

Reconceptualizing the Lived Experience of Games: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Single-
Player Experience

By

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the relationship between video games and players regarding lived experience. It revisits the classical debate of the idea of immersion and similar concepts in video games, challenging the concept of immersion by taking a phenomenological stance that sees a direct connection between the player and the game as opposed to their ontological separation. Using a blended phenomenological approach that draws from Alfred Schutz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu, and following the phenomenological method as outlined by Schutz (1932), the paper looks at four games from the *Animal Crossing* (2004, 2013) and *Fallout* (2008, 2010) series. The analysis examines Being and consciousness, meaning and meaning structures, projects of action, and the structuration of the social worlds of the game. The analysis will demonstrate that the ways in which people approach their everyday social world is very similar to the way that they approach the social world presented by the game, revealing a connection between worlds of experience through lived experience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Video Games, Society, and You

With an undeniable boom and growing public popularity, video games are fast becoming an important part of many people's lives. A report released by the Entertainment Software Association of Canada (ESA) in 2011 indicated a strong popularity in games and vast value in the video game industry, posting a contribution of 1.7 billion dollars to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP) (SECOR Consulting 2011: 3). A subsequent report in 2014 indicated growth, reporting that 61% of Canadian households had gaming apparatus, with approximately 54% of Canadian declaring to be "gamers," with 48% of this figure being female, and 52% male, now contributing 2.3 billion dollars to Canada's GDP (ESA 2014: 4). The 2011 report identified the proliferation of mobile devices and "social gaming" as key factors in enabling the growth of gaming (SECOR Consulting 2011: 4). Accordingly, as the activity grows, the culture around it grows as well. Along with the population statistics presented by the ESA, their research indicated a large percentage of Canadians owning computers (ESA 2014: 16). With the wider accessibility of the internet and more people playing games, it is easy to find online communities dedicated to almost any game one can think of.

As the culture around gaming grows, so too does the academic interest. The number of academic studies in video games has dramatically increased and, perhaps most importantly, the variety and scope of research is much broader. The technology surrounding games and game studies being conducive to connectivity has enabled greater degrees of involved ethnographic research. For example, Sherry Turkle's (1984) work *The Second Self* conducted research in a time where there was less connectivity and less variety. Although what she discovered in the creation of game culture in physical arcade settings was valuable, it has now been amplified with so many different venues that allow people to connect and talk about games from all over the world. Significant contributions to the field of game studies have been made with important texts

such as Stephen Kline's *Digital Play: The Interaction of Culture, Technology, and Marketing* (2003), Nick Dyer-Witheford's *Games of Empire* (2009), and Peter Vorderer's *Playing Video Games: Motives, Responses, and Consequences* (2006). New specific foci on discourses surrounding identity, particularly gender, and online game ethnographies conducted in games such as *EverQuest* and *World of Warcraft*, have also contributed important texts to the field. These new works have provided valuable insights not only into player interaction with games, but also with other players. Compilation works, such as *Beyond Mortal Kombat and Barbie: New Perspectives in Games and Gender* (2011), feature established scholars such as Mia Consalvo, Carrie Heeter, and Elizabeth Hayes, and new ethnographies such as Jenny Sundén, and Malin Sveningsson's *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Identities at Play* (2012) and Kishonna Gray's *Race, Gender, and Deviance in Xbox Live: Theoretical Perspective from Virtual Margins* (2014) have added much to the scholarship of player experience.

All of these studies make reference to some kind of player engagement with the game. Whether this means immersion, identification, or just interaction, these studies highlight the fact games hold a significant social value. This essay will add to the literature regarding player interaction or experience with games themselves as opposed to interaction with others through games. It will mainly draw on sociological theory, in particular the phenomenological tradition, which in some ways seems to have been somewhat neglected or muted in favour of more recent philosophies or forms of understanding experience.

The purpose of this research is to re-examine the ways that we understand playing video games from a phenomenological perspective. We will first have a brief literature review that covers some topics relating to immersion or presence, demonstrating that these concepts rely on psychological or emotional attachment. We will cover another popular concept of identification

with particular characters, themes, or ideas, which also indicates a fundamental separation of the player from the game in front of them. After seeing how interaction or action and connectivity between the game and player have been traditionally viewed, we will look at the games to be examined in this study. From there we will then have a theoretical breakdown of various concepts and ideas that will be used in the analysis. Before the final analysis, we will outline the data and methods.

By using a mixed phenomenology consisting of theory from Alfred Schutz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu, following Schutz's phenomenological method, we will conduct an analytic breakdown of four games from two series, *Animal Crossing* and *Fallout*, examining Being, meaning, and structures of the social world. This will demonstrate that the way humans interact with the social world is in many ways the same way that humans interact with the game world, making clear the existence of a much more fundamental and complex connectivity between the game, player, and everyday lifeworld than accounted for by ideas such as immersion, presence, or identification.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Virtuality, Immersion, and Playing Games

Video games and experience, in a phenomenological sense but not necessarily within the tradition of phenomenology, have been the subject of considerable study. With early landmark ethnographic works such as Sherry Turkle's *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (1984) and new work from Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson, *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Passionate Play* (2012), the digital worlds created by games such as *Second-Life*, *EverQuest*, and *World of Warcraft* have demonstrated time and again the closeness of games to our everyday lives, and a growing personal significance in terms of personal and social experience. Researchers have examined experience within contexts of immersion and virtual reality, realism and simulations, symbolism and interpretation, and race and gender. This literature review will cover the various ways in which player experience in and around the game have been researched in recent years. Beyond examining the players themselves, researchers have also examined questions of action and interpretation, morality, and spatiality.

The reason for covering the literature to follow, particularly that of immersion, is because this is how action and interaction within games are usually conceptualized. There is a great emphasis on the idea of “feeling” like one is in the game, or “forgetting” one is playing a game, that it “mimics” real life well enough to evoke these feelings. Studies also mention that players might get bored, or again “feel” disconnected, even though they are still in control. However, these conceptualizations are often problematic because they often rely on particular factors or a set of conditions to achieve these feelings. Being reliant on conditions can cause problems and these ideas in themselves do not fully capture the game experience. How do we bridge the gap? How can we more directly address the ontological problems of a separated game world and real

world and the implications that carries? By taking a phenomenological line of inquiry, we can reshape our understanding of what it means to play a game.

The Self and Real versus Virtual Worlds

The relationship between the supposed virtual and real worlds are critical to understanding the actual experience taking place in video games. On the subject of the separation of virtual game worlds and real worlds, the scholarly debate has traditionally pointed towards a clear distinction. But how do we define the virtual, especially pertaining to games? “Virtual” is not necessarily synonymous with digital worlds, nor specific to video games or cyberspace. It has a long historical tradition involving art, ritualistic and religious contexts (Shields 2003). Rob Shields proposes that the word virtual comes from the idea of “virtue,” wherein a “virtual person” would be an actual representation or embodied of a moral or ethical *ideal* (Shields 2003: 3), suggesting a separation from common reality and the virtuous, which has an aura of unreality.

Pinning down what “virtual” is against “the real” proves difficult. Merleau-Ponty’s conception of virtual space is not the contemporary idea of a digital space, rather it means any space that is created and enables situations (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261). Jean Baudrillard’s account of the virtual is that of a “simulated” reality that humanity is enmeshed in, which has a complex relationship with the “real” world, being in some ways more “real” than the real itself (Baudrillard 1981: 1, 20). Shields argues that virtual is real but not concrete or actual, and suggests that the digital idea of virtual is simply the most recent incarnation of virtual (Shields 2003: xvi, 2, 205-6).

Though recent research is changing the conceptualization of separate digital game worlds and the “real” world, studies are still at odds in this debate to some extent. Some hold that the digital game world is a virtual one, distinct and clearly separate, or in competition with, the

everyday world (Boellstorff 2008; Castronova 2007; Malaby 2007). Others see the spaces as connected, yet still fundamentally segregated, particularly in terms of socialization and dispositions (Bartle 2004; Dibbell 1993; Salen and Zimmerman 2004; Schmierbach and Limperos 2013). Micheal Nitsche suggests that although a virtual space has a root in human knowledge and is a social product, it does not exist as a “place” until a player has interactions with it (Nitsche 2010: 191). In contrast to this, Nowell Marshall argues that virtual worlds, once created, “continue to exist and change,” even if you, the player, are not present (Marshall 2008). Maude Bonenfant (2011) questions the assumptions held about the term “virtual” as a distinct separation from the real world. She notes that the word “virtual” implies that “these worlds are outside ‘real life’” in some way, which is not necessarily the case, though Shields notes that this assumed separation is the current commonplace conceptualization of the virtual (Shields 2003: 19). The way that the “virtual world” of the game is framed is very important and informs how one may conceive of the game experience.

Conceptualization of the separation of these worlds on the player’s behalf may inform their behaviour in these digital worlds (Jin and Park 2009; Schulzke 2009; Tamborini, Eden, Bowman 2012; Weaver and Lewis 2012: 610;). For example, Salen and Zimmerman (2004) offer a model where player engagement with a game requires awareness that the video game experience is a bracketed world. Such a view is reinforced by Thomas Malaby, who argues that virtual realities are removed from the realities of everyday life (2007). On the other hand, Tom Boellstorff (2008) suggests that it is the everyday world that is bracketed wherein the game experience is exclusive to itself and players do not view everyday life as interfering or influencing their gaming experience. Negotiated understandings of virtual game worlds, such as Castronova’s position of having the game world and real world in competition with each other in

terms of experience and understanding are also important for consideration, as they may offer players a choice in terms of what they wish to take away from, or bring to, the game (A. Galloway 2004; Castronova 2007; Clark and Chalmers 1998; Hartmann and Vorderer 2010).

Understanding this connectivity and/or separation, as well as similarities and/or differences of the real and digital worlds in terms of culture, identity, and agency is at the forefront of research regarding “immersion.” Richard Otto (2007) examines the correlations between “real world” communities and “virtual world” ones in an ethnographic study of *EverQuest*. Through interviews, his research found that the respondents, players of *EverQuest*, felt as though the game provided a community like any other activity (2007). Frans Mayra’s (2008) findings seem to follow this line of thought, also suggesting that games provide a culture like any other, not necessarily or explicitly suggesting the worlds are separate. She observes connections between games and everyday life by exposing the shared language, artefacts or symbols, memorabilia, and shared spaces. Jin Kim conducted an ethnographic study of a game culture that extended well outside of the game itself based on the community and suggests that user-generated content creates more of a “world” between players (Kim 2014). Florence Chee, Marcelo Vieta, and Richard Smith’s ethnography on the players of *EverQuest* came to a conclusion similar to Mayra and Kim. Chee, Vieta and Smith’s research shows that other players refer to their peers not as other characters, but as actual people, and view games as a means of “re-enchanting” social life via sustaining “meaningful community experiences” (Chee, Vieta and Smith 2006: 154, 169).

The Player and the Game: What is Immersion?

Immersion and simulations of reality have been a topic of discussion for quite some time, particularly if we include debates on imitation from ancient philosophers such as Plato (Plato

2000). When it comes to video games, immersion stands out differently from other media primarily because video games require action and input from the user, whereas the other forms of entertainment tend to treat the participant as a receiver of experience, not the creator. Video game experience is subjective, and each game will have varying degrees of immersion or impact on the player's perception of self.

Recognition of the uniqueness of video games to other forms of media contributed to the development of multiple conceptualizations of the idea of immersion (Schulzke 2014). In various incarnations, immersion has been a key aspect of video game studies, providing an underlying framework for many forms and purposes of game-related research, each version providing different angles of explanation for various phenomena. Four major levels, concepts, or types, of player interaction or player "immersion" with the game are generally discussed, with increasing levels of connection. Because immersion as a term now has particular contexts and conceptualizations, I will use the term "connection" instead of "immersion," indicating a player's "connection" to the game. First, the most basic and classic type of connection is immersion. The second level of connection is presence. The third is what has been called "parasocial interaction." The final and deepest form of connection is labelled "attachment" or "persona."

Let us begin with immersion. A thoroughly discussed topic regarding multiple aspects of media and forms of entertainment, immersive aspects of books, television, film, theatre narratives, and video games have all been examined at some point. There have been various stances on the proper definition of immersion, but all generally point to the idea that the participant feels totally immersed in the story provided by whatever medium. Alison McMahan (2003) suggests that the most accepted definition comes from Janet Murray (1997). This definition can be briefly summarized as being "surrounded by a completely other reality," similar

to the idea of being submerged in water. This immersion sensation “takes over all of our attention, our perceptual apparatus,” and is a “participatory activity” (Murray 1997: 98-99). McMahan also suggests that immersion was a “removal from life” and “personal involvement” in the world provided (McMahan 2003: 67). Stephane Natkin defines immersion as an “absence of disbelief,” wherein the player has some control or part in the narrative, and there is a particular perception of the game world (Natkin 2006: 41). Alex Golub believes that immersion is more of a sensorial realism, relying on “realist simulation” tactics in the design itself (Golub 2010: 19). Peter Berger, a software engineer, describes the immersive experience as resulting from a detailed and interesting virtual space wherein “players forget that they are playing a game” (Berger 2008: 47). He also suggests that this experience can be described as a mimesis, putting mimesis in the context of mimicking the real world. His stance is that design techniques play a crucial part in allowing players to become immersed in another world, which is followed up and arguably improved by Michael Nitsche, positing that game design, in terms of realism, is not enough, but also emphasizes that a virtual space is “a product of human knowledge,” (Nitsche 2008: 191), enabling easier access or immersion to this space. Like Berger, Jung-Yoon Kim and SangHun Nam (2014) suggest that immersion in virtual realities is dependent on technical design appealing to the senses (411-412). Immersion can be considered as a sensorial perception of being within a virtual world that is distinct from the “real world,” enabling the idea of being “immersed” in a different world.

In this sense, the idea of immersion regarding video games is too general and lacks specificity, particularly in describing regarding personal and emotional experience. A more descriptive term for a more personal connection to the game can be found in *presence*. Despite being used synonymously in common conceptualization and other writings (McMahan, 2003:

84), presence can be seen as the *result* of immersion (Nitsche 2008: 203), a sort of deeper level of connection set out by Richard Bartle (2004). Clive Fencott builds on older work from Lombard and Ditton that posits presence as “a perceptual illusion of non-mediation” (1997). Fencott believes that presence is the result of perception of the virtual world rather than sensorial feeling (Fencott 1999). A more recent publication from Nitsche agrees, also viewing presence as a “perceptual illusion” and “mental state” where players feel as though they are present in the game itself, but not just in a sense of non-mediation, but as an active part of the environment (Nitsche 2008: 203). Carrie Heeter offered a definition of presence that distinguished three kinds of presence: personal, social, and environmental. Summarized, these kinds work together to influence how and why one feels they are in a virtual world, acknowledgement of existence from other beings in that virtual world, and the extent to which the environment reacts to them (Heeter 1992: 2). So we can see that presence differs from immersion because it is more of a psychological feeling of *being there*, as opposed to a particular perception of the game itself.

The concept of the “every man” character is a good example for considering presence the next level up from immersion. The “every man” character is a character that is designed to enable the average, everyday player to relate to the game by adding an extra sense of “being there” in the digital world. The “everyman” character, from a design stand-point, is supposed to add another level of connection, given that the player-character (here on PC) could be any person; they were not fantastically intelligent, strong, or unrealistic looking (in terms of achievable body-types). However, as with immersion, there is still a distinguished, separate world here. Presence clearly appeals more to the psychological and emotional than immersion, but still does not entirely capture the lived experience of playing a game, neglecting social aspects of the game. To address this, parasocial interaction became a new angle of connection.

Parasocial interaction can be considered a deeper form of connection than both immersion and presence because it actively examines the social aspects of games as opposed to representations and realistic simulations. Parasocial interaction relies on the premise that virtual worlds are understood as social spaces, not just a graphical spatiality (Bartle 2004: 4-31; Golub 2009: 19). Jin and Park describe parasocial interaction as “users responding to ‘representations of humans’ in a manner that is typical of any social relationship” (Jin and Park 2009: 724), meaning that there is a still smoother transition to this digital world, yet still imply an assumed understanding of a basic separation of digital and physical worlds. Bowman, Schultheiss, and Schumann add to this, suggesting that there are “feelings of intimacy” or connection with fictional characters. This could be extended to whether or not that fictional character is a PC or non-playable-character (here on NPC). Christine Daviault (2013) offered some exploratory research how players engage with NPCs. Through interviews with designers, she determined that, like our everyday life, the characters that surround the player are just as important socially as the connections between ourselves and the game. Although there are some compatibility issues here, there is certainly useful information in these works, particularly how we might think about experiencing others in-game.

Castronova (2007) argues that “early visions” of virtual reality have been replaced by massively-multiplayer-online (MMO) games, wherein they provide comprehensive social worlds that “compete” with the everyday world, yet the two are still fundamentally separate. In parasocial interaction within a game world, the avatar is the manifestation of the self with the game particularly for the purpose of interaction with others (Jin and Park 2009: 724). This sort of interaction can be seen in the study conducted by Kim in *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. Though many players contacted each other through online media, the game served only as a social tool, a

nexus or hub of interaction for the players to act with each other (Kim 2014: 357, 363). Here we can see the more complex forms of connection, yet there is still an underlying framework that assumes an essential separation of the real world and the virtual world of the game.

The final and deepest level of connection is termed the persona, or character attachment. Though it is the closest thing to the phenomenological connection I will be presenting, it is still predicated on an initial segregation. The basic premise of the deepest level of connection is the “internalization” or “psychological merging” of the player and the PC (Bowman, Schultheiss, Schumann 2012). Bartle describes the persona where the player is “directly being there; not role-playing a being, you are a being; not assuming identity, you are that identity... No level of indirection, no filtering, no question: you are there” (Bartle 2003: 155). Though he termed it “self-presence,” Lee adds that this level of connection would be a “psychological state in which virtual self/selves are experienced as the actual self” (Lee 2004: 46). Bowman, Schultheiss, and Schumann ascribe this deep connection to character attachment, where players can construct a friendship and identification with their character, as well as engage in a suspension of disbelief in terms of real/unreal worlds, resulting in a feeling of “responsibility of action” and a total “sense of control” (Bowman, Schultheiss, Schumann 2012: 170). McMahan believes that this kind of connection could be characterized as “deep play,” which is predicated on immersion through “obsession” (McMahan 2003: 69). Miroslaw Filiciak, with a Baudrillardian twist, suggests that the player can construct their in-game identity based on the manipulation of images, or surrounding one’s avatar with objects in-game to construct the identity they wish to be associated with (Filiciak 2003: 91, 95). This would be an example of deep connection, as the PC or avatar is clearly regarded with great importance and connection to the player. Turkle found that people who play games described gaming as an engaging and active process, meaning playing is

“something you do, something you do in your head, a world that you enter, and, to a certain extent, something you ‘become’... video games are interactive computer microworlds” (1984: 66-67). This kind of connection can be viewed as a persona-level immersion as a connection of some sort is felt with the game, and it is recognized as a microworld as opposed to a virtual world. Jeffery Cain’s research on teenage alienation also took the route of embodiment of avatars. He uses a theoretical concept from Deleuze, the “body without organs,” to assert that the PC in the game is an extension or “simulation” of our organic body (Cain 2006: 64).

Direct connection with the game, in terms of seeing one’s self as part of the digital reality presented, provides a different kind of connection. As discussed later, a feeling of direct connection changes the perception of the virtual space, which has led to a variety of experiments and research within physical and rehabilitation therapy fields. With a direct connection, digital or virtual reality provides a “perceptual rehab space” which provides patients with a space that is taken seriously (Flynn and Rizzo 2009: 360), and visual representations provide rendering of movement which is considered to be real, as well as beneficial and rigorous (Flynn and Rizzo 2009: 361-2; Lewis and Rosie 2012: 1882). Golub’s study on the execution of “projects” in virtual worlds adds another dimension to this, as actions are considered more “real” if they are taken seriously (Golub 2010: 20). Eladhari suggests that with this deep form of connection, players, through their avatars, are playing “themselves” as a character in another world (Eladhari 2007: 174). Personalized attacks on other avatars as studied by Schulzke (2010) and Johansson (2009) may serve as evidence of serious connection, and by extension, perceived serious connection (others valuing their avatar as much as another) in others, with avatars. Though certainly this kind of connection brings a multitude of questions and concerns (such as taking

seriously particular actions), it serves as a basis to try a new approach that confronts the dualism of real and virtual.

The Results of Immersion/Connection: Why does it Matter?

Part of the problem with all these levels of connection, with the few exceptions given, such as the “non-diegetic” immersion presented by McMahan (2003), is the reliance on three different factors. Often studies focus or place emphasis on just one of these factors, but the main problem is that they do not include all possible angles. The first factor is a reliance on a visual representation of the player, either as a self-generated avatar or an existing PC. The second factor is an overall narrative, a structured story or social setting for the player to get into. Third is the analysis of realism or simulated realities that are supposed to mimic things in the outside world. Though each of these emphases demonstrates a different level of connection, they lack connectivity with each other resulting in analytic holes. They do however provide different insights into the experience of the player.

Each focus has its own set of problems. For example, if we focus on an avatar-based immersion, Eladhari claims that avatars are not just “vehicles for movement” but more importantly “they are the functional core of each individual playing experience” (2007: 172). Bartle’s “levels of immersion” also depend on visual representation, as he claims that the deepest form of immersion, the persona, is a direct connection made through the avatar (Bartle 2003). As Schulzke notes, this focus on avatars or narrative driven games almost by default excludes entire genres of games that do not have these, such as *Tetris* (2014: 252), though he did not provide an alternative.

To remedy this gap, McMahan also suggests that there are two kinds of immersion, diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic refers to an immersion relating to the narrative, whereas non-

diegetic refers to focusing on the gameplay itself, such as strategy development, level grinding, and gaining experience points (McMahan 2003: 69). Mark Wolf also tried to work around this problem by positing two forms of PCs, “implied” and surrogate, where the latter is the visual representation and the former sees the PC “constructed outside the screen” but still implied to be there (Wolf 2003: 50).

Similarly, if we assume that only simulated realities constitute a virtual world that can be immersed in, this deprives many games of “immersive” ability. Reliance on narrative for immersion presents its own problems. Richard Galloway posits an additional separation, that of “realistic representation” and “realistic narrative,” where games and/or studies see the “realness” of a game (in terms of graphics) or “social realism” (narrative, interaction) often separately (2006). Without binding these together, it quickly becomes evident we are missing the whole picture.

The level of connection is also framed in terms of how players conduct themselves *within* a game. Multiple analyses have been done here. To begin with, a deeper level of connection creates different levels of thought when it comes to action. Clark and Chalmers (1998), building on the work done in the late 1980s and 1990s by Sherry Turkle and others, argues that with more “immersive” connections, identity extends beyond physical constraints. This extension of the self influences decision making. Though players are certainly free to make some choices where available, Schulzke suggests that games are mostly a reflected bias of the author, “conservative” in terms of moral decision making (Schulzke 2009). This claim is made by asserting designers do not often challenge players on ethical dilemmas, favouring “common sense” understandings of moral standards (Schulzke 2014: 261). Bowman, Schultheiss, and Schumann suggest that character attachment, or having the deepest connection with the avatar or PC, will invoke an

appeal to the players' understanding of everyday life in order to commit to actions or make decisions (Bowman et al 2012: 170). In addition to this, studies of feelings of guilt and enjoyment in games follow the connectedness of the player with the avatar. The more connected, the more likely the player is to view the avatar as an extension of their self and act accordingly (Schmierbach and Limperos 2013: 527). As a result, when negative things happen over digital media in these game worlds, it is possible to seek retribution against an avatar instead of the actual person. Here we come across a debate, as Johansson (2009) believes it is morally acceptable or correct to punish avatars because it is assumed the person behind the avatar will feel guilt or pain. However, Wolfendale (2007) and Schulzke (2009) posit that this kind of behaviour is negative and immoral precisely because it is assumed to affect the human player, even if directed at an avatar. In addition to this, many studies have been conducted regarding concerns about socialization, for example, an extensive body of research of feminist analyses on gender roles through representation (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 2009; Dill and Thill 2007; Hayes 2007; King and Krzywinska, 2002; Miller and Summers 2007), or games' influence on adolescent development (Narine and Grimes 2009; Willoughby 2013).

