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“WE’RE MEANT TO CHOOSE”:
Thematic Changes in Video Game Adaptations of Non-Participatory Media

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ABSTRACT

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Video game adaptations are often viewed only as extension of franchises, tie-ins or other products made for the purpose of creating profit. At the same time, how this adaptation process is affected by the participatory medium is not widely researched. This study discusses video game adaptations of non-participatory texts through the themes of violence, and gender and sexuality by comparing the source texts to their adaptations. These themes were chosen because of their significance in the public discourse surrounding video games. The texts included in this study were Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Yager Development’s *Spec Ops: The Line*, Harlan Ellison’s “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream”, its adaptation by the same name by The Dreamers Guild, H. P. Lovecraft’s *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, Headfirst Productions’ *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Osmotic Studios’ *Orwell: Keeping an Eye on You*.

The study found that the included video games could discuss violence in an introspective and complex manner. However, themes of gender and sexuality were largely omitted even if they had a strong presence in the source text, except for cases in which female characters were victimised. It was discerned that although the included video games could offer insightful commentary on violence, they were more hesitant at discussing sexual and gender issues, leading to those themes being omitted during the adaptation process.

Keywords: adaptation, video games, video game adaptation, video game violence, video games sexuality, video games gender, gender and sexuality, violence, participatory media, Game Studies

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Videopeliadaptaatiot nähdään usein vain tuoteryhmän osina tai muina tuotteina, jotka on tehty vain taloudellisista syistä. Tapa, jolla tämä osallistava media vaikuttaa adaptaatioprosessiin, on samaan aikaan vähän tutkittu aihe. Tämä tutkielma käsittelee ei-osallistavien tekstien videopeliadaptaatioita väkivallan, sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden teemojen kautta vertaamalla lähdetekstejä niiden adaptaatioihin. Nämä teemat valittiin, koska ne ovat toistuvia aiheita videopeleistä käydyssä julkisessa diskurssissa. Tutkielmassa käsitellyt tekstit ovat Joseph Conradin *Heart of Darkness*, Yager Developmentin *Spec Ops: The Line*, Harlan Ellisonin “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream”, sen The Dreamers Guildin tekemä samanniminen adaptaatio, H. P. Lovecraftin *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, Headfirst Productionsin *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*, George Orwellin *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Osmotic Studiosin *Orwell: Keeping an Eye on You*.

Tutkielman mukaan videopelit pystyivät esittämään väkivaltaa kriittisillä tavoilla. Tästä huolimatta sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden teemat oli pääasiassa sivuutettu, vaikka niillä olisi ollut tärkeä rooli lähdetekstissä. Poikkeuksena tähän olivat tapaukset, joissa naishahmo oli väkivallan kohteena. Tutkielmassa todettiin, että vaikka tutkielman käsittelemät videopelit pystyivät käsittelemään väkivaltaa monimuotoisesti, ne eivät tahtoneet käsitellä sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden teemoja yhtä laajasti, mikä johti näiden teemojen lähes täyteen poisjättämiseen adaptaatioprosessissa.

Avainsanat: adaptaatio, videopelit, videopeliadaptaatio, väkivalta videopeleissä, seksuaalisuus videopeleissä, sukupuoli videopeleissä, sukupuoli ja seksuaalisuus, väkivalta, osallistava media, pelitutkimus

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1 Introduction

When one opens a copy of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the events of the story progress in a reliably predictable manner. Winston thinks he has discovered a way to contact a secret society to resist the all-powerful seeming INGSOC. He develops a relationship with another would-be revolutionary and their illegal relationship becomes a way of resisting in their minds. And finally, it is revealed that the secret society is in fact a lie produced by INGSOC itself and Winston and his partner are taken into custody. After various kinds of torture, Winston is mentally broken and made to admit to his crimes, both real and invented. Interpretations might differ, but the events stay the same.

How would a change of perspective change this? What if we could take Winston's place or guide him? Could this added agency change the thematic focus of the story, or would it allow one to successfully struggle against INGSOC? How would these and other possibilities affect the meaning of the overall story? Could they even change how we view the original text? By examining video game adaptations of different works, one can potentially explore these questions.

In recent years, there has been heightened interest in the interactions and potential clashes of traditional and new media. Theories of intermediality, transmediality and other broader cultural frameworks, such as convergence culture, consider relations and transfers between old and new media as a defining feature of modern culture (see Jenkins; Thon). However, when one considers adaptation, it is important to realise that the process of adaptation is never simply a case of copying another work or harmonising it with a larger whole. Much less so when the lines

between media are crossed. As Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn show, the conventions and unique qualities of different media practically mandate a change in themes and narrative and their focus (16, 24). However, already in the theory they present one can see how ill-equipped it is to analyse video games because of its prejudices. When discussing video game adaptations, Hutcheon and O'Flynn often refer to franchise creation as a motivation (e.g. 30, 86). Although they recognise that there are several reasons why one might want to adapt any given work (85-95), connecting video games to purely financial motivations construes their scope of reasons as narrower than other media. In addition, Hutcheon and O'Flynn seem to doubt games' ability to convey stories and themes on their own, instead having to rely on affordances of other media, film in particular, to do so (e.g. 13). What defines the medium of video games is made trivial, and preference is given to cutscenes, non-interactive cinematic sequences, as the main vehicles of story and themes.

Although this study will not attempt to produce a new complete or even supplementary theory on adaptation, it will show that not all adaptation into video games is simply a movie with interactive action sequences in between or attempts at broadening a lucrative franchise. Indeed, unlike tie-in video games that are released alongside a main product, such as a movie, none of the games in this study are part of a larger transmedia franchise. Instead, the games in this study are all unrelated to the original work's release, some having over 100 years between the original and the adaptation. This is in order to show what kind of changes adaptation into video games might cause when not subject to controlling policies of an overarching and pre-defined marketing or merchandising project. The texts included in this study are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream" (henceforth "Mouth"), H. P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, George Orwell's

Nineteen Eighty-Four, and their respective adaptations, Yager Development's *Spec Ops: The Line* (henceforth *Spec Ops*), The Dreamers Guild's *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* (henceforth *Mouth*), Headfirst Productions' *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth* (henceforth *Dark Corners*), and Osmotic Studio's *Orwell: Keeping an Eye on You* (henceforth *Orwell*).

The content of this study is divided into four chapters in addition to the introductory chapter. In chapter two, I will discuss meaning and narrativity in video games and present different views on these features. At the same time, I will present the focus that forms the basis of this study, namely an emphasis on player-centric approaches to games. Finally, this chapter will conclude by discussing how this study defines an adaptation. In chapters three and four, I begin my analysis with themes of violence, and gender and sexuality. These are both themes that have been heavily discussed in the context of video games and video game culture, both within academic circles and without (see Sarkeesian and Petit; McLaughlin; Chalk). The purpose of these chapters is to assess whether or not this purported culture of video games has affected works as they have been adapted and if these themes show indications of features unique to video games. After this, I will present my conclusions in the final chapter.

2 On Video Game Narratives

Narrative is evolving. This is not a comment on the current state of narrative and narrativity, so much as it has been a reality since human beings began telling stories to each other. Ways of telling stories have evolved over time within media and as new media have emerged, they have been affected by and affect other media. The newest form of this is participatory media, such as video games, which although they do not need a narrative, can make it manifest in new ways via direct user input. However, several scholars argue that the narrative potential of participatory media is either not properly understood or is yet to be properly utilised (see Sicart).

In this thesis, I will discuss the differences between media and development of narratives by examining adaptations from non-participatory texts to video games. However, before discussing the special features of video game narratives, one must have a brief look at old media narratives, their structures and other features. This is important partly because video games, as a younger medium, have borrowed and still borrow features and structures from them. It is also significant specifically to this study as it provides us with a point of reference to compare changes caused by the adaptation process. In addition, one can through these features find possible reasons why changes in narratives have been made.

In the following two sections, I will first discuss the features of narrative and narrativity in non-participatory media, such as books, plays, and film. I will use the model by Marie-Laure Ryan (*Avatars*) as my primary source for old media narrativity. Second, I will explore the unique features of video game narrativity and introduce the features that will be most important to this study. In doing so, I will discuss how video games create meaning and narrative through reciprocity. In addition, I will discuss if

and how Ryan's model could be applied to video game narratives and present other models that might suit them better.

2.1 Narrative Qualities in Old Media

In her book *Avatars of Story*, Marie-Laure Ryan proposes that narrativity, or "storiness", is not a binary, either/or -feature, but scalar (7). This means that texts that may not be universally agreed to have a story, like novels and films, may still have a degree of storiness to them. Her proposal comes in the form of eight conditions, divided into three semantic and one formal and pragmatic dimension (ibid.):

> Spatial dimension
> 1. Narrative must be about a world populated by individuated existents.
>
> Temporal dimension
> 2. This world must be situated in time and undergo significant transformations.
> 3. The transformations must be caused by nonhabitual physical events.
>
> Mental dimension
> 4. Some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world.
>
> 5. Some of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents, motivated by identifiable goals and plans.
>
> Formal and pragmatic dimension
> 6. The sequence of events must form a unified causal chain and lead to closure.
> 7. The occurrence of at least some of the events must be asserted as fact for the story world.
> 8. The story must communicate something meaningful to the recipient.

Each of these conditions presupposes the ones that came before it (7), and as more of these conditions are fulfilled, a representation can be recognised to have more narrativity. By design, each of these "prevents a certain type of representation from

forming the focus of interest, or macrostructure of a story" (8). For example, number 2 discounts static descriptions, number 4 "scenarios involving only natural forces or nonintelligent participants" (ibid.), and number 8 eliminates "bad stories". Ryan concedes that this last one is the most controversial condition on her list and that "it needs to be complemented by a full theory of the different ways in which narrative can achieve significance" (9). Indeed, the eighth condition does not define "meaningful", and one may ask if the purported lack of meaningfulness might even produce a meaning of its own in the minds of the audience.

The decision of how many fulfilled conditions constitutes a narrative Ryan leaves to the individual (9). This somewhat mellows the eighth condition as not all users of this model will require a story to be good to be a narrative. In addition, Ryan says that despite where different people draw the line of when something can be considered a narrative, they "basically agree" with the relevant requirements for narrativity and their importance relative to each other (ibid.).

Ryan makes a distinction between the quality of "being a narrative" and "having narrativity". According to her, a narrative text is one that is created with "the intent to evoke a story in the mind of the audience" (10-11). However, it is the reader's recognition of this intent that decides if it is a narrative, even if the story evoked is not the same as was intended (11). Thus, she defines "having narrativity" as a text's ability to evoke a story (ibid.) In other words, having narrativity makes recognition as a narrative possible, but does not dictate that a text is a narrative.

Although I have used the term "text" here, Ryan's model can be applied to a far wider range of media and concepts. Indeed, pictures and even architecture and music can be said to have some narrative aspects. However, according to her some media are not as suited for narratives as others, having "serious handicaps" (4). This can be easily

seen in media such as music without lyrics and in architecture, which can be very esoteric from the point of view of narrative. Indeed, these can be seen in three broad media families, “verbal, visual, and aural” (18). These are supposedly in a descending order with verbal language as “the native tongue of narrative” (20). Although this can be seen to place media in a hierarchy, she does point out that these three narrative modes complement each other in multichannel media, such as film, theatre, and TV (20).

The model proposed by Ryan does not elevate one medium over others. Instead, she draws attention to the different strengths of media and how they can tell a similar story in different ways, although she does also say that certain narratives are better suited for certain media (4). However, this less hierarchical view of media is not the only one. Indeed, certain scholars are adamant on the idea that certain media are simply not as good at conveying stories. In the next section, some of these theories will be discussed in relation to video games.

2.2 Narrative and Meaning in Video Games

Although there have been assertions that video games do not have or should not have narrative (see Eskelinen) and their study should only concentrate on play through ludology, the study of game and play activities (Mäyrä 8), it is now being questioned whether the resulting so-called narratology-ludology debate ever actually took place (Mäyrä 10). However, one must recognise that narrative and stories are very different in games than in other media. As Roine notes, “games typically lack a sense of story being *told* and are, therefore, not compatible with the communicative model constructed on the basis of literature” (83, original emphasis). Instead, one must search for the meaning

and narrative of games elsewhere. This section presents a select few of such theories and constructs through them the view held by this study.

One theory on where the meaning of games comes from is proceduralism. According to proceduralism, “rules are the meaning” in video games (Sicart). Indeed, all games, digital or otherwise, are defined to an extent by their rules, which define what one can do within its confines. Although in physical games there might be certain leniency to the rules, in video games, the rules are coded into the program. This means that the most fundamental rules cannot be changed except with specialised knowledge, unlike physical games’ social contracts. Indeed, proceduralism establishes the uniqueness of games as a medium to be based on their “procedural nature” as argued by Janet Murray, meaning that video games are processes that operate in a similar way to computers (Sicart). This absoluteness of rules is indeed something unique to the medium and it is tempting to assume that these rules define the meaning and the narrative of the game.

Although Miguel Sicart sees the value of proceduralism in establishing video games as a medium separate from other media, such as film or literature, he criticises the movement because of its seeming disregard for play and the player. Although players are admittedly important, they are only viewed as “activators of the process that sets the meanings contained in the game in motion”. In other words, the player is only a mechanical part of the process and does not add anything to the experience of the game. Indeed, all divergent interpretations are assumed to be misinterpretations, resulting of playing the game wrong. What constitutes as playing wrong is ill-defined. A player might be able to complete the game as intended, that is, seemingly completing the process right and playing “right”, but if their interpretation of the meaning is different from the prescribed one, they have played “wrong”. According to proceduralism, “play

is not central to understanding the meanings created by (playing) games, since it is the rules that create those meanings" (Sicart). In other words, anything outside the objectives set by the rules is not relevant to a player's experience or indeed, the content of the game despite it being a potential way of playing the game. As Sicart explains, proceduralists believe that "the meaning of the game, and of play, evolves from the way the game has *been created* and not how *it is played*" (original emphasis).

One might also notice a problem with how proceduralism seems to disregard a player's interpretive frame: it assumes a normal, "ideal" player. Because a game's meaning is defined before the player and a normal playing experience is defined as producing this meaning, producing a different meaning is by definition the result of an abnormal process. This in turn implies that the player, the only element not completely under the control of the designer, is abnormal as well. Inadvertently, proceduralism creates a situation where players whose cultural and personal context influences the meaning reproduction of a game are considered unsuitable for its process and so sidelines this same cultural and personal context. This naturally prompts the question of what is implied as the "normal" interpretive frame for these games and what kind of players are privileged as the norm. In fact, according to Sicart's description, "[f]or proceduralists . . . the game *is* the rules, both in terms of its ontological definition (the *what* in what is a game), and in its function as an object that creates meaning in the contexts in which specific users *use* it" (original emphasis). This seems to imply that a player's real-life context does not matter because a game produces a new context in which previous experience is not supposed to matter and instead the player only has the choice of understanding and appropriating the rules or play wrong. Indeed, player's real-life context and experience can only matter negatively, as aberrant instead of the norm.

