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The Meaning We Give It: Utopic Manifestation in Interactive Media

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Declaration

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

Table of Figures

Table of Appendices

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to answer the research question: *How is the utopian genre categorised, constructed and consumed in interactive media?* Pulling from a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods three case studies, *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware, 2015), *Persona 5* (Hashino, 2017) and *The Wolf Among Us* (Telltale Games, 2013) are analysed and three utopian schemata constructed. These schemata are designed to function as codes to analytically code the game and determine the location of every utopic sign that can be found during a single playthrough. Utopia in this project is defined as *an action a person takes, or an object they create that is designed to lead to, or evoke the memory of, the best version of themselves.* This definition of utopia influenced what was termed a utopic sign. From this analysis a deeper investigation into the three case studies follows, examining the different forms utopia can take in a variety of video game story-worlds such as refugee narratives, worlds that mimic our own highlighting corruption and dystopian story-worlds beyond salvation. Utopia is continually present in each of these examples and its malleability is indicative of humanity's need for a utopic journeys and goals; video games construct narratives full of such journey that can impact a player on multiple levels. These case studies have crafted complex surrogate societal experiences that engage with players on a deep emotional level, affect their responses and highlight flaws in our own society. The ability of this medium to create play experiences at this level while still giving agency over to a player highlights the power of video games, their potential for societal construction and the impact they can have upon a player. This project not only brings this important aspect of video games to the fore but provides a method of study others can replicate to examine both utopia and dystopia in games and an unparalleled insight into the relationship between utopia and video games.

Keywords – *Utopia, Video Games, Refugee Narrative, Manipulative Society, Post-Apocalyptic Story-worlds, Coding Schemata*

Introduction & Methodology

Thesis Inception

The subject of utopia in the gaming media has been a topic I have been acquainted with for some time. This thesis is in fact a follow-up project to a Masters Dissertation (Murray, 2016) conducted from 2015-2016 observing how utopia could in fact be present in interactive media. The earlier dissertation was written with the hypothesis that utopia could not exist in video games since the concept of utopia revolves around notions of perfection and peace. These are two qualities at odds with the ludological challenges and narrative intrigue modern video games require. Such a concept of utopia was proven to be short-sighted, as was the breadth of video games investigated. For such a short thesis only a single case study could be given proper examination. Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XIII* (2009), hence referred to as *FFXIII*, was chosen for its utopian themes and the distinction between the narrative's two main locations: *Cocoon* and *Pulse*. The former a shining white beacon in the sky where all inhabitants' needs were met, while the latter was a wild place where death awaited the unwary. As can be inferred the utopia/dystopia connection was not difficult to argue, but the progress of the original thesis went much further to prove the initial hypothesis incorrect. Over the course of investigating the chosen case study, using a multi-disciplinary approach of textual analysis and analytical coding, it came to light that aspects of utopia were present in multiple areas of the game. Not only was it arguable that utopia made itself present and impactful upon the game's ludological and narratological construction, but that utopia was in some ways necessary to them and functioned as a conduit for some of the most impactful encounters of the game. The final boss battle of the main storyline serves as a good ludological example while pivotal moments of growth for playable characters serves as a narratological one. Utopia, contrary to initial belief, was most certainly strong in video games.

The unexpected conclusion of this Masters Thesis served as a springboard to new areas of research on utopia in video games. If utopia was in fact prevalent in the initial case study, it could be present in many others as well. Different video games would make use of unique environmental queues or ludological practices to allow utopia to manifest in a way specific to each game. Countless utopias could form through the different combinations of ludological and narratological elements created in games. Such thoughts drove this research from attempting to argue the unsuitability of utopia to gaming to

instead arguing its necessity to the media. To highlight utopia's potential impact upon players and its appearance in several video games, particularly examples with a strong narratological element. Of course, such claims should not be made without a great deal of further research. Therefore, these claims would remain pending till further examination of the subject could be undertaken. Before even that could begin a larger, more comprehensive thesis (this project) needed to be structured with concrete and achievable aims and goals.

The goal of this PhD Thesis is to provide a much stronger, detailed analysis of utopic manifestation in gaming using multiple case studies. Given the smaller scope of the initial thesis the next logical step was to expand the research parameters. By including multiple video games of differing kinds, the presence of utopia could be indicated. This research would go beyond supporting utopic manifestation in one game of a single genre, such as *FFXIII* as a role-playing game (RPG), that the MA thesis examined but instead focus on multiple genres. Increasing the scope of the research in such a way meant the nuanced structure of any utopias that manifest could be examined. Expanding upon original research could help to see if utopia remained the same at its core while the genre of game changed, or if utopia could manifest in a different fashion to better suit the genre of the games it is manifest in. More research needed to be completed into the utopia for this expanded investigation. With a secure anchor into the area of research the method for investigation could evolve and again be applied to the case studies. The mixture of close reading, textual analysis, content analysis and, most importantly, analytical coding served its purpose well. Together these methods provided both qualitative and quantitative data in the original thesis. If this method can again be applied successfully to a much larger project, then it could become a method applicable to any case study seeking to find and catalogue instances of utopia presence. With some editing, the method could even detect and catalogue dystopic presence or different criteria entirely dependent on the researcher's needs. Given the strength that can be attributed to conclusions in humanitarian subjects built from qualitative and quantitative data, crafting a repeatable method that cultivates and makes use of both could have impact upon many investigations into new media.

Finally, this thesis began by seeking to downplay utopia as a concept in gaming. However, in studying the term utopia's ability to contribute to gaming, political, sociological and psychological research has been found. In this thesis it is necessary to argue that video games should be considered media artefacts of value to all the above research areas, but particularly to utopia and sociology. In a world where some societies may rise and fall over a handful of years and others endure for centuries, scholarly research into them is constantly evolving. Media reflects such changes and video games have evolved significantly to now craft believable, engaging societies. Players can impact and be a part of these societies and this phenomenon serves not only to influence utopian studies of society but of a person's ability to interact with a society in a way that could not be studied elsewhere. While far from a singular project capable of definitively proving such an argument; this thesis will attempt to contribute towards helping fellow scholars see the sociological value of video games and take them up as artefacts worth examining.

Subject

Video Games are perhaps one of the most swiftly evolving industries in the world today yet have been slow to have acceptance into the academic sphere of rigorous research. Astrid Ensslin noted in her book *Literary Gaming* (2014) that gaming and game studies often only found its place relegated towards an ostracised portion of English or Media departments. Yet video games are a growing subject that need new forms and methods of close reading, or close playing to be more accurate. Of course, this is not to say that gaming media has been without research, quite the opposite. Throughout most of the late 90s into the 2000s there was rigorous debate between ludologists, Jesper Juul (2005), Markku Eskelinen (2001), and narratologists, Marie-Laure Ryan (2001), Janet Murray (1997), Espen Aarseth (1997) among others debating 'game versus story' in order of importance. That is, whether a game should first and foremost be examined for its ludological algorithms and mechanics or for its method of storytelling and ability to construction engaging worlds for players. In more recent years though, both sides have come to see the importance of the other field and research has moved beyond this arguing for the use of both disciplines to better exam gaming media. Works such as Ensslin's *Literary Gaming* (2014), Souvik Mukherkee's *Video Games and Storytelling* (2015), Jenkins' *Game Design as Narrative Architecture* (2004) and the recent anthology *Gaming and the Arts of*

Storytelling (2018) serve as just a handful of examples. Each text works to highlight how game studies has matured to incorporate both ludological and narratological assessment in order to further research into the media. It can be argued that much in the same way gaming is constantly moving forward and evolving that its researchers have followed suit, showcasing great capacity for taking on new elements of research and developing methods of study for the benefit of the whole scholarly community.

From this step forward several other disciplines have moved to examine the media for ways in which it has research potential. Not only easily related subjects such as literary examination (as Ensslin demonstrated) but other fields of research such as sociology and psychology. Ferguson (2015) used video games and their perception as a method of examining societal views towards younger people. Whereas Crawford (2009) gave a conference speech in which they noted the 'underwhelming' amount of research sociologists were putting into examining video games. This trail of thought was picked up in his later published book *Video Gamers* (Crawford, 2011) in which he noted 'interest in and research on video gamers has risen significantly. This is a welcome development as it is evident that video games do matter, and not just to those who play them'(2011 Pg. 1). Therefore, it is worth stating that examples of multidisciplinary research into video games is gaining further traction. The topic has moved forward to such a point where it examines not only the media itself, but those who engage with it and how games can and do affect them. Academically, video games' potential to research is immense.

From another standpoint, the business potential of video games is easily highlighted. The most recent UK Games Industry (UKIE) Fact Sheet noted several breakdowns of the video game industry noting its growth and impact. This impact did not only focus on those in the UK but the world. Based on latest figures the estimated number of gamers reached 2.2 billion; this is a conservative estimate as the number could be as high as 2.6 billion (UKIE, 2018). Recent figures revealed in the Entertainment Software Association provided new insight into American's usage of video games, highlighting that a staggering 75% of American households have at least one family member who would identify themselves as a 'gamer' (ESA, 2019). Statistically speaking, gaming has tremendous reach in terms of its audience and potential impact. The breadth of audience

video games possess reflects this level of impact and further justifies its potential as an area for academic research. This research will not be restricted to the media itself, since it can and has focused on psychological, sociological, business and ethnographical research. It is vital research continue into video games to catalogue and discuss the influences of this rapidly evolving medium.

The reach and extensiveness of the game industry's wealth should also be noted. The global games industry was catalogued to reach $116 billion in 2017. This marked a 10.7% rise since the previous year and further growth to the market is expected (UKIE, 2018). This growth in the market has been catalogued in more depth through the increase American game sales. As of 2018 the total spent on gaming, this including dedicated gaming hardware, content, accessories and virtual reality, reached $35 billion. As of 2019 this amount has increased to a total of $43.4 billion. The vast majority of this profit, 83%, comes from digital format sales (ESA, 2019) and this highlights not only the wealth of the gaming industry but also the ease with which people can access content. Ease of purchase is a major factor that influences the decision to buy. Purchasing power is also becoming less of a concern as the average age of a gamer is now considered to be 35 years old (UKIE, 2018), 33 in America (ESA, 2019) and both reports infer that the average gamer will have spent over a decade playing games by this point. Therefore, it is likely more common that a gamer is buying a game for themselves rather than an under-aged individual attempting to convince a parent to purchase on their behalf. This form of purchasing power means that prospective buyers will seek out games they wish to play. The level of engagement players will have with societies in games purchased will reflect this and only deepen as a result.

There is a final important element of the clichéd gamer image that these reports can dispel: the young male gamer. Both reports showcase a more even split between male and female gamers in recent years. Woman are now believed to be more likely to play games than men, however despite this they still play less frequently hour for hour (UKIE, 2018). In America, the gender split is still in favour of men, but to a small extent with 54% of gamers being male and 46% being female. In both cases the average age was ranked above thirty. Therefore, not only is the academic field of game studies evolving, its casual

audience is aging above what stereotype indicates and from this a need for greater depth and breadth in both game mechanics and story is likely to develop. Such a huge industry would likely benefit a great deal from the impact of focused research into the media. From a purely academic standpoint, researching a now older average audience is likely to have varied results regarding sociological and psychological experiences in players. Since average gamers are now adult members of their own societies with different wants and needs than the stereotypical 'young male' audience may have. This is one more factor that could influence experiences with game societies with possible impacting results to fields previously mentioned and to utopian studies as well.

Researching into video game media is a crucial element of this thesis, however it is not the sole focus; this project planned to deeply analyse the subject of utopia in gaming and thus it will be a key topic throughout this piece of work. Analysis, research and discourse on the term has been wide ranging across disciplines since its inception in the original text, *Utopia* (More 2016), first written in 1516. That the term is still oft debated some half a millennium following its creation is a strong argument for its relevance to modern academic inquiry. However little in-depth research has been conducted on how the term may impact video games. Neither the player, a ludological or narratological viewpoint has been deeply examined and therefore an immediate challenge is found in trying to find relevant existing research. Also, taking any research on similar subjects from other fields and incorporating it into this could prove a challenge and thus any chosen theory must be justified. The endeavour is not nearly as difficult as it may at first appear though. The subject of utopia is, in the words of Vivian Greene, 'a malleable and elastic concept' (2011 Pg. 2). Utopia has found itself present and viable in a broad range of academic disciplines across the humanities. It is primarily due to this range of applications that the term has become a focal point to this piece of work.

The range of utopia covers several different areas in academia but also in popular culture. While the term itself may not be explicitly used the narrative trope of a search for perfection is nothing uncommon. As far back as Jules Verne's exploratory novels, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *Journey to the Centre of The Earth* (1864) it can be seen that humanity was looking for the so-often thought of perfect place that exists in the far-off

somewhere. As humanity's understanding of the world around it grew the location of this utopia changed both in people's minds and in the fiction produced. Utopia was first across the sea, the bountiful shores of America, then in the ocean's depths or in the planet itself. From there utopia further expanded and was thought to be found in space and with each new location humanity sought to seek it out and discover it. Whether or not humanity has succeeded in such endeavours is a still debatable topic. But the somewhat research-led answer would, at this point, would be that success and failure are not the best terms through which to assess humanity's interactions with utopia. In the same manner a researcher would not always assume that success and failure are the best criteria through which to assess the experience of playing a video game. Utopia's malleability demands a more nuanced set of criteria to be evaluated on and that is one further element of research that this thesis hopes to aid in progressing.

Purpose & Argument

In keeping with the subjects of this project that have evolved from an MA Thesis, the research question of this project will need to be broken down and expanded upon. This will provide strong clarification on the aims and objectives of each section. The goal of this PhD is to examine: **How the utopian genre is categorised, constructed and consumed in interactive media.** Picking apart this question highlights four key aspects that will be discussed in more depth below. These are: interactive media, categorisation, construction, and consumption. The importance of establishing early what these terms mean to the project, the ways in which they will be applied and how they further the project to meeting its end goal is crucial to creating a clear understanding of the work being done.

The first of the four aspects examined here is interactive media. In regards to this project the term is not used to focus on texts that make use of non-trivial effort such as clicking on links to move from one stanza of text to another, as Aarseth noted in his work defining ergodic pieces of text (1997). But specifically, will be applied to video game media. There is an interesting comparison found between the utopic and the ergodic since both arguably require non-trivial effort for progression that will be specific to each example. The malleability of utopia (Greene, 2011) means that different actions, different goals will need to be fulfilled for progression and some may be more complex than others,

building upon new principles. Meanwhile a particular piece of ergodic literature may be simple to navigate while another requires more complex actions. In order to investigate the manifestation of utopia and the three C's (category, construction, consumption) three different video game case studies have been chosen. By examining all three a varied, successful and valid investigation into interactive media can be undertaken. The first case study is *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware, 2015). Created and realised by the company FromSoftware who were also responsible for the *Dark Souls Trilogy* (2011 - 2016). The game follows an unnamed protagonist, simply referred to as The Hunter who the player controls as they travels to the city of Yharnam set within a gothic, Victorian-esque location in order to receive healing blood. The Hunter then proceeds to join The Hunt attempting to purge the many beasts and other such monsters that are plaguing the city's streets. The beasts and monsters in question roam Yharnman madly attacking and killing any human life they see. The game is in keeping with what has come to be known as the qualities of a 'FromSoft Game,' such as incredibly difficult ludological paradigms that require a great deal of skill to master. It is mainly for this quality that the game became a case study for the project since it places such emphasis on ludological skill and mastery while still often praised for its intense and impactful storylines.

In contrast to *Bloodborne's* ludological heaviness the second case study of the project is *The Wolf Among Us* released by the now defunct Telltale Games company. Pulling from the *Fable* comics (Willingham, 2002 - 2015) as a source material the player controls protagonist Bigby Wolf (a reinterpretation of Little Red Riding Hood's 'The Big Bad Wolf'), who serves as a sheriff for the fairy-tale characters (Fables) forced to flee their homeland and hide in New York. The game revolves wholly around its narrative. The player moves Bigby from location to location uncovering more of the story as they go and occasionally going through quick-time events to ensure Bigby's success in violent encounters. Yet, despite its lack of ludological paradigms, *The Wolf Among Us* was a very well received game that's narrative alone earned it a strong audience.

The final case study of this project is *Persona 5* (Hashino, 2017) released by Atlus as the fifth main game in the *Persona* series that has been running since 1996. Unlike the intensely ludological *Bloodborne* or the intensely narrative-driven *The Wolf Among Us*,

Persona 5 is a game of two faces. The game has two very different forms of play, one of which centres around social simulation. The player takes on the role of a disgraced high school student in Japan, having him attend school and interact with his friends to learn more about them. Together with this the player must decide how to best manage the protagonist's time between schoolwork, part-time jobs, hobbies and social interaction. Then, the player must manage a dungeon crawler style experience in which the protagonist explores locations, finding treasure and battling against enemies before a traditional boss encounter. *Persona 5* balances its ludological and narrative aspects and, as with both other case studies in the project, was very positively received. Overall these are three very different styles of video game that were all popular with audiences and focus on very different storylines. Therefore, they provide a strong breadth of topics for examination regarding utopic manifestation.

With the case studies of the project introduced now it falls to highlight how they have been investigated. As noted earlier the original MA Thesis of this project made use of analytical coding to help examine appearances of utopia in a video game. This project has done the same and it is from this that the term categorisation became so important. The first step in this project is a very close analytical reading, or close playing of the three texts to afford an expert understanding of them. From these three different schemata have been created, one for each case study, that have been titled 'Utopic Schema.' Each schema is comprised of five different priori codes that have been used to analytically code the three case studies and provide a breakdown of each one. The coding process notes each differing utopic sign's appearances throughout each game. For further clarification on these schemata and their usefulness to detailing categorisation, David Rumelhart defines a schema as 'a data structure for representing the generic concepts stored in memory' (1980 Pg. 33). A schema is then, a collection of unwritten rules so common that many people who repeat certain experiences come to understand how such experiences will flow with no need for them to be formally written out. For example, those who drive long distances for work are likely to have a more comprehensive 'road behaviour' schema, whereas those who train dogs would have a more comprehensive 'dog behaviour' schema. Douglas and Hargadon on to give a highly applicable example of a schema in action stating 'schemas

tell us to expect something nasty in the basement in almost any horror film' (2000 Pg. 153). These notions of unwritten yet applicable rules can be tied to video games in the same way. For example, a schema may tell gamers to expect a save point before a challenging battle or if they come across a wide open, yet empty space that a boss battle is soon to follow. Taking these unwritten rules formed from close readings and close plays and noting which aspects of them are indicative of utopia, then writing them out and using them to code a case study has provided valid quantitative data on the appearance of utopia in these games.

Coding, while often described as an arduous process (Basit, 2003), is integral to bringing together and ensuring collected data can be applied succinctly as evidence to draw conclusions. Indeed, the role of coding has been summarised by Seidel and Kelle as focusing on the collection of differing phenomena and putting them into some form of order so that further patterns may emerge (1995). This is the process of categorising differing elements of utopia. If successful, more examples of utopia can be found in not just a single case study, but across two or even three case studies and to further validate research. Given that the three case studies in this project are vastly different this could have great importance to the manifestation of utopia regarding video games in general. Therefore, the crucial nature of this element to the project and to further research must be recognised. Without the three utopic schemata applied to each case study the project itself could not progress.

The aim of *construction* as a term is to take a step beyond the categories found and begin to investigate different patterns that have started to come to light. If using categorisation has led to finding patterns, then questioning how those patterns fit well in the studies is vitally important. Basit notes that 'creating categories triggers the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data. This schema helps the researcher to ask questions, to compare across data, to change or drop categories and to make a hierarchical order of them' (2003 Pg. 114). Therefore, the first step of this project provided deep understanding and quantitative data gathering. The second step needed to examine why this form of the data was found. If a certain sign appears so much more often than the others, why? If two signs often appear in conjunction with one another then what is the

connection between them and why do they not appear in common conjunctions with other signs? Questions such as these and others began to emerge as the project reached its next stage. With a firm grasp of the sorts of utopia these case studies seem to be manifesting the project can go on to investigate why these utopias are prevalent, and why the utopias are constructed this way in these case studies. These questions could not be asked without the initial data there to help create them and therefore the structure of the project begins to shine through. Not dissimilar to a rolling ball of snow gathering more and more of itself and growing as it descends a large hill; as this project progresses it only accumulates more data and research points that are vital to the construction of key questions. In turn such questions will provide further conclusions and branches of research on the subject. Therefore, the importance of examining the construction of the case studies' discovered utopias is one more vital step in answering the overall research question on how utopia comes to manifest in interactive media.