Some research has begun to frame virtual worlds more along the lines of phenomenal social worlds. Sundén and Sveningsson begin to depart from the conceptualization of dual worlds in their work, *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Passionate Play* (2012). This work examines the experience of women in *World of Warcraft*, looking at how desire is managed and how identity is shaped and negotiated through the online communities known as guilds or clans. This fits into the above mentioned work of Chee, Vieta, and Smith, who also use Schutz's concept of "gearing into" other worlds of meaning (2006: 161). Alex Golub explores the idea of "projects" put forward by Schutz, though in a minimalist manner, suggesting that

increasing levels of immersion are required for a more serious coordination of complex “actions” (Golub 2010: 20). His research demonstrates a continuity of Being within the digital world, and though never explored, indicates a continuity of worlds. Dennis Waskul’s research in role-playing games examines how people identified with their generated avatar or persona. In interviews, his respondents displayed an affinity for their other selves particularly because they felt they were not “bound by the rules” of everyday life, and had more freedom to choose how they look and how they can make a life for themselves (Waskul 2006: 23). These works can be used to understand the contribution and connection of communities surrounding games. Although not explicitly linked in this way by Turkle, an example of this manifesting itself can be seen in recognition of particular human players in arcade communities (Turkle 1984: 70), however, this can easily be extended to new sites of inter-person gaming through digital media.

Chapter 3: Introduction to the Research and Games

So we see now the various ways of looking at “immersion” and some of the problems it has. We can now turn our attention to the games that will be examined. The research will draw on four games, *Animal Crossing: Wild World* (2004; here on *AC:WW*; *AC* will mean *Animal Crossing* in general), *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (2013; *AC: NL*), *Fallout 3* (2008; *FO3*) and *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010; *FO: NV*). The purpose of selecting these games is two-fold. First, *Animal Crossing* can be seen as geared towards a youthful audience who are still undergoing processes of socialization. It has a casual atmosphere, not focusing on any “realism,” lending itself to relaxing play and allowing players to make of it what they will, having no real game “progression” given that there is no “end-game.” On the other hand, *Fallout* is aimed at more mature audiences, dealing with serious themes, including adult content and focus on aspects of realism. There is a defined game progression, and choices made in these games are better made after most socialization is completed, given the choices the player makes changes *how* the game progresses. The rationale for picking both two sets of sequels is because, for all intents and purposes, they are the same game, just with a different theme and different plot or basis mechanism. As a result, this enables me to draw on an extended variety of examples and resources for illustrating the point without radically deviating to other games that do not have the same continuities, fundamentals, or mechanics. There is also the added benefit of all these games being relatively contemporary and seeing how changes were implemented that may augment the effects I intend to illustrate.

The Games: Animal Crossing and Fallout

AC: WW and *AC: NL* are “life-simulator” types of games, with very loose-knit rules and multiple ways of playing. These are games aimed at a younger player base and could be viewed

as a “play-stage” game, in terms of George Herbert Mead and his stages of socialization (1932). The games are set in a fictional small town in which the player can either just be a villager or be the “mayor.” This town is fairly reminiscent of small cottage towns, where there are a few stores, everyone is familiar with each other, and prime economic activities are harvesting fruits and buying and selling goods at a “farmer’s market” sort of venue. Earning money and buying things, whether it is objects, clothing, or house expansions, could be said to be the prime point of the game, although there are no real set “goals” for the game.

Within the limits and parameters of the game, how *AC* is played is mostly up to the player. If the player elects to ignore the other villagers in town, they will not know the player, and have an attitude that reflects this. If the player chooses to interact with them, they will develop an attitude towards the player based on their actions towards them. If the player decides they do not want to build a bigger house, they do not have to. If all they want to do is go fishing and visit the coffee shop, that is their choice, and it will not inherently affect the game positively or negatively, in terms of “outcomes” since there are no real outcomes or endings. Generally the game revolves around consumerism and interaction with the other NPCs. All the NPCs are animals of some sort, hence the game title. The generic “villagers” all have pre-set generic stock-type personalities, ranging from jock or preppy to lazy or snooty. The standardized characters that are unique in their animal, insofar as they are the only one of that kind of animal, for example Blathers the owl, have personalities set within their roles that could be seen as stereotypical in everyday life.

Unlike games with a set of quests we can critically analyze, what we can analyze here are particular experiences that the player will likely have as they play the game. For these games we will examine in particular the aspect of “learning” gestures through communication in the game,

how we perceive them in game and from our everyday stocks of knowledge, their predicted and actual effect on NPCs in the game. We can also look at specific instances of communication between the player and NPCs, such as gift exchange, task assignment, and consumer-culture based actions.

FO3 and *FO: NV* are a mix of role-playing games (RPG) and first-person shooter (FPS) games. They are set in the same timeline of a post-apocalyptic America, *FO3* in Washington D.C. and, as the name implies, *FO: NV* is set in and around Las Vegas. In this timeline, America and China engaged in nuclear warfare, eradicating most life on earth. A few pockets of civilization remained, but most cities are in ruins. Some were protected by underground “Vaults,” and others who were not so fortunate and had to bear the brunt of radiation, lacking shelter, food and clean water. In these games, players will encounter the best and worst of humanity, including slave traders, cannibals, people who kill for fun, and groups willing to commit genocide, yet there are also protectors, innovators, and people struggling to rebuild what was lost. The prime drive for most characters is economic exchange, and money (bottle-caps) rules all. In *FO3*, the player is placed as a Vault dweller that leaves the vault when their Father leaves it to resume work on a water purification plant. In *FO: NV*, the player assumes the role of a “Courier,” a messenger tasked with travelling the Mojave Desert wasteland around New Vegas. In both games, the PC is totally built up around the specifications made by the player, though within the functional limitation parameters of the game. This includes race, gender, height, and facial features, but also allows the player to balance their seven characteristic values (SPECIAL values) which will remain with them for most of the game, being Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, and Luck. Having higher or lower levels of any of these features changes the way the game progresses, in terms of actual game play such

as higher Intelligence offers a specialization with technology such as added energy weapon damage, or having higher Perception unlocks specific conversation options which opens particular quests or events. These attributes can, and probably should, be made strategically, but on a first play a player may be more likely to select values that correlate with their own ideals.

In these games the player will encounter a wide variety of characters, some unsavoury and others not, and an array of disgusting and terrifying creatures and areas. They will be faced with choices and decisions, all of which will have an impact on the end. Right near the beginning they can choose to detonate an old nuclear bomb in a town and destroy everything and everyone inside it. The end goal of the *FO3* is to complete the water purification plant and provide water that is free of radiation to the Capital Wasteland; yet at the critical moment, you have the option to put a virus in the water that would eventually kill everyone who had ever been exposed to radiation. In *FO: NV* the end sees a new state of New Vegas; it is the player's part to decide who will rule it. Will it be the New California Republic, a remnant of old America? Or the sadistic Legion with their ancient Roman philosophy? The notorious Mr. House and his army of robots? Or will you defeat all these factions and let it be independent? Again, choices and decisions with other characters will factor into the final outcome.

In a stark contrast to the *AC* games, *FO* offers more specific quests and tasks we can analyze here. The primary analyses from these games will be related to specific quests, which tend to encompass many different aspects of the game. We will also examine the player and the game's various interactions within the context of the "karma" and "reputation" systems that they implement. Along with these, we can use particular examples of interaction with the NPCs, factions, and themes within the analysis.

Concluding Remarks

We have four games that are based on player-choice. Radically different in themes, goals, and playstyle, yet similar in modes of progress and fundamental decision making in terms of practicality, desire, and personality. With the ability to examine a game for aspects of pre-socialization, in terms of total-socialization, and a game that utilizes already understood meanings and connotations, we can make an analysis of the correlation between everyday life and the single-player experience.

Chapter 4: Revisiting and Expanding Phenomenology: Schutz, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu

As we are aiming to demonstrate the relationship between the single-player experience of video games and everyday life, we will draw on three main social theorists to provide a basis of analysis. The analysis will bind many of these ideas together to create a bigger picture, as each of these theorists presents particular ideas or points of view that fit in well with others, but on their own do not explain the connection fully. We will first explore German phenomenologist Alfred Schutz and his work regarding the social world, particularly in meaning structures, communication, and consciousness. Second, we will examine the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his work on perception, particularly in terms of understanding Being in relation to space, time, and social worlds. Last, we will cover some of the ideas presented by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which will provide a basis for action, interpretation, and the formation of dispositions. All of the ideas will come together to demonstrate the importance of what players bring to a game, how they negotiate a game, and fundamentally, how they play a game.

Schutz's Phenomenology

Alfred Schutz was a German sociologist who pioneered the sociological phenomenology movement which stemmed from an evolution of Edmund Husserl's philosophical concept of phenomenology. Although Schutz's writings mostly revolve around the analysis of interactions between people in a physical, immediate setting, his work holds fundamental ideas that we can use to understand face-to-screen interaction, and the complexity of meaning as it becomes mediated and remediated through multiple digital platforms. In this particular section, I will bring some of Schutz's ideas into a more direct relevance to digitally mediated interaction,

particularly that of video games. First we will examine how Schutz developed the concept of *dureé* or duration, and relate it to the experience of game players. Tying into duration, we will move into a brief discussion of Schutz's notion of the "fundamental anxiety" and its relation to action. Moving on from this, we will look at the various facets of meaning, in terms of objective/subjective meaning, contexts, and structures, and how this relates to the world of video game experience. Developing from here we can look at intersubjectivity, interaction, motives, and symbols. We will further build this with a brief discussion of Schutz's idea of the *soziale Mitwelt* or social world of contemporaries, as well as the *soziale Vorwelt*, which is the social world of predecessors. The final concept to be discussed here is Schutz's "finite provinces of meaning" and the connection to multiple worlds or realities of lived experience. Together these ideas should provide a strong base for an analysis of the triple relationship between the game, player, and society.

Duration and the Stream of Consciousness

Briefly mentioned in the previous section was the term *duration* or *dureé*. Duration is a way of looking at the flow of time. There are two main aspects of duration I will examine. First is the stream of consciousness, in terms of leading a continuous existence. Second is the coexistence or simultaneous existence with the stream of consciousness of another. The stream of consciousness and duration is deeply tied to how players play video games, as their consciousness focuses on the actions they make in the game itself.

Schutz declared meaning to be a problem of historical time, a consciousness of one's internal duration (Schutz 1932: 12). Consciousness of internal duration is what Schutz calls the "stream of consciousness." The stream of consciousness is continuous, and does not break. We may step outside of it temporarily, but this is only to look back upon our previous experiences

and reflect. A person endows experience with meaning only after they reflect on it. According to Schutz, all meaning and experience is historical. Following Bergson's concept of duration, there is "no side-by-sideness," no mutual externality of parts, and no divisibility, but only "a continuous flux, a stream of continuous states" (Schutz 1932: 45). To speak of different tendencies or two directions of thought would be purely metaphorical (Schutz 1951: 86). Here I want to present the dilemma contained in the real/virtual distinction.

A person may justify actions in the virtual world by stating, "It is just a game," effectively making a distinction between the physical world and the world mediated by a screen. A person may change their behaviour in a game to be radically different than in the real world because they believe they feel free from the regulations of society. However, Schutz and Bergson show us that it is our stream of consciousness that matters when conceptualizing a connection between the real and virtual worlds. When choosing among "projects of action," Schutz argues that we anticipate our accomplished act, a *modo futuri exacti* (Schutz 1951: 87). Adding this to Bergson's assertion that when choosing between actions, we are in a "dynamic process in which the ego as well as its motives are in a continuous stage of becoming" (Schutz 1951: 87), we can see that we are concerned with the act to come rather than what has been done already (Schutz 1932: 68). The ego develops continually, constantly changing in duration, and this is the development of our personal biography. Our decisions have been influenced, not in an associationist or determinist sense, but in the growth of our ego itself.

When we make decisions and choose among projects of action in video games, it is within our stream of consciousness. Though removed from the everyday working world itself, being within the particular world of experience of the video game, in Schutz's sense the mind is not separated from our physical body that enables our actions on the screen, nor is it separated

from the screen mediated body. When a player engages with another character in *FO* and is subsequently given a variety of options to choose from, we phantasize the completed act; “where or what will this interaction get me”? When presented with choices to act, which will end up having an effect on the end of the game and the rest of the progression of the game, we consider the possible consequences based on our previous schemes of reference. The phantasized projects demonstrate, as Bergson and Schutz point out, “different tendencies of my personality at successive moments of my *durée*” (Schutz 1951: 86). The stream of consciousness is not broken or separated by the virtual mediation; it is a continuation of it.

In another vein, Schutz discusses duration and streams of consciousness in relation to direct interaction with other people in terms of understanding meaning. It is posited that we can live in simultaneity with the duration of someone we are engaging with. This enables us to “grow older together” and observe the other’s lived experience as it takes place (Schutz 1932: 102-3).

The philosophical debate at hand here is the living in simultaneity of duration of a character that has no human player behind it. Does an artificially constructed life form have the same duration as we do? How do we construct their “lived” experience, do they even “live” to experience things? Undoubtedly some can argue either way. Schutz argues that a “Thou” is endowed with duration and consciousness, “not a shadow on a screen” (Schutz 1932: 108). I will proceed with the assumption that other characters experience the player, and have some form of consciousness, meaning that they *exist* in terms of Being. The reason for this is that it allows their adaptive functions to proceed, even if they are limited by code. The NPCs change in attitude and dialogue towards the player as they “grow older” with them, and at the same time, the human player will get a better understanding of the personality of that character as they develop alongside the player. When Schutz suggests that the “shadow on a screen” does not have

their own duration/consciousness, he has in mind media formats such as movies and television, which do not permit actual interaction from the participant, where the person on the screen will react to the participants' actions.

In AC, as I will show later in greater depth, characters indeed “grow older together” with the player; it becomes a “We-relationship” as Schutz describes it. When one has built a solid relationship over a long period of time with a NPC, the NPC will do things such as host a birthday party for the player, give them gifts, and at the height of the relationship present the player with a picture of themselves. Each of these experiences is supposed to have symbolic or emotional meaning attached to them, and to suggest that these characters are simply “shadows on a screen” with no Being is to rob these experiences of the meaning they give to the player. When the player interacts with another character, by “growing older together” we can begin to anticipate their reactions to certain phrases or items based on our lived experiences of them. As Schutz suggests, the player positions their past experiences with NPCs, and understand meaning based on this synchronization.

When it comes to video game/screen mediated interaction between two human players, rather than a human-computer relationship, I have no hesitation in claiming that the relationship is identical to what I have just described. The main difference is that we understand that there is another human being behind that player. However, in terms of duration and streams of consciousness, we still grow older together to understand each other's meanings. At this point, it is time to move on and talk about meaning itself.

Meaning: Structures and Contexts, Subjective and Objective

As just described, meaning is tied to our duration, since as already mentioned Schutz describes meaning as a historical problem. Schutz describes various aspects of meaning, such as

meaning endowed in duration, meaning contexts or configurations, structures of meaning, and the subjective/objective aspect of meaning in interaction. We will examine in particular, the idea of subjective/objective meaning and meaning-contexts in relation to how we might look at meaning in video games. How we actually execute actions based upon these understandings will be looked at in the section regarding action, interaction, and intersubjectivity further on.

Subjective and objective meanings are an important aspect of Schutz work, particularly in the development of understanding interaction. Subjective meaning, as Schutz describes it in interaction, “is always the meaning meant by me but never the meaning understood by you” (Schutz 1982: 142). However, by this Schutz means that the meaning understood by the receiving party is never *exactly* understood as it is precisely intended, just like the simultaneity of streams of consciousness is never entirely identical, only extremely close at best (Schutz 1932: 32, 107). This subjective meaning “confronts” the receiver, known as the Thou, “as objective meaning, already posited and now in need of interpretation” (Schutz 1982: 142). Objective meaning is the meaning assigned to *ideal types* or *ideal objectivities* “such as signs and expressions” (Schutz 1932: 33). The objective meaning already has a “meaning-context” and it is up to the receiver to interpret what has been said (Schutz 1932: 131-2). This subjective/objective relationship highlights the presence of what is known as the “intersubjective” world, wherein meaning is an intersubjective phenomenon, and participants in interactions draw on the meanings already existing, known as stocks of knowledge or schemes of reference, to understand meanings posited by others.

Accordingly, subjective and objective meanings influence every form of interaction. For example, language is an essential part of a culture, of a world of experience, because words have meaning assigned to them that must be understood intersubjectively. They are signs and symbols

to be oriented to and understood. Schutz asserts that words give us “the highest *life form* accessible to us, that of *linguistic-conceptual thinking*” (Schutz 1982: 130). Let us briefly examine how a meaning is constructed.

Meaning-contexts are constructed as we synthesize meaning through separate lived experiences, wherein the synthesis “becomes an ‘object’ within consciousness” (Schutz 1932: 75). A completed Act, which entails all the processes of an action or *project*, is a meaning-context. The Act, as a whole, is given subjective meaning by the actor, presented as an objective meaning to be interpreted by the receiver. We come to a knowledge of the outer world “*only through a new symbolization*” (Schutz 1982: 127). Symbols are generated by those who came before us, the world of predecessors, who leave us with schemes of reference and stocks of knowledge to endow particular meanings on our lived experiences. The meaning-context is created when we experience particular instances, and put them together. Schutz (1982: 129) emphasizes that nothing exists in isolation, and that we live in a world of experiences for everyone.

Video games and the cultures surrounding them are full of meaning, whether it is their own meaning contexts and structures, or references and parallels to the everyday intersubjective world. There are two ways meaning is constructed in the game. First there is the history of the game itself, which gives us particular meaning-contexts, and then there is the world of predecessors in the everyday world. For games with little to no history ascribed to them for the player to negotiate, we can draw more plainly on the stocks of knowledge already presented. With games that have more backstory, we must be more careful. As with everyday life, the subjective meaning of the player will not be understood totally by another character, whether it is human controlled or not. The meaning to be interpreted can be interpreted on basis of the game

itself. This is why in *FO* it is not always the best idea to follow stocks of knowledge based on the everyday world. *FO* presents its own objective meanings that the player must interpret, and when envisioning a projected act must use *these* meanings rather than the ones from the everyday world when ascribing their own subjective meaning. In the everyday physical world, we can see an example in the usage of gestures across cultures. When one person visits another culture, to enable fuller understanding they must adhere to the meanings set by that culture. To do otherwise would potentially ruin a projected act, or possibly risk insulting someone accidentally.

When we have a set of experiences, no matter what the game, we can also construct meaning-contexts from them. The completed *act* within a game is made up of various actions of meaning and intention. For example, in *AC*, the player most likely wants to gain popularity in the town. If you want to gain popularity in the town, there are various ways to go about it, so we envision possible ways to do this, “sketching out the *intentional Act*.” We decide on a course of *action* and start working towards the overall goal; “the project is brought to fulfilment by *action*.” Finally, we gain popularity by completing our project; “the result is an *act* or completed deed. This act itself is a meaning-context” (Schutz 1932: 75). When others under-go the same actions, we can understand what they are trying to accomplish by understanding the meaning-context. Similarly, we can understand through various meaning-contexts the end goals of particular characters in *FO* as they act of their own accord and are not always stationary. In the sections to follow, the relevance of the development of meaning will be made clearer as we discuss the execution of actions and motives in interaction itself.

The Fundamental Anxiety; Pragmatic Interaction and Development of Meaning

I want to briefly refer to Schutz’s essay “On Multiple Realities.” Here he discussed what he calls the “fundamental anxiety,” which he believed was ingrained in society. This anxiety is

the knowledge of *finiteness*; “I know that I shall die and I fear to die” (Schutz 1945: 228). This “primordial” anxiety generates a structure of “interrelated systems,” such as desire, fear, and risk, which prompts us to set and achieve goals (Schutz 1945: 228). According to Schutz, this becomes a critical aspect of the working world, because it becomes an underlying factor in every action we commit. The fundamental anxiety forms part of the development of the “pragmatic attitude” which characterizes the *natural attitude*. Part of the natural attitude that Schutz builds on throughout his work is the idea that we are always working towards something; there is constantly something pragmatic about our interactions and communications within the working world (Schutz 1945: 208). The fear of finitude adds another dimension to our natural attitude, insofar as we are always doing things within this frame of mind. Logically, we avoid committing actions that are detrimental to our *time* and body; we make these things as infinite as possible. Time is extremely important. We want to make lasting impressions on the world around us, so people remember us or a metaphorical way of extending our life, and perhaps so we do not feel insignificant, part of the world of predecessors Schutz describes. A key part of the fundamental anxiety, according to Schutz, is that it rests only within the paramount reality (Schutz 1945: 228). However, I disagree with this. The fundamental anxiety is certainly present within video games, and around its culture, demonstrating this particular province of meaning to be so closely related to the paramount reality we could consider it an extension of it.

Thus, this reflects back on the development of meanings, finite provinces of meaning, and duration. The fear of death is an interesting part of the video game experience, for this fear motivates the player. In stark contrast to the group of phantasms, in video games we have several reasons to desire to avoid death, or fail in our tasks. Sometimes you only have one chance to achieve the goal, failure could mean the direct opposite of what is desired. However, depending

on the nature of the game, how we perceive ourselves in relation to “death” or failure changes completely. In fact, we could say that many video games use this idea of wanting to achieve great things. How many games revolve around being a hero? Saving notable figures, or doing great things? To end up being recognized by the world presented by the game? In *FO*, the character becomes a hero for bringing clean water to the wasteland, or ushering in a new era of peace. In *AC*, the player may get a statue of them erected in the town square, or they are praised for good leadership. We always act in a pragmatic sense, acting towards our goals, which will almost invariably end up with some population attaching meaning to the player. There is an anxiety going about these things, and the anxiety of finitude we feel in our everyday life is projected into the game, because it is us making the interactions.

The principles of the fundamental anxiety also play a factor in the multiplayer experience. Particularly in a competitive game, players want to be known and remembered for their skill. A testament to this lies in the multiplayer *Doom* (1993) community as extremely skilled competitive players from the past are listed on well-known sites, and their legacies are continually referred to, even after many years have passed, and some of the players are deceased. As a result, the province of meaning within the *Doom* community is influenced by people who make the effort to be known, recognized for doing something, and developing future stocks of knowledge for new generations to draw on for various interactions. At this time, we will move onto examining action and interaction itself.

Intersubjectivity, Social Action, and the World of Directly Experienced Social Reality

Now that we have discussed time-flow and the stream of consciousness, meaning, and the fundamental anxiety, we can examine the core theory of the world of directly experienced social reality (*Umwelt*). This is the defining feature of video games as a media technology: the fact that

we can experience resistance, see change, and choose our own actions in a game removes it from the same categories of film and television. This section will discuss the world of directly experienced social reality, action, intersubjective interaction, motives, and signs and symbols.

In the world of directly experienced social reality, we have what is called a “Thou-orientation” and a “We-relationship.” Schutz posited that these attitudes occurred in “face-to-face” situations in the immediate physical world; the “spatial and temporal immediacy is essential” (Schutz 1932: 163, 202). This face-to-face experience “presupposes” the simultaneity of streams of duration already discussed. The Thou-orientation is the awareness of another “human-being as a person,” meaning they have life and consciousness as well (Schutz 1932: 163-64). The We-relationship is interacting with them, “growing older together” as discussed in the section on duration. This relationship, the inclusion of intersections of duration, allows for an intersubjective experience of communication. We can understand each other because of our interconnectedness; based on what two participants know of the others’ lived experiences, particular meanings will be interpreted differently by each person, but not precisely in the same way.

This highlights again the problem of understanding NPCs as having life/consciousness and whether or not the player does or should treat them as another person. Nevertheless I maintain that although NPCs may not have the same consciousness as humans do, they still change and become experienced with us as a playable-character within the game. Fortunately, the issue is made simpler when considering other characters controlled by other human beings. When it comes to these characters, players must view them simply as other humans, not just as a character. However, as mentioned before, we must modify the idea of an immediate face-to-face

experience to include the directly experienced social reality that is simply accomplished through a digital screen.

