerality can work to obscure a medium's underlying ideology. In her 2009 book *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, Barker touches on the concerns of physically embedded ideology by exploring a relationship between the 'viscera of the film'—her metaphor for the cinematic apparatus of exhibition—and that of the audience. "Films appeal to the more immediately accessible musculature and skin, inviting their participation in a way that invokes the temporal rhythms of the viewer's viscera," (128) she claims, connecting film's temporal structure to the rhythm of humans' inner works, such as the heartbeat. Both film and human inner workings present themselves as continuous motions, with the micro-processes of the projector and of the human heart largely escaping our attention when functioning properly. Awareness of a process, of course, is a basic prerequisite for the ability to reflect on it. Her suggestion that viewing a film can engage the viewer in ways that emerge from the senses, but possess an impact that extends beyond them, constitutes a useful metaphor for the ways that physically engaging (by means of excess or otherwise) representations can transport ideology in an untangleable way from 'real' physical experience.

My model of visceral realism is one that similarly hides its ideology deep within our bodies by presenting the affect it induces as concrete indices, rather than abstract signifiers of the sensations experienced at D-Day. This is to argue that audiences can remain aware of the formalist, representational nature of the film without critically reflecting on their "gut feeling," especially given that the representation of the opening battle openly manipulates the 'guts' of the film, as in the portrayal of Miller's shock by the manipulation of sound and recording speed. Such a claim fails to adequately consider the viewer's active role in experiencing a film. Rather, the

disorientation and physical stress caused by these manipulations constitute the scene's most inner and most inaccessible ideological space, not the aesthetic language on its surface.

Contemporary reviewers and scholars have recognized the battle scene's intention to overwhelm viewers: English scholar Milton Cohen reports a feedback from both viewers and critics that describe the film's first twenty-five minutes, or rather, their experience of it, as one of spellbound awe for the enormous *realism* it gives to the D-Day landing by locating the viewer in the visual action and especially in the deafeningly aural chaos of that first day's devastation (322). As it stimulates the senses of vision and hearing, the film can bring about an elusive sense of presence.

*Saving Private Ryan*'s innovations in its construction of realism lie in its adaptation of body genre conventions (Williams). It introduces an aesthetic framework typically external to the war movie genre. These extra-generic conventions, as I argue, appear as external to narrative conventions. As a result, their engagement of the body appears as a non-mediated experiential continuum between viewer and the depicted event's witnesses, authenticating the film's historiography. Additionally, the introduction of body genre conventions clashes with the scene's subject matter, breaking down the generic coherence of aesthetics and setting in the film's opening. As this clash amplifies the viewer's disorientation, it adds to the suggestion of an experiential continuum with the depicted confused soldiers.

Contemporary takes on *SPR*'s aesthetics confirm Williams' claim that spectacular and bodily engaging film genres did not enjoy cultural recognition during the 1990s. In his review, Hertzberg associates these strategies with "mindless spectacle":

> Spielberg takes (and enlarges) an arsenal of filmmaking techniques that have been developed mostly in the service of sensation and mindless spectacle (the fireballs, the blood bags, the gory prostheses, the plastic and animal viscera, the earsplitting, digitally enhanced

noise) and turns it toward a quite different purpose - authenticity, in the re-creation of a great and terrible historical episode (31).

Similarly, in his review, film journalist Richard Combs calls the opening battle "more grim carnival than documentary" (50).

Reclaiming these ostracized strategies in the service of representing a sacred moment in American history might at first seem counterintuitive. However, it is exactly D-Day's sacredness that reframes the filmic techniques as markers for *visceral realism*. A 1990s discourse that had sanctified WWII veterans via their unfathomable sacrifices set up a mode of understanding history marked by embracing the radical difference to non-veterans' own civilian lives. *SPR* taps into this mode, using the categories of excess and physically overwhelming its audience to illustrate this difference in a visceral fashion: it appears to show the historic experience via radical difference with present peace-time United States, a juxtaposition represented via the film's openly conventional moments.

Four years before the release of *SPR*, the 50th anniversary of D-Day had rekindled a reference to WWII and its soldiers across the U.S., which was intensified by the failure of the Cold War to become a new source of national pride.[49] English and American Studies scholar Catherine Gunther Kodat describes the cultural climate surrounding the production and release of *SPR* by recalling "the tidal wave of World War II nostalgia that had been activated by the anniversary of D-Day . . . and had not yet completely subsided by the time of *Saving Private Ryan's* release" (90).

Reverence for the soldiers' sacrifice and suffering constituted a central facet of this nostalgia. It resurfaces throughout the film's narrative, establishing a pattern that goes beyond its employment of body genre aesthetics. Contrasting himself with the heroic figure of Captain Miller

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[49] Rogin 17.

(Tom Hanks), Spielberg explains how he identified with the figure of the cowardly anti-hero Corporal Timothy Upham (Jeremy Davies): "I'm not sure I would ever be able to withstand what a lot of those guys did for us 54 years ago. I'm not sure I would've been able to take it . . . I used Upham to kind of voice how I would have reacted in similar situations" (Spielberg, "Saving Private Ryan" 73). The representation of a sacrifice, the horrors of which would be impossible for the postwar viewer to recreate, emerges from the nostalgia and reverence mentioned above. What is signified by the film's visceral realism is thus the feeling of being overwhelmed, horrified and unable to imagine oneself as acting heroically in the intensity of battle, as signified by the scene's aesthetics. Adding to the experience of unmediated history, ironically, is the simulation of 1940s' recording equipment and aesthetics, as well as the reenactment of the battles' soundscapes.

The Archive Effect and the Emulation of Historical Recording Technology

In a *Newsweek* piece, Spielberg references a major motivation for creating the film: "I wanted to make the kind of war film about which a veteran of Omaha Beach might remark, 'This is pretty close to what it was like'" (Spielberg, "Of Guts and Glory" 68). His explicit connection between the witness and the scene's resulting testimonial authority likely only meaningfully influenced the film's cinematic experience in rare cases. However, the simulation of historical imagery informs the movie's visual language, and uses the authority of the past witness to suggest a presence in the past event in *SPR*. As I will show, Spielberg emulates historical film recording technology and references the imagery of war photographer Robert Capa. As a result, he inserts the recorded perspective of participants in the battle into his film and aligns the photographer-witness with his audience.

Spielberg filmed *SPR* in an aspect ratio of 1.85:1, rather than using wider images conventionally employed to add to its genre's epic nature.[50] Doherty claims that Spielberg chose a narrower image in order to "avoid associations with the glory mongering WWII spectacles of the Fifties and Sixties" (70). In hindsight, it would be naïve to agree with the suggestion that *SPR* surpasses former WWII films by reducing any conceptual suggestions. A break with former visual WWII conventions may very well suggest the wish not to employ former vessels of ideology. As I have shown, however, the film is far from ideologically neutral. More importantly, the opening battle's style emulates 1940s recording technology,[51] the aesthetics of which were defined by both technological and cultural circumstances. Spielberg's inspiration by famed war photographer Robert Capa[52] becomes clear in a direct comparison of their images (Figure 37 to Figure 42). Both feature a grainy quality, and a nearly identical record of their 'prophotographic' or profilmic space respectively.

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[50] While a few other WWII battle films like *Cross of Iron* (1977) and *The Big Red One* (1980) had used the ratio of 1.85:1, most had chosen a wider image: *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *The Longest Day* (1962), *The Great Escape* (1963) and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977) were all shot in 2.35:1, while *The Battle of the Bulge* (1965) used a ratio as large as 2.76:1.

[51] One critic comparing the opening battle's shaky handheld cameras to contemporary newsreels is *Newsweek*'s David Ansen (52).

[52] "Probably the things that informed me more than anything else were those surviving snapshots of Omaha Beach taken by the famous war photojournalist Robert Capa" (Spielberg, "Saving Private Ryan" 69).

*Figure 37: Capa I*



*Figure 38: Capa in SPR I*



*Figure 39: Capa II*



*Figure 40: Capa in SPR II*



*Figure 41: Capa III*



*Figure 42: Capa in SPR III*

Beyond referencing the work of Capa, Spielberg also simulates the historical recording technology of the 1940s:

> [W]hen I analyzed [combat] footage, I discovered that a lot of those old cameras that were being used by the Signal Corps had 45-degree shutters. A 45- or 90-degree shutter eradicates blurring, and it made the image look so neurotic and chaotic and panic-stricken, that I thought this is the way I needed to shoot every combat scene in *Saving Private Ryan*. (71)

The simulation of historical film recording techniques in the battle scene evokes a quasi-archival quality that underlines the temporal distance between audience and historical subjects, a distance that leads to what film scholar Jamie Baron (2014) calls the *archive effect*. As she argues

in her book by that title, archival material (or, as it appears in *SPR*, its simulation), produces temporal disparity between the then and the now (21). By simulating said images, a medium can be perceived as an object from the past, carrying the authority of the witness.

While Spielberg's references to the aesthetics of archival documents produce a sense of authenticity, the film's sound design does not attempt to reinforce this archival effect but achieves its authority via a fetishistic re-enactment of the combat's soundscape itself, rather than its recording methods. Spielberg had his sound crew fire tens of thousands of bullets past microphones in order to capture the 'real' sound of battle:

> I got these wonderful sound guys, real computer nerds, so fetishistic about it they even made sure they fired off the right sort of German ammo . . . These guys fired the ammo into sand, into dirt, into mortar, into a mess kit, into meat. They got half a cow from a slaughterhouse and fired into that. They put a uniform on an actual half a cow, to get the sound of bullets going through clothes into flesh. (2)

Spielberg's mention of "computer nerds" seems at odds with their decidedly analogue, non-virtual methods of producing profilmic sound, rather than referencing its recordings. His use of the term likely refers to modern technologies of capturing these sounds, which would present a stark contrast to the fetishism found in the recording of the battle's visuals. It is this fetishism of *production*, rather than capture, that establishes the sound event as reenactment. Even before becoming integrated into the film, this event becomes its own signifier of WWII sound: it attempts to produce, rather than *re*-produce, original historical recordings.

*Saving Private Ryan*'s image and sound thus suggests an authentic experience of history by (re-)producing its visual and sonic environment in two different ways. The visuals evoke historic recording equipment and its resulting images, infusing the filmmaker with the trust of the documentarian via archive effect and affect by offering the audience a visual framework associated

with directness. Its sound design, on the other hand, uses modern technology to capture the sounds of reenacted battle, rather than those of seminal recordings, by using historic guns and bullets.

**<u>Conclusion</u>**

In this chapter I have explored *Saving Private Ryan*'s tensions between familiar narrative convention and disrupting shifts of visceral genre tropes, the evocation of historical footage via the archive effect and its resulting affect, the production of quasi-historical image and sound, and the film's opportunities for identification that hinge on Upham and Miller. All these elements recall contemporary views of the Greatest Generation, linking the film to their great suffering and reasons for celebrating them. I have explored these elements to analyze the film's strategies of authentication that have given its representation of history and its underlying ideology a sense of authority. *SPR*'s play with narrative body genres and use of FPS conventions motivates its viscerally engaging moments, while the use of the archive effect stakes a claim to historical realism in a nostalgic nod to historical imagery and recording technology. These are the central aspects of its realist style that infuses the film with trust in its representations.

In Chapter III, I will use these categories of subjective viscerality and allegedly objective attention to historical media to explore the impact *Medal of Honor* (1999), a FPS that was largely seen as an adaptation of *SPR* (see reception overview in chapter III), had on the representation of WWII. Being released within a year of *SPR*, I argue that both works noticeably engaged with their digital cultural context by shifting representational authority from the indexical to the visceral.

**CHAPTER III:**

*Medal of Honor* **(1999): Virtual Violence and Its Ideological Redemption in History**

As early as its first mission briefing, *Medal of Honor*'s (1999) player-character Patterson is presented as a heroic, highly competent individual, and as such, a perfect fit for the game's mission. By introducing Patterson in the context of a rigid historical space marked by contemporary technology and a recursive sequence of frames, *MoH* offers the player a highly desirable point of identification. This increases immersion on a diegetic level—being "caught up in the world of the game's story" (McMahan, 68), while also establishing a subject position that frames the ensuing gameplay as located in the past.

The film sequence that introduces Air Force Lieutenant Jimmy Patterson to his first mission features a voice-over by the character Colonel Hargrove addressing Patterson, and—by extension—the player. Hargrove is from the Office of Strategic Service, the intelligence branch of the US Military that would later become the CIA. He acknowledges that, while Patterson considers himself "just another anonymous pilot in the transport corps," his heroic actions, specifically "taking out a half a dozen of the Wehrmacht and then sneaking back into friendly territory," had made him a desirable candidate for recruitment by the OSS, whose missions, as Hargrove explains, include "[e]spionage, sabotage, subversion, search and rescue--you name it, we do it." The player is thus introduced to Patterson's already extraordinary life at the beginning of the game, underlining his exceptional 'out of the box' heroism.

Other games' player-characters, e.g. those featured in *Call of Duty* (2003), frequently require training that serves to introduce the player to the game's controls and follow the player-character's rise to competence. Alternatively, *Wolfenstein 3D*'s (1992) B.J. Blazkovicz or *Doom*'s (1993) nameless protagonist are thrown into their battles by sheer accident, being captured or invaded by enemy forces. Patterson does not need to acquire any particular skills before gameplay commences, nor is he blind-sided by an attack that forces him to engage. Rather, he is chosen because he is a perfect fit for the missions at the game's inception. This difference is relevant for his construction as an ideal player-character, which allows for a fantasy of empowerment on the part of the player that, in its suggestion of agency—the sense that "the things we do bring tangible results" (Murray, 126)—functions as an important aspect of immersed gameplay.

As I have shown in chapter II, the release of Spielberg's 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan* shifted the acceptance of bodily engagement in mainstream Hollywood war cinema. While physically engaging film had long been poorly regarded by critics (Williams 1991), audiences' visceral responses to *SPR* did not result in its critical dismissal but were rather regarded as a way to unlock a particular truth about the experience of the war veterans it depicted. The film combined its viscerality with attention to historical material culture that can result in the archive effect, a term coined by Jamie Baron (2014, see also Chapter II). By including or simulating archival material like historical film sequences, Baron argues, fictional works can be imbued with the authority of the witness.

The combination of viscerality with a foregrounding of historical material culture constitutes what I have called the mode of visceral realism. This mode fuses the documentary's rhetoric of disengaged objectivity with the subjective immediacy of what Linda Williams (1991)

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terms body genres and the FPS and serves as a new way of claiming historical authenticity, by introducing the audience's physical engagement as a category. Like *SPR*'s viscerality, the FPS's immersive qualities have been (and remain) understood as a feature that minimizes the distance between player and the game's diegesis.

Typically, historical authenticity has resulted from employing tropes from former iterations of historical representations, or, as Salvati and Bullinger (2013) put it, "a chain of signifiers assembled from historical texts, artifacts, and popular representations of World War II" (154). Chapman (2018) notes that "framing something as history in certain ways within popular culture can carry a particular authority" (36). It is this authority that sets *Medal of Honor* apart from former iterations of the FPS genre. The gameplay's physical engagement via immersion, rather than a source for concern, attaches itself to a history-based narrative that distinguishes it from games like *Doom*.

In this chapter, I continue to explore the shifting public perception of physically engaging media that represent WWII in the historical context of the late 1990 and early 2000s. I argue that the 1999 genre-hybrid *Medal of Honor* represents the central moment, in which FPSs engaged *SPR*'s critical acclaim by tethering its violently immersive gameplay to concrete representations of what was then widely discussed as heroism within America's past. As a result, the game effectively distanced itself from moral anxieties about the genre's former iterations in a way that contributed to its culture-wide acceptance and economic success.

First, *Medal of Honor*'s thematic connection to WWII allowed its makers to present the game as an ideologically sound experience by participating in a post-1994 discourse that highlighted the "Greatest Generation's" war efforts. This rhetoric was especially present during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of D-Day, a discourse that I have described in relation to *Saving*

*Private Ryan* in Chapter II. Guy Westwell discusses this period in his book *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* (2006): "The 1994 anniversary of the D-Day landings…had triggered a more general cultural fascination with World War II" (90, see also Chapter II), he explains, adding that "[i]n the political rhetoric of presidential speeches, the endlessly-looped television documentaries, and the nonfiction books dominating the bestseller lists" (90). In the 1990s, WWII was constructed as the nation's communal effort to overcome barbarism.

Using the archive effect, the game's employment of historical artifacts and technology gives the appearance of educational materials that framed gameplay through menus and cut-scenes.[53] By locating *MoH* in a specific historical time and space, these moments establish the violent gameplay's presence in the domestic sphere as less of a moral threat in the wake of the Columbine massacre: the player-character was part of the allied WWII efforts, and as such, his violence was warranted and clearly isolated from the present unlike the fictional characters of earlier FPSs. The reputation of Steven Spielberg, acting as a producer on the game, only heightened the perception that the game made an authentic use of what Adam Chapman (2018) calls past time.

While the relationship between game time and real time had been explored at length as early as 2001,[54] it was Chapman who used Jesper Juul's (2005) concepts of play time—the time spent playing the game—and fictional time—the time shown to have passed in the game diegesis—and integrated these concepts into a framework of historical representation, adding the third category of past time. Chapman uses this term to mean the way historical games present time "as it is claimed to have appeared to agents" (91). I will use his terminology and especially

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[53] See my discussion of Tanine Allison (2018) below

[54] Wolf, 85-88

the concept of past time throughout this chapter to discuss the distinction of player actions and player-character actions.

Second, by basing its design on the James Bond Nintendo 64 game *GoldenEye007* (1997) evoking the genre of the spy thriller, *MoH*'s violent gameplay appeared within a familiar, accepted framework while Nintendo's reputation as a child-friendly platform contributed to this notion. As I will explore below, this reputation had been bolstered by a public discourse around the senate hearings concerning the subject of video game violence.

## Historical Background

*Medal of Honor* was designed between 1997 and 1999, and its focus on clandestine warfare reflected these years' U.S.-foreign policies, cultural environment, and the *PlayStation*'s technological limitations. Responding to these contemporary aspects allowed the game to not only obtain a level of relevance, but to distance itself from issues that were typically associated with the FPS in the 1990s.

The U.S. administration under President Bill Clinton during the mid-late 1990s used increasingly aggressive foreign policy, rather than military actions, in their conflicts with hostile countries. America's use of indirect warfare via espionage and technological sabotage resulted in a cultural environment that could be emulated in a 'lone wolf' stealth type of game setting, while also allowing the depictions of violence to be characterized by 'clean' individual killings, rather than *Doom*'s (1993) gory piles of bodies (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Clinton's administration imposed economic sanctions to intervene in the nuclear tests of India and Pakistan in May 1998 and in the Kosovo conflict, chose to destabilize the Milosevic regime by using cyber-attacks against the government rather than sending in ground troops, as had been demanded by U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair. The findings of the May 1999 Cox Report

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revealed to the public that this type of warfare extended to actions against the U.S. as well: it

reported two episodes of systematic nuclear espionage by China against the U.S. over the course

of two decades. Finally, the Iraq Disarmament Crisis was, at this point, still shaped by politics of

containment, rather than George W. Bush's post-9/11 pursuit of preemptive military action.



*Figure 43: Doom (1993)*

At home, the April 1999 Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, CO renewed

anxieties about the violent impulses of youth cultures, popular music, film and video games,

specifically the FPS *Doom* (1993). Eric Harris, one of the two Columbine shooters, was reported

to be an enthusiast of the game, had designed levels in his free time, and referenced being

preoccupied with the game in his personal writings.[55]  Dirk Johnson and James Brooke report in

the NYT that Eric Harris was "an avid player of *Doom* and *Quake*" (April 22, 1999). The

Washington Post calls him a "fan of the original [sic] shoot-em-up game *Doom* . . . Using special

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[55] http://www.acolumbinesite.com/reports/cr/900columbinedocs.pdf

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software, he created new levels filled with monsters for players to blast their way through" (April 22, 1999). These sources illustrate how video games had become associated with school shootings. As I will show, *Medal of Honor* largely avoided being grouped with the negatively discussed earlier FPSs by providing a unique historical subject position that extended to texts like its printed strategy guide. It also attached itself to Steven Spielberg's reputation and cinematic work and emulated the *N64* game *GoldenEye007*.

The technological inability of the *PlayStation* to dynamically depict warfare in which large numbers of allied and hostile soldiers were engaged in conflict thus found a welcome political environment. This allowed it to focus on missions characterized by stealth that created its own ideology of American exceptionalism and spread out its depictions of violence across the virtual space. Regardless of its makers' intentions, I argue that the game as a historical artifact reflected contemporary foreign policies and responded to public concerns about school violence.

Unlike other academic sources that provide broader histories of the WWII FPS genre, focusing on 1999's *Medal of Honor* means not contextualizing the game in the United States' post-9/11 political and cultural shift. Tanine Allison argues in her 2018 book *Destructive Sublime. World War II in American Film and Media* that the rise of the WWII military shooter coincided with the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that were increasingly theorized as 'post-heroic' and executed from a distance, rather than by sending ground troops (158). As a result, she claims that these shooters answered the nostalgic longing for a conflict characterized by ethical clarity and conventional warfare. While her fruitful analyses proved that framing the history of the WWII FPS genre as a whole as largely a post-9/11 phenomenon can provide clear and helpful insights, my own analysis cannot be productively framed in this fashion. Rather, I illustrate how the military FPS genre's rise in popularity began before 2001. This allows my own

analysis to draw attention to *MoH* and to add specificity to existing broader accounts. It is especially *Medal of Honor*'s reactions to cultural anxieties and its resulting contributions to the genre's rise in acceptance that constitute a blind spot in academic literature. Attention to those dynamics will allow me to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the genre's history, while also drawing attention to the interplay of design choices and public discourse.

Unlike later military shooters like 2003's *Call of Duty* (cf. Chapter IV), *Medal of Honor*'s clandestine missions framed WWII as a 'war from a distance' in its own right. Jimmy Patterson, the game's protagonist, does not anticipate the country's later cultural environment of disembodied warfare from afar, but emerges from the same discourse as *Saving Private Ryan* that celebrated the Greatest Generation in the wake of the 50th anniversary of D-Day (see chapter II). Rather than the film's evocations of the Greatest Generation, who saved the democratic world's freedom by suffering a great deal, the game, as a hybrid of the spy thriller and the military shooter, highlights the WWII hero as a highly competent and brave individual, as opposed to an often overwhelmed collective. Patterson's physical discomfort, emulated by the vibrating PlayStation controller, contributes to the player's virtually embodied experience of the game, giving its diegesis violent agency and thus contributing to a sense of embodied presence beyond its visual and auditory design.