Of the three different C's making up the research question the final one is perhaps where the most important conclusions of the overall project may be found. The *consumption* of utopia, regarding this project, focuses on the player as much as the narrative of the case studies. On a level above film, television and books the video game is incredibly interactive. Video games go beyond the action of pressing play and pause or stopping to flip a page over. A game cannot be played unless the player is there for every moment directing the protagonist's movements from beginning to end. There is undoubtedly a relationship formed between the player and the games that they play, a connection between them and the narrative that is often described as Investment (Domsch, 2013; Douglas and Hargadon, 2000; Hefner et al., 2007; Murray, 1997; Schulzke, 2014). This investment is what has the potential to cultivate very strong emotional reactions in those who play these games and cause them to be deeply involved in the fictional societies that several video games create. For this aspect of the research question the in-depth understanding of the video games and their respective utopias has been examined from the point of view of those who play the games. The project has attempted to theorise how their reactions to consuming the video game give further meaning to the utopias that each game creates. If this project were to expand further issues such as the different reactions of

more diverse groups, such as more veteran players, newer players or even those who have never played video games before can be examined. At the same time the project analysed what impact experiencing these utopias through playing the games could have on a player. In order to do this academic theory that focuses on cognition and individual reactions has been pulled from. In the case of this research project the areas theory was drawn from was psychology, sociology, utopian theory and studies on time and place.

Overall it is hoped that through a combination of the three C's discussed that this project will be able to examine the three cases of interactive media. Through this examination the project will argue that not only is utopia present in each individual case study, but that it is very different in each case study. The story-worlds of each game have provided different criteria for utopia to manifest around. And with each differing utopia those who play the games have also become invested in the games' societies. In some cases, players reflect those values themselves giving deeper meaning to those utopias in the time they spend playing until they finish the game. At which point the utopia is ended and another begins to grow as new game is taken up.

Background & Context

Video Games

A vital text to justify the place of games in utopian scholarship would be Bernard Suits' *The Grasshopper* (2005). While at first instance this is a philosophical text the subject matter links closely to games of all sorts. *The Grasshopper* pulls from the classic Aesop's fable regarding an Ant who diligently collects food in the summer months to ensure it will eat during winter in comparison with a grasshopper who plays throughout the summer and will therefore not survive the winter. Suits' text sees the Grasshopper in conversation, justifying its choices and arguing for the value of play in all things. Most importantly, his text notes the barriers of entry to play such as suspension of worldly common sense in favour of paradigms that are more nonsensical, to craft enjoyment in the process of gaming itself. Based on this summation the magic circle could exist as a form of utopia during the time a person steps in it. The circle demands payment in the form of suspending disbelief and taking on new wants and needs that could give a person the brief experience of success and happiness, meeting a goal and becoming the best they could be for that situation. An example of this 'barrier' in action would be a video game

character with a large and powerful weapon who is unable to progress past a wooden door without a key. The two notions together seem nonsensical. However, much in the same manner a theatre audience suspends their disbelief as a set is pulled off and another pulled one, the idea of a powerful weapon unable to break a simple wooden door is held as 'true' for the purpose of play. In his introduction to the text, Thomas Hurka summarises Suit's thoughts on the two topics stating 'in utopia, people will accept limitations just in order to overcome them.' (2005 Pg. 15). Of course, so bold a statement does not and arguably cannot cover all instances of utopia. For example, Suits is very much entrenched in the notion of the physical space utopia compromised of a large society of like-minded thinkers; while certainly an interpretation of the subject this is far from the only viable option. However, the overall relationship between utopia and gaming, or rather the desire to play and the happiness that may be found in the process, highlights a clear link from utopia scholarship to play and by extension video games.

The malleability of utopia demands that those experiencing it adhere to certain expectations and this holds true in aspects of play. Johan Huizinga first put forward the idea of The Magic Circle in his text *Homo Ludens* (1938). Astrid Ensslin defines *The Magic Circle* as 'a spatially and temporally confined psychological condition that players enter into when they embark on gameplay' (2014 Pg. 23). Essentially, a prospective player is required to adhere to a specific cognitive state from the inception of their play until they are finished. Physical games from the complexity of Live Action Role Playing (LARPing), to the simplicity of tag require players to understand and accept their behaviour will be different. Digital games hold true to this as well. A video game player must accept their character on the screen is an extension of themselves, a conduit through which they can experience the story-world of the game. A strong sense of context is made through the process of creating a Magic Circle influenced by the social experience the game offers. There is still a sense of physicality to the experience influenced by the chosen console, control and space in which the game will be played (Elson et al., 2014). The preparation processes for playing a video game are complex and thus the experience of playing itself is equally deep and meaningful. The malleability of context a potential player can build around a gaming experience (what they choose to engage with) is akin to the malleability

of utopia. A person will likely have to adhere to specific rules and instances to join and maintain a utopic state in the same manner a gamer must craft a specific context to fully engage with a video game.

There are theorists who focus directly on instances of utopia in video game media. Marcus Schulzke (2014) and Gerald Farca and Charlotte Ladevèze (2016) have both published work in this subject, though certainly not focusing to such an extent. Schulzke is more focused on the power of video game story worlds to function as critical utopias or dystopias with a strong leaning towards the success of the latter and failure of the former (2014). Schulzke notes the failure of a utopic fantasy world in this media yet again; as with Suits, he is more focused on a physical incarnation of utopia rather than looking beyond it or at an individual level. Farca and Ladevèze are similar in this vein, however their research into *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) notes the heavily dystopian story-world, but also the natural environments of the game that symbolise a hope for a better future. This hope for improvement or a better standard of living is a quality Farca and Ladevèze note as 'a firm and indestructible core' (2016 Pg. 2) to the critical dystopia. These previous works show the limitations of study into utopia in video games, further justifying the need for this project.

Utopia

Utopia is a term that has existed centuries before gaming media came into play and has a much larger canon of theory to pull from. However, as broad as the entirety of utopian scholarship has been only a slim amount is wholly relevant to this research project. But, this is not to say More's own work or even those who preceded him cannot offer insight on utopia and its relationship with video games. Long before Thomas More first penned utopia and created the term, Grecian philosophers debated the idea. Plato authored two works of note in this area. The first is *The Laws* (Plato, 2016) consisting of twelve books in which three men (an Athenian who functions as Plato's mouthpiece, a Spartan and a Cretan) discuss laws and methods of governance while travelling towards the temple of Zeus. The second is *The Republic* (Plato, 2000), argued to be 'Plato's statement of what the ideally best city is' (Bobonich and Meadows, 2018 Part 3). *The Laws* goes into great depth about how such a best city would function, including its governance, schooling and day to day survival. Chris Bobonich and Katherine Meadows note that the

main goal of the City of Magnesia (the proposed city to be constructed in *The Laws*) is 'to produce citizens who possess complete virtue' (2018 Part 7). So, immediately it is apparent that the most important export of the city would be its people who must be well-educated and understand the world around them. There are a myriad of ways all three men in the dialogue discuss how to do this and all could conceivably be successful; them going back and forth about the merits of different methods for a pre-planned best city goes on at great length, highlighting how much time can be given over to such a discussion.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between these moments of planning and the process players go through in several games from the strategy or simulation genres. Games such as *Civilization* (Meier, 1991) and *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) also involve similar processes. For example, when crafting an empire in *Civilization* the player must make decisions about how to handle exploration for new technologies, farming, diplomacy and even weaponry. Much like Plato using his three characters to debate alternating ideas, players of *Civilization* must do the same in the hopes of achieving success and for themselves, effectively winning the game as best they can by forming the strongest empire. *The Sims*, however caters to a much more downscaled and personal approach; rather than attempting to build an empire for the ages, players instead begin by building a family of whatever size they prefer, a home for them and proceed to then live out a 'simulation' of their lives. Plato's need for 'virtue' in Magnesia's citizens is related to this since the player will decide what could be termed as 'virtue' for their created characters. They may choose to reflect an ideal version of themselves, have a Sim attempt to earn as much money as possible, focus on their education or even expand their creative skills. The length of Plato's twelve books is reflected in games like *Civilization* and *The Sims* since, depending on how long the player wishes to continue the game, they may progress to an empire that wins a space race or simulate many generations of a family.

The boon of these empires and simulation families is that they are, at their core just that, simulations. A player may choose to utterly neglect their empire or simulation family simply out of curiosity of what the downfall for such a choice may be. Attempting to translate such empires, families or even cities like Magnesia into the real world is an issue Grecian philosophers Socrates and Glaucon have discussed in their own work. While

analysing Utopia's sources and influences, J.C. Davis notes the dialogue of Socrates and Glaucon, particularly their stating an ideal society 'can't be accommodated anywhere in the world, and therefore rests at the level of ideas' (2010 Pg. 28). There is some debate regarding Plato's intentions for Magnesia, whether he considered the planned city a viable place for people to live or if he considered the strain would be too great for citizens, thus rendering it more of a thought experiment (Bobonich and Meadows, 2018 Part 3). But considering the argument that Magnesia was a thought experiment of sorts again links these ancient musings to the pleasure of simulation in video games. Just as Socrates and Glaucon limited their dialogue to nothing more than ideas discussed, people playing video games are well aware they are interacting with figures on a screen and not real people. Gamers, playing games in the simulation genre, are merely moving through their own best kind of society, their interactive utopia.

Utopia was written by Thomas More in 1516 there is still much debate on the meaning behind More's work. Thomas White gives a very succinct summation of these differing views by stating 'Thomas More has a wide range of interests, and he probably had a number of different purposes in writing Utopia' (1976 Pg. 639). More wrote the piece a time of great exploration where men were discovering new, unknown areas of the world and interacting with new societies. 'More used the emerging awareness of otherness to legitimize the invention of other spaces, with other people and different forms of organization' (Vieira, 2010 Pg. 4) to put forth his own fictional society that reflected his incarnation of the 'best' society. Some choose to interpret More's work as a satirical piece (Heiserman, 1963) in which More, an intensely religious man, saw fault in the capitalist inclinations of those in wealth and thus his fictional nation 'Utopia' reviled gold and wealth. It (gold) was an object that formed chains worn by slaves or was used as the material for chamber pots; this is just one example of More criticising the state of society about him. Indeed, the word Utopia is made up from Grecian words meaning 'no place' and is thus 'etymologically/a place which is a non-place' (Vieira, 2010 Pg. 4) linking back to the notion of both a thought experiment and a satirical place that is not a place. Some have even taken up a more wistful interpretation of More's work, such as utopian author Ursula Le Guin noting utopia is 'an expression of desire for something lacking here and

now' (2016 Pg. 195). Since More's creation of the term it is now used commonly used to mean 'the allegedly perfect society' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 5). Often this school of thought puts utopia as a synonym for places of religious reward such as the Christian 'Heaven' or the Buddhist 'Nirvana' despite its original intention to harken back to the Grecian Golden Age (Vieira, 2010).

The huge variety and differing interpretations of More's work is something that is reflected in many digital games. Games such as FromSoftware's *Dark Souls* series (2011 - 2016) deliberately work to conceal the true meaning behind their narrative and instead provide a player with a vast open world to explore and learn of the tragedies of those around them. Indeed, the first game in the series culminates in a battle with a former ruler of the land who became a hollow husk out of desperation to avoid the advancement of time. *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (1993) opens with the protagonist washed up on the shores of a strange and unfamiliar land, again touting exploration and interaction with new societies and experiences. From a perspective of ludo-narrative synchronicity this makes sense since player and game protagonist are both. learning about the world around them simultaneously. Much in the same way both the reader of *Utopia* and the version of Thomas More within *Utopia* learn simultaneously of Raphael Hythloday's travels. The exploratory aspect to new and unfamiliar lands is a common aspect of both utopia and video games but games can also highlight satirical issues just as some believe More was attempting to do. Samurai Punk's *The American Dream* (2011) is a virtual reality (VR) game designed to satirise America gun usage through a would-be wholesome 1950's setting. The player begins as a baby in a crib and they must immediately learn how to shot a gun. From this they continue to tackle almost any issue they are met with, from tending to the garden to opening a soda can by shooting at it; throughout these tasks the game keeps up its wholesome façade highlighting how many Americans view gun violence as just another aspect of everyday life. Even when analysing the predecessors and first appearance of utopia, there are strong links between the desire for creating a 'best' city, a perfect household and to use these tools to satirise or even outright critique aspects of current society. The link between utopia and video games is strong and this project highlights just some of the ways the subject can impact many areas of academia.

Theories on utopia became prominent enough to inspire movements dedicated to creating a physical utopia in the (at the time) modern world. The Pansophists, led by the scholars Johann Valentin Andreae's, Tommaso Campanella and Francis Bacon sought to 'harmoniously join Christianity, science and technology' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 53). The three went so far as to craft blueprints for a city named *Chrtistianopolis* and a society *Pansophia* that were both designed to provide as comfortable life as possible for its inhabitants. Given this was little over a century since More's original work was written, the earliest Pansophist work *Chrtistianopolis* published in 1619, they wrote of large towers full of information anyone could access while living charmed lives. The benefit of such an existence was that all members could use their free time to practice their religion and worship God. In this example there is a hint of technological advancement, yet the physical and religious aspects of utopia remain paramount. Moving forward a few more centuries some works still held true to the notions of the physical and technological but the religious importance began to decline; Edward Bellemy's *Looking Backwards* (1888) envisioned a futuristic New York where technology had increased qualify of life. Jules Verne's works published within two decades of Bellemy's also noted the power of technology beyond the time such as Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* and the *Electric Balls* he employed to kill pirates in The Mysterious Island (Verne, 1920). However, in Verne's text there is a stronger argument for utopia not as a physical space, but rather manifesting in the journey to seek these places out. Together with this journey, the introspection of the characters as well as their relationships with one another brought another level to utopian narratives. While utopian scholarship would not follow as swiftly it too began to move beyond a religious interpretation and a physical manifestation.

Ernest Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1995) is argued to be the single most comprehensive examination of utopia by Ruth Levitas (2007). The text was originally written in 1954 and is a three-part philosophical volume detailing Bloch's musing on a variety of subjects focusing on the human condition. While often not explicitly mentioned, several of his thoughts are indicative to utopian research. Their relevance to this thesis is found in their focus on the internal, the mental and the social interpretations of utopian elements. He crafts a notion of Original Yearning (Bloch, 1995), writing that from the

moment a person is born there is a need, a desire to have more and to become better. Bloch's musings highlight the 'journeying' aspect of utopia; made more impactful to this research as it manifests not as a place but as an internal feeling. Cosimo Quarta (whose work was translated by Daniele Procida) argues on the 'need for utopia' (1996). He (Quarta) highlights that utopia exists within humanity as a drive and desire pushing them forward to improve and excel. Quarta pulls from the story of Original Sin, noting that it was this need for utopia or *Homo Utopicus* that led to Adam taking the apple and thus giving knowledge to humanity. This action caused Adam and Eve to be chased from the physical utopia of the Garden of Eden, but from this knock down to Earth came the opportunity to again rise and improve.

While utopia is a much-present and oft debated subject from a western perspective, there is also academic study into non-western utopias, the ways in which they manifest and the affect they can have on different groups of people; especially those who exist in a post-colonial society. Western utopia's are often thought of as 'allegedly perfect' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 5) and anything further is the subject of specific case study and debate; what is 'perfect' to one specific group of people and what defines a specific group are some examples. However, non-western utopias seem to have a more concrete thread of commonality between them: the notion of looking backwards to build a utopia. Theorists in this field have discussed this aspect in different ways. Ralph Pordzik discusses the strategy of a post-colonial utopia as undercutting 'fixed notions of coherence and permeance and to recuperate alternative identities' (2006 Pg.130) bringing to light the power of these utopias to push-back against the colonisation of a society in favour of establishing a utopia out of what existed pre-colonisation. Such a thought links well with Pordzik's 2001 assessment of the African utopian work *July's People* (1981) by Nadine Gordimer in which he states 'the roles of employer and servant are swapped more than once' (2001 Pg. 183). This utopian vision set within a 'dystopian present' (Ibid) shows the undercutting of norms leading towards alternate identities such as a black 'employer' and white 'servants.' Western utopias often attempt to craft spaces where elements are perfect and unchanging such as the earlier mentioned *Christianopolis* designed by the Pansophists and Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1971). In contrast here, Pordzik notes that

Gordimer refuses to keep any shift in dynamics static, writing that the process could not be deemed a complete reversal (2001) at any point. Anupama Mohan establishes a similar point in her analysis of *Giraya* (2011) by Punyakante Wijenaike. She describes the novella as a 'taut indictment of the upper class's inability to deal with change and modernity' (Mohan, 2015 Pg. 33) while critiquing the colonial aspects of Sri Lanka.

Postcolonial utopianism is not limited to notions of physical space. Despite the lack of research in this field (Ashcroft, 2012) several authors 'Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong or Ben Okri' (Ashcroft, 2012 Pg. 2) have published works designed to move this form of utopia into a space of hope rather than any (fictional or non-fictional) physical location. Bill Ashcroft succinctly notes that 'for postcolonial utopianism, as for most contemporary utopian theory, Utopia is no longer a place but the spirit of hope itself, the essence of desire for a better world' (Ibid). The major change comes in understanding what a specific 'better world' may mean in the context of any given work. Regardless of its origin, utopia remains a malleable term (Greene, 2011). But again, Ashcroft highlights the commonality of non-western utopias to look back at what once was, at using memory to help define a hopeful future; he writes 'the distinctive feature of this [postcolonial] utopian thinking is the importance of memory in the formation of utopian concepts of a liberated future' (2012 Pg. 2). Indeed, Ashcroft establishes this idea in multiple works; publishing a piece in the following year he states that utopianism cannot exist without the 'operation of memory' (2013 Pg. 99). Colonialised societies can lean towards historical or even mythic places, building on those memories to change their present for a better future.

Ruth Levitas produced significant work attempting to define utopia and overall argues for it as a process rather than place. She states that 'it is impossible to tell which ideas are Utopian until they realise themselves, when cease to be they Utopian' (1979 Pg. 20). This showcases that utopia is not only experienced via a journey but that it is defined during that journey. Once the journey is finished and the utopic idea reached it struggles to still be categorised as utopian. As a final follow up to this theory, utopian author Ursula Le Guin wrote that as soon as a goal is achieved it ceases to be utopic at all (2016). Pulling from more modern theory on utopia as an ephemeral experience rather than a physical space led to this project's definition of the term. For the purposes of this thesis, utopia is

defined as **an action a person takes, or an object they create that is designed to lead to, or evoke the memory of, the best version of themselves**. Throughout this project this definition will be used to help explore several varied manifestations of utopia in gaming media.

Dystopia

Given the importance to utopia in this project it would be remiss not to acknowledge the term given to the opposite situation: dystopia. Considered at first glance to be a great deal more applicable to gaming media, dystopia is a much younger term yet has also been the focal point of a breadth of academic inquiry. Here, a short history of the term's inception and place in history will be noted to help justify dystopia's already accepted place in several highly popular video games, as well as its evolution through history. Claeys notes that 'the term "dystopia" enters common currency only in the twentieth century' (2010 Pg. 107), making the term some four hundred plus years younger than More's utopia. Several theorists (Claeys, 2010; Levitas, 1979; Segal, 2012) tend to attribute the rise of dystopia, and the subsequent fall of utopia, to the change in the state of worldly affairs in the mid-twentieth century. Claeys argues this development as 'a nightmarish twentieth century, soon powerfully symbolized by the grotesque slaughter of the First World War' (2010 Pg. 107) began the change towards dystopia. The carnage of the First World War was only the beginning to such feelings on the end of utopia or, as some termed dystopia 'the end of history' (Claeys, 2010 Pg. 108). The industrial revolution held some utopic potential by following the Pansophist idea of technology present to increase the ease of life. However, the ensuing Second World War showcased how deadly this new technology could be via the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. 'The Cold War' followed this violent period of history. Several countries secretively continued to develop weapons of mass destruction and tensions between countries rose due to the threat such weapons presented. Writers of fiction were unable to ignore this state of the world around them and a trend in dystopian fiction began to rise. This trend is seen through works like George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). These fictional narratives aided in the creation of a more common definition for the term dystopia: 'portraying feasible negative

visions of social and political development, cast principally in fictional form' (Claeys, 2010 Pg. 109).