Let us refer back to constructing an action. An action is part of a complex series of functions that move towards a completed Act. The action is the in-progress execution of a previously envisioned phantasy, part of a *project* designed to meet a particular end goal. Stocks of knowledge or schemes of reference are used in executing particular actions, in the form of body language, speech, or gestures. The subjective meaning of person X is an objective meaning to be interpreted by person Y. Person Y will respond based on their interpretation of person X, drawing on their previous knowledge, and the simultaneity of duration with person X. The meaning posited by person X is understood infinitely closely to, but not precisely, by person Y because the meaning is *intersubjective* and common to the everyday world around them. This kind of interaction happens wherever interaction occurs. In this manner, the everyday physical world is the same as the video game world. Sometimes the meaning is not prominent, and there is little to no choice to what the player can posit as their meaning, but at other times it is quite clear. When dealing with other human players, we can see some of the same principles being applied. The main difference between other human players and NPCs is the limitations placed on the latter's response set. It is scripted, predicted, but also posited by the creator as the understanding this particular character would have in their particular world of experience, based on their constructed history and relationship with the player in the immediate sense.

When players interact with a character, there is that pragmatic sense guiding them, as well as their motives. Schutz discussed two forms of motives: the genuine "Because" motive and the "In Order To" motive. The "Because" motive is linked to the past: it is our socialized self, our personal biographies influencing us. Schutz posits that it is objective and is thus accessible to

observers who wish to reconstruct the act (Schutz 1932: 91, 1951: 71). The “in-order-to” motive is based upon the project; it is in the future tense, an anticipation of the completed act (Schutz 1932: 88). Here we can see more clearly why meanings developed by the worlds of predecessors in both the game and in the everyday world are important for understanding player interactions with other characters, human or not. The because-motive will be influenced by the player’s personal biography, the external social factors that have shaped the player’s disposition over their lifetime. In some ways it will influence why they choose to commit a particular action, or follow a particular path. For example, in *FO*, players will have radically different opinions on particular factions based on their personal biographies. What action they take towards these groups will be informed by a strong “because” motive, which is not just tied to the game. A particular example we could look at is the slave trading groups. The player has most likely grown up being taught that slavery is wrong, so being confronted by groups that deal in the brutal slave trade will most likely be dealt with in a hostile manner.

For the in-order-to motive, we simply need to look at what the player’s goals are. If the player is looking for information from a particular person, they will talk to a variety of people in an effort to find the specific person. The end goal, the projected completed act, is the driving cause behind in-order-to motivated actions. The player’s goal to build a café in *AC* can only be achieved after gaining approval from various townspeople. The player speaks to various people in the town “in-order-to” gain approval, “in-order-to” build the café. A majority of *FO*’s gameplay revolves around the “in-order-to” motive of interaction. The player must constantly do things in order to get information or items to go to the next place. Most interaction in games is all about the future project, which is to complete the game. In order to complete it, players must

complete all the necessary actions to complete the total act. Thus, understanding the “because” and the “in-order-to” motives are essential aspect to understanding interaction in video games.

Last, we will briefly discuss interactions in relation to signs and symbols. Schutz declared signs or symbols to be “artifact objects” that are interpreted not in themselves, but according to the interpreter, and that it is “absurd” to speak of a meaningless sign (Schutz 1932: 120-1). Schutz goes on to describe sign systems as signs placed in particular meaning contexts, and to place a sign in its proper sign system is to place it within our total experience (Schutz 1932: 120-1). Signs are important for understanding intersubjective actions as they are used by people to posit subjective meaning to be interpreted by a receiving party. They must be discoverable within the context of the past experience of the person’s lifetime (Schutz 1932: 123). Interpreters of the sign can have three different interpretations: 1) objectively on the basis of his interpretation, 2) based on the knowledge of the channel, and 3) how anybody else might read it (Schutz 1932: 129). Signs hold two functions, significative and expressive. The *significative* function lies within the giver’s own experience, while the *expressive* function is the meaning acquired within discourse (Schutz 1932: 126). Signs can be actual objects, or simply gestures, but they are phenomena that must be negotiated at all times. As a result, signs play an important part in communication and intersubjective action in the social world.

Signs and symbols are an intricate part of the video game experience. The player will orient to signs, symbols, and gestures made by other characters. *FO* allows players to customize what they wear, but clothing is sometimes given a particular symbol depending on the faction it came from. Other characters in the game will react differently to the player based on what symbol they wear, as each group orients to the *expressive* function the symbol has. Similarly, other human players might interpret the player based on the allegiance they show. This

interpretation could mean the difference of extreme violence or welcoming arms towards the player. In an everyday world analogy, to wear the brand of the Legion in *FO* would garner similar reactions as wearing a Nazi Swastika badge in a North American metropolis. In regular gameplay, being able to negotiate symbols is a critical part of moving through the game itself, and this applies to every game. Even words, as pointed out by Schutz (1982), can act as signs, and just like in the everyday world, a player needs to be able to interpret what another character or person is saying, particularly based on what the finite province of meaning or world of experience is.

The World of Contemporaries and the World of Predecessors

The World of Contemporaries is another way of examining the lived experience of the player in video games. In Schutz's terms, it looks at our relationships with people who live in the same time with us but we do not experience them immediately (Schutz 1932: 181). This creates what is called the "They-relationship." There are a few social relationships within games that have these same characteristics. This section is more useful in understanding other human player actions, but can still be applied in a somewhat limited sense to NPCs. We will also examine what Schutz called "the World of Predecessors" in relation to game and interactions. Again, as mentioned previously, this holds a double function within video game culture, the predecessors in the game itself and predecessors surrounding the game grounded in the paramount reality.

In the They-orientation, there are "degrees of anonymity" in our relationships with various types of people, such as postal workers. Schutz suggests that "the pure They-orientation is based on the presupposition of such characteristics [of a person] in the form of a type" (Schutz 1932: 194). Social relationships are what Schutz calls "indirect," meaning we do not immediately have contact with these people, going as far to suggest that we do not even deal

with “real living people... only ideal types” (Schutz 1932: 205). Schutz asserts that in immediate, face-to-face relationships, or We-relationships, “the partners are constantly revising and enlarging their knowledge of each other,” as opposed to the They-relationship where this does not occur (Schutz 1932: 203). The They-relationship is based strictly on ideal-types.

In terms of NPCs, I will consider the Brotherhood of Steel faction in *FO*. The player does not get to know individual fighters, or get to meet many of them. However, based on the ideal type depicted in the game, the player can trust that they are “doing the right thing,” or are clearing an area overhead, or will provide some sort of basic protection to the player without a direct social relationship, just as one expects the postal workers Schutz uses in his examples, to deliver a letter that was put in the mail (Schutz 1932: 184). The relationship between individual members is an anonymous one, a They-orientation, and the player will act accordingly, ignoring the foot-soldiers and speaking only to those who provide some sort of direct relationship, such as the Elder and Captain, both of whom must be engaged with to complete the game. The relationship between the player and these characters grows and changes as they learn more about the possible motives of the characters, whereas with the foot soldiers there is nothing but an ideal type.

Similarly, when we consider other human players, it is just as easy to construct an ideal type to create a They-orientation. In many online-multiplayer games, there are “guilds” or “clans,” which consist of like-minded individuals playing competitively with and/or against each other. These groups allow for the development of ideal types. Someone from guild X will most likely behave in this manner, or someone from clan Y is most likely a bad player. When a player hears of actions someone has done in the game, based on the meanings constructed around the

ideal type of the group, the player will understand the meaning of the action, and be either surprised, or not surprised, which is more likely.

In essence, Schutz defines the world of predecessors as “what existed before I was born,” and a predecessor as “a person in the past not one of whose experiences overlap with mine” (Schutz 1932:208). Obviously in itself, this is not a very practical definition to work with, and also somewhat contradictory. A person in the past may be an elder, for example, and their experiences do not overlap with mine, but may not be dead per se, just departed from the area. In video game culture, it is difficult to regard history as something involving a long timeframe, as most games with a “history,” particularly in widespread, online-multiplayer games, are not that old. However, there are multiple users that arrive later, and do not overlap with others that have since left the game but may still be alive. These players contribute to the development of the province of meaning.

We come to understand the world of predecessors “through record and monuments” (Schutz 1932: 209). Relating back to the fundamental anxiety, we can see that previous players make sure there is some sort of continuity of the history of a given game or game culture. This is made evident in screenshot and demo repositories, and more recently in social media outlets such as Youtube videos and Twitter. Fads and events from the past world are referenced by older community members, which in turn keep recalling the old names to the front, reproducing those various meaning contexts and the culture of the game. Although these meanings exist in a finite province, the way that this is achieved is exactly the same as the paramount reality.

Now, we must also consider this concept in a game that is more single-player based. It is easier to conceptualize in reference to a game with a rich background and extensive story to it, so we will refer back to *FO*. The idea that the world of predecessors defines the present world of

direct social relationships and contemporaries cannot be more evident than here. In the past, humanity almost eradicated itself. The player is thrust into a world where those who have previously lived are referred to, as particular groups and individuals such as “The Master,” “The Enclave,” and “The Brotherhood of Steel.” These groups have influenced the worlds of the games, and on a more micro level, individualized provinces of meaning within the game. The world of predecessors does not necessarily need to be made up of people in the real world, rather, as Schutz suggests, “*a person* in the past whose experience does not overlap with mine” (Schutz 1932: 209). Without the people of the past in these worlds, constructed or not, there would be no meaning, and the reactions garnered when referring to these individuals or groups would not be seen as legitimate. As a result, the world of predecessors is an essential aspect of video games, just like it is essential to the development of meaning in the everyday common world.

Multiple Realities or Worlds of Experience

Part of the key to understanding video games as simply another facet of everyday life or in the context of rejecting a dualist separation of virtual and real is by using Schutz’s conceptualization of “multiple realities.” William James posited that reality is “simply relational to our emotional and active life” and that to deem something *real* means that this thing “stands in a certain relation to ourselves” (Schutz 1945: 207). As a result, reality is built on subjectivity and “each world whilst it is attended to is real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with the attention,” meaning something can be a separate reality as long as we are devoting our full attention to it. Accordingly, there is the potential for an infinite number of “sub-universes,” in James’ terms, and each “sub-universe” has its own “special and separate style of existence” (Schutz 1945: 229). However, Schutz believed James’ work to be too limited psychologically

because it is based on a system of beliefs and attention. Instead, Schutz followed Husserl's concepts of ontology and meaning to address these different "realities" (Schutz 1945: 229-230). Thus, Schutz offers the term "finite provinces of meaning" as opposed to "sub-universes," suggesting "it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality" (Schutz 1945: 230). From here we can move into a breakdown of what finite provinces of meaning are, how they are constituted, what they mean in relation to the everyday world, and their relation to video games.

We will begin with an examination of how Schutz constructed his idea of reality. The critical part of Schutz's concept of multiple realities is the *intersubjective world*, which will be explored in detail later. For a "reality" to exist, it is necessary that there is an intersubjective, common world that people must negotiate. This world features fundamental elements that participants recognize, enabling communication and interaction. Schutz classified this world as the "archetype" or "paramount" reality, by which we can have a point of reference for other "realities" (Schutz 1945: 230-2). The paramount reality is "the world of physical things" that "offers resistances" or "places tasks" in front of us; it is the world of "locomotions and bodily operations" (Schutz 1945: 227). In other words, according to James and Schutz, the paramount reality is the world of physical and sensibly perceivable things (Schutz 1945: 226). I want to modify this understanding of "physical things" to "things we can interact with" because it is less restricting to the idea of virtual interaction, which is indeed almost entirely non-physical, yet it exists externally to and separately from us. However, I will maintain the idea that to be part of the everyday world it cannot be a world of experience that cannot be modified by us, such as a movie or a fictional novel. Movies and novels typically do not require active input from the audience that changes the social or spatial world; they are mostly a spectacle that cannot be

changed by the audience. These forms of entertainment do not enable “working” or modification in Schutz’s sense by any means, which is why they must be excluded.

Characteristics of Finite Provinces of Meaning

Let us now discuss *finite provinces of meaning* proper. Finite provinces of meaning have specific cognitive styles, or ways of thinking, and this creates an “accent of reality.” Within this particular style, these provinces are consistent with themselves and there we can “call a certain set of our experiences a finite province of meaning” (Schutz 1945:230). So what is presented to us is not a separate reality in the conventional sense of the word, but rather a separate *world of experience*. I would argue that video games certainly provide us with unique and bounded worlds of experience. Schutz provides six initial stipulations for what constitutes a cognitive style in a finite province of meaning, and we can relate each to game play in turn. I will draw the parallels from the everyday working world Schutz discusses to the world of *FO3* and *FO: NV*.

The first stipulation is a “specific tension of consciousness” (Schutz 1945: 223). Developed by Bergson, a tension of consciousness is the level of attention we give to life. Bergson suggested that there was an “indefinite number of different planes” of consciousness (Schutz 1945: 212). In terms of the everyday world, wide-awakeness is our “tension of consciousness.” Wide-awakeness is a state of mind that devotes the fullest attention to life and its necessities, and is the highest plane of consciousness (Schutz 1945: 213). Moving in the opposite direction would be towards “turning away from life,” best exemplified by sleep (Schutz 1945: 240). Essentially, it is how serious we take life to be at a given moment. When a game is played, the player will tend to concentrate on the game itself rather than things going on around them. Because our duration is linked to the game at that particular time, a player will shift their attention back to the everyday world of experience when it is necessary. One could conceptualize

the attentiveness to life akin to deeply reading a book; the reader focuses on the content at hand rather than the world around them. However, I would argue that video games demand more attention because of their interactive aspects, and are on a higher plane of consciousness as a result. A player in *FO* must pay attention at all times because it is hazardous to their character in the game to not pay attention. There are a multitude of NPCs and monsters waiting to attack the player, and the player must be conscious of the game to interact with other characters in order to progress or engage in social action.

The second criterion is “a specific *epoché*” (Schutz 1945: 230). In the sense of the working world, Schutz suggested that the *epoché* of the natural attitude was a suspension of doubt in the reality of the world, insofar as that everything actually is as it appears (Schutz 1945: 229).¹ This *epoché* of the natural attitude allows us to generate typifications or taken for granted ideals “which structure daily life” (Schutz 1973: XLIV). Each cognitive style then has its own specific *epoché* that determines part of our attitude towards given objects, people, or ideas in a given province. This becomes critical to provinces of meaning, as the *epoché* will help determine the ontology and epistemology of that province. In games, the *epoché* is dictated on a per game basis which will influence how we play. Particular parts of games introduce their own miniscule finite provinces of meaning that change the *epoché* for a particular section. Since the world of *FO* is more or less supposed to be like “real-life,” the *epoché* is to not necessarily doubt what the player sees, however, the player is taught early on to doubt everyone’s motives. The world of *FO* is human depravity, and as a result making decisions can be difficult because we cannot necessarily rely on traditional means of distinguishing sincerity in characters. We must get into the mindset of the world presented to us, and work from there.

¹ This stands in opposition to Descartes’ position that we must doubt everything.

The third aspect is “a prevalent form of spontaneity, namely working (a meaningful spontaneity based upon a project and characterized by the intention of bringing about the projected state of affairs by bodily movements gearing into the outer world)” (Schutz 1945: 230). Schutz adopts Leibniz’s idea of spontaneity and describes it as “the effort to arrive at other and always other perceptions” (Schutz 1945: 213). The “highest” form of spontaneity is action in the outer world that changes it (Schutz 1945: 213). In essence, spontaneity is simply engaging in social action. It is important to realize that spontaneity is how we go about our lives; trying to accomplish things. I would suggest that this is what separates video games from other forms of media entertainment. A player moves to accomplish objectives, social or not. Players engage with other characters to effect some sort of change in that particular world. What Schutz calls a “project” is a *project of action* which will be described later in greater detail. Nevertheless, at this point I will suggest that a player will engage with a character with a particular project in mind with the hopes of achieving it. When a player talks to another character in *FO*, they have a preconceived notion of what they are hoping to get from them. They will “phantasize” possible end results, and try to cater to the character in a manner they think will achieve the particular result they want. A player will feel accomplished if they manage to effect some sort of change in the character, such as causing them to go elsewhere, ally with the player, give money, and so on.

The fourth feature is a “specific form of experiencing one’s self.” Schutz’s example for the everyday world here is “the working self as a total self” (Schutz 1945: 230). This means a person is an active and interactive body with the collective whole. Connected to this, the fifth element is “a specific form of sociality” (Schutz 1945: 230). In the “paramount reality” or the everyday world, this is the “common intersubjective world of communication and social action.” This means that our forms of communication and action are oriented towards achieving

communication with others, or interacting with others in the shared arena of everyday life. To address both of these together, a player in *FO* has a particular sense of experiencing their self as they can effect change within the collective whole in the game. Due to the origins of the player, the other characters will react in particular ways, and depending on reputation, react in more ways. The wasteland of the game is an intersubjective arena that the player must learn how to communicate in, know what gestures are and are not appropriate, and learn how to predict responses of others based on dress, gender, and attributes.

The final condition is “a specific time-perspective (the standard time originating in an intersection between *durée* and cosmic time as the universal temporal structure of the intersubjective world)” (Schutz 1945: 230-1). This means that people understand progress of events in terms of their sequence, and in our everyday world, this is “standard time.” This includes the processes of acting, such as acts already performed, acts in progress, and thinking about what acts will be performed. In terms of a cognitive style, how our perception of time and processes of positing meaning may change on a per-province basis. Understanding progressions of events works the same way in *FO*. It has its own standard flow of time; by committing one action, the player can spark a chain of responding actions from other characters that occur over time. The progression is logical and makes sense. It allows the player to conceive of actions in terms of future responses, and by drawing upon past experiences, allows them to make the best decisions possible.

Characteristics of Finite Provinces of Meaning: What Constitutes a Province?

First and foremost Schutz suggests that all “worlds” are finite provinces of meaning (Schutz 1945: 232). Each world has three fundamental characteristics. First, a particular cognitive style; second, experiences within the worlds are compatible with each other if they are

within the same cognitive style; third, each province may receive its own “specific accent of reality” (Schutz 1945: 232). We have just covered the cognitive style characteristic. As for compatibility, provided the game progresses smoothly without external glitches or non-intentional bugs, experiences are certainly compatible with each other in the *FO* world. This is why drawing on both *FO 3* and *FO: New Vegas* provides valuable interactional information. If you play one of these games, you will go into the other one well-armed in terms of cognitive style and anticipation of experiences. The stocks of knowledge from one will greatly benefit you in the other. The experiences are compatible with each other and carry the same cognitive style, despite being two different games. Schutz posited that an “accent of reality” was a set of compatible experiences in a particular world (Schutz 1945: 231). *FO* and many other game series achieve this, so we can say that this criterion is fulfilled.

Second, the provinces are distinct from each other. Schutz suggests that experiences compatible with each other are limited to each province, and should be seen as “merely fictitious, inconsistent and incompatible” (Schutz 1945: 232). As earlier suggested, this does not necessarily mean that every concept within a given province is entirely different than another. Different provinces may have the same problem, but through different ontologies and epistemologies, one will come to different conclusions to this problem. For a simplified example, we can look at the worldviews of a deeply religious individual versus that of a scientific individual. A deeply religious individual may believe that problems in the world are influenced by a god of some kind, accepting and addressing issues in a fatalistic sense. The scientist uses forms of reasoning and experiments they were instructed in to find causes and solutions to problems. These worldviews are completely separate, inconsistent and incompatible, yet both seek to address the same problems. Video games have these features as well.

Commonly referred to as a “universe,” we can see that games construct their own sets of history, lore, ontologies and epistemologies. With a most obvious example, if we chose to contrast the worlds of *AC* and *FO* we would immediately find that each is entirely different from the other in every experiential regard. *FO* is built around the worst of humanity and is an extraordinarily violent world, while *AC* removes all humans except the players, and encourages the development of a comfortable lifestyle.

Relating to the second argument, Schutz then determines that these incompatibilities allows us “to talk of *finite* provinces of meaning” (Schutz 1945: 232). Provinces are limited, possess boundaries that can only be broken through forcefully, as a “leap,” characterized by a subjective experience of shock (Schutz 1945: 232). In a continuation of the third argument, Schutz then posits that these “leaps” or “shocks” are “nothing else than a radical modification in the tension of our consciousness” (Schutz 1945: 232). Tensions or planes of consciousness have already been discussed. In relation to identifying different provinces of meaning, this ties directly into the previous point. When we switch games, we have to radically alter our mindset. We really have to make a “leap” because the differences are so great in every respect. We change the cognitive style and prepare for something else entirely. What works in *FO* will not work in *AC* and vice-versa. The expectations of gameplay and attitudes are completely different, and this is the leap we have to make.

The fifth thesis suggests that each cognitive style in each province has its own specific sets of the following: tension of consciousness, *epoché*, form of spontaneity, form of self-experience, form of sociality, and time perspective. This is a summary of the previous set of six criteria regarding cognitive styles, and thus has already been described in detail, and does not

need to be repeated. Suffice to say, games serve the same cognitive style as the working world, switching only when needed.

Lastly, Schutz suggests that our everyday lifeworld, the working world, is “the archetype of our experience of reality” and thus every other finite province of meaning is simply a modification of that world (Schutz 1945: 233). This means that the everyday experience is our frame of reference, the nexus of multiple realities. If we accept that video games are simply an experiential world rather than distinctly separate realities, we can clearly see how we draw on everything we know to play the game. Although we gradually learn to adjust to the unforgiving world of *FO*, the everyday reality gives us tools of interaction that benefit the player in the game in the long run. By doing good deeds, the player will earn a positive reputation which benefits them but will cause mercenary groups to hunt them down. By acting cruelly, the player will earn negative reputation and cause many otherwise friendly NPCs into enemies that will attack them without warning. *FO* certainly acts as a modification of the everyday working world, and we draw on what we know to negotiate it.

Although Schutz’s theories were developed primarily for understanding immediately physical, face-to-face interactions in society, we can usefully abstract these theoretical frameworks and understandings to screen-mediated interaction in video games. I have argued, through Schutz’s phenomenology, that a game provides players with a world of experience that is an accent of reality, rather than a disembodied, separate one.

Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology

The second branch of theory that will be drawn on comes from Merleau-Ponty. The work that will be examined here is *Phenomenology of Perception*, published in 1945. Coincidentally, Schutz’s essay “On Multiple Realities” was published the same year, and each work lends itself

to a greater understanding of the other. With his work *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty adds another, if slightly different, dimension to the phenomenology of Schutz. If we can say the work of Schutz presented thus far focuses more on the development, placement, and execution of meaning, Merleau-Ponty gives us more of a basis in understanding the fundamentals of our being in a social world in terms of Being and consciousness, space, and perception. We will cover conceptualizations of consciousness, spatiality, the body itself, and perception.

Consciousness: Connecting the Self to the Game

There is a very old and strong tradition of philosophers who have wrestled with issues of Being and consciousness, Schutz being one of them. Merleau-Ponty brought a different approach to Being and consciousness by situating them within bodily sense and perception, another long-standing philosophical tradition. Although it is often danced around or simply glossed over as “immersion” or “presence,” issues of Being and consciousness are at the core of many debates in game studies.

The first idea to examine is the concept of consciousness and Being in relation to the body. Since we want to connect the experience of a video game as equal to the experience of everyday life, the connection or unity between our Being and the game itself must be established.

To start with, Merleau-Ponty provides a rejection of the Cartesian dualism between the soul and body, where Descartes states that his soul, or “I,” “is entirely distinct from the body” (Descartes [1637]1968: 54). In contrast, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the experience of our body provides an “ambiguous mode of existence” wherein the body is not exclusively an object or subject, but rather a “natural subject, or a provisional sketch of my total being,” through which the unity of soul and body is “accomplished at each moment in the movement of existence”

(Merleau-Ponty 1945: 204, 205, 91). To emphasize this, Merleau-Ponty suggests we “have no other means of knowing the human body than by living it, that is, by taking up for myself the drama that moves through it and by merging with it,” resulting in the conclusion that “thus, I am my body,” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 205), meaning that, as opposed to a distinguished body as a vehicle for a soul, we are in a constant state of unity.