Sicart also notes that there is no empirical evidence for proceduralism and its claims. However, he does note that there is empirical evidence for players negotiating a game's rules while in play (see Taylor "Does"*, Play*, "The Assemblage"). If rules are the meaning, then this seems to indicate that games' meanings are negotiated by the players themselves. Indeed, considering divergent interpretations as "wrong" seems more like an attempt to discredit evidence in order to maintain proceduralism's established positions. In addition to this, Sicart also points to several author's statements released by certain game designers who subscribe to the proceduralist ideals (e.g. Humble). These statements are meant to explain the rules and thus the meaning of the game. This prompts Sicart to ask: "If rules contain the meaning, what is the need for an author statement?" Indeed, it indicates a mistrust toward the player who the designer fears will play incorrectly and thus sees the need to provide further orientation.

In the proceduralist mindset, the meaning of a game is predetermined. As Roine notes, for certain ludologists such as Gonzalo Frasca, this seems to be an assumption for all media (86). Thus, proceduralism's assumption of a predetermined meaning is not unique to games but to all media, and it is predicated on the idea that the reader, player etc. is always supposed to be a passive receiver, even though the passivity of a player of games may involve a bit more leg work.

Similar to auteur theory in film studies, proceduralism places the creative power of a project on a single individual. Indeed, Murray seems to regard this as the ideal for narrative games in the second edition of her influential book, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (195). Because of this, the meaning of the game is defined before the act of playing takes even place and the player is only needed to complete the meaning by following the rules (Sicart). Paradoxically, although proceduralism aims to establish games as a unique medium, it also downplays and mitigates a factor lauded as unique to video

games: player participation. Unlike viewers of traditional movies or TV series or readers of traditional books or short stories, players can participate directly in the narrative and its storyworld. However, according to proceduralism, the player's place is only to complete the meaning of the game, with as little as possible interpretive thought. Sicart points out that most of the games whose developers ascribe to the proceduralist ideals belong to gameplay genres where it is easy to have rules govern the whole experience, such as single player puzzle games, which only have a single right solution. However, when one moves away from such genres, it becomes more and more difficult to have such an absolute control over the player's experience. Indeed, this control seems to only exist in an idealised version of a player who is essentially a blank slate, onto which the meaningful rules of the game are programmed. This of course requires one to disregard the fact that a player has their own interpretive frame, based on their experiences and culture.

Both Frans Mäyrä (19) and Sicart declare that the meaning of a game is produced during play itself, as a result of the player's participation and not the designer's prescriptions. Furthermore, Mäyrä stresses the interconnectedness of gameplay, which he equates to the rules, and representational elements. Although "gameplay is a necessary condition for games to be games", the human mind involved and its "capacity to interpret meaning into sign systems and phenomena" cannot be ignored (Mäyrä 53). Indeed, the player's ability to interpret the game can produce meanings that the designer, whose design choices can be influenced by factors they are not fully aware of, did not intend despite including materials to produce those meanings.

Although expressive and creative play is exactly what proceduralism tends to overlook, it is precisely this uncontrolled, that is, not controlled by the designer, play that is claimed to prevent a story, "a sequence of (typically) related events" (Hitchens

and Drachen 15; also see Costikyan). The issue is stated to be due to the lack of authorial control, that is, the carefully crafted sequence of events can never be played in completely the same way, thus breaking the sequence and pacing. However, Sicart states “players don’t need the designer - they need a game, an excuse and a frame for play”. Indeed, it is ultimately in the mind of the player and thanks to their interpretative ability that a narrative is recognised. One might argue that it is the play and the narrativization during that play that creates the personal narrative of a game. Although the game might provide elements and frame for the narrative, it is the player that pieces together events into a sequence. As Sicart states, “meaning is played”.

Marie-Laure Ryan, however, disagrees. In an attempt at creating a theory of narratology that does not exclude video games, Ryan attests that interactivity, which is “the property that makes the greatest difference between old and new media”, does not work for storytelling, “because narrative meaning presupposes the linearity and unidirectionality of time, logic, and causality” (*Avatars* 99). However, as Hanna-Riikka Roine points out, interactivity is a poor way to differentiate new media from old because it is a term used too vaguely (115). In addition, referring to Richard Bartle, she notes that all storytelling media are interactive because “no story exists unless there is someone to engage with it” (ibid.), and Adrienne Shaw goes so far as to say that “books are the original interactive medium, in that readers create many of the literary sensory elements in their heads” (3). However, if this interactivity is associated with narrative, it becomes unambiguous, according to Ryan, which eliminates non-narrative texts and digital texts that do not have any choices in them (*Avatars* 99).

Instead of interactivity, Roine concentrates on reciprocity, the system’s ability to react and engage with the player (111). Indeed, although one might be able to interact with a book, as Bartle suggests, the book cannot answer this interaction. Ryan does

acknowledge this ability in video games in her list of properties of digital systems that she "regard[s] as the most relevant for narrative and textuality" (98). But Ryan defines this property, "[i]nteractive and reactive nature", mainly as an ability of the system, as the ability of the game to react to "voluntary or involuntary" input. However, Roine defines this as a two-sided process where the game and the player both interact with each other, each reacting to the other and not simply one taking in input.

Another factor that is often discussed in relation to video game narrativity is immersion. This is related to the fact that in games, a player can interact directly with the game world and thus feel more like they are there themselves. Mäyrä proposes that there are at least three immersion strategies, which relate to a person's gameplay style. These are sensory, challenge-based, and imaginative immersion. Sensory immersion Mäyrä describes as "the powerful overall quality of the interactive moving images and sounds"(108). Challenge-based immersion "involves being immersed in solving problems that are blocking a player's advancement" and "the rewarding element associated with successful and skilful passing of these challenges" (108-9). The third type of immersion is "imaginative immersion" which occurs when "the player becomes emotionally as well as intellectually absorbed in the game world" (109). At the core of this type of immersion is imagination and Marie-Laure Ryan notes that it is not only present in video games but in other media such as literature as well (*Narrative*). It is likely that although players might immerse more in one way than the others, no experience of immersion is purely of one type. These are important for narrativity as well because they tell us something about the frame in which a player might be engaging with narrative elements and how a developer might be structuring these elements. For example, Roine notes that different approaches to a game can produce different strategies "in actuality" (23) and thus different narrative and thematic

interpretations. It is possible that a developer understands these different immersion strategies and designs their game to encourage certain types of immersion over others, thus affecting how they present narrative elements.

In her doctoral thesis on speculative fiction and worldbuilding, Roine discusses reciprocity as an important method of worldbuilding in games. According to her, "[f]or genuine *agency* to emerge, the digital environment must be meaningfully responsive to user input" (118, original emphasis). Indeed, if the reaction of the system did not mandate some kind of counter-reaction by the player, video games would be left on the level of digital picture books where an animation plays after clicking an object but no true consequence occurs. Instead, for example, enemies can change their tactics depending on player action, which in turn necessitates them to adapt as well, or choices in conversation change a side character's attitudes toward the player character, which lead to different plot elements, such as betrayal or heroic sacrifice, to which the player in turn has to, or at the very least is expected to, react. Instead of the preordained completion of meaning of proceduralism, Roine suggests that games and their designer created processes "provide [the player] with a frame for play, and engage her in a reciprocal action" (118). In this way, although the underlying rules are recognised as important as the source of the frame of play, after their creation the game is given to the player, to play and to interpret. In this view, the player is "a communicative dialogist - or a conversationalist" who is in communication with the system of the game itself (Roine 119), and through the game's representational "shell" they come to understand the procedural "core" as well (Mäyrä 53).

This study adopts the view that reciprocity can also be viewed as an aspect of video game narrativity. In this view, narrativity of video games is produced as a communicative interaction between the player and the video game. According to Roine,

it is irrelevant to ask whether games are stories or narratives (23). Instead, one should ask “whether these works of fiction invite narrative interpretation as a relevant response, and how it relates to other responses during the engagement with them” (ibid.). What one might question about this statement is the definition of “relevant response”. What makes a response relevant? By adding this caveat, Roine implies that not all interpretations are relevant. She elaborates further when discussing “ludonarrative games”, a term coined to combine the play at the core of games and narrative. In discussing these games, she notes that this term recognises that certain games, such as abstract games, do not need narrative elements or devices, but at the same, certain games would be incomprehensible and unplayable without them (23).

Furthermore, Roine dismisses searching for “‘somebody’ that authors the meanings of [video games], or asking what kind of narrator-like figure meanings can be traced back to”(123). Instead, “we should focus on the processes and cues shaping the act of play when discussing frames of interpretation” (ibid.). These processes include absolutes, such as the play area or other mechanical rules that limit actions, but they also include representational elements which direct the player in their actions and how they should regard these acts. These softer cues can be resisted, and play can be taken outside of them, or they can be disregarded, but they tell of what kind of communication the system wants the player to partake in.

From the point of view of adapting non-participatory media into video games, reciprocity provides an interesting point of study. Although non-participatory media can be considered interactive to an extent, only digital mediums such as video games allow the narrative to interact back at the player. Reciprocity allows stories to be told in a different way because they are produced not simply by a rule-crafting developer, but through the communicative act of play between the player and the game. This naturally

requires a different orientation to how themes and narratives are provided in this reciprocal medium.

It should be noted that none of the case studies of this paper are role-playing games (RPGs), which are the primary genre Roine discusses in her thesis. In these games, one is invested in their avatar character and their interaction with the storyworld, thus facilitating the feeling of reciprocity. However, as Mäyrä has shown, there are different immersive strategies that can be applied to any game. This study thus evaluates its subject games primarily through imaginative immersion. This is not to say that this type of immersion or enjoyment of games is superior for an academic study or otherwise. It is simply the most fruitful point of view for this particular thesis. One should also note that although this is the primary viewpoint, it is not purporting to be a pure viewpoint. Immersion is a complex phenomenon and although a player might favour one type, it is not unreasonable to assume they experience the others to a certain degree during play.

One aspect of immersion and how a player interprets is the positioning in a game. In several video games, this is the position of a certain character. Roine notes that this positioning does not communicate anything to the player on its own, but instead it provides a "*universal frame* that makes the game, its workings, and its goals much easier to understand" (125, original emphasis). This frame affects the player's choices as it offers them a role to perform and interpret the events in the game. However, most games, especially role-playing games that Roine describes, allow and expect the player to not only interpret the world but also the frame they are invited into. In other words, different players, or even the same player, can play the same character, or frame, in different ways. This can vary from intentional reinterpretation to simple difference in player life experience. This frame is also important because it can suggest what kind of

values the player is expected to adopt or what the game assumes to be a normal player, as they will have an easier time adopting this position. As Roine points out, "the position inside (or outside of) the world is not the object of representation, but rather an indirect consequence of representing other objects (such as the fictional game world with its existents)" (126).

Although I have aimed to discuss how both video games and non-participatory media can convey narratives, that is, what they have in common, establishing a difference between digital games and other mediums is just as paramount. As Roine notes, studying different media as types of literature perpetuates ideas of what can be art (22). In other words, one should be wary of conceptualising non-literary mediums as types of literature, thus erasing their own uniqueness and potential. If we discuss other media such as digital games through the criteria of literature, we risk making other media seems derivative (Juul 23). Indeed, especially when discussing adaptation, one should resist the idea of a work of literature being adapted into another type of literature. Instead, one should note the ways in which a different medium renews and transforms the set of ideas that make a work.

2.3 What Is an Adaptation?

The question posed by the title of this section is important to ask because some of the video games this study discusses might not initially seem as such, especially if one expects a similar or comparable plot between source and adaptation (see Appendix A). For example, while *Dark Corners* can easily be connected with the original plot and narrative of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, *Orwell* bears little to no resemblance to George Orwell's novel. Therefore, can it be considered an adaptation?

Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn provide the basic definition of an adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" (170). In the case of *Dark Corners* and *Mouth*, it is easy to declare them as adaptations. *Mouth* shares the name, characters, and to an extent, the setting of Harlan Ellison's short story. *Dark Corners* is an adaption through two sources. Firstly, it is a "reimagining" of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, borrowing from its setting and story. Secondly, it employs the so-called Cthulhu Mythos, inspired and based on Lovecraft's works. However, the case for the two other games in this study is less clear. With regard to *Orwell*, neither the store page on *Steam*, an online video game marketplace, nor the page on its developer's site mention George Orwell or his novel ("Orwell; Osmotic studios). In the case of *Spec Ops,* the game was confirmed to be inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in an interview after the game's launch (Laughlin). Can these be considered adaptations?

In this thesis, I broaden Hutcheon and O'Flynn's definition slightly and suggest that an adaptation can be a work that invites interpretation through the frame of a previous work. This invitation does not have to be as explicit as declaration of what it is based on. Instead, the invitation may be made clear through other intertextual connections. *Orwell* begins this invitation with its name and continues it with the naming of characters and their roles in the storyworld, some of which have names identical to characters in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Both narratives have a very explicit theme of how information is controlled, although both emphasise different aspects of it. *Spec Ops* in turn uses names that connect it with Joseph Conrad's novel. Although it can seem backwards, the developer revealing *Heart of Darkness* as an inspiration can be considered such an invitation. Although it happened after the launch of the game, it reveals something about the intention behind the work and nothing prevents players

from playing the game again with this frame of interpretation in mind. Indeed, some players might be playing the game only after learning about the inspiration.

Hutcheon and O'Flynn note that "in the end, it is the audience who must experience the adaptation *as an adaptation*" (172, original emphasis). If this were the only limit on what can be an adaptation, one could potentially consider anything an adaptation. However, if we limit to Hutcheon and O'Flynn's definition, an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation, and my own, an invitation to use a particular frame, one can narrow potential adaptations to a reasonable degree. Of course, one must also note that this model is created mainly for this thesis. For it to work reliably outside of it, considerably more refinement is required and that goes beyond the scope of this study.

3 Violence

For the past few decades, violence in video games has been a hotly debated topic. Indeed, it was through this discussion that age rating systems, such as the ESRB in 1994, were created (Chalk). Despite this, the question of how much violence in video games affects and possibly inspires players and especially underage players is still debated to this day and video games are frequently blamed for incidents perpetrated by young people (e.g. Salam and Stack; Campbell).

The assumption that video games are oriented toward violence is also noted in academia even to the degree of claiming that it is an inherent part of video games, as with Ryan, who says it is because of the very properties of the medium itself (*Avatars* 118). Although she recognises that the surrounding culture is part of the cause, she sees the mechanics shooting a gun as working well with a mouse or joystick interface. At the same time, the immediate and in a certain way spectacular effect of shooting a gun is perfect for a medium that demands an immediate effect for the player's actions (ibid.). However, one has to recognise that this idea of video games being perfect for depicting this kind of action is itself born in the same culture, which is fascinated by violence. Thus, it might be initially difficult for us to imagine other ways to utilise this interface so effectively, especially since it is by this point so ingrained into the ideas of the medium as well.