*Controversy*

The genre's public perception and press coverage at the time of *MoH*'s release point to an increase in public anxieties focused on the FPS. Many groups feared that FPSs' engagement of the player, particularly its use of perspective that conflates the view of the player with that of the player-character, would translate to non-virtual acts of violence. This illustrates that the genre's

perceived close relationship with their players' bodies still rendered them 'bad objects', and

prompted the creators of *Medal of Honor* to distance themselves from these earlier FPSs.

In 1994, the *Washington Post's* Dave Nuttycombe claimed that players of FPSs, then also

known as "*Doom* clones" (Arsenault 2009, 164-65), inscribed their virtual experiences on the

players' bodies: "Like a day spent on the ocean, a long stretch of *Doom*-playing can leave the

synapses of the brain still racing to its rhythms" (10/10/1994, n.p.). By the time of *Medal of*

*Honor*'s development, the connections between 'real-world' violence and FPSs had become a

focus of the genre's coverage outside of gaming journalism. *NextGeneration*'s speculation that

*DreamWorks Interactive* chose to miss the chance of marketing their upcoming game at the E3

trade show "because they didn't want to fall victim themselves to the violence hounding TV

crews" (July 1999, 14)[56] illustrates this conflation of virtual and non-virtual violence during the

time's press coverage. The article's polemic criticism of "violence hounding" journalists also

shows the defensive position players and publishers of FPSs found themselves in, as the

perceived aggression of "hounding" rhetorically marks the journalists, rather than FPSs, as

agents of violence.

As I will show now, *Medal of Honor* countered the perception of the FPS and the

anxieties centered around its virtual acts of violence by constructing a unique subject position in

its mission briefs and cut-scenes. I argue that by using a dual address of both the player and their

player-character, *MoH* grounds gameplay and its virtual violent actions in a rigid historical

frame.

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[56] While the genre of the FPS was particularly scrutinized as a possible trigger for real-life violence, it needs to be noted that the non-FPS fighting game *Mortal Kombat* (1992) had been subject to similar, equally well documented controversies.

**The double address of player and soldier--the historical and the domestic space**

By using the double address of soldier and player via aesthetics, control interfaces and narrative, *MoH* frames virtually violent gameplay in the game's historical narrative. The "archive effect," a term I borrow from film and media scholar Jamie Baron's eponymous 2014 book, limits the conflict as one of historical reenactment, only the "Greatest Generation" ideology of which, but not its violence, extends to the present. As a result, the game manages to historically contain its violently immersive experience. This frame, unlike former explicitly fictional FPSs, allows *MoH*'s virtual violence to be safely displaced from the domestic sphere, which I argue contributed to the growing social acceptance of the FPS genre in the late-1990s. While one might rightly argue that this double address conversely transports historical violence into the present domestic sphere, it still distinguishes the game from earlier FPSs, like *Doom,* that had an openly fictional diegesis, the violence of which did not permit them to be seen as contained in the past.

The Archive Effect

*MoH*'s cutscenes, loading screens, and gameplay combine virtual spaces with the materiality of manufactured quasi-historical artifacts, the aesthetics of which engage the material culture of the game's historical setting. The combination of diegetic and non-diegetic elements does not by itself constitute a new component (Wolf, 83). It is, rather, *MoH*'s diegesis which is grounded in realistic re-creations of the past that constitutes a novel element. While the game's gameplay suggests a spatial continuum between player and player-character via the subjective point of view, in which Patterson's eyes function as a virtual camera, these artifacts integrate play time into the game's historical diegesis.

Baron analyzes this new type of non-textual, quasi-archival artifact primarily in its "*experience of reception*" (7, italics in original). She refers to this experience as the "archive

effect," which produces a relationship between elements of a medium and its audience via the suggestion of temporal disparity. Baron focuses on film-based representations, yet, even *MoH*'s still images, while clearly constructed, rather than indexically reproducing historical materials, serve to ground the game in its historical narrative and setting. Baron discusses the manufacture of 'historical' images that replicate the archive effect via the open manipulation of documentary footage (in films like *Forrest Gump* (50)), or the adaptation of visuals that evoke the archive effect (the newsreel opening to *Citizen Kane* (52)) without hiding their manipulation.[57] As I will show, while it does not use the language of documentary film, *MoH*'s constant evocation of historical material culture outside of gameplay serves as 'evidentiary values' that restrict it to historical reenactment and binds its virtual violence to the fictional, ideologically untouchable past agent Patterson, rather than the player. As a result, the physically engaging, because immersive, gameplay of *Medal of Honor* redeems the FPS's focus on violence by grounding it in 'authentic' history.

Film and media scholar Tanine Allison has noted other examples of isolated use of historical material in her 2018 book *Destructive Sublime*, claiming that in WWII themed games like *MoH*, it is due to the game world's inability to indexically replicate physical space that the archival footage *outside* of gameplay performs the labor of providing documentary 'truth': "[T]he video games carefully deposit archival footage outside of the playable game world. The archival images can provide context but are placed securely in the past…" (169) It is this space, located "securely in the past," that, I argue, produces *MoH*'s claims to historical accuracy. While Allison finds that "the gameplay in virtual landscapes … gives the impression of unfolding for

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[57] The death of Charles Foster Kane is no more presented as a historical truth than Forrest Gump's meetings with John F Kennedy and John Lennon, but rather as self-aware hinges between history and fiction, in which the archive effect functions diegetically, rather than making claims about historical facts.

the player in real time, in the now," the use of the archive effect outside of gameplay marks it as historical reenactment. It does certainly occur in the present, but its violence is still clearly marked as a virtual play within the game's construction of the past.

I find that archival images in *Medal of Honor* and the simulation of archival-ness in created images function in ways that speak to Allison's analysis and that counteract anxieties about FPSs. First, as they provide a sense of "documentary 'truth'," these images establish themselves as a source of information about the past, attaching themselves to educational claims associated with the documentary film genre. Second, their position "securely in the past" underlines the 'past-ness' of the game diegesis, displacing their violent actions from their domestic environment in the present. Both these elements ultimately serve to distinguish *MoH* from earlier FPSs, whose problematic reputation was reinforced by a discourse on media violence after the Columbine shootings.

Both the mission instructions by character Manon Batiste and the following loading screen employ what Baron called the "experience of reception," while they remain openly constructed. As a result, they illustrate the concept of the archive effect. The instructions and the loading screen both feature representations of historical artifacts and references to *Medal of Honor*'s digital and constructed nature, anticipating a gameplay that lets the player manipulate a violent, faux historical space that always remains 'at arm's length'.

## Manon's Instructions

Manon Batiste acts as Patterson's liaison with the French resistance. Her words, along with the screen's aesthetics, offer a historical frame for the anticipated immersive gameplay. Opening with "Bonjour," which somewhat awkwardly marks her as French, she asks the player, to "press the (x) button to turn the page and start the briefing" because "[t]ime is of the essence"

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(Figure 44). The card containing her correspondence is placed on various historical artifacts, including a map, a compass and an ammunition clip, while her photograph is attached to the paper at a slightly crooked angle, rather than employing the straight lines associated with computer graphics. When she references the *PlayStation* controller, prompting the players to press a particular button, she directly addresses them in the present, while the historical artifacts ground the moment in its narrative environment of 1944, just as her reminder that "time is of the essence" similarly relates to past time, rather than play time. This dynamic is repeated when Manon ends the briefing by instructing the player in the use of a German weapon in the game: "Hint: to gain control of a German machine gun, press the "Action" button. Good luck!"

As a result, play, exemplified by the controls, becomes grounded in the past time of the game diegesis: Manon's introduction and the presence of historical artifacts tether the player's controller to their corresponding actions in the game's representation of 1944 and thus frames the virtual violence historically. While former FPSs had also provided narrative frameworks for play—in the case of *Doom*, surviving hordes of demons released from hell on a space station— none employed the extensive use of history to locate the player's actions in the past in a way that strongly connected to an ongoing ideological discourse. Co-creator of *Doom* John Romero, in

fact, points to the absence of a strong narrative as a boost of identification with the protagonist's actions: "There was never a name for the DOOM marine because it's supposed to be YOU" (np).
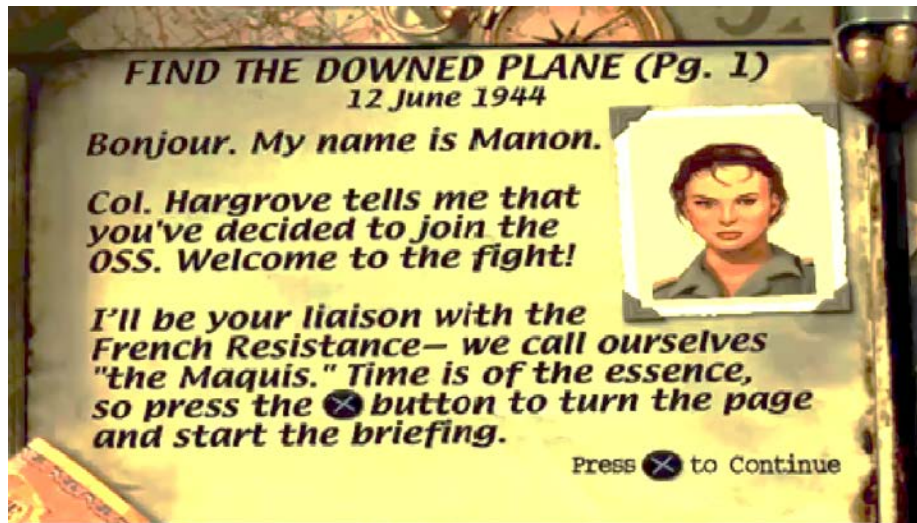

*Figure 44: Manon*

During this first briefing, Manon asks Patterson (and by extension the player) to recover an Allied G-3 officer, who was shot down after returning from a secret meeting with the resistance. His knowledge of both Allied battle plans and the resistance puts the entire French underground in jeopardy if he is captured. As Wehrmacht search parties are already on the way, Patterson is instructed to immediately locate the downed plane "and see where the trail leads. (The pilot's logbook is also missing, so be on the lookout for it as well.)" This is followed by a loading screen featuring a fictional "On to Victory!" Army poster (Figure 45).
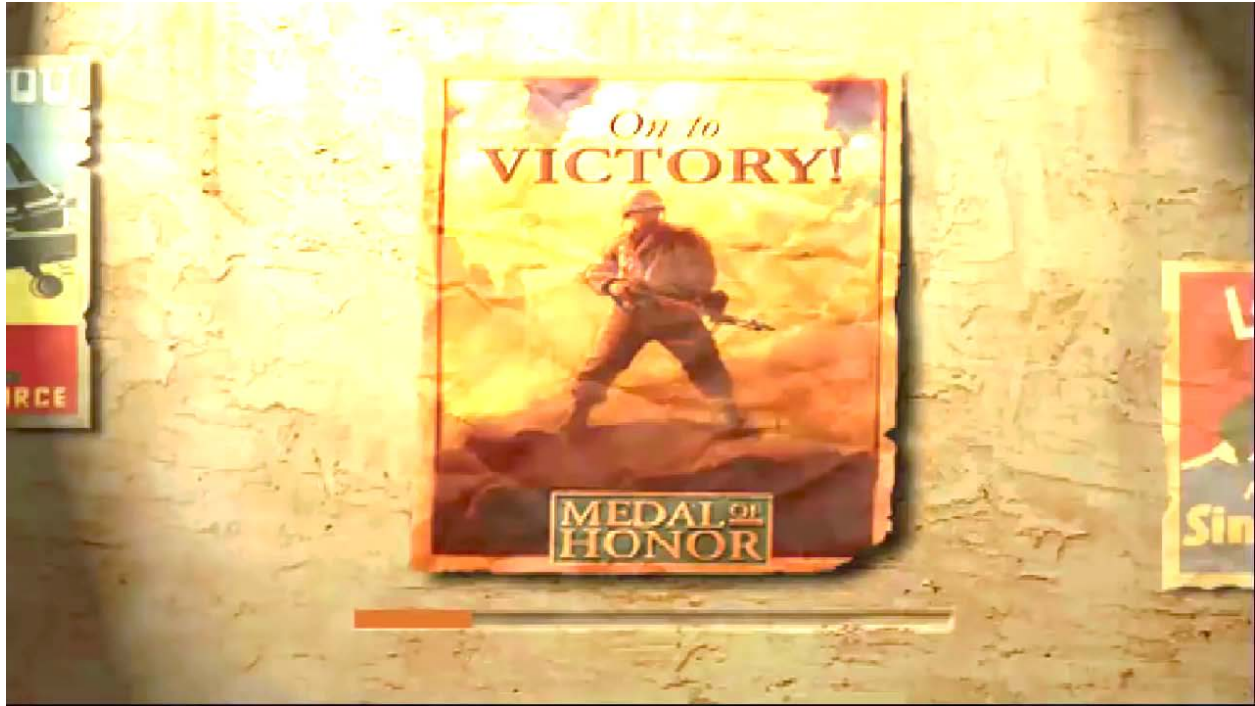
*Figure 45: On to Victory!*

Loading Screen Analysis

The loading screen similarly alludes both to play and to the constructed past: the fictional poster is marked as an artifact via its wear and tear, with a torn bottom-right corner. The call "On to victory!" emulates historical military propaganda, while the game's logo on the bottom of the poster highlights the narrative's fictional status. The wall to which the poster is attached equally combines the materiality of the past setting with the digital present of gameplay. It frames the poster with two other, half-visible ones, and the wall-surface is shown to be irregular and rough. Underneath, a digital loading bar that is embedded in an indented notch carved into the wall, provides feedback about how much loading time has passed.

The loading screen dovetails the virtuality of gameplay in the player's present-time with the evocation of past material culture. The poster, given the explicit use of the game's logo, can not be confused with a historical artifact. It is merely appropriating the aesthetics and—via wear

and tear—the 'oldness' of the poster that allows it to stand in for a historical object and to evoke the archive effect without attempting to claim a 'truly archival' status. The combination of manufactured materials with the game's logo thus anticipates the game's experience as a virtual re-enactment of violence in a faux historical space, rather than providing an experience of gameplay as a domestic activity grounded in the present. Again, this focus serves to counter anxieties connected to the genre's past games like *Doom* that had no such strong attention to its diegesis and found themselves exposed to accusations of promoting school violence because their ungrounded violence was seen as having no narrative or ideological purpose other than to add shock value.

The game's official strategy book replicates the dual address of player-as-historical soldier, which grounds the players actions within *MoH*'s historical diegesis. Paratexts like strategy guides cannot speak directly to the experience of play. However, given its official release and backing by DreamWorks Interactive, this strategy book can reflect on the company's intentions. They are not necessarily identical with the actual experiences of play, but they are indicative of the ideological aspirations of game company's publisher *Electronic Art*, and as such worthy of exploration.


Game Strategy Guide

The *Medal of Honor Official Strategy Guide* (1999) recursively mimics several text genres within its pages, framing a presentation of German NPCs (see chapter III), weapons used in the game's diegesis and basic battle strategies in a fictional OSS Handbook (Figure 46). Its mission guide is presented as a 'most secret' folder compiled for Patterson (Figure 47).
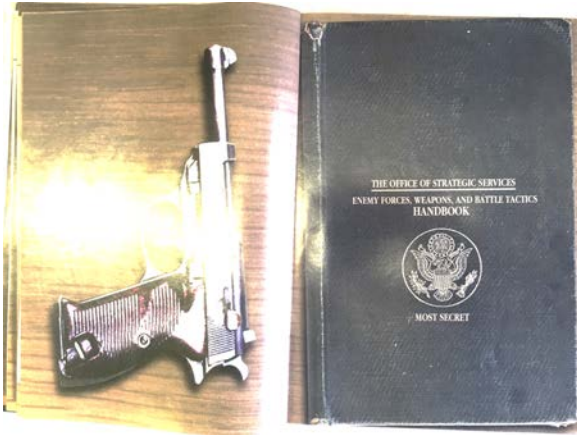
*Figure 46: OSS Handbook*
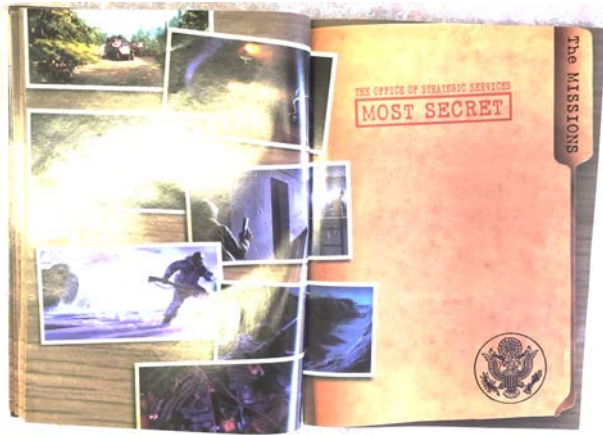


*Figure 47: Missions Guide File*

The pages that contain the handbook's cover feature the background of a wooden table, on the left side of which Patterson's Walther P38 handgun is placed (Figure 46). By doing so, it establishes the book as an object within the setting of the game. As in gameplay, the readers view the objects before them on the table through the eyes of Patterson. The 'book's' language reinforces this type of historically framed identification. It opens with "Lieutenant, you will encounter numerous enemies…," establishing the 'you' of the text, and thus the reader, as Patterson, who is frequently addressed as "Jimmy" thereafter. At the same time, it features abstract references to gameplay that are targeted at the player in the present.
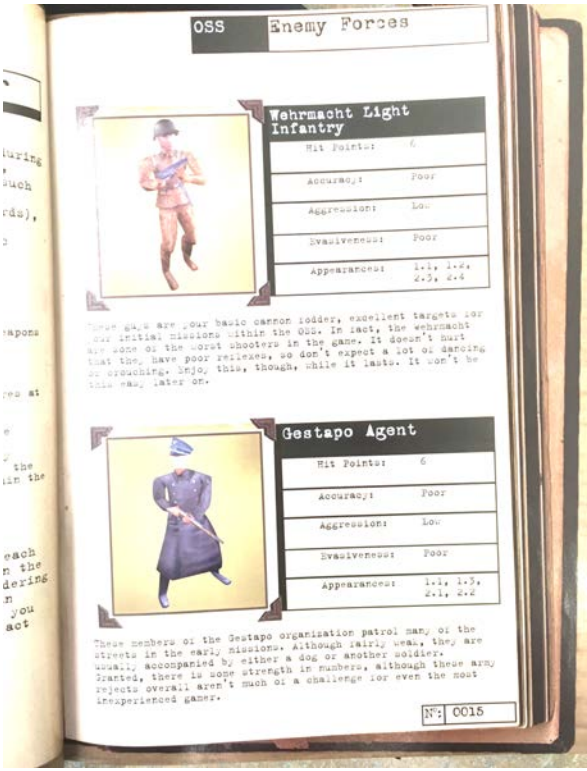
Figure 48: Enemy Forces
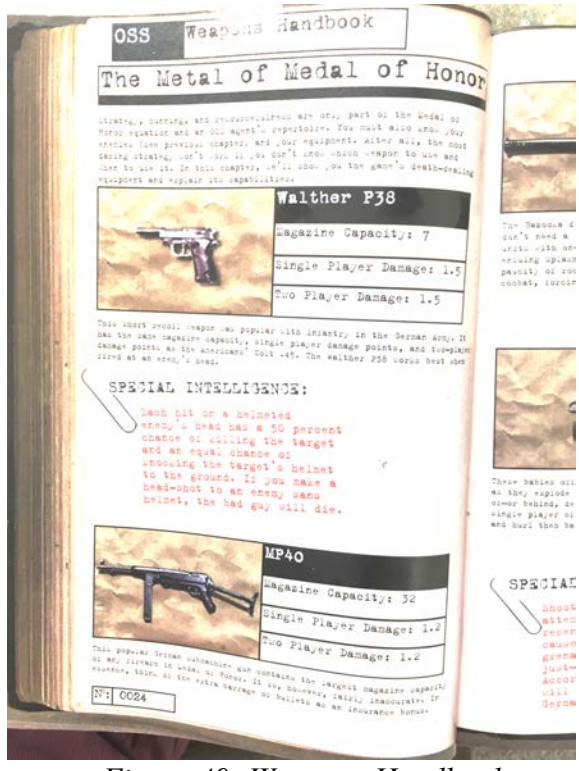


Figure 49: Weapons Handbook

Figure 48 shows images of two NPC categories within the game: the "Wehrmacht Light Infantry" soldier and the "Gestapo Agent." These images are computer-generated to facilitate recognition during game play; however, they are presented as material photographs, pasted into the book via adhesive mounting corners. Both NPC categories are described to the player via their "hit points,"— the amount of damage required to defeat them, "accuracy"—their ability to directly hit the player-character, "aggression"—the degree to which the enemy will pursue or fire at Patterson, "evasiveness"—their ability to evade attacks, and "appearances"—the missions that feature them. While some of these categories could be framed to directly address Patterson, the

categories of "hit points" and "appearances" represent such a level of abstraction and an awareness of future missions that they must be aimed at the player.

Later in the book, however, a note explicitly combines the abstract category of hit points with the address of Patterson: "Humans (whether yourself or the Germans, Jimmy) take approximately 24 points of damage for every second they are in the explosion…" (32) Besides using the category of hit points, the class of "humans" represents an equally abstract group. While "humans" in the physical world feature an enormous range of different strength and tenacity, the text frames them as a category of NPCs, while still addressing Patterson as the note's reader. As a result, it speaks to the player's actions and strategic decision as being those of Patterson, and thus locates gameplay in *Medal of Honor*'s past diegesis.

The *Weapons Handbook*, while not nearly as thorough as the weapon descriptions in *Call of Duty*'s strategy guide (chapter IV), describes both the weapons' in-game use, and their historical relevance to WWII, again locating tools of the player in the historical world of the game. Figure 49 shows a Walther P38 and a MP40 submachine gun, while a chart indicates both their magazine capacities, and the point-value of the damage they deal to Patterson's enemies. Like the description of the enemies, these abstract values possess relevance only in the context of gameplay. Below the chart, a small blurb indicates that "[t]his short recoil weapon was popular with infantry in the German army" (24), providing some level of historical context. Underneath the blurb, a paperclipped "special intelligence" note again provides numerical values that instruct the player, with the paperclip functioning as a hinge between the flatness of the printed guide

book and the three-dimensional handbook on Patterson's desk: "Each hit on a helmeted enemy's head has a 50 percent chance of killing the target…" (24).