The first obstacle we come across is here. Descartes discussed the dualism of mind and body (Descartes [1637]1968: 54); at this time we are not concerned with this particular dualism, but a dualism between the player of a video game and the mode of exploration the game presents to the player, whether that means a third or first person perspective, or lack of any visible in-game avatar. To some degree, the same principles of Descartes’ dualism apply; equally so Merleau-Ponty’s rejection. We will work on the assumption that we can apply some of the same principles of the dualism between mind and body to the dualism of the player and the game, and follow Merleau-Ponty’s lead in rejecting this dualism.

The video game player has no other means of having an experience of the game than their own play-through of it. Watching a video may provide a sense of what the game is about to a player and how they might imagine they will experience it, but they will never truly experience the game until they actually play it for themselves. A spectator may think they can feel the experience of the PC of a game if they are watching them, or if the game has moved to theatrical cut-scenes. However, the cut-scene creates a brief separation of being between the character and themselves by denying the player any control of their self; there is less personal experience in terms of actual knowing, and more of an experience or feeling for that character.

A second concept in Merleau-Ponty’s *Being* is the “body schema”. The body schema, as understood by Merleau-Ponty, does not refer to locating “bodily experience” or designation of

positions of our various body parts as posited by “classical” thought (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 101). The body schema refers to a “global awareness” of our position within “the inter-sensory world,” a “*situational spatiality*” and “a manner of expressing that my body is in and toward the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 102-103). It is important to distinguish that the body does not exist *in* space and time, rather it *inhabits* them (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 140). As a result, the body schema evolves from a summary of located points in space and time, enabling us to understand that there is an experience of the body within the world. This connects and builds upon the previous point that our body and mind are in a constant state of ambiguous connection. By demonstrating that a body does not simply *exist* in a space, rather *inhabits* or *knows* a space, a meaningful connection between our self and the space that our body is occupying is made. This connection will be made clearer in the next section regarding spatiality and the body, but it suffices to say that spaces are occupied, and not necessarily just gazed upon, if action can be conducted. Here a game-related example is useful.

Although we are indeed *watching* a screen as the game plays out, we are also *inhabiting* that space; players familiarize themselves with the motions they can conduct in the game. *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005) relies on the player being able to make coordinated movements in order to climb the mountainous creatures in the game, something that can only be done with an understanding of points of reference and understanding of the body of the space. Thus, the body schema allows us to examine how a perception of space can be made in relation to our Being, as well as demonstrating that in a given space the body is always connected with the mind.

Merleau-Ponty continues to build on this pattern of thought in relating Being and consciousness directly to the body by positioning it within a *milieu* or social world. With the

body schema providing more of a physical/sensory understanding of the unity of mind and body, Merleau-Ponty also discusses the unity of the body and mind within an established *milieu*. Descartes describes the body as a “vessel” of the mind (Descartes [1647]1968: 159); Merleau-Ponty describes it as a “vehicle of being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 84), meaning that having a body in a given space also connects with that space’s given social *milieu* or social world. This terminology can become confusing. The key to avoiding the Cartesian problem is remembering that the body is always connected with the mind. The body does not only occupy objective space or virtual space (this will be covered further on), but also, due to the constant unity of body and consciousness, a complex (or not so complex) social space which is perceived and oriented to *at the same time*. Merleau-Ponty states that along with the continuous ambiguous unity of mind and body, the body has a “perpetual engagement” with a space’s *milieu* (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 84). Here we can find a problem with a dualist conception in games.

For example, we find that some forms of “immersion,” such as presence, rely on an *emotional connection* that is totally subjective as to whether or not the viewer wishes to *feel* immersed in *another world*. Now, with the unity Merleau-Ponty gives us, the body schema, with points of reference and movement, enable us to actually inhabit said space in a more physical sense, and act towards it; the unity between the body and consciousness also allow a player to engage in the *milieu* of a given space, and this is a fact regardless of emotional feeling. By enabling perceptual and practical intentions within and towards objects in a given space (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 84), that space becomes part of our lived reality.

We end up with a unified Being; the body and mind are in a state of constant unity, the body schema provides the ability to act with intentionality, and the body/mind unity enables an engagement with a social space in any given spatiality. Understanding this unity is important for

understanding games in a more fundamental sense of engagement with the game by a given player. Now that we have a baseline approach to the game, we can build on the connection between a player and the game in essence by more fully exploring perceptions of space.

Spatiality and the Body: Games and Virtual Space

Merleau-Ponty discusses the phenomenological body at length with regard to physical and perceived space. It is discussed in correlation to different ideas throughout the work, though there is a chapter dedicated to space. Conceptualizing space is essential to understanding experience in video games, because how a player conceptualizes their Being in a space and how they perceive space as a social space will have an effect on game play.

The main argument Merleau-Ponty brings forth regarding space is an extension of the arguments already presented regarding Being and consciousness, positing space as an aspect of experience that is connected, and connects everything to things and our self. Space is regarded as a “universal power” of the connection of all things, as opposed to conceptualizing space as something where “all things are immersed” and as an abstractly shared characteristic of all things (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 254). We can understand various worlds as part of this power and view them as all interconnected in some way. Space can be virtual or immediately physical, as we have earlier noted in Merleau-Ponty’s conception of virtual (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261). If we conceptualize space in this manner, virtual space, in terms of a space that is presented on a screen, becomes fully integrated with the everyday world. As stated, the ideas of *immersion* and *presence* rely on the idea that a player feels inside the game or virtual world, or that they are in that particular, segregated world; by taking Merleau-Ponty’s stance we can understand the world as *connecting with* the player, as opposed to the player *being in* an objective world. This connection is fundamental, an essence, and transcends any form of socialization, interpretation or

execution of action. Conceptualizations of immersion in virtual worlds which posit virtual worlds as something separate can be rejected at this point, though as we explore more of Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of space we can solidify this rejection further.

Before we continue, we should clarify the concepts of inhabiting a world and the virtual body in conjunction with space as a universal connector, since these ideas might seem contradictory. To be clear, Merleau-Ponty's conception of a world is not restricted to physical space, nor a particular social space (as opposed to, for example, to Schutz's *finite provinces of meaning*), rather a world should be regarded as a space that *enables* situations, where positions become possible (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 346, 253-4). A cultural or social world is an outcome of a complex formation of situations and positions (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 363), and thus should be read as distinct from a "world" as a space. The world is built on perception, so "to perceive is to believe in a world" and space is not separate from someone who perceives it (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 311, 334). As such, we can have a world that is perceived, but which is connected to us as a power, rather than something in which we immerse ourselves. Games readily provide that space. When we turn on a game, we are perceiving the space that it provides, and by extension perceiving the "complex formation of situations and positions" generated by that game, connecting us both to a social world and a "virtual" world, virtual only insofar as it is not the immediate physical world, but requires physical actions to negotiate. At this point, we can now examine the virtual body in a virtual space.

An important discussion of the perception of the body in space occurs when Merleau-Ponty introduces the virtual body. In this work, the idea of a virtual body is not the contemporary idea of a digital avatar, rather, a body that is not our first, or not our immediate physical body. A crucial statement is made here that clearly indicates that a virtual body is in a unity with our self.

“What counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body, such as it in fact exists, as a thing in objective space, but rather *my body as a system of possible actions*, a virtual body whose phenomenal ‘place’ *is defined by its task and by its situation*” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261; my italics). Space is the key factor in this passage; virtual bodies, so long as we are the controller of our self, cannot act without our consciousness. The spectacle does not matter; mirror-image or game, our position in space (and by extension, time), is defined by tasks and situations to negotiate. While Merleau-Ponty suggests that a virtual body can “displace” the supposed real body, insofar as the subject “no longer feels himself to be in the world he is actually in” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261), this does not mean to suggest that the body is separate, nor that the person feels themselves to be a different character. He uses the example of a room and person reflected by a mirror to illustrate the point.

A mirror creates a virtual room, and the person creates a body in that room. Even if they do not perceive that body visually, for example by keeping their eyes closed, the mirror provides a habitat. Although there is an “anchorage” in the real world, a subject will perceive their “legs and arms required for walking and acting in the reflected room,” creating an effect of “inhabiting” the visual spectacle before them (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 260-1).

Merleau-Ponty also emphasizes that “my body is where it has something to do” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 260), indicating that we inhabit space as a total Being wherever our actions have an effect of some sort, whether it greatly changes the world we are inhabiting or does nothing at all. So long as an action has been made in that space, we are there. Games provide this space; every game provides a player with something *to do*. Objectives and tasks are provided by this space for the player to complete, meaning that they are not embodying an avatar, they are not being “immersed” in a digital or virtual world; players are acting within a

perceived space. As a result, we can take a “virtual body,” which simply means to be a body other than the one we are normally accustomed to, as connected to our Being through the power of space, thus enabling a game to be directly connected to us.

Furthermore, we do not need a visualized body, real or virtual, to understand our Being as unified within a game. Merleau-Ponty states that “in consciousness, appearance is not being, but phenomenon” and our own being is not simply what “explicitly appears” to us, nor are we bound to live a single representation (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 310). Although the body exists “as a thing in objective space” it does not matter much, what is important is understanding the body as a “system of possible actions,” even for a virtual construction of the body, wherein the place for the body is defined by tasks and situations (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 260). In Merleau-Ponty’s virtual body example, he mentions that the person looking at the mirror could close their eyes, but the virtual space will still be there (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 260).

A game will provide a space, whether or not we choose to engage it. In some games, such as *The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask* (2000), the virtual space will act on its own accord to some degree, insofar as there is an active clock and the characters in the game will do things based on a schedule without the human player doing anything. In other games, such as fighting games, the environment demands responses from the players for something to happen. In either case, that space exists whether or not something happens there, acting as a connecting power for our Being regardless if we view it or not.

By extending Merleau-Ponty’s conceptions of space to digital spaces provided by video games, there is clearly a fundamental connection with our ontological Being. The digital space is not a separate space or world, insofar as space and worlds transcend cultural or social bounds,

meaning a digital world cannot be made via the popular conceptions of *immersion* or *presence*; these spaces precede those feelings. How we *perceive* the space leads into the next section.

Perception: Perceiving the Self in Virtual Game Worlds

Now that we have covered the first two bases for understanding a unified existence of the subject and object in video games, we can begin to examine the way that other objects are sensed or perceived in relation to our existence. Perception is a core element of Merleau-Ponty's work, and constitutes a binding characteristic towards the rest of his ideas. It is essential to understand how we perceive ourselves and the digital world presented by video games, because this is one of the most contentious areas of video game studies in terms of media influence, gender and racial discrimination, and even education.

We must first look at how Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes perception. Throughout the work it is complexly woven in at different points, however, there are a few key aspects about perception that guide us. Perception is knowledge *of* something, an interpretation of *something* that has been sensed. This enables an infinite range of perception, from simplistic audio and visual recognition to complex connotative understandings in particular cultural *worlds*. Perception is not *a priori*; sensing comes first, and perception (or knowledge of the sensed) develops and changes over time (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 342). Emphasis should be given to the bodily connection; because of the direct unity of the self and the body, perception instantly becomes part of the self, but also moves with the body and where we perceive the result of our actions to be. This is what gives us the ability to inhabit a virtual space; we perceive the world *with* our body (though not in a dualistic sense) and it is a means of *having* a world to perceive, either through reference points (body schema) or action (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 354, 213, 147).

Merleau-Ponty winds perception throughout his work, resulting in some repeated information, but we should keep in mind what has been previously discussed.

We have already noted what Merleau-Ponty described as a world; an inhabitable space, whether it is immediately physical or virtual, that enables situations. A world on its own is just a space. There is also the cultural or social world, which is a world with an added dimension, an array of situations and positions of *things* that form a particular cultural world. We can place this within perception, and examine a game world as a cultural world, and by extension as a space that is inhabited by us. We have said that Merleau-Ponty suggested that “to perceive is to believe in a world” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 311), meaning that when we feel we are perceiving things that exist only in a world that is presented before us, which is not the everyday, physical real world, that this world exists as part of our phenomenological being, part of our lived experience.

Additionally “to perceive is suddenly to commit to an entire future of experiences in a present that never, strictly speaking, guarantees that future” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 311), meaning that in this other world we perceive and exist in, there are experiences and actions that lead to a future that is not exactly set. Like Schutz’s projects of action, we set out a plan to reach an intended goal. Sometimes this plan does not follow through exactly as predicted, or sometimes does not work at all. However, before this plan of action is established, we have to perceive and understand the world before us. The unified Being with the body schema, understanding of the space, and knowledge of objects all contribute to the conscious action that is committed, and, as Merleau-Ponty points out, after we perceive the world before us, we commit ourselves to a future that is the result of our action which is in turn a result of our perception.

Although it may be argued that many games have a linear progression, especially through cinematics or paths that are the same every time the game is played, how players go about

completing the level or area is not always accomplished in exactly the same way, and certainly never guaranteed on a first try. There is some element of originality, a unique way of achieving something, a feature prominently highlighted in “open-world” concept games. A player perceives the virtual world before them, and makes an action based on the knowledge that has been gained thus far. Indeed, in more flexible games that have randomized interactions, understanding and perceiving the virtual space’s cultural world is critical for advancing. Regardless, once that virtual space has been perceived, a future of possibilities has been committed to (even if one possibility is turning one’s head away from the screen entirely).

If we go back to the rejection of the Cartesian dualism and the virtual body, we can see how perception works out within a game, in terms of raw sensory perception. The virtual body in Merleau-Ponty’s mirror example does not in itself perceive; rather, we make the perceptions our *self* in contexts of that virtual space and act according to what situations arise in that space (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261). As a player perceives something in a game, it is they who are doing the perception, not the playable character. Even if a game script calls for the PC to look in the direction of a sound or possible threat, it is irrelevant unless the player has taken note of this behaviour. In understanding what this action means, the thing in question becomes part of the player’s perceptual field. If the player cannot directly observe the thing in question, it will become, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, part of a mental experiment to try and perceive what that *thing* might be; this is part of the idea that something that is even imaginable can be perceived (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 334). Part of this imagination is grounded in the understanding of the game’s cultural world understood so far by the player; but also partly grounded in the player’s understanding of their own cultural world. Along with the body schema, a player’s perception within the game is, in fundamentals, much the same as everyday life. Before an action can be

properly committed to, a person makes a judgement based on their knowledge of their surroundings and given situations; this judgement is determined by everything that is perceived, and it is the same thing in a game. Sensory perception relies on a unified Being with the body and space; virtual space or virtual body are irrelevant, they are connected with our Being.

Continuing this line of thought, again similar to the idea of a continuity of consciousness in terms of spatiality, Merleau-Ponty discusses a unity of Being in relation to *things*. Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes the “perceived” as objects that are physically present as well as those that are not, and more importantly he suggests that we can perceive a “unit of value” that is only available to the individual (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 335). There is nothing, according to Merleau-Ponty, that cannot be perceived to some degree. He gives the example of never visiting a place, yet we can conceptualize it in our minds, a “mental experiment of perceiving it” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 334). Thus, we come to the most important part of the matter: a thing “can never be separated from someone who perceives it” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 334), just as space cannot be separated from those who perceive or experience it. Perception becomes more than a sensation, it becomes communication, “or a communion... a coupling of our body with the things” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 334). The perception of things is important because things form perceivable worlds. Perceptions of the body are the most important; Merleau-Ponty suggests that the first “cultural object” is the body of another person, because as “a bearer of behaviour” they are an embodiment of a cultural world (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 364). As objects and other bodies are inseparable from the world they form, the more of these things we encounter, the more informed we are of this world. As discussed, our perception develops over time, and given that cultural/social worlds can be very outwardly detailed or very vague and subtle, with each new perception we gain a fuller understanding of that cultural world, which becomes part of our own

lived experience. This can explain why it is that when someone plays a game in a series they have previously played, they will already be familiar with the cultural world presented and this new game simply adds a new dimension or experience of that world. On the other hand, it also demonstrates the ability of the player to understand a new game as they play it further; the more *things* they are exposed to, the greater the understanding of the world that is achieved. The relationship between perception and *things* is extremely important to understanding the construction of a cultural world, as well as the way our Being experiences everyday life in a spatial and social sense.

The last discussion will be the evolution of the perception of things. First, like space, *things* are not separate from the space they inhabit and is a “correlate” of those who perceive them (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 334). Nevertheless, they are separate from our self insofar as “we do not see ourselves in it.” Second, if we can even *imagine* something, we can perceive it. Finally, we perceive the world *with* our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 213).

It cannot be missed that how we perceive a thing, whether it is an object or some sort of “unit of value,” changes over time. It is noted that the things themselves may not change, but, familiarity changes the perception we have *of* them completely (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 342). A simple example can be seen in the familiarity of a neighbourhood or town. Though after many years it does not change in itself, the knowledge of the area changes with the growth of the individual. Another, more pointed example is being in a relationship with another individual; after many years, it seems to be that one is in a relationship with another person entirely, not the one they first began with (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 342).

According to Merleau-Ponty, our perception of *things*, which includes lived-experience, transforms our previous knowledge of those *things*. It suffices to say that as a being has

perceived more in its life, the perception and experience of the familiar will evolve as well. This cannot be truer of a video game. In its fundamentals, the “habitat” or world of the game does not change. As the player progresses in the game, specific areas or objects may shift around, but the platform does not change. For many games, such as *Mega Man* (1987) or *Super Mario Brothers* (1985), the game world is the same every time the player turns on the game; it is predictable, and how to play it can be made into a science of efficiency. The player eventually becomes familiar with the habitat and the perspective on it can change. As the player’s *knowledge of* the environment varies, it carries with it different sensations, whether it is nostalgia, excitement, or boredom. The development or evolution of our perception is very much part of our Being, and this is important for understanding how an object, like a game, can become meaningful or a very essential part of someone’s everyday life.

Perception is a critical part of understanding not only how we experience our everyday world, but also how we experience video games, especially in relation to our self. How things in a game are perceived are essential in any basic design principles, now more so than ever with an intense scrutiny on digital visual culture. The connection between perception, spatiality, the body, and Being that Merleau-Ponty discusses will work in conjunction with the subsequent section regarding Bourdieu’s work particularly regarding the development of habitus.

Concluding Remarks on Merleau-Ponty

To bind everything together thus far, we can understand our Being, body, movement and perception as a phenomenal body, not an external object that moves through the objective world. The body forms “but one element in the system of the subject” and their world (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 109), a world that is not necessarily fixed and singular, but changing and multiple. We have discussed how consciousness and being works in relation to the body, as well as spatiality

and the body, and can now bind these ideas with perception of the subject as a sense not bound by space or physicality. Merleau-Ponty describes what he calls the “intentional arc,” wherein our “life of consciousness,” which includes perceptual life, sensation, and knowledge, is situated within our relationships to time, space, and social reality (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 137). By being continuously united or situated within our personal histories, present projects, and the perceived reality around us, our actions and perceptions are not aimless; they exist in relation to our temporality, spatiality, and existence. We cannot act outside of these relationships; we can only change these relationships by the developing them further, but never erasing or totally overwriting them (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 413-414). By understanding ourselves as a phenomenal body within a world, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates how we can perceive someone else as a phenomenal body, sharing our spatial, temporal, and social world. This is one of the essential points of understanding our phenomenal body as unified within video games, particularly when knowingly engaging other human players.

Merleau-Ponty offers a variety of different perspectives on understanding the phenomenological connection between the player and the game. His ideas of perception in relation to the body, spatiality, and consciousness enable us to begin to paint a fuller picture of the phenomenological experience of the player in a game as a unified, continuous being in the world. Through his perspectives I have argued that we can find a fundamental connection between the player and game that goes beyond concepts such as immersion.

A Different Angle: Pierre Bourdieu

Now that we have established a basic connection between Being, consciousness, and perception of our self within games, we can look at Bourdieu’s theories to help complete this picture. Although Bourdieu is not a phenomenologist proper, the methods and concepts he

employed provide another means of explaining human interaction and individual interpretation. He covered a variety of topics and terms, but we will focus on just a few to complement what has already been provided. First of these to be covered will be two types of “capital,” being social and symbolic capital. Second will be the field, which will provide a continuity with capital as well. Finally, one of the main ideas Bourdieu presents, the *habitus*, will be examined as it links all of these concepts together. Bourdieu’s theories have an interesting application to video games in general. There are three major aspects that have to be addressed when considering his ideas. First is the socialized player before they begin a game; what do they bring to the game from their everyday lives? Second is what does the game do in terms of socializing them; what do they take from to the outside world? The final aspect is understanding the intersectional judgements that are made based on both of these socializations; how does a player progress in game?

Symbolic Capital: Reciprocal Meaning in Action

A central point of Bourdieu’s writings comes in the form of what he calls capital. Capital is integral to the continued development of the *habitus*, and also integral to our perception of a person, place, thing, or action. Everything that is within our lived experience contributes to the development of our levels of capital. Thus, video games have a three-fold effect with capital. First, how does our capital prior to game affect how we play; second, how does our capital within the game grow; third, how does the experience affect our capital post-game completion? Although all the forms of capital are worth exploring, for this paper we will just cover symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital can be loosely characterized along the lines of honour, respect, or prestige. Symbolic capital comes along with other forms of capital, and requires active maintenance on the part of the holder, as building the other forms of capital contributes to the

development of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is crucial to developing symbolic *power*, which is the ability to “impose the principles of division, knowledge, and recognition” on other people (Bourdieu 1990: 189). Wielders of symbolic power have the ability to use their other capital to project their visions and may influence others to follow, or to dominate others through recognition of that capital/power (Bourdieu 1990: 122, 131). Along with recognition of symbolic capital, Bourdieu believes that part of the drive of symbolic capital and power is the “search for recognition” or to be formally recognized as a person of extreme importance (Bourdieu 2000: 166). As part of this pursuit, other capital can be converted into symbolic capital, and symbolic power tied into them through “*symbolic effects of capital*” (Bourdieu 2000: 242). The social world provides meaning for people’s lives, “reasons for being”; the struggle for symbolic power and capital is a core part of life itself (Bourdieu 2000: 240-241). Given its high importance, this capital should be examined separately from the others.

Bourdieu gives a detailed example of the use of symbolic capital exchange in the ritual of gift-giving, characterized as a form of symbolic violence. People give others gifts, often expecting reciprocation, otherwise their own symbolic capital, reputation and thus symbolic power, will fall to some degree, creating a pseudo-battle of credentials. Depending on the social positions of those giving gifts, the symbolism may be more or less overt and, in Bourdieu’s perspective, symbolically violent (Bourdieu 1990: 127). Symbolic capital requires constant maintenance and attention, except in the case of objectified credentials or visible cultural capital which enables a person to not constantly have to renew/prove themselves in that regard (Bourdieu 1990: 130-2, 136). As a result of lasting and tangible recognition, as well as great value, symbolic capital is key to domination through symbolic power. This is exerted through the ability of the wielder of symbolic power, or dominator in Bourdieu’s terms, to construct the

world through which the *habitus* is formed for the dominated, meaning the dominated can only really negotiate their world through tools given to them by the dominators (Bourdieu 2000: 170-1). As a result, symbolic power is extremely valuable in changing or maintaining social positions.

Symbolic capital and power have a niche applicability to games. Symbolic capital may carry heavier power in an online multiplayer open world setting, where being respected and known matters to the game's everyday community, but nevertheless we can find it within a single-player experience too. The social world of the game gives meaning to the life of the player within the game, it gives them purpose, drive, a "reason for being." The struggle for recognition may not be conscious from the player's perspective, but it certainly matters in *FO: NV* especially because throughout the game, the player has to be recognized by various factions in one way or another. Symbolic capital is earned in games usually through tasks or conversion of other forms of capital, which changes dispositions of NPCs towards the player, usually for the better but sometimes for worse. For example, *FO* runs on a system of "karma" and reputation, where certain actions give or take "credit" from the player which is recognized by other NPCs in the game. Having higher or lower levels of karma enable different dialogue with certain characters, receive freely given items, or different abilities all based upon a system of recognized "credit." This form of "capital" can also be used to influence others and is a deciding factor in what NPCs the player can team up with. Items, gifts, or quests given by those in a higher standing in the game also carry more weight, particularly in terms of outcomes and how many people will be influenced by the items or gifts. In a sense, symbolic capital could be considered vital for many different aspects of this game.