In keeping with the chosen media of this research project the fictional form of video game narratives has seen a great deal of dystopian content, particularly in the last decade. Games such as *Bioshock* (Irrational Games, 2007), *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013), *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015) and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017) are just a handful of examples that all received critical acclaim. It is not difficult to see how the notion of dystopia, the worst feasible outcome, can provide a narrative full of challenge lending itself to ludological trials. Janet Murray notes in her assessment of games as Symbolic Dramas (1997) that challenges such as overcoming powerful enemies and gathering a great deal of a precious material are common successful ways of asserting agency. The expression of agency then helps to craft an enjoyable experience. Given all the above games and more make use of looting and crafting mechanics as well as powerful boss battles and levels of progression, it is easy to see how dystopia can suit gaming media on a ludo-narrative level. Overall, dystopia caters to the specifities of video games such as interactive challenge, symbolic dramas and story-worlds that allow for the exploration of other possible realities.

Society

The study of human society has proven itself highly relevant to utopian study and as a method of examining the player as well as the video game. Therefore, a brief overview of sociological theory formed together with utopia is necessary for this project. The two areas of research coming together is a natural leap of logic since every incarnation of utopia requires a person, or more commonly persons, to act in order to bring it to fruition. There can be no utopia without people acting towards it. This connection can be seen in commonalities between sociological thought and utopia or dystopia popularity. For example Lawrence notes that 'in the 20th century, the years between the two World Wars sustain the suggestion that periods of major social upheaval excite utopian thought' (2008 Pg. 199). When a society is going through a period of strife it is natural that methods of coping are far more likely to catch attention and become incredibly popular at a significant rate. Lawrence uses societal views of certain medicines as a strong example of this. He notes that for a brief period following the Second World War and the invention of

penicillin 'medically driven utopias were respectable' (2008 Pg. 199). This, of course, was incredibly short lived given the boom in dystopian thought and literature in the years following. However, the clear link between utopia and/or dystopia and each's popularity in any given society is incredibly important. In the face of an uncertain future a strong medicine is found and for a moment (however brief) it is accepted and respected by a whole society that medicine will allow the achievement of utopia; if the whole of a society agrees upon it then it is its own sort of truth.

The power of a united society goes a long way towards the establishment of a utopia; so far as More's original text the entirety of 'Utopia's' residents agreed on their customs and laws. This enabled the country to be easily governed. Ruth Levitas echoes elements of this need for conformity in order to achieve utopia by noting that 'it is possible to define utopia as that state of society ultimately aspired to by an individual or group' (1979 Pg. 23). From this the importance of societal unity, dealing with societies of varying sizes, comes to the forefront of utopic manifestation. While the physicality and the placement of utopia took centre stage in the early period of the term's scholarship, now it cannot be denied that the inhabitants of a utopia are more important than its location. Sociology continues to theorise differing ways that utopia exists in societies yet Levitas takes the fore in a more recent article stating the need for utopia among humans. She notes that utopia serves many roles in society including enabling humans to attempt to discover 'who we are, why we are here and how we connect with each other' (2007 Pg. 290). Overall sociology enables scholars to investigate the most important aspect of any utopia: its people.

Time & Place

There are two final terms that must be discussed before they appear in this project, time and place; both terms are at their most useful when used to examine utopic consumption. Understanding a specific period of time and a certain place gives further insight into how an individual player may come to understand a video game society as well as how that society by itself may be understood. After a long period of investigation into differing periods of time, noting the term's complexity (Starkey, 1989) and humanity's evolving understanding of it (Abazi and Doja, 2018), one theory on time was found to be particularly relevant to utopian scholarship: *On The Experience of Time* by Robert Ornstein

(1997). Most importantly, Ornstein's conception of Relative Time. To summarise this theory, Ornstein put forward that our society is constantly exposed to differing stimuli and it is where society gives the most meaning to these differing stimuli that measures a period of time. Through this understanding we may describe periods of time as the 'time of the warrior' or the 'time of the philosopher.' It may not be too bold a statement to note that currently we are living in the time of social media. From a non-western perspective the power of memory to establish time is discussed, specifically the 'possibility emerging from the past' (Ashcroft, 2013 Pg. 99). The value of time given over to society is yet another link between time period and utopic manifestation; both can be seen to rely upon meaning given to them rather than any design created beforehand.

Place also receives a variety of meanings from several disciplines, most notably geography and architecture. However, Tim Cresswell's *Place: An Introduction* (2014) served as the most valuable research to defining this term and noting another commonality to time and utopia through giving meaning. Cresswell noted that place, similar to utopia, was a subject that served to only benefit from an interdisciplinary approach (2014). Due to this there are several different definitions of space and place in existence that are still often debated by academics from differing schools. For the purposes of this research though, Cresswell's definition of place is 'spaces which people have made meaningful' (2014 Pg. 13). The similarity is immediately obvious in that, according to Cresswell, a space evolves to a place when given meaning by a person or group of people. It was upon this discovery that place truly found its niche in this project and the physical aspect of utopia, as well as the mental and emotional one, could be critically examined. In keeping with Cresswell's thoughts, this multidisciplinary approach ranging from video games to utopia, dystopia, sociology, time and place will enable the strongest and most varied understanding of the three chosen case studies and of utopia in gaming media.

Assemblage

Due to this multidisciplinary approach to both utopia and the gaming media, attempting to find a succinct form of expression for the kind of inquiry took some time. Game theorist Souvik Mukherjee assessed this aspect of gaming and noted video games in particular are connected to socio-cultural, political and economic theory (2015). Furthermore, he noted that in attempting to examine aspects of game narratology

commenting on such aspects of society, academics run the risk of seeing ludological mechanics as merely 'prosthetic to the playing experience' (2015 Pg. 10). This could harken towards a back-step on game theory to the ludology-narratology debate. Mukherjee suggests a new style of game examination that helps to allow for all elements to be considered at once for the ways they affect the overall experience of playing a game. He uses the term *assemblage* to try and enhance the flexibility of game study; he muses that without such a flexible method of assessment studying the medium is akin to 'a blind man trying to know what an elephant looks like' (2015 Pg.15). Such inflexibility means critics will only focus on a single aspect and attempt to discard the rest, leaving the entirety of the artefact unknown. To officially define the term, Mukherjee pulls from Phillips:

> The senses of either "arrangement", "fitting" or "fixing" [… and] one would speak of the arrangement of parts of a body or machine; one might talk of fixing (fitting or affixing) two or more parts together; and one might use the term for both the act of fixing and the arrangement itself.
>
> (Phillips, 2006 Pg. 108-109)

This definition of the act of assemblage was supplemented by Mcgregor-Wise's own work on the term where he notes an assemblage to be 'a whole of some sort that possess some identity' (2005 Pg. 77). Overall an assemblage can be understood to mean a creation made up of a variety of parts in a specific way and possessing an identity derived from its method of construction. Regarding this project such a term is highly applicable to the notion of differing understandings of video games and to an understanding of utopia. Given that utopia's meaning hinges upon meaning given to it through a society (however large or small) the identity in question could vary as much as the affixing process itself. The applicability of assemblage to examining of a variety of utopic manifestations catalogued over the course of close-playing three very different case studies cemented its placement in this academic inquiry.

Justification & Importance

The link between video games and sociology has been made by several theorists such as Mukherjee (2015), Crawford (2011), Herodotou et. al (2015) and Greitemeyer et. al (2010). Video games have evolved tremendously since their inception and are now considered by many to be an art form rather than just a game to be played. However, several games are still created to fulfil only this criterion and can instead be engaging

interactive experiences. Other video games, though, are designed to kindle and evoke significant emotional reactions from those who play them. This aspect of video games is now so well regarded that the media has had its own BAFTA since 2004. Much in the same way books, TV and film are heralded as culturally relevant based in their subject matter, narrative proficiency and (in the case of the latter two) direction and acting, video games are now accredited awards for these elements with Video Game BAFTAs. Awards for Narrative, Original Property, Audio Achievement and Performer in both a leading and a supporting role demonstrate this similarity.

Popular recognition is not the only reason video games have been designated as cultural artefacts. Patricia Greenfield wrote in the early 90s discussing the impact videos games were having by this point in time. She writes 'video games as a cultural or cognitive artefact have tremendous social importance because of their nature and mass medium' (1994 Pg. 4). She continues by examining how children are often exposed to computer technology through video games first. While this notion holds true the age of her article denotes that the 'children' in question are now adults. There is an entire generation who have grown up around the evolution of gaming media. These people have witnessed video games grow from a state of blurry pixels to sophisticated digital recreations of actors or original characters. This added a depth of presentation that draws players in further. Video game remakes are considered objects of nostalgia that again serve to engage old players and introduce new ones. The impact video games are now having is tremendous and they are considered by many to be one of the most popular entertainment media consumed in modern society. The fact that video games have such a massive audience and the ability to house such complex narratives that reflect relevant sociological issues highlights their importance to academic studies and to the player who engages with them.

Aside from their value as cultural artefacts, video game experiences can also be socially valuable due to the creation of in-depth virtual worlds. Several 'AAA' games (video games made by a larger company with entire teams dedicated to them) have built societies with hundreds of individual characters all designed with different roles, opinions and action commands. However, the sociological value of these story-worlds has been

somewhat overlooked in gaming media in favour of sociological study into ways gamers interact with one another in a role-play setting (Bowman et al., 2016; Corneliussen and Rettberg, 2011; Peng et al., 2010; Taylor, 2006). While analysing video games as a lens for social interaction is certainly valuable research, the worlds created in games primarily designed for single player/offline interaction are much less investigated. Therefore, another contributing factor for each of the three case studies in this project was their making use of very little, if any, direct interaction with other gamers while playing. This leaves only the player with the story-world and agents of it around them. The power of games to make worlds such as these that are designed to mimic our own society, to showcase the plight of refugees or worry of acceptance and even the last days of a post-fallout society, gives players a chance to become legitimately invested in these agents and interact with them with that emotion at the forefront. In these examples we see the power of games to give virtual experiences of societal interaction that would be impossible to have in any other medium. Because of this, investigation in the utopic potential of these games will not only yield new thought about utopia, but also on the power of games to provide these experiences and what influence that may have on video game players.

Based on the success of the industry, companies will continue to produce new video game artefacts that in turn offer case studies for new and innovative research. Academic scholars can pull from research, like this thesis, to further assess and investigate trends in the gaming community. Results of such inquiry will no doubt be valuable to larger AAA corporations and smaller independent studios alike. Applying this research will allow companies to create new and exciting games to sate the cravings of an ever-growing market. Therefore, research into gaming media has the potential to be doubly beneficial from an academic and business standpoint. As noted by several game theorists and argued over the course of this introductory chapter, there is an undeniable element of the multidisciplinary to video game scholarship. This project alone incorporated subjects ranging from psychological time inquiries to sociological investigations on the impact of social media. Therefore, several disciplines outside of game studies can find strong arguments and conclusions applicable to their own research fields by examining this thesis. At the same time the growing economic power of the gaming industry means more

monetary value and interest can be invested into video game scholarship. Research results may be shared in order to help streamline existing narrative, ludological or other video game elements. New research could even allow for the creation of innovative game mechanics since a key understanding of any method is crucial in order to subvert it and create something new. Overall then, the highly profitable nature of the video game industry will see the expansion of video games and their audiences in the coming years. From this will come the opportunity for scholars to further engage with and create beneficial research in the field.

In the same way that the video game industry has shown no signs of slowing down or vanishing, utopia too has endured long past its nadir in societal value. Despite the Cold War and more worldwide prominence in dystopian fiction several scholars have noted utopia is beginning to see a re-emergence in society and academic inquiry (Garforth, 2005; Levitas, 2007; Segal, 2012; Wright, 2010). This is justification for the terms continued value in the academic sphere; to have over half a millennium in the face of academic debate and still be the subject of disagreement and new definitions is a feat few other terms can claim to possess. Mannheim (1936) and Bloch (1995) both noted in their philosophical investigations regarding utopia that it exists beyond the academic sphere. Furthermore, both see utopia as a key factor affecting the lives of the general public, albeit at a much more subconscious level; a person will rarely say they are seeking a more utopian existence, yet they almost certainly will be. People strive to better themselves every day in a plethora of micro-actions ranging from choosing what clothes to wear and what to have for dinner, to attempting to kick an addictive habit or devote their time to helping those who have less. The need for utopia in humanity is still present and unlikely to vanish in coming years. If anything, utopia will only become more essential as the world faces darker and more uncertain times. As Lawrence notes, social upheaval is an excellent catalyst for the crafting of utopian thought (2008). With this understanding of the term in mind bringing investigations of utopia forward to a newer media will be incredibly valuable to the scholarship of the subject. Likewise, such research will aid with our understanding of that new media as well. The inception and past of utopia are both well-trodden paths, but new scholarship demands new artefacts for research.

In attempting to discuss research on video games and utopia only a handful of examples could be named and categorised for their applicability while others were more concerned with the notion of play in general. Identifying this gap only further validates the need for this research project. The value and importance of all terms discussed here, from utopia to video games and those between, has been established. Therefore, the gap in analysing how they all come together to affect the media and those who engage with it has also been found. Of the few works that research the appearance of utopia or utopian thought in gaming none will do so in as much depth as this project has. Furthermore, this project aimed to provide not only a significant examination of utopia in video games, but also has provided a suitable methodological framework that another researcher could apply to a case study of their choosing. Not only could the schemata method be applicable for identifying and categorising utopic manifestation in video games, but it could be adapted to locate and quantify any specific instant or event in any given video game. Bearing these further outcomes in mind, this project will not only be filling a gap in researching a multidisciplinary term of crucial importance but will also be able to provide scholars with a strong and valid framework for analytically coding video games.

Methodology: The Utopic Schemata

Given this project is an expansion of a previously completed MA thesis, the methodology was already somewhat defined. For the purposes of this work it was necessary to establish the strengths of that initial method of research and consider why they provided useful data to further the project. In order to answer the research question of this project, how is the utopian genre categorised, constructed and consumed in interactive media, this work was approached through a pragmatist paradigm. The paradigm was designed to seek out and employ both methods of study and areas of research that were best-suited to provide applicable data and arguments to the project. Grounded Theory (Hoe and Hoare, 2012) was employed to find a strong balance between quantitative and qualitative research leading to the conclusions and further arguments. The reasoning behind these choices was two-fold; pulling from the initial MA research project's successful investigation and attempting to build upon research for more focused content and textual analysis. By funnelling the research in this fashion later chapters were able to put forward highly specific, arguable utopian elements found in the case studies. If

not for this approach, the impact of these video games would have been a very difficult succinctly express. To set up this rest of this project clearly, this methodology will move through the differing sections of study, such as paradigm use and grounded theory, before examining how the utopic signs of the project were discovered. From there the context around how the methodology evolved will be considered and the utopic schemata of the project displayed.

Pragmatist Paradigm

The paradigm a researcher chooses to move through their work with has a tremendous impact upon their projects. This project is focused on video game case studies and examines utopic manifestation within them. It is immediately obvious that this work crosses several disciplines of study. Therefore, too rigidly narrowing down the research method used in this project could have potentially caused a loss in the quality of the research and constructed arguments. Kuhn defines a paradigm as an 'accepted model or pattern' (1962 Pg. 23) a researcher may follow when attempting any form of investigation. However, the term does go beyond this highly simple interpretation and carries connotations of the researcher's philosophical position and overall attitude towards their research; without it, an academic's research would be without direction (Feilzer, 2010). This project demanded a wide base of inquiry, searching through several different schools of thought not only on utopia, but on video games, play studies, humanities and social sciences. More importantly, the project was consistently evolving, seeking out new schools of research to determine their suitability to the project. In some cases, this led to serendipitous discoveries that changed the direction of research for entire chapters. So, while finding a suitable paradigm to work in was needed for guidance, said paradigm needed to freeing rather than constrictive.

A prime example of a paradigm suited to freeing academic thought is the pragmatist paradigm. Yvonne Feilzer notes that in the past schools of academic research techniques have often been divided between investigating through positivism or constructivism and those who require a mixed methods research paradigm 'do not fall comfortably into one or the other' (2010 Pg. 7). Given the cross-disciplinary nature of this research an easy fit between those two key paradigms was not forthcoming. Pragmatism, though, when used in an academic setting for research purposes, works to move to the

side of other, more constrictive, paradigms and instead 'orients itself toward solving practical problems' (Feilzer, 2010 Pg. 8). This method of research style suits this project strongly as even in the smaller MA project large stumbling blocks were found that needed to be assessed and moved past. Questions such as 'what is utopia?' 'what is a utopic sign?' and 'how is a utopia sign catelogued?' are just a few. Such issues all but halted the initial research done in this project and it was only by mixing methods of a qualitative and quantitative styles that a solution was found. This example highlights the need for, and justifies the choice of a pragmatist paradigm for this project. The freeing nature of the style and practical applications 'aim at utility for us' (Rorty, 1999 Pg. XXVI) as researchers and this enables relevant research styles to work together. So, mixtures of results are found and considered as one, as an assemblage (Mukherjee, 2015) to provide the strongest and most wide-ranging conclusions.

Working in a pragmatist paradigm led to using grounded theory for initial study in this project. To define the term, grounded theory 'is a methodology for meticulously analysing qualitative data in order to understand human processes and to construct theory-that is, theory grounded in data or constructed "from the ground up"' (Saldaña, 2011 Pg. 6). In much the same way, assemblage theory demands some initiative to apply to differing areas of study. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari make particular reference to the book as an assemblage, referring to it as a 'body without organs' (2013 Pg. 4). The book, according to Deleuze & Guattari, will function in connection with other books, with other organs without bodies. By taking these bodies and plugging them into one another in different ways to continually learn more and improve, different bodies are formed that led to different answers and, more importantly, more questions. Grounded theory within a pragmatist paradigm supports this approach since it relies on the researcher moving forward with what best suits their needs. If a particularly interesting comparison or result from a plug-in combination in is found, leading with it can create new arguments. It was from this approach that the significance of specific combinations of utopic signs was discovered leading to the arguments of chapters four, five and six of this thesis. Considering the multitude of senses a video game can touch upon (more than a book can for example)

there are a plethora of new ways to plug in different codes, seeing how they function and what the lens of utopia will discover as it analyses these differing results.

Manuel DeLanda makes a similar point on assemblage that highlights its applicability to grounded theory as a method of inquiry. In his work *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, DeLanda notes that parts of an existing assemblage, referred to as components, may be removed, then plugged into a different assemblage to create different reactions (2016). It is this quality of assemblage that makes it impossible to break them down to the sum of their parts; the result of an assemblage is 'not of an aggregation of the components' own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities' (Delanda, 2016 Pg. 11). To link this point to grounded theory and the methodology of this thesis, it is difficult to make as compelling an argument when each sign stands alone as a coded element that has been catalogued for its frequency. Utopic manifestation becomes increasingly arguable when signs are analysed together. It was only by examining the commonalities of these signs that further analyses of the case studies were possible. For example, the signs of *Bloodborne* having notions of 'the self' in common led to an investigation on microtopias and their appearance in the game. *The Wolf Among Us'* signs when examined together highlighted a harkening for The Homeland leading to analyses of refugee communities. For *Persona 5* notions of social connections, social growth and power allowed for research into societies, manipulation and communication. So, while utilising assemblage theory together with grounded theory did not explicitly lead to the results of this thesis, it did provide strong quantifiable data that allowed for further areas of research. Without the mixture of these two methods, this project would not have been able to move past its coding stage.