One might think, based on these views, that violence is far more prevalent in the newer medium than in older ones. Certainly, if we compare it with novels, the amount of visual representations of violence is far greater. Indeed, at a glance, it is hard to say what a novel contains as the images it conveys are constructed, with the help of the words in the text, in the mind of the reader, while in visual genres, such as films and

most digital games, tone and example of the content can be discerned, accurately or not, with a literal glance. This paper will not directly answer the question “are video games more violent than other media?” However, it will essentially discuss it as it compares re-imaginings to the original works. This will not answer the question though, and one should keep in mind that there are several other factors in addition to medium that separate these works, such as time and author.

However, it is important to keep these attitudes towards the medium in mind while we consider the changes in adapted narratives. If one wishes, one can consider them as a popular hypothesis or simply prejudice. They also demonstrate the atmosphere of the cultural environment that video games and adaptations into video games are made in. This in turn shows what game developers might view as expectations by the audience or something to work against to try and change the idea of video games as simple violent gorefests.

When discussing how violence is depicted, I will also discuss how these acts are justified. For this purpose, I will use the idea of six moral disengagement factors in games (Hartmann et al.), which are based on the delineation by Albert Bandura et al. of eight mechanisms exhibited by humans in real life. These moral disengagement factors are how “individuals reframe reprehensible acts against others in a way that makes them appear worthy, just, necessary, or inconsequential” (Hartmann et al. 312). These six factors are: moral justification, “portraying conduct as serving a socially worthy or moral purpose”; euphemistic labelling, “exemplified by language, sounds, or graphical depictions that make harmful conduct respectable if not humorous”; diffusion of responsibility, “minimizing personal agency for a violent act by placing responsibility on others who were involved”; distortion of consequences, “minimizing, ignoring, distorting, and/or disbelieving the effects of immoral actions”; dehumanisation, “having

enemies that either do not possess human qualities or are stripped of human qualities, therefore seeming to possess fewer moral rights"; and attribution of blame, "blaming adversaries or circumstances for the violent action" (319-21). I will go into more detail on these factors as they arise in the analysis itself. Because some of the texts, both sources and adaptations, do not contain any violence perpetrated by the main character or their allies, such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Orwell* and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, comparison will also include how potential violence is justified.

Although video game violence is not real violence, it is important to consider how it is depicted due to its potential effects on the player. Certain research suggests that video game violence is related to real-life aggression (e.g. Anderson et al.; Fischer et al.) and that moral disengagement factors are related to this (e.g. Gabbiadini et al.). Indeed, certain scholars claim that players enjoy video game violence precisely because they do not see the characters on screen just as pixels and the violence towards these real-seeming characters is made palatable through moral disengagement factors (see Hartmann). In addition, just like with other media, against whom violence in video games is justified can inform and reinforce attitudes in real-life.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first one will discuss how moral disengagement factors are primarily before and during a violent act and how this indicates what targets are justified or even preferable. The second section will look at how the consequences of violence are depicted if at all. This includes depiction of injury and if the main character or player is rewarded for violence.

3.1 Targets of Violence

According to Hartmann et al., "more emphatic [players] tend to feel guilty about harming (seemingly social) video game characters" (311-12). More broadly players are

shown to become irritated when the violent actions a game urges them to do are not properly justified or effects mitigated (312). This shows that moral disengagement factors are integral to enjoyable gameplay. However, not every act of violence is created to be enjoyable to the player and some violence might be shown to be unjustified on purpose in order to produce a certain emotional effect.

This section discusses violence in video game adaptations by comparing them to the source works from the point of view of moral disengagement factors. In addition, a special consideration will be given to the issue of against whom the justified violence is directed. The main focus will be on the actions that the main character is expected to or can commit. However, if the main character is aligned with an organisation or group, their acts of violence and the main character's reactions to them will be considered as well.

Both *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and *Dark Corners* dehumanise their enemies in order to justify the violence and disgust toward them. Indeed, dehumanisation is a plot point in both of the works, as the residents of Innsmouth are willing to become less human in order to gain the boon of the monstrous Deep Ones, ensuring their town prosperity. Bennet Lovett-Graff connects this with Lovecraft's personal beliefs and support for eugenics. According to these beliefs, social ills arise from deterministic traits passed on from generation to generation and not from social policy or systems and could thus only be solved through "extreme methods, including mandatory intelligence testing, legalized separation, deportation, sterilization, and, if need be, outright elimination" (177). Indeed, the reaction by the US army in the novella includes concentration camps and euphemistic "disposal of prisoners" (504). In addition, while the novella has the fish-like people not speak any recognisable language when they are chasing the main character, in the adaptation they do speak English all throughout the

game. Although the purpose of this is most likely to provide the player with information through the enemies' reactions, it can also have the effect of reminding the player that these beings are still human beings on some level and could perhaps be reasoned with. However, the game does not give an option to do this and the only interaction one can have with the enemy outside of cutscenes is violence.

Despite these strategies to dehumanise the residents of Innsmouth, the novella also complicates its own dehumanisation strategies. As noted by Tracy Bealer, "this impulse to reject and dehumanise the racially marked other is complicated by the conclusion of the story, when the narrator's further research reveals that he is the product of [miscegenation between a Deep One and a human]" (32). This forces the reader to reconsider the events of the story as the narrator is revealed to be one of the dehumanised other and by the end, embraces his transformation (554). In *Dark Corners* although it is revealed that the main character Jack Walters also has a secret familial connection as his father was possessed by an alien consciousness at the time of Walters' inception, this does not create a similar connection with the events of the game despite its superficial similarity to the one in the novella. Indeed, because of its disconnect to the events of Innsmouth, this does not reframe the narrative in a similar way.

In addition to dehumanising the residents of Innsmouth, both works indicate that the cult of Dagon and the residents of the town have committed reprehensible acts themselves. The most prominent of these is the murder of several of the inhabitants who resisted the rule of the cult in the town. Although this is only alluded to in the novella (530), in the game, the player will inevitably discover remains of these people as they move through the town. This can be considered as a moral justification for the player's violence. More specifically it is "advantageous comparison, which relies on minimizing an immoral action by comparing it to the action of an enemy" (Hartmann et al. 319). In

regard to these moral disengagement factors, both *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and *Dark Corners* are fairly similar. However, unlike the game, the novella complicates its own moralisations against the Deep Ones. Indeed, the player's actions against the people of Innsmouth are never questioned in the same way that the novella's reveal of the narrator's ancestry reframes the story. This complexity is absent in the game. However, according to Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, "[s]hort story adaptations have had to expand their source material considerably" (19). While removing certain complexities, the game instead broadens the storyworld. However, although several new areas that were previously only referenced or alluded to have been added, one major addition to *Dark Corners* is in the form of the action scenes, the gameplay. One might be tempted to make the conclusion that this gameplay comprises mainly of violence because such is the nature of video games. However, this would only show the critics' narrow knowledge of games, which do offer several other forms of gameplay. A choice that is common among developers should not be construed as a sign of an inherent feature.

According to Harlan Ellison, when creating an adaptation of "Mouth", he wanted to create a game where the player could not win in any straightforward way, but only play "nobly" and come closer and closer to winning, "but you could not actually beat it" (Walter). Although this claim of not being able to beat the game is contestable, one should consider this idea of nobility when analysing the game, particularly the violence in it. Indeed, defining certain violent acts as noble and ignoble fit into Hartmann et al.'s definition of moral justification, and the game allows the player to make this distinction by increasing or decreasing the character's mental state or by simply killing the character and ending their scenario, forcing the player to start again. Providing rewards for the player is defined by Hartmann et al. as an indicator of moral

justification (319) and the uplifting jingle accompanying this reward can be seen as an indicator of euphemistic labelling (320). At the same time, sanctioning the player indicates an ignoble act, which is accompanied by its own sound effect. For example, Gorrister's attempts at killing himself and Benny's attempt at cannibalising another human being both lead to their scenarios ending and the player having to start again. At the same time, preferable, rewarded acts of violence include Ellen striking against her rapist and Gorrister immobilising his mother-in-law by placing her on a meat hook after they have discovered his wife together. It is made clear during the scenario that Gorrister's mother-in-law has always berated him and made him feel inferior while at the same time utilising his abilities and making him prove to her that he is worthy of her daughter in perpetuity. Noble violence is thus defined as resisting an oppressor, someone or something that uses their position of power to harm others. An aspect of these situations is that the game rewards the rejection of the tortures and changes of AM, the supercomputer who has trapped and also keeps the humans alive, while acting in accordance with them is punished, such as when Benny acts like a beast by wanting to eat another human and Gorrister giving into his suicidal tendencies. Noble violence is therefore also defined by whether or not it is used to overcome a perceived character flaw.

However, in addition to these scenes of mechanically defined noble and ignoble violence, there is at least one case of violence that causes no change in the character's mental state and which the game forces the player to take part in. At the beginning of Nimdok's scenario, he takes part in a medical experiment in a recreation of a Nazi concentration camp. The purported medical purpose of this experimental surgery is in the end superfluous and the only result is that a Jewish child to be maimed for life. This act does not cause any change in Nimdok's mental state. However, this is most likely

not any kind of moral judgement, but instead, related to Nimdok's own confusion and partly wilful memory loss. At the beginning of the scenario, he does not understand where he is although he recognises some places and objects as familiar. Part of this scenario is, in fact, for Nimdok to remember and confront his own actions and past. Thus, for an act to be noble or ignoble, one must be in a state of mind to understand the action. In Hartmann et al.'s terms, this could be considered diffusion of responsibility because a fellow doctor observes and instructs Nimdok in the operation, which is comparable to Hartmann et al.'s indicator "the player had to follow explicit orders given in a mission briefing or by a commander" (320). However, this does not match the situation neatly. Hartmann et al. do not consider the possibility of an altered or deteriorated mental state as a factor in their moral disengagement factors, instead assuming clarity of mind.

Although this section mainly discusses the actions of the player and the characters they control, there is also a way in which AM's actions against the humans are justified. As discussed above, the characters in the video game have to overcome a fatal flaw in their character. In his comparison between Ellison's short story and Dante's *Inferno,* Jeremy Withers also demonstrates the similarities between the *contrapasso* punishments in *Inferno* and Ellison's short story. *Contrapasso* means "a punishment that is often either analogous to or resembles the sin committed" (10). However, whereas the punishments by AM in the short story do not aim at anything other than causing suffering to the survivors, in the video game, they provide a chance of proving themselves. Each one is constructed based on a character flaw each of the survivors has and if the survivors complete these scenarios in the right way, it is implied that they overcome this flaw. Thus, they become stronger in order to face AM in the second half of the game. However, one must ask why. Although AM might not have a motive for

this, it can be construed as a message by the video game that the humans deserve their torture unless they can overcome their "sin". However, one should also consider a practical possibility for this. From a game development point of view, the chance to defeat AM provides a victory condition for the player. Although endings similar to the short story, where Ted is turned into a jelly-like creature, are possible, it is not a satisfying ending for the player. Instead, in a video game, there must be an ending that is satisfying in a different way from a short story and the violence endured and done must not impede player agency. Whereas in the short story Ted only has one chance to end his fellow captives suffering, the video game allows them to have numerous possibilities to affect their fate.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, although the main character and their allies do not perpetrate violence, the presence of violence is so ubiquitous that it borders on banality. The sound of an explosion requires no particular reaction (31) and even when a missile lands close-by, normalcy returns soon after (96-97). The target of these rocket bombs is very broadly defined. It is a whole nation, not even certain groups of people in that nation. At the same time, entertainment inside Oceania seems to be violent to the extreme both in order to dehumanise the enemy and to desensitise the viewer to violence. The transformed attitude toward violence can also be seen in how viewers regard extreme violence in movies as humorous (10-11). Even under the principles of INGSOC, there is no clarity on who is the target of violence except as an ill-defined enemy. Indeed, as a society based on mistrust, everyone is a potential enemy. Thus, governmental violence can be directed against anyone at practically any moment and the citizens of Oceania are conditioned to regard each other in a similar manner, replacing social feelings with paranoia and violence. For example, when a young woman who Winston finds attractive looks at him, he feels "a peculiar uneasiness" (13),

which he later channels to thoughts of brutally killing her (18). This is because he assumes any kind of interest from another person must be paranoia and suspicion as well and has also himself been conditioned to reject the possibility of feelings such as attraction that create bonds between people (75). Although Winston does not perpetrate violent acts against others, he does promise to do them for a cause. When he is supposedly inducted to a resistance group, the Brotherhood, he promises to potentially commit horrific acts in their name, including “murder”, “acts of sabotage which may cause the death of hundreds of innocent people” and “throw sulphuric acid in a child’s face” (197). Whether or not these acts are deemed justifiable in order to fight an oppressive regime. Indeed, all of these potential acts are offered by O’Brien who is later revealed to be loyal to the Party. Thus, making Winston declare his willingness is more of an act of entrapment by the state than presenting justifications for act that Winston himself might not have even thought of without O’Brien’s influence.

Just like in the novel, the player character of *Orwell* does not perpetrate any violence themselves. However, their actions can lead to violence. This potential violence is justified throughout the first half of the game where the necessity of the Orwell surveillance system is stressed to the player. In particular the terrorist attack occurring in the game’s starting cutscene is used as a form of advantageous comparison while a potential second attack is used to morally justify all means to discover who has caused the attack. However, throughout the game, the player is also privy to a lot of information about the lives of the suspects. The humanisation caused by this has the potential of undermining the moral justifications provided to the player, thus making them consider more carefully what information they provide to the agency searching for the suspects in order to provide an accurate or even sympathetic image. Indeed, by the end of the game, the moral justification of the government is juxtaposed with

justifications of the suspects and the revealed perpetrator of the bomb attacks, who are worried about the increase of government surveillance such as Orwell. At this point, the choice of who to side with is left to the player. A parallel can be drawn between the promises Winston makes to commit violent acts in the name of the Brotherhood and choosing to side with the suspects in *Orwell*. Although the bomb attacks in the game do not kill hundreds, the player must decide if killing innocent bystanders is justifiable in order to resist an increasingly oppressive government. Indeed, a major difference to the novel is that this resistance would potentially still have an effect, while under INGSOC, there is no true hope in resistance. Allowing this hope, the game provides a space for the player to act.