Capital has a multitude of ways of appearing in games, and the extent to which it matters is always different. However, capital in itself forms just a part of the formation of dispositions. It should be kept in mind when exploring other aspects, such as the field, habitus, and bodily knowledge, that capital is intrinsically linked with each of these.

The Field: the Hierarchical Structure of a Game World

The field is a term that Bourdieu uses to conceptualize and formulate the structure of positions that people take up in various areas of their lives. Although it may seem like a very macro idea that might not be applicable to video games, it is actually quite the contrary, and has a larger impact, particularly on a player's disposition towards a game, than one might think. Bourdieu emphasizes the effect of these hierarchical fields in our everyday lives, and they operate in more subtle ways within games. However subtle they may be, they still exist and play on our *habitus* and capital which in turn affects our lived experience of the game.

The field is a set of networked and objective relations. It is a series of positions which are “objectively defined by a system of distinct properties,” or an existing structure of some kind, whether it is relating to academia, science, cultural production, or everyday life (Bourdieu 1983: 312). For every area of activity or inquiry, there is a field that one must negotiate. This field involves situated positions that are relative to another and each position depends on the other to exist, much like a sports team, where the analogy came from. Bourdieu suggests that all fields are of force and struggle; struggle either transforms or maintains a force that has an effect on those in the field and those surrounding it (Bourdieu 1983: 312). Fields are generated upon value and distribution of *capital*; in certain fields, particular kinds of capital are worth more, and others worth less in terms of trying to acquire a more advantageous position in the field, which is the primary goal of most people (Bourdieu 1983: 324). What is considered legitimate or worthy is

established by a “professional body” of labourers in the field (Bourdieu 1983: 318); changing or replacing what has already been deemed legitimate is often where the struggle comes from.

Bourdieu stresses that lines should not be rigidly drawn to demarcate a field, because those lines will likely be from our own presuppositions, and fields are not isolated in terms of what effects they may or may not have on other fields (Bourdieu 1983: 24). The “legitimate” forms of knowledge or institutionalized points of view can be referred to as what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. New membership within a given field means an “implied” acceptance of these presuppositions (Bourdieu 2000: 101). Although difficult, *doxa* may change. The fields and participants all interplay with each other; a massive change in one field, for example the field of science, may greatly change the layout of the economic and political fields. Our struggle in the field is part of what gives us capital, and our habitus is only “effectively realized in relation to a determinate structure of positions” socially marked by the “social properties” of their occupants (Bourdieu 1983: 352).

The field is important for understanding the function capital can play in both the player and the game play of a game. We can posit that there are three very basic fields that a player must contend with in engaging video games. First is the field that the players themselves are situated in within their everyday life. What is their struggle, how are they struggling, are they attempting to reinforce or transform the field? Since a field is a point of view, a way of viewing an object or experience (Bourdieu 2000: 99), understanding the field that shapes the incoming disposition of the player is important.

Second is the field that the game is produced within. Bourdieu’s piece on the field of cultural production (1983: 321-2) discusses a similar field with literature and art, with a struggle

between two primary hierarchies; the “heteronomous principle,” which is the “bourgeois” or dominant position, and the “autonomous principle” which was a more “for itself” principle.

The third field is the various fields that are found within the game itself. While there may be some direct parallels to fields found in the everyday life, there are also unique ones, and sometimes none at all. The player is obliged to use their capital, which is gained in both the game and everyday life, to compete in the fields presented to them.

Given that we want to explore the player’s experience within the game itself, let us examine the field within a game. Often it is the goal of a game to change the field in some way; it may be a large field, for example, a fundamental hierarchy and way of life that may be perceived as negative, and the goal is to change it to be positive, or it may be a smaller field, or series of smaller fields, where adjustments propel the player forward, usually through use of their accumulated capital. The field is an excellent place for seeing how capital enables change in a player’s position. Like fictional narratives, often games are attributed as demonstrating to players and spectators that they can, as individuals, make a difference to their lives and the lives of those around them, a theme prevalent in *FO: NV*. There are three major competing fields and doxa in the game. The first is the doctrine of the Legion, a radical group pretending to be ancient-Roman. The second is the NCR, which is deeply tied to 20th century American values. Finally, there is the campaign of an independent New Vegas. Each faction has its own set of values and goals that set it firmly against the others.

The player initially is not set for or against anyone, but eventually has to pick a side that will, by the end of the game, eliminate the other two. Each group has its own hierarchy and actions committed by the player will change their own position within that hierarchy. Throughout the game the player will encounter NPCs of various positions in their given field and

through various quests the player can influence a change in the field. The player must use all their forms of capital (social connections, wealth, knowledge, and symbolic prestige) to maneuver through the field to ultimately come out at the top of the hierarchy. Their position within a particular field also factors into the various smaller fields outside of their chosen path. NPCs will react differently to the player according to their position within the hierarchy of a given faction, which in turn can change their available capital either negatively or positively.

In considering what field the player chooses to follow, their own experience in everyday life may influence their decision. The Legion, while promoting a very organized operation, very little corruption, is also incredibly cruel, is very basic with technology, and endorses slavery and mass murder. This may directly clash with the *doxa* the player is normally exposed to in their everyday life which proclaims all of these things are wrong and should be fought against. This points them towards the NCR, which is often reflective of the current forms of government; good intentions, but very corrupt, unorganized, and possessing superior military technology. The third major field option, the independent New Vegas, rejects allegiance to either of these factions and allows the player to reshape the field in their own vision to some degree.

So we can see that fields play a role in the disposition of a player within a game, and toward a game, which in turn influences how the game is experienced by the player. With understanding the field, we can also see a more complex role of *capital* within it, particularly in the development and execution of it. Now that these aspects have been explored, we can move onto the development of *habitus*.

Habitus and Development

As we have examined ways of developing courses of action through Schutz and Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu offers a different approach. At the core of Bourdieu's ideas is the *habitus*, which

influences actions within the field and how we may use or generate capital. As it informs our everyday actions, from a Bourdieusian perspective it would be a key part of understanding human interaction with video games, in terms of what we bring to the game itself and what we may take out of it.

Habitus is a product of a collected history, which in turn produces more history, but not a passive product, rather it is an “active presence of a whole past of which it is a product” (Bourdieu 1990: 56). In a sense similar to what Schutz described as our schemes of reference and stocks of knowledge from our world of predecessors, Bourdieu characterizes the *habitus* as an “active presence” of past experience as schemes of perception, thought, and action. Through strategic calculations based on this past experience, we can make more “correct” actions and decisions (Bourdieu 1990: 54). The *habitus* has an “infinite capacity for generating products” (products being thoughts, expressions, perceptions, and actions), yet this infinite capacity is limited or bounded by historical and social situations of production (Bourdieu 1990: 55). As a result, *habitus* is developed through practice and is pragmatic; acts are calculated, yet also “practiced” so results can be automatic with little to no reflection. It is important to note that the emphasis is given to early development; Bourdieu suggests early life experiences form the basis of our outlook on life and perceptions on all future experiences, and this influences the “anticipations” of *habitus* to default more to what is learned earlier in life rather than later (Bourdieu 1990: 54-5). Although *habitus* can develop and change, it is dependent on conditions to form or reform dispositions, and it is resistant to such reformation challenges (Bourdieu 1990: 54, 61).

Habitus can also be seen in a collective form; it is not necessarily isolated to a micro, individual level and this is where we can see the effectiveness of habitus in moving positions in a

field, as well as the field influencing the development of habitus. This collective habitus enables the development of institutions and is a “precondition for [the] co-ordination of practices and practices of co-ordination” (Bourdieu 1990: 59). These forms of practice enable the constitution of institutions and legitimate bodies of knowledge as well as a “full-realization” of a field (Bourdieu 1990: 57). As a result, the individual habitus becomes more “harmonized” with others in a similar class, situation, or position which enables the development of particular points of view, such as objectification and apperception (Bourdieu 1990: 59-60). Thus, the individual is actually negotiating two habituses; the one they develop for themselves, and the collective habitus of the community surrounding them.

There are a variety of ways to apply understandings of the *habitus* to games, though the relevance to each game may be different. Let us consider *FO: NV* as an example. The player’s *habitus* for action within the game constantly develops in terms of committing actions as they learn more techniques on how to get through a variety of scenarios requiring increasing quick-thinking. Games typically require an increasing skill level to progress, and *FO: NV* is no different. The basic skills presented at the beginning of the game as well as basic encounters are frequent and thus mastered as practiced. Reactions to the appearance of certain enemies becomes automatic and thoughtless. Actions that once took some time to plan out and executed usually with some flaws can now be done swiftly to great and advantageous effects, with simple quick glances at the structural environment and enemy positions.

The disposition of the player is also formed as the game progresses and they are exposed to certain events. *FO: NV* demonstrates the effects of early experiences on a disposition. As an individual, the player grows but also keeps the earlier experiences in mind, as events are sequential. The first encounter with the Legion is striking one; stumbling into an entire town

dead or dying at their hands for no seemingly good reason. Yet the player may still opt to join them later in the game to take over New Vegas and surrounding Wasteland. As the player progresses through the game, they take in the collected history of the social world they are in, and the actions they commit are understood as part of that world, that arena of the Wasteland. This collected history is also part of the collective *habitus*, wherein the player can adjust to other groups in terms of considering who to finally support in the end-game scenario: the NCR, the Legion, Mr. House, or independence. With various groups having different positions on the main factions, the player's disposition is influenced as they get a greater scope for the field they are competing in.

Habitus contributes to understanding the development of dispositions in our everyday life, and it is no different than within a game. The potential for collected histories, social structures, and ability to master action much in the same way as everyday life. It also presents a unique juxtaposition for the player who has an in-game *habitus* and an out of game *habitus*, particularly in terms of seeing how the two develop together over time.

Action and Bodily Knowledge

Now that we have explored the development of the *habitus* and the various kinds of capital, let us see how they are executed in practice. Although action has been alluded to somewhat in our previous discussions, we can now take it one step further. Bodily knowledge has been referenced within the discussion of the *habitus* but it is also a key part of action, particularly in understanding action, and having the practical and “common sense” knowledge of when and where to act.

Bodily knowledge is a way of comprehending a world - a world which both “encompasses and comprehends” people in it (Bourdieu 2000: 130). Bourdieu believes that the

only real way to describe the way this occurred, or the relationship between agent and world, was by positing the body at the centre of the relationship (Bourdieu 2000: 182). Practical knowledge, which is developed through experience and institutionalized forms of practice, becomes part of our everyday “common sense” knowledge. Similar to the discussions brought forward by Merleau-Ponty, immediate physical space is not the only one in which we can commit an action; rather our body enables us to be in multiple spaces, including a social space. Bourdieu posits the social space, “the locus of the coexistence of social positions, mutually exclusive points, which, for the occupants, are the basis of a point of view,” as the space where bodily knowledge is both inscribed and executed (Bourdieu 2000: 130). By referring to the body, we can situate a given action within a particular space because we always occupy both a physical and social space (Bourdieu 2000: 131), meaning we can see the actual action as well as interpret it.

Action is committed through the *habitus* and bodily knowledge. “Inscribed in their bodies,” social actors have a wealth of past experiences that enable more consistently “correct” actions (Bourdieu 2000: 138). Action is not a gamble, or radical free action, rather it is, for the most part, a rational and calculated act; our dispositions are “somewhat pre-adapted” to a particular end goal (Bourdieu 1990: 54). Our practical knowledge enables us to operate in new game settings; *habitus* indicates that practice enables us to make decisions without serious reflection. Here we can see that a player can make correct decisions in a game they have never played before because they have played something similar. Even if we play a completely new game, our previous experience and embodied knowledge enables a player to negotiate that new game with relative ease and correctness because our practical knowledge provides us with a pre-formed sense of one’s place (Bourdieu 2000: 184). Players do not have to re-learn everything every time they play a new game; there are usually some basic mechanics that are fundamentally

the same, the only difference is that the means of achieving the goal may be slightly different, the mathematical calculations may be different, and the theme is different, but that is about it.

Let us take two contrasting examples that can illustrate the point. A very basic example is seen in the fighter genre; once you've played *Mortal Kombat* (1992) or *Street Fighter II* (1991), you are able to play games such as *Guilty Gear X2* (2002) or *King of Fighters '98* (1998) with relative ease and probably at a more advanced level than expected for first time players. There are complex combos and special moves that can be done aside from "button mashing," but generally all fighter games follow the same mechanics; "X" button is punch, "Y" button is kick, "Z" button is defend. The social space is very limited and mainly consists of storylines for self-improvement, fighting for a significant other, or revenge motives.

A more complex example that integrates a more developed social space aspect can be drawn from *FO* and *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*. The basic mechanics are the same, although the theming and social spaces are radically different. Yet, someone who has played *FO 3* would be able to navigate *Oblivion* without too much adjustment. Knowing how to read the situations at hand and engage in dialogue with NPCs as well as knowing what general skills you want to prioritize will get you through the game with few problems. In both cases, previous experiences allow the player to get a "sense of their place" within each game and make sense of the actions and conduct of various factions and characters with ease.

As a result, bodily and practical knowledge is an example of the execution of the habitus. If our habitus is our collected history and informed dispositions, the way we exhibit these is through our actions, which is our bodily and practical knowledge manifesting itself. Bodily and practical knowledge enable us to act in situations that are not exactly the same as those to which

we are accustomed. Thus, bodily and practical knowledge is important for understanding how we are able to act and make sense of our actions within games.

Concluding Remarks

Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, field and doxa, capital, and bodily/practical knowledge provide an augmentation for the ideas already covered by Schutz and Merleau-Ponty. In a basic sense, we have covered three major aspects of everyday life and games. The first is the overall conceptualization of Being and consciousness. The second aspect is the development of structures of meaning and dispositions. Third is the execution and interpretation of action as well communication. As we have gone through some of the ideas posited by these theorists one-by-one and seen how they can be applied in various senses to games in general, we can now begin to put these together for a coherent analysis of how two particular kinds of games are understood, navigated, and played by people of all backgrounds.

Chapter 5: Analyzing Game Experience

The analysis section will be an empirically informed phenomenological analysis. A phenomenological analysis is key to this discussion as the phenomenological method is a “means for entering into a distinctly philosophical analysis of the presuppositions of daily life” (Natanson 1970: 3). Given that the bulk of the theory in this work is Schutz’s, we will follow Schutz’s phenomenological method, as opposed to Husserl’s original phenomenology. Where Husserl disagreed with empiricism informing phenomenology, Schutz’s theories lend themselves better for the analysis, with more methodology behind them. Indeed, as Costelloe points out, Schutz, in many ways, deviates from Husserl’s first designs of phenomenology, particularly regarding transcendental philosophy (Costelloe 1996: 241). This work will be based upon Schutz’s outline in *Phenomenology of the Social World* in terms of progression, but also integrates the collected data from the games detailed below.

The data will be comprised of two sections, a quantified section and a qualitative section. Since *AC* in general could be better understood as a game that allows social learning, and *FO* as a game that encourages use of already socialized skills, we can draw out a fuller relationship between these games and the fundamental ways we learn and do things in everyday life. In other words, we are going to examine how meaning is constructed through actions for the player to learn, how the player might begin to interpret these meaning-structures, and how they might act upon them based on an execution of constructed in-game habitus within contexts of the everyday life. The quantified data provide a basis for the construction and analysis of Schutz’s configuration of meaning and development of meaning. First, in *AC*, which is more of a “socialization” style of game that involves more about learning rather than execution, we will examine the teaching of expressions or gestures through jokes. Second, in *FO*, which as stated is

more about the execution of interpretation, and far more game dependent on player action, we will look at events that cause karma/reputation gain or loss. Both of these sets are based upon particular instances as opposed to drawn-out endeavours which will be the focus of the qualitative data.

The presentation of data itself more or less clarifies precise parts of the play-through, as opposed to just being general about analyzing the play-through. By taking specific instances and actions and capturing them as a form of quantified data, they provide an explicit reference to particular game instances I encountered in my play-through of the games. By detailing the specifics of the qualitative data, again I am clarifying the scenarios and contexts in which these events occur, providing more background knowledge for when we get to the analysis itself.

The purpose of the charts are mainly to further contextualize the qualitative analysis. The questions for the chart were generated to complement the theories presented, attempting to tie questions of the game with the everyday life. Using a chart or table allows us to see how the events or actions are not isolated incidents, providing slightly more credibility with multiple instances and actions. The intent is to discover the relatability to the fundamentals of everyday life, so the chart is made in a manner of yes or no questions, with little subjectivity. Although the premise is that higher total numbers indicate a stronger connection to daily life, they are not meant to demonstrate a mimicry of everyday life. They are meant to show that we learn much in the same way as we do in everyday life, and see how we draw on pre-established knowledge when we start to play, and gradually become more familiar with these things as part of the game world as we go along.

The qualitative data will be the bulk of the analysis. Here we will examine more structured events that go on over time, as opposed to the quantitative data which are more or less

“instances” than meaningful interaction. Although they will be described in more detail shortly, the aspect we will examine in *AC* is relationship building with villagers, which develops meanings for the player, and allows a We-Relationship growth, in a Schutzian sense. In *FO* we will examine two quests, which demonstrate the ability of the player to learn and navigate particular worlds of meaning, yet exercise judgement based on multiple facets of learning or habitus development. The two data-sets will be put together for a more complete picture.

For more technical aspects of the game, and verifications of alternative results, I have consulted the community-maintained databases for each game, the *Nookipedia* and *Nukapedia*. Information for each game that is generally unavailable for a player, such as code, transcripts, or hidden data, is available in these locations, and the sites are consistently monitored for accuracy.

Data: Animal Crossing

The first quantified set of data we will take and analyze from *AC* is the player’s ability to learn emotions, expressed with gestures. These gestures are demonstrated and taught by the character Dr. Shrunk, who is a psychologist and comedian. The jokes are usually fairly bad (most likely intentionally designed this way), with the punchline serving as the gesture/emotion to learn. In all, there are 40 gestures to be learned, although one of these is more or a less a joke in itself, a small dance called the Shrunk-Funk-Shuffle that Dr. Shrunk performs at the very end of every joke.

Since only one joke per day was told, I had to visit Dr. Shrunk every day to see a new joke. Each joke was recorded as it was told, along with the various expressions that went alongside it. Expressions in brackets are actions done while the joke was being told. For example, when (Mischief) is used, this indicates at this time the gesture was used. Each joke was

subject to a series of questions that would help frame the relationship to everyday life. The questions were as follows:

- 1: Does the gesture/expression being taught fit in with the joke (could it have been conveyed better)?
- 2: Does this joke make sense to the game world? Within the particular structures of the game would this be a predictable or average dialogue?
- 3: Does this joke make sense to the everyday world? For example, if you were to tell someone else the joke would it make sense to them?
- 4: Does the emotion/gesture elicit a predictable response based on the game world?
- 5: Does the emotion/gesture elicit a predictable response based on everyday world understanding of such an expression?
- 6: Is the gesture an appropriate rendition of the emotion?

Responses to these questions were recorded in a binary where 0 indicates a “No” response and 1 indicates a “Yes” to the questions provided. For questions 4 and 5, if there was no reaction this was included along with results, because not every action requires a reaction, or would have an expected reaction. For example, the shocked and surprised gesture yield no response. If two people were to hold a conversation together, upon learning something previously unknown someone is likely to show shock or surprise on their face, but the speaker will usually continue on anyway as if there was no interruption or change, unless the speaker is expecting a reaction or is in turn surprised at the other person’s surprise.

Expression	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Total
Flourish	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Anger	1	1	0	0-1* ²	0	1	3-4
Resignation	0	1	0	1	0-1*	1	3-4
Sadness	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Agreement	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Outrage	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Pride	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Disbelief	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Fearful	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Sorrow	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Sleepy	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Delight	0-1	1	0	1	1	1	4-5
Cold Chill	0	1	0-1	1	1	1	4-5
Love	0	1	0-1	1	1	1	4-5
Sheepishness	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Curiosity	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
Shyness	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Worry	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Glee	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Happiness	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Heartbreak	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Inspiration	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Mischief	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Joy	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Disagreement	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Thought	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Sunniness	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Shocked	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Laughter	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Aggravation	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Bashfulness	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Daydream	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Mistaken	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Sneezing	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Showmanship	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Surprise	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Greetings	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Sighing	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Distress	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Shrunk-Funk Shuffle ³	-	-	-	1	1	1	3

(Table 1)

² *Context required for understanding

³ Not actually a joke to teach an emotion, rather a small cheesy dance.

Let us have a detailed example of how this works. An example of a joke that works very well is the “Mischief” joke and expression. The expression of the character makes a shady looking smile, and small chuckle to themselves, which gives the idea of someone being shady about something or up to some mischief. It is clearly recognizable without learning the joke and a well-executed design for the expression. The joke in itself is a good representation of the expression and makes good use of the gesture.

(Happiness) “Have I ever got a serious case of the up-to-no goods today!”

(Curiosity) “Wanna know why?”

(Mischief) “Yeah, I BET you would!”

(Curiosity) “Hey, do you have something on your nose there?”

(Mischief) “Psych! Gotcha!” (Laughter)

This is a great example of a joke conveying an expression with a particular meaning behind it. The player learns the correct contexts of when to use and interpret it within the game, and should easily understand the joke from everyday life contexts, as the expression is not much different at all, and the contexts are very similar if not the same as well. Because the gesture is appropriate and understandable in both the game and everyday life contexts, and the joke is appropriate for it and makes sense in both contexts, this joke/expression is given a 6.

An example of a joke that does not work out so well is the “Resignation” joke. The gesture of “resignation” is a hands-up shrugging of the shoulder. This is a recognizable action in the everyday world and the game world, and the gesture is appropriate for the intended expression. However, the joke meant to convey the gesture misses the mark.

“The other day... I ran into an old buddy of mine...”

(Pride) “He used to say ‘This company isn’t grand enough for a man like me. Someday I’ll show them and quit!’”

(Curiosity) “Well, you know what I said to him?”

(Resignation) “Can I get fries with that?”

The gesture being taught with this joke does not fit very well. If it was told as an expression for anyone else, they probably would not understand the point was to show an expression of resignation. However, it does make sense within the game world, given that 1) all the jokes are almost all terrible in quality and 2) players would come to expect something like this. However, the gesture given does make sense in both everyday life and the game world contexts, eliciting predicted responses, and it is understandable without knowing the joke that conveyed it. Therefore, “Resignation” would score a 4 out of 6 on the scale.

Probably the least useful gesture is the “Flourish” gesture. With this, characters do a quick spin, present themselves with arms out, and some stars come out around them. Even with the name, this gesture does not make a whole lot of sense. The joke does not convey the purpose of it very well either.

“Well you see... I used to be a great reaction comedian a while back.”
(Pride) “So of course I had a powerful gag to use when I really hit a homerun. I’m going to give you an extra-special treat and let you see it today!” (Happiness)
“Watch carefully! Are you ready?”
(Flourish) “That was SPINteresting!”
(Curiosity) “Want to see it again?”
(Flourish) “That was SPINteresting!”
“That was easy wasn’t it? I wonder why that never caught on...” (Sheepish)

Even at the end of the joke, we can see the little faith in the gesture. The gesture is rarely ever done in the game by anybody, and when it is, it is the rare occasion when someone wishes to present themselves, for example showing something off like new clothing or style. The gesture barely makes sense in the game world since it is very niche, and definitely this gesture would not convey much in the everyday world. As a result, this expression scores a 2 because it is not very relatable to the everyday world, but still makes a bit of sense in the game world and can still be understood using the same fundamental ways of learning how to interpret gestures in the everyday world.

The second aspect we will examine are particular instances of interaction that pertain to meaning or relationship construction, relationship in the sense of Schutz's degrees of anonymity and relation of interaction within the contexts of Worlds (Predecessors, etc). This will be done through the "quest" of building a relationship with a villager in *AC*.