However, the data in this case required parameters be put in place before it could even be constructed, an initial framework of plug-in combinations to combine utopian theories from varying disciplines with video game case studies. While a phenomenological paradigm would be useful in later chapters for analysing the case studies, it could not provide enough aid for initial research to take place. Deep critical analyses of several theory texts were required before the coding process could begin; the method uses 'a line- by-line coding of the written text, identifying descriptive categories

which are constantly compared for similarities and differences' (Burck, 2005 Pg. 245). In this case the 'written text' was a video game and was therefore audio and visual as well as textual. This added new and complex elements to the construction of the codes in question and highlighted grounded theory's applicability to the project since 'grounded theory approach lends itself to the exploration of under-theorized areas' (Burck, 2005 Pg. 245). The manifestation of utopia in games is a very under-studied area of research as background on the topic has shown. Grounded theory was therefore highly applicable to craft new forms of theory in analyses of video games that were then applied to the case studies of the project to allow for the games to be coded. Throughout the production of this thesis, no other project has been found that applies grounded theory to analytically coding video games. This is not to say such research does not exist, but that investigations into the subject provided no results.

Coding the games chosen as case studies for this project provided a great deal of raw numeric data. Quantitative analysis was required in order to showcase and present this data in its most useful form. This quantitative data was primary research made up of the utopic elements found in the case studies. Findings from the initial MA thesis that evolved into this project (in which only a single case study was chosen for analysis) showed over eight hundred individual signs of utopia were found (Murray, 2016 Pg. 19). This MA thesis focused on the analysis of Square Enix's *FFXIII* and was undertaken on the hypothesis that a video game would struggle with any form of utopian narrative because a utopia was, by Segal's definition, 'allegedly perfect' (2012 Pg. 5). As research progressed quantitative findings showed utopia was indeed present within *FFXIII* and played a large part in forming the game's driving conflict, rising and falling with chapters of the game (see Appendix 1). Utopic signs were continually prevalent instead of simply presenting themselves during the game's beginning (prior to the appearance of an inciting incident) and the game's end (when equilibrium is restored). Thus, the Ma thesis became less concerned with proving the unsuitability of utopia to gaming media, and instead focused on analysing the impact it had on the video game case study.

From these conclusions on utopia's manifestation came the useful notion that 'narrative and interactive experience are completely separate yet at the same time

completely inseparable' (Murray, 2016 Pg. 70). The original thesis worked to separate and break down elements of *FFXIII* into Proppian-esque catalogable instances that lent easily towards quantitative analysis and display; this culminated in the use of graphs to show utopic signs and this method is repeated in this project. At first glimpse such a structuralist approach would seem at odds with the use of assemblage. Propp's Morphology of the Folktale (1968) focuses on breaking down story actants to their bare functions (Attebery, 2012) while assemblage focuses on perhaps the opposite, Manuel DeLanda noting 'the properties of a whole cannot be reduced to those of its parts' (2016 Pg. 11). Here the notion of game and narrative being separate yet inseparable is needed. The quantitative coding process does break down the game, even in some cases separating game and narrative events and engaging with them separately. However, the numeric information gathered from this process is not the end-goal of this project, but rather a stepping stone towards those next areas of inquiry. By breaking the games down this way, they can be viewed from angles hidden while trying to assess them as a whole and questions formed form looking at the data this way led to the latter three chapters of this project. Therefore, the more formalist/structuralist approach in the thesis' earlier stages melds well with assemblage to form new areas for research. Without the mix of the two styles (and grounded theory) this thesis could not have been completed.

In keeping with this method, it is prudent to use quantitative content analysis to highlight the most important trends (if any) found throughout the data collection process. Following this, the data was refined to present it in an understandable, compelling manner. To fully define the term, 'content analysis was used primarily as a quantitative research method, with text data coded into explicit categories and then described using statistics/quantitative analysis of qualitative data' (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005 Pg. 1278). The phrase 'using statistics' translated into this project as making use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets in order to construct graphs displaying raw data. Despite the existence of sophisticated software such as SPSS and MATLAB, this project required taking raw data and forming it into graphs for coherency. Since more complex data interaction was not needed, Excel fit the needs of this project well. This form of data analysis suited the purposes of the research best as the large amount of data could be problematic to sort

through for its most important aspects. Too much unsorted data risked detracting from the overall clarity of arguments made. Indeed, this turned out to be the case as initial drafts of chapters 4-6 of this project focused very heavily upon the data and failed to elucidate proper arguments or place any important context around them. Through a process of redrafting it became clear that while the data was incredibly valuable to the project (as it could not progress without it), the research had moved beyond requiring it be the primary point of focus. So, by making use of a mixed methods research paradigm a great deal of raw data was gathered from the case studies. That this was managed despite a lack of other research in the field and despite the malleability of the terms involved is a testament to the method's success.

The process of gathering this data was also simple, yet effective. Analytical coding technology such as HubSpot, MaxQDA and Quirkos were initially considered but lacked the capacity to analyse a complex media artefact like a video game. While such software can track the use of a specific word, responses and even categorise information, video games make use of audio and visual cues and, regarding the case studies of this project, player exploration and choice. These kind of variables are, simply put, too complex for such software to handle. With any swift computerised solution impossible, playing through the games and coding them by hand was the chosen method. Each came was played from beginning to end with a coding sheet designed for each game's utopic schema on hand (see Appendix 2). An obvious limitation to this method is the amount of time required to complete a game play though. For example, *Persona 5* took ninety plus hours of in-game time to complete one coding attempt. Considering the schema's went through more than a single draft before reaching their final stage and this coding process needed to be repeated, it was very time consuming. But, lacking any other form of method it did prove a viable option and gathered the data required.

Utopic Signs

The main term used throughout this project is utopia. Therefore, it is crucial to state which definitions were used for this project due to the variety of meanings that have been given to the term from different researchers in different fields. This project used two definitions of the term to construct a third, original definition of utopia that was used as a perimeter for measuring utopic manifestation in the case studies. The first of these two

definitions was crafted by Ursula K. Le Guin in her essay A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be. Despite the plethora of definitions that exist for utopia, not only from academics of varying fields but from More's own text and ancient Greek philosophy, this project sought definitions that dealt with notions of the self as well as more emotional journeys. The older philosophy of the Greeks preferred to discuss entire cities, exploring their governance and laws to craft a society that was 'best' for them (Bobonich and Meadows, 2018) and More's own utopia discussed the exploration of new cultures and to act as a work of satire of existing ones. Video games are a newer media and the more modern utopian scholarship seeing utopia as an emotional journey every individual takes (Le Guin, 2016; Levitas, 1979, 2007) that is beyond reach yet that one we constantly strive for (Bloch, 1995; Quarta and Procida, 1996) seemed more fitting with the media. Video games are symbolic dramas (Murray, 1997) that require the existence of a goals players strive for that, upon completion, present players with another challenge to take its place. Le Guin's definition also carries with it a sense of melancholy, she calls it a 'sad but ineluctable fact' (2016 Pg. 166) because utopia cannot be achieved for any great length of time. It is an anti-imperialist point that fits with the finite experience of engaging with.

In keeping with the idea of games as symbolic dramas, Le Guin states, 'Utopia is uninhabitable. As soon as we reach it, it cease to be utopia' (2016). The key aspect this definition brings forward is utopia's intangibility in combination with its omnipresence. That utopia is forever beyond our reach but always in sight, always a goal to be worked towards, a journey to be undertaken, and a challenge to be overcome. These factors are similar to the ludologic experience of playing video games. Janet Murray uses the example 'I am challenged by a world of constant unpredictable emergencies and I survive it' (1997 Pg. 142). The second definition was put forward by Cosimo Quarta and translated by Daniele Procida in their article, 'Homo Utopicus: On the Need for Utopia' (1996). In this article the notion of humanity ever striving to surpass itself is argued. The authors write 'this impulse to reach out towards what ought to be, this tendency to self-transcendence, this deep aspiration to become what is Not Yet, makes of humanity a being that is essentially projective, that is Utopian' (1996 Pg. 160). In this definition comes the concept

that humanity is forever trying to become more than it once was and currently is. Humanity attempting to improve upon itself in much the same way gamers are consistently improving their player schema and skills with specific titles, moving the characters forward until completion. Like Le Guin's definition it too is something that cannot be grasped (intangible) but is always there, always in mind as something humanity can aspire to. Again, like Le Guin, it also has some comparability to the basic ludological qualities of video games. In this case, 'I start off with very little of a valuable commodity and end up with a lot of it' (Murray, 1997 Pg. 142).

However, to truly move forward with the creation of a utopic schema for each case study a carefully considered and original definition of utopia needed to be crafted upon existing theory. For the purposes of this project elements of Le Guin and Quarta and Procida's definitions were brought together. By expanding on their work, a new way to define utopia was created that focused not only on the ever-present journey and deep-seated need for utopia, but one that also considered sociological and temporal elements. These final two elements (sociological & temporal) were key to hone in on utopian elements in the chosen case studies. They allowed the research to fully catalogue how utopia in video games is constructed and consumed by player or even an audience observing gameplay. Therefore, this project came to define utopia as an action a person takes, or an object they create that is designed to lead to, or evoke the memory of, the best version of themselves. By combining aspects of time, place and society in the analysis of the three case studies a stronger understanding of utopic manifestation in video games was found and its potential impacts better measured.

The schemas used to code the case studies were the culmination of analyses and discussions on several different utopic, ludological and narratological theories. When applied to the case studies they formed the backbone of this project's primary research. To establish what utopia could be defined as a great deal of research was done. First, utopia was considered as a literary device, seeing how it was used to analyse several texts both in the text itself (Bloch, 1995; Levitas, 2007; Schulzke, 2014; Segal, 2012) and as a school of thought applied to texts at a later date (Edwards, 2009; Farca and Ladevèze, 2016; Søfting, 2013) before selecting two main definitions and building an original definition from them.

Together with this, research was required on the critical elements of the case studies. All are video games and so their ludological and narrative elements often work in synchronicity, producing utopic signs to be examined and coded. Once this research was underway the goal was to produce a utopic schema, made up of a number of utopic signs that would be the codes used when analysing the case studies. Each of the three main case studies had completely different signs that are vague by nature. Therefore, chapters one through three focus on establishing the case studies' ludological and narratological signs, analysing and justifying the decision to include them in each game's utopic schema. Each schema, shown in the final pages of this methodology, introduces the signs used that will be applied to the case studies. It is imperative these schemata be justified and explained prior to showcasing any coding results in order to make clear what utopic signs were examined how they were found in the video games. The strength of these schemata comes from the deep critical thinking and analysis that went into choosing them and the raw, primary data necessary for the coding section of the project they provided.

The final section of the project was a discourse on the patterns, or lack thereof, found in the display of the quantitative data. Chapters four through six focused on what cognitive impacts the utopian elements could have on a player, how the player may react to these impacts and how these impacts could contribute to their enjoyment or deeper emotional response to the game. They considered specific instances of utopic manifestation, subjects they touch upon and societal queues they use to further their impact. These final chapters moved into research disciplines that had yet to be utilised in the previous sections. Tucan notes that 'the fact that most of our mental work is largely unconscious and extremely intricate requires an interdisciplinary framework and a wide range of methodologies so that more light will be shed onto our mental behaviour' (2013 Pg. 299). In order to try and build this varied framework the project sought to have argued and gathered a large amount of quantitatively assessed qualitative data about the experiences video games offer to a player. This data, and theory crafted from it, offered some discourse on how the reactions to such cognitive processes could be experienced. More specifically, to see if these utopian elements were processed in a meaningful way by other characters in the games' story-worlds and by the player's engaging with them.

Herman's work on cognitive narratology was useful here as he provided many insights into how the player absorbed the video game. Herman discusses the ways in which readers (or players) interact with a narrative by seeking out the motivations for characters, relying on underlying structures and using that information to form opinions on characters as well as predict their behaviour (2013). This relationship between the player and the story-world they are experiencing that Herman describes is where the majority of these theories were examined from in order to see how utopic manifestation in games affected a player. Overall, by studying the patterns in the coded utopic elements as 'story-elements' players will have a cognitive reaction to, new conclusions were drawn on the manifestation and reception on utopia in video games.

Forecasting

As a final portion to this introductory chapter the outline of the overall project will be laid out. The first next three chapters (section one) will apply the utopic schemata to each case study giving an in-depth analysis of case study. The chapters will consider the ways each individual sign may be considered utopic and their overall impact upon their video game focusing on *Bloodborne*, *The Wolf Among Us* and *Persona 5* in that order. Chapters four through six (section two) will pull from the most prominent signs or relationships between signs in each utopic schema to establish what specific kind of utopia each video game is able to host. The effects, mind-set and actions of those living in these utopias will lead towards conclusions on each case study. The order for the case studies in this second section will be *Bloodborne*, *The Wolf Among Us* and *Persona* 5 ordered this way to examine an individual utopian, a split utopia and a society-wide utopia. Finally, the conclusions of this project will summarise the overall thesis before asserting the power of video games to construct and house a great variety of utopias each with differing meanings.

Chapter 1 Bloodborne: A Utopia for the Self

Introduction

This chapter will serve as a deeper investigation into the case study of FromSoftware's *Bloodborne* (2015), focusing on the overarching narrative of the game and several of its main mechanics for the ways in which they have aided the creation of *Bloodborne's* utopic schema seen in the methodology. Further analysing the selections made for this schema will show the methods through which *Bloodborne's* utopia potential manifests and the consistent thread linking each sign. Each sign will be considered at an individual level, its meaning made clear via the context of the game (highlighting both ludological and narratological importance) to show why it marks the presence of some form of utopia and the impact it can have upon the player. The place of the player and their relationship with the Hunter (player character) is considered in order to establish just how *Bloodborne*, a game with an empty, voiceless protagonist, can cultivate player empathy. The game takes this emotional connection further to the point where a new player 'self' is crafted for the purposes of play; this further heightens the potential for a strong utopic experience. This relationship between the player and Hunter is core to *Bloodborne's* success at evoking deep emotional responses in the player with minimal narrative exposition. This makes the game an excellent example to highlight the power of video games to impact their players' emotions in ways no other media are able to. *Bloodborne* is a game that focuses upon the individual. The Hunter and player are one and the same; the former an empty vessel through whom the player expresses agency in the game.

The player chooses The Hunter's appearance, their gender, their skillset and (as more sets are acquired) their attire. However, The Hunter's identity does not depend entirely on the player; when engaging in dialogue with NPC's the player can only choose from two or three speech options, limiting their choices to make a more coherent storyworld that The Hunter will fit into. Using the Hunter as a vehicle the game crafts an impacting, successful interactive experience in which the game's utopian potential is found. But there must be some element of identity for The Hunter that the player can latch onto. In his 2001 article Jonathan Cohen discusses how a player will identify with a media character; he notes 'identification requires that we forget ourselves and become the other that we assume for ourselves, the identity of the target of our identification' (2001 Pg. 247).

This process can, of course vary between each video game, specifically depending on how pre-determined a playable character is. For example, *The Wolf Among Us'* Bigby Wolf is a character with a personality, quirks and dialogue used to share his perspective of the world with players in the hope that they will form an empathetic link, that they will pity (Hiltunen, 2001) him and feel catharsis at his success. This success is compounded by a player's direct agency (Murray, 1997) resulting in victory. *Bloodborne*, though does not offer the player a verbal character in such a way. As noted, the player will respond to conversations with NPC's but this is done through a choice of up to three (though most often two and sometimes one) text choices on screen. The player is lacking The Hunter's perspective. *Bloodborne*, in the same way it presents its narrative, leaves much of The Hunter up to the player to infer. They (The Hunter) are an empty vessel in so much as they present no personality to the player. Instead the player will form a kind of identity for The Hunter themselves, as this chapter will go on to explain.

Given the breadth of this examination and investigation, a variety of differing academic texts are employed to produce as strong an argument as possible. Notable theorists in this chapter are the seminal works by Janet Murray and Jesper Juul and more recent works from gaming scholars focusing on utopian and dystopian elements (Schulzke, 2014). As expected, this chapter has a heavy reliance on utopian scholarship (Greene, 2011; Le Guin, 2016; Levitas, 1979; Quarta and Procida, 1996). In order to fully examine the psychological relationship experienced by a player as they engage with *Bloodborne*, some scholarship on psychology and identification theory will also be incorporated (Klimmt and Hartmann, 2006. Przybylski et al., 2012). This multidisciplinary approach is vital to ensure the game is analysed as comprehensively as possible. The depth and breadth of analysis will highlight the power of video games to cultivate a form of utopia that a includes the player. This deeper relationship between player and story-world goes beyond the more passive interactions of observing characters and situations in film, TV or books (Hefner, Klimmt and Vorderer, 2007). Justifying the place and power of this most immersive media highlights *Bloodborne's* ability to craft utopian potential in its gameplay experience and emotional impact. It is vital to establish the media's specificity towards this more intimate relationship with players and this chapter will serve to

demonstrate that regarding *Bloodborne*. To achieve these goals, this chapter will first examine the utopic sign of Insight before establishing its connection with The Boss Battles. The chapter then moves to analyse the two signs focusing on beasts and Kin and on to the power of Caryll Runes. Each of these examined points makes up a sign from *Bloodborne's* utopic schema that is displayed below. Finally, the relationship between the player and Hunter is examined before final conclusions on *Bloodborne's* utopic schema are drawn.

This schema is akin to works by Propp and Campbell designed to break down pieces and analyse them as components but there are some differences. Campbell's work was designed to analyse the structure of plot, *The Heroes Journey* (1990) provides a structure formed from studies of Grecian epics that can be applied to more modern narratives to showcase their popularity. These schemas, however, are not as wide-reaching. Each schema is intrinsically detailed to the specific case study; the schema below is applicable to analysing the utopian elements of *Bloodborne* but the same schema would not translate well to other case studies. Campbell's work could also be considered reductive to the impact of a case study, lessening the emotional impact it may have when characters and places are reduced to archetypes and settings. This schema, although similar, is not so reductive; rather than reduce the player's experience down to its bare structure, it seeks to highlight patterns and provide elements for new academic inquiry and is acquired from the player moving through the game as they usually would, enjoying the experience. Unlike Campbell, who structure was a highly valued and useful breakdown of plot, these schemata are not a final product but rather a useful tool for further analysis of utopic manifestation.

Sign Number	Sign Description
1	Gaining Insight
2	Signs of 'The Hunt'
3	Caryll Runes
4	Boss Battles
5	Signs of 'Elevation To Kin'

Table 1: The Utopic Schema applied when coding Bloodborne.

Gaining Insight

As was noted via Eskelinen (2001), differing game mechanics can and do affect the game world on different levels, ranging from larger impacts that require changes in gameplay to smaller changes that are found when the player seeks them out. These levels provide a strong framework through which to assess *Bloodborne's* utopic signs. The first element of the game, or game mechanic, as defined by Miguel Sicart (2008) examined in *Bloodborne's* utopic schema is called Insight. The Hunter gains Insight in several ways: using items they may find in the story-world, coming upon a new location, or by encountering a boss for the first time. By noting the differing ways Insight is acquired the spatial test of Insight gathering becomes apparent: the player must explore every location in the game and search for the items that provide Insight, or engage and defeat every boss the game contains. The player's victory is necessary since they gain Insight upon first viewing the boss and upon the boss's demise. The item that provides Insight is called 'Madman's Knowledge', or a more powerful version known as 'Great One's Wisdom' (FromSoftware, 2015); the former provides one Insight while the latter provides two. Such items are scattered throughout the game, often hidden away or protected by powerful enemies, and it can be challenging for the player to claim them. This kind of mental challenge and test of ludological skill serves a primary function of adding fun to the game

(Juul, 2007 Pg. 109). The 'mental challenge' in this case is the act of exploring *Bloodborne's* winding, circular and often labyrinthine environments. The 'skill challenge' demands the player defeats difficult opponents. Weaving trials like these organically into the game creates further player investment. Games being 'fun' encourages the player to attempt these tests multiple times until they win. *Bloodborne* leads with this demand for ludological skill offering Insight as a reward for only the player-character (the Hunter); it is victory for the individual in the game with no benefit to the world around them. This lack of social benefit in favour of the individual will show itself many times in *Bloodborne*. Regardless of the methods chosen to attain it, amassing Insight can result in the environment around the player changing due to their increased perception and awareness.