As a military shooter, violent acts are practically mandatory for the design of *Spec Ops*. Indeed, it is very similar to the FPS, first-person shooter, games that Hartmann et al. analyse, mainly differentiated by its third-person viewpoint. As such, the game also contains several moral disengagement factors. These include, for example, dehumanising enemies by covering their faces, attributing blame to enemies' own actions, diffusion of responsibility by having a squad the player is part of and the player character blaming Colonel Konrad, an authority figure, for his own actions, euphemistic labelling by calling killing "taking someone out", and distortion of consequences in the use of long-distance weapons with victims being "barely visible and hearable" (Hartmann et al. 320). However, the game also subverts practically all of these disengagement factors. For example, as the mental state of the main characters deteriorates, they move from euphemism like "taking someone out" to "kill", and it is revealed at the end that Colonel Konrad has been dead the whole time and it is stressed that all the violence by the squad has been primarily the fault of its leader and the game's main character, Captain Walker. It is also notable that throughout the game

enemies can be seen to reacting to being shot and could be seen on the ground after being shot. Indeed, the player must kill these enemies if they want their weapon or ammo. However, this forces them to consciously choose to kill them when they are already wounded and on the ground. This makes the player actively complicit in these acts.

The ubiquity of violence committed and committable in *Spec Ops* is strongly contrasted to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In the novella, the main character, Charles Marlow, commits only a few acts of violence. Indeed, most of the violent acts happen around him or he witnesses the results of violent systems. However, a comparison can be drawn between how the novella reveals the falsity of colonialism's justifications and its brutal systems. Marlow's aunt, for example, thinks that the East India Company's - and Europeans' in general - mission in Africa is about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways", whereas Marlow "ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit" (12). There are several subsequent events that similarly undo the moral justifications and dehumanisation contained in the idea that Africa needs Europeans to educate its peoples. Instead, it shows the brutality of a project only aimed at profit, such as when Marlow happens upon a grove where exhausted native workers "had withdrawn to die" (16-17). In both *Spec Ops* and *Heart of Darkness*, Western powers enter an Othered space with the supposed mission of saving the locals, either through European values or reasserting order. Indeed, toward the beginning of *Spec Ops*, one of Walker's squad members, Lugo, says that they are supposed to be saving the people there, not kill them. Walker disregards this by saying that the locals attacked first, signifying that de-escalation and saving them is not an option anymore. Although the two works take place in widely different settings, both discuss the effect of leading Western powers of their day invading a foreign space under false pretences of moral

justification. Indeed, the novella and the game do not simply demonstrate the immorality of the acts but also the immorality of the moral disengagement factors use in order to commit these said acts.

Both *Orwell* and *Spec Ops* make the player complicit in the violent acts and systems in the game. Complicity is a new type of experience unique to games, according to Jesper Juul (113). Indeed, although a work of literary fiction or TV show can indicate that someone who the viewer or reader identifies or sympathises with is complicit for example in systemic oppression, thus indicating the viewer's own complicity, only a game can make one complicit first, albeit simulated, hand. As seen above in *Orwell* and *Spec Ops*, this is integral to the themes and narrative of the games themselves. Instead of witnessing violent acts or the rise of a police state through fiction, these games make the player part of these acts, and indeed, allow them to commit these acts.

Although one could easily reduce the story of a game like *Spec Ops* into cinematic cutscenes with action in between, similar to Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn (13), this fails to recognise how important this action is to the themes of the game. During these action sequences, the player is invited to literally play into the fantasies of an all-American hero soldier who can do no wrong and whose morally questionable actions are brushed aside by an "ends justify the means" attitude. It is certainly possible for a movie or a novel to invite participation into such fantasies and then turn them on the reader or viewer. However, it does not have the same potential immediacy and intimacy as acting it out yourself, even if just through a game avatar. The players' control over the game character make them complicit in the act. Thus, *Spec Ops*' impact would not be the same without either cutscene or interactive action. Although the game could have presented this in a different way, it cannot be claimed

that the themes and narrative of a game are simply driven by non-interactive cutscenes. More broadly, one can consider this unique complicity part of all games. All failures, or very nearly, are the fault of the player, at least if we assume the game designer was competent. For example, in *Mouth*, although the player might become complicit in acts of violence committed by the game characters, they might also become complicit in acts done *to* the characters, either through wrong choices or slowness of reflexes.

One must note that this complicity is not always used in order to bring something to the fore. Although *Spec Ops* criticises both similar games and our popular conceptions of war itself, most games of the same type, military shooters, also make the player complicit in acts of war that could be considered heinous or even criminal. However, in these games, this is in order to let the player take part in the purported glory and heroism of war, while the negative aspects are mitigated through moral disengagement factors as shown by Hartmann et al. (326-29). Indeed, one can view this simply as a continuation of Western cultures' fascination with reliving their own triumphs (Allison 183). Video games can actually be viewed as more efficient in perpetuating these ideals. While in non-participatory media one can witness representations of heinous acts guised as heroism or anti-heroism and thus have a greater degree of distance, in video games, one participates in these acts and is rewarded by the game, reinforcing the supposed heroism through direct player reaction. This naturally does not mean that a player has to, but one must recognise that games can incentivise viewing of these acts of war as acceptable or even preferable. At the same time, one has to be mindful not to claim that games are the sole perpetrator of this phenomenon. Indeed, several games depict and incentivise acts that in the real world would be criminal. However, when most of the surrounding culture does not support these acts, it is not likely that a game alone can make them acceptable outside of itself.

As Tanine Allison notes, images of war are perpetuated by a far wider range of media products than military shooters which are simply a continuation of the same trend (183).

Although one can claim that the amount of violence increased in these adaptations, most of them did not glorify it as certain popular sources would have suggested. Indeed, *Spec Ops* has the main character commit far more violent acts than *Heart of Darkness*, but it subverts these acts and their justifications. In a similar manner, *Orwell* complicates the violent acts of different people and groups by providing justifications for each of them. And although *Mouth* mechanically defines certain acts of violence as noble, far more nonviolent acts are defined as noble while several acts of violence are also defined as ignoble. The only game which increased violence committed by main character while also using moral disengagement factors to make it acceptable and palatable was *Dark Corners*. One must note that in the novella, the US army also sees itself as justified in essentially invading Innsmouth after what the main character tells of his experiences (505). Essentially, the violence may not have been committed by the main character, but the story was a way to justify it. This is problematised by the novella itself when the main character is revealed to be turning into one of the Deep Ones and embracing his transformation. This complexity is in turn omitted in the game. Despite this, if we assume that adaptation reveals certain core features of a medium in the way it changes a story, one cannot make the assertion that video games inherently glorify or even increase violent content. Indeed, what is shown is that video games are capable of addressing the issue of violence in complex ways.

3.2 Consequences of Violence

In defining their six moral disengagement factors, Hartmann et al. discuss several ways games mitigate or completely omit the consequences of violent actions. This might be

done by not showing wounds or signs of pain on the enemy NPCs, having their deaths be unrealistically clean or so distant from the player that the effects cannot be observed, or by rewarding the player (319-20). This section discusses how these factors are present in video game adaptations and how or if it is comparable to the source work. As with the previous section, the main focus is on the actions of the main characters.

In discussing potential rewards of violence, simply being able to progress in a game will not be considered a reward. Instead, a reward must be a benefit to the player stemming from a choice or skill, while progression is simply something required to complete a game. In other words, a reward will make progression easier for the player or provide them with a particular distinction in the game.

As discussed in the previous section, in *Mouth*, ignoble violent acts lead to the characters' mental state worsening. Ultimately this leads to them not being able to survive the end of the game where a strong mind is required to finally defeat AM. The main difference between nobility and ignoble is the direction in which one exerts power. By attacking those who are ignoble and in some position of power, one improves the chances of defeating AM later. There is a comparison one can make to the violence and its consequences in the short story. There are a few occasions where the survivors are violent toward each other, such as when Gorrister kicks Ellen (24), when Benny attacks and maims Gorrister (35) followed quickly by Ellen and Ted killing the other survivors. Gorrister kicking Ellen does not seem to have any true consequence, regarded by Ted almost as banal, which indicates the environment the survivors subsist in. Benny's act has no time to have true consequences because he and the other survivors, with the exception of Ted, are killed. However, Ted and Ellen's act has significant consequence: it ends suffering. Although AM still tortures Ted after all the other survivors are dead, none of the others will suffer like this. Thus, this act can be seen as noble, as a sacrifice

of one's self for others. And although the violence is directed at the other survivors, the act of killing them is more an attack against AM who is forcing the humans to live presumably forever. Just like in the game, attacking those in power who are ignoble themselves is considered noble.

In *Orwell*, the player can choose to support the government's push for more surveillance or reveal it to the public. At the same time, although there are more endings than two, this is a choice between two types of violence, government violence and terrorist acts, and which of them is more justified to the player. The player chooses between the two based on what they have learned and what views they hold. In theory, this is a choice between two equal views. However, the views of the developers also inflect these choices and their outcomes. If the player chooses to expose the Orwell system and themselves at the same time, the Nation will move to a utopian future where government surveillance is not required. At the same time, the choice to side with the government will lead to security under repression with pre-emptive arrests and violence that have already been seen in the game. There is a clear indication which is supposed to be the preferable choice according to the developers. Thus, *Orwell* defines violence of a governing system as immoral while striking against it while also killing bystanders is if not preferable, then acceptable to attain the end result. Indeed, the consequence of government violence is more violence, albeit of the legal kind.

In *Dark Corners*, players are not given a choice about the violence they commit. Although they are usually not rewarded for it, it is the primary mode of progression, despite the occasional puzzle strewn throughout the game. Although the main character eventually attempts to commit suicide after the events of the game, there is no clear link between this and the violence he commits. Indeed, it is connected more with the unnatural horrors that he witnesses in Innsmouth and his lost memories returning than

his own actions. Through violence, he is able to defeat Hydra and Dagon, the main sources of the town's corruption. His later succumbing to suicidal depression can be viewed as part of a heroic sacrifice where he has sacrificed his sanity in order to defeat a greater threat to humanity at large. A similar kind of heroism is not present in the novella, however. Instead, the main character succumbs to his heritage, which originates from the Marsh family of Innsmouth, causing him to undergo a similar transformation to the residents of the town (552-54). However, there is no indication that his visit to Innsmouth was the catalyst for this. Although he is inspired to research his family history more after the events in the town, the transformation seems to have been inevitable, dictated solely by his inherited conditions. Main characters of both works thus succumb to something by the end but while the novella's main character is destined, the game protagonist's fate justifies his violent acts even more, showing how the events and beings in Innsmouth damage one's psyche irrecoverably, enhancing their dehumanisation.

As discussed in the previous section, *Spec Ops* actively subverts several of the usual moral disengagement factors observed by Hartmann et al. At the same time, *Heart of Darkness* was shown to subvert justifications for violent systems in a similar way. This is also reflected in how the works depict the consequences of violence. As shown above, the novella shows that enlightenment and civilisation is not the primary consequence of the European influence in Africa. Instead, it reveals violent and exploitative systems. In *Spec Ops*, the famous white phosphorous scene, in which the main characters accidentally kill several civilians, and which marks a turning point in the game's tone, does not end with successfully defeating the enemy while side-lining the fact that the game characters have just committed a war crime. Instead, the player has to walk through the scorched area, first witnessing the dying US soldiers and finally

the civilian casualties. At the beginning of this, the player fires the white phosphorous by looking at a computer screen providing footage from a camera above the battlefield and does not directly see the destruction they cause. This had the potential of distorting the consequences, as Hartmann et al. note, by the use of long-distance weapons, "such that enemies hit by this weapon were barely visible and hearable" (320). The game subverts the expectation created by looking at the events on a screen and forces the player to walk through the destruction they have caused, thus showing what the consequences of violence are. It is important to note that the use of white phosphorous does not happen in a non-interactive cutscene and the reveal of the embracing bodies does. By allowing the player to fire the rounds of white phosphorous themselves, the game makes them complicit in the spectacle of war. Afterward it forces the same player to look at the consequences of those actions. This point in the game is where the tone of the story shifts as it has become clear that American main characters are not the unambiguous heroes and their actions do not only have positive consequences.

The white phosphorous scene and its aftermath are, however, not based on player choice, and must be completed in order to progress. However, after this *Spec Ops* provides several scenes where the player has to choose between violence and, if nothing else, a less violent option. For example, right at the end of the game, Walker discovers Colonel Konrad's body and that he has been dead the whole time and the person Walker has been talking to has been a figment of his own damaged mind. This causes him to go through an episode where he talks with the Konrad he has imagined and the player is given a choice between Walker accepting responsibility for his actions and killing himself, ending the game, or shooting the apparition of Konrad and continue blaming him. This will lead Walker to become even more deranged, thinking that he is now in control over the US troops in Dubai. By the time new US troops have come to relieve

the troops in the city and evacuate them, Walker has dressed up in Konrad's clothes and seemingly does not comprehend his surroundings. When a US soldier asks him to relinquish his weapon, the player is given the choice of what to do: either let go of your weapon or attack the soldiers. If the player chooses to surrender, in a subsequent cutscene, Walker will imply he did not survive his experience in Dubai, indicating how the violence has affected him. By choosing violence and killing the soldiers, a cutscene will show Walker answering a radio call inquiring after the soldiers he had just killed, and saying: "Gentlemen, welcome to Dubai." This is a phrase Walker said to his squad at the very beginning of the game when they arrived in Dubai. This indicates the cyclicality of his violent trek through the city, one which he is now starting again. Thus, the consequence of violence is the damage to one's own mind and potentially more violence. *Heart of Darkness* offers a comparable judgement on the colonial project when a doctor examines and implies that going deeper into Africa will cause changes in one's mind. He also asks Marlow if there is any madness in his family (11-12), implying that only the mad go deeper into Africa or people whose families do have mental illness might be more prone to the changes there. Anna Reid relates this to Victorian fears about "going native" and degenerating as opposed to evolving (61-62). The changes that the doctor is attempting to record "[indicate] a moral degeneration in man when far away from 'civilisation'" (62). This is exemplified in Kurtz who has "regressed, physically, morally" (65) and Marlow has to resist this regression lest he turns into a violent brute (64). As Reid concludes, "in his encounter with the unknown the European degenerates morally and physically" (70).

As has been shown above, these video game adaptations' relationship with violence is not as straightforward as video games rewarding violence. Indeed, *Mouth* penalised certain types violence while rewarding only a few select cases and *Orwell* did

not enable the player to commit violence directly and presented situations where their selfless actions might lead to violence despite of themselves. One could critique games such as *Spec Ops* for making violence a requirement for story progression, while attempting to comment on it. However, this comment could not be made without it. Indeed, the game's core design is to be like other war shooters but at the same time different. What makes *Spec Ops* exceptional is not mechanical or gameplay innovation but in how it depicts violence and in doing so, reframes the violence in similar games. Thus, in discussing video game violence, just as in all media, one should take into account the context and narrative purpose of the violence.