Perhaps one of the key aspects of *AC* is building relationships with the villagers that come into town. It is not likely that a player will see all of them given that in *AC: WW* only eight villagers can visit at a time with one hundred and fifty programmed different villagers (Nookipedia 2015b), and a maximum of ten at a time in *AC: NL* with three hundred and thirty-three villagers (Nookipedia 2015a). They come and go at random, although they may be prevented from leaving if the player makes an effort to keep them around. Their intended stay range is completely random. Throughout the game, the player can interact with these villagers and build a relationship with them, either in a negative sense of mutually expressed dislike or in a positive sense of good friendship. If the player does not interact with the villager at all, a neutral sense is taken towards the player. In building a relationship with the villager, the player engages with them in a variety of interactions, ranging from gift-exchanges, favour completion, bizarre and entertaining conversations, and mail reception (and exchange if the player so chooses). As the friendship grows, these things become more frequent. The height of the relationship is reached when the villager bestows upon the player a gift, which is a picture of the villager. This could be considered a "quest" of sorts, acquiring the picture of a villager. The acquisition of a villager's picture is not immediate; the player does not necessarily know beforehand that this item has even been coded into the game. The only way that it becomes known is if a villager makes a reference to it, and can take weeks or months to get this item. Such an elusive item immediately has connotations in the everyday world; a picture of a friend

can have an infinite number of meanings for various beholders, and as such makes for an interesting piece for analysis.

The method of analyzing this will be a phenomenological breakdown of the development of the relationship between the player and the other villagers, and how it correlates to the development of understandings of meanings that have been constructed by the game. For example, the villager might say out of the blue to the player one time that “it is a *villager*⁴ family tradition to give their closest friend a picture with an award-winning smile. Funny, huh?” This presents the picture not only as a desirable and achievable item, but also constructs a meaning around that item. The process needed to achieve this is fairly involved and requires considerable playtime and focus on a particular character. As a result, it offers up many particular instances that can be examined for interaction, meaning-construction, and meaning-interpretation. Many of these instances include the use of expression and emotions, and thus the analysis of these instances can be put together with the analysis of the gestures.

Data: Fallout

Let us move on to *FO*. For the qualitative data, we will examine two “quests” in-depth. The quantified data will be twenty instances of karma loss or gain. Ten of these instances will be quest-related, while the other ten will be incident-occurring instances that have impact on karma. The reason I will use a combination of “main-quest” and “side-quest” for the first ten instances is that often the main-quest requires some side-quests for advancement, whether it is for easier advancement or the player stumbles upon the quest while trying to complete a main-quest objective. All of these instances will require direction or requests from other NPCs. For the random incident occurrences, it is beneficial to use these as well because the player does not

⁴ This means that “*villager*” may be replaced by the name of the villager making this remark; it is a scripted dialogue that any villager can use in reference to their own name.

necessarily have to engage with these things to complete the game; they are entirely optional, and thus the player has to go out of their way to do these things, nor are they requested to do these things.

The karma scale in *FO3* ranges from negative 1000 to positive 1000, where players (and NPCs) are categorized as “Very Evil” (-750 to -1000), “Evil” (-250 to -749), “Neutral” (-249 to +249), “Good” (+250 to +750) and “Very Good” (+750 to +1000) (Nukapedia 2015d). All quests listed were completed first, and additional information, for example the different karma outcomes, were either checked in game or referenced by the community monitored database called *Nukapedia*. Again there was a series of questions that are coded in a “yes” or “no” binary, scored as “1” and “0” respectively in table form (table 2). The questions for this table were as follows:

1. Are there multiple choices the player can make for different results (beyond binary do it/do not do it)? *Important because it restricts what the player can actually do
- 2: Does the karma change make sense within the game world (is it externally influenced or not really fitting, feels shoe-horned in as a token)?
- 3: Does the change make sense within everyday world contexts (for both negative and positive changes)?
- 4: Does the arbitrary karma gain/loss push players towards catering to dominant interest (socially acceptable) ways of playing the game? For example, feelings of guilt or unease committing these acts that have a known negative effect?
- 5: Does the action yield a predictable response (in terms of game effects as well as karma gain/loss)?

Decisions: Individual Act	Karma Change	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Total
Murder Faction NPC	Loss ⁵ Gain	0	0	1	1	1	3
Free Wasteland Captives	Gain ⁶	0	1	1	1	1	4
Enslave People	Loss	0	1	1	1	1	4
Stealing ⁷	Loss Neutral ⁸	0	1	1	1	1	4
Hack Owned Computer	Loss	0	1	1	1	1	4
Murder Misc. NPC	Loss	0	1	1	1	1	4
Donation to Charity	Gain	0	1	1	1	1	4
Suicidal Man	Loss ⁹ Gain	1	1	1	1	1	5
Interaction with NPC ¹⁰	Loss ¹¹ Gain	1	1	1	1	1	5
Give Water to Beggar	Loss ¹² Gain	1	1	1	1	1	5

Quest	Decision	Karma	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Total
Our Little Secret	Exposing Cannibals	Neutral Gain ¹³	0	1	1	0	1	3
Tranquility Lane	Dr. Braun's orders	Loss Gain ¹⁴	0	1	1	1	1	4
Rescue from Paradise	Freeing Slaves	Gain	0	1	1	1	1	4
Project Purity or Impurity	FEV contamination	Loss Gain ¹⁵	1	1	1	0	1	4
Power of the Atom	Destroy Megaton	Loss Neutral Gain ¹⁶	1	1	1	1	1	5
300 Pieces of Silver	Extortion of money from girl	Loss Neutral Gain ¹⁷	1	1	1	1	1	5
Oasis	Harold's Heart	Loss Neutral ¹⁸	1	1	1	1	1	5
Come Fly With Me	Enable rocket lift-off	Loss ¹⁹ Gain	1	1	1	1	1	5
Replicated Man	Expose android	Loss ²⁰ Gain	1	1	1	1	1	5
Take it Back!	Sacrifice	Neutral ²¹ Gain	1	1	1	1	1	5

(table 2)

Let us take two examples to demonstrate what the chart would be looking for. First, we can look at the instance of slavery in the game. It can be held as a “common-sense” assumption, commonly-held, or socially constructed acceptance that enslaving people is wrong and should not be done. There are legal conjectures to back this up as well as a strong educative practices detailing the evils of slavery in the education system early in our lives. *FO* offers the ability for the player to forcibly enslave people in the game with a particular weapon, and then sell them into slavery. This is not part of the main-quest of the game, so players have to go somewhat out of their way to do this. Because of this, for question one, “does the player have multiple choices with different outcomes,” the answer is no, thus “0,” because it is simply a matter of whether or not they are going to do this to a NPC. The consequence for enslavement is instant karma loss, at negative 100 points per person, which is fairly steep in comparison to other petty crimes (-1 for eating a corpse, -5 for stealing, -5 for hacking terminals, and so on). This karma loss makes sense in two contexts; first, the game world indicates that there is a movement against human-trafficking and it is not widely accepted, but little can be done about it (for whatever reasons). To sell a companion into slavery or enslave someone with the Mesmetron (the weapon to dupe people) could be seen as on par with the hated Raider faction. As a result, the question two slot earns a “1” because the karma change is well-set in the meaning of the game world. The third question, that of everyday life, the karma loss makes sense because at this point in life, it is assumed that it is well-engrained in the player that taking/selling slaves is not acceptable by any means, which also answers question four. With question five, regarding predictable outcomes, with greater negative karma the player will become known throughout the Wasteland as someone to avoid or kill on sight if possible. As a result, enslaving NPCs scores 4 on the chart.

For the second example, we will take a “Quest-Related” karma instance. The example will be the *FO3* end-game event. The player is faced with a dangerously radioactive and potentially explosive water-purification device. The purifier needs activation or it will explode, along with any hope of non-irradiated water for the Wasteland. The catch here is that whoever activates it will die from the radiation. There are a few choices that the player can make, all of which will impact the Capital Wasteland and their legacy, giving question one a “1.” They can let the purifier explode, sacrifice someone to activate it, or activate it themselves, sacrificing themselves in the process. Karma is gained if the player chooses to sacrifice themselves. The end-game theatrics, as well as various points in the game, refer to sacrifice for a greater good as a positive thing, “the ultimate virtue,” so question two is tallied as “1.” In everyday life contexts for question three, an altruistic suicide (for a tangibly greater good) would not be frowned upon, though perhaps not fully accepted, so this earns a “1” as well. There is no karma change if the player allows the purifier to explode or allows another person to activate it. Karma is only lost (at a cost of -1000) if the player contaminates the water with the modified FEV from the “Project Impurity” quest. For question five and in-game effects, they are noted; if the player sacrifices themselves, they are venerated as a hero who made the ultimate sacrifice whereas if they do not, they are chided. Furthermore, if the FEV is inserted, it is pronounced that they turned the entire Wasteland into a graveyard, revealing that the only humans who remained were those of the Enclave, entirely defeating the purposes of the player in the later part of the game. As a result, this question earns a “1” resulting in a score of “5” for that quest.

These charts will contribute to the phenomenological analysis, but the focus will be on two quests. First will be the main quest of *FO: NV* because it illustrates well the potential for unique player growth in terms of starting with preconceived notions based on the everyday

lifeworld and subsequent meaning-construction in the game world influencing decisions that change the outcome of the game. Unlike the *AC* “quest” of getting a villager’s picture, where good or bad relationships can be fixed over time, many of the actions in *FO* cannot be reversed or patched up. Once you have committed an action, it is done, and some things cannot be undone or tried again.

The second quest will be the side-quest “Oasis.” Part of the reason this side-quest can serve as a good part of the analysis is because this is not an early game quest, meaning at this point the player should have a decent understanding of the nuances of the wasteland, and what each decision truly renders beyond short term gratification. It is also fairly small, which provides a contrast to the brief examination of *FO: NV*’s main-quest. Both of these quests provide an ample flexibility for phenomenological analysis.

The main quest to *FO: NV* has been briefly discussed already. The game begins with the player being revived after an attempted murder. *FO* lore refers to the PC as The Courier, as that is the career of the PC. While on-route to deliver a Platinum Chip, a Vegas hustler shoots the PC in the head, steals the chip, and makes off with it. Once revived, the PC, who is weak and defenseless, gets help from the town to get the Platinum Chip back. However, trouble begins and the player is faced with a decision. Either they can help the town fight criminals who have come to destroy it, or help the criminals overrun the town. Once this decision and action have been committed, the player moves towards New Vegas, faced with similar situations on the way. Along this path the player learns about the New California Republic (NCR), the Legion, and Mr. House, a mysterious entity who wields great power over the Vegas strip. Each faction seeks to dominate the Mojave Wasteland and New Vegas, and once the player reaches New Vegas, a process begins wherein the player can side either with the NCR, which is typically seen as

“good,” the Legion, typically seen as “evil,” Mr. House which could be considered neutral, or forgo all of them and go for an independent New Vegas. As part of this main quest to secure the Mojave, the player must meet and work with a variety of other towns and smaller factions, where what they learn there might influence what direction they wish to take in the end. For example, through the course of the game it is evident that the NCR is very corrupt and fraught with difficulties, making them less desirable candidates to run the area, however, the Legion is extraordinarily brutal and the player knows that supporting them would probably hold civilization back for many years. The player is left facing many decisions, and many interactions. Meeting many of the other factions demonstrates the ability of the game to change player perceptions of face-value good and evil, and allows them to make decisions based on the meanings the game constructs as opposed to what is known outside the game.

Second will be a side-quest from *FO3* called “Oasis.” In “Oasis,” the player comes across a secluded area of the Capital Wasteland that is very much alive; it is lush, green, fertile, and seemingly healthy. The source of this is a genetically mutated tree, the result of a potted plant actually fusing with a human. The tree, which has a face in its trunk, is referred to as a deity by the cult-like people around it, however the man who is fused with the tree and speaks is named Harold. Harold asks the player to end his life, which has been absolutely miserable, being ignored and rooted to a single place for decades. Harold suggests destroying his heart, which has been taken deep into an underground cave below by the sentient roots in an effort to hide it. The player also has the option to burn Harold with a flamethrower, although it is stated that this will cause Harold great pain, whereas the destruction of the heart directly will not. Given that this act is supposed to be an act of mercy, burning Harold, while the easiest option, results in negative karma (Nukapedia 2015b). After the player leaves Harold’s area to complete the task, they are

approached by the two elders of the community. Each gives the player a vial of serum to inject into Harold; Father Birch wishes to halt Harold's growth with a sap, and Mother Laurel provides a liniment that increases the growth that will spread to all the Wasteland eventually. Neither of these options kill Harold. So in essence, the player has three choices, one with two options. As with many quests, the actions come down to an understanding of the meanings presented to and understood by the player.

Phenomenological Method

We can now move on to how we will look at these data. Phenomenological analyses, according to Abawi (2012) and Bloor and Wood (2006), have the potential pitfall of simply "revoicing" an experience as opposed to actually transferring the meaning to the reader (Bloor and Wood 2006). However, given the nature of phenomenology, these analyses should invite the reader, in a sense, that enables them to bring their own life and experiences to the analyses (Halling, 2002: 28). This allows for a more personal understanding of the analysis, in a sense that it does not seem like a sterile and cold research process, but rather a descriptive yet philosophically informed account of a concrete experience. Polkinghorne (1989) gives three points in which the phenomenological method can be useful to researchers. Mostly this is in regards to "accessibility," and the most important aspect for this work will be taking numerical data and making sense of it in a meaningful way. The benefit of this is greater "accessibility" to the research, in terms of meaningful understanding (Halling, 2002: 21). For example, despite the reader potentially not playing these games, the phenomenological analysis in this work should allow a degree of relatability because of the connections made regarding everyday life.

Sixsmith and Sixsmith (1987) attempt to reconcile empiricism with a Husserlian phenomenology. Although in a more profound sense their work is not useful here, it does shed

some light on the use of numerical figures and data charts within a basic phenomenological framework. The value lies in their ability to demonstrate how “individual meanings may be interrelated within a more general conceptual structure” (Sixsmith and Sixsmith 1987: 328), which becomes useful in setting up numerical data in the first place. Within the data, many of the values are an assumed value; taken for granted, common-sense values in-line with dominant social values. The assignment of values in the data indicate my own interpretation of “common sense” values. For example, other researchers or players may shift the values I assigned to particular jokes or actions in the charts above. Additionally, when considering games, where players can often make their own interpretation of events or have to discover the meaning of a new object, how this comes to be understood is particularly useful. Quantitative data, in our case the charts, can assist or shed light on how frequency in meaning interpretation can become intersubjective meanings (Sixsmith and Sixsmith 1987: 330). Although phenomenology is predominantly a qualitative method, an interpretive sociology, quantitative and numerical data can add an extra dimension to a phenomenological analysis.

Numerical data are the basis of how games operate in a more fundamental sense. Games are programs run by a series of scripts that can really, regarding the single-player experience, only be as interactive as they are designed to be, whether it means more or less interactive. Stefan Bohme (2013) discusses how numbers in games produce a normality, an understanding of how games compile and create statistics that can be interpreted out of the game. He describes how every action becomes part of the algorithm of a game, which may lead, depending on the game design, to changes in game experience. Bohme states that qualitative actions in games can be radically different, but are reduced by the game to quantifiable results as actions are “captured, measured, and transformed into statistics” (Bohme 2013: 137, 138). These numbers

are also qualitatively useful, as numerical data is conducive to constructing normality (Bohme 2013: 138). For example, when discussing *FO*'s karma which is a numerical range, we can see that particular actions have particular numerical values assigned to them. How the player's karma moves up and down the scale is qualitatively different than another player's, however, in the end the final result is what matters towards how NPCs react to the player. When used in conjunction with the outline Schutz provides, it becomes clearer how the numbers can become important in terms of relevance to the construction and interpretation of meaning for the player, as well as considering the game as a product of the social world, especially when we can take examples of more personal meaning such as the destruction of the town to lose karma or simply looting an abandoned home.

Schutz's theoretical work in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* provides a methodological basis from which we can draw and move with a phenomenological method. In this work, he is aiming to provide a "methodological anchor of interpretive sociology" by providing a broken down, step-by-step analysis of the "meaning-structure of the social world," via determining "the precise nature of the *phenomenon of meaning*" (Schutz 1932: 13). This includes everything discussed in the Schutz section of chapter 4. An additional concept to this method that will be Schutz's *finite provinces of meaning*. The method of definition has already been described here, with the six criteria for identifying a province of meaning (1945: 232, 233) and six criteria for understanding a "cognitive style" (1945: 230, 231). As we follow Schutz's method in the analysis, *finite provinces of meaning* will appear at the end because they are extensions of the social world, with differing degrees of complexity and connection to the everyday world, the structures of which must be understood first if provinces of meaning are to be meaningful understood.

Now that the data of choice have been presented and outlined, we can bring together the theoretical ideas to clearly show the connection the player has with the game that goes beyond immersion, demonstrating a true continuity in terms of Being, as we examine the fundamental ways in which we learn how meaning is constructed in a world that is made before us, how we may interpret this world and act upon it, how we interact with other beings in this world and how they react to us, and how these things coincide with the way we do things in everyday life.

Chapter 6: Experiencing Social Structures of the Game World

We may now begin the analysis of the data. This analysis will take the three branches of theory outlined thus far and bind them together. We will also supplement the analysis with some of the conclusions reached by others where applicable. Throughout the theory section we have examined examples and applications of each idea on their own, providing a framework within which we can better understand the synthesis.

Consciousness, Spatiality and Time Duration: Locating the Self in the Game

Let us begin with the fundamentals. Following Schutz's phenomenological method, we have to first establish the phenomenological connection of our Being with the game itself before we analyze how we make and interpret meaning out of them. In the theory section we have discussed how Schutz and Merleau-Ponty's ideas can enable us to conceptualize our Being as unified within the game. To prevent too much repetition, some aspects will be less fully covered at this time, and made more evident when we come to the analysis of the social reality.

We understand that we inhabit the game world. What I am proposing here that there is a unity between the player and PC, regardless of conscious "identification" or association tendency. Unlike Merleau-Ponty's idea of seeing one's self in a mirror, we have an implicit understanding that on the screen before us is a particular view of our self in physically/visually loose sense. This understanding is that it is not our self or body, but at the same time it is; as Merleau-Ponty suggests, our Being is not simply what of our selves is explicit (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 310). Game dialogue or tutorials identify this fact; although these instances may be considered as breaking "immersion," they actually reinforce our phenomenological connection. The idea that we are told how to interact with the space before us is no different than being told

how to properly play a sport. Certain actions or commands have certain effects, whether or not the results occur in a “virtual” space, in Merleau-Ponty’s sense of the word virtual.

Further, we can see that our self is operating in a game through the idea that a player has things *to do* in a game world. The PC does not do anything on their own. The world will keep moving around them, time will continue flowing, but as Merleau-Ponty, our “position” or location of phenomenological Being is “defined by its task and situation” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261). We must consult our self, and construct a plan of action to complete a task, just as we would sketch out or “phantasize” an Act in the everyday lifeworld (Schutz 1932: 61). In Schutz’s terms, the game provides a resistance to the player’s action, to prevent the player from changing the world, “requiring effort to overcome” and complete the task (Schutz 1945: 227). As we will see later on, as we construct a social world, where our intentionality is drawn to is independent of the type of space we are in, we simply adapt to the situation at hand to complete tasks.

Let us consider spatiality and perceiving the game world. These examples give us an indicator of how we come to understand our body in a virtual space, virtual in Merleau-Ponty’s sense of the word (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 261). It also provides us with an excellent model of Schutz’s adaptation of Husserl’s “I can do it again” motive (Schutz 1945: 224-5). The game teaches us as a player how to interact with the space. It is common for games in their early stages to give explicit instructions to the player directly rather than the character, whether this is in a tutorial stage, conversation with a NPC, or icons that appear on the screen. This can be considered part of the “adjustment” to a new world. It can be overt or subtle, with combinations of these being more subtle as a technique of design for “immersion.”

We can find examples of overt and subtle techniques from *AC* and *FO*. In *AC: NL* there are instances where a villager suggests looking up into the sky by “pressing UP on the d-pad,”

including a figure of the d-pad (directional pad) in the text itself. The villager may then admit to not knowing what a d-pad is or why they gave that advice, which is the game acknowledging they are speaking directly to the player, not necessarily to the avatar of the player. In the early stage of *FO: NV* following the character creation, the player is introduced to Sunny Smiles, who gives the player their first set of weapon equipment. As she gives instructions to the player, indicators appear on the screen that tell the player what buttons to press or how to do something. For example, when Sunny demonstrates how to aim and fire a gun, she will say to aim at the bottles, but in the top corner of the screen, button indicators tell the player what to press. In both scenarios, we have examples of learning how to navigate the virtual space we are currently inhabiting. We also see how we are given tools to help construct projects of action, and consistently taught things we need to be able to do repetitively.

If we are taught how to operate in a game space, this means we can also consider consciousness and reflection, again building on the “I can do it again” idea. The game environment is a new one; knowing what to do is not yet engrained in our bodily knowledge. The player must figure it out first by reflecting on what has previously happened and what they have learned before they move on. This provides an excellent opportunity to examine the development of the habitus as well as examine the reflection in the stream of consciousness, particularly regarding acts. Player restarts (usually after death) are a great example. In many games, progress can only really be made on a trial-and-error basis. Through trial-and-error, the player becomes “more correct” in their action, in Bourdieu’s terms (Bourdieu 2000: 138). Reflection comes as the player looks back at what happened and thinks about what worked, what did not, and how the act can be improved, following Schutz’s principles (Schutz 1932: 90; 1982: 48). *FO* offers this chance quite often, as difficult situations may require multiple tries before succeeding. Areas and

scenarios later in the game will often require just the same basic techniques from the beginning. Eventually these “virtual” spaces become second-nature to navigate.

Although these aspects were only briefly examined, we can see that our experiencing body and stream of consciousness are unified or connected with the game as we play it. However, these aspects will become more evident as we look at more complex forms of interacting with the games. We will first move on towards meaning structures and the construction of meaning within games.

Finding Meaning in a Game: Structures and Constructions of Meaning

Now that we have seen how the game acts as an extension of space and enables a continuity of Being for the player, we can move on to look at how meaning is constructed for the player and how the player may interpret these meanings. This section will use the two data tables for the basis of analysis.

After identifying basic connectivity with the game, the player will immediately attempt to understand what is being presented before them. Usually this interpretation is first based on previous stocks of knowledge, whether this means drawing on previous game knowledge where relevant, such as particular movement techniques, or everyday life experience, such as understanding emotion, if there is nothing else to go by. For example, when playing *AC*, given that it is a game that reinforces meaning construction or a primary form of socialization as opposed to *FO*'s focus on acting upon interpretation of meaning, it is more likely for the player to draw on their learned lessons of the everyday world to first negotiate the game. It is worth noting that it is impossible for the player to bracket, in a Husserlian way, their everyday life experience entirely when playing a game, especially for the first time.

What I am not trying to say here is that games simply provide a parallel or mimicked everyday lifeworld. They are a social product of that world, and inevitably many things will be similar or the same, such as signs or expressions which allow for greater or more meaningful engagement with the player because these signs or expressions are known and provide a starting place. This is similar Bourdieu's notion that the habitus looks for a comfort zone to begin interpreting unfamiliar situations in (Bourdieu 1993: 59-60). We see an action committed, and know what it is, and bestow meaning upon it, leading to a reaction. The player is not being immersed so much as adapting to the situation. This is a reason why using "immersion" as a description of this kind of engagement does not work.

We will start with the *AC* gesture/emotion chart. Throughout *AC*, all characters use these various gestures to make their dialogue more meaningful for the player. Not having any sort of emotional change or visible reactions in the dialogue would take away considerably from the experience of the game. The gestures are part of intentional acts; they are supposed to reinforce or convey a point beyond what reading words on a screen can do. These gestures are also supposed to be intersubjective; they are used quite often and the player is supposed to be able to understand them fluently.