The weapon handbook's fetishistic depiction of historical weapons not only provides the player with gameplay instructions, but also plugs into contemporary gun culture and its celebration of historical weaponry. It features twelve weapons ranging from the Springfield '01 Sniper Rifle—"100 percent American made" (26)—and the Thompson Sub Machine Gun—"popular with American Commando forces in both World War II and the Korean War" (27)—to the M1 Garand rifl —"famous for becoming the first standard self-loading rifle in American military history" (29). As a result of these descriptions, the faux handbook reads in large part as much as a game guide as it does as a gun collector's catalogue. Its proud introduction of the "100 percent American made" rifle echoes a popular discourse within U.S. consumer culture that is to a large extent centered around cars and, more importantly, firearms.

The "popular" and "famous" WWII guns within the game replicate the history buff's desire to shoot the quality technology that once fueled the Greatest Generation's offensives, reenacting their attacks from a historical distance. The book thus advertises the game's virtual guns as tools to re-live a proud moment in American history—an American success by U.S. troops and U.S.-manufactured weaponry of the past. However, the image of the Walther P38 handgun (Figure 49) also recalls its earlier use as a prop positioned next to the OSS Strategy Book's cover (Figure 46). By doing so, it underlines Patterson's gun ownership and reinforces the notion that he is the 'true' reader of the book, further conflating the player and the player-character.

This dual address in the guide's fictional texts cannot be merely dismissed as part of the strategy guide-genre. Other games' guides, including those published by *BradyGames*, only

rarely attempt to replicate the players' subject positions. For example, the company's strategy guide for *Mario 64* (1996) clearly differentiates between acts of play and the player-character's actions—"When sliding down a hill, *you* can jump to regain control *of Mario*" (4, my emphasis). Neither is this a question of game genre—even in later FPSs' guides, the conflation of subject positions remains minimal. While the strategy guide for *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (2007) does refer to an NPC as "your CO [Commanding Officer]," it never masquerades as a document from within the game's diegesis. It also never addresses readers by the characters' names,[58] and instead primarily refers to the player's rather than to the player-character's strategic choices: "*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* is not the type of game you can just charge through" (13).

The subject position of the *Medal of Honor* strategy guide thus uniquely provides an explicit reinforcement of the game's implicit subject position to its readers and as a result allows its ideology to come to the surface. While its collection of fictional texts cannot possibly reflect the multiplicity of play experiences shaped by the players, their individual environment, and cultural context, it reveals the publisher's intended subject positions. Its recursive "book-within-the-book" style and use of historical artifacts that address its readers as Patterson establish a framework for historical reenactment that incorporates abstract references to gameplay and contemporary gun culture into the violent past space of the game. Effectively, they dislocate these present moments from the domestic sphere by reinforcing the place that major elements of gameplay, such as weapons, occupy in the game's diegesis. As a result, like the artifacts described by Allison (see above), these moments become "placed securely in the past…" (169). The guide thus constitutes an artifact that draws attention to the game's distinction from former

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[58] There are several player-characters over the course of the game

FPSs, as it highlights the strategy of separating *Medal of Honor*'s violent gameplay from the

present and locating it in the past.

Following the loading screen discussed above, gameplay commences. The screen now

consists of a three-dimensional representation of game space in which the player operates as

Patterson, while the HUD communicates gameplay details to the player (Figure 50). This HUD,

as I will show later, illustrates the games design as based on the Nintendo 64 game

*GoldenEye007*.



*Figure 50: Mission 1*
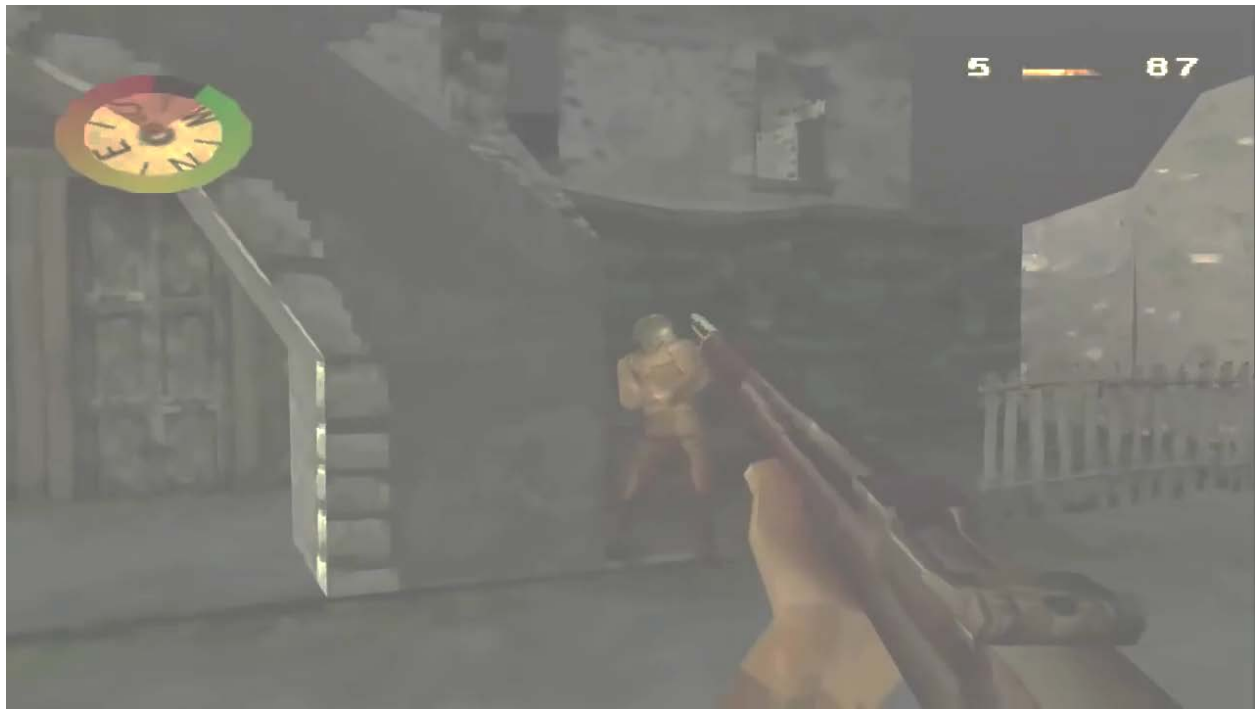
On the top right, the image of a bullet indicates the current weapon used. To its left, a

number shows the amount of ammunition available before needing to reload, while to its right, a

number indicates the overall available ammunition for this weapon. On the top left, a compass

signals the direction of the player-character. It is surrounded by a circle ranging in color from

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green to red. As the player receives damage, this circle begins to recede—once it completely disappears, the player-character has died and failed the mission, although his death is eliminated from the overall narrative (see below). Whenever the player-character is hit by hostile fire, a red triangle on the compass indicates the direction of the attack. The HUD thus combines the materiality of artifacts (bullet, compass) that correspond the Patterson's historical space with abstract non-diegetic, often numerical, indicators that provide feedback to the player. In the case of the compass, both types elements are combined via the colored circle and the red triangles.

Using the HUD, the player engages with the virtual space by fulfilling the game's specific objectives: recovering intelligence from a pilot, who turns out to have fallen to his death, and finding his plane. Sneaking through a maze of hedges and town streets, Patterson makes his way toward the plane, ideally killing all German soldiers on the way. Unlike trench warfare, the player rarely encounters a group of more than three soldiers. This speaks to both the technological limitations of the 1994 *PlayStation*, and the thematic and ludic significance of Patterson as soldier-spy, as opposed to *Doom*'s or *Wolfenstein 3D*'s run-and-gun type of gameplay. Once the pilot's logbook is recovered from the plane, which is guarded by two soldiers, the player is prompted to check his updated mission objectives. These ask him to move into the nearby town, eliminate at least eight Gestapo officers, sabotage their radio transmitter and find the hideout of the French resistance. Once Patterson enters the hideout, the mission concludes and, depending on the successful achievement of all objectives, moves on to mission two. Alternatively—for example, if Patterson did not recover the pilot's logbook or find the plane before entering the town or did not destroy the radio transmitter—the player is forced to restart the beginning of the first mission in order to carry out all required objectives.

*Engagement with Space*

Gameplay links this narrative closely to an engagement with its faux historical space. The player progresses through the French village by moving the controller's two joysticks with their left and right thumb. The left joystick corresponds to the virtual camera's (i.e. Patterson's) horizontal movements. Pushing the stick to the front and back leads the player-character forward and backward, while pushing it to the left and right causes him to "strafe," i.e. walk sideways in a straight line.[59] The right joystick tilts and pans the virtual camera by pressing up or down (tilting up and down) and sideways (panning to left and right), while the use of the buttons causes Patterson to attack, run, or move in a prone position. It does not allow for unusual means of movement (walking on hands, skipping, etc.).

This limitation, which is arguably a result of the *PlayStation*'s processing power at the time and the number of the controller's buttons and joysticks, does not present itself as a true constriction. Unusual means of movement would be of no use in the represented conflict and skipping through the battlefield would be perceived as historically inaccurate, and thus hamper immersion. Chapman ascribes a similar relationship between the perception of historical accuracy and immersion when he talks about objects within the game, although he rejects the term immersion, due to the hyperbolic promises attached to the name and its frequent conflation with the concept of 'flow' (68; 84). He claims that within the realist simulation style, which includes games like *Medal of Honor*, the "rule-governed behaviors ascribed to objects/environments and characters … will often try to *show* the past as it is claimed to have appeared to agents" (61). I argue that the abilities of the player-character (i.e. the game's *subject*), including their limitations, function similarly in the realist simulation style. Patterson's

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[59] *Medal of Honor* permits the player to choose between two differently mapped controller layouts that offer variations on which buttons trigger which actions. In my analysis, I focus on the pre-set layout 1.

movements, as executed by the player, are subject to limitations inherent in the game's rules

which reflect constraints present in the past event simulated by *Medal of Honor*. This contributes

to the game's sense of realism.

The player's movements are funneled through the virtual space by means of obstacles

that allow for few variations. While in the 'real' world, bushes, houses and fences would allow

someone access if they forced themselves through by breaking doors or jumping over low

fences. But, the game limits movements to a maze-like obstacle course (Figure 51) that features a

meandering route with a large number of dead ends. The feeling of presence in this space is thus

not limited by Patterson's physical abilities—there is no narrative motivation, like injuries, to his

inability to perform these actions—but the game's abstract rules determine the player's
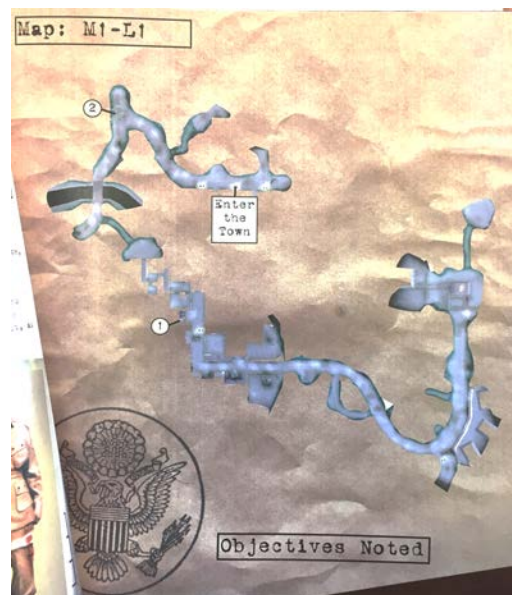
interaction with space.



*Figure 51: Mission 1 Map (taken from the Strategy Guide)*

While the game rules' arbitrary nature could be argued to hamper immersion, more

importantly, these limitations ultimately function to tie gameplay into the invariable overall

narrative of successes embedded in the historical environment of WWII. Chapman has provided

the first theorization of space in historical video games, in which he argues that these games require the player to negotiate "real space in response to, and to gain particular responses from, screen-based spatial representations" (100). Agreeing with his conclusions, I find that the space of *Medal of Honor*, which structures the player-character's hostile encounters within a maze, constitutes a narrative resource in its own right. It not only anticipates the player's actions by guiding their movement through the game space but also provides narrative cues in both its maze-like design and its visual inventory of WWII film tropes.

In fact, the narrative structure of the maze-type game reinforces the construction of Patterson's intelligence and courage. In *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), Janet Murray explains the lasting appeal of the maze structure, as it melds "a cognitive problem (finding the path) with an emotionally symbolic pattern (finding what is frightening and unknown) …" (130) Like my earlier description of Patterson, she finds that the maze story appeals to the player-character's "combination of intelligence and courage" (130). Calling upon Patterson's (and the player's) courage and intelligence, the construction of *Medal of Honor*'s spatial diegesis as a maze thus directly reflects the conception of Patterson as courageous—as his heroic efforts of taking out six Wehrmacht soldiers alone illustrated at the beginning of the game—and intelligent. In his opening address, Hargrove praises Patterson's success during his schoolwork: "Excellent leadership skills, noted for being especially smart and resourceful…" with "straight As, from start to finish." The construction of space in the OSS's missions thus confirm the player-character's ideal abilities and offers the player an attractive object of identification as a result.

The game space itself recalls the material inventory of WWII combat films, even if in a far less developed fashion than during its less interactive moments like mission briefings. Set in the ruins of a war-torn French village (Figure 52), the first mission uses visual tropes familiar

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from WWII movies like Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. The image includes both a demolished vehicle marked as part of Nazi Germany technology via the Wehrmacht's *Balkenkreuz* ("bar cross") emblem and a corridor of ruined brick stone buildings. Figure 53, one of many possible examples across the film and the genre in general, illustrates the presence of the same visual language in *Saving Private Ryan* that features a similar corridor of ruins.

Chapman calls the spatial structures that link space and narrative by embedded information "narrative gardens," and compares the unfolding of their narratives to those of theme-park rides and sequentially staged formal gardens (102). His description of game space as a deliberate structure that incorporates both the smaller gameplay level and the larger, invariable historical narrative resonates with my reading of *MoH* as an immersive experience that remains contained within a historically and ideologically invariable framework—an experience, that allows for some agency on the game play level, while the overall narrative—to use Chapman's metaphor of the theme park ride—remains 'on rails.'

One should, however, not simply dismiss this limited agency, as the navigation of space provides the player with a meaningful catalyst for immersion. In *The Medium of the Video Game* (2001), Mark Wolf looks into the player's agency in maze-type games, explaining that "off-screen space can often be actively investigated and explored by the player [, which] . . . can constitute a large part of game play itself" (52). The spatial consistency of these spaces allows players to view it "from multiple angles and varied viewpoints…" (66) Not only is this agency meaningful for immersion, but its limitation allows the greater ideology of American success to pervade gameplay design and distinguish it from former FPSs.

*Figure 52: Mission One*


*Figure 53: The French town of Ramelle in Saving Private Ryan (1998)*

Embedding gameplay within a rigid, ideologically inconspicuous historical frame and grounding Patterson as a historical subject with great identificatory appeal was all the more necessary at the time of *Medal of Honor*'s release because of the post-Columbine discourse. The constant presence of the gun in this FPS consistently marks the game space as one of violent

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conflict. Allison confirms this when she writes that "[t]he visual and spatial experience of the game is intrinsically linked to the violence perpetrated through the weapons, which are usually a permanent fixture at the bottom of the screen" (179). However, this is not merely a matter of aesthetics. As "video game space is 'actionable' predominantly through shooting" (179) in FPSs, both its visuals and its engagement through play unsurprisingly find counterparts in former iterations of the genre like *Doom* and thus need to be contained in a historical narrative framework that extends to the game's construction of the player subject position in order to not attract concern.

*POV*

      As I have laid out in this dissertation's introduction, the relationship between the POV shot and immersion is a complicated one. Scholars like Laurie Taylor (2003) have claimed that, rather than functioning as a catalyst for immersion, the inability of the FPS to portray the player-character during gameplay leads to issues with projection and suspension of disbelief. She argues that "[a]n exclusively first-person point-of-view impoverishes spatial presentation in the game and removes the possibility of the player playing within the game space, which removes the possibility for the player to internally experience the game space" (29). In an exploration of online games, Taylor similarly claims that avatars, i.e. the visible embodiments of the player-character, "are crucial in producing a sense of presence, of 'worldness'" (117). Other scholars, often coming from a different disciplinary background, have disagreed with this view. Geographers Ian Shaw and Barney Warf (2009) claim that the "removal of an on-screen object facilitates the player's unmediated encounter with virtual space" (1336). Yet, as my discussion of *MoH* illustrates, Taylor is correct in claiming that, indeed, immersion in WWII FPSs is tied more strongly to the idea of realistically offering a quasi-touristic access to past events, in which the

player can move relatively freely within rules that mark the game as physically and historically accurate.

It is thus spatial agency rather than just visual identification that impacts the experience of gameplay. In *Digital Games as History* (2016), social scientist and game scholar Adam Chapman finds the realism of historical FPSs to be grounded in the impossible attempt to show the past 'as it really was' via rule-governed behaviors that align the past with the everyday logic of the present. They exhibit a high level of visual specificity that draws from codes and tropes of Western cinematic realism and offer the player a type of spatial agency and control over the virtual gaze (61-66). Both spatial agency and its limitation by the game's specific rules contribute to the *MoH*'s immersion and its restrictions that ideologically ground the game. As a result, it creates the feeling of being transported to the scenario's time and space via the actions of the player. This restricts the game's violent play to a specific setting that differs from the present world, and, ironically, to the context of virtual representation, rendering its violence less suspect. Unlike FPSs with fictional violent scenarios, like *Doom*, the setting of *Medal of Honor* is clearly defined and distinguished from the present by its historical framing.

Additionally, the FPS *Medal of Honor* does not offer a representation of the player character on screen in the manner of *Saving Private Ryan*, whose main characters can be seen by the audience. As point-of-view long takes, to use a correspondent concept from film analysis, no level's gameplay includes images of Patterson, who is only seen during cinematic cutscenes and on documents between the levels, leaving the players with a view of only their enemies; the decision not to constantly shoot a gun is driven by the risk of being exposed, or unnecessarily

depleting the available bullet rounds, rather than by the concern of friendly fire.[60] As a result, the virtual camera becomes equivalent with the weapons' crosshairs: what is seen is to be killed. Due to the genre's ubiquity throughout the United States in the late 1990s, it is safe to conclude that in spite of the inability to play within the game space, as pointed out by Taylor, these games possess the ability to excite their players. As I will show, the apparatus of the game itself takes over the identificatory position of the visible player-character, removing the need for an on-screen human object for identification.

In his book *The Imaginary Signifier* (1982), Christian Metz shows that identification with on-screen characters or their actors during a film is secondary to the primary identification with the cinematic apparatus itself, an identification that does not require a human on-screen presence. His reason for this belief is that even the presence of a human object on screen, "still tell[s] us nothing about the *place of the spectator's ego* in the inauguration of the signifier" (47). Rather, as the spectators identify with themselves as 'looking', they similarly associate with the camera, or its placeholder during the film's screening, the projector. As a result, they are not startled when pans or tracking shots simulate their bodies' movements, while they remain still: the viewer has "no need to turn [his body] really, he has turned in his all-seeing capacity, his identification with the movement of the camera being that of a transcendental, not an empirical subject" (50). The critical failure of Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947), and the intellectual labor required to engage with art films like Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void* (2009), both of which were shot entirely from their protagonists' points of view, point to the fact that the absence of a secondary identification with an on-screen protagonist constitutes, in fact, a hurdle

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[60] The missions that include the extraction of friendly soldiers from enemy territory do feature non-hostile characters on the screen, however, these are rare instances.

for a film's immersive powers. Even when this hurdle is facilitated by an idiosyncratic cinematic style that leaves a viewer largely unprepared for a film, self-identification 'as look' does not appear to come naturally to viewers.

This, however, is different in the genre of the FPS video game. Unlike in film, the camera is not a transcendental subject in games, but operates within a set of predetermined conditions, controlled by the players themselves. As a result, the relationship between players and their virtual bodies transcends mere self-identification-as-vision in the sense of Metz: the players' agency within the game's strict parameters allows them to identify with the apparatus trifold: as vision, as movement, and as aggression. On top of Patterson, *Medal of Honor*'s players are invited to identify with the revealing, kinetic and destructive capabilities of the game's virtual camera—Patterson's eyes—and his gun. To modify Metz' quote, the apparatus is more than the audience's "all-seeing capacity" to the players. To them, the all-seeing capacity, the moving capacity, and the destructive capacity within the game's diegesis all form the game's apparatus that serves as the player's point of identification. It is this conflation of vision and violence that constitutes the primary mode of engaging with the FPS's game space. Thus, in order for *Medal of Honor* to distinguish itself from pre-Columbine-era games, it required a robust historical narrative in order to motivate its focus on aggression.

*Death*

The absence of the player-character's death from *MoH*'s narrative empowers players with fantasies of immortality but limits them by not allowing any alternative outcomes, including Patterson's death. In its treatment of death, *Medal of Honor* is situated between classic arcade-style games that provide the player character with a number of lives and entirely reset the

program once they are depleted,[61] and "save anywhere" games that eliminate the concept of lives and allow the players to create a save point[62] wherever they desire.[63] Patterson's inability to die reinforces the game's overall ideology of American success during WWII. Rather than focusing on the very real prospect of death U.S. troops faced in Europe, eliminating his mission failures from the storyline results in the narrative of an exceptionally apt soldier, which in turn contributes to the player-character's desirability as a source of identification.

When the player character in *Medal of Honor* is fatally wounded, the virtual camera, now deprived of its function as a gun and unavailable to the player's controls, tilts up to suggest that Patterson has fallen on his back, the screen fades to black, and without suggesting physical harm by showing blood, the mission restarts from its beginning, not acknowledging this moment. It thus differs from games that tie death into their narratives like *Call of Duty 4* (2007), *The Last of Us* (2013) and—a new development in a historical war FPS—*Battlefield 1* (2016), forcing the player to abandon the fantasy of an indestructible stand-in and introducing a new player-character after the first one's passing, Patterson's death erases the failed mission from the overall progress. Every mission, and eventually the game itself, is finished by means of a player-character that has never died or failed a task. Appropriately, the virtually embodied gun can only kill, but not be killed. It is not possible to circumvent this purge of failure from the overall

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[61] Examples include Namco's *Pac-Man* (1980), Konami's *Frogger* (1981) and Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* (1985).