The effects of Insight appear via the environment around the Hunter, as opposed to anything directly controlled. The game defines Insight as 'The depth of human knowledge' (FromSoftware, 2015), immediately inferring that it plunges to deeper, darker aspects of understanding and estrangement from what was before considered the norm. A movement from the familiar to the strange has been examined for its contribution to a utopian journey: in regards to grasping this knowledge Sargisson notes, 'people who try and realise utopian dreams/often find the various effects of estrangement impossible to endure' (2007 Pg. 393). This estrangement forms from the harsh, irreconcilable differences between a desired utopia and the current norm. As the Hunter progresses through the story-world they will likely attain more Insight, bringing them closer to this depth of truth that several intelligent agents in the game are also seeking to achieve. The effects of this journey become more apparent based on the amount of Insight gained: certain characters become active and change their dialogue, new enemies appear, some existing enemies begin attacking in different ways, others can be heard singing unsettling tones, Lovecraftian-esque Great Ones (Amygdalas) appear on the buildings of the city inferring they've always been there (see figure 1), and a baby's cry can be heard in the distance.

Figure 1: An Amygdala crouched around a building.

Overall, new enemy attacks and the appearance of new enemies hint at the world never existing as the player originally saw it. These changes are likely to impact the player and cause strong emotional responses such as fear, confusion or intrigue. The player must then continue the game with these heightened feelings and that could feed into their gameplay styles. The player's tense, nervous state makes them act erratically and fail challenges they previously succeeded in.

The 'madness' of increased Insight affects not the Hunter but the player, controlling them through this emotional reaction, and tests them in new ways. No other media can mimic this kind of trial. Regardless of how afraid a person watching a horror film is the plot will still play out the same. If the environmental effects of increased Insight unnerve the player, then their skill may falter, and the difficulty of challenges feels heightened. By overcoming these emotionally charged challenges the player will feel more triumphant as they have overcome their own nerves as well as ludological difficulty. Well-crafted video games demanding this emotionally intense gameplay showcase the height of interactive media evoking a 'fun' experience that film, TV and books have yet to match. *Bloodborne* goes further by showing how this deeper truth affects characters in the game, some even interpreting it as more utopic. A character named Micolash shows nothing but maniacal pleasure with this knowledge, despite it costing the lives of several others and his own

sanity. The Hunter appears to be the only agent in the game who can withstand the truth Insight provides with no adverse effects. It singles out the Hunter, separating them from all other agents in the game and highlighting the individual experience over a shared social one. The individual's experience with Insight and the new aspects of the story-world it unlocks show utopian potential; it is a form of self-transcendence in the game, changing the Hunter's experience of the world in subtle ways. Insight's power and value to bring about these changes shows its worth as something far greater than merely that of a collectable item.

Insight can be used as a form of currency. Murray notes a key aspect of symbolic action in games is to begin with a small amount, or none, of a valuable item and proceed to have it in great supply by the game's end (1997 Pg. 142). The Hunter starts the game with an Insight value of zero; this, along with the challenges surrounding it, infers Insight's value. When the player first encounters the Hunter's Dream (the safe space 'hub' of the game) there is a character there known as 'The Doll' who acts as a levelling up point; this character is unavailable to the player until they acquire at least one Insight. Therefore, the player is stuck without the ability to empower themselves until they gain deeper truth regarding the world around them. The requirement for Insight to attain self-improvement is noteworthy from a narrative perspective as it highlights the power of the deeper truths the player will explore over the course of the game, yet from a ludological aspect it showcases the importance of this stat. Attaining access to the Hunter's Dream provides the player with a shop where the currency is Insight. The player can purchase valuable items to aid them in battle as well as new attire based on powerful foes they have defeated. The new clothes give the player access to new item descriptions through which nearly all concrete knowledge of these characters is found, bridging the gap between ludological currency and narrative truth in the story-world. There is one commonality between them all these examples: Insight provides the player with *more*. More knowledge, more equipment, or more power to progress further in the story-world. *Homo-Utopius* is clearly apparent: the need to 'know more, to be more' (Quarta and Procida, 1996 Pg. 159). Obtaining, spending or merely hoarding Insight makes the Hunter more than they were at the beginning of the game and serves as a stepping stone helping them become 'the best'

version of themselves. Whether this 'best' version be a powerful hunter, a traverser of dreams or a Great One in the making is up to the player. The use of Insight is not a requirement; it is a choice made solely by the player and it only benefits the player. The individual is the focus of Insight's impact.

Boss Battles

The player gains Insight by encountering a boss entity in *Bloodborne*, both at first witness and at the boss's defeat. Bosses themselves serve multiple functions in video games. First and foremost a boss battle in *Bloodborne* will serve as a difficult test of the skills the player should have honed and mastered over the course of the game. FromSoftware games are notable for their difficulty. In a sense the non-trivial effort in progressing *Bloodborne* would likely require more skill with the game's mechanics then say a player engaging with a *Super Mario* title; this forces the player to become highly skilled and brutally punishes failure. This barrier to progression is an excellent example of Murray's assessment of Games as 'Symbolic Dramas' (1997); she notes several elements and mechanics in game worlds are in fact very similar processes to events we encounter in everyday life. However, these experiences are compressed into a single (or few) moments in video games and this results in a greater impact upon the player and the game-world itself when these encounters arise. Murray details specifically the process of 'encountering a difficult antagonist and triumphing over him' (1997 Pg. 142) and that directly reflects the process of meeting a boss serving as a barrier to progress and achieving victory over them. Not only does this victory bring satisfaction to the player (via the Symbolic Drama) it also gives the player concrete proof of their ability to continue in the game. Not only were they able to overcome the difficult antagonist of the area, but they faced the challenge with courage (Murray 1997) and have thus been rewarded for it via in-game loot. *Bloodborne* rewards victorious players with a currency known as 'blood echoes' (used to level up the character) and valuable items that cannot be found elsewhere in the game. It is simple to see how the defeat of a game boss shows success for the player and the player alone. In *Bloodborne*, the player may summon non-playable characters (NPCs) to aid them in some battles or request online help from another player. However, immediately following a victory both NPC or online summons vanish, leaving the player alone. Even in examples

where outside help can be provided the player does not experience it for long and their solitude remains paramount.

The simple assessment of 'victory' is not concrete enough to garner a place in *Bloodborne's* utopic schema. If that were the case than the same value could be given to any and all successes the player has (every enemy defeated, every step taken, every button pushed, etc.). Further elucidation is needed. In terms of this project's definition of utopia, to improve oneself is to take a step forward on a utopic journey. Yet, at the same time, it is possible 'players may become active participants in creating or perpetuating the problems that make game worlds dystopian' (Schulzke, 2014 Pg. 316). A balance needs to be found. The player's experience in the story-world of *Bloodborne* begins after a great deal of conflict has occurred. Yharnam has already been made victim of a beastly scourge, most citizens have already fallen to madness, and the machinations of secret communities have already ended in disaster. As the player moves through this heavily dystopian setting, they can leave it in a more improved state; in this the player 'encounters a challenging test of skill or strategy and succeeds in it' (Murray, 1997 Pg. 142). The current state of Yharnam is dire. People cower in their homes and the streets are filled with beasts that need to be put down to ensure the safety of humans (the species of the Hunter). This state of play could serve as motivation encouraging players to go and fight. Skilled players can clear the streets and keep the monsters at bay ensuring the survival of their own kind; performing these actions would mean they are keeping the dystopian problem (as they see it) at bay. Several boss battles are merely larger, more deadly examples of such problems whose deaths yield utopian progression. By killing these bosses, larger areas of the story-world are kept safe and the player can continue their journey through the night of the hunt.

The 'Boss Battle,' with the context of *Bloodborne's* story-world behind it, can be utopic progression because they carry connotations of both story-word improvement, self-improvement and increased levels of safety. The Hunter takes the place of a utopic 'I' in battle against a dystopic 'Them' or dystopic 'Other.' Father Gascoigne serves as an excellent early example of this dystopian 'Them/Other.' He is the second boss the Hunter may battle, and first boss they must battle in order to progress in the story-world. Interestingly, this boss character can be summoned before the Hunter fights him to assist

the player in battling the Cleric Beast (the first optional boss of the game) and this could arguably be a more utopian version of the character. In this instance Father Gascoigne is doing what he set out to do (fighting in the hunt) and aids the player in slaying a large beast. These moments of companionship could even foster a friendly relationship between the player and this NPC. Since the player was alone in the game till this point, having a friendly companion to traverse through Yharnman defeating enemies with would be a refreshing and pleasant experience. The culmination of this companionship is both the Hunter and Father Gascoigne defeating a boss together; their victory serving as an emotional highpoint. However, when the Hunter comes upon Father Gascoigne a little later the once-ally is now lost to bloodlust and attacks the Hunter. Later in the fight Gascoigne gives in completely and transforms into a bestial creature, manically trying to kill the Hunter. This is the dystopian version of Father Gascoigne for two reasons: one, he is no longer a human participating in the hunt and is instead a ravenous and bloodthirsty beast; and two, he is no longer an ally on the Hunter's side but instead is an enemy. Father Gascoigne may be aptly described via Nietzsche: 'he who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster' (Pg. 102) as this transformation does indeed come to pass. Father Gascoigne's alliance changes and the player sees Father Gascoigne change from being a part of the utopic 'I' (or 'We' in this case) to the dystopic 'Them.' Father Gascoigne is now a beast and his fall (or change) presents the Hunter with a new test to overcome, meeting the requirement of a Symbolic Dream, because this beast must be put down to save others and allow the Hunter to progress further into Yharnam. What first appears to be a strong challenge to overcome is in fact a much more complicated narrative culmination of different factors in the game, challenging what is and isn't utopic. More importantly the previous companionship the player shared with Gascoigne now becomes a tragic memory as they must kill this one character who acted as their ally. The overall experience impacts the player on an emotional level thanks to the medium; unlike a more passive medium such as film or book the player must actively best Gascoigne in combat, witness his fall from grace and know they are leaving themselves with no allies in Yharnman once again. No grand narrative exposition occurs and yet the victorious words 'Prey Slaughtered' (FromSoftware, 2015) flash across the screen

highlighting what Father Gascoigne has been reduced to and what the player has done. This visceral emotional fallout is another experience only video games can provide. It is the context behind these boss battles, what they represent to the story-world and player rather than pure ludological challenge, that earns the sign's place in *Bloodborne's* schema and continues to show the plight of the individual in the game. Turning back to Le Guin, she, in a similar point to Nietzsche, notes the blurred line between utopia and dystopia; where one is present the other will also be (2016). This line is perhaps at its thinnest during these Boss Battle moments; while it is a utopic encounter, the dystopic elements can be found within.

Signs of 'The Hunt'

'The Hunt' sign focuses on the beasts and bestial encounters in *Bloodborne*. 'The Hunt' is the main event driving both the narrative and ludological challenges of the game forward when the Hunter awakens in Yharnam. As they continue playing, the player can begin to piece together what 'The Hunt' is and what it represents with the help of several NPC dialogues and in-game clues. As Schulzke notes, 'games set in more complex worlds that include sufficient levels of detail that they might qualify as being utopian or dystopian employ narratives to give deeper meaning to the ludic experience' (Schulzke, 2014 Pg. 317). The narrative around 'The Hunt' is the focus of most of *Bloodborne* and worth considerable value when it comes to locating utopian elements in what first appears to be a heavily dystopian framework. By examining the history behind 'The Hunt' and providing further context to specific instances where it occurs utopic potential is found. The malleability (Greene, 2011) of utopia is beautifully portrayed in the history of Yharnam's descent into chaos since the very thing responsible for 'the beastly scourge' (FromSoftware, 2015) was once heralded as a miracle: The Old Blood. Found during an excavation into old tombs, the Old Blood can heal any injury and cure any illness. The presence of this substance could easily make Yharnam a utopic location since a person's 'best' self is likely to always require peak physical health to aid in their goals. Many people with similar thoughts travelled to Yharnam for treatment and the city flourished with wealth and power. Perhaps in a reflection of Le Guin's essays, her note 'as soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia' (2016 Pg.166) is seen here, as the blood was consistently

overused by some and its negative effects became apparent. Monstrous beasts appeared and began stalking the streets. These monstrous beasts, having once been citizens of Yharnam, are now twisted beyond recognition or sanity. In a perhaps ironic turn of events, those who battled the beasts (clerics of the Healing Church) imbibed more blood than any to remain at peak health and thus 'clerics transformed into the most hideous beasts' (FromSoftware, 2015). This cycle of battling beasts and healing only caused 'The Hunt' to continue in Yharnam.

Understandably, the people in Yharnam sought to separate themselves from beasts (despite at their core being one and the same). Kearney notes 'ever since Western thought equated Good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been liked with notions of exteriority' (2003 Pg. 65). It is but a small leap to take this desire of putting good with ourselves and evil with what is not 'us', to see people declaring what is utopic with themselves and their accomplishments, while asserting what is dystopic with what they consider to be outside their own influence and control; it is 'one of the oldest stories in the book' (Kearney, 2003 Pg. 65). Thus, the humans of Yharnam, most notably those of the Healing Church, took up the mantle of the utopic good while the Beasts became the dystopic evil. The beasts, unable to empathise with or relate to any form of the decided 'good', only cemented their position in the eyes of Yharnman culture; 'the national *We* is defined against the foreign *Them*' (Kearney, 2003 Pg. 65). Because of this 'The Hunt' is heavily supported and heralded as a battle of good versus evil. The Hunt represents an almost desperate clinging to the long-dead utopian glory of Yharnam, as though killing all beasts and exterminating this 'Other' presence would bring back what has not been lost. However, Yharnam is already past this hope for recovery as the society is all but destroyed. In the face of this dystopia the only sight of utopian potential is found on the level of the individual.

Since there are so few individuals left human within Yharnam it is an understandable to infer that the beasts have in their own way, colonised the space. In her description of Walauwe (a colonial manor in Sir Lanka), Mohan notes it has been touched by British colonisation but not destroyed by it (2012) and the same could be said for Yharnam. The space still has human-made structures dominating its landscape and

several inhabitants lock themselves away, safe from beastly attacks, and cackle somewhat manically indoors as the Hunter passes. There is enough of the original, beast-free Yharnam still standing that the few sane humans left can experience hope and infer times when the city was successful, powerful and rich. Because of this there still exists some hope that, if they survive, things will get better in Yharnam; several sane humans try and 'wait out' the night of the hunt while The Hunter explores the dominated space and exists as an 'Other' figure in it. The more common narrative trope is a monster invading the town, attacking, killing until the citizens of the chase it out; in this case though, it is The Hunter who is the outside figure that is attacked on sight while the beasts harmoniously exist in one another's presence. This twist reflects The Hunter's place as the lesser figure in Yharnam fighting alone for survival at almost every turn in spaces that once would have accommodated them. Beasts lurk on city roads and in the main streets but also in the dark corners of homes and behind windows ready to attack; the familiar space of a city is made unfamiliar, is made Other by the beasts colonisation it making The Hunter a stranger to the land in more ways than one.

The Hunter has no memory of Yharnam, no knowledge of these by-gone glory years, yet they are considered part of this utopic 'We' from the game's inception. The first NPC spoken to, Gehrman, gives instructions to the player over the course of his dialogue:

> I am... Gehrman, friend to you hunters. You're sure to be in a fine haze about now, but don't think too hard about all of this. Just go out and kill a few beasts. It's for your own good. You know, it's just what hunters do! You'll get used to it...
>
> (FromSoftware, 2015)

Of important note here is the tone of this introduction – the player is told not to think, to give up clinging to confusion and merely kill beasts for two reasons: it is for 'our own good' and 'just what hunters do.' The Hunter has no sense of identity and is suddenly given one. This serves to bring the Hunter into the utopic 'We'. The price paid for that place is two-fold: the blood of Yharnam's beasts and the loss of an independent choice. In this the utopian context behind the Signs of 'The Hunt' is properly revealed: a single group battling against an evil and fulfilling their roles as protectors. As Levitas notes 'utopia criticises the present, postulates a desired alternative which requires effort to bring into being' (1979 Pg. 22); this is what 'The Hunt' embodies, a return to the utopic land of Yharnam that can only be achieved via the death of all beasts. The city is long past this

point of saving, but the goal, the journey, the quest to achieve this impossible dream reflects Le Guin's theory on utopia only existing as it is yearned for. The few people left in this land are desperate to have Yharnam as it once was, a powerful utopian place where all were healthy. In the same way utopia exists as a point of yearning, it is made more appealing since it is currently unobtainable. The Hunter is caught up in this whole-hearted desperation and all signs of 'The Hunt' (see figure 2) that are found in the game take on a new meaning. They are not signs of a chaotic battle between man and beast, but rather a battle to rid the town of dystopian influence.

Figure 2: A crucified beast serving as a symbol for 'The Hunt'

Their choice to make use of hunters and violence to achieve this end is no surprise, since when 'faced with a threatening outsider the best mode of defence is attack' (Kearney, 2003 Pg. 65) and such battles have caused numbers to dwindle. As the player progresses through the game, they come to realise the Hunter is perhaps the only character left still battling against this dystopian influence. They are alone in their battles for the now lost utopian Yharnman. This goal cannot be achieved – 'The Hunt' cannot end successfully – but the act of hunting remains utopic all the same. If anything, its value is only increased since the Hunter acts alone, a single utopic figure in the face of a vast dystopia. Not only does this cement signs of 'The Hunt' as a utopic sign, but it once again emphasises *Bloodborne*'s choice to centre the game around the individual and their journey.

Elevation to Kin

There are three different factions at work in *Bloodborne*: Hunters (Humans), Beasts (Semi Transformed/Fully Transformed), and Kin (Celestials/Great Ones). Thus far this schema's analysis has detailed the human, mostly through examinations of the Hunter, and the beast factions. However, there is a third party at play whose appearance is a great deal more shrouded until mid-way through the narrative. If the conflict between hunters and beasts is a strong example of being repelled at the forced confrontation of an 'Other' entity, the Kin creatures in the game represent a fascination and obsession with the 'Other.' Both regarding the place of the 'Other' and the 'Self' and (most importantly) the gap between these two states. While most of the characters in the game sought the Old Blood's healing powers to maintain a state of 'best' via physical health, there were some who sought a different form of evolution: one that could be found in communion with The Great Ones. *Bloodborne* is a game that makes no attempt to hide its inspiration and homage to works of the author H.P. Lovecraft, particularly through the inclusion of entities known as Great Ones that are described in horrifying terms beyond human comprehension. Often merely gazing upon these creatures leads to madness or death. They are so inconceivably different that they represent the peak incarnation of what an 'Other' could be.

Kearney turns his attention to creatures of this vein in his analysis of the 'horrific sublime'; he notes that 'borderline experience with something monstrously disturbing fills us with both repulsion and attraction' (2003 Pg. 89). Some characters in *Bloodborne* actively sought out these monstrously attractive entities in the hope of gaining a 'depth of inhuman knowledge' (FromSoftware, 2015) beyond which they should have any form of access to. Despite the difference in substances people use (the Old Blood and the Great Ones) there is some similarity to be found in the results of these attempts: chaos, death and transformation. Yet, despite these clear failings, the search for knowledge with the Great Ones and the price paid has direct comparable links to the tale of Eve and the serpent in the Christian Bible. This religious text is used by Quarta as a direct example of *Homo-Utopius*, i.e. the *need* for utopia; the author notes that Eve was not seduced to consume the fruit in the garden so that she might discern for herself what was good and what was evil, but rather the truly convincing lie was that eating the fruit would make her

and Adam 'as God' (1996 Pg. 162). The notion of being 'more' is by itself extremely vague and, perhaps, unhelpful. With this added context though, it can be seen that to become more than human ('as God') would provide Eve with knowledge and power beyond which she currently possessed, and this was what truly swayed her to partake of the fruit as the serpent was tempting her to. The characters in *Bloodborne* who also desire the knowledge of Great Ones seek it in the hopes of becoming more powerful: to learn what they could not possibly learn in their current state, to see more than they could possibly see as mere humans. All these are examples of self-improvement, to attain a stronger level of being: a 'best' version of oneself even should the cost be a loss of self and painful failure. These failures evoke a great emotional response in the player, serving to unnerve them in a similar manner to the effects of Insight despite some NPC characters being enthralled by the Kin and The Great Ones. The links between several *Bloodborne* characters attempting to communicate and receive boons from the Great Ones, and striving for improvement towards a more utopian state can therefore be easily made with the Hunter (and by extension the player) excluded from the group; once again they are alone.