We should examine the numbers first. For clarity, rather than a statistical breakdown, the numbers are more or less meant to contextualize the analysis to follow. There are a total of forty gestures/emotions programmed into the game. Based on the numbers, a strong majority of them are exactly the same as one would expect to see them in everyday lifeworld contexts and actions, as well as responses. If we break the numbers down, twenty-three out of forty scored a 6, meaning understanding these gestures requires no extra help. If we categorized the gestures that scored either 4 or 5, that adds an additional thirteen, bringing the "very obvious" total to thirty-

six. Clearly *AC* relies on the player having an implicit understanding that such gestures and emotions are either the same or very close to the everyday lifeworld to enable the game to be a more meaningful social world for the player to engage in without having to relearn these things. As mentioned, these gestures carry particular meanings, understood by the player, indicating existing structures of meaning in the game.

Schutz notes that in a social world the meaning-context is already there for a particular sign (1932: 132), the sign in this case being the gesture. With some of the lower scoring gestures, such as “Flourish,” the meaning is there, but the player may not know precisely what it is yet, just a vague idea. When a gesture is made, it is up to the player to interpret it. This interpretation is important because contexts matter where the gesture is made. For example, when being issued a challenge by a villager, a contest of some sort, they may make the “outrage” emotion. However, it is not meant to display anger, rather a kind of intensity on the part of the villager for the contest. Schutz makes clear that signs can be used in various contexts and should not be strictly limited to their objective meaning, as “the structure of the social world is by no means homogenous” (Schutz 1932: 132). By playing and engaging with the social world of *AC*, the unfamiliar gestures will eventually become known, recognized, and interpreted more correctly.

This increasing recognition comes to impact the interaction between the player and the villagers. Let us take the simple example of a greeting. In *AC* the player has the ability to wave/greet other villagers outside of common conversation. As the player becomes more familiar with other villagers, in either a positive or negative sense, the reaction to the wave changes. In a neutral relationship or if the player has not met the villager, the wave is met with a nod of acknowledgement. If in a positive relationship, the returning wave may be enthusiastic with an obvious smile. In a negative relationship, the villager may turn their head away

accompanied by the “Cold Wind” expression to snub the player. In each case, there is a meaning bestowed upon the greeting given by the player, and a meaning in the response given back to the player.

We can find another example of understanding meaning. When the player sees two of the villagers engaged in conversation, they see the various emotions being displayed. The player can choose to enter the conversation, but they can get a sense of what may be going on. For example, a villager may display the “sadness” or “outraged” emotion during the conversation with another villager, and after the conversation they may remain angry, sad, or really happy. These are what Schutz would call *expressive acts*, acts which have a meaning for the person expressing them as well as a purpose of being interpreted by the receiver (Schutz 1932: 117).

Consider the following conversations between two villagers.

Conversation between Tank and Rocco:

Tank: Dude, Rocco! What’s wrong with your face, bro?” (Surprise) Bro, you are lookin’ even crankier than usual, *catchphrase!*” (Worry)

Rocco: It’s that insurance salesman, Lyle! That slimy-palmed sleazemonger won’t leave me alone! He starts chasing me around town every time he sees me, *catchphrase!*

Tank: “DUDE, Rocco! You’re talkin’ about that guy with the bar code!” (Outrage)

“Y’know, a bar code? A comb-over? *Catchphrase!*” (Anger)

Rocco: “Yeah, *catchphrase!*” (Aggravation) “I hope that guy takes a long walk into a pitfall!”

Conversation between Tank and Cube.

Tank: “Hey Cube, do you like tank tops or t-shirts?” (Curiosity)

Cube: (Surprise) “Me? I’m more of a no-shirt-necessary kind of guy, *catchphrase!*” (Love)

Tank: (Surprise) “Hwhat?! So what soaks up all your workout sweat, *catchphrase?*”

Cube: “Sweat?” (Glee) “I don’t sweat. I chill. That’s what I’m good at. You know... chillin’.”

Tank: (Shock) “You don’t sweat?! Bro, are you some kind of alien, *catchphrase!*” (Distress) “Cause if you are, I’m gonna be forced to crush you like a soda can!”

Although the player is not involved in these conversations, the emotions displayed are understood by the player. This follows Schutz’s example where he describes how action A by

person X, observed by friend F and sociologist S, are both interpreted on the basis of experience of the world and person X (Schutz 1932: 31-2). The player, as an onlooker in these conversations, sees the emotions/gestures being displayed by each participant interacting and will be able to make more meaning out of them based on their experience of the two villagers.

Having an understanding of gestures/emotions displayed in the game is part of the lived experience of the game. The player becomes more familiar with various characters, and the various emotions displayed along with the conversations become more and more understood as the player's We-relationship grows with them. There is a clear phenomenological connection here as the player's experience of the villagers grows, so too does their stock of knowledge, understanding of meaning, and overall a more meaningfully understood game world.

Moving on, while the *AC* charts provides us with basic meaning regarding gestures or emotions, the *FO* charts give us a more complex construction of meaning based on more complex actions or completed Acts. The karma change is an end result of an irrevocable action, whereas the gesture or emotion chart is part of an ongoing interaction in a "face-to-face" situation with other characters, whether they be NPCs or human.

We will have a brief examination of these numbers as well, though the results are very similar. Again what we are seeing is the use of everyday lifeworld understandings to promote connectivity with the player, a connection which demands little adaptation from their established dispositions in terms of conduct. With twenty instances of karma change, the first ten being Act related while the second set action related, every single karma change was predictable on the basis of the everyday lifeworld and had a predictable in-game effect. Most of the results indicate a strong connection to everyday lifeworld understandings of the results of action.

In the “Individual Act” chart, we can see how immediate or instant actions as opposed to complex Acts have an impact. Something as simple as giving pure water to a beggar is a karma rewarding action, and is obviously seen as such. The meaning of such an action is programmed into the game world to do so. But it is also an action that the player would understand. Being able to understand and negotiate these meanings is important for making the game more meaningful, but also beneficial for deciding what routes the player wishes to take. They are not obligated to conform to a particular playstyle, it can be rather dynamic. For instance, if a player wishes to do an “evil” play-through by committing all sorts of karma loss acts, they need to understand what precisely constitutes right and wrong. It will also require a different adaptation of the habitus. It exhibits an understanding that there is a social world present in *FO*, one that must be observed in some way to make sense of action.

Acts or actions that provide positive karma are recognized in the *FO* world, and likewise with negative. As Schutz says, the world is given to us all, and acts committed in it have meaning for everyone in it (Schutz 1932: 32). As the player gives water to the beggars, frees captives or slaves, and donates to charity, the actions not only have an effect on those the player is immediately interacting with, but also the players themselves and other ideal types, such as mercenary groups, that are neither seen nor heard at the time. This only becomes known as eventually a group will show up stating there is a contract on the player’s head, saying “Well, now... If it isn’t the little saint from the vault. We’ve been looking for you. Someone’s put quite a price on your head” (Nukapedia 2015a). Clearly the actions have meaning in the game world, meaning that varies for different NPCs and factions, indicating a more complex social world which we will look at later.

The Acts and actions enable an exchange of various kinds of capital. A driving force of the game world is the acquisition of money, which is bottle-caps in this world, and material goods. In a large majority of the quests or actions the player receives either caps or items as a reward. In the case of the action of “Freeing Wasteland Captives,” after being freed, the captives will offer a reward. However, if the player does not take the material reward (economic capital) symbolically offered, they gain an extra 25 karma point (Nukapedia 2015c). Here is an example of an interaction with a captive (Nukapedia 2015e).

Captive: “My... thank you! Thank you so much! I thought I was dead for sure! Here, I managed to hide these supplies before they tied me up. You take them, it's the best I can do to thank you...”

At this point the player can choose whether or not to take the offering. I opted for the “No, you’ll need it more than I do” response.

Captive: “Okay... if you say so. I can't thank you enough, stranger.”

Here then we have an exchange of capital, but also meaning creation. As mentioned, committing particular acts influences the game world in particular ways, whether this means mercenaries are more inclined to hunt the player down or being recognized by other NPCs for being a good person.

This leads to one more aspect in the capital exchange. With the symbolic capital exchange comes a social capital exchange as well. Karma and reputation have an influence on who the player has access to for partners, as well as who they can talk to in order to undertake particular quests or actions (Nukapedia 2015c). For example, if the player has good karma, they will not be able to get the NPC Jericho as their companion, who remarks that the player is too much of a “goody two-shoes” for him. Similarly, if the player has bad karma, they will not be able to acquire a companion like Fawkes, who is arguably one of the strongest NPCs in the entire game. When approached for being a companion, Fawkes will lament the player’s actions, saying

“My friend, I am saddened to hear that you have turned away from a noble path. Return to me when you have learned to take the right action, and I will walk with you” (Nukapedia 2014). Clearly then the player’s actions and Acts are not isolated incidents; they do have an impact on the social world of the game and those who inhabit it.

In *FO: NV* symbolic exchange is even more relevant, as the player earns symbolic credit with various factions, in the end-game scenario that faction will come fight on the player’s behalf. We will see this more when we look at the main quest of *FO: NV* later on, but suffice to say at this point there is a correlation between the meaningful actions or Acts of the player and the capital exchange within the games that is built on existing meaning structures in the game world.

In the end, both sets of charts demonstrate that there is an existing social world in these games, and there are meanings that the player will either come to understand throughout experiencing the game world, and can easily enter this world through adaptation in their dispositions and use of pre-existing knowledge. This indicates a phenomenological connection as well as going beyond ideas of “immersion,” and this will be further demonstrated below.

Action and Meaning: The “Oasis” Quest

After examining the construction of meaning through the analysis of the charts, we can now move towards a more detailed example of how the player might act upon these meanings and interpret them from other players or NPCs. For this analysis, we will look at the construction of a completed Act and meaning through the “Oasis” quest in *FO3*. We have seen the quest “Oasis” in the chart concerning meaning as a result of action. We will now analyze this more in-depth to get a sense of how meaning is made out of the completion of a quest. Although we did not look specifically at the “Quest” portion of the chart in the last section, the principle of what will be said here is applicable to the quests listed, and this will be a more detailed analysis.

As mentioned before, “Oasis” is not a beginning area quest. Providing the player sticks to the main quest path, the location of Oasis itself is quite far out of the way. Therefore at this point, a player should be familiar with many traits of the *FO* world, in terms of structures of meaning. They should also at this point be viewing quests in a pragmatic way, in terms of how to make the most out of a quest, including forms of capital and how this quest might affect their place in the field of the game world.

In a “quest” we have a complete Act we can examine from start to finish. Let us revisit what we have said about constructing a completed Act. Person X posits an objective meaning for person Y to interpret, who responds to this based on previous knowledge and interpretation of person X. Harold posits to the player that he wishes to die because life has become unbearable.

Harold: “I've been literally rooted to this spot thanks to Bob²² for maybe twenty or thirty years... I can't even remember anymore. Can you imagine being stuck in one place for that long not being able to eat or to read or to sleep or anything? In the meantime, I have these Treeminders bothering me every day about things I don't even care about. I can't stand it anymore.”²³

If the player tries to dissuade Harold from this path, he is adamant about the situation.

Harold: “I've tried to stay happy, really I have. Bloomseer Poplar thinks I'll live for hundreds of years... maybe even more! Can you imagine THAT? Stuck here for centuries? I can't do it, I just want to be alone. Just me and Bob until the end. When I saw you coming towards Oasis, I thought I felt that you'd understand me. I guess I was wrong.”

The player responds to this based on their experience and interpretation of Harold. Although Harold laments his situation and makes his request, the player will never precisely understand the meaning behind his words, but rather understand very closely. As Schutz says, this is because the meaning behind the words are intersubjective, meaning that, with a “reflective analysis,” we

²² To clarify, Harold refers to the tree that took over him as Bob or Herbert.

²³ All *Fallout* character text files can be found on Nukapedia. Text files were examined to check alternative or unavailable messages in conjunction with the text seen in the play-through.

can think of ourselves in Harold's position (Schutz 1932: 115). Thus, the player should easily be able to understand why Harold wants to die. When agreeing to his request, Harold's reaction reaffirms this.

Harold: "You will? Oh! You've made us so happy! Isn't that right Bob?"

The paths the player can take have already been outlined. Briefly surmised, the player can either follow Harold's request, or undertake Tree Father Birch's request to halt Harold's growth to preserve the Oasis, or follow Leaf Mother Laurel's request to enable Harold to spread throughout the Wasteland. What we can now do is examine a project of action. The player will think about what the end gain of the quest will be. This is enacting Schutz's *modo future exacti*, as now with a set goal, the player constructs in their head how they will go about completing the quest. As previously discussed, the ego that has developed over time influences the decision to choose a particular project of action (Schutz 1932: 68). "Oasis" presents the player with an easy way out of the quest, which is to burn Harold alive. They could also forgo doing the quest entirely and simply leave the area. To otherwise complete the quest requires going through a series of caves, which the player would assume, correctly, are filled with dangerous enemies. From here, we can sketch out the construction of an Act.

First we can examine the player's path choice in terms of Schutz's "in-order-to motive" and "because motive" as well as tie into Bourdieu's habitus. The player decides their path "because" of their understanding of the game world, and "in order to" complete the quest as decided, a series of steps must be followed. At this point, the player will be familiar with the steps of completing a quest, and not really have to think about it. As Bourdieu suggests, going beyond Schutz, with more experience we become "more correct" in our actions, having to think less about them (Bourdieu 2000:138). For our example in "Oasis," the cave system may be daunting to a newer player, or a lower level player. However, as noted, the enemies encountered

should not be really anything new, and the player should be able to handle the situation fairly easily. Choosing to complete the quest in itself is an “in order to” motive, as the end goal for most players is to improve their position through experience points or acquiring extra perks and items. When considering what is in it for them, Harold informs the player that there are a bunch of “nifty gizmos” in the cave system that they can take (Nukapedia 2015b). The decision then is made to go through with the quest.

This leads to the projection of an intentional act. To restate, the projection of an act is separate from the act, in that it is a “phantasizing” or construction of a possible act (Schutz 1932: 59). The project is also reflective thought (Schutz 1932: 61); the player is considering what has happened in quests in the past to think of what may come in this quest and how to overcome potential obstacles. In the natural attitude, the pragmatic goal of the act is set, (Schutz 1932: 62; 1945: 227-8), meaning the player has a definite desired outcome of this quest, and there are concrete steps that the player must take, given in example by Schutz as steps or means M_1 , M_2 , and M_3 to meet goal G (Schutz 1932: 61).

Next comes the actual action taken. After the player leaves the area, they must talk to the other inhabitants of Oasis, the Treeminders, for information and access to the subterranean caves where Harold’s heart is. After receiving information, the optional paths from Birch and Laurel, and the key to the caves, the player’s “ M_1 ” is completed. Next comes the cave journey to Harold’s heart. The cave segment features some enemies that would be considered tough for lower level players and a variety of loot. Getting through this would be the completion of “ M_2 .” At the end of the cave lies Harold’s heart, and here the player makes a decision for the three choices. Making the choice and exiting the cave is the completion of “ M_3 ” which altogether reaches the end goal “ G .”

We now have the completed Act. In this quest, I chose to honour Harold's request instead of the two leaders of the Oasis because this is what I understood to be more merciful in the cruel world of *FO*. We negotiate the meanings presented in the game based upon our own understanding that has been ingrained in our consciousness. I viewed Birch's request as selfish and controlling while Laurel's request is not great either because of the nature of Harold's mutation. Although these two options had idealistic virtues at play, I felt they robbed Harold of agency, which in my understanding is one of the most important aspects of humanity.

As the Act has been completed, this means the quest has been completed as well. The completed Act provides a "unity" to the rest of the actions committed in the quest (Schutz 1932: 75), as well as a unity with the self, given that the quest is a "situation" demanding action from the player, which is unified with the self through action and situations (Merleau-Ponty 1945). Thus this Act has created a meaning-context, and can be referred to in the game world or reflected upon in the stream consciousness in a personal sense, and contributes to the personal history of the player and their lived experience, as well as impacting the game world and the NPCs that inhabit it.

The Development of a We-relationship: The AC Picture Quest

We have just examined in detail how a completed Act creates a meaning-context in the world. Before we examine the social world proper, we will examine another complex form of action, being interaction with an Other. At this point we will examine the "quest" of acquiring a villager's picture, through the development of a We-relationship.

One may think that building a "relationship" with a NPC is not real, or that is it a false relationship with absolutely no meaning. However, I would suggest that it can be like many other types of We-relationships, and it is really up to the player to make of it what they will. Daviault

(2013) loosely demonstrates that there is a certain degree of “symbiosis” between the player and NPCs, but again we can understand this complex relationship better through Schutz’s phenomenology. What we have here is a growth of a character, moving from the world of contemporaries to the world of consociates. The world of contemporaries consists mainly of ideal types (Schutz 1932: 181), and the world of consociates, where we find “concrete” We-relationships, which are face-to-face and direct, is more intimate and known (Schutz 1932: 163).

The ideal type serves as the “interpretive schemes” for the social world, meaning they are part of the stocks of knowledge we rely on for the world (Schutz 1932: 185). *AC* demonstrates the ability for players to develop a relationship with the actors through “face-to-face” interaction that transcends ideal type or stock-type NPCs. Although the villagers begin as stock types, all with somewhat predictable dialogue based on their scripted personalities, as the quest for their picture begins, they become less stereotypical.

We should begin with the world of contemporaries and some ideal types to demonstrate how a NPC is pulled out of the world of contemporaries into the world of consociates. For example, drawing from the non-villager characters, it is not likely for the player to expect them to be anything more than ideal types, such as the aforementioned Blathers, the museum curator. Another example would be Pete the mailman. Schutz’s preferred example of the ideal type is the mailman, so this provides a great parallel. In *AC* mail is delivered daily, but player never actually sees the mail getting delivered, and only occasionally gets to see Pete roaming around the town. If the player plays infrequently, there is a good chance they will not know who delivers the mail, let alone meet him. Players do not get to know Pete; in interaction, he does not speak of things outside of his job. With both Pete and Blathers, as Schutz says, “we do not know them personally, and never expect to” rather we just expect them to play a function in this social

world, and “only as bearers of these functions do they have any relevance” in the game and for the player (Schutz 1932: 184-5).

With the villagers, it is different because the player will see them frequently, and has the opportunity to get to know them easily. The player simply has to choose who they wish to interact with. However, without interacting with the villagers, they are an ideal type. The player will see them out and about, doing things they would expect the villagers to do, or even do themselves, including fishing, visiting stores, or utilizing outdoor equipment such as benches. In the “quest” of attaining a villager’s picture, a social relationship has to be made, a “friendship.” The player has to pull the villager from the World of Contemporaries to that of Consociates. Eventually, as the player becomes more familiar with a villager and the anonymity less, they receive letters from them, are given nicknames, asked favours, have visits, and occasionally given gifts. When the villager sees the player, they will actively approach them to seek conversation. If the player ignores a villager, the villager will also ignore the player and go about their business. As expected, villagers who have not been interacted with remain an ideal-type; they send no letters and make no interaction with the player, even when they leave the town for good. However, once the player has created a We-relationship and drawn the villager into the World of Consociates, they become a Thou which the player can orient to (Schutz 1932: 163-4).

In interaction, we are experiencing the villager’s experience of us. Although Schutz suggests that we have to necessarily reflect whenever we observe an Other to grasp their lived experience (Schutz 1932: 102), again following Bourdieu’s idea of inscribed knowledge or practiced knowledge where we do not need to reflect, we can see the villager’s living their lives in the town. The player can observe them, for as they exist as an Other, the player lives in simultaneity with them, in Schutz’s terms (Schutz 1932: 102). As the player observes and gains

experience of them, they will have a pretty good idea of what the villager might do in town in terms of action, or what they might want when they interact with the player.

When the player begins to interact with a villager, the interaction slowly becomes more meaningful over time. As the We-relationship develops, the villager dialogue becomes less associated with their designated stock-type. They begin to ask favours, those mentioned above.

The following are quotes from a “lazy” type villager. First was the introduction:

Cube: (Sleepy) “Yawwwn... Oh man, I am really not good at waking up early, *catchphrase*.” (Sadness). “But I really do want to eat breakfast, so I have to try to wake up as best I can...” (Sadness). “I’m Cube. I’d be happy to have you for breakfast sometime!”

After talking with Cube a few more times, he was still pretty stock.

Cube: Allen, do you have a special place? You know, like a special place where you can take mid-day naps when you’re tired? Huh? Oh, me? Well, when you’re out, sometimes I like to snooze on your floor!” (Happiness)

Eventually he changed a bit and challenged me to a fishing contest.

Cube: It seems to me that fish have similar faces. Especially the sea bass! Talk about a familiar face. (Agreement) “Yeah...” (Idea) “Wow! Talking about sea bass has given me a great idea! Um... Wanna see who can be the first to nab a sea bass?” (Curiosity)

Completing this task is just another Act. As we have already seen, there are steps to follow, and results to be had, as well as meaning in the Act itself. By completing the Act, the villager’s “faith” or friendship with the player grows. Although the characters do retain the essence of their stock type, the point here is that the conversation does eventually evolve beyond that.

Another example of a growing We-relationship is the villager bestowing a nickname on the player. Newer villagers that enter the town learn of it, and as the We-relationship begins to grow, these newer villagers draw on this knowledge. This indicates that the nickname already has a meaning associated with it, it exists as meaning in a social world. Here is an example:

Yuka: “So, Allen, I’ve heard that some people call you “*nickname*.”²⁴ I think it’s pretty great. Can I call you that too? It’s so perfect for you!”

The choices the player gets are “Of course!” or “No way.” After selecting the affirmative, the villager is visibly pleased.

Yuka: (surprise) “Really? It’s OK? Then from now on, you’ll be “*nickname*” to me too!”
(happiness)

After having seen the analysis of meaning in gestures/emotion, we can see that the villager is expressing a genuine happiness, as though they are actively aware the relationship is growing stronger, the player and villager “growing older together” in Schutz’s terms.

We can also find examples of the “indirect” We-relationship. The indirect We-relationship is part of the world of contemporaries, yet connected to the world of consociates. The indirect We-relationship is a reference to the past (1932: 182), where we are not experiencing a Thou directly in a face-to-face “concrete” situation. The player can receive letters, randomly or not, but some indicate an act of the past. The following two examples are instances where I gave a sick villager medicine, and another when I rated a villager’s home.

Letter from Freya:

You saved me, Allen!

I’m so grateful to you! In my moment of such déclassé weakness, you gave me that miracle medicine. I’m much better now, so let me thank you with this present.

Full recovered Freya

Letter from Melba:

To the classy Allen,

Your saying you liked my home has really inspired me to keep improving it! I’m so excited by the possibilities. Please accept this token of my thanks.

Your friend, Melba

²⁴ The nickname is randomly generated. Using *nickname* indicates the space where the generated name would be, no matter what it is.

Not only is this an indication of the growth of a relationship and the moving away of an ideal-type villager, but it is also a meaningful action. The player can reply to these letters, and receive further responses, which may or may not contain gifts (Nookpedia 2015a).

The villagers will also start to randomly give gifts to the player if there is a budding friendship. This can happen either through the mail or if the villager walks up to the player to interact with them.

Carmen: “Heya, Allen! Didn’t I hear you say you wanted a(n) *item*? Well, here you go. I found one for you, *catchphrase*.” (Happiness) “Think of it as proof of our friendship. You’re always so nice to me, and I want to thank you. If you don’t still need it, go ahead and throw it away or something, *catchphrase*!”

Letter from Melba

A surprise for Allen!

I know this is out of the blue, but the other day I found the perfect present for you. This time I’m confident you’ll like it. Really confident! ...I kept the receipt. Let me know.

Hopefully yours, Melba.

Both of these actions have meaning assigned to them to be interpreted by the player. The player should recognize that a friendship is growing, and that in face-to-face interaction with these villagers, the We-relationship is more meaningful. Furthermore, when we consider this picture acquisition as a quest, we can view these events as steps towards that completed act; we can refer back to the step-by-step project we saw in the “Oasis” analysis and draw similar conclusions here.