[62] A save point is created when the player saves the game's progress at a particular time and place within the diegesis, prompting the game to restart there, rather than at the beginning of the level or a pre-determined checkpoint when the player-character has died or failed the mission otherwise.

[63] Historically more associated with PC gaming than console gaming, examples of this include Rockstar Games' *Max Payne 2* (2003) and Valve Corporation's *Half-Life 2* (2004).

narrative and have Patterson die. As a result, the character invincibility not only empowers players, but restricts them as well.

Constructing an alternative (hi-)story by allowing Patterson to be killed by Axis soldiers lies outside of the spectrum of possibilities, as the game's outcome has been predetermined. The player is forced to perform an individual story that, in its trajectory toward success, condenses the broad overall narrative ark of the Allied forces' victorious struggle in WWII into the narrative of a single victorious soldier. Thus, the absence of failure and death both empower and limit the players, forcing them to perform the story of the troops' greatness on an individual level. Unlike *Saving Private Ryan*, *Medal of Honor* is no memorial to the sacrifice of fallen heroes, but a synecdochical portrayal of the U.S. military *in toto* as the invincible super-soldier Patterson.

### *GoldenEye007* (1997)
The far less controversial 1997 Nintendo James Bond FPS *GoldenEye007*, on which *Medal of Honor* was based—even though it was not set in WWII—shows that the drastic reduction (or even elimination) of blood and gore could help FPS's acceptance as a genre. *GoldenEye007* was located in the James Bond universe, the films of which had never exceeded a PG-13 rating and were widely accepted as harmless entertainment. Equally important, the game was exclusively released on Nintendo's *N64* console that had the reputation of featuring family-friendly games. Given the popularity of *GoldenEye007*, console players of 1999 would have likely been familiar with it and would have recognized the similarities in *MoH* that go far beyond the player-characters' first names. The Nintendo game constitutes the first moment in which a console, rather than a PC, featured the ability to play an FPS, which explains the overlap in

design. As a result, players are invited to react to *Medal of Honor*'s similarities by constructing

Patterson within the framework of Bond's personal traits.

At the time, Nintendo had successfully established itself as a major distributor of family-friendly video games by contrasting their products with SEGA's more adult-oriented releases in the December 9, 1993 senate hearings focused on video game violence. In particular, the senate hearings discussed games *Night Trap* (1992) and Sega's violent version of *Mortal Kombat* (1992)—which sold significantly better than Nintendo's heavily censored release of the same title. Initiated by democrat Joe Lieberman, the hearing claimed that Nintendo was a game company that constituted no major cause for concern. Games like Sega's *Mortal Kombat* and their graphic violence, on the other hand, ultimately led to concerns that resulted in the founding of the Entertainment Software Rating Board. In "Super Mario Nation" (1997), Steven L. Kent sums up the negotiations by stating that while the committee "gave grudging praise to Nintendo for editing *Mortal Kombat*, they condemned the entire industry for recklessly allowing children access to acts of extreme violence" (47).

*Medal of Honor* was released on the Sony *PlayStation*, a platform that had published a large roster of mature-rated violent games since its 1995 U.S. release,[64] and found itself in a similar position to Sega and other game publishers that released adult content: the senate hearings raised public awareness and anxiety about games that featured virtual violence. It remained a challenge to counter the public perception of the FPS as a subversively violent genre within its own, not explicitly all-age appropriate, publication context. *MoH* with its connections to *Saving Private Ryan* and its evocation of historical material culture was instrumental in

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[64] Some examples are Mortal Kombat 3 (Midway Games, 1995), Doom (Williams Entertainment, 1995), Loaded (Interplay Entertainment Corp., 1995), Alien Trilogy (Acclaim Entertainment, 1996), Die-Hard Trilogy (Fox Interactive, 1996), and Resident Evil (Capcom, 1996).

shifting the perception of the FPS genre away from Nintendo's quasi-monopoly on family-friendly releases.

*GoldenEye007* itself largely translated the plot of *GoldenEye* (1995) film into an interactive medium. Like *Medal of Honor*'s overall representation of successful U.S. history, its overall adapted storyline remains unchanged (see my discussion of Chapman above): In his first post-cold war appearance, Bond investigates two electromagnetic "GoldenEye" weapon satellites, whose control has fallen into the hands of a Russian crime syndicate. This syndicate is headed by Bond's former MI6 comrade Alec Trevelyan, who plans to use the satellites against the UK. Locating the satellite dish in Cuba, Bond is captured, while 'bondgirl' Natalya Simonova manages to destroy the satellite by programming it to enter the earth's atmosphere and rescue Bond.

Given the game's basis in *GoldenEye007*, the elevation of the player-character to an idealized supersoldier in *MoH* is reinforced by transtextual pointers to the genre of the spy thriller, and to the James Bond franchise more specifically. Communication professor Kimberly Neuendorf et al. (2009) echo a wide consensus among scholars[65], critics, and fans when they point out that "the uber-masculine persona of James Bond has been a predictable element for the Bond franchise's worldwide audience" (747). As a result of these expectations, linking Patterson to Bond by emulating *GoldenEye007*'s transfers some of his traits to *Medal of Honor*'s protagonist.

The player's ability to become Bond in the highly acclaimed and financially successful (8 million copies sold[66]) FPS *GoldenEye007* for the Nintendo 64 console infuses play with the

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[65] Cf. Amis (1965, ch. 4), Bennett and Woollacott (1987, ch.7), Black (2001, ch.6), etc.

[66] Bateman and Boon (2006, 233)

cultural, social and sexual prowess Bond exhibits throughout the franchise, not the least in Martin Campbell's *GoldenEye* (1995). While *GoldenEye007*'s gameplay itself offers the same subject position of player-as-gun as *Medal of Honor*, external framings of Bond immerse the player with empowering fantasies of "uber-masculinity," the extent of which would not directly result from the game in isolation. In *GoldenEye*, James Bond's masculinity occurs because of his cultivation and cunning, rather than physical power, which renders him as an ideal agent for secret missions. The film establishes his upper-class cultivation through status symbols like luxurious watches and cars (and women, one could argue). His strong sexual appetite and lack of care for the expensive gadgets he uses (much to the chagrin of their inventor, 'Q') are presented as a superior virtue in contrast to romantic feelings or responsible behavior. Throughout the film (and series), women are highly objectified, and Q's reactions are that of an absentminded inventor, which elevates Bond's disengaged coolness. His intimate knowledge of covert tactics, technology and politics finds its counterpart in Patterson's strong educational background and his sneak-attack on Wehrmacht soldiers prior to the game's beginning.

Design for *Medal of Honor* began in November 1997, three months after the release of *GoldenEye007*. This Nintendo 64 game is widely acknowledged as having a general influence on later console FPSs, especially in its development of local multiplayer capacities and its control scheme that in variations would become the standard way of console FPSs' controls. However, the parallels between the missions of James Bond and *Medal of Honor*'s Patterson are more striking than in any later FPSs outside of the Bond franchise.

Early reviews of *Medal of Honor* tirelessly point out the similarities between the two games. Cultural studies scholar Martin Barker (2004) has drawn attention to the ways ancillary materials like reviews shape expectations, and as a result influence the experience of a film,

illustrating that a discussion of these reviews will grand some access into the general perception

of *Medal of Honor*. *Game Informer* (12/99) claims that "if you see someone playing [*Medal of*

*Honor*], you may think that it's a sequel [to *Goldeneye007*] or a new James Bond game. The

resemblance between the two products is uncanny" (49), *GameWeek* Magazine (November/99)

asks its readers to "[l]et PlayStation owners know that this is their *GoldenEye*" (14), and *Official*

*U.S. Playstation Magazine*'s Kraig Kujawa (12/99) calls it "World War II's version of 007"

(132).

Both the reference to the James Bond universe that eerily resembles *Medal of Honor* in

its combination of stealth and armed conflict, and the idea of a '007 World War II' illustrates

how these games were regarded. *MoH* was seen as merely changing the setting of the narrative

of the earlier game. *MoH* is indeed 'their,' i.e. *PlayStation* players', *GoldenEye007* in that both

games tie their decidedly ungory violence to an established framework—the James Bond

universe and representations of WWII, respectively—and, in public reception, form a different

type of FPS game than *Doom* with its gory conflicts that possess no well-established precedent in

popular culture.



*Figure 54: GoldenEye007*

Figure 54 demonstrates the aesthetic and ludic similarities between *Medal of Honor* and *GoldenEye007*. While both feature typical elements of the FPS—the maze-like organization of the virtual space and the centered gun and the bottom of the screen—the HUD with its image of a bullet corresponding to the currently used weapon and the numeric indication of rounds remaining overall and in the current clip is an innovation on the part of *GoldenEye007*'s designers that was directly adopted in *DreamWorks*' 1999 release. However, *MoH* moved these elements to the top left of the screen from the bottom right. The game's control design by Nintendo allowed an FPS for the first time to be played on a console, rather than through the PC-typical peripherals of keyboard and mouse.

Both games' designs were limited by the technical capacities of their respective consoles (the *Nintendo 64* and the *PlayStation*), as they did not have the calculating power, online-play[67], and complex controller periphery of a contemporary personal computer at their disposal. Media journalist Ben Gill writes in the *Encyclopedia of Video Games* that "*GoldenEye 007* (1997) . . . made first person shooting games a viable proposition on consoles when previously the genre had been associated primarily with home computers because the mouse-and-keyboard controls allowed for greater aiming precision and their on-line capabilities provided a multiplayer experience that wouldn't exist on consoles for several years" (139). Thus, it comes as no surprise that *Medal of Honor* looked to Nintendo's first successful console FPS for inspiration, as it had overcome these limitations to produce a highly successful game.

*Medal of Honor* portrays missions of espionage and sabotage that find their counterpart in cultural memory of the covert aggressions of the Cold War era and its aftermath, as fictionalized

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[67] Sega's Dreamcast, the first home console with online play capabilities, would not be released in North America until 1999.

by the Bond franchise[68], rather than in WWII's "real" battles. This is evident in Patterson's relationship with the opposite sex, and Manon Batiste in particular.

Patterson's French liaison Manon Batiste, who starts out with addressing the player-character with a polite "Bonjour. . .Welcome to the fight!" begins to show a personal investment in Patterson in later mission briefs, asking him to "[b]e careful," refers to him as "mon pote" ("my buddy") and "mon ami" ("my friend"), and becomes mindful of her word choices when referring to a former love interest, calling him "[a]n old ~~boyfriend~~, er, male acquaintance of mine" (strikethrough in original). In light of a new German weapon she asks him to "[t]read lightly, mon ami" and admits to "hav[ing] grown fond of [him] over this past year."

EA Games' *Medal of Honor: Heroes* (2006) for the PlayStation Portable hand-held console substantiates this increasingly personable relationship as a trajectory toward romance, as James Patterson is revealed to have proposed to Manon after the war. While players in 1999 could obviously not be familiar with this later narrative development, it confirms that Manon's language choices can be read as more than friendly banter, and that constructing their relationship's dynamics as similar to those of James Bond and his female allies (appropriately referred to as "Bond girls," whose name often allude to their sexualized narrative position[69]) at any particular cinematic installment is, in fact, a valid, "canonical" reading of the franchise's first game. While Patterson's relationship with Manon is framed more romantically than Bond's hypersexual relationships, their ability to attract the opposite sex connects the two characters.

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[68] Particularly striking examples include the films *You Only Live Twice* (1967), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), *A View to a Kill* (1985) and *GoldenEye* (1995).

[69] Examples include Honey Rider in *Dr. No* (1962), Mary Goodnight in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), and Dr. Holly Goodhead in *Moonraker* (1979).

The dynamics of the Bond franchise that influence *MoH*'s retelling of WWII function differently from those that form memory along the lines of culture, nation [70], or language. *Medal of Honor* adapts elements from the financially successful game *GoldenEye007* out of the economic concern to create a successful commodity. Those processes should therefore be framed within the context of capitalism and its media systems, and how adapting the brand of James Bond relates to systems of historical representation which *Medal of Honor* engages in, in general.

Alison Landsberg (2015) claims that with the emergence of mass media and the resulting commodification of historical narratives, memories and images of the past became available as "prosthetic memory" to people who had otherwise no biological claims to them (18). Reacting against Adorno's "culture industry" model and its attack of a commercially structured modernity, Landsberg attempts to redeem capitalism and the technologies of its mass culture by pointing out that they "open up a world of images outside a person's lived experience, creating a portable, fluid, and nonessentialist form of memory" (18). Her optimism that commodified prosthetic memory makes images and narratives "widely available to people who live in different places and come from different backgrounds, races, and classes" (21) neglects to consider the new frameworks of power relationships and privileges that necessarily go along with such a shift toward circulation practices according to free-market principles. However, her notion that productive analyses of memories as commodities require different categories than political ones like 'nation', is a powerful one. Downplayed problems with capitalism are at the center of media scholars Jonathan Bullinger's and Andrew J. Salvati's Marxist anxieties in their attack on "Brand WW2." While they also chide narrative templates that inform our collective memory of the war

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[70] cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1991.

for their reductive tendencies, their major concern lies in the fact that those possessing the

necessary influence are in a position of shaping collective and cultural memory. Within the

capitalist system, memories become "brands" with recognizable visual signifiers and emotional

cues:

> Brands today are nearly ubiquitous elements of our culture, whose inherent reputational economic logic allows them to colonize societal institutions previously assumed to be immune or unrelated to branding. Brands possess a dynamism that allows for cooptation of consumers' immaterial labor that can both challenge and reinforce the core brand message. This results in a cultural memory reduced, packaged, and sold back to the audience as a branded representation left to stand in for historical complexity. (1)

I do not wish to join Bullinger and Salvati in mourning the inferior quality of narrative templates,

as I am not invested here in determining whether they constitute an endorsement for or a defect

of capitalism. However, observing the effects of the templates that were commodified by the film

and video game industry can show us the epistemic space they carve out for their audience, and

the kind of contact with history promised by the medium. Brands like *Medal of Honor* shape

cultural narratives of history, and attention to their status as products of capitalism can show us

how commodities shape such narratives differently than concepts like nation or language.

The player embodies the invincible Patterson, displaced from the Cold War to WWII, and

the difference between player and Bond drives home the point that "[m]ost gamers couldn't hack

the real thing" (*Computer Gaming World* 10/03, 104), elevating the Greatest Generation in the

game in much the same way as the post-1995 discourse in which the game participates. What is

more, *MoH* illustrates Bullinger's and Salvati's concern that within the capitalist system, the

power of shaping collective memory lies within those that already possess the necessary

influence. DreamWorks' literal capital that is needed to produce and distribute an AAA game

like *Medal of Honor* is the most obvious example of this, but Spielberg's cultural capital,

acquired by directing films like *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Saving Private Ryan* also allows his

name to give this WWII Bond adaptation the guise of historical verisimilitude. As I have shown above, in spite of the widely recognized similarities to *GoldenEye 007*, and the vast differences to *Saving Private Ryan*, the attachment of Spielberg's name to *Medal of Honor* caused frustration in reviewers, as the game's lack of blood did not replicate the *SPR*'s markers of realist style, which they mistook for historical verisimilitude. As Spielberg stood for historical accuracy, any departure from a total historical experience, within the limits of the *PlayStation*'s technological abilities, seems to run counter to the associations with his history film work.

*Medal of Honor* adapts the brand of James Bond, along with the construction of its protagonist, based on economic considerations. The highly successful (see above) console game *GoldenEye007* becomes a template for designing a game that promises to be equally profitable. In doing so, *Medal of Honor*'s retelling of WWII history becomes infused with the fictionalized cold-war inventory of conflict that had characterized the majority of the Bond film franchise up to its release. As a result, James Patterson takes on Bond's "uber-masculine persona," both immersing the player by offering transtextual fantasies of power and limiting this immersion by idealizing the invisible uber-soldier.


**<u>Conclusion</u>**

"If ever the romantic notions of being a spy actually existed," *Medal of Honor*'s booklet claims, "it was probably with the OSS" (5). As I have shown, the game's narrative frame and gameplay, built around ideological notions of the post-1994 "Greatest Generation" discourse and the James Bond game *GoldenEye007* indeed romanticizes its violence by attaching it to the trope of the heroic WWII soldier. The game implemented this attachment by suggesting historical authenticity via an attention to historical artifacts and a double-address of player and player-character that embedded gameplay into an overarching quasi-historical story of American

success, unchangeable by death or failure, and as a result dislocated its violence from the present. This proved to be a crucial innovation over former FPSs, which had provided no ideological justification for their detailed displays of blood and gore and came under public scrutiny for allegedly encouraging school shootings. *Medal of Honor*'s less problematic re-visitation of U.S. battles was based on the James Bond game *GoldenEye007* by Nintendo, a company that had been deemed to be family friendly in public and political discourse. It tethered the physically engaging immersion of the player to wholesome American ideologies and laid the groundwork for the 'bad object' of the FPS to become more broadly accepted.

My last chapter will explore how the PC FPS *Call of Duty* (2003) continued to ideologically and historically frame virtual violence as an access to past American success. Emerging after the traumatic event of 9/11 and its resulting ethically convoluted military actions in the Middle East, *CoD* immersed its players into the mythological past of WWII as the just multinational effort against the evils of Nazi Germany.

# CHAPTER IV

## *Call of Duty* (2003): Immersion and Historical Realism

With *Call of Duty*, a second franchise revolving around FPSs representing World War II entered the market in 2003, quickly establishing itself as the *Medal of Honor* series' strongest competitor. A migration of creative talent from Electronic Arts (frequently shortened to EA) to Activision's *CoD* creating studio Infinity Ward established a connection between the new franchise and the heritage of historical representation found in this dissertation.[71] Activision staff claimed in an interview that the company planned to profit from FPS's strong sales by emulating proven modes of representation including its realism and immersive mechanics.

Beforehand, in May 2002, about two-and-a-half years after the original game, *Medal of Honor* (1999), EA published *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. It was the WWII FPS franchise's[72] third release and its first installment for PC, rather than for the *PlayStation*. The year's sixth best-

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[71] Members of the game's developer 2015, Inc., most notably development director Vince Zampella and engineering lead Jason West, soon left Electronic Arts due to unhappiness with the company's leadership and payment issues (Dring). According to its members, however, the creative unit itself had been functioning well. *Allied Assault* level designer and writer Zied Rieke recalls: "We had bonded as a team, but decided we wanted to work with new management. Many members of the team were actually going to leave to find new jobs, regardless of potential royalties coming in from *Medal of Honor*" (ibid). As a result, the team largely remained intact in its transition to new leadership, establishing a sense of continuity in labor between the two franchises.

[72] See chapter III

selling video game,[73] it received much critical acclaim from magazines like *Computer Gaming World* and *GameSpy*

Electronic Arts' most direct competitor, game publisher Activision, signed much of *Allied Assault*'s development team, grouping them into a new development studio they named Infinity Ward, a move that did not go unnoticed in game magazines. *Computer Gaming World* acknowledged: "Infinity Ward is comprised or more than 20 former members of '2015', the company that developed *Allied Assault*" (35). Activision tasked the new studio to develop a game thematically and generically similar to *Allied Assault* in order to expand their North America-heavy game sales to include more international success,[74] assuming WWII to be a universally attractive setting (Dring). The publisher was not shy in communicating that it was looking for its own version of *Allied Assault*. Scott Dodkins, Activision's vice president at the time, remembers the company's wish to "get the men that made *Medal of Honor* to make a version of *Medal of Honor* but under a different name . . ." (Dring).

By combining quasi-cinematic aesthetics with a references to historical artifacts, *Call of Duty* and its marketing materials set out to construct an immersive player experience, the narrative of which reinforces and reinterprets the U.S.-centric ideology of *Medal of Honor*'s 'Greatest Generation' discourse.

Game publications noticed the similarity between the games at the time of *Call of Duty*'s release, primarily citing issues of intellectual property, rather than its content, as the reason

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[73] https://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_030128a.htm

[74] In the years preceding *Call of Duty* (2003), Activision had mostly published tie-in game versions of U.S.-American film productions like *The Lion King: Simba's Mighty Adventure* (2000), lines of games based on Marvel's X-Men (2000, 2000b, 2001, 2001b, 2002) and the Star Trek (1999, 2000, 2000b, 2001, 2001b) franchises, as well as a game based on Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002)

Activision did not release the game under the *Medal of Honor* brand. Computer Gaming World

(10/03) wrote:

> So why don't they call it *Medal of Honor 2*? Because EA . . . own the right to that
> franchise . . . [Infinity Ward] have the experience and talent to improve on the *MOH*
> experience, and they have something to prove: They want to build a better WWII shooter
> and beat EA at its own game. (100)

Activision had formerly focused on settings like *Soldier of Fortune*'s (2000) nuclear terrorist

hunt and the science fiction/fantasy shooters *Quake II* (1997) and *Quake III Arena* (1999), as

well as the fictionalized WWII shooter *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (2001).

The success of *Allied Assault*, as well as assumptions about a general world-wide

attractiveness of WWII games might have well driven Activision's new choice of a more

realistic WWII setting for their next FPS. The game's narrative, distributed along the lines of the

American, British and Russian war efforts nearly equally, rather than focusing on a single heroic

soldier in the tradition of *Medal of Honor*, confirms this suspicion.

However, media scholar Tent Cruz (2007) suggests that, at least in the case of the United

States, the increasingly tangled and convoluted ethics of post-9/11 military actions constituted an

ideal cultural environment for WWII-nostalgia and the simple ethical context of its culturally

formed narratives. He writes:

> The terrifying uncertainty of [the war on terror and the occupation of Iraq] contrasts with
> the popular history of the Second World War, a war with clearly defined roles: Allied
> soldiers versus Axis soldiers, democracy (and communism) versus fascism, with armies
> of relatively equal size and technological sophistication pitted against each other. While
> the Second World War was undoubtedly much more complex than these simple binaries
> imply, the popular understanding of the war, as represented by mainstream films,
> documentaries, books, and video games, is one of good versus evil. (n.p.)

Sociologist and game journalist Hartmut Gieselmann (2007) adds the perspective of quasi-utopic

masculine national community to this scenario: "The new message [of WWII shooters like *Call*

*of Duty*] was: It is a man's duty to go to war, the nation is a big family and it is an honor to kill

and to die for your country. . . In games, military comradeship appears to be stronger even than ideological views" (n.p.).[75] As I will show, however, the theme of comradeship is very much part of the game's ideology.