What needs to be examined then is the Hunter's (and by extension, the player's) relationship or inclination towards dealing with the Kin themselves. The encounters between the Kin creatures of the game come, first and foremost, from Insight. Insight is the very 'inhuman knowledge' (FromSoftware, 2015) those who sought the Great Ones needed to acquire, yet the Hunter cannot help but acquire more and more of it by simply progressing through the story-world. Even should the player never use any Insight-related items they cannot stop the Insight number from rising upon every first encounter with a new area, first encounter with a boss creature, and defeat of a boss creature. As it is more likely that a player exploring the story-world should use Insight items, their number will rise even more swiftly. As this number rises and the player continues to move further in the game more and more of the Kin come to light; these enemies evolve from being a single encounter in a beast-filled area to entire mobs of Kin with varying powers. Towards the final few areas of the game there is a strong shift in enemy appearance in favour of these Kin enemies, showing the Hunter's journey towards them. The Winter Lanterns (see figure 3) encompass this relationship between player, Kin and Insight. A status effect

known as 'Frenzy' will build simply by remaining in the line of sight with these creatures. When the stat has filled completely, the Hunter loses eighty percent of their health. Such a drastic drop in health while battling an enemy can cause high levels of stress and cause players to panic, often leading to the Hunter's death. Kin creatures highlight the effects of Insight focused to a deadly level in a way that beast creatures never do. This relationship between Kin, madness and player stress reflects the immersive experience video games provide while balancing game and story. These Kin creatures only affect the Hunter as well, not one another or any other enemies who wander too close. The heightened sense of danger accompanying this sign is only relevant to the Hunter, the individual's experience in the game.

Figure 3: A Winter Lantern inflicting the 'Frenzy' status.

A more environmental example of this movement towards Kin is the Maneater-Boar enemy's evolution (see figures 4 and 5). In its first appearance in an earlier area of the game the boar looks purely bestial. However, as the influence of the Kin grows, the boar begins to change. Its later appearance shows a multitude of eyes on its face, hinting at forbidden knowledge in the game's canon.

Figure 4: A maneater boar enemy in an earlier area of the game.

Figure 5: A maneater boar enemy in a later area of the game, note the mass of eyes covering the upper half of its face.

This estrangement from the norm, from the 'We' towards a new and different 'I' can be crucial towards achieving a utopian experience (Sargisson, 2007) and this turns out to be the case of the game. In order to achieve two of the three endings that the game offers, the player must consume multiple items to increase their Insight and commune with a Great One. In one of those two endings, the player character outright evolves into an infant Great One, reflecting the self-transcendence referenced in *Homo Utopius*. The evolving relationship with Kin and the forbidden yet seductive empowering knowledge the Kin represent is where the utopian elements of this faction come into play. The player has

more power regarding this sign since several 'Kin heavy' areas of the game are purely optional and must be sought out. In the same way that Eve was required to take and bite the apple to learn and evolve, so too must the player seek the Kin out and learn of them. It is this potential to evolution and improvement that sees interactions with Kin a sign in the schema.

Runes

Bloodborne's lore notes, 'Runesmith Caryll, student of Byrgenwerth, transcribed the inhuman utterings of the Great Ones into what are now called Caryll Runes' (FromSoftware, 2015). These runes are items collected over the course of *Bloodborne* and serve a ludological effect of strengthening the Hunter. However, this is not why they are worthy of note; the runes (as their workshop tool describes) are the 'inhuman utterings' of the Great Ones. The majority of Great Ones exist in their own plane that human beings can rarely (if ever) understand. The idea of Great Ones or even Kin becomes synonymous with elevation and reaching new states of existence. The 'Other' becomes the norm as humanity comes closer to this goal. This fits with the 'more' theory of *Homo Utopius* (Quarta and Procida, 1996) in so much that humans, particularly hunters, sought out the works of Runesmith Caryll in the hopes of attaining higher knowledge. *Homo Utopius* (Quarta and Procida, 1996) pulls from a Blochian paradigm of thought, detailing the desire of humanity to 'know more, to be more' (1996 Pg. 159) and goes on to state this desire is 'an essential character of the human species' (1996 Pg. 60); the use of the term 'human' is particularly apt regarding this case study as, in *Bloodborne* it is humans who are attempting to at once dominate the beasts and imitate the Kin through a myriad of ways. Caryll Runes impart knowledge and bestow some strength upon the Hunter (and in theory any other hunters who may use them) immediately elevating them to a level slightly above that of other standard humans. However, each rune has different levels of power; for example, the 'Moon' rune bestows greater Blood Echo drops from enemies, but there are three forms of this rune. One bestows 10% more, the other 20% and the third 30%. Naturally each of these is acquired later in the game and each is more difficult to attain than the last. While the obvious 'utopic' journey of gameplay completion is at work here, that is not enough for runes to earn a place in the game's utopic schema. Utopia can be seen in the character

changes these runes bestow. Each makes the Hunter stronger (to better face game challenges and obstacles) but they arguably also make the Hunter less human as they take in more of the inhuman knowledge of the Great Ones. It could be argued the utopic 'I,' that is to say, the Hunter standing alone against all others, is slowly converging towards the, dystopian 'Them' by taking on these characteristics, particularly bestial ones. However, by time such bestial characteristics are fully taken on the 'Them,' so far as the player character is aware, has become the 'I'. The player is still controlling a Hunter, their goals, wants and desires unchanging. The Hunter now looking bestial or Kin-like will only effect the experience of gameplay. The benefits of Caryll runes, such as increased Blood Echoes or higher health, lean towards utopic evolution. The best version of 'I' can be found in the qualities of the 'Them' and in the process of this mental transition towards 'Them' the 'I' is both kept and lost. The Hunter is still very much themselves even if the runic augmentations make that difficult to tell. Much in the same way the Hunter becomes more intimately aware of Kin and their place in the story-world, they also rely more heavily upon their inhuman knowledge to achieve their goals, no matter the cost. It is a price only the Hunter will pay, the runes affecting them and only them as *Bloodborne* continues to display its preference for the individual.

The effects of runes can be seen in-game through the physical appearance of the Hunter. The more powerful the run the more difficult it is to find; the best are saved until the end stages of the game. The game's downloadable content (DLC) serves as the most difficult portion of *Bloodborne,* containing some of the most powerful runes. Two such runes are 'Milkweed' and 'Beast's Embrace,' both of which change the player's appearance when acquired and worn together with other items (see figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: The Player Character while equipped with 'Beasts Embrace' and taking on bestial characteristics.

Figure 7: The Player Character while equipped with 'Milkweed' and taking on kin characteristics.

The obvious ludological motivation is apparent as the new appearances come with new move sets for players to learn and master, as well as augmented abilities with certain weapons designed to match. The runes give the player the choice to have the Hunter take on either the qualities of a beast or the qualities of a Kin, effectively bringing the player character into those societies. As Schulzke notes in regard to the role of utopia in groups, 'societies need to compel members to be productive and members must be prevented from coming into conflict with each other' (2014 Pg. 319); however this is not the case in the

game. The player character can be a beast and still be attacked by beast enemies who do not harm one another, and the same is true of Kin enemies while appearing as a Kin. This ludo-narrative dissonance that cannot be experienced until the very late portions of the game showcases Le Guin's note that upon achieving a utopian state, it ceases to be utopic (2016), and instead new goals must be searched for. The signs of 'The Hunt' demonstrating the plight of the beasts and the elevation to Kin highlighting a human's dire need to learn more are both utopian journeys that can now be reached; yet, the moment the Hunter does so and ventures into the game-world again, nothing has changed, save for them.

Caryll Runes affect only the Hunter and have no impact on the world around them. Further emphasising that, in terms of *Bloodborne*, the act of moving towards and battling for any kind of utopia is a done on an individual level. The Hunter is not privy to a society that will work with them towards their goals. Instead, they must make use of augmentations to change and improve only themselves, be it through knowledge or power, to ensure their survival in Yharnam. The importance of the Caryll Runes and the impact they have upon the player character is the predominant reason for their placement in *Bloodborne's* utopic schema. The powers offered by Caryll Runes serve as an excellent reflection for the struggles undertaken by the Hunter on their individual journey. Furthermore, the attention paid to the individual and the Hunter's exclusion from beast and Kin groups even while taking on their characteristics explicitly details that *Bloodborne's* utopian potential is found in the individual and not in any kind of group or society.

Player Character

There is one more aspect of the game worth deeper examination prior to moving forward: the Hunter themselves. The Hunter is a blank slate, a mute vessel, a vehicle through which the player can fully experience the world of Yharnam and the many horrors it contains. Yet scholars have noted that character identification is 'argued to be an essential element of game enjoyment' (Hefner et al., 2007 Pg. 40). It is necessary to explore how the Hunter is designed so that the personal utopic journey *Bloodborne* perpetuates and the Hunter undertakes can be understood. Especially since this journey has a great deal of

impact upon both the video game and the player. This portion of the chapter will briefly move away from the schema analysis to assess the Hunter and the player's relationship with them in greater depth, highlighting the cultivation of emotional identity and investment.

Bloodborne relies upon the player's skill and action to progress the game from its beginning to one of several ends, and players to engage with the game since it is an enjoyable experience. Research into psychology has noted the ability of humans to 'use media entertainment in order to improve their well-being' (Klimmt and Hartmann, 2006 Pg. 135) and this is the core reason video games are such a successful form of media. They craft experiences other media are not able to that afford players enjoyment and improvement to their well-being. However, focusing on the player and their well-being may appear to be moving towards equating a form of utopia with a player's happiness; this is not so. The context of the game has shown that *Bloodborne's* utopic journey affects only the Hunter who is designed to possess virtually no inherent personality or defined appearance, save those that the player gives them. The player decides what the Hunter will look like, what weapons they will make use of and how they will interact with other NPCs throughout the game. It is only natural, then, for the player to project elements of themselves onto this 'blank slate' Hunter. Theories on the idea of a 'self' have evolved in years to see it no longer as a fixed mental construct in a person but rather 'as state-sensitive and malleable depending upon the situation' (Hefner et al., 2007 Pg. 40). Hefner et al. further build upon this theory in their work detailing the changes a person will make in order to see more of themselves within a character they play. Or in contrast, adopt some new and different views pertinent only to a constructed temporary self who exists in media work with which they are currently engaging. Essentially, the person playing *Bloodborne* possesses the capability to not only to engage with the world of Yharnam and the Hunter, but to also craft and construct a whole identity for Hunter in keeping with the rules of the game. The player's successes, choices and actions are not only vital to a weaker notion of 'player success equals utopia' but also to a much deeper, context heavy 'player-via-Hunter' encounters, choices and consequences utopia. Each sign in *Bloodborne's* utopic schema has emphasised the individual nature of this case study's utopia this and several

examples such as boss battles and Kin encounters, show the emotion-heavy impact the game's encounters can cultivate.

A player has the ability and the desire to see an ideal self at play (Przybylski et al., 2012) the more they move through and become aware of the game's story-world and its lore. Therefore, since 'video games provide a gamut of idealized attributes embodied by ready-made, idealized roles in highly immersive narratives' (ibid Pg. 70) the player can and does have a great impact on any utopic, or dystopic, actions made. For the purposes of *Bloodborne* the player takes on the role of a foreigner to Yharnam whose first and only given instructions are to hunt beasts. From this point onwards the player will immediately begin to evolve a new 'self' pertaining to the game and their Hunter whose journey begins with all the potential for both utopia and dystopia. At the same time they are 'experiencing abilities and satisfactions that are difficult to access in everyday life' (ibid). The use of the word 'satisfactions' by scholars bears significance as it harkens back to Murray's original notes on agency in video games: 'The satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices' (1997 Pg. 126). This does not justify gameplay alone as enough for any sort of utopian satisfaction, but the power of the player and the choices they make can and do lead to it.

Should the player choose to go forth into the story-world and fully explore, collecting Insight items and exploring optional areas of the game, where Kin enemies abound, they are much more likely to experience a greater immersion while at once building the signs catalogued in the game's utopic schema. With time and further game play this 'immersion in video-gaming contexts would influence the connection between game-self–ideal-self convergence and intrinsic motivation' (ibid) to bridge the gap between player action and Hunter action. In this strengthened relationship the joining of player and Hunter satisfaction results in a singular utopian experience. The player's actions alone are not garnering utopian success; it is the context through which the player views those actions after filling the blank slate of a Hunter with their own specialised self that elevate those actions to small instances of utopic feeling upon the player's journey. Every hunt sign, Kin sign, Insight item, Caryll Rune and boss battle provide another minute step towards an elevated player-Hunter's utopian desire. The relationship between

the player and the Hunter has served to bring new light and context to the power of the player's action. The power of immersion to blur the gap between the notion of players and characters they control in games allows small utopian successes to transfer across both agents. This is a relationship is one of the greatest strengths found the process of playing video games. The utopic signs of this schema would be very difficult to catalogue the same way in a different medium. This investigation into *Bloodborne* shows how a person can be emotionally impacted by a media artefact but their impact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Bloodborne's* utopic schema is driven singularly by the player and the Hunter and affects only them. All other agents in the game, enemies, NPCs, etc. are unable to change and are often too late to be changed due to the game's timeline upon the Hunter's arrival. The world of Yharnam and the Great One's dreams on the fringes of it are all nearing their end, beyond saving to the point where the only salvageable aspect of the world is the Hunter themselves. The Hunter's actions and choices as they move through the game are what truly give the game its utopian potential. Interacting with Yharnam, becoming drawn into emotional conflicts and frightening environments influence the state of the player and this, by ludological demand, will affect the Hunter. The affordances of *Bloodborne* to craft these situations so masterfully and viscerally speaks to the power of the media and the impact video games can have. Utopia is found in the individual's plight in this story-world and those experiences transfer as satisfaction to the player thanks to the close relationship they form with the Hunter.

This is not to say the other agents in the game are wholly without use. Other creatures often serve as signs in of themselves such as differing enemies reflecting the predominance of 'The Hunt' or the place of Kin in the more hidden spaces of the world. Items that impact Insight or Caryll Runes providing extra strength boons to the Hunter are found in the game as well, serving as their own signs. However, these uses still harken back to the Hunter as the singular fixture of the game through which all utopian elements converge and flow as they will be catalogued and coded. It is through the player-Hunter-self relationship that any utopic elements in the entirety of the game can be found and recognised. The affordance of video game media to cultivate a relationship between

players and game characters is what provides the added depth needed for an impacting utopian, or dystopian experience. That depth for emotional effect is the reason this project could go forward and highlights the influence this media has on players and researchers alike.

Chapter 2 The Wolf Among Us: A Utopia of Choice

Introduction

Telltale Games' *The Wolf Among Us* serves as the most narrative-focused game of the three that will be examined. In this chapter a critical analysis of the utopic signs will provide arguments for both the sign's inclusion and the ways the signs showcase utopian elements in the game. Overall this chapter seeks to argue that not only is utopic potential rife in the game but that it depends upon the player. Specifically, the utopic potential relies on the player's agency to direct the narrative. Despite the game's overarching story remaining consistent regardless of player choice, the nuanced actions the player has the protagonist, Bigby Wolf, take can affect some appearances of specific signs. These choices also affect whether Bigby's overarching narrative journey could be considered utopic. By analysing the case study's signs the power of the player is brought to light. As with the previous case study, utopian theory will be applied throughout this chapter together with work on game studies and design. However, theory on player relationship and motivation (Gabbiadini et al., 2016; Zagal, 2009) is applied as well. Works on film Noir (Flory, 2004; Fluck, 2001; Hillis, 2005) are applicable to the case study so that Noir elements of the game are identified. It is vitally important to argue the power of the player in this chapter specifically since not only can the player influence the narrative and affect utopic sign appearance. The potential for the player to form a strong emotional connection with Bigby and feel success or failure alongside him brings in an element of utopic feeling that could not be investigated as heavily in a more ludologically heavy game such as *Bloodborne*. The Noir aspects of the game show how utopia is consistently found in the narrative despite success at portraying dystopian heavy traits such as the failed American Dream and post-war poverty. This chapter will begin with narrative heavy signs such as Allusions to Fables, True Fable Appearance/Behaviour and Magic before examining more complex signs such as Revelations and Fights, these signs making up the game's utopic schema displayed below, with some final considerations to the utopian potential found in the player's power of choice.

Sign Number	Sign Description
1	True Fable Appearance/Behaviour
2	Magic
3	Allusions to Fables
4	Revelations
5	Fights

Table 2: The Utopic Schema applied when coding The Wolf Among Us.

Allusions to Fables

'Allusions to Fables' is a sign to note and catalogue each instance a character or space in *The Wolf Among Us* describes, alludes to or outright discusses a Fable who is not present in the game-world. The sign provides two major points for discussion: the case study's clear pulling from a source material, and the suggestion of loss and its relation to the Noir genre of narrative. The game pulls from an incredibly vast array of source material throughout. Fairy Tales are a prevailing narrative that is seen in many different media (books, comics, films, TV, series playable fictions, etc). Therefore, its use in a new media such as video games is unsurprising. Propp identified some 439 tales' worth of characters to exist and play a part in any narrative set in a fairy tale diegesis. *The Wolf Among Us* lacks the length and depth to even attempt to bring such a vast array of characters to light over the course of its narrative.

At a base level this is due to reasons of practicality but also due to the nature of the game itself. It has been established that 'game levels are frequently capable of, and indeed designed to, elicit affective responses' (Yannakakis and Togelius, 2016 Pg. 1) and it is a great deal more difficult for the media to evoke such reactions when over four hundred individual characters are battling for the player's attention. Fairy Tale characters, as Propp surmised, make 'possible the study of the tale according to the functions of its dramatis

personae' (1927 Pg. 72). Such a structuralist reading of the game could bring some interesting notes to light, however given the overarching tone and meaning cultivated by the game it is fair to argue *The Wolf Among Us* goes beyond this simple structuralist assessment. The characters are formed from their less intricate fairy-tale stories, but through the addition of interwoven relationships and complex needs (Maslow, 1943) they are elevated to new heights. This makes the Fable interpretations engaging and fresh to an older audience, and presenting them through video games adds an element of control over them that players may not have experienced before. Video games excel in presenting older narratives to players in innovative ways, crafting new and pleasurable experiences thanks to the huge material of works that have come before that they can pull from.

The characters in the game are fewer, but a great deal more complex than the archetypes for action Propp discussed. The demands of the narrative require a complex reimagining of Fairy Tale characters but presenting them through video games impacts the change as well. The game demands agency from the player in the form of making choices (see figure 8) that often have a time limit upon them, forcing the indecisive player's hand. These choices then skew the acts of the principle character, Bigby Wolf, as per the player's decisions. This addition alone brings a new level of control that defies the one-dimensional functions of Propp's dramatis personae in favour of a much deeper, complex and smaller cast. Yet the narrative still seeks to appeal to connoisseurs of fairy tales through small asides in speech, hints in text and in the environment of the game itself. These embedded allusions of wider narrative (Bevensee et al., 2012) provide another level to the game itself for those familiar with more obscure fairy tale characters and add to the overall depth and believability of the story-world. They hint that although the player is only privy to small array of characters and narrative, there is a much larger world of Fables still existing. Eagle-eyed players will seek out these more obscure allusions, crafting challenges for themselves and encouraging replies to check over an environment again.