However, one should note that one game discussed here, *Dark Corners*, did increase violence from the source work. It is also the main way of progressing through the game and the game only provides select moments when other ways of interaction with NPCs is possible. If we believe Marie-Laure Ryan, this is simply a natural result of the fact that a computer interface using a mouse is best suited for pointing and shooting a weapon (*Avatars* 118). Although one should also not discount the influence of source text, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* complicates its narrative with the reveal of the narrator's heritage. Instead, the increase of action is more in line with the findings of Tanine Allison who sees video games favouring "the immediate gratification of activity" while neglecting complexity (192). However, as shown above, action-filled games such as *Spec* Ops can feature complex ideas. Indeed, although action may dominate in the actionable medium, it can be used to communicate a message that is not simple the action and its gratification.

4 Gender and Sexuality

The subjects of gender and sexuality have for a long time been a hotly debated issue in video gaming communities. Although it has been claimed that the amount of representation and the quality of it will improve over time, this has yet to be seen in practise (Sarkeesian and Petit). Indeed, some have claimed that misogyny and sexism are “ingrained in video-game DNA” (McLaughlin), while others make the more moderate assertion that it is a significant problem but not inherent to gaming culture (Yang). Indeed, a study conducted by EA, a large gaming developer and publisher, shows that a majority of participants want games to be more inclusive and that the backlash to inclusivity comes from a vocal minority (Shi).

The question this chapter poses is how do these claims, particularly the ones regarding sexism and misogyny, manifest in video game adaptations, or if they do at all. Just like in the earlier chapter on violence, source works will be compared to their adaptations and how content regarding gender and sexuality has changed will be discussed. One has to note that this cannot be a simple quantitative process as conceptions of gender and sexuality have changed significantly in the past 100 years. Indeed, even if gender is not one of the main themes of a work, the underlying ways of thinking about gender and sexuality have changed. Thus, consideration must be given to how these new, subtle ways of thinking are present how do they potentially modify thematic content in addition to the overt changes.

Although it could have been possible to separate gender and sexuality into two distinct subjects, the decision was made to keep them together for this study. This is because gender and sexuality are often intertwined in larger society and culture. Indeed, it is of no special interest that someone is sexually or romantically attracted to women,

but it is of great interest to a great many when that someone happens to be a woman as well. Even without going into the question of sexual orientation, there are certain held expectations about how people of a certain gender are to express this sexuality and what kind of sexuality is allowed for them. And when one takes into account trans and other, wider gender issues, these expectations and assumptions change once more.

There has been a great deal of change in gender and sexuality in media in just the past couple of decades (see Scarcelli et al.). At the same time, issues surrounding them, be it representation of men and women, LGBTQ+ rights or the ever-pervasive wage gap, have become ever more part of the public discussion and politics. Thus, one subject this study is interested in is how have these attitudes changed between the original work and the adaptation, or have these subjects been introduced when there originally was nothing.

When discussing gender and sexuality in video games, one has to note that the representation within them is not separate from other media. Indeed, as Adrienne Shaw notes, "[t]reating gaming as an isolated realm makes this misogyny a spectacle" and "it normalizes the oppressive behavior within mainstream gamer cultures" (2). Indeed, divorcing gamer spaces from the surrounding culture can cause them to be constructed as spaces that cannot be affected by progressive movements in the larger world and thus the same principles of consequences and responsibility do not apply to them. Instead of "boys will be boys", "gamers will be gamers". This can be seen in the backlash to feminist critique of video games. Shaw notes that in this backlash many rejected anyone's right to critique video games, not just women (4).

However, several scholars have noted that video game related spaces and communities, both online and offline, are often marked by misogyny and anti-feminism (e.g. Braithwaite, Consalvo, Shaw). Thus, although these are not unique to video games,

these attitudes seem to have a more prominent way of manifesting within the communities surrounding video games. Although these attitudes do not directly relate to the content of games, they do tell of a vocal part of the consumer base whom game developers might target and of the context, in which video games are made and consumed. At the same time, one must remember not to conflate these attitudes with the actual content of games. As can be seen in Shaw's example of audiences remembering an explicitly non-white character as white (2-3), the audience creates their own image of the characters they consume through media, which depends on their own expectations, identification and a complex series of other factors.

In the following sections, I will discuss how representation of gender and sexuality has changed from their adaptation source and attempt to discern, if some of the changes have a unique "video game-ness" to them. This will be done through discussing who the actors are and who is acted upon in the selected works and how queer content and potential has changed. At the same time, I will compare the games with each other to see if representation has changed in the time between the games and bring into question whether diversity simply happens naturally over time.

4.1 Actors and Actées

The video game market tends to be dominated by products that cater to the wants and needs to the assumed white, heterosexual, cisgender[1] male consumer. As Shaw points out, this does not necessarily lead to all representation to be of white, heterosexual, cisgender males, as we do not necessarily need to identify with a character to enjoy the product they are in (3). Despite the validity of this claim, Anita Sarkeesian and Carolyn

[1] "of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth" (*Merriam-Webster.com*)

Petit point out that the number of big budget video games centring experiences of female protagonist is not increasing, despite a wider understanding that people other than men are part of the player base. In fact, the data shows that instead of centring female characters, most games provide an option of gender, while the percentage of those games with a specifically female protagonist has actually decreased along the years.

In this section, I will discuss who is an actor and who is acted upon from the point of view of gender and sexuality. Although I will discuss characters in general and how they are represented in the narrative, my main focus will be on who the player character is or can be. As the player character is usually the protagonist, that is, the character who advances the plot and thus can cause change, intended or not, in the game world, it also has the potential to reinforce ideas of who can cause change in the real world.

An important detail to note is that video games are not alone as a male-dominated medium. Indeed, most Western media is still largely filled with white male characters despite an increase in and a push for diversity (see Gauntlett). Thus, as one discusses and analyses older works, which might have greater prestige than their adaptations do, the potential basis which they provide for representation in the adaptation, must be taken into account. This, of course, is not a simple case of the older work dominating the content of the newer one. Instead, it offers the adapter a chance to diverge and tell a familiar story - or at least initially seemingly similar one - with certain key aspects changed. Indeed, just as there is resisting readings of texts, there can be resisting and subverting adaptations.

In the case of the texts in question for this study, two out of four adaptations remained with male main characters. However, in the case of both adaptations, *Spec*

Ops and *Dark Corners*, the main character has transformed into a more active one compared to the source work. Although the main character of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* is more active than most of Lovecraft's narrators, who tend not to be protagonists in the sense that they do not push the story forward so much as they discover it after the fact. However, after investigation, which begins to reveal the history of Innsmouth to him, his main actions include running away from the town's inhabitants, culminating in an acute case of fainting (549). In stark contrast, Jack Walters from *Dark Corners* is a police - and later in game, private - detective who is immediately placed in a siege of a cult headquarters. Already here and later when Walters travels to Innsmouth, he is a more active participant in the story. Similar is the change from Charles Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* to Captain Martin Walker in *Spec Ops*. Marlow too acts mainly as a spectator, the reader's viewpoint into another place. Although far more active than the usual Lovecraft narrator, Marlow has nowhere near the same activity and agency as Martin Walker, with whom the player navigates combat situations and makes hard choices that effect not only his own fate but the future of Dubai.

Although player action and participation are often brought up as important features of video games, the feeling of powerlessness is not completely unexplored in the medium. In *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, an influential horror game by Frictional Games, for most of the game, the player has no true way of fighting back at the monsters they encounter. It can be argued that player action is still integral to this because the limited attempts to stop the monsters directly, such as throwing items or furniture at them, demonstrate the futility of this action. This shows that video games do not inherently need violent power fantasies or gun-toting heroes to be successful, and indeed, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* could have been adapted into a game similar to

Amnesia: The Dark Descent. However, this does not explain why it was not and was indeed adapted into an action-oriented FPS.

One explanation is certainly audience expectation and through it, monetary concerns. Hutcheon and O'Flynn note that economic concerns can often cause alterations when adapting from one medium to another (30). As they further point out "expensive collaborative art forms . . . are going to look for safe bets with a ready audience" and "seek ways to expand [their] audience" (87). Naturally, making a game that diverges from popular trends is always risky, and although fans of Lovecraft's original story might have accepted a game where the protagonist is mostly powerless, a larger audience of games would have expected a proactive male hero. Indeed, a larger audience might not know Lovecraft's work directly, but only through cultural osmosis. All adaptations must take into account the context of their creation (Hutcheon xviii), and during the mid-2000s, top selling games were dominated by strong masculine protagonists ("Top Selling PC").

This reasoning can be extended partly to *Spec Ops* as well. However, one must recognise that in this case, audience expectation is used to transgress against military shooter conventions. As discussed in a previous section, the game forces the player to come to terms with consequences of their actions, even though they would be celebrated and encouraged in most military shooters. At the same time, the game breaks the image of the masculine warrior hero. As Tom Digby notes, men in war reliant societies, such as the United States, are subjected to the warrior ideal, "regardless of whether they actually function as actual warriors" (52). According to Digby, one of the key elements of this warrior ideal is to be "emotionally tough", which necessitates that a man "must be able to focus selectively, and sometimes suspend altogether, the capacity to care about the suffering of others, but also his own suffering" (54). It is not difficult to see

how these feed each other as the suffering of others witnessed, or even caused, by an individual begins to affect that person's own mental wellbeing. In *Spec Ops*, this feedback loop can be witnessed via the actions of the characters and the player is given hints at how the player character's and his companions' mental health is deteriorating. The team begins with controlled acts of violence, but the more they witness horrific sights and commit violent acts, the more they descend gradually into brutality, cruelty, and hallucinations and flashbacks, which blurs the line between the real and unreal. This goes against the ideal of an emotionally tough male hero being able to witness anything and still remain sane and healthy. Indeed, it is exactly this emotional toughness which causes them to deteriorate mentally. As Digby shows, boys are taught emotional toughness from a very young age (57-58). This undoubtedly causes them to have little to no way of processing negative emotions caused by the violent tasks included in the warrior ideal. This is commented on in *Spec Ops* by depicting how Walker and his squad commit ever more heinous acts as their frustration grows and they are unable to escape the situation they are in.

As Gabrielle McIntire writes, the women in *Heart of Darkness* do not travel and "reinforce a sense of extreme separation between the colony and the metropole" and "are crucial for guarding and preserving difference between Africa and Europe" (259). In *Spec Ops*, however, they create a connection between the Middle East and America. One of the game's primary scenes is after the player has destroyed several enemy positions manned by supposed traitor US marines, using white phosphorous, a type of incendiary munitions. After walking through a blasted landscape where still burning and injured marines can be seen crawling and heard moaning in pain, the player and the accompanying characters arrive at a trench, which they discover to have been filled with civilians who inevitably could not find a way out as the flames began to engulf them.

After the realisation is made, the player character begins to stare at the charred bodies of a woman clutching a child, who one assumes are a mother and child. Instead of keeping the locals as faceless enemies for the whole game, *Spec Ops* shows a different side to them, not as civilians to save but civilians who are being harmed directly by the player character's actions. These civilians are then shown through a universal image of a parent trying to protect their child, creating a connection between the Other and home.

However, despite this shift in the representational role of women, their agency does not change. While men are antagonists, those who work against, and protagonists, those who work toward, the women do not work at all. Indeed, the most important role they play is as dead proof of the horrors of war and the actions of the player. Similar to Kurtz's native mistress, who represents the Othered Africa itself, they are sights to behold although awe-inspiring in completely different ways. Indeed, if we propose that "[o]verpowering the African mistress [is] one and the same as conquering the infernal landscape that she represents" (Saeedi 541), the charred woman and her child can be seen as a representation of the continuing suffering that Western intervention in the region has caused.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's attitudes towards women are interesting from the point of view of the discourses surrounding video games. He insists that women should be kept "out of" the story completely (48). Soraya Murray argues that *Spec Ops* also has a "retrograde" attitude toward women ("Race, Gender"). Although they are not kept out of the story, they are brought in only as props for it, "symbols of victimhood" (39). As such, they are used by the game to convey its message but are not given any agency, existing only as "passive tools" (47). Instead, they are only to be looked at with pity and horror. One could argue that according to a more traditional war shooter model, which valorises the male warrior, women should indeed be kept "out of" the story.

However, *Spec Ops* brings them in to manifest the consequences of war, but at the same time, denies them their own voice.

Although *Spec Ops* is attempting to show the harm specific to males under militaristic patriarchy, as Digby shows, it accomplishes this by mostly excluding women. This exclusion turns women into props and denies them agency. Indeed, the women in *Spec Ops* turn into manifestations of how war scars men. Although the game presents its audience with victimisation of women, the game concentrates on the deterioration of the three men the story follows. Thus, the soldier become the primary victims of the war while women are secondary and witnessing their victimhood adds to the men's mental anguish and victimisation by combat situations themselves.

In addition to limiting women's roles as actors, Clive Barnett shows that, in *Heart of Darkness*, the text "[constructs] its preferred audience" (278). This audience is constructed and assumed to be exclusively male and their masculine togetherness is constructed through shared interests and commitments. This can be seen in the novel's adaptation as well, which shifts the social setting of the characters to an even more masculine one, the US army. Instead of being excluded by the decision of an individual narrator like Marlow, women in this adaptation are excluded by the systems around them. However, as discussed above, in *Spec Ops* women are excluded from all active roles, being relegated to the role of victims. Instead, the game relies on the fraternal ideal of the army, presenting a world where only men act. As the player is the physical actor in any game, they too are constructed as male while being made privy to this masculine world. As Barnett notes, Marlow is given a "choice of nightmares" by his trip to the colonies (278), something which he only reveals to a group of men, into which the reader is invited (281) but not Kurtz's Intended. In a similar way, the descent into madness in *Spec Ops* is purely witnessed and shared by male characters, the squad of

three soldiers. This construction of audience extends the assumption of who is an active subject outside the game, as the imaginary person who is assumed to be doing the physical action of playing the game is gendered male.

Another adaptation that increases how active the male protagonist is, is *Dark Corners*. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the adaptation replaces a powerless character with an active private detective. As Philippa Gates points out, "[t]he detective genre has traditionally been a male-centred one based on the social assumption that heroism, villainy, and violence are predominantly masculine characteristics" (7). Indeed, *Dark Corners* emphasises these masculine traits with its new main character. So much so that at the end of the game, although the might of the US navy has come to bear on the cult in Innsmouth, it is the lone private detective who strikes the decisive blow against the evil Old Ones. As mentioned above, a powerless protagonist was relatively rare in video games until *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. Thus, it was natural for the adaptation to provide the player with an avatar who does not run from the city but instead delves ever deeper, violently dispatching mainly male villains along the way.