Indeed, the platoon-based, rather than lone-wolf-style, combat of the first *Call of Duty* game emphasizes masculine community by grouping the player-character with a squad of friendly military characters in much of the game's three single-player campaigns, and its narrative tropes thus connected more strongly to conventional WWII cinema like *Saving Private Ryan* and its cast of characters (see chapter II) than *Medal of Honor*'s evocation of the spy thriller.

In *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (2003), Jeanine Basinger underlines this connection when she defines the geographically, racially and intellectually mixed squad as a major trope of WWII combat cinema: "[E]ach of these men plays a traditional role that defines the internal structure of the combat story" (53). Her comments highlight the centrality of masculine community for the WWII film, and shows how *Call of Duty*'s 'squad' gameplay finds its counterparts in cinema history.

The game's campaigns included the perspective of three different Allied countries— arguably playing to a post-9/11 desire for scenarios of nation-based international community in the face of the convoluted politics of the Middle Eastern wars. In its representations of the U.S., U.K., and Russian war efforts, however, the game's narrative featured clear ideological distinctions between the three, reinforcing the idea of the American soldiers as driven by

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[75] It should, however, be noted that the same historical moment of uncertainty is also being credited with a later shift of the focus of the FPS to narratives of troubled Middle Eastern deployments. Media scholar Peter Mantello writes: "Like the vague and nebulous formulas for which real-world policy-makers and war planners communicate and prosecute the War on Terror, the post-9/11 MS video game increasingly relies on imaginary frameworks and speculative future threats that indirectly appeal to present-day concerns . . ." (Mantello, 486).

heroism, the UK soldiers as driven by duty, and the Russian soldiers acting in the face of

coercion and risk of violence at the hands of their superiors, in other words, serving as an

extension of the Cold War by ideologically pitting capitalism against communism.

In this final chapter, I will conclude this dissertation's analysis of the WWII FPS and its

immersive qualities. What began as a highly fictionalized "bad object" (see my analysis of

*Wolfenstein 3D* (1992)) grew into a quasi-educational representation of historic events, in part

motivated by *Saving Private Ryan*'s (1998) immersive bodily address, with meaningful changes

from *Medal of Honor* (1999) to *Call of Duty* (2003). As I argue, the game's aesthetics wed the

bodily address of its immersive gameplay to traditional cinematic representations of WWII,

evoking the materiality of historical objects like weapons and analogue film to establish a mode

of historical realism (see chapter III). At the same time, in a reflection of US-centric historical

accounts, it builds a hierarchy of heroism between the USA, the UK, and Communist Russia,

while highlighting international community as the war's historical heritage.

The game's reception in the press highlighted both its immersive nature and its presumed

authenticity by referencing its squad-based gameplay and intensity, that approximating that of

the historical event, as well as its recreations of military objects and battle spaces. *Computer

Gaming World* praises the "game's team-based design [, which] succeeds so well you'll often

find yourself worrying about your NPC buddies . . ." (103). Followed by a litany of featured

weapons, the magazine points out that all the weapons in *Call of Duty* are "authentic to both the

era as well as the army you're fighting with" (103). In a report from the E3 game expo, *PC

Gamer* notes that the player-character's comrades "feel like a crucial part of the action, and the

resulting immersion is incredible" (12), and two issues later (10/03) it praises the game's "gritty

realism," that perfectly captures "what the applicable forces had to endure during the war" (22):

"[i]t's a gripping experience that'll leave your heart racing, […] capturing the intensity of WWII like no game before it" (23). That realism and immersion are constantly cited as the game's major selling points makes one wonder about the relationship between the two. A central overlap between the concepts appears to be the construction of the game world, and whether a diegesis possesses the power to stand in for physical realities (past or present) to the extent that it supports the player's ability to suspend disbelief. As I argue, the perception of agency that conforms to expectations shaped by the game's setting and a type of aesthetic verisimilitude that governs its diegesis represent design choices of gameplay and aesthetics that promote immersion.

In her 2016 revision of *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Janet Murray claims that matching the scripts of coding the actions of the digital world and cueing the player's actions appropriately results in the feeling of agency (144), which, as she argues, can result from a tight match of controller and screen actions (138). In historically-themed games like *Call of Duty*, this 'appropriateness' of player-agency is largely determined by matching the agency of the represented historical subject. According to Adam Chapman (2016) this results in "historical resonance" (36), which I will explore further when discussing the game's aesthetics in concrete examples. The term describes "the establishment of a link between a game's historical representation and the larger historical discourse, as the player understands it" (36), including, as I argue, appropriate levels of agency determined by the player-character. Immersion can result from the experience of an authentic world that suggests a level of agency appropriate for its historical setting. Unlike *Medal of Honor*'s superspy narrative, the protagonists in *Call of Duty* almost constantly need support by friendly NPCs, or, more frequently, they enact necessary actions to support their fellow troops' forward momentum through space. "In the war that

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changed the world, no one fought alone" (see my discussion of the *Call of Duty* packaging below), the game's box art proclaims, linking the limitations of the player-character's agency to the "band of brothers" narrative that had been well established in Hollywood's representations of battle, the game's "larger historical discourse."

Immersion thus partly rests on the game mechanics' suggestion of historical realism, as expectations about agency during the past event are applied to the game's facilitation of agency during game play. Meeting these expectations that were shaped by popular media does not, however, merely apply to the game's mechanics but involves its aesthetics.

Baron (2010) describes the inclusion of indexical, archival images in games as possessing "archive effect." It is important to note that the archive effect constitutes an "experience" of archivalness, a suggestion of temporal disparity, rather than its actual presence. As a fictional construct, it allows media to "be imbued by the viewer with various evidentiary values as they are appropriated and repurposed…" (Ibid.). Like *Call of Duty*'s mechanics, the archive effect's aesthetics similarly draw on a "larger historical discourse" to construct an immersive world.

Again, this discourse is to a large extent found in Hollywood war film. Tanine Allison (2018) mentions a reviewer who claims that games like *Call of Duty* make players feel like "you're in your own war movie" (164). Indeed, the game draws on the war film genre's tropes in terms of narrative, iconography and the use of "evidence and historical references as strategies of authentication" (168-9). The last element, in particular, highlights the use of the archive effect, referring to its use in Hollywood films like *Saving Private Ryan*, and the historical event itself, even though they tend to be embedded between levels of gameplay that offer meaningful agency (169). While *Call of Duty* indeed locates the use of the archive effect outside of gameplay, I argue that its occurrence in framing texts shape the experience of play even in promotional

materials, the game's strategy guide, and reviews. Thus, I will include these texts to highlight not only their expression of the game's ideology, but the ways in which they shape player expectations.

Given the game's reliance on platoon-based gameplay, my analysis of *Call of Duty*'s single player campaign will explore the implementation of NPCs. Their inclusion was a response to Activision's explicit desire to offer a *Medal of Honor*-style PC game that would appeal to an audience beyond the U.S. by infusing an immersive experience of play in the FPS genre.[76] I argue that *Call of Duty*'s immersive gameplay experience is fueled by perceptual and psychological character-identification[77] and a mode of historical realism based on (1) references to popular representations of WWII (in particular to *The Longest Day* (1962) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)), which substitute the physical historical spaces they represent, (2) the use of the "Archive Effect" (Baron 2013) and, (3) a narrative which confirms popular U.S. centric WWII accounts that emphasize the heroism of American troops in contrast to other allied soldiers.

By exploring the game's marketing materials, contemporary reception, framing controls (the player's virtual embodied hinge between the material and the virtual via keyboard and mouse), narrative and aesthetics (the game's representation of historical space), I will show that *Call of Duty* does not resolve the possible tension of virtual embodied subjective access to history and the allegedly objective material historicity of the game's diegesis by assigning them to separate aspects of the game like framing controls (subjective hinge of the non-diegetic interface) and aesthetics (in an allegedly 'objective' mode of historical realism). Rather, the

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[76] For an in-depth discussion of this mode and the differences in its applications across media (film, game, etc.) see this dissertation's introduction.

[77] cf. my discussion of Gaut (2006) in this dissertation's Introduction

game design allows the player to engage with these aspects from a middle ground between the player's physical and the player-character's virtual body. As a result, the player actions work together with the game's representations to construct an immersive experience of a certain mode of historical realism, rather than merely serving as a motor for enjoyable gameplay. I will only sporadically touch on the issue of whether or not the represented events indeed successfully epitomize the historic events. Rather, my interest lies in the game as a work of rhetoric (White 1987), allowing the player to experience a mode of historical realism as a catalyst for immersion, independent of whether this realism accurately represents historical events. Similar to my analyses of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Medal of Honor*, I will demonstrate how *Call of Duty* represents another iteration of the use of immersion as an—at least commercially—accepted mode for WWII historiography. Focusing on the elements mentioned above, I will not include the game's multiplayer mode, soundtrack and menus in my analysis.


**Game Packaging and Strategy Guide: Embodiment and Historical Realism**

Box Art

Given the game's status as a commodity, its presentation to potential buyers serves as an important means of advertising and visually condensing the included content. This is even more the case with *CoD*, since at the time of its release, physical purchases at a store were the single means of acquiring the game. Commercial game downloads of AAA games (i.e. games with large budgets for development and marketing) only becoming a broadly-used distribution strategy years later.

The art and the language of the original *Call of Duty*'s (2003) game box (Figure 55) highlights its reliance on allegedly historically authentic WWII narratives via a rhetoric that visually and verbally restages the game's immersive continuum between player and game. At the

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same time, it anticipates *Call of Duty*'s narrative framework of masculine (national) community as constitutive of the experience of gameplay, a framework that constitutes a cornerstone of its mode of historical realism, while also highlighting the efforts of the U.S. troops, rather than the other featured campaigns.

The cover art is a point-of-view depiction of an American soldier engaged in battle; the gun on the bottom of the image, while connected to the bottom-left soldier, finds its counterpart in the FPS's convention of depicting the gun at the bottom of the screen as a hinge between player and game (Klevjer 2006). The soldier on the right side of the image points his finger directly toward and yells at the viewer. Doing so, this image restages Uncle Sam's WWI "I want you" recruiting poster with a sense of heightened urgency. Proceeding from the bottom to the top, the cover maps out a trajectory from self to other: the very bottom contains the gun, functioning as a hinge between viewer and image, while further upwards, a faceless soldier is seen firing in the direction of battle. Scanning further upwards, the soldier pointing his finger at the viewer reinforces the sense of presence by engaging the viewer via communication. Additionally, in the middle ground, two soldiers that are shooting from cover toward the enemy represent the first instance of conflict, connecting foreground and background. These four characters (and the "viewer's gun") are connected via common low-key lighting and framed by the ruins of a house, staging presence and masculine community in a mutual visual space defined by shared lighting and architecture.

Beyond these walls, the top half of the image constitutes the space of conflict in which the self and its allies encounter the other-as-enemy: it is a brightly lit open space, marked as an area of conflict by seven gunshots, an explosion on the right, contained by ruins, and a fire far in the background. This trajectory from self to address of the self, to friendly soldiers, to an

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aesthetically demarcated, relatively anonymous field of conflict with the other, metaphorically

restages the mechanics of immersion via a fluid continuum between the viewer and their



*Figure 55: Call of Duty's (2003) packaging*

American squad. This constitutes a manifesto of *Call of Duty*'s immersive mechanics located--

quite literally--front and center of the game's marketing materials. At the same time, the clearly

defined space in which the game's communication occurs evokes masculine community as

gameplay's constitutive framework.

Game Description and Reception

The language used on the back of the box also suggests the CoD's ability to engage the

player's body and immerse it into historical events, wedding the themes of immersion and

historical realism. "Intense battlefield moments" promise to "put you in the heat of the action,"

with *PC Gamer*'s review certifying the game to be "the most intense WWII shooter ever."

Strikingly, this intensity is a "cinematic" one: "experience the cinematic intensity of World War

II's epic battles . . .", it invites the reader, describing those battles as "authentic combat missions." The hinge between bodily engagement and realism in *Call of Duty*, as described by the box, thus rests on the evocation of cinematic representations of battle.

At the same time, the text alludes to *Call of Duty*'s squad-based game mechanics representing a sense of community: "In the war that changed the world, no one fought alone" (see also my discussion of realism and immersion above) is written in front of the American flag, introducing the category of 'nation' as one of this community's frameworks. Unpacking this language and imagery reveals several claims about the game:

First, and most obviously, they present *Call of Duty* to be exciting and immersive. Both the repeated references to intensity and the direct placement of the player within the "heat of the action" constitute a thematic echo of the cover art's "Uncle Sam" gesture, promising to immerse the player in the game by engaging/addressing their body.

Second, they portray *Call of Duty*'s squad-based gameplay as a direct extension of historic events and their cinematic representations. Since "[i]n the war that changed the world, no one fought alone," the game's mechanics echo these allegedly historical dynamics of masculine community, aesthetically framing them as citizen-soldiers by referencing the American nation via the flag. Debra Ramsey (2015) draws on this fact when she observes that *Call of Duty* introduces "the idea of the soldier as a member of a 'brotherhood' forged in the extreme spaces of combat" (99). *Call of Duty*'s official strategy guide (2004) explicitly frames this brotherhood as a historical fact represented by the game, suggesting that the game's focus on squad-based play allows it to draw from authentic combat strategies: "[T]he designers have brought squad-level gameplay to life like it has never been done before. In *Call of Duty*, you're part of a squad, working together to achieve a common goal. As such, there are some real-world tactics and rules

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that you should know" (4). According to the guide, the fact that "real-world tactics" help the player to succeed in gameplay is a direct result of its squad-based gameplay, i.e., these mechanics represent dynamics within the "real-world" brotherhood-based historic event. It thus evokes, and subsequently downplays the significance of cinematic mediation.

Third, rather than claiming that the game recreates film's representations of battle, the marketing materials allege that the historic battles themselves possessed "cinematic intensity." This wording conflated cinematic representation with the historical event, framing the tropes of visual realism used by films like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) as markers for authenticity. Since this ideological discourse posits cinematic representation to be a privileged, hyper-real access to history, it follows that there is an expectation that a type of historical realism will follow from using cinematic aesthetics. As I will show, many of *CoD*'s missions have indeed been the subject of film and television, and the game design builds on these representations and their visual and narrative tropes.

My three points underline the game's claims to historical realism via its squad-based mechanics, which make it possible to apply historic military strategies of community-based battle within a 'cinematically authentic' aesthetic setting, and promise a physically engaging, immersive mode of play. The conflation of cinematic convention with historical events in WWII FPSs has been noted in scholarly analyses: in interviews with self-described gamers, anthropologist Scott A. Lukas (2010) found that people "expressed that what makes combat believable, such as in the *Call of Duty* series, is the use of effects that are common to similar period films like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)" (86). As mentioned in my introduction, according to Kingsepp (2006), the games "connote the *Saving Private Ryan* version of Omaha beach rather

than the well-known documentary images that are almost exactly replicated in the film" (ibid).

*Call of Duty*'s cinematic opening sequence serves as a first example of this.

## Cinematic Moments: Call of Duty's Opening Montage

Space in *Call of Duty* is organized around both non-interactive and interactive

configurations: the opening montage constitutes a central non-interactive moment, while the

explorable game space itself offers interactive play with more meaningful player agency. Both

configurations serve different purposes for constructing a particular subject position: the

moments characterized by little player agency infuse the game with markers of authenticity by

referencing the authority of photographic indexicality, while also presenting its ideological

agenda.

Aesthetically disconnecting *Call of Duty*'s opening sequence from the playable missions

establishes a dichotomy between the "authenticity" of its cinematics and the viscerally engaging

gameplay. Film and media scholar Tanine Allison explores this strategy in her 2010 article "The

World War II Video Game Adaptation, and Postmodern History":

> [Such a] sequence places the player outside of history, as a contemporary viewer
> watching cable television and learning about events far in the past. The separation of
> these sequences from the rest of the gameplay reinforces the sense that this . . . footage
> may be authentic, but it is dated and obsolete, while the full-color, interactive combat
> missions of the game are immediate and viscerally engaging. The game may not be
> authentic in the same way this combat footage purports to be, but it does give the
> illusion of presence and interactivity that the older images lack. (189)

Allison's attention to the game's dichotomy points to a kind of diacritical realism, in which two

of its modes—photorealism and visceral realism (see chapter II) claim authenticity by

distinguishing themselves from each other.

*Call of Duty*'s cinematic opening, to some extent located "outside of history," indeed

serves to establish a sense of historical realism (or "authenticity," the closely related concept

used by Allison). In this way, the opening sequence introduces a type of gameplay that cannot

compete with the trust generally bestowed on cinematic representations.[78] However, it associates

this aesthetic with images created within the game's engine, rather than constructing digital

images in a distinct visual composition. As a result, by making use of gameplay's visual

language, the opening infuses these computer-generated images with the authority of mentioned

"dated and obsolete" depictions and carries them over to the visuals of play.

The opening montage begins with the virtual camera moving over six black and white

images that were created within the game's engine, rather than with a camera, fading into each

other. They show tanks attacking a city, a Russian flag being raised among rubble, soldiers

running through a town, a soldier firing in front of a church, troops in the trenches and troops

running up the hill. Some of these images were edited to evoke photography's materiality

through folds in its 'paper' (        Figure 56).



*Figure 56: Cinematic Opening*

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[78] See this dissertation's Introduction.

A gradually appearing caption reads: "In the war that changed the world, victory was not achieved by one man, but by the lives of many." The montage then moves on to show low-saturation moving images (evoking the materiality of film stock) of battle without added captions: an aerial shot of soldiers running through the snow and the ruins of Moscow, carrying a bright red Russian flag. The flag carrier is shown to be shot down, falling to his death. It then shifts to the Western front, revealing burned out French hotels, troops shooting machine guns out of a window and running through a field. Finally, a virtual helicopter shot shows bombers attacking war ships, and wounded soldiers. In slightly more saturated images, we then see soldiers running toward the camera in slow motion, surrounded by bombed out buildings, an aerial shot of tanks in the snow, a town square in rubble, soldiers in the countryside, a charging anti-aircraft gun, a church steeple, and the Berlin Reichstag. The captions for this sequence read: "Across the battlefields of Europe, many nations united to reach one goal: Berlin." Finally, the screen fades to black and the title "Call of Duty" appears in its branded silver-gray font, explicitly tying the images to the game.

This opening montage evokes historical photographs and film, i.e. the "dated and obsolete" footage mentioned by Allison. It shows black and white images created within the game's engine, and by providing a written commentary that depicts the war as a common effort of many individuals, rather than single men, it anticipates the game's three distinct campaigns from the U.S., UK and Russia perspective.

Since the images in *Call of Duty*'s opening sequence are not digitized historical photographs, but electronically constructed, the temporal disparity of "then" and "now" (see my discussion of Baron 2010 above) does not manifest itself in a tension between game and image. Instead, both temporal dimensions are co-present in the digital image itself as it had been infused

with materiality: it combines computer-generated images with the materiality of photography, including its objects' flatness, black-and-white color scheme, and wear-and-tear. As a result, it evokes a viewer experience between the indexical and the digital; artificial images are overlaid with signifiers of materiality which thus establish a 'divided' viewer position. The trope of materiality functions as an evidentiary claim of authenticity the digital images themselves were unable to provide and blurs the lines between "then" and "now," history and its representation. In spite of the strategic placement of indexical images outside of gameplay, these images still influence the reading of gameplay's visuals as they specifically work to inscribe them.

The strategy, antagonizing the general suspicion of digital images as opposed to the trust bestowed on photographic imagery, allows the montage of images to serve as proof for their captions, which reject war as a narrative of individuals in favor of a pan-national effort, carried out by a multiplicity of heroic troops. By doing so, the *Call of Duty* franchise's first installment differentiates itself from its major competitor *Medal of Honor*. Debra Ramsay (2015) confirms this when she writes:

> [T]he first *Call of Duty* … initiated changes to the mainstream narrative of World War II. For the most part, *Medal of Honor* reflects the dominant cultural story of the war by concentrating on the actions of the heroic individual American soldier and consequently marginalizing the experiences of soldiers of other nationalities. In contrast, activision.com asserts that *Call of Duty* refracts World War II 'through the eyes of citizen soldiers and unsung heroes from an alliance of countries.' (98)

The captions add to a sense of authenticity vis-à-vis the implicitly rejected, historically highly rare, lone-soldier/spy experience of the *Medal of Honor* series.

As the montage moves on to moving images, its evidentiary function now emphasizes the 'cinematic' quality of the game, serving as verisimilitude to history's "cinematic battles" (see above). Kingsepp (2006) claims that the aesthetics of Saving Private Ryan have become such a pervasive trope in the representation of WWII that alluding to them results in nearly the same

experience as depicting the historical battles with no such proxy. However, the experience of shifting from the simulated textuality of historical documents to the tropes of Saving Private Ryan cannot be simply explained by motivating a different set of culturally established signifiers of the 'real'. That is even more the case, since this part of the montage quickly moves between different scenarios that do not allow for a unified text. Its nod toward Hollywood cinema aims to produce the epic nature and visceral response of the films' battle scenes, particularly as condensed in their cinematic trailers, rather than the film's tropes that have come to connote authenticity. After having established its particular (allegedly more authentic) portrayal of the multinational troops as groups rather than individuals, the game now lays claim to the kind of excitement and representational authority associated with big budget Hollywood productions, WWII's "cinematic intensity" the box text had promised.

The rhetorical strategy of *Call of Duty*'s opening cinematics thus lays claim to historical realism by emulating the material nature of historical documents (i.e. photographs), which it incorporates into images created within the game's engine that functions as the basis of the game's later immersive gameplay, blurring the lines between the two and infusing the game's visuals with the indexical authority of said images. It acknowledges the war as a pan-national effort and uses visual tropes of trusted WWII representations in film. Finally, via text, it connects the game's space-driven play to historical events by assigning a travel-based narrative to these texts.

## Immersion and its Challenges in *Call of Duty*

As laid out in my Introduction and echoed in chapter III, scholars have challenged the notion that FPSs, with their primary perspective of a continuous POV-shot (see introduction),

constitute a uniquely immersive genre. It is true that the FPS's lack of an active on-screen actor can hinder the player's self-projection onto the player-character and thus presents an obstacle to immersion. This constellation can render the player a participant observer, highly engaged in the actions of the game but disconnected spatially and in regard to identification. *Call of Duty* addresses this issue of spatial immersion in its tutorial level by blurring the lines between the player-characters' actions and the player's abstract controls that trigger them via Non-Player-Characters.