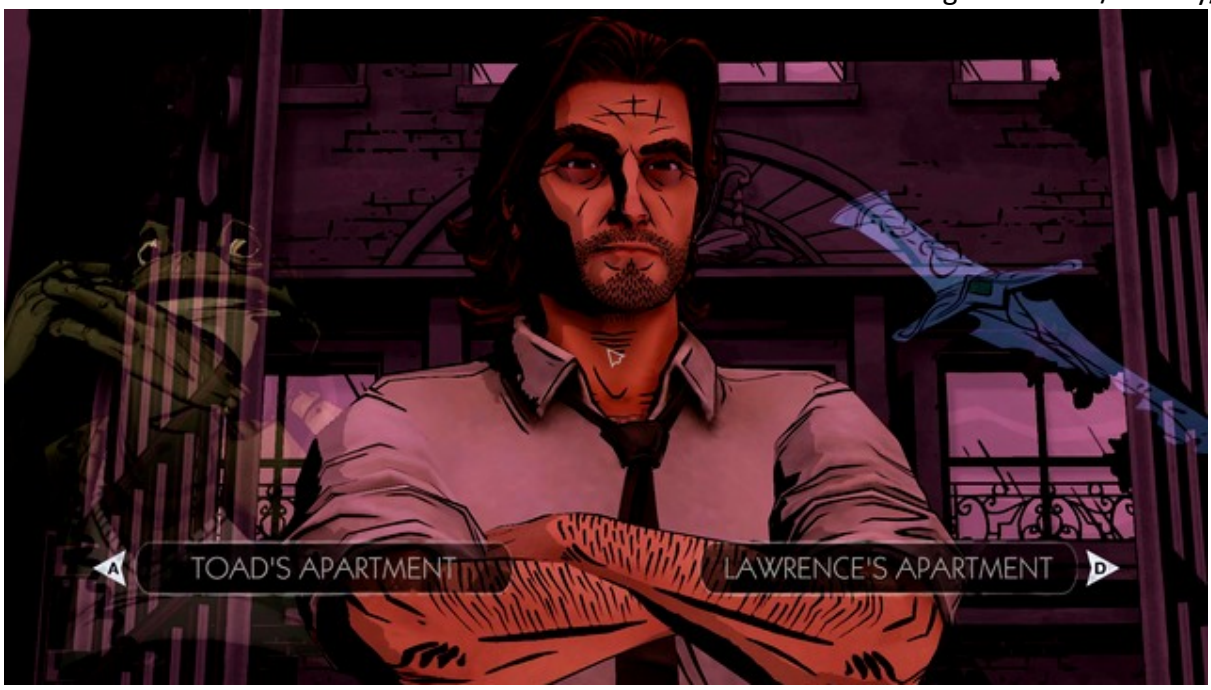

Figure 8: Making a choice in The Wolf Among Us

The depth and complexity of the story-world does not rest upon the 'fairy tale schema' already crafted by prospective players, but also upon other genre conventions. *The Wolf Among Us* evokes the narrative flow and style of the popular Noir genre. Noir is 'a term created in analogy to the series title of hard-boiled detective issued in France in the so-called *série noire*' (Fluck, 2001 Pg. 380). The principle character of the game, Bigby Wolf, works as the sheriff in Fabletown and thus immediately fulfils the genre convention of a protagonist seeking justice and order. Noir films tend to focus on detective-driven mystery narratives packed with action and melodramatic engagements (Fluck, 2001) and these aspects are found over the course of a play-through of *The Wolf Among Us* as well. More relevant though, is the power of Noir to allow an audience, or players in this case, to engage with (and have sympathy for) 'post-war Noir protagonists' (Hillis, 2005 Pg. 3). Bigby Wolf is just that: a post-war protagonist. Though never mentioned directly, it is inferred several times in the earlier episodes of the game that all Fables are living in New York as a result of a war against 'The Adversary' who drove them from their homeland, with many Fables losing their lives in the process. From this it can be deduced that Bigby, and all other Fables, are living in a state of post-war and carving out a new space for themselves all these years later. This distinction is vital not only for noting the game's strong usage of Noir aspects, but also for its characters' behaviour.

As noted, the Allusions to Fables utopic sign details when a Fable who is not present within the game is mentioned directly or referred to in some capacity. The characters often mention Fables who are no longer among them having lost their lives; Bigby directly refers to Little Red Riding Hood as 'Red' and notes she 'didn't make it out' (Telltale Games, 2013), inferring both a Fable who never appears in-game as well evoking a sense of loss in himself and several other characters. It is this notion of loss, and the Fable community's current displacement, that enables the manifestation of a searching utopic desire. This desire comes into existence at an individual level (via Bigby's goals and actions as directly influenced by the player), but also grows to reflect the needs of the Fable community as a whole, again in keeping with the Noir convention that 'audience members are asked by these films to shift their identification away from the tragic protagonist to one more aligned with the interests of the father or the state' (Hillis, 2005 Pg. 2). By the game's end, even more Fables have been lost to in-fighting and power struggles, with the community coming together (physically) to witness the final conflict. *The Wolf Among Us*, then, reflects this transition from loss, to hope for improvement and the utopic journey of forever seeking a better, safer, home for all Fables, always empowered by the thought of those who cannot be with them.

Bigby is the character who the player controls and through him the particularly tragic aspects of loss in Noir are highlighted. A Noir protagonist actively seeks transcendent notions that match not only *Homo Utopius* but the American Dream as well. They are 'toughened' by the world around them despite its unfamiliarity, yet are held back by dark pasts and baggage they struggle to leave behind (Hillis, 2005 Pg. 5). A Noir protagonist's inability to achieve the American Dream in this way comes to reflect a 'failed' American Dream: a dystopian concept. Chapter 1 already showed that utopia exists within dystopia and the same is true here. A Noir protagonist, Bigby Wolf, understands the world around him is far from pleasant or fair, that a person cannot become better through hard work and reason (Hillis, 2005 Pg. 4). Yet he still attempts to be a force for good. In a heavily dystopic setting, Bigby seeks to be better, more than he is. He desires the utopic yet consistently sees the struggles of those around him while recalling the deaths (the failures) of those from his past. Noir represents a broken American Dream,

the shortcomings of utopian ideas (Hillis, 2005 Pg. 4), but Bigby remains a force for justice in this world consistently pushed forward by every allusion to an existing and a lost Fable. The lost Fables are motivational remnants that not only push the protagonist forward but exist as 'easter-egg' like references for players to feel satisfaction when they observe and catalogue them. This blending of complex Noir and utopian ideals still able to come across as engaging 'fun,' (2010) as Juul describes, highlights the strength of the game. Continued study into video games and gaming is essential to further understand and improve the media's power in constructing these gameplay experiences.

True Fable Appearance/Behaviour

Out of a required necessity for their living-state and survival the Fables must hide who and what they are from the humans in New York. They achieve this end via two methods; the first is with the inception of 'The Farm' (a place where Fables who cannot be hidden are exiled to) and the second is the invention of 'Glamours'. Glamours are not required by all Fables since some having the ability to appear human while others look human initially. However, they are needed by many others to appear human and therefore live in New York without revealing their people's existence. Several characters are not referred to by their Fairy Tale moniker which further shows their distance from their original selves. The protagonist is named 'Bigby' which, while similar enough to the words 'big bad' for some recognition to come, is not enough to make a direct connection. The game works to hide the characters' true identities to a slim degree for two reasons already discussed: depth of story-world and audience familiarity. The act of using a Glamour is not the key aspect to focus on, despite the pleasure it may provide an eagle-eyed player. The key focus here is when a Glamour is stripped away, and a Fable's true form is revealed.

A Fable's true form can be revelled in two ways: by the Glamour dropping and the Fable in question reverting to their original state. A strong example of the first would be both the characters Grendel and Holly in the Trip Trap Bar. Both characters appear as a bar-patron and bartender initially, however when encountering Bigby and deeming him a threat both drop their Glamours to reveal themselves as a bridge-troll and as Grendel from the *Beowulf* (Tinker, 1902) epic. An example of the second would be when a character such as Bloody Mary uses her powers to teleport between locations through mirrors or has a

long-standing grudge with the Magic Mirror. Small instances like these during interactions between Fables brings to light the intricacies of Fable culture and the retention of it despite their current location and situation. This aspect not only further establishes the depth of the story-world, it also aids a great deal in character identification.

Identification is a complex term. 'Identity interprets and organizes intra- and interpersonal actions and experiences; provides the motivation, plans, rules, and scripts for behaviour; and adjusts in response to changes in the social and physical environment' (Thatcher and Zhu, 2006 Pg. 1077). Identification can also infer 'how we perceive a character is how it appears, and vice versa' (Tronstad, 2008 Pg. 250). This aspect of identification is an important addition when dealing with a video game case study since players will often become emotionally invested in characters they control. This strong relationship has a huge impact on a player's experience. Revealing an identity is a dual-pronged process that affects both the course of the narrative and the player's experience. Regarding the narrative, dropping a Glamour allows the Fable in question to become more deeply in touch with their 'true self' and their actions change accordingly: characters such as Bigby Wolf and Bloody Mary become a great deal more aggressive and empowered in conflicts, and characters such as Toad Jr. (TJ) become adept swimmers and have strong desires to spend time in water. These characters are embracing and retaining who they once were, reverting back to their original behaviours and desires once the Glamour is shed. Empowering themselves and harkening back to times during which such illusions were needed are two examples of why dropping a Glamour could lead to a more utopic state. The Fables could even be considered from a post-colonial viewpoint here and the act of 'harkening back' this way is akin to pulling from memories of what was to change the present out of a desire for a more hopeful future. To show that the can exist as they once did in this different space. From the stand-point of a player though, the impact is somewhat different. The game makes use of its characters' source materials by allowing the player not only to see Bigby Wolf or Grendel, but to see The Big Bad Wolf as a four-legged beast or Grendel as the monster battled by Beowulf. The player identifies the characters in this new (original) form and often a strong point in narrative follows this transformation, creating a link between True Fable Appearance/Behaviour and moments

of high narrative importance. *The Wolf Among Us* relies on its narrative to cultivate player investment. Moments where Glamours are dropped would often occur when players are most engaged with the media and likely wishing for a specific outcome.

There is also a strong link to be found between a Fable's true appearance and steps taken, or a yearning for, a utopic journey. A Fable, when transformed into their true selves, has access to a stronger array of abilities and powers; this is demonstrated in the opening conflict between Bigby and the Huntsman in which Bigby's eyes only begin to change due to the Huntsman's choking him. Bigby's body reacts to the danger and prepares to battle in a more powerful state. This transformation in a setting where such a change is not considered appropriate (for fear of discovery by humans) is in fact a demonstration of the utopic journey and desire for self-improvement. In these appearances the Fables are demonstrating their true power, their 'final form,' to use a more common ludological signifier, and in this demonstration of a 'more' version of themselves they are evoking their 'best' incarnation. The utopian characteristics of the process come to light. Such transformations often serve as the precursor to larger narrative events in the game during which discontent is reigning. For example, when Bigby needs to battle another Fable or when tensions rise causing other Fables showcase their true powers. In either instance the Fables' 'restlessness and discontent are connected/to the discovery of freedom' (Quarta and Procida, 1996 Pg. 159-160). 'Freedom' in this case is the freedom to showcase oneself and experience that utopic step of becoming 'more'. Even if this freedom only lasts for a limited time it brings strong feelings of pleasure, quite literally letting the wolf out of the cage. This utopic sign showcases itself in concurrence with moments of narrative importance over the course of the game. It highlights the pleasure players may experience at the sight of a Fable's true form and the tension of challenges soon to come. There is an undeniable link between Fable culture and their true appearance noted in their steadfast clinging to who they truly are despite their current situation. Such struggles against a need to conform to the new surroundings of New York and the emboldened power their true forms bring to them are reasons why True Fable Appearance/Behaviour is included in *The Wolf Among Us'* utopic schema.

Magic

True Fable Appearance often works in tandem with another sign from *The Wolf Among Us'* utopic schema: Magic. Almost all Fables with a non-human appearance require some form of magic to ensure that they can remain in New York, except for characters like Bloody Mary and Bigby, both of whom appear able to change their forms from monstrous to human at will. However, the game itself never expands upon this in the narrative. It may appear somewhat difficult to relate magic and its fantastic elements back to the Noir, detective genre the game is clearly attempting to craft, yet the core building blocks of the genre pulls from 'a post-war atmosphere of disillusion, distrust, alienation, loss of orientation and existential despair' (Fluck, 2001 Pg. 381). All these Noir-centric elements can be attributed to the state of the diegesis in this game. The Fable community currently exists in a post-war state and the divide between Fable communities is clearly apparent by the first episode of the game. An example of this divide is Bigby walking past a long line of disgruntled Fables attempting to find help who are stonewalled. In comparison, richer characters like Bluebeard able to bypass waiting thanks to their elevated status. The realisation of this state of imbalance and attempts on the part of Bigby and Snow White to bring some true order to their society work to show a journey of self-improvement on their behalf.

This same journey also reflects a state of play paralleling America's own societal difficulties post Second World War. The layers of deception and injustice both Snow and Bigby encounter throughout the narrative can be traced back to the use and abuse of Glamours and magic to even this balance. To say magic is utilised as a weapon in this game would not be inaccurate. However, magic remains the strongest hope many Fables have to remain in New York and live a better, more charmed existence. Fluck's continued assessment of Noir notes that 'the quest for individual freedom is presented as a running around in circles or an existential trap' (2001 Pg. 381); the buying and use of Glamour fits this description well and its overly dystopian styles make it more difficult to view the subtle utopian elements of the experience. Glamour allows the Fables to escape life on The Farm and facilitates their chance to build better lives. But another element of sociological connection bears examination. The Normative Influence (Wood, 2003) that the appearance of humanity can give is not to be underestimated. Looking human at once dispels the

threat of the inhuman monster, the aspect of alterity through which identity is constructed (Kearney, 2003). Instead, it opens a cultural discourse (or the opportunity of it) between these two societies. The Fables in the game can move about all of New York freely, interacting with humans in a peaceful setting unaffected by war. Coming from such a chaotic past this would be a helpful experience, further enabling them to settle in New York and seek a better existence for themselves. A peaceful setting would foster the 'essentially creative preconscious utopian impulse' (Levitas, 2007 Pg. 291) and encourage each Fable's own self-improvement. Without magic this process would be impossible and only the heavily dystopian Farm would remain.

The Wolf Among Us has two conflicting political groups who showcase Noir's predilection for highlighting unjust aspects of American politics. The tension between the two classes of Fable life in Fabletown comes down to the use of magic. The Crooked Man offers discount Glamours (and a deadly form of business management) that all Fables can access to allow them to remain in New York. The upper-class Fables are strict in their usage of magic crafted by witches and connections often matter more than need. This skewed summation of the rich ensuring their own longevity and leaving others to suffer for survival is of course a blatantly dystopian concept. Yet with the progression of the game's narrative a change is seen. While the illegal use of Glamours is stamped down, the fate of their creator (Auntie Greenleaf) is left up to the player. Auntie Greenleaf may have the source of her magic destroyed, or be elevated to a position of authority because of her magic. This gives her the opportunity to help more Fables who need Glamours. While not the only ending the game can have (due to its choice-based progression) 'this alternative is an indictment of the status quo simply because it shows that the real world is not living up to its potential' (Schulzke, 2014 Pg. 323). It is the principle purpose of utopia to at once critique an existing world yet showcase a potentially better one (Segal, 2012). The showcasing of a better world can be done through the treatment of Auntie Greenleaf and the (potential) chance for a more positive distribution of magic by the game's end under more stable and just leadership.

Magic alone is not enough. It cannot bring about great changes (positive or negative) without other factors because it is a tool. In the game magic is a weapon or an

aid that is utilised by different factions over the course of the game all in the hopes of a better and more comfortable form of life. Based on this project's definition of utopia, magic has the potential to be used as a tool for utopian progression just as it could be used to lead Fables down a worse path. Instances of both these scenarios can been seen in the unchangeable narrative of *The Wolf Among Us* and in the choices the player makes. 'The expression of the desire for a better way of being' (Levitas, 2007 Pg. 290) is, some argue, the core of utopia itself. At its core, magic serves this very function. It gives Fables the chance for a better life. With Magic Fables have more opportunities in the place they must now call home and a pragmatic failsafe should their world collide with the Mundy (human) world in a way that they are not otherwise prepared for.

Revelations

Preparation is a luxury Bigby Wolf rarely has the opportunity to employ over the course of the game. The Noir genre is characterised by an inciting incident in the form of a mystery that serves as the focal point and provoking investment for the protagonist from beginning to end. This focal point is often overshadowed by other surprises and shock discoveries both the viewer and cast must navigate before any form of conclusion can be reached. *The Wolf Among Us* mimics this style by giving the player several startling revelations to uncover over the course of the game, starting with an unexpected death to create irreversible investment from Bigby.

This moment comes with the death of Faith, the game's incarnation of the King's Daughter in the French fairy-tale *Donkeyskin* (Perrault, 2010). In the opening scene of the game Faith is presented as a mysterious character whom the player is likely to learn more about as the game progresses. Most importantly, she experiences kindness and heroism from Bigby and is kind to him in return. She notes 'Hey, I need to tell you something: You're not as bad as everyone says you are. I'll see you around...Wolf' (Telltale Games, 2013). This establishes Bigby's own place in the story-world, battling again his past actions for acceptance, echoing Levitas' thoughts on utopia as 'the expression of the desire for a better way of being' (2007 Pg. 290). But this burgeoning and positive connection for Bigby is cut short when he finds Faith's severed head on the doorstep of the Woodlands apartment block. This first revelation of the game creates a very personal investment for Bigby. From this incident the entirety of the narrative moves forward and expands to

reveal more deception and intrigue designed to keep the player engaged. This search for the truth via ludological advancement is in its own way a Le Guinian-esque journey towards a more utopic state of being as she discusses in 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be' (2016). The game drives the player forward to attain goal after goal in the hope of learning more, providing the player with a new peak to climb as soon as they have conquered the one before. Video games take this deeply engaging, often violent and mysterious genre and pull a player in, giving them power. This creates higher stakes for a player than it would a viewer and holds the potential for a much more 'fun' (Juul, 2007) experience. By examining the Noir mode and its relationship with video games, then discussing these two points with utopian theory and player action will provide more valid conclusions.

The player's connection to Bigby is likely to come from two sources: the power of the Noir genre to build sympathy with a post-war protagonist (Hillis, 2005), and from the propensity of gamers to form an emotional connection with the character they control (Gabbiadini et al., 2016); both these elements come into play at the game's inception. The lack of knowledge Bigby starts with is indicative of Murray's *Games as Symbolic Dramas* in which players begin with little of a certain item (in this case knowledge) and end with a large amount (Murray, 1997). Though not a physical commodity, Noir characters' 'belief in the American Dream allows them to see their desires for material gain as directly connected to acquiring greater agency and social status' (Hillis, 2005 Pg. 4). These elements can be seen in Bigby. The material gain Bigby seeks is knowledge. Whereas 'improved social status' is seen in his desire to be accepted by his fellow Fables (a desire given to him by Faith then ripped away with her death). Finally, Hillis' use of agency is most auspicious in regards to this project as the player, the outside actor within the magic circle of play (Huizinga, 1938), is enacting meaningful effort to see Bigby (and by extension themselves) achieve more of this valued knowledge via revelations to move the journey forward.

The narrative does see Bigby move into this position of not just physical, but also social power. By the game's end the player will achieve an out of game trophy entitled 'Happily Ever After'. But this end is yet not necessarily a happy event in of itself. Le

Guin's notion of utopia ceases upon a journey's completion and therefore the game could be seen to end unsatisfactorily for Bigby as he's achieved what he desired and has nowhere else to go. In his last scene he is standing alone outside the Woodlands building, a physical signal he still feels unaccepted by those he protects. However, this is not the final moment of the game. Bigby is given one final conversation with a reappearing character: Nerissa. In this Bigby (and the now heavily invested player) are once again given Bigby's sought-after affirmation of goodness: 'nobody cares about us. Not really. You'll make things right, you and Snow' (Telltale Games, 2013). Nerissa says, 'you're not as bad as everyone says you are' (Telltale Games, 2013). These words set off several lines of dialogue tying Nerissa and Faith together and hinting they are in fact one in the same. This revelation causes the player and Bigby to rethink all encounters with Nerissa and changes their understanding of the narrative as a whole, providing more knowledge. The interaction then gives the player one final choice: to follow Nerissa or let her go. From there, the screen fades to black, leaving the player still desiring further understanding and Bigby once again mid-journey, a highly utopic space to remain in. The concept of revelations earns its place in this case study's schema as a possessor of knowledge that is passed to both player and protagonist at once. It drives the narrative forward providing the elevation Bigby desires and the agency for him to act as the player sees fit. When examined together, Noir, player, protagonist and utopia showcase an argument of utopic revelations existing at the very centre of this game.