We have looked at this example already in the analysis of the chart, but again the greeting gesture with another villager is important since it is based on the relationship. This is an example of a concrete We-relationship interaction. In this instance, waving at Tank, a villager with a good relationship, resulted in a return wave, smile, and positive chime. Waving at a Cube resulted in a

nod of acknowledgement, but nothing more, since he was new villager, and thus the friendship had not developed yet. On the other hand, Pinky, with whom there was a negative relationship, returned the wave with a head-turn away and a “cold-wind” gesture in an obvious snub. What we can take away from this, other than an execution of meaning as previously discussed, is Schutz’s idea of the lived experience of an Other. The player’s experience of a villager, in a face-to-face setting, will also be the villager’s experience of the player as well (Schutz 1932: 106).

Experience of the Other, whether it is their actions or interaction, forms the We-relationship either negatively or positively.

In the event that the player does not play for a long period of time, or speak to the villager they have built a friendship with, the villager will take note, remarking on the absence or lack of interaction directly. The following are some examples of conversation where the villager recognizes the player’s absence.

Peanut: “Hey there! My name is Peanut. Nice to meet you! Wait a minute! Is that you, Allen? Why haven’t I seen you around, *catchphrase*? (Distress) Were you sick in bed? ...No, of course not. Well, glad to see you looking so peppy!” (Smile)

Pudge: “How many weeks has it been since we last saw each other? Eight? Way too long! You haven’t changed a bit! People have been telling me that I’ve grown a lot, but for you, time seems to stand still.... It’s kind of creepy, really” (Distress)

Freya: “Oh, we’re on speaking terms again, I see? It’s been 1 week. So I just assumed we were in a fight. Well, I’m glad to hear everything is OK. *Catchphrase*, it’s good to talk to you again!”

Acknowledging the playtime of the player may also reinforce awareness of time flow, as the player and the villagers “grow older together.” This also works with the player’s birthday. The most befriended villager will greet the player at their house on the birthday, and they will receive letters from villagers they are good friends with. For example, in *AC: WW*, the villager Tank was waiting outside the door to my home.

Tank: “Yo! *nickname*! Happy Birthday!” (Happiness) “Anyways, here’s a gift I got for you. Do you like it?”

The player has a choice between “So happy” or “Not really.” I selected “So happy.”

Tank: (Surprise) “That’s awesome! I just grabbed something from the store, I’m glad you like it! We will always be the burliest of buds!” (Happiness)

I also received a letter from the villager Drift, whom I had also befriended.

Letter from Drift

You da (hu)man, Allen,

I may be forgetful, but I didn’t forget my buddy’s BIRTHDAY! Happy day, yo! Lift somethin’ for me!

Your bud, Drift

In AC: NL, Freya was waiting at my home.

Freya: “I am here on important and serious business, the likes of which I cannot explain to you.” (Mischief). “Come with me!”

After arriving at Freya’s house, there were other befriended villagers inside to wish me a happy birthday.

Freya: “Happy birthday! Surprised? We’ve been planning this for a while now.” (Glee)
Of course, the player’s birthday is programmed into the game before they start; they do not actually tell the villager when their birthday is, however, villagers with neutral or negative relationships will not acknowledge the player’s birthday at all.

When a villager leaves town, we also see evidence of the we-relationship in another “indirect” way through the letters the player receives when the villager goes. If the villager was ignored completely, the player will not even receive a letter acknowledging they left. They remain an ideal type. If the villager was not entirely ignored, but had a weak relationship, the letter was fairly typical. The following is an example of a weak friendship departing letter.

Letter from villager Chadder:

Sweet sorrow, Allen,

By the time you read this letter, I'll have already moved far, far away. This farewell leads to a new challenge for me. I hope you'll support me from afar!

Moving forward, Chadder.

I knew very little about this villager and only interacted with him a few times, usually out of necessity, for example delivering a package to him for another villager. However, the following is an example of a stronger friendship.

Letter from Alice

Farewell, Allen,

It's time to say good-bye. I shed a few tears as all the memories of my time here came rushing back to me. You've been such a good friend... I won't forget you!

Take care, Alice

There is a clear difference between the two. Most important is the acknowledgement of the We-relationship itself. The fact that the "lived" experience of the player comes to bear a part on the departure letter indicates that there is a certain amount of dynamic game-play involved that relies on the player interacting with the villagers.

Eventually, after considerable time, the "quest" will come to a close and the player will attain the picture. The giving of a picture is meant to convey a meaning of true friendship. As an elusive item in the game, difficult to acquire and non-re-purchasable in case of losing it, the player understands it as a symbolic token and unique item, much like photographs in the everyday world. Photos carry a certain amount of symbolic capital, which is represented in their Happy Room Academy point designation, being one of the highest scoring individual items in the game. The asking and completion of tasks is a passing back and forth of symbolic capital, in sense. If we think back to the karma chart for *FO* and the brief discussion of capital exchange, this is different only in the degree of seriousness of capital exchange, which matches the

seriousness of the game world itself. Receiving the picture is the end of a series of exchanges and the height of the We-relationship and lived experience of the villager.

There are two ways of actually receiving the picture. First is receiving it as a reward for completing a task. This is most common way to receive it. Second is to receive it in mail when the villager moves away from the town. In both cases it is clear that it is supposed to be a symbolic exchange that carries meaning, in particular the growth of a friendship. Let us look at an example of each. The first example will be a reward type. In this case, the villager Rosie requested an ocean fish of any kind. In the We-relationship we come to understand the Other more based on our experience of them (Schutz 1932: 106). For example, although I was asked to get any ocean fish, I know that the rarer the fish, the more appreciated it will be. I caught a shark, which is one of the rarest river fish, to give.

Rosie: (Surprise) “Unbelievable! Did you really catch a shark just for little old me?”
(Glee) “What a rare treat! I can’t WAIT to tell everyone about this amazing gift, Allen!”
(Happy) “I can’t even begin to give you something just as nice. But maybe this will do the trick!”
(Delight) “I kinda figured you would really like Rosie’s Pic! You are, like, my hero.”

We have here a completed Act with a posited meaning. The villager displayed much gratitude in receiving this item, and with the gestures/emotions displayed it was quite clear that this was meant to be conveyed as a symbolic exchange.

The second example is a mail reception. I could not convince a villager, Purr1, to stay in town and let someone else leave instead. On the day of the departure, I received the following letter with the picture attached.

Letter from villager Purr1:

Listen to me, Allen,

No matter where I am, you’ll always be one my dearest friends. I hope our paths will cross again one day, but until then, I entrust this picture of myself to you

Farewell! From Purrl.

Again, we see just as clearly that it is meant to be a symbolic exchange. The We-relationship is built to the fullest in this friendship and the picture is tangible proof of it.

We have just analyzed how the player can develop a We-relationship with a NPC in a game. This contributes as a piece to the whole experience described thus far, following the phenomenological method laid out by Schutz and described here earlier. Now that we have seen how a “face-to-face” interaction between the player and other characters can be seen as a We-relationship, let us further elaborate on the construction of the social world.

The Structure of the Game World: the Worlds of *Fallout: New Vegas*

We have now established that there is directly experienced social reality at play. What we have mostly been describing thus far is the world of consociates, or world of directly experienced reality in a “face-to-face” relationship (Schutz 1932: 169). There is the existence of other worlds that structure a social reality, being the worlds of contemporaries, predecessors, and successors. The main quest in *FO: NV* will help identify and establish the existence of these worlds, as well as their impact and meaning for the player. It has also been mentioned that within the Acts, actions, and understanding, that there are indications of an existing social reality that must be negotiated. Essentially this section is building on what has already been said, and thus will be brief. Recognizing the structure of the social world is very important in a game like *FO: NV*, as in a play-through of the game the player will have to negotiate these worlds fluently, knowing that the actions committed have an impact on the immediate world surrounding them, the general world of the game, and the future of that world. These actions are usually based on interpretations of the world, built from an understanding of the past.

We will start with the world of consociates. As said, this is the “face-to-face” interaction between actors. We have already covered most of the relevance in the *AC* picture quest,

especially concerning interacting with others and positing meaning. For *FO: NV* it is not much different. The player quickly develops a “Thou-orientation” to the multitude of NPCs that must be negotiated in some sense. The player has an awareness of these Others that share a space and time (Schutz 1932: 163). The player is intimately aware of the NPCs occupying the same space and time, assessing their posited meanings and acting upon them. For example, it is likely in *FO* the player will be assessing whether or not the NPC occupying the same space and time is a threat. The player will assume an “Other-orientation” to this NPC, in preparation for any intentional acts that involve “affecting the Other” (Schutz 1932: 146-7). As Schutz notes, we constantly check ourselves in the immediate We-relationship, to verify our interpretations of the Other’s mind or intentions (Schutz 1932: 171). In the world of *FO*, the wrong interpretation can mean a loss of opportunity, a fight, or death. The player’s actions must be calculated, especially as the game progresses. This is also evidence of a continued development of habitus, as the calculations become easier and consistently more correct.

For example, the first time the player encounters the Legion along the main-quest line is likely at a town called Nipton. Upon arriving, they will find all the residents of the town, minus four people who “won the lottery,” dead or dying via burning, decapitation, or crucifixion. The Legion members responsible for this are led by *Vulpes Inculta*, who then approaches the player to speak with them. Immediately the player will assume an “Other-orientation” to *Inculta*, and assess the meaning of what is before them, and preparing themselves for potential projects of action. In this encounter there is no fight, as *Inculta* simply asks the player to spread word of this to other towns, but the player may have several projects of action running through their mind as they do not know what may happen when they are approached. Based on what is encountered at the entrance to the town, it would not be unreasonable to assume the player is about to be

attacked. With only basic knowledge of the Legion at this point in the game, the player has little choice but to draw on whatever knowledge they may have the Others before them, whether it be “general knowledge,” as told by others, or “specific knowledge” which is known to the player firsthand (Schutz 1932: 169). These knowledges come from a world of contemporaries and predecessors.

FO exhibits a complex world of contemporaries, an indirect experience of social reality. The world of contemporaries is full of people that we knew less and less of, but expect to fulfill tasks and perform functions that contribute to social reality. The contemporary is one who “coexists” in time with us, but is not immediately experienced (Schutz 1932: 181). *FO: NV* features a host of figures the player has not met, or might not ever meet, that are referenced to by NPCs indicating policies that are affecting their social world. This ranges from individuals who may be referenced, but may not be part of the main-quest line so a player might never meet them, or “collective entities” that contribute to the field of the Wasteland that the player will never truly know.

For considering the world of contemporaries in games, Schutz’s degrees of anonymity is of great use. The degree of anonymity depends on “the convertibility of a They-relationship into a We-relationship” (Schutz 1932: 195). The relationship between the Legion and their leader, Caesar, is a great example. Going through the main-quest, Caesar is frequently referenced by other NPCs as a clear figurehead of the Legion. In Schutz’s terms, Caesar is a figure whose existence is known, but not as a concrete individual for a while (or never at all if the player does not follow the Legion path in the main-quest), leading him to be known as a “point” in social space with a particular function (Schutz 1932: 180). But depending on how we play the game, we might get to know him, even if only a little bit. On the other hand, the NCR is not so clear.

We can see a greater degree of anonymity when considering the NCR. They, as a group, are typically referenced indicating a more complex social world than the Legion. The NCR would cover two degrees of Schutz's "anonymity." First we can see the NCR as a "collective entity" that we know the form and function of, but do not really know any of its members (Schutz 1932: 181). Furthermore, they are often referred to in contexts as a "state" or "nation." Schutz characterized this relationship as "collective entities which are by their very nature anonymous" and we will never have true contact with (Schutz 1932: 181). In both cases, the social reality is affected by these groups, as various NPCs dispositions are informed by interpretations of these groups. Indeed, when the player does something to affect these groups, the social world becomes aware of these events and changes accordingly. For example, if the player manages to kill Caesar himself, many other NPCs will have positive reactions to the player, and aspects of the game will change (Nukapedia 2015c). The world of contemporaries is part of lived experience, however indirect, and influences or changes the world around us, and this can matter in games. These contemporaries rely on a world of predecessors to be established.

The *FO* games rely on an extended world of predecessors, being macro or micro histories, for a complete phenomenological understanding of the game. An important part of the "pure" world of predecessors is the establishment of a field which is left for the player to navigate. This field contributes to the dispositions of the variety of NPCs encountered along the way. The player does not know the history of the game world, and can only pick up fragments as part of their lived experience in that social world, achieved through "monuments" and dialogue with other NPCs (Schutz 1932: 208-9). Although the player does not experience first-hand any relationship with this past, through interpretation and understanding of these signs and symbols, they influence decisions in the present.

FO: NV's entire situation is a result of the world of predecessors. The history given to the player provides a backdrop for understanding the relevance of the differences between Mr. House, the NCR, and the Legion to help them make an informed decision in their main-quest path. Whether it is a pure or general version of the world of predecessors, when NPCs posit meaning before the character, it is usually contextualized upon a backdrop of the NPCs understanding of these factions and the physical world they inhabit. Every aspect of the game is an intersection of personal NPC biography and world history. Many NPCs help the player in their quest in the assumption that the player will make their own world better, and that is the crux of the whole game world.

The end goal of this game is to impact the world of successors. Schutz (1932) gives us little to draw on to discuss this world, however, it does end the construction of various social worlds nicely. In both of the *FO* games examined here, the end-game purpose is to influence what is yet to come. In *FO: NV*, the end game is a determination of what faction wins the Mojave Wasteland and New Vegas itself. In my play-through, I determined an independent New Vegas was the best course of action. This quest included dismantling the Legion army, removing the NCR presence and chain of command, and completely destroying Mr. House's army along with killing him. As Schutz suggests, the world of successors will consist of people the player will know nothing of (Schutz 1932: 143); the game is over, and what will happen in that social space will be a mystery. All the player can do is speculate, and make assumptions based on the actions that they committed throughout the game.

We have seen then that there is a structured social world within these games. There are predetermined meanings, fields, contemporaries and consociates. The structures of the game's social world allows for a situating of meaning within the game. For example, the quest of Oasis

is situated much more meaningfully within the social world of *FO3*. By recognizing the existence of these structures, we can see how they contribute to the player's interpretation of meaning and action, ultimately affecting how the game is experienced and played.

Provinces of Meaning or Worlds of Experience

Now that we have seen how *AC* and *FO* form and function as social worlds, we can further connect them for the final aspect of the analysis. This section will examine the idea of game worlds being a kind of *finite province of meaning*, although we will not strictly adhere to Schutz's (1945) principles. Classifying a game as a province of meaning in itself indicates a sort of connectivity with the everyday world, which is important to clarify as it is. We have already seen how a game can qualify as a *finite province of meaning*, but now we will expand the concept to be more inclusive and more accurately describe the phenomenological connection between the game world and the everyday lifeworld.

Instead of strictly following Schutz's (1945) conceptualization of "finiteness" in these provinces of meaning, I would prefer to think of these game worlds as "modifications" of reality as opposed to enclosed ones, or as an extended part of reality. Merleau-Ponty posits that a world of experience is not an "island" that has no links to another (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 305). We, as players, enter into the social world. We can see the games structure their social world through the establishment of their own "fields of domination." We understand that there are certain sets of rules and meanings that we have to orient to and abide by. These worlds are inextricably connected to our everyday lived experience because they are unified to us through a unification of our Being.

The player is conscious of the game world, and has intentionality within that world. We have an "immanent" interest in it, meaning we do take it seriously to some degree. Furthermore, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, we are not separate from a world which we perceive (Merleau-Ponty

1945: 334). Our “intentional arc” as Merleau-Ponty calls it, unifies these experiences, as well as the existing social structures and situations, as well as a knowledge of the past and prediction of the future (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 137). Time does not stop when we play a game, and our perception of the game world changes as time goes on and we become more familiar with the game world (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 342), and in some cases, acquiring a greater understanding of how that world works.

The body, as a unified-with-our-Being mediator of these worlds, has all the knowledges of the various worlds inscribed in it. Bourdieu’s insight into bodily knowledge and habitus gives us a clue to see how provinces of meaning can be brought together. Bodily knowledge enabled consistently more correct action in these games, a growth of the habitus. When moving from *AC: WW* to *AC: NL* and *FO3* to *FO: NV*, I was accustomed to the worlds presented before me, and I progressed much faster in all aspects of the sequels because they were, barring some technical changes such as the damage factoring in *FO: NV*, virtually the same. Players have the ability to use their previous stocks of knowledge and experiences in games. They do not have to relearn everything every time they pick up a new game, nor do their experiences disappear when they leave a game world. Beyond knowing or easily understanding how to play the game, players also have a better understanding of the fields, transfers of capital, and the social structures presented by the games. The role of the player itself also becomes easily more and more easily understood, requiring less reflection on the role itself, particularly in sequential games. Games are not isolated provinces from each other in every respect, as many mechanics operate the same way across even vastly different games, as already mentioned. We use knowledge we can from one game world to another, even if it is as basic as communication habits or spatial understanding. This is the effect of Bourdieu’s habitus, the collected history of the player enabling action in

unfamiliar places by drawing on collective experience in an “active presence” (Bourdieu 1990: 54-6).

We have seen how the player in a game can not only interpret posited meaning, but also create meaning through action. In a game we develop full projects of action to make completed Acts. These Acts are understood as part of the game world, which is an intersubjective world. The actions of the player have an effect on the game world, and are understood by inhabitants of that world, allowing for communication and interaction. Schutz claims that in the reality of everyday life, we cannot take back what we have done when we act because we change the outer world, though we can “restore the initial situation by countermoves,” (Schutz 1945: 217) and the games provide this same aspect. Once we make a series of moves in *FO: NV* in the main-quest line, such as killing Mr. House, this cannot be changed. It affects the game world, changes it, and unless we start over, we cannot restore the initial situation to try again.

We have examined how a game can have a structured social world, given boundaries by means of a field. With the establishment of meaning, there is inevitably a field. How “competitive” that field is may be different per game, for example *AC* does not really rely on a field, whereas *FO* has more established positions of domination, but they exist nonetheless. The existence of a field is indicative of a form of a social reality, a world defined by various positions, situations, and boundaries. Schutz briefly mentioned what he called the “field of domination,” being the everyday life world, which becomes a “field of domination” due to the fact we have “an eminently practical interest” in the everyday lifeworld, because we face the world with a pragmatic attitude (Schutz 1945: 227). Bourdieu’s field, as we have described, is a series of positional relations based on a system of properties (Bourdieu 1983: 312). In these games, it is not that much different. With the pragmatic motive, we find or create situations

where positions become possible (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 253-4). These situations provide resistance; to achieve a position is an accomplishment that is the result of an intentional Act. Let us briefly look at how a “field” enables us to establish a game world as a working world, requiring plans of action, interpretation and positing of meaning, pragmatic motives, and a degree of seriousness to fulfill intentional Acts.

The main quest in *FO: NV* revolves around the field established not only by the physical world of *FO* but also the fields established by the three main factions, being Legion, the NCR, and Mr. House. Throughout the main quest-line, the player essentially has to deal with smaller factions on behalf of one of these larger factions. The way that the player deals with these smaller factions is a symbolic exchange. For example, when accomplishing tasks for the Legion, the head of the organization, Caesar, will reward the player with symbolic capital, which is reputation. For my part, as I decided to go against all three, dismantling as many of their alliances and schemes as I could along the way, I earned negative symbolic capital from the NCR and the Legion (Mr. House was killed), and was hated by both, meaning I would be subject to random attacks from various patrols from these factions. If the field is a set of predetermined positions based on defined values of capital (Bourdieu 1983: 324), we can view the reputation change, negative or positive, as a symbolic exchange, and a change in place in the field. My actions had an effect on the game world. It offered resistance, it offered positions in social space, completing certain tasks bestowed certain capital upon me, and there was certainly a feeling of accomplishment by the end. The criteria of a social reality, a world of *working*, are present.

These actions and Acts thus become part of our lived experience. Just as we “do not leave the world behind” when we enter these game worlds, we do not simply leave these worlds behind either (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 306). Our Acts and actions do become inscribed in our

bodily knowledge, not necessarily for the everyday world, which it can in cases such as puzzle solving, but for other games as well. When references to these games are made in other places, such as the everyday world, we can immediately draw on our lived experience of them as opposed to being confused when they are brought up in another “province” as Schutz characterized it (Schutz 1945: 231-2). We do not have a “shock” as Schutz suggests, but rather, we can assume Bourdieu’s stance that when a different knowledge is required, our habitus, which is filled with our experiences and history, simply makes adjustments as opposed to a “leap” or “shock” for a transition in finding the correct meaning being posited before us.

Thus, we can see, as a whole, a game, as shown by *AC* and *FO*, constitutes a world of experience that is connected to the everyday lifeworld, and does not exist as a separated, “finite” province of meaning. They become integrated with our lived experience, and their meanings and knowledges inscribed in our bodies. We, as players, learn to act in these social realities, experience resistance, and change the game world. They move with us in time, and our perception of them changes.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: More than a Game

To say games are “more than just a game” seems overdramatic and cliché at this point, however, it is true. We have seen games transcend their digital boundaries and become part of our self. They become a part of the player’s consciousness, a segment of their lived experience. The experience of the game becomes part of the player’s stock of knowledge, something they can refer to in any context, whether that be another game, a sporting event, interpreting a movie, or simply the everyday lifeworld in general. The experience and knowledge are not necessarily confined or bound to a “finite province” of meaning or world of experience. They are accessible in the mind of those who have played them at any time.

The dangerous and sometimes inevitable question that comes out of this is the crux of the violence debate; if it is true that we are unified with our Being in the game, if we are presented with a situation that is similar in the everyday lifeworld, would we make the same choices? If that is indeed *us* making the decision, to be violent, does this not translate to the everyday life? By now the obvious answer is no because we have seen it is the particular world that we are thrust in that compels us to act in certain ways; we are shaped by our interpretation of the province of meaning, behavioural tendencies are not inherent.

Thus, the experience of the game is not fundamentally separate from our Selves, nor is the game world isolated from our everyday lifeworld. By taking a phenomenological approach based primarily on Schutz’s ideas, we find that there are alternative ways of thinking about game experience. A bridge between the virtual game world and the everyday world is made to capture the entire experience, not just parts of it. Ideas such as immersion, or deep play, do not capture the fundamental connection between the player and game, instead treating games simply as a social product for consumption, or an escapist reality dependent on a suspension of disbelief, an

experience that is bracketed out of the reality of everyday life in itself. By now it should be clear that there exists a unification between the player, the game, and the everyday life.

To briefly summarize, what has been demonstrated is that with a detailed reading of Schutz's phenomenology with expansions from Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, we can begin to rethink what is meant by "game experience" by positing a total unity of Being between the player and game. This challenges concepts of immersion or identification for example, which, as we have seen, conceptualize a fundamental separation of player and game, as if the player is simply stepping into a new role, or suggesting the feeling of connection is due to supposed "identification" with a character. To this end we have used the games *Animal Crossing: Wild World* and *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* as well as *Fallout 3* and *Fallout: New Vegas* in our phenomenological analysis. Using multi-part data that included looking at gestures and emotions, actions and Acts for meaning-contexts, as well as a detailed examination of "quests" and general game play, the analysis followed Schutz's methodology of working backwards to examine the structuration of the social world of the game and the player's place within it. We began with situating the player within the game world as a connected Being. We then examined how meaning was constructed. We furthered this with the analysis of "Oasis" and saw how completed Acts are made. After this, the development of the We-Relationship in *AC* was looked at. This led into the discussion of the structuration of a social reality within the game. Finally, we contextualized the social world within the framework of an extended and complex "province" of meaning.

As far as game studies have come in recent years, with the explosion of gaming-related activity and growth of gaming culture, there is constantly room for further development, whether this means analyses of how we play games, how games engage with our everyday world, or even

how games can develop their own culture. With new media technology constantly being adapted for game use and the proliferation of internet capable devices, there is room for more research to see how more constant communicative and information connectivity leads to a further breakdown of once previously “finite” provinces of meaning, allowing for an even fuller and more meaningful experience for players. Whether this new experience is single-player or connecting with friends or contemporaries, it is up to them, but the choice is there.

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