These NPCs diegeticize said abstract controls by addressing player and player-character simultaneously, constructing a subject position that conflates the non-diegetic with the diegetic, drawing the player into a game world marked by tropes of historical authenticity, making up for the visual barrier of immersion represented by the screen as described by scholars like Laurie Taylor (see Introduction). This shift into diegesis resembles the strategy guide's claims to historical realism where the mechanics of squad-based battle allow the player to experience aspects of historical warfare within its virtual representations. Adapting Dan Pinchbeck's (2009) categorization of NPCs, I will show how these characters serve to offer a type of immersive experience facilitated by gameplay and visuals, while also serving the end of historical realism, confirming the game's own claim to the idea that "victory was not achieved by one man."

NPCs and PNPCs

Experimental game designer and game scholar Dan Pinchbeck (2009) defines NPCs as agents with some form of individuality that are recognizable as separate characters from the background population. Other than their representation (i.e. to whether they appear in cut-scenes

or in-game), Pinchbeck organizes NPCs, or PNPCs,[79] according to the functions they serve within the game's diegesis. Their main function, according to Pinchbeck, lies in their ability to serve as "goal-communication and manipulation devices," broken down into the following categories, to which I will refer in my analyses of *CoD*'s gameplay:

a) Explicit instruction ("go here and do that"), an epistemological schema that simplifies gameplay by attaching significant markers to the ongoing action. By drawing the player's attention to actions that drive the gameplay forward within the diegesis, rather than explicitly addressing its underlying abstract system, the game's creators exercise control over the player's attention and behavior and, by extension, affect. The player is often rewarded for paying attention to PNPCs, which opens up the potential for more complex affective experiences. *Call of Duty* uses this function frequently—as I will show below, the player is repeatedly ordered by NPCs to use weapons only available to the player-character.

b) Virtual expansion of affordances,[80] i.e., allowing the player to perform an action by proxy, which the player-character itself is unable to perform. Transferring the action from the player-character to a PNPC not only redistributes the action itself, but also its attached thought: the avatar is framed as a body, not a mind. The underlying epistemological message that the player does not have to think about the why and the how of his actions, as these will be externally supplied, makes the

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[79] Pinchbeck defines a subcategory of NPCs, *Persistent* NPCs (PNPCs), as NPCs "presented in the diegesis who appear repeatedly or have a definable role in the world and plot" and which are, to an extent, "defined by diegetic significance rather than representation" (ibid.).

[80] Affordances, as broadly defined by Chapman (2016, see below), are "opportunities for action" (74).

player surrender decision-making power to the system: "The avatar's role is to supply the embodiment, not the mind. In a not insignificant number of cases, PNPCs determine where to go next and what to do next . . ." (271). The perception of the PNPC as a body goes beyond Pinchbeck's concerns about player-system politics of power. Framing the player-character (or "avatar") as a body defines gameplay as an embodied, immersive experience via a continuum between the "mind" of the player and the "body" of the player-character.

c) Their most indirect functions: offering contextual support and continuity, fulfilling a vital role in ensuring that the player's actions are successfully supported by the environment. "This leads to a semantic, schematic justification of the occurrences presented in the game. When context is described, in effect, the idea of the 'atmosphere' of the game is being essentially recast in terms that are ludological" (272).

I will now analyze *Call of Duty*'s first game space, a recreation of a 1940s U.S. Army boot-camp, using these three categories to explore its construction of an immersive experience in the mode of historical realism within the context of teaching the player how to control their player-character Private Martin, and by extension teaching him how to be an effective soldier and platoon member. The mission counters the immersive shortcomings of the FPS genre, connecting the player's non-diegetic use of mouse- and keyboard-controls to the diegetic experiences of the player-character. It does so by using Non-Player-Characters, while employing the aesthetics of WWII propaganda art and references to military movies to establish the mode of historical realism, infusing the game with authority regarding its historical depictions.

## NPCs and Historical Realism in Camp Toccoa

The game's first space that can be relatively freely explored by the player is set in a representation of Camp Toccoa, GA, which was used by the U.S. Army beginning in 1942. It introduces the player—and the American campaign's player-character Private Martin—to the game's controls. Two NPCs explicitly instruct—Campbell's category a) of NPCs—both the player-character Private Martin to perform actions central to gameplay, and the player to trigger these actions via the game's peripherals, i.e. via keyboard and mouse, while Martin's comrades offer narrative context, i.e., Campbell's category c).

The first NPC, Captain Foley, introduces basic movement through space (controlled via the keyboard), control of the player-character's virtual camera (via the mouse) and how to engage with the game's systems of information.[81] In his address, he conflates the player, who possesses access to non-diegetic information, with the player-character, whose virtual body is based within the game's diegesis. Using dialogue, Foley's character *narratively* tethers the player's non-diegetic controls of mouse and keyboard to Private Martin's actions, extending the game's diegesis to the player's controls and offering an experience of unity of the player's physical and the game's virtual world. As a result, *Call of Duty* achieves both perceptual and psychological immersion[82] by merging the player and their use of abstract controls with the player-character present in the game's diegesis.

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[81] For an in-depth discussion of the FPS's controls, in particular the distribution of camera-control and movement through space, see this dissertation's introduction.

[82] see my Introduction's discussion of Gaut (2006)

At first, Captain Foley's instructions and the non-diegetic controls appear to be neatly

separated by diegetic dialogue and non-diegetic on-screen text:[83] Foley's audio command to

"read each of these important signs" is juxtaposed with non-diegetic on-screen text attaching this

command to game controls: "Use your mouse to look at the large five signs!" As the player

moves the character from sign to sign, they encounter an aesthetic designed to resemble

historical military propaganda posters, which portray gameplay strategies in a visual language

suggesting authentic 1940s' instruction:

> "Use grenades to flush out hard points," "Attack Attack Attack. Move together as a
> team," "Always reload before going into battle!" "Suppress the flank," and, showing the
> image of a makeshift grave, "Don't make the same mistake! Always move from cover to
> cover" (Figure 57 and Figure 58).

In their double-address, these instructions ask both the player and the player-character to

use (virtual) grenades before moving into heavily protected territory, to keep close to comrades

(i.e. NPCs), to avoid reloading during battle, to use suppressing fire in order to incapacitate the

enemy's flank, and to seek cover rather than be exposed to hostile fire by blindly charging

toward the enemy. Creating a historical palimpsest, the instructions present themselves as part of

authentic soldier training by drawing on visual representations of the game's historical period

and by adapting dialogue from films depicting the Vietnam War, which featured the hardships of

boot-camp as a far more common narrative trope than WWII film. Only a few WWII focused

films, such as *The Girl He Left Behind* (1956) and *Baby Blue Marine* (1976), narratively feature

boot camps but also do not focus on battle.

This use of quasi-historical artifacts increases the historical game world's cohesiveness

by matching its dialogue: one poster is a modified replication of John Vickery's 1942 poster *His*

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[83] This visual analysis assumes that – unlike in the chapter's screenshots - the player does not use the option to
display dialogue subtitles.

*life is in your hands* (Figure 59), which actually addressed the home front's work force, rather than the troops. This does not require the player to be familiar with the original poster, in fact, a lack of familiarity renders the cohesiveness more effective. Its inclusion creates historical resonance.

At the same time, however, the instructions serve as pointers for the *player*, instructing them how to successfully navigate the game's space according to its design. This double address allows the game to create a historically convincing game space that immerses the player by framing the abstract controlling actions ("use your mouse", "press [TAB]") performed by their physical body as part of the game world, immersing the player's body into its diegesis. As Martin goes further into his training, this overlap becomes more apparent.

After the player has finished looking at the posters, Foley begins to directly address the player's controls: "Now check your objectives: you'll notice that your current objective is highlighted. In addition, the location of your current objective is marked by the star on your compass. As you approach your current objective, the star will move towards the center of your compass." This is juxtaposed with the on-screen command "Press [Tab] to see your objectives", which displays the objectives on-screen, overlaying the player's view of the game space (Figure 60). In this way, after having established a level of historical resonance, the non-diegetic framing controls and visuals become linked to the game world as Captain Foley explicitly addresses these controls within the game's diegesis. While the compass serves as another quasi-historical artifact evoking the mode of historical realism, the game mechanics anachronistically project a virtual GPS with mission markers onto it. This creates two simultaneous visually readable layers of time, which bring together the physical present of the player into the in-game representation of past time, creating a sense of simultaneity of past time and play time.

Chapman finds this simultaneity to be a general aim of "realist simulations" of history, such as *Call of Duty*. According to him, these simulations tend to suggest an even ratio of play time, i.e., the time passed during game play, fictive time, i.e., the time passed in the game's diegesis, and, important here, past time, i.e., the game's represented actions as they relate to the actions taken by historical subjects (91-93). Of course, and Chapman points this out, it is impossible to give a realistic account of past time, as few records exist that would indicate "what was done minute-to-minute or second-to-second in the past" (91). In particular, the level of the individual, and thus all representations of past time must remain fictions like in this case, in which general knowledge about boot camp instruction during WWII is used to construct a specific fictional timeframe in its space.

Captain Foley continues to comment on the game's framing controls, after which the player-character is instructed to "open the gate and run the obstacle course. Go! Go! Go!" The dialogue, containing the trope of military dialogue (and competitive sports) "Go! Go! Go!" infuses the non-diegetic player controls of mouse and keyboard with diegetic urgency and thus significance. This becomes even more concrete during Sgt. Moody's instructions on weapon training.

Via dialogue, another NPC, Private Elder, is introduced to be a friend of Martin's. This NPC offers contextual support—Campbell's category c) of NPCs—pointing out that when context is described, in effect, the idea of the 'atmosphere' of the game is being essentially recast in terms that are ludological (272). Martin then runs an obstacle course introducing the player to the ability to crouch, crawl and climb over blockades and presenting the corresponding "stance indicators" in the HUD (see Introduction). The trope of soldiers being insulted during training, here by feminizing them ("Move it, ladies, this is not your Aunt Fanny's dance . . ."), later by

comments on Martin's appearance ("Unless you're as dumb as you are ugly, it may dawn on you that each weapon is good for different situations") recalls film representations of boot camp, primarily in depictions of the Vietnam war, such as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman's infamous tirade in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). The references to other media (here to film dialogue, rather than to the aesthetics of propaganda posters) that feature the trope of boot-camp hardship open up the game to external texts, drawing on a larger generic discourse, and expanding both the game's diegesis and its mode of historical realism.

*Figure 57: Instructional Poster 1*


*Figure 58: Instructional Poster 2*


*Figure 59: John Vickery, His life is in your hands (1942)*

*Figure 60: Mission Objectives*

After finishing the obstacle course, an NPC named Sgt. Moody oversees the player's

introduction to weapon controls. During this training, Moody makes explicit references to

framing controls only visible to the player, not the player-character, such as the Heads-Up-

Display ("The number of rounds in your weapon and the number of rounds you are carrying are

displayed in the lower right corner of your HUD"), the crosshairs in the middle of the screen

("Your accuracy will be defined by the tightness of your crosshairs"), the effect of the player-

character's position on his shooting ("You will be more accurate while not moving and in the

crouching or prone positions"), a zoom effect simulating aiming down the gun's sights ("You

will notice a slight zoom effect when you raise and aim down the sight of a weapon without a

scope"), and its effects on the player character's movements ("Take a few steps while aiming

down your sight. You're gonna move slower this way"). He also references that "your weapon

will reload automatically," clearly not an available option for the physical gun that is being

represented here, but part of the game's abstraction of historical artifacts.

At the same time, Moody frames some of the games' mechanics as based in the player-character's physical reality, his physical limitations ("Unless you've got three hands, you can only carry two weapons, besides your sidearm and grenades") and the risk of permanent death (see chapter III), which the game's mechanics do not allow to occur ("These skills could mean your life").[84] As Martin learns to use explosives, a virtual count-down timer in the form of an old-fashioned pocket watch appears. Moody warns the player-character: "Note that a stopwatch has appeared. This will tell you how much time you have to get your butt out of there, unless you want it blown off! Fire in the hole!" The double-address of player and player-character here emerges from the presence of the old-fashioned pocket watch that serves as a historical artifact invoking the archive effect, and the warning to make sure Martin does not get his 'butt blown off' (player-character) when it (virtually) 'appears' (the player's points of experience/view).

So far, immersion and historical realism, two clearly closely related concepts in *Call of Duty*, have emerged from two major sources: First, the NPCs unite the perspective of the represented historical subject and of the player by blurring the line between the player's abstract triggers for in-game actions (i.e. keyboard and mouse controls) and the resulting actions of the player-character. Thusly, in their instructions, they offer representations of game mechanics in the (virtual) flesh. Second, the frequent references to historical artifacts (military posters, pocket watch) and other representations of war via generic tropes (drill sergeant address taken from war film) establish a sense of historical realism.

Describing the technology of the game's represented weapons and historicizing them by explaining their place in the overall war effort, the game's strategy guide suggests another source

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[84] Unlike historical battle, the game does not allow for permanent death – dying during gameplay results in replaying the unsuccessful mission, rather than narratively incorporating the player-character's death, e.g. by assigning a new player-character.

of realism that represents a meaningful shift from successful FPS franchises released before

*Saving Private Ryan*. The arsenal of weapons available to the player in *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992)

included non-descript weapons like generic machine guns and chain guns, *Doom* (1993) featured

a futuristic plasma gun and its bigger version with the tongue-in-cheek name BFG9000 ("Big

Fucking Gun 9000"), while *Heretic* (1994) and *Star Wars: Dark Forces* (1995) similarly

equipped player-characters and foes with weapons befitting the games' fantasy genre ("ethereal

crossbow." "gauntlets of the necromancer") and the Star Wars franchise ("thermal detonator,"

"imperial repeater gun"), respectively.[85] Not unlike *Medal of Honor*'s strategy guide (see chapter

III), but with a higher emphasis on including historical background, *Call of Duty* takes pride in

its representations of specific weapons historically used by axis and allies. Its official strategy

guide dedicates eight illustrated pages to showcase the game's twenty-three weapons, explaining

both their place in history, and, in a smaller section, their tactical in-game use.

The book's encyclopedic entries on the weapons (Figure 61) hint at a blur of past time

and play time similar to the strategies used in *Call of Duty*'s tutorial level. The description of the

Sten Guns, which "were developed by Britain to be very simple and inexpensive to create…"

bleeds into the present time, when the tactical description points out that they are "used in the

Hurtgen forest missions near the end of the game" (15). Once more, the representation of

historical artifacts (here a gun, rather than a stop watch) evokes the archive effect, while

references to game missions and the "end of the game" transport the archive effect into play,

contributing to its mode of historical realism.

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[85] While some FPSs like *GoldenEye007* (1997) and *Half-Life* (1998) did feature weapons with real-life counterparts
like James Bond's Walther PPK pistol and Heckler & Koch MP5K submarine gun in *GoldenEye007* and a Glock
9mm pistol and a .357 Magnum in *Half-Life*, neither game explicitly uses these weapons to create a sense of
*historical* realism within their explicitly fictional, genre-driven diegeses.

This text illustrates that *Call of Duty* indulged in a fetishism of wartime technology even more explicitly than *Medal of Honor* (see my discussion of *MoH*'s strategy guide in chapter IV). Future WWII FPSs, even outside of these two major franchises, like *Battlefield 1942* (2003) and *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* (2006) would join in this focus on historical weaponry, underscoring *CoD*'s significance in the genre's evolution.

The game's missions similarly foreground *Call of Duty*'s connection to 'historical' events by being clustered around famous WWII battles, notably Operation Overlord (i.e., the invasion
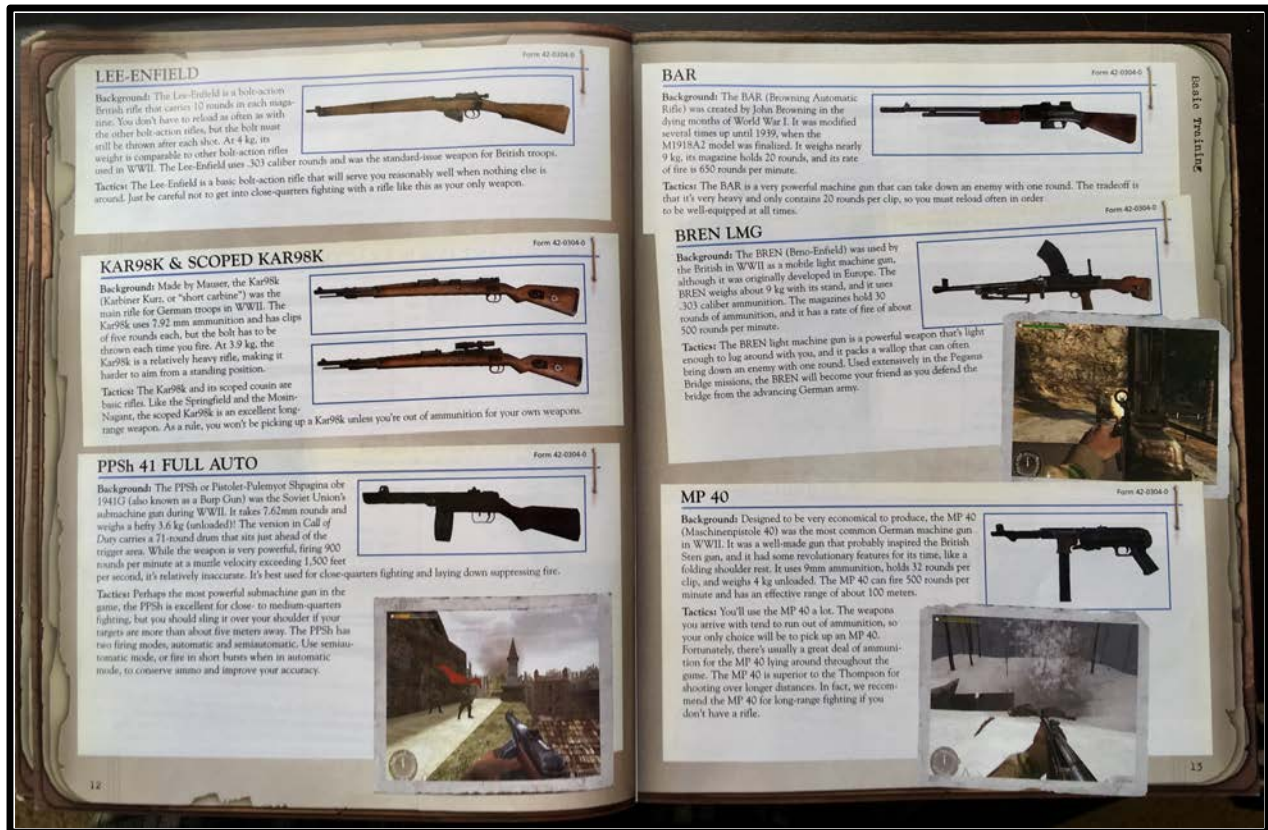


*Figure 61: Call of Duty Strategy Guide*

of Normandy by allied troops) and Operation Tonga (i.e., the British efforts within the invasion), as well as the Battles of Stalingrad and Berlin.

**Campaigns**

Before gameplay starts, a loading screen informs the player of the first mission's

narrative framework by allowing them to steal a glance at Private Martin's diary. This serves as a

personalized history lesson, or, in more critical terms, manufactured autobiographical history.

Both the objects surrounding the diary and Martin's writing itself include micro and macro-

historical aspects. A combat knife and a Magnum .45, both standard equipment for American

infantry soldiers like Martin, lie next to Eisenhower's half-covered D-Day letter to the troops,

introducing and layering itself into a top-down "great men" perspective of history. Scribbled in

(arguably Martin's) handwriting on the letter; however, it reads: "here's hoping i [sic] make it

safe. Please Lord protect me" with the letter dating two days before the invasion—"June 4

1944." This introduces the idea of the common soldier as a historical actor to the loading screen,

visualizing this aspect with a black and white photograph of Martin and a fellow paratrooper

tucked underneath the knife.

The diary itself similarly covers individual and "great men" views of history. After giving

an awkwardly didactic account of the pathfinders' place in the invasion and its in-game

representation ("The pathfinders land before the main force and place beacons on the landing

fields to guide the rest of the pilots and paratroopers in"), Martin expresses frustration in having

been "cooped up [for weeks], and forbidden contact with anyone outside, with nothing to do but

memorize maps and battle plans," adding that "we're all quite eager to be in France." At the

same time, he references that "[t]he brass are sending the airborne in first," and writes that "[a]

few hours ago, General Eisenhower paid us a visit."[86] The war's strategists and the soldiers to

implement these strategies are thusly both addressed in the loading screen, which serves to

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[86] Eisenhower did, in fact, visit the 101st airborne division on the eve of D-Day.