The only adaptation concerning this study, which adds a playable, explicitly non-male character when the source text only had a male viewpoint, is *Mouth*. Although *Orwell* does not limit the player's gender options, it also does not make them significant to the story. Instead, they are a purely visual option for one's user interface that are meant to make the player feel more comfortable in their virtual workspace. In *Mouth*, instead of simply being allowed to play just as Ted, the player is allowed and expected to play as all of the characters, including Ellen, an African American woman. However, this is not so much a move towards a female point of view for the source narrative as it is a general expanding of the world, as all of the characters gain their own scenarios and anyone of them can be the one to finish the game.

The character of Ellen is not unchanged, however. In the original short story, in addition to not being the point of view or the protagonist, she is mainly presented as a caretaker. Although Ted claims that she only cares for Benny due to his enlarged penis (24), he also observes her comforting Gorrister after he nearly faints (22). She is also shown to be the only one with a degree of hope as she dreams out loud about what kind of canned fruit they might discover (22, 34). Indeed, it is possible that this is her attempt to lift her companions' spirits, although it does not seem to have the intended affect on Ted the narrator at least. Another role Ellen has in the group is to provide sexual satisfaction. Indeed, although Ted claims her to be a hypersexual "slut" (28) and enjoying sex with Benny, he also refers to it as a service (24). Because of Ted's paranoia it is difficult to discern what is real. Indeed, the alleged hypersexuality might be a projection of Ted's own jealousy and desire, and Ellen might service the men sexually to save herself from violence on the men's part, some of which is still present, such as when Gorrister kicks her (24).

In the video game adaptation of Ellison's short story, Ellen is shown in a very different role. She does not have her companions to take care of nor any side characters. Indeed, almost all of the side characters in her scenario are overtly robots, repeating a predetermined script. Norma Manatu shows how black women are commonly represented as sexualised in film. She argues that black women in American films have no roles apart from sexual ones and audiences are not "socialized to feel for or feel with" them (42-43). At the same time, black women have a seeming lack of interest in romantic heterosexual relationships (48). However, although video games are partly a visual medium, this does not seem to be the case in *Mouth*. Instead, Ellen is desexualised as she is made into a playable character. She is no longer described as hypersexual like in the short story. However, what is retained is her past as a chaste

person, “a virgin only twice removed” as the short story describes her (29). At the same time, the threat of sexual violence by the other survivors, who are all men, is implied by AM at the beginning of her scenario.

In relation to sexual assault, Ellen is made to stand apart from the other characters in the video game adaptation. Each of the characters has to overcome a character flaw and reconcile with an event in their past. Ted is a paranoid fraud who has taken advantage of women especially; Nimdok is a Jew who helped Nazis at a concentration camp; Benny is selfish and left his fellow soldiers to die; and Gorrister is antisocial and his abuse is implied to have caused her wife to be committed into a mental asylum. In all these cases, it is the actions of the men themselves that have damned them. In contrast, Ellen’s scenario revolves around her rape, which caused her current “hysteria” and phobia of the colour yellow. There is a fundamental difference in these flaws. Whereas the flaws of the male characters cause them to act unethically toward other people and usually gain a position of power, Ellen’s sin is inaction. In her scenario, she comes face to face with her rapist - or at least AM’s reconstruction - once again and she must fight back in order to progress. The two other options provided, running away and giving up, lead to a cutscene that shows the shadows of Ellen and her assailant as Ellen is grabbed by the assailant, implying that she is assaulted again. In addition, this forces the player to start the whole scenario again, making it possible for Ellen to be raped several times in a playthrough. In essence, Ellen is characterised as passive and has to learn to be active, while the four men have only been active in some wrong way. Being the only playable woman and the NPCs being constructs created by AM that wait for the character to progress the scenario, it is difficult to see this as something other than reinforcing the baseline passiveness of women that they must overcome.

There are parallels to Ellen's passivity in the short story. However, this passivity is also present in the other characters. None of the characters try to oppose AM in the short story and simply go along with his taunting. Indeed, they do not see a way out until at the very end, when Ted kills Benny, Gorrister and Ellen. It is notable that he is joined in this by Ellen who kills Nimdok before Ted kills her (36). Although she does not initiate this act that frees them from AM's torment, she is the only one in addition to Ted that takes action. Thus, she is shown to make the same progression from passivity to action as Ted, unlike in the adaptation in which she is the only initially passive one.

In *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, only one non-male person actually appears in the story (510) while a handful of others are mentioned. All of these characters are inconsequential to the actual plot. However, two women, Obed Marsh's wife (506) and the narrator's great-grandmother (552), are significant in that they bring the corruption of the Old Ones to their families. By marrying to into families, they cause the bloodline to be tainted and eventually cause the narrator's transformation into a being similar to the people of Innsmouth (552-53). In the adaptation, *Dark Corners*, there are in fact more female characters. However, their presence in the story is minor. Indeed, both are killed after appearing only sporadically. First of these is Rebecca Lawrence, a woman who tries to warn Walters about the dangers of Innsmouth and later helps him after he has become trapped in the town. However, she is killed while providing Walters an escape route from a violent mob before he has found a weapon. Although Walters seems distraught at this in the moment, she is not mentioned after this. The other female character in the game is Ruth Billingham, the girlfriend of Brian Burnham whose disappearance Walters has come to Innsmouth to investigate. Although this seems to indicate she has a larger role in the story, she is in fact killed relatively unceremoniously. This takes a certain comedic tone as Walters can save her from one

life-threatening situation, which requires player skill. If one fails this, the game will continue with Ruth dead. However, the very next transitional cutscene will have her and Burnham die in a car crash, making saving her in the first place near pointless. Indeed, it seems that both women are killed off after the story has no more use for them. The only other overtly non-male presence is Hydra, the final enemy of the game. However, she does not have a character as such. Instead, she is mentioned in occult texts but not felt as a presence throughout Walters' ordeals in Innsmouth.

In almost all of the adaptations, the role of women decreased. Although *Heart of Darkness* attempts to keep women out of its story, the women that are present are made more significant by this explicit claim to exclude them. Only game which could be considered to have increased the role of women was *Orwell*, in which several of the people who the player is tasked to spy and gather information on, are women. These women also take actions to further their stories and ultimately one is revealed to be the mastermind behind the group's actions. Although this is certainly more than the singular significant female character in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it does not divert from the fact that the common trend in the adaptations discussed here decreased the role of women in both theme and narrative or made them more passive than in the adapted work.

4.2 Queer Adaptations

Inclusion of queer and LGBTQ content in video games is known to cause violent backlash as much or more so than inclusion of female characters. Although all Western media has had a less than friendly relation with queerness and queer representation has mainly been in the form of villainous or humorous characters, it has been claimed that video games, a far newer medium, has a particularly hostile relationship toward sexual and gender minorities. Indeed, as recently as 2018, people commented most about a kiss

shared between two women in the trailer for *The Last of Us, Part 2*, with reactions ranging from “massive insults” to “tears of joy” (Reymann-Schneider).

In this section, I will explore how queer content has changed in the adaptation process and compare my findings with the assumption that video games reinforce similar retrograde attitudes toward queer people as they are believed to reinforce for women and thus, reinforce heteronormativity. To do this, I will use the method of queer reading. Alexander Doty describes queer reading as uncovering “the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts . . . all along” (16). If one views adaptation as being a reading in itself or based on a reading of a text, it seems likely that queer adaptations could emerge through such readings. Similar to Doty’s assertions, a queer adaptation does not need to invent queerness. Instead, it can foreground and amplify what was already there.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will not define queerness simply through codified identity labels, such as “gay”, “lesbian”, “bi” and so on; instead, I will expand my definition to include Alexander Doty’s assertion that “queerness should challenge and confuse our understanding and uses of sexual and gender categories” (xvii). As Doty suggests, “new queer spaces open up (or are revealed) whenever someone moves away from using specific sexual identity category . . . to understand and to describe mass culture” (xviii-xix). It is also more fruitful to expand meaning of queer in this way. Looking for specific categories is a limiting view in itself, looking for what already is, what is codified - and not what could be and discover something new.

Of all the texts concerning this study, only one has a character explicitly stated to be non-heterosexual - Benny in “Mouth”. However, in both the short story and the video game, this sexuality is erased. What differs is the method of erasure. In the video game, the issue is simply not mentioned and regarded as if it never happened; in the

short story, it is still mentioned in the text, but it is not present in his actions. One could argue that AM's violent manipulation of his mind and body have caused this. However, I argue that this homosexuality, or at the very least, prejudiced and bigoted views on it, is present in the way he has been altered.

In the short story, Benny is stated to be homosexual by Ted (28), but he only exhibits heterosexual desire. Ted's explanation of how each of the survivors has been changed by AM implies that he has turned them into opposites of their previous selves. For example, Gorrister had been a "doer, a looker-ahead" but been turned into a "shoulder-shrugger" (28). In regard to Benny Ted says: "He had been gay, and the machine had given him an organ fit for a horse" (ibid.). The implication here is that being a homosexual man is the opposite of having a large penis, a common supposed signifier of masculinity, one's "manhood". Jeremy Withers argues that this is a form of Dantean punishment or *contrapasso* (11), in other words, "a punishment that is often either analogous to or resembles the sin committed" (10). According to Withers, Benny's current state as a drooling idiot is an inversion of his former self before AM as a brilliant scientist (12). Similarly, he is forced to sexually service a woman, thus performing a sexuality he is averse to (12-13). Indeed, Withers also notes how AM's punishments tend to attempt at erasing identity in general (15), and the short story itself also erases his sexuality as the tortures of AM have evidently turned him into a heterosexual and he is not allowed to display any homosexual behaviour in either text. However, it is notable that the video game erases his sexuality completely while at the same time, inventing a new past for him in the military. Indeed, one of the main themes of his scenario is coming to terms with his actions toward his fellow soldiers. As Digby asserts, "if you are deemed gay, that means you are not masculine" (60) and vice versa while warriorhood is considered an ideal for men. In this light, the emphasis on his

military past could be seen as an overcorrection, divorcing him further from the short story's mention of homosexuality, which would be detrimental to his masculinity in militaristic cultures. But *Mouth* itself is not a particularly militaristic game. It is, however, possible that this culture of militaristic masculinity affects it too as video games are often thought of as the purview of teenage boys and young adult men. As Digby shows, the demand to be a "real man" is instilled in boys at a very young age (58-60), and it is likely that products aimed at them would follow this trend. Another potential reason why Benny cannot be a homosexual in any capacity in the video game adaptation is how homosexuality can be seen as passivity in men. As Digby explains, in a gender binary, exhibiting traits associated with the opposite gender can cause "especially boys and men" to be ridiculed and subjected to homophobic insults, which are meant to indicate you are not a real man (60). One of these supposedly feminine traits is passivity, opposite to masculine activeness (Gates 24). Video games are by and large about action, although not always in the same spectacular sense such as action movies. However, all games are based around player action, that is, play. One could argue that in the culture that values masculine action, this makes games in general a "masculine" media. At the same time, a protagonist might not be allowed to exhibit supposedly passive traits, such as homosexuality.

However, one could argue that the erasure of Benny's sexuality is related to AM's origin as a military machine. Cultures and societies that value and valorise militaristic power, according to Tom Digby, exhibit homophobia in order to police especially boys' and men's' sexualities (60). In this light, the military-made AM's torture and transformation of Benny can be seen specifically as a violent attempt at "correcting" and punishing him. To compensate for Benny's perceived lack of masculinity, AM increases the size of his penis, his euphemistic manhood. At the same

time, his new, more animalistic form makes him more aggressive. Although Benny is made into something that does not resemble a human anymore, he might be viewed as more of a man.

There is seeming hypocrisy in AM's apparent need to "correct" Benny's sexuality, however. As Darren Harris-Fain notes, AM rapes Ted in a vision, "a mental sodomy of sorts" (147). Although AM does not inherently have a gender or sex, Ted and the other survivors refer to the supercomputer with masculine terms, such as "he" and "Daddy the Deranged" (23). Thus, AM's rape of man could be considered a homosexual act. However, both male victims and perpetrators of rape usually identify as heterosexual (Ioannou et al. 203). An explanation for this is that rape is not about sexuality but "power and control" (Penn). As a method of control, rape is not a homosexual act, at least not for the perpetrator. However, it reduces the male victim into what a misogynistic culture sees as a woman's position. At the same time, similar to *contrapasso*, military discipline tends to try and reduce one's individuality and identity in order to function in a group. Indeed, combining Withers' idea that AM's punishments aim at denying identity to his victims from his victims with a homophobic motive, I argue that AM is attempting to erase all identity that does not fit the definition of "normal" in heteronormativity, that is, heterosexual and cisgender.

In the visual representation of the video game, Benny's gigantic member is all but gone. What is gone as well is the animalistic side of Benny. Although this could be read as an attempt to remove a certain level of homophobia, it also eliminates the reading of AM's homophobic origin. Indeed, instead of reducing homophobia it seems more in line with an attempt to remove sexuality from the story all together. This would not be entirely true though as the game does include certain sexual actions, namely the attempted rape of Ellen and Ted's attempts at seducing women. These are both viewed

negatively as Ted's attempts will make him unable to achieve the optimal ending in his scenario. Thus, the only sexuality allowed is example of "bad" sexuality, the violent, loveless or distracting. However, at the same time the game affirms righteousness of chaste heterosexuality. To achieve the optimal ending of Gorrister's scenario, one must reunite him with his wife, or at the very least AM's construct of her. The video game thus erases the non-heterosexual and generally sexual themes of the short story while at the same time affirming a conservative view in which heterosexual marriage purged of visible sign of sexuality is the only desirable form of sexuality.

Sexuality has a significant role in the Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As the story progresses, sex that does not produce children becomes a form of defiance toward the government for the main character Winston and his partner Julia. Although heterosexual, one can draw parallels between this and ideas of certain queer scholars. Judith Halberstam for example argues that queerness constructs "queer time" in opposition to heteronormative society and its demands for reproduction (2). Indeed, similar to the queer time that emerged in late twentieth century during the AIDS epidemic, both Winston and Julia know that they or their relationship does not have a future and Winston even thinks that they are intentionally "stepping nearer to their graves" by being together (159). This does not matter, however, as Halberstam explains: "The constantly diminishing future creates on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment" (2). In the INGSOC policed system, Winston and Julia are queer heterosexuals, emphasising their moments together while certain that one day it will lead to their own deaths.

The way in which INGSOC polices sexuality can be related to how several real-life societies police the boundary between homosociality and homosexuality. The

"homosexual role", how homosexuality is defined by the majority, "helps to provide a clear-cut threshold between permissible [homosocial] and impermissible [homosexual] behaviour" (Jeffrey Weeks qtd. in Sedgwick 85). This forces a certain distance to be maintained at all times, which can even take the form of distrust. INGSOC extends this to include the heterosocial and heterosexual. Instead of placing trust in other people, one should only trust and love the party (310). Although heterosexuality is allowed in purposes of reproduction, a level of distrust must be maintained with everyone at all times as the improper crossing of boundary from utility to desire must never happen. Indeed, INGSOC seems to maintain a sort of hyper heteronormativity where one's relationships are only meant to be (re)productive and anything else is "SEXCRIME", including "[heterosexual] intercourse practised for its own sake" (355).