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connect the personalized battle narratives of gameplay with the grand strategic narratives of popular historical accounts, once more establishing historical realism, yet one located outside immersive gameplay. As I will show later, this personalized introduction, featuring a photograph of Martin and the highly personal genre of the diary, constitutes a difference to the introduction of the British and the Russian player-characters, who are introduced via military orders that vary by appealing to the soldier's sense of duty and threatening death in the case of deserting.
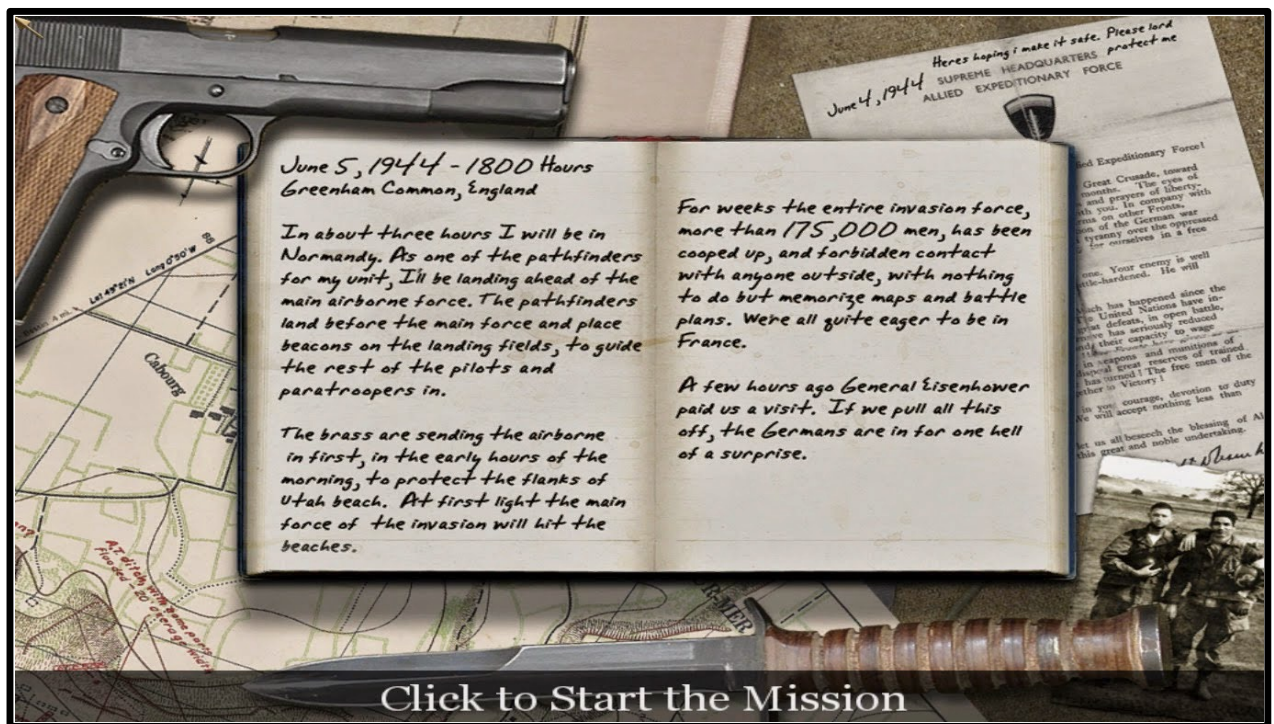


*Figure 62: Martin's Diary (Loading Screen)*

*Gameplay and Narrative*

As the level begins, Martin parachutes into the French village "St. Mère Eglise" under the cover of darkness. As one might expect, the village is based on an actual place in Normandy, from which German troops were flushed out by U.S. paratroopers during Operation Overlord, a mission that was popularized by its portrayal in *The Longest Day* (1962).

*CoD* references cinematic representations of WWII in a similar fashion as during the opening cinematics and the tutorial level. Upon finding that a fellow soldier carrying a radio

beacon has fallen to his death, Martin retrieves it from him and activates it in an open field. Reacting to the beacon, U.S. transport planes drop a number of paratroopers as German infantry soldiers open fire. After the drop zone is secured, Martin and his fellow soldiers move through the village, attacking the Germans house by house. Martin is then ordered to disable an attacking armored tank-car-hybrid ("half-track") by shooting its operators, allowing the squad to move forward. The next morning, the squad continues to clear the town, with Martin disarming three German anti-aircraft guns ("Flakpanzers") by use of explosives. Just like the guns used by the player, the inclusion of the half-track and the Flakpanzers contribute to a sense of historical realism.

While the level opens by taking a "lone wolf" perspective akin to that of *Medal of Honor*, Martin's work primarily lies in facilitating the movement of his comrades by using equipment and achieving objectives unavailable to them. This includes the retrieved radio beacon and the explosives used on the Flakpanzers, as well as the neutralization of the half-track. The NPCs order Martin to perform those activities —"explicit instruction"—while also serving as objectives themselves, being able to move forward due to the player-character's actions. This squad-based combat again establishes a sense of historical realism, as it connects with the game's claims about historic battle.

*Figure 63: Pegasus Bridge in Call of Duty*



*Figure 64: Pegasus Bridge in The Longest Day*

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*Figure 65: Across the Pegasus Bridge in Call of Duty*



*Figure 66: Across the Pegasus Bridge in The Longest Day*

The visuals of the Pegasus Bridge mission draw heavily on visual WWII tropes established in particular by the film *The Longest Day* (Figure 63, Figure 64, Figure 65, and Figure 66), recreating its exact *mise-en-scene* via use of props and setting, while the player can recreate the film's camera position and movements by moving the player-character. This differs from the continuous flow through space that had been characteristic for the majority of FPSs before *Call of Duty*, which enabled the player to pursue what is often referred to as a *run-and-gun* strategy (Grimshaw 2008; Leonard 2010). Rather, Martin's mission alternates between the taking of space, emphasizing movement through and neutralization of enemy positions, and defending both taken space and his comrades, emphasizing cover and eliminating attacking forces from a relatively static position. His spatial movement through and within St.Mère Eglise looks as follows: Move to dead soldier to retrieve beacon from him, move to field to prompt fellow paratroopers to land. Defend field from German troops with slow movement toward town. Move through town, eliminating enemies. *Call of Duty*'s squad-based play that relies on a multiplicity of NPCs and is linked to the game's mode of historical realism (see above), thus directly influences the game's function of space.

At one point in the American campaign, however, historical realism turns into an antagonist to the game's need to make strong returns on Activision's financial investment, The ambition not to omit the Holocaust from the game results in its vastly reductive representation; more complete representations of Nazi war crimes would not only pose technological issues, but threaten public condemnation, which would likely result in sales issues.

*Sanitized Holocaust*

In the sole level to feature allusions to the Holocaust by featuring its visual inventory, *Call of Duty*'s historical realism reveals how the need to sell a great amount of copies overrides

attempts to recreate historical events in a realistic fashion. Departing from film and media

scholar Mark Poster's 1991 term "sanitized war" (222), which describes misleading television

coverage of the Gulf War, I use the moniker "sanitized Holocaust" to describe this level's

representational strategy. Poster suggests that early 1990s' news coverage, with its "sortie counts

instead of body counts, has created a soap opera war where … support for the war is the

discursive effect" (222). I choose to adapt this term, since, similarly to the news segments in

Poster's analysis, *Call of Duty* represents the crimes of Nazi Germany by omitting explicit

depictions of civilian suffering. Rather, it chooses a visual metonymy, in which the camp's

general architecture and general visual inventory of camp imprisonment stand in for its troubling

events and its subjects, housing one military POW, rather than large groups of civilian inmates.

By doing so, the game chooses a middle ground between not alluding to the Holocaust at all—a

stark contrast to the popular understanding of WWII and American motivations—and attempting

a more realistic representation of the camps, which would have likely resulted in accusations of

trivializing the events by including them in a PC game.

Popular representations of WWII, which celebrate America's entry into the war primarily

as a response to Nazi crimes and its treatment of Jews specifically, rather than as a political

reaction to Pearl Harbor, construct this conflict along lines of morality, and present a view of

American troops as motivated by Germany's atrocities, rather than by political necessity. Film

scholar Kathryn R. Kane (1982) comments that the ultimate legitimation of killing, "and one at

least implicit in most [U.S. combat] films, is that morality lies in one's purpose and not in one's

deeds, that high moral purpose justifies otherwise evil acts. . ." (102). Guy Westwell (2006), a

film scholar as well, shows that this tendency was strong enough to survive throughout and

beyond the 1990s: "War continues to be shown--in films such as *Pearl Harbor* [(2001)], *Saving*

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*Private Ryan* [(1998)], *Behind Enemy Lines* [(2001)], and *Black Hawk Down* [(2001)] as an existential battle between humane, moral individuals and a faceless, fanatical, inhumane enemy" (111). Including a setting that shares a great amount of the Holocaust's visual inventory thus contributes to *Call of Duty*'s attempt to cover the important ideological points of the US war effort, while its inability to acknowledge the Nazis' war crimes illustrates the problematic relationship between video games and their ability to engage with troubling subject matters in the early 2000s.

It is easy to imagine that including prisoner NPCs would have faced the game designers with additional challenges; besides the additional processing power required, perversely, neither the ability to shoot them, nor rendering them invulnerable to friendly fire would result in desirable game mechanics, either allowing the player to commit war crimes while playing as an American soldier (putting the game's American "Teen" rating, and thus sales, in jeopardy, while likely causing public condemnation), or rendering the level as unconvincing as the absence of prisoners altogether.

As the level taking place in a prison camp begins, Martin has already successfully supported the Allied war efforts by destroying many tanks, anti-aircraft guns ("Flak guns"), and enemy mortar positions all across the Western front, submitting intelligence by breaking through the German lines by car, escorting wounded comrades to safety, stealing secret documents from the Axis, and rescuing an English Captain from an Austrian castle. His last mission, dated September 1944, entails rescuing an English Major from the "Dulag IIIA" labor camp in Strasshof, Austria. Unlike former representations of WWII in video games, *Call of Duty* here alludes, if only in a highly reductive version, to the Holocaust's infrastructure within a playable

game space. In contrast to most other missions, this one features a 10:00 minute time limit triggered by the first shot fired by Martin.[87]

Equipped with a sniper gun, Martin eliminates the guards by the camp entrance, clearing the way for Captain Foley (see boot camp level) to ram the gate with a truck. Upon entering the camp, Martin and his comrades shoot wave after wave of German soldiers, making their way to the prison, where they are greeted by stereotypically British Major Ingram: "Yanks! Now there's a spot of luck! Come to collect me, have you? Lead on lads, no time for handshakes and hellos." This quirky dialogue is one of several aspects illustrating that the representation of the Holocaust is primarily invested in "checking the box" of including Nazi crimes, rather than in a representation of historical events in their own right. Most importantly, it offers gameplay in a non-controversial space, rather than exposure to troubling historical human cruelties, which could lead the player to a moment of reflection which would take them out of the represented historical moment in which they are immersed.

*Computer Gaming World*'s review from January 2004 shares this sentiment, claiming that "[s]ure, there's nothing really funny about war, but *Call of Duty* is a game, and, well, games are supposed to be fun" (103). This idea that games are primarily a vehicle for fun has been challenged, particularly by scholars in queer game studies who find that this focus prevents the exploration of marginalized identities and unpleasant subject matters. Bonnie Ruberg (2015) claims that "[t]he traditional and often myopic focus on fun forecloses a rich array of emotions—among them anger, annoyance, fear, alarm, and hurt—that can in fact shape a game's message as much as (if not more than) its content and mechanics. By contrast, looking at games that go

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[87] This hard time limit does not receive any explicit narrative motivation. All the player learns is that the Major has to be rescued by then, or "they'll be sending someone to rescue *us*."

beyond fun creates new spaces for players, games, and queer worlds at the margins" (110).

While the above review clashes with Ruberg's call to make video games able to create new

spaces for formerly less represented groups, especially in the LGBTQ community, the sentiment

perfectly illustrates the limitations of games that require a considerable financial return on their

labor and cost intensive production upon release. Mohini Dutta (2015) illustrates this when she

laments a "separation into games for 'fun' and games for 'change'," between "games for

pleasure [and] games for social justice" (n.p.), and, one might add, games that ride on a

substantial investment of funds, and those that are able to take risks.

What can be represented is thus not only decided by technological limitations but also

depends on assumptions about the medium's appropriate objects of representation and the

necessity to avoid public outrage as well as the financially crucial target audience of main-stream

gamers 'not having fun'. While I have argued in chapter III that the release of *Saving Private

Ryan* opened up the setting of WWII to FPSs, it appears that the genre's perception in 2003 still

rendered its games unable to engage with controversial themes. Ironically, while later,

exclusively "Mature" rated, installments of the franchise would regularly include controversial

levels and marketing materials to boost their releases' visibility (most notoriously the "No

Russian" level in 2009's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, in which the player participates in a

terroristic airport massacre), the original game successfully obtained a "Teen" rating by avoiding

such dynamics.

Focusing on a prison, rather than a concentration camp allows *Call of Duty*'s designers to

historically motivate not showing the horrors of a death camp. The design of the camp itself also

serves this purpose. While it features a recognizable visual inventory from Nazi camps (barbed

wire, watch towers, etc.), it fails to even acknowledge the presence of any detainees besides the

Major. Not only is the camp void of prisoners,[88] but all the buildings (save the Major's prison) consist of dining halls similar to the one shown in Figure 67, featuring no sleeping barracks. Troublingly, while omitting references to war crimes, the level features a swimming pool in the camp's center, a historical element (primarily for staff-use) frequently used by Holocaust deniers in attempts to downplay the cruelties occurring in Auschwitz and other camps (Potok 2010).

In addition, the 10:00 minute time limit on top of the attacking troops forces the player to rush through the camp to reach the prison building in time, minimizing both exposure to the level's minimal details and any time to reflect on its representational blind spots. The logical flaw of a heavily fortified camp with one single prisoner does put this level at odds with its own claims to realism, but, more interestingly, it showcases the wish to not entirely leave out Nazi crimes against humanity, which in (historically inaccurate) popular representations has frequently served as the central legitimation for American involvement in the European Theater.

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[88] Thousands of Hungarian Jews had (via Auschwitz) been sent to Strasshof in June 1944, so their absence is historically inaccurate.
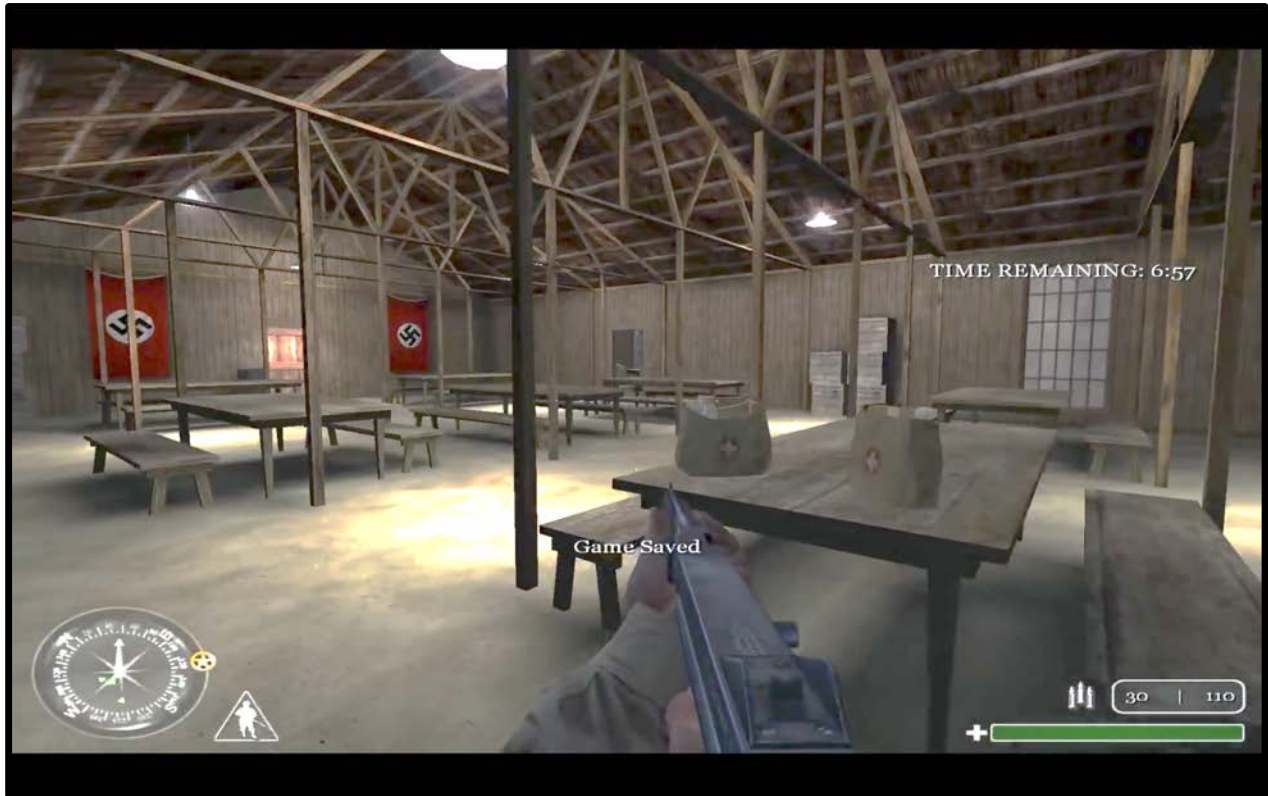
*Figure 67: Dining hall in the Dulag IIIA mission*

At the same time, the game avoids spoiling the immersive 'rush' of killing Nazis—in fact, as a result of the timer, pacing increases—by including explicit references to the Nazis' war crimes. While I do not argue that pacing directly influences realism, the inclusion of a timer serves as a type of filter controlling the player's contact with the game's level and privileges the level's objective, rather than its setting. It does not influence game space itself. However, similarly to appropriate agency (see my discussion above), the level can produce an experience of historical resonance by producing a pacing appropriate for a soldier on a hectic 1940s' rescue mission behind Nazi lines.

Not unlike the inclusion of archival materials largely located outside of gameplay, the rushed and minimized presence of Nazi war crimes link the game to popular historiographies, while never fleshing out this connection. Notwithstanding any speculation on the designers'

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motives, it remains noteworthy that *Call of Duty* features this awkward representational

compromise. While the simulation of time pressure might result in historical resonance, its main

focus is the player's continuously enjoyable gameplay experience and the game's non-

controversial reception.


The British Campaign – Operation Tonga

Arguably the most evident design choice indicative of the desire to market *Call of Duty*

to a more global audience is that the single-player campaign takes place from the perspectives of

the American, British and Russian forces, rather than, like *Medal of Honor*, being restricted to a

narrative covering U.S. efforts. In a contrast to Private Martin's story and its strong emphasis on

squad movements, the British campaign in large parts echoes *Medal of Honor*'s quasi-

superhuman soldier, ending its story with a covert spy operation. It differs from the U.S.

protagonist, as the resulting minimal presence of meaningful NPCs and the near-absence of his

reactions to the events render protagonist Sgt. Evans hard to identify with. This, in turn, hinders

psychological immersion.

The counterpart to Martin's handwritten diary (see above) equally shows little investment

in his character. As Figure 68 shows, the British campaign's first loading screen not only

removes the highly personal diary to introduce the player to Evans, but personal photos, and, in

fact, any visual portrayal of the player-character are absent. Instead of interlocking a subjective

and a top-down anticipation of the events to come, its focus lies on an official, "TOP SECRET,"

typewritten document outlining the first mission in dispassionate military language. While

handwritten annotations can be spotted both on the document and the photographs in the

background, Evans' personal voice is largely absent from what serves as his introduction to the player.
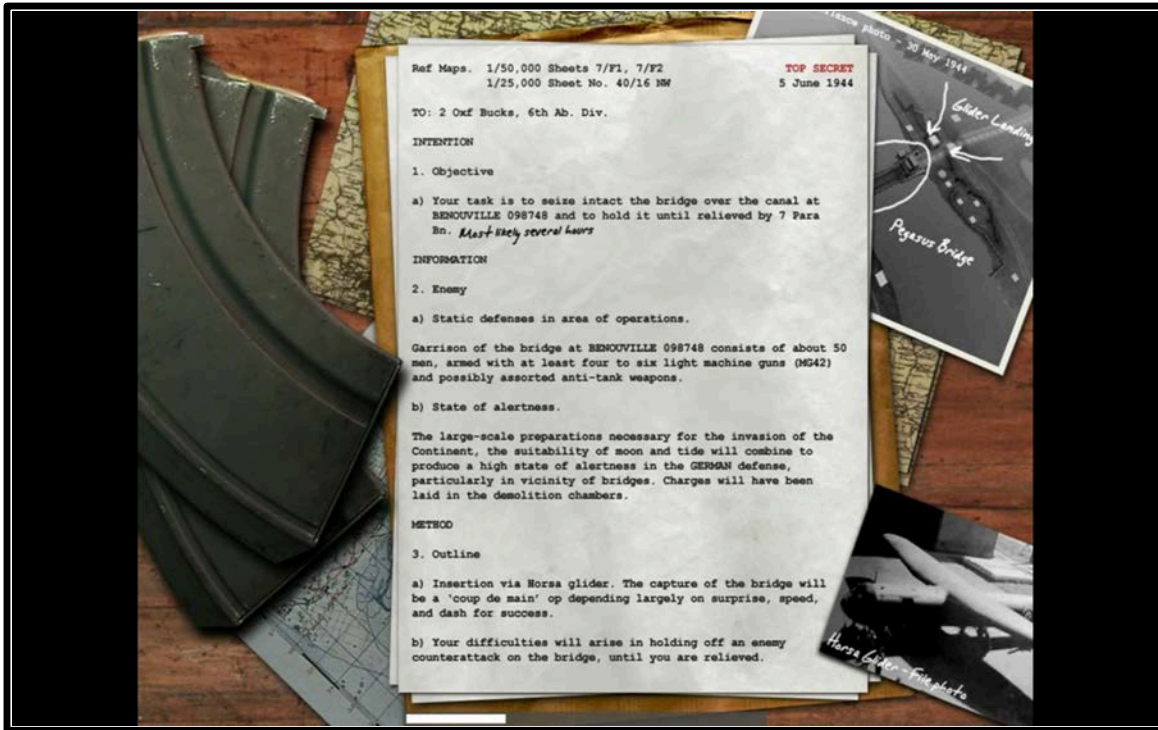


*Figure 68: Evans' Orders (Loading Screen)*

The mission opens with Evans and his comrades crashing close to 'Pegasus Bridge' in the middle of the night, overwhelming German forces and claiming the bridge as their own. This mission is based on "Operation Deadstick," in which British troops captured the Caen Canal bridge (to be renamed Pegasus Bridge afterwards) and the River Orne bridge.

In the morning hours of June 6, 1944, the soldiers fight off Wehrmacht counterattacks, with Evans in charge of the German Flak gun, eliminating Wehrmacht tanks. After having successfully held the bridge long enough for British reinforcements to arrive (with a 5:00 minute timer indicating the remaining time), Evans is deployed to the German *Ruhrgebiet*, a primary technological hub for Nazi Germany. To clear the way for British bombers, he singlehandedly

infiltrates the Edersee Dam[89] and—with the help of explosives—destroys any anti-aircraft guns

in the vicinity, while also damaging the dam's generators. After he is met by a Captain ("Captain

Price") and a fellow soldier in a truck outside of the facility, they flee heavy German attacks to

reach an Airfield. Using an anti-aircraft gun, Evans destroys the German Stuka dive bombers

chasing them and finally boards a friendly plane that takes him and his fellow soldiers to safety.

This mission is loosely based on 1943's Operation Chastise, in which British bombers

damaged the Edersee Dam; however, not with the help of any troops securing the premises

beforehand. In 1955, Pathé cinematically released the movie *The Dam Busters* based on these

events in the UK. This way, *Call of Duty* chooses a narrative and setting already established via

film.

The last mission features Captain Price and Evans boarding the German battleship Tirpitz

disguised as German officers. As Price dies in German gunfire when his papers are discovered to

be counterfeit, Evans, once more with the help of explosives, destroys the ship's boilers and

radar systems, recovering patrol logs and order documents in the process. With Price being

fatally hit during the beginning of the mission, Evans shoots his way through the battleship by

himself, escaping on the boat that had brought him and Price on board.

The game mechanics conform largely to the American campaign, allowing the game to

forego a second boot camp style introduction, which presented the player with an effective way

to identify with his player-character. Like his U.S. counterpart Private Martin, only Evans has

access to weapons needed to successfully hold Pegasus Bridge and eliminate Stuka bombers, and

he shoots German forces from the back of a driving truck during one mission. The function of

the timer is reversed here: unlike Martin's timed effort to break out Major Ingram, Evan must

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[89] The game abbreviates its name to "Eder Dam".

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hold the bridge until reinforcements arrive: when the timer has run out, the mission is successful, rather than a failure. The mechanics of space also don't vary meaningfully from the American missions. Like Martin, Evans takes and holds ground with the corresponding movement patterns.

The British last two "lone wolf"-type missions, which barely feature any Allied NPCs, contain little meaningful English dialogue. As a result, unlike in the American campaign, Evans' identity is rarely fleshed out by means of dialogue, displaying the game's focus on the American campaign. With Voronin, the Russian campaign features a player-character even less fleshed-out and even more problematic as a facilitator of psychological immersion. Furthermore, the Russian (communist) war effort is portrayed as driven by threatening and coercing its troops into battle, resulting in a clear ideological difference to the portrayal of the two, allegedly self-motivated, capitalist countries.

## The Russian Campaign--From the Battle of Stalingrad to The Battle of Berlin

The campaign does not make the player participate in the Russian war of aggression, in which the USSR invaded Poland from the East as allies of Nazi Germany beginning September 1939. Rather, it opens on September 18, 1942, more than a year after Germany had attacked the Soviet Union, effectively ending the 1939 German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact or 'Hitler-Stalin Pact.'

While the American campaign features a player-character motivated by comradery, and the British campaign relies on dutifully fulfilling orders, the Russian campaign highlights a sense of pressure and threat from superiors as the troops' motivation to push forward. The American preloader differentiates between soldiers and "the brass," allowing the player to identify more strongly with the former. In fact, one might argue that the available contrast supports the immersive experience of the American levels. The British document, however, does not establish

a relationship between the two groups. Rather, it frames the British war effort as ordered from the top, rather than as a patriotic effort, while the player-character's actions confirm an embrace of these orders. This slight absence of soldier agency is strongly intensified in the Russian missions' preloaders.



*Figure 69: Stalin's Order 227 (Loading Screen)*

After Martin's diary, and Evans' annotated mission briefing with a relatively small audience (indicated by its "top secret" label), Stalin's order and the Russian propaganda posters constitute the broadest, least individualized access to the Russian player-character. A shortened version of Stalin's historical order 227 (Figure 69), which opens the first mission as a loading screen, anticipates this sense of pressure. It addresses the army as a collective "we" and

depersonalizes the sense of pressure by downplaying its nature of a military command, and shifting it to the personified "Motherland," rather than Stalin as its agent. The



Figure 70: Irakli Toidze, Motherland Is Calling! (1941)



Figure 71: Viktor Semyonovich Klimashin, Kill the German Beasts! (1943)

threats against "panic-mongers, traitors, and cowards" resonate with the document's generally brutal tone ("stubbornly," "to the last droplet of blood," "grab") and form a strong contrast to the patriotic US soldiers, who, in Martin's diary, were described as eager to fight. Soldier agency is replaced by force and the rhetorical employment of the Motherland as an ultimate authority at the apex of the military hierarchy.

The order's shortened version also draws stronger attention to the verb "exterminate," a word choice that, while present in the historical document, blurs the lines between Russian war efforts and Nazi Germany's genocide. The document itself is attached to a wooden surface, amid Russian propaganda posters: The poster on the left is a fragment of Irakli Toidze's 1941

*Motherland Is Calling!* painting (Figure 70), depicting a woman holding the Red Army's Oath of Allegiance, including a pledge to "unquestioningly carry out all military … orders of commanders" and to accept the "harsh punishment of Soviet law" if breaking the oath. The poster fragment on the right is a piece of Viktor Semyonovich Klimashin's 1943 painting *Kill the German Beasts!* (Figure 71), which depicts a red bayonet killing a tiger identified as Nazi Germany by means of swastikas. The text reads: "Kill the German Beasts! Annihilate Hitler's Army – You Can And You Must!" Similar to the U.S. campaign's tutorial level that features variations of contemporary artwork, the two posters result in a sense of historical realism via the archive effect, yet, like the game's opening cinematics, this realism is located outside immersive gameplay.

Gameplay and Narrative

Not surprisingly, the Russian campaign does not feature any major deviations from the gameplay mechanics featured in the other campaigns. In its use of NPCs and general narrative, however, the campaign constitutes an explicit extension of the theme of military coercion, to which the first loading screen alludes. Forced at gunpoint by his superior officers, conscript soldier Corporal Voronin ("Воронин"), at first not carrying a weapon, joins his comrades in liberating Stalingrad in his first mission. As he picks up one of the guns left by the droves of dead Russian soldiers, he makes his way to the city, where he kills German officers with a sniper gun, finally capturing Red Square. Teaming up with Sgt. Makarov, the two clear several buildings until the player is instructed to meet up with Captain Zubov at the train station. Promoted to Junior Sergeant, Voronin secures a supply route in the city's sewers before arriving at a "Pavlov's house," a German stronghold, where he meets up with a squad of comrades. Here, he witnesses a fellow soldier being forced to act as a decoy, attracting German fire, while the rest

of the group make their way forward. Holding the house until reinforcements arrive (indicated by a 4:00 minute timer), he finishes the mission. As he is then deployed into Poland in 1944, Voronin infiltrates and destroys a German tank repair facility. Commandeering a T-34 tank for the next two missions, he helps a group of Russian tanks to push westward through Poland, travelling through countryside and an unnamed Polish town in ruins.

The theme of coercion is noticeably present throughout large parts of the campaign, illustrating the game's ideology that demonizes the only non-capitalist allied nation it represents. The push into Stalingrad begins with a group of visibly frightened troops on a boat crossing the Volga river. The superiors remind the soldiers by yelling at them through a megaphone in a heavy Russian accent that "[t]here will be no mercy for defeatists, cowards, or traitors! Anyone caught deserting his post will be shot!," recalling Stalin's order on the mission's loading screen. As terrified soldiers jump over board when German bombers launch an attack on the boat, the superiors first attempt to push them back (Figure 72), then shoot into the water to kill any surviving "traitors" (Figure 73).

Ironically, this mission most strongly resembles *Saving Private Ryan*'s opening sequence: both feature terrified soldiers on a boat moving into an extremely chaotic and violent battlefield, jumping ship—on Captain Miller's (Tom Hanks) command, rather than by deserting in *SPR*—only to be shot underwater. The two scenes also employ Czech hedgehog barricades, a moment during which sound cuts out to simulate shellshock, and dead comrades scattered across the shore (Figure 74 and Figure 75). The difference between *Saving Private Ryan*'s Captain Miller, shown as part of the crew, to the crass indifference of the Russian campaign's soldiers and aggressive superiors is meaningful here, delivering a noticeable contrast between *Saving*

*Private Ryan*'s heroic American soldiers and the Russian soldiers brutally forced into battle by

incorporating the film's *mise-en-scène*.



*Figure 72: Russian superiors attempt to push "traitors" back into the boat*



*Figure 73: Russian superiors fire at deserters*

*Figure 74: SPR's opening battle*



Where is my artillery support, Major? How long is that going to take? I am
losing too many men up here! Are you trying to lose the docks? I told you
already, you idiot! The Germans are breaking through to the riverbank! We need
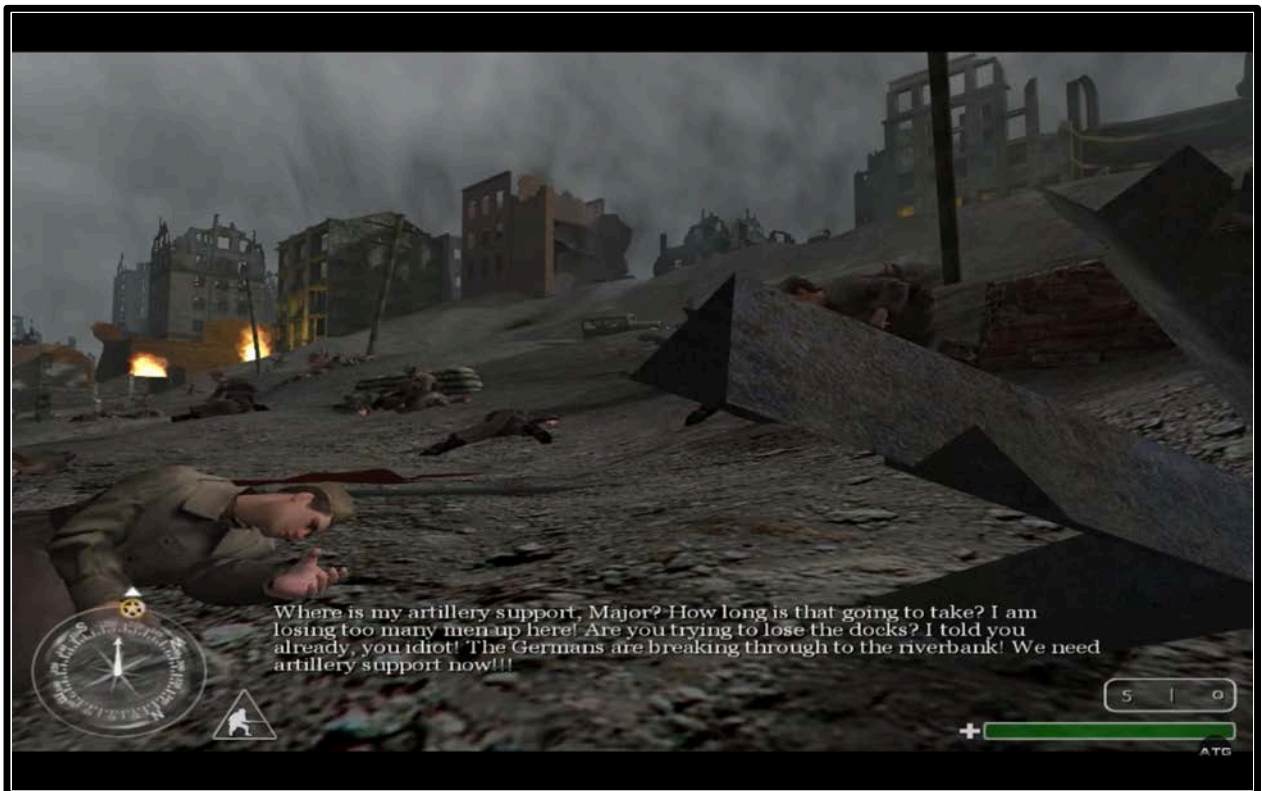artillery support now!!!

*Figure 75: Elements of Saving Private Ryan in Call of Duty's Stalingrad mission*

When taking the German stronghold "Pavlov's house,"[90] the commanding Sergeant similarly forces a private to serve as bait for the German troops, allowing the player to attack the house with a sniper rifle from a safe distance: "Private Kovalenko, as the fastest man here, you will be the bait.—Me? No, thank you, Comrade.—That is an order! Alexei will cover you with the sniper rifle from here. Now go before I shoot you myself." Choosing to be shot by Germans, rather than by *myself* (in this way, the order acknowledges that Kovalenko will be shot either way), he storms toward the house, dying in the process, unless the player manages to kill the Germans in time, which does not make a difference to the mission's outcome.

The theme of forcing soldiers to move into battle, which in the first mission is stressed by contrast with *Saving Private Ryan*'s soldiers, separates the Russian campaign from those of the U.S. and the U.K. It allows the player to call on prior cinematic representation of WWII, while contributing to the game's overall message of the U.S. soldier as exceptionally brave and moral: unlike the Russians, the Americans do not have to be coerced to fight. While perceptual immersion is supported like it is in the previous campaigns, psychological immersion rest almost entirely on the mode of historical realism (historical artifacts, visuals taken from popular cinematic representation, confirmation of the idea that Russian soldiers were less heroic than its capitalist allies), as Voronin is not fleshed-out enough to constitute an effective catalyst for psychological immersion via identification.

The strong ideological structure of the Russian campaign does, of course, not mean that playing it necessarily results in a dismissal of the country's war effort. Murray notices that the ability of players in some *Star Wars* games to play from the perspective of the villainous empire speaks to the fighting game genre's dramatic potential: "[T]he moral impact of enacting an

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[90] The building and its name are also based on a historical German stronghold.

opposing role is a promising sign of the serious dramatic potential of the fighting game" (139).

While *Call of Duty* never has Russia and USA ahistorically face each other in combat, their

soldiers' different motivations compare the systems of capitalism and communism, alleging

different levels of freedom, self-motivation, and coercion, for their citizens. As a result, playing

as a Russian soldier indeed has the player enact an ideologically (if not militarily) opposition to

the United States. In spite of its rigid ideology, the game thus allows for a richer experience,

especially as the Russian gameplay itself remains virtually indistinguishable from the other

campaigns. This could open up reflections on the constant brutal nature of war, independent from

its ideological backgrounds, and yield an understanding of the similar nature of all soldiers'

combat experiences at the time. This, however, requires a certain level of abstraction, or at the

least a type of play that focuses on the played battles, rather than their ideological narratives.


### The "Allied Campaign"

In an effort to tie the three former campaigns together, the concluding "Allied Campaign"

features three missions: a U.S. mission played through the player-character Martin, a UK mission

played through Evans, and a Russian mission played through Voronin. Differences in gameplay

and narrative to the other campaigns are once more virtually absent, as every mission conforms

to the frameworks I laid out earlier. Martin is tasked to capture documents that contain the

location of V2 rockets about to be fired at London, which Evans then destroys in mission 2.

Finally, Voronin participates in the Battle of Berlin, ending with witnessing the Russian flag

being flown on top of the Reichstag.

Ending the game from a Russian perspective (with the opening cry "Victory or death!",

reinforcing the theme of coercion) appears to be at odds with the game's general focus on U.S.

troops as being heroic. However, as the Battle of Berlin effectively constitutes the end of the war

in the European theater, this ending is an understandable design choice. The cinematic end

sequence of the game, however, explicitly ties the three campaigns together for the first time in

the game.

Given that either mission could have easily been incorporated into the three major

campaigns, this awkward coda cannot be motivated narratively. Rather, it allows to echo the

game's motif of pan-national efforts that served *Call of Duty*'s claims to historical realism on its

game box art and cinematic opening by switching between its points of view more quickly. It is

the concluding cinematic sequence, which effectively ties the American and the Russian war

effort together for the first time, however, similarly to the opening sequence, outside of

gameplay. The cinematic ending consists of archival footage showing celebrating freed civilians,

German POWs and celebrating allied soldiers, taking the player out of immersive gameplay and

offering the perspective of an outside observer, "a contemporary viewer watching cable

television and learning about events far in the past" (Allison, 89). A voiceover in a Russian

accent narrates the images, concluding "Today, I crossed the Elbe river in Germany and shook

hands with an American soldier. Although I could not understand anything he said, I felt this

man was my brother. And I think he felt the same." This sequence explicitly ties the three

campaigns together, as contact between the three nations happened only once throughout the

game (the British Major's prison-break facilitated by American troops).


**<u>Conclusion</u>**

Organized by means of a pan-national narrative, *Call of Duty*'s four campaigns do little

to hide the game's hierarchy in its portrayals of U.S.-American, British and Russian soldiers.

While immersion via perceptual identification and via the mode of historical realism remain

largely constant within the game's three national perspectives, the three player-characters

Martin, Evans and Voronin, as well as their interactions with NPCs reveal an ideology that conforms to popular U.S.-centric accounts of WWII generally, and to an ideological difference between capitalism and communism specifically. Yet, conforming to those accounts once more supports the mode of historical realism by confirming the player's assumptions about these nations.

Additional features of this mode include historical artifacts, including a quasi-fetishistic recreation of WWII weaponry, and narrative/visual tropes taken from cinematic representations of battle. Bookmarking gameplay with cinematic sequences that evoke the position of a viewer watching a cable-TV history special (Allison) serves the same purpose by using visuals created by the game's engine, while simultaneously using the archive effect to reference the materiality of historical documents.

The game's unsuccessful attempt at representing the Holocaust, however, reveals that this mode and immersion are not necessarily connected to each other, and that historical realism can be subject to conflicts with game design and commercial interests. As I will show in this dissertation's conclusion, *Call of Duty* represents a third iteration in the evolution of the WWII FPS, constituting the point of wedding immersion with historical realism after *Wolfenstein 3D*'s anti-historical, and *Medal of Honor*'s genre-driven scenarios, while 2009's *Wolfenstein* remake marks the end of historical WWII representation as a thematic center for FPSs.

## CONCLUSION

I began this project invested in the wish that the public discourse take video games more seriously than it historically has, an impulse which I share with many of my colleagues in game studies. The representations of history featured in *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* do not always possess the complexity of media that financially depend less on pleasing their customers (e.g. low-budget experimental film and indie games). Yet, the ways in which the games' hegemonic ideologies are embedded in their formal, narrative and affective structures are far more complex than their views on history and citizenship. As the games' subject positions oscillate between immersing their players into artificial historical spaces and the affectively removed subject position of Bertolt Brecht's Epic theater, they deserve to be analyzed as meaningful components of a widespread mode of engaging with historical representation. This dissertation has focused on the ways the cultural environment of 1990s and early 2000s U.S. has shaped particular representations of events central to this country's ideology, and the reactions provoked by these representations. A focus on different historical and cultural settings would yield different, yet equally useful observations on the interplay of culture and representation.

In Germany, a political discourse that has not taken video games as seriously as the U.S. has created a paradoxical situation in which media censorship aims to protect citizens from what is thought of as the anti-democratic power of Nazi symbolism. Media violence is heavily policed, and the representation of the swastika is limited to "educational purposes, the struggle against unconstitutional movements, art, science, research or teaching, reporting on current events or history and similar purposes" (§86 1.3 StGB). Video games have not enjoyed the cultural capital of narrative film and literature. As a result, Germany's treatment of shooter games that represent World War II differs from any other nation's game localization efforts: suspicions about virtual

violence and assumptions about its immersive nature led to heavily modified German releases of *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty*. The former title entered the German market in a censored version, which was not allowed to be advertised or openly displayed in stores and was restricted to customers over 18 years of age. *Call of Duty* met with a similar fate. Its representations of the swastika were exchanged for images of the iron cross or altogether removed, while words like "Nazi" or "fascist" were substituted with "Deutscher" (*German man*) and the Wehrmacht was renamed "deutsche Armee" (*German army*). Like *Medal of Honor*, it was only available to adults and could not be advertised. This particular protocol of limiting media access was to a great part established for pornography and horror, where it has been frequently used to censor, ban and limit access to film. Legally grouping shooter games with these genres again exemplifies Linda Williams' observations on cultural capital and Body Genres (see Introduction).

Legally repressing these games, which center around killing Nazis, has led to a strange interest from Neo-Nazis. These right-wing groups consider gaining illegal access to these banned symbols an act of rebellion, a rebellion that overrides the games' intended ideology of celebrating violence against Nazis. In 1998, a Frankfurt court found a member of what the judges called the "nationalist scene,"[91] guilty of publicly displaying unconstitutional symbols.[92] He had uploaded *Wolfenstein 3D (1992, see Chapter I)*— a game in which the player's enemies and their environments are covered with swastikas— to his mailbox and shared his password with a group of 120-130 fellow 'nationalists'. The judges argued that allowing the application of such symbols in video games would make it impossible to counteract their growing public use. If children and teenagers were legally permitted to be exposed to such symbols of unconstitutional organizations

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[91] As a result, the court strangely adopted the euphemistic self-description of German Neo-Nazis

[92] Higher Regional Court (OLG) Frankfurt, File Number 1 Ss 407/97. March 18, 1998. Anonymized German document available at http://www.technolex-anwaelte.de/user_data/OLG_Frankfurt_a.M._1_Ss_407_97.pdf

in video games, they could easily become accustomed to them, which in turn could make them more susceptible to being influenced by National Socialist ideology. According to this panel of judges, the fact that the Nazi symbols in *Wolfenstein 3D* are those of the player character's foes does not solve this problem, as one would always have to anticipate that some players of video games or any forms of play would sympathize or identify with the opponent or enemy in the game. The historical and legal environment of Germany thus led to a reversal in the game's American reception: it rebranded playing this fictionalized celebration of America's anti-Nazi efforts as an act of right-wing civil disobedience. While there are scholarly engagements with German game censorship (Mayer 2012), an analysis of the fluid construction of ideology in immersive video games via a complex interplay between immersion, historical heritage, political anxieties and the representation of traumatic history remains to be explored in the German context.

In this dissertation, I have shown that the ways in which users access the content of commercial historical representations are informed by the cultural discourse into which these representations are released. While I have also shown how the cultural environment— such as the discourse on the "Greatest Generation"— can steer decisions on the part of game design, it is equally true that cultural and historical circumstances —like the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre— necessarily inform a game's reception, including the experience of playing it. Of course, while the catalyst for my own project had been a frustration with a dismissive treatment of a highly influential medium by German media censors, I wrote much of it in a political climate suggesting that notions of realism and the meaning of history are heavily shifting under a current resurgence of the political right in the United States. As of today, the symbolic inventory of Nazi Germany is widely seen at White Nationalist rallies that protest

an inclusive treatment of minorities and what they regard as the removal of Confederate heritage. Conspiracy theories, rather than narratives of history and culture from formerly accepted authorities, inform many decisions of Washington lawmakers. Faith in the media has been systematically reduced by the notion of 'fake news', while lies have been redeemed as "alternative facts" by White House spokesperson Kellyanne Conway. In a time in which presidential advisor Rudi Giuliani can proclaim that "truth isn't truth," but rather always "somebody's version of the truth," it is of great importance to critically analyze the multitude of sources from which we construct our own understanding of reality as a society. As game and media scholars, we can uncover the myriad ways in which immersive media tell their own stories about history, politics, and the place of the individual subject. Our training allows us to draw attention to the ways realities become articulated through media, and to share our insights with our students.

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