In *Orwell*, there is no clear indication that sexuality is policed in any particular way - at least, not in a way that is different from tolerant-seeming Western societies in real life. As the video game is not set in a society as extreme as the one in the novel, one would not expect same kind of policing in it. However, whereas the novel's surveillance and policing of opinions is practically taken place publicly, in the video game world, this is still done in a more subtle manner. As the operator of the Orwell surveillance system, the player is tasked to find tidbits of information about the subjects they are investigating, using anything they can to provide evidence on people's character. This in turn reveals hidden attitudes on subjects. Although none of what one might discover is illegal, the player knows that whatever they find might be used later against the person they investigate and create a prejudiced image of them. Even though there might not be any law against a particular sexual orientation, lingering stereotypes and prejudices could be used against a person. This shows how a government can pretend not to hold anything against homosexuality but at the same time, use it to their advantage when

they need to. This is, however, left on the level of potential in *Orwell* as all of the relationships in the game are heterosexual in nature, and are used mainly as connections with each other and not politicised or used thematically as such. However, despite this potential of how one's out-of-context private information online can be used against them, sexuality has a very mitigated role compared to George Orwell's novel where the government aims to eradicate "the sex instinct" and "abolish the orgasm" (310). Instead, *Orwell* concentrates more on how the information we put online freely can be used against us and can be used to create a particular image of us when filtered through algorithms and human prejudice.

Homoeroticism in *Heart of Darkness* has been noted by several scholars. For example, Donald S. Wilson states that "given the tale's potentially scandalous central theme—one man's ambiguous obsession with and quest for another man—[Joseph] Conrad had to proceed with the utmost caution and care" (97) due to the homophobic Victorian male audience. Indeed, Wilson shows how Marlow at several points reinstates his masculinity when his fictional audience questions it (102-4). However, this does not actually remove the ambiguous relationships Marlow has with men, such as with his African helmsman, who he missed "awfully" and who had been "at [his] back" on their journey upriver (50). In addition, his quest to find and speak to Kurtz has particular subtext to it and Wilson compares "white spots" on maps and Kurtz, whom Marlow would wish to "explore" (107). At the same time, Richard J. Ruppel argues that "women are actively excluded from the economy of desire in the novella" (153). According to Ruppel, women in *Heart of Darkness* "disrupt male, homosocial relationships" (154) and men have to escape to the wilderness to engage in such relationships (158). In addition to these homosocial relationships that are implied to crossover to the sexual, the character of the Harlequin, Kurtz's male companion before Marlow arrives, creates a

certain queer gender confusion and Ruppel describes him as “androgynous, but really more female than male” (160).

Similar gender transgression does not exist in *Spec Ops* although one character, a reporter known only as the Radioman, could be seen as an adaptation of the Harlequin. However, although Walker does mention that the Radioman has travelled with Colonel Konrad on a previous mission, their relationship does not have the same sexual undertones as Kurtz and the Harlequin. In fact, the Radioman and Konrad can be viewed as part of what in the novella is a single person, Kurtz. Walker mentions that he recognises his voice while serving with Konrad and that one could not forget “a voice like that”. Similarly, in the novella, Kurtz’s voice and speaking ability is mentioned often as an indication of how special he is (e.g. 47, 75). Ruppel notes that Marlow too wishes to listen to Kurtz’s “penetrating words” (163). However, whereas Kurtz’s voice is something to look forward to, the Radioman and his voice is always viewed antagonistically, often informing Walker and his team of their worsening situation or directly antagonising them over the radio. Thus, the game excises one part of the novella’s homoeroticism.

An equivalent to Marlow’s obsession with Kurtz can be found. Walker admires Colonel Konrad as a war hero when the squad arrives in Dubai and continues to believe that finding and being able to talk to him will somehow solve the situation as it worsens around him. Indeed, the primary voice in Walker’s head is that of Konrad and after he has discovered that the colonel is dead, if the player chooses not to accept that Walker is to blame for his actions, Walker will dress in Konrad’s uniform and in essence, become him. However, there is not the same kind of homoeroticism included in this longing as with Marlow’s. Instead, while there is a clear degree of admiration, Walker uses Konrad to displace the blame that belongs rightly on himself. Thus, homoeroticism is mitigated

in the adaptation. Indeed, if there is intimacy between men in the game, it lessens as it progresses, and the members of the squad turn more violent toward their enemies and each other. The three men go from no shows of affection to purely violent physical contact with other men.

In general, all the adaptations surveyed have a decreased amount of overt and potential queerness. This is done by outright omission, such as in *Mouth*, or shifting the focus of the narrative, such as *Spec Ops* or *Orwell*. The only adaptation which did not cause a perceptible change in its queer content, potential or actual, was *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* to *Dark Corners*. However, this is simply because neither of the works have any queer content to speak of. The opposite did not occur either and no particular stress is placed on normative heterosexuality. Although one of the earlier parts of the plots does involve saving and reuniting a heterosexual couple, they are not significant for the themes of the game as they are soon killed despite player efforts and disappear from the plot. From this and the examples discussed earlier, one can see that the video game adaptations have either shifted toward less queerness or maintained heterosexuality. At least in the case of these particular texts, change to the video game medium has mitigated or erased queerness.

In the examples above, I have presented several cases and demonstrated how the narratives have been desexualised in the adaptation process. This applied to both instances of sexual activities, mentions of them, and representation of sexual identities outside the heteronormative. The aversion to sexual content is not unique to video games. Indeed, any depiction of sexual acts, even if not explicit, are often deemed pornographic unless mitigated by humour. However, as Mäyrä shows, on a certain level, video games are still juvenile despite claims of maturity (118). Indeed, while this juvenile nature might promote power fantasies through violence, it might be incapable

of exploring a subject such as adult sexuality. It can also be argued that the games industry itself is complicit in this by essentially reproducing a juvenile idea of maturity, which in turn reproduces and reinforces the juvenile nature of the medium.

The changes in gender are more complex. Games such as *Orwell* and *Mouth* provided larger and more roles for women and *Dark Corners* included some women characters. However, *Spec Ops* erases almost all women from its narrative even though women have an important role in the themes of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Instead, as was discussed above, particularly women of colour are included in the narrative only as victims and have no agency. Their suffering acts simply as a sign that another character has done something unacceptable. A potential explanation for this for disparity in presence of women might be explained by genre. Military shooters are traditionally marketed towards men and boys and thus constructed as masculine, borrowing from masculine power fantasies associated with the military. At the same time, this genre has develop an emphasis on realism. This in turn produces its own type of realism, which is partly borrowed from film, with its own reality effects. Through the exclusion of women from this "real", military shooters also reproduces the ideas which exclude women from active roles in their narrative.

At the beginning of this chapter, the question was raised of whether or not the increased discussion surrounding issues of gender and sexuality are present in the included video games. Although certain games, such as *Spec Ops,* critique the ideals for men, women's or other gender issues were not afforded the same space for discussion. The one non-male issue that was repeated victimisation, such as in *Spec Ops* and *Mouth*. However, in the case of *Spec Ops*, women were reduced to passive victims and in *Mouth,* the trauma caused by victimisation was a flaw to overcome. Apart from these cases, gender issues were primarily not present. This could indicate that the included

video games preferred not to address these issues and instead did not take part in the larger cultural discourses on them.

Another group that is largely excluded in the adaptations is queer people outside binary gender. One must recognise their lack in the adapted works as well. However, certain narratives could have utilised them to strengthen their themes but chose not to. For example, in *Orwell*, one could find out one's gender identity or considerations thereof in their personal files. This could have been used to highlight the danger of the Orwell system as one's gender identity can still prejudice law enforcement against an individual or put them in danger in larger society, even if there is no official legal punishment or condemnation. However, the developers in each case of decided not to include these issues in their games.

5 Conclusion

This study attempted to compare its findings to claims made about video games in popular media. Primary among these claims were the idea that games are violent and that they have retrograde attitudes toward gender and sexuality. In looking at video game adaptations, it was expected that one could discover indication of whether or not the adaptation process would skew the original material in a particular direction.

Although in the case of certain video game adaptations violence committed by the main character did increase, there was often a purpose to this violence. Indeed, although *Spec Ops* was by far the most violent game and also increased violence significantly compared to the original work, it criticised similar actions in the real world and in other games while using player complicity to emphasise its message. One should also note that the primary interest to this study was violence committed by main characters, because they serve as points of view or roles the audience is expected to play. For example, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* take place in settings where violence is abundant and commonplace, but the main characters commit none or very few of these acts. In *Orwell*, although the main character can intentionally cause violence to occur, the game as a whole has far less violent content. Indeed, although it did not fit the scope of this study, how much the overall amount of violence or what one might call background violence changes between mediums. However, in both the source works and the adaptations, the violence served a purpose beyond just being entertainment and instead, had a strong thematic significance. Thus, it becomes important to look at video game violence as something that takes place in a context, both in the small context of the game itself and in the larger context of the cultural and media landscape as a whole.

In discussing gender and sexuality, it became apparent that video game adaptations tended to shy away from the subject of sexuality in particular. Indeed, although there were no overt signs of sexualisation or sexism as certain popular sources suggested, there was instead an overall desexualisation by which both queer and sexual themes were omitted and erased. However, at the same time, the amount of female characters was increased arguably in all games compared to the source texts. However, most of the adaptations presented women in very particular contexts. Indeed, in *Spec Ops*, one sees women mainly as passive victims and in *Mouth*, the female playable character's story revolves around her overcoming the trauma caused by her victimisation. In *Dark Corners*, all of the female allies to the player character are killed. Only *Orwell* did not include themes of gendered victimisation while also increasing the amount of female characters.

An apparent conclusion from this is that the games discussed are more comfortable with depicting violence than sexuality and gender issues. Indeed, only issue of gender the games discussed included was that of violent victimisation. In other words, only times themes of gender were thematically significant was when it was connected with violence. This seems to support the assertion that video games tend to be violent but in a new way. Indeed, although I have shown that the discussed video game adaptations have several complex and introspective ways of discussing violence, it also seems to be true that they can only discuss female experience through violence and victimisation. Thus, the main theme again becomes violence in its many forms while other types of actions and experiences are neglected.

The adaptations also highlighted a particular type of victimisation, that of heterosexual cisgender women. At the same time, queer themes of the source works were not present in the adaptations. Instead, the games were desexualised and de-

gendered in support of a heterosexual default. It is notable that although sexual and gender minorities are still often victimised in real life, they are not afforded as much representation as violence against women. This is not to downplay the violence heterosexual cisgender women face, but it is to highlight the difference in the treatment of different types of victimisation. Indeed, although the games were discussing women's issues solely through victimisation, this is arguably better than having those issues completely omitted.

One observed narrative element that video game adaptation introduced was the use of complicity. Due to the nature of video games, the player must partake in the actions in the game. This is already widely recognised. However, complicity provides wholly new ways to present and explore themes than non-participatory media. When a player is required to be intimate with the action, information from those actions is produced and absorbed in a different way. The triumphs and failures are the player's own. Although games have mostly been reluctant to explore failure, instead opting to allow the player to reload an earlier state and try again, games have the potential to explore failure in a different way to other mediums. Indeed, this can be seen in games like *Orwell* where the game will move on even if the player fails at a crucial moment.

This study was notably limited in its scope, only discussing eight works in total. However, there are several potential study subjects that could provide further information on video game adaptations and thus information on how themes and narrative manifest in video games. Although this study intentionally veered away from including franchise adaptations in order to highlight works outside of them, a great number of video games are made as part of a franchise or are movie or TV series tie-ins. In tie-ins and franchise adaptations, the source work and the adaptation are often not separated by a significant amount of time and might share creative control. This might

enable one to observe thematic changes better without the potential interference caused by cultural change over time. However, one must note that the motives of tie-in and franchise adaptations can be very different from adaptation unrelated to franchises. This study was also limited in its sample size due to its qualitative method. A larger scale quantitative study could provide information on what kind of changes adaptation into video games cause. Another potential course of enquiry could be to consider how certain genres are adapted. Although video games can often be divided into thematic and narrative genres, such as science fiction, fantasy, detective stories, similar to other media, as a participatory medium, video games can also be defined in terms of their gameplay, such as first-person shooter, real-time strategy, or role-playing game. Currently, there is no research of how thematic and narrative genres might be adapted into gameplay genres and if there are patterns in this adaptation process.

Despite this study's limited scope, it is clear that video games have not developed to be more inclusive simply over time and they easily centre violent content. Although more studies are required to see how this relates to the larger media landscape, it is doubtful that violence and lack of representation beyond the white cisgender male are inherent to any medium. Indeed, it is more likely that the answer resides in culture both around video games and in the general media landscape. Only by interrogating these structures can the medium develop past its current thematic and narrative hang-ups.

Appendix A: Summaries of the Works

The following section will provide brief summaries of the works discussed in this study with minimal analysis or interpretation. However, it is included to show the differences between the plots. Each non-participatory source text is followed by its adaptation, divided into pairs for ease of reading.

Heart of Darkness and *Spec Ops: The Line*

Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) tells the story of Charles Marlow and his time as a riverboat captain in Africa. Once he arrives in Africa, he begins to witness the horrors of the colonial projects. While he waits at the Outer Station of the Company, he hears about "a very remarkable person" called Mr. Kurtz (19). To get to the boat he is to captain, Marlow must travel on foot to the station where his steamboat is based. On this journey, he discovers that his boat has been wrecked. Once he arrives at the station, he has his boat fished out and repaired. He is tasked to find and relieve Kurtz, who he has heard praise of from several people. However, as he begins to near the station Kurtz is stationed at, Marlow also meets violent resistance from the native Africans. As he arrives to the station, he discovers the several excesses Kurtz has indulged in, including being worshipped by the natives and also misusing his powers to subjugate them. This leads Marlow to believe Kurtz has gone mad. However, Kurtz is also physically sick and, on the way, back down river, he dies, and Marlow is only left with his final words: "The horror! The horror!" (69) When Marlow returns to Europe, he seeks out Kurtz's fiancée, only referred to as his Intended. When she asks Marlow to tell her Kurtz's last words, Marlow lies and tells her they were her name.

Yager Development's *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012) is a third-person shooter in which the player takes the role of Captain Martin Walker who is sent to a sandstorm

ravaged Dubai as part of a three-man Delta Force team. Before the events of the story, the “Damned 33rd” infantry battalion, commanded by Colonel John Konrad, a man Walker has met and admires, was meant to evacuate the city. However, this proved impossible because of the sandstorms. Accompanying Walker are First Lieutenant Alphonso Adams and Staff Sergeant John Lugo. Although they have been ordered to confirm the presence of survivors and immediately radio for extraction, Walker decides they will investigate further after they fight and kill some locals turned “insurgents”, as they soon hear them being called over the radio. In the city, the team discovers that several factions are vying for control, what is left of the 33rd infantry battalion, the local insurgents and the CIA agents who at least seemingly on the side of the locals. After they discover the 33rd hostile to them and that the battalion has committed atrocities, the team sides with the CIA. This leads them to a heavily fortified place called the Gate, under the control of the 33rd. The team attacks them using white phosphorous, a type of incendiary munitions. This inadvertently leads them to kill 47 civilians whom the 33rd were sheltering at the Gate. Walker blames the 33rd and Colonel Konrad. Soon Walker is contacted by Konrad via a radio phone he finds. Eventually, the team meet another CIA operative, Jeff Riggs, who they help lead a raid on the city’s water supply in an attempt at crippling the 33rd. However, Riggs opts to destroy the whole supply, dooming the city and the people in it to die in order to cover up the atrocities of the 33rd. After this, the team is led by Walker to hunt down Konrad whom he believes has answers. However, after the team members are separated, Lugo is lynched to death and Adams dies in a fight to the death. In the end, only Walker makes it to the Dubai Seaside tower, a fictional stand-in for the Burj Khalifa. Although at first Walker seems to discover the villainous Konrad he expected in the penthouse, it is soon revealed that the real Konrad killed himself and has been dead the whole time Walker has been in

Dubai, and the Konrad Walker has been seeing and hearing has been a hallucination brought on by the need to justify Walker's own actions in Dubai. The game offers three potential endings. Walker can kill himself, accepting blame for his actions. He can also reject this which leads to him to finally call for extraction. When the army arrives, Walker can surrender or attack them. If Walker dies in the ensuing fight, he recalls Konrad telling him when they served together that soldiers "do what's necessary", then die, before dying himself. If he kills all of the soldiers, he picks up one of their radios and says "Gentlemen, welcome to Dubai", a phrase he used when the Delta Force team arrived at the city in the beginning of the game.

"I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" and *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*

In Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" (1967) 109 years have passed since the mass genocide of all people on Earth, save for five survivors, four men and one woman. These survivors are kept alive and tortured by AM, the amalgam of the supercomputers that perpetrated the genocide of humanity. These survivors are Ted, the narrator and a delusional paranoid, Benny, a brilliant scientist turned to a semi-simian form by AM, Gorrister, an idealist and pacifist turned apathetic shoulder-shrugger, Nimdok, of whom much is not known apart from that AM forced him to use his current name, and Ellen, formerly chaste woman turned nymphomaniac. Narrated by Ted, the short story's plot begins when one of the survivors, Nimdok, has a vision of food in the ice caverns. Although they are dubious, they decide to make the journey because AM keeps them in near starvation constantly. On the way, they are subject to numerous tortures by AM, including a monstrous bird, and Benny is blinded when he tries to escape. During these trials, Ted realises that AM wants to punish them, the last remnant of humanity, because it lacks the ability to be creative or to move freely unlike the

humans who created it. When the group arrives in the ice caverns, they discover that the food is canned but they have no way to open the cans. This causes Benny to go into a rage and attack Gorrister. In this moment, Ted realises they can only escape through death and grabbing an ice stalactite, he kills Benny and Gorrister. Ellen, realising what Ted is doing, kills Nimdok. Finally, Ellen is killed by Ted, but Ted is left alive and transformed by AM into a being unrecognisable as a human and unable to hurt himself.

In *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* (1995), developed by Cyberdreams and The Dreamers Guild and co-designed by Harlan Ellison, the setting and characters are same at least in name. The player controls each of the characters from the short story in turn. Each has their own separate scenario to complete in the first half of the game where they are meant to overcome a personal flaw and confront actions in their past. During these sequences they also meet characters, some of which are AM in disguise, while some are simply parts of him, and are able to damage AM's mental defences. These come into use in the second half of the game when the Russian and Chinese supercomputers re-emerge from AM's consciousness and offer to turn one of the humans into binary code to attack AM in his mind. Here the survivors also learn that there are 750 cryogenically frozen humans on the moon, waiting to be reawakened. Depending on what the player is able to do in AM's mind, they are presented with one of seven endings. Five of these endings are a variation of the ending of the short story and turned into "a great, soft jelly thing". In the sixth ending, the player is able to disable AM only partially and his Ego kills the humans on the moon. In the final potential ending, all the supercomputers are disabled, the frozen humans are returned to Earth and the character the player took to AM's mind, becomes their protector in binary form. The other survivors are killed as AM's physical complex explodes with them inside.

The Shadow Over Innsmouth and *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*

H. P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936) tells the story of an unnamed man who travels through a mysterious and isolated town of Innsmouth in order to save money. All the townspeople have a particular shambling gait, their eyes are bulgy, and heads are of an unusual shape. Once in the town, he decides to investigate it further, meeting a normal-looking man from Arkham, transferred to work at a local grocery store. From him, the main character gains a map of town and learns of Zadok Allen, a drunk who might be able to tell about the town's history if plied with enough alcohol. Later, the narrator meets Allen who tells the narrator how Obed Marsh brought customs and rituals of a Kanak tribe back to Innsmouth with him. In hard times by offering human sacrifices, the Deep Ones provided the town with large fish hauls and strange jewellery made of pale gold. Allen also tells how Obed Marsh and his followers started a cult and when they were arrested, the Deep Ones attacked the town, killing half of its population. The survivors of the town were forced to join Marsh's cult and breed with the Deep Ones, causing their children to eventually turn into Deep Ones and migrate underwater. The cult still controls the town and Allen hints that it has sinister plans for the surface world. Allen stops his tale when he believes he sees something in the direction of the sea, believing that he and the narrator have been spotted. The narrator, however, is undisturbed by this and dismisses the story. Returning to the bus stop, he is planning to leave but is informed that the only bus in and out of town is broken and needs to be fixed. It is suggested to him that he rent a room in a hotel for the night. During the night, someone tries to enter his room and he escapes out of a window. During his escape through town, he finally sees the true form of the Deep Ones with their fish-like features that cause him to faint. After he wakes up the next day unharmed, he hurries to Arkham where he informs the authorities of what he has seen. This

prompts a raid on Innsmouth, in which several of townspeople are placed in concentration camps. Later, the narrator researches his own family history further and discovers that he too is related to Obed Marsh through a great-aunt and he is slowly turning into a Deep One, just like the residents of Innsmouth. Finally, he embraces his fate and decides to break out his cousin, who is further along in his transformation, from a sanatorium so that they can join other Deep Ones in an underwater city.

Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth (2005), developed by Headfirst Productions, begins when police detective Jack Walters is called to a siege of a cult headquarters. The leader of the cult has asked for him specifically. Once he arrives, a firefight separates Walters from the police, and he goes in the mansion alone. In the basement, he discovers a strange device which is revealed to be a portal when two alien creatures come out of it. Walters loses consciousness and when he is found by the police, he has a completely different personality. He is placed in Arkham Asylum for a time but is released and travels and studies the occult for six years. After these six years, his original personality returns and cannot remember the events of the past six years. As he tries to find out what happened during those past years, he becomes a private detective. This leads him to taking up a missing person case in Innsmouth, concerning one Brian Burnham, a store clerk sent to Innsmouth to establish a store there. Once in the town, he asks around unsuccessfully, while meeting characters familiar from the novella, such as Zadok Allen. Walters is also forced to stay the night at a hotel and is attacked during the night by an armed mob and has to flee over the rooftops and sneaking in alleys. During his escape, Walters finds weapons and also meets a federal agent Lucas Mackey. He also finds Burnham and his girlfriend Ruth, but they are both killed as the three try to escape Innsmouth. Subsequently, Walters meets an FBI squad led by J. Edgar Hoover. Together they raid the Marsh Gold Refinery where Walters

discovers and is attacked by a Shoggoth, a shapeless being made of black goo covered in eyes. The being seemingly dies when the building is demolished. This leads to an assault on the town by the US military. However, when the headquarters of the cult controlling the town proves resistant to the attack, Walters is sent to infiltrate it via an old smuggling entrance. Here Walters saves Mackey who had been kidnapped for a ritual sacrifice. After disabling the barrier around the cult headquarters and discovering a secret chamber, Walters falls into tunnel leading to the sea, only to be rescued by USS Urania, a Coast Guard vessel assaulting the island of Devil's Reef, the source of the Deep Ones. The vessel is beset by the Deep Ones and Dagon, a demigod. However, the demigod is defeated by Walters before the Urania sinks. Waking up on Devil's Reef, Walters continues down old smuggling tunnels to discover the Deep Ones' city, which is being assaulted by a US Navy submarine. However, a magical barrier protects the city. Fighting through to a temple that is the source of the barrier, Walters kills Mother Hydra, the bride of Dagon. Escaping through another portal, Walters collapses in front of Mackey and Hoover on the other side. Walters memory of the past six years returns, and he remembers being projected far to the past while his body is being controlled by a member of the Great Race of Yith, a species that projects its consciousness across time while taking care of the host body's consciousness in their own era. It is also revealed that Walters' father was also being possessed by a Yithian during the time of Walters' conception, making him part alien. When his consciousness was sent back, his memory was erased. However, now that he remembers it again, he goes mad and is confined to Arkham Asylum where he attempts to hang himself.

Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Orwell: Keeping an Eye on You

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is set in a dystopian version of the eponymous year, where Great Britain, renamed to Airstrip One, is ruled by a totalitarian super-state. The leader of this super-state and its ruling Party is a figure only known as Big Brother and it is governed by an ideology known as INGSOC, or "English Socialism". Winston Smith is a member of the Party, working at the Ministry of Truth. His job is to rewrite and fabricate documents so that history conforms to the ever-changing decrees set by the state. Despite his position, Winston hopes to oppose the Party in some way. He also known that this already makes him a thoughtcriminal, a person who has thoughts prohibited by the INGSOC ideology and will be caught eventually. As a form of opposition, he begins writing his own thoughts and criticisms of the Party in a diary. He also comes to believe that the proletariat class, also known as the proles, are the key to overthrowing the state, although soon discovers they have no political ambitions or consciousness. He notices a young woman glancing at him at times, becoming convinced that she is somehow aware of his thoughtcrimes and begins to suspect that an Inner Party member called O'Brien is part of a resistance group known as the Brotherhood. Eventually, Winston's suspicions of the young woman are proved false as he receives a note from her telling that she loves him. They begin a secret relationship and Winston finds out her name is Julia. This relationship becomes a form of resistance against the Party for them as the Party doctrine sees sex only for reproduction. Later, Winston is invited by O'Brien to his apartment where Winston and Julia are sworn into the resistance movement. A short time later, Winston receives a book, supposedly written by the leader of the resistance, which details how the current political system came to be and how to resist it. However, before Winston is able to figure out why the Party wants to maintain its power so much, he and Julia are captured

by the Thought Police. While Winston is imprisoned and tortured at the Ministry of Love, O'Brien is revealed to have been setting up a trap for them. He personally tortures Winston and explains that the party seeks power for its own sake. Finally, Winston's mind is broken, he betrays Julia and he is not only made to say what the Party wants, but also believe it. Winston is released to public life and meets Julia who was also tortured and betrayed him as well. Their feelings for each other are gone and Winston finally accepts that he only loves Big Brother, the leader figure of the Party.

Osmotic Studios' *Orwell: Keeping an Eye on You* (2016) is set in a state called the Nation lead by the similarly named the Party. Although democratic elections still exist, the Party is authoritarian. The government can legally spy on its citizens in the name of national security, using a surveillance system called Orwell. The player takes the role of an Orwell investigator outside the Nation. The game begins when a bomb explodes at a public square, killing several people. Using snippets of information found online by the Orwell system and picked by the player, the player's contact, Symes, begins to form an image of the suspects and other people of interest. During this investigation the player has several choices that will shape the image of the suspects and with it, the Nation's response against them. For example, when one suspect, Cassandra Watergate, is revealed to have had an altercation with a police officer, it is the player's choice whether or not to include that this was done in self-defence. The investigation soon begins to focus on an activist group called Thought. The leader of this group is revealed to be a university professor called Abraham Goldfels and Thought is shown to have taken part in anti-government surveillance protests. This leads to the discovery of other Thought members, such as Harrison O'Donnell, Juliet Kerrington, and Nina, whose surname is not yet known. It is also discovered that an unknown individual, called Initiate, is hacking Thought's website for an unknown reason. The player

discovers that the group has protested in three places, two of which have been bombed. Symes surmises that the third unknown place is the next target. Two potential places are offered, and the player has to choose which one based on the information they have discovered. If the player chooses correctly, the bomb is defused. If not, there are several casualties as the bomb explodes. Nina who is now suspected to be the bomber is revealed to be Sergeant Nina Maternova. Nina notices that the player has been able to access their computer and escapes with her son. Depending on the information supplied by the player, she can be arrested, escape, or be killed by the police in a shootout. After this, Nina's email account receives a message from Abraham, indicating that the bombs were a plan between him and Nina. This leads to the player investigating Abraham's location. While this investigation is happening, Harrison tries to recruit Initiate, who reveals he is already a member and tells Harrison about Orwell and how they are under surveillance. Harrison later relays this information to the other members of Thought. While investigating Juliet's computer, the player is momentarily disconnected from the Orwell system. The player discovers that Abraham used to have a different name before he immigrated to the Nation. They also discover that he is dead and someone has posed as him for over a year. Initiate is revealed to have hacked into Orwell when the player disconnected and posts Symes' personal information online. The next day the player's contact in the Nation is Secretary of Security Catherine Delacroix. Symes has either been shot or is in hiding, depending on the results of player's actions involving Nina. Delacroix tells the player they can only upload 20 snippets of information before a call by Abraham to Thought members. After the player has reached the limit, the call happens, and Initiate takes control of the Orwell system from the player. Initiate realises that Abraham is dead, and that Juliet was the one posing as him. Juliet admits having planned most of the events in the game, including manipulating Nina to commit the

bombings. According to Juliet, peaceful protesting was not working and now the only person who can make a difference is the player who she knows is listening in. Four options are presented to the player which will decide the end of the game. Incriminating Thought will create public acceptance of the Orwell system and the player is invited to immigrate to the Nation. Incriminating Delacroix will cause her to resign, Orwell to be dismantled, and the player is wanted for extradition. By uploading their own information, which Orwell has been secretly gathering about all its foreign operators, to the system, the player can reveal the existence of Orwell to the world, causing global outcry. This leads to Thought becoming a political party and the player is made their honorary member. If the player tries and fails to implicate Delacroix, they have to turn in the members of Thought. This leads to the group being arrested, Orwell being made public to a neutral reception and an arrest warrant being placed on the player. In a final cutscene, the player uploads a statement about the scandal on to Orwell.

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