Fights

Despite *The Wolf Among Us* stressing a rich, deep story-world for players to explore and characters to understand in favour of ludological mastery, it does have moments in which progression depends on player agency. The most prevalent example of this would be when two characters come to blows and engage in fights. The game makes it very clear that the physicality of the protagonist, Bigby, is paramount in several moments of combat from its inception. During the prologue of the first episode Bigby is called to a conflict occurring at an apartment block Mr. Toad owns. In doing so he (Bigby) comes upon a scene in which The Woodsman is attacking Faith for not recognising who he is. Any attempts made to understand the situation and uncover the truth are waylaid as both Bigby and The Woodsman start fighting. Who begins the fight is up to the player as they

have the option of having Bigby make the first move or to attempt further mediation only to be met with violence. The battles are heavily stylised in the game. The player is not so much dictating when and how the battle shall proceed but rather in what directions to take the flow of combat and how successful Bigby will be in his attacks and his evasions. The mechanic used to test players in fights is a 'Quick-Time Event.' Players will see a button (or buttons) prompt on-screen and must successfully use the corresponding button on their controller or keyboard as instructed before a timer elapses (see figure 9). Should the player succeed then so will Bigby and the battle will continue, ending in his victory. This level of agency is somewhat denied in his first battle with the Woodsman where the player is pre-determined to be on the cusp of losing only for Faith to rescue Bigby. In these moments the player has a more ludo-centric goal of survival, victory and mastery. Players must exert their agency through Bigby to showcase his power as not only the Sheriff of the town, but also the Big Bad Wolf of his own Fable tale.

Figure 9: A Quick Time Event in The Wolf Among Us

Fluck notes in regard to Noir 'The fight until the very end is a matter of self-respect' (Fluck, 2001 Pg. 387) and Bigby is on a journey throughout the game to attain the respect of those around him and (arguably) himself. He desires to prove his evolution and growth from merely a terrifying animalistic monster to an intelligent detective. As the narrative progresses both the intelligence needed to further solve the crimes presented to him and the battle prowess required to ensure his own survival dog Bigby and heighten the stakes

of the story. By piling such trials onto Bigby's now sympathetic post-war figure, the suspense rises and facilitates greater excitement in the player (Zillmann et al., 1975). The game offers the player, through Bigby, the choice to be particularly brutal in such battles or less so. It is the agency of the player to decide how Bigby will act in several of his battles that creates potential for utopic progression in him. Colin (one of the three little pigs) says in the game's first episode, 'But no, hate's the wrong word, they fear you more than anything. You ate a lot of people back in your day' (Telltale Games, 2013). Bigby seeks to beat back this past-self and move forwards, having several opportunities in the game to do so that become more important over the course of the game. Building higher stakes and putting more pressure on the player as well as the protagonist they control affords a greater impact and experience.

The starkest example of this comes in the game's final encounter with The Crooked Man. While standing trial his guilt is proven by Nerissa's testimony and his judgement left up to Bigby to perform (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Options at The Crooked Man's Trial

The player can have Bigby either rip off The Crooked Man's head, throw him down the Witching Well, or imprison him for his crimes. The Crooked Man is responsible for several character deaths in the game and now Bigby, despite his desire to reform, may murder him. 'His dilemma, which stands at the centre of detective Noir narrative, is how

to adapt methods and skills from the semantic field of "badness" without becoming corrupted by them' (Fluck, 2001 Pg. 387). Bigby, through the player's choice, can choose not to employ violence and instead imprison the Crooked Man, showing not only himself but all of Fabletown who came to witness the trial that he is a better man. This showcases his desire for self-improvement and embodiment of a better (or even best) version of himself. Despite every battle, every fight and even every death Bigby has caused or been involved with, the player can still let the characters in the game see him as a reformed protector and not a mindless beast. The player has the same agency to portray Bigby in a less positive way. Each player may have a very different interpretation of the situation and believe different actions may be correct. Game designers cannot and should not think their moral choices align with others (Heussner et al., 2015). Based on differing interpretations, multiple versions of this decision could be argued utopic. Since this chapter has focused on interpreting The Wolf Among Us as a Noir narrative, the 'reformed character' arc provides the most utopian ending. In differing contexts outside the scope of this examination other interpretations could be considered.

This ending does bring up an interesting point with notions of memory and using it to form a more hopeful future. In post-colonial utopias, memory is an incredibly powerful tool of utopianism (Ashcroft, 2013). By looking back at the memory of what once was a better future can be envisioned and moved toward. The history or memory of the Fables would infer Bigby's most utopic choice would be to viciously kill the Crooked Man and, soon after, gorge on one of the other Fables to sate his hunger. But the Fables are a divided society, Bigby cannot please both sides in some situations (such as Auntie Greenleaf) and looking back into his own memory, from what the game infers, he was vilified by almost all them. Bigby's memories of The Homeland are more neutral than others may be. He did not see himself as a 'villain' nor a 'hero.' In fact, when justifying himself to Colin (one of the Three Little Pigs) for attempting to eat him in the past he simple states 'I was hungry' (Telltale Games, 2013). Bigby existed as a wolf who needed to survive, to kill and eat so that he could live. He would not destroy just for sake of anarchy. So, when the fate of the Crooked Man is in his hands, Bigby would know he does not need to kill, there is no need to expand valuable energy that could be saved and used elsewhere. Bigby could be

harkening back to his own pre-New York state and animalistic instincts to spare the other Fable's life. It is interesting to think of the 'Hero of Fabletown' as someone who is simply taking a path of least resistance to survival. And one aspect of survival is connections and allies. Bigby both shows himself as merciful to other Fables and uses his memory of the past to impact his present choice all at once.

Overall, it is not a concrete certainty that battles and fights can lead to a better version of Bigby; they can showcase his true Fable-self (i.e. the Big Bad Wolf) but it is in the hands of the player to decide whether or not to take that course of action. The utopic potential in Bigby's narrative is showcased many times over the course of the game. His lack of acceptance, his lack of knowledge and yearning to attain more of both are at 'the origin of the utopian impulse' (Levitas, 2007 Pg. 291). While the element of choice is at the crux of this success or failure, the battles Bigby fights serve to bring him closer each time to what he and the player desire.

Power of Choice

The core ludological element of *The Wolf Among Us* lies in the power of choice and how the player seeks to assert their agency on the world around them. This point is a potent reminder that utopia exists in the journey towards it. Often a journey that is fraught with dystopian potential, the power to fail and the choice to give up. All are vying for a place in existence and from the moment the play engages with controller in hand they are on the precipice of what Alber terms the *Actual World* (2019) or AW.

The world we currently inhabit is termed an AW. The narrative and story-world of *The Wolf Among Us* is not. The moment that the player begins engaging with the game, interaction with the AW is put on hold and instead the player must navigate several *Alternate Possible Worlds* (APWs) that are already semi-formed in the distance, ready to be formed into a concrete state of existence through the player's choices. Alber describes APWs as 'our dreams, visions, utopias, hallucinations and fictional narratives' (2019 Pg. 157), bridging the gap between both the game narrative and the potential for utopia while at once providing an excellent form through which to assess and interpret the power of choice from a more narrative-centric standpoint. Of course, as with any kind of utopia, dystopia is not far off and the player will have the agency to forge both kinds of world depending on their actions. The player may or may not be aware of the impact their

choices will have on the overarching story, depending on whether they have played game already or made use of a guide to facilitate their progress. But if they are playing this game blind (with no prior knowledge) then only one APW can come into view and even then, it will not be wholly clear. A new player cannot depend on inside knowledge to ensure they get the ending they desire but must progress in the direction the narrative most engages them to and continue from there.

Some APWs are far removed from a utopian self or realisation with Bigby and those around him. Come the trial of The Crooked Man the player could instruct Bigby to kill the other in a gruesome fashion before the eyes of all the inhabitants met over the course of the narrative. This leaves several Fables horrified and even more fearful of Bigby than they may have been at the beginning of the game. Just as Bigby's representation as 'The Hero of Fabletown' is an APW, so too is his depiction as a violent, monstrous enforcer of the law, dealing out death as he sees fit. Video games present a 'new form of persuasive rhetoric' (Zagal, 2009 Pg. 1) that can and does influence the ways in which the player takes in the narrative. It influences how they can respond to the moral quandaries before them and serves to help funnel a player to some degree towards certain avenues of play throughout the game. Zagal summarises moral dilemma as 'a situation in which an agent morally ought to do A and morally ought to do B but cannot do both, either because B is just not-doing-A or because some contingent feature of the world prevents doing both' (2009 Pg. 1). Such situations are presented to the player from the beginning of the game. Perhaps as a form of continued Normative Influence (Wood, 2003) not upon the characters in the game, but on the player, the game keeps a running percentage spilt of the different choices players made in response to the dilemmas placed before (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Showcase of choices different players made

It is in pursuit of this 'influence to conform with the positive expectations of another' (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955 Pg. 629) that could have an impact upon players. It may drive them towards what they consider to be the 'best' solution to a dilemma in the hopes that others will have done the same. The game does have methods to skew the players' choices, such as the first major choice presented to them. This is termed a major choice because (unlike almost all other decisions made) there is no running timer and the player may take as long as they desire to choose their course of action. The player meets Mr. Toad in the open prologue but later hears him sounding distressed in a phone call. The player is then given a choice to either visit Mr. Toad or visit Faith's home in the hopes that her husband (Prince Lawrence) may be the killer. Based on choice percentages shown by the game as of 2014, 69.2% of players decided to visit Toad before Lawrence. Using this information, the player's actions are being funnelled through such mechanics and they are required to actively resist them in order to make more 'unpopular' choices. Or, alternatively, the player could be encouraged to re-play the episode again and make choices opposite to other players out of curiosity, encouraging replayability for the game. In both cases the game encourages players to make large decisions with deep thought and consideration due to their consequences. This is a strong example of video games providing social experiences even in single-player campaigns. It elevates the experience by adding another level to it and fostering a community around the game, creating an instant social connection.

A strong socio-psychological review of gamer choice cognition is somewhat outside the scope of this project. However, the notion is worth highlighting as an aside simply because so much of the utopian or dystopian occurrences argued over the course of this chapter depend upon what decisions the player makes. Of the three case studies of this project, *The Wolf Among Us* provides the most potential for both victory and defeat based on the narrative power given over to the player. Even if only a handful of the choices the player makes have a stark impact upon the story, they can and do affect Bigby's overall interpretation. The narrative provides the utopian constructs more than any other aspect in the game. By putting even a small amount of that power in the hands of the player, the balance of utopia and a dystopia is in a constant state of flux.

Conclusion

The Wolf Among Us has served as an excellent example of a narrative focused game that showcases its utopic potential via the powers of choice and agency on behalf of the player. The game offers much in the way of more conventional, 'happier' conclusions for players to search for yet at the same time allows for a more brutal and bloodier version of the story. A version of the story that see Bigby as little more than the figure of violence that many believed him to be before the Fables were forced to settle in New York. The game does, however, present Bigby as a sympathetic protagonist deserving of the best possible ending. The game pulls from several different aspects of the Noir genre such as stark crimes, lying or intimidated witnesses and innocents left forgotten to fade away. The combination of these elements work to create sympathy for Bigby. As a post-war protagonist Bigby not only garners player interest and sympathy but also serves as an excellent narrative vehicle through which to tell the story. Through Bigby's journey the player is given deeper insight into the Fable world, seeing them pushed to reveal their true selves and move to fight not only for their right to remain in New York but also to try and make it better. By doing so, the corrupt government (which Bigby was a servant of and not wholly party to) is revealed and the game ends with the leadership of Fabletown changed for the better. This remains the end state of the game's story-world even if Bigby, based on the player's actions, has not. Overall it is this great potential and journey from loneliness and disrespect that can evolve to one of friendship, power and admiration that

marks the possible utopian narrative in *The Wolf Among Us* given greater insight via the argued utopic signs and schema and the media through which it is portrayed.

Chapter 3 Persona 5: A Utopia of Rebellion

Introduction

If there is an element of commonality to be found between Bigby Wolf and the protagonist of *Persona 5* (unnamed since the character can be named as the player desires) it is loneliness. By the game's inception the player is made aware the protagonist has been expelled from his school, forced to move from his home to a new city and is currently on probation at his new school where the other students revile him as a troublemaker. The stark difference between these two narratives is that while Bigby sought to enforce and maintain the current hierarchy of his land, The Phantom Thieves (the protagonist and the party of playable characters) seek to tear the existing hierarchy down. In these acts of rebellion and change the utopic signs of the game's utopic schema find their roots. To fully analyse these aspects of *Persona 5* this chapter draws on work to justify and analyse the position of the Other and the Alien (Kearney, 2003), the Ego and the Id (Freud, 1964) and The Absolute Stranger (Heller, 2000) so that the notion of the protagonist party and their Persona (as well as the position of the Phantom Thieves in general) may be better understood. Work by the utopian theorist and sociologist Ruth Levitas (1979), (2007) is highly applicable to this schema in order to understand the drive bringing the Phantom Thieves forward and their desire for approval and acceptance. Very specific to this chapter is work by Martin Buber and Gordon Mordechai on the power and depth of human communication (1988), (2011) to truly highlight the utopic potential hidden in negotiation and speech in contrast to physical battles.

As the longest game to play out of the three case studies, averaging at about ninety hours for a single play-through, there were a great many aspects of the game that could have been brought forward for examination on their utopic potential. This chapter seeks to justify and highlight the chosen utopic signs as the most viable for this project and the most useful for coding the game from beginning to end. In order to do this, the chapter focuses primarily on notions of The Other to set groundwork for themes that will be reoccurring in the different signs showcased in the chapter. First Persona Reveal and Gain New Persona are examined for their interaction with the self, the Other and the strength of negotiation. Then focus shifts to Phantom Thief Approval and Forging/Advancing a Social Link so that both larger and more in-depth societal influence can be highlighted. Finally, Boss Encounters/Battles are analysed to showcase the rebelliousness found in all signs for

this game. These listed signs make up the game's utopic schema displayed below. Finally, conclusions are drawn emphasising not only the utopic drive of rebellion experienced by the characters in the game, but also by the player drawn into *Persona 5*'s strong narrative.

Sign Number	Sign Description
1	Persona Reveal
2	Gain New Persona
3	Phantom Thief Approval
4	Forging/Advancing A Social Link
5	Boss Encounter/Battle

Table 3: The Utopic Schema applied when coding Persona 5.

The Other

A large theme underpinning several aspects of *Persona 5* is the notion of The Other and The Ego. The Other was first coined in the cultural work of Edward Said (1978) and The Ego in the psychological work of Sigmund Freud (1964). Naturally, the breadth of theory has widened considerably since these initial works and been taken in by several other fields of academic discipline such as Religious Studies and Philosophy. The Other is not the only term of 'opposition' being used. Both The Absolute Stranger (Heller, 2000) and Alien (Kearney, 2003) will also be examined in order to clarify the protagonist party of *Persona 5*, their motivations, place in society and their own relationship with several Others found over the course of the game's narrative.

As Freud notes in his structural model of the human mind (Freud, 1964), the Id is a person's instinctual behaviour while the Super-Ego represents an opposite as a person's strong moral position. The Ego's presence serves to mediate and balance instincts and morals, attempting to forge a 'middle ground' of sorts. Freud notes that it 'is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this

difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces' (1964 Pg. 19). A person's Ego can and will be influenced and aided by our sociological connections and perceptions. The Other works in much the same fashion (so far as influence is concerned) as Said first noted the Other to be essentially a person attempting to understand something that is not like *us* (1995). His use of 'us' serves to set an immediate distinction as the appearance of an 'us' suggests an immediate 'them'. Kearney moved the term into the field of Philosophy and circulated the Other back into our own person as well as an external manifestation. He noted the Other to be in keeping with a difference in the self as a person experiences it. Kearney states that in the face of an Other a person has two choices: '(a) to try to understand and accommodate our experience of strangeness, or (b) to repudiate it by projecting it exclusively onto outsiders' (2003 Pg. 3). The ability of a person to make either of these choices is dependent on their sense of fairness and justice (Kearney, 2003). This is opposed to an Ontology of Sameness (Cohen, 2012) in which Levinas notes 'the self cannot survive by itself alone' (Levinas, 2012 Pg. 24): essentially, using an Other to justify prejudice and meaning for the Self.

A more wholly negative view is Kearney's usage of The Alien. He defines it as the experience of living as an outside being, but to also mean 'discrimination/suspicion/scapegoating' (Kearney, 2003 Pg. 67). It conjures an image of the outsider who is blamed for problems in a society and creates an image, a concrete manifestation, for the 'us' of the scenario to objectively hate. This is a common pattern seen over the course of history to give that imaged Self a stronger form of identity and placement. The problematic placement of young black men as perpetrators of violent crime (Welch, 2007) or people of the Islam faith as terrorists (Mamdani, 2002) in some modern media are examples of creating such a 'them' for the 'us' to hate. This notion also fits well with ideas of the colonised people pushing back against their colonisation in favour of examining memories of older, fairer times. Further still from this scapegoated Other is the notion of The Absolute Stranger; so called because 'the world where they live has never been theirs' (Heller, 2000 Pg. 150). This can be interpreted in a multitude of ways though this project deems it prudent to say 'never been theirs' as meaning 'they' have never been in a position of power or control in the world they inhabit. Instead they exist

there at the mercy of those in power and can do little (if anything) to change that dynamic. From this, The Absolute Stranger, somewhat ironically, finds a place in all these areas of prejudice. To the Other of Said they are a figure that cannot be understood and who does not bear enough importance to warrant trying. To Kearney's Other they could manifest as both a separate physical entity that has never belonged or a figment of oneself (an Id) smothered by the Super-Ego and Ego due to societal moral frameworks and a fear of becoming a reject of society. To Ashcroft's postcolonial utopia the Absolute Stranger is the figure erased from memory, not even considered a figment of a utopian future. Even to Levinas' Ontology of Sameness the Absolute Stranger must exist in order for the 'same' to create that structure of sameness, the 'Them' to their 'Us.' In all examinations of Otherness summarised thus far, The Absolute Stranger is forever present, yet forever rejected.

This brief exploration into cultural, sociological, philosophical and psychological Otherness tethers to a utopian area of study. Levitas argues Ernest Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* to be 'the most extended and systematic treatment of the concept of utopia itself' (2007 Pg. 290). In this three-volume text Bloch muses on the concept of urging. He notes 'nobody has sought out this state of urging, it has been with us ever since we have existed and in that we exist' (1995 Pg. 45). Extrapolating from this, the urge he describes could very well be the drive inside humanity to live, to improve and to evolve. Levitas notes 'everything that reaches to a transformed existence is, in this Blochian sense, utopian' (2007 Pg. 290). However, this theory can go further to incorporate notions of the Other and its place in the utopia of the self. Bloch goes on in his next passage *Naked, Striving and Wishing, Unsatisfied* to say 'As something definite it [longing] ceases to strike out in all directions at once. It becomes a "searching" that has and does not have what it is searching for, it becomes goal-directed driving' (1995 Pg. 45). The urge makes a specific goal manifest, an achievable thing to help combat the longing a person feels. Such a process is summarised by Levinas as 'perhaps a (sometimes) secularised version of the spiritual quest to understand who we are, why we are here and how we connect with each other' (2007 Pg. 290). This interpretation brings the concept of utopia together with that of The Absolute Stranger. Both exist in a state of non-existence, utopia malleable and distant while the Absolute Stranger is an enemy who never belonged. They each seek

understanding, evolution to belonging and existence to move from what they are to something better. In keeping with this project's usage of utopia, they are arguably attempting to make strides towards the best version of themselves, to overcome and understand their Otherness and, perhaps, move beyond that definition as an Other altogether.

Persona Reveal

Listening is not simple a term and has been the subject of multiple studies through academic history. This project will focus on 'good listening' (Beatty, 1999), the core relationships between humans (Buber, 2003) and, most critically to this project, the notion of giving oneself to another with the act of speaking and listening (Buber, 1988). The act of truly listening is defined from Buber's work and reinterpreted as 'being present to the other, that is, responding to the other as a whole person and creating a space in which the other can speak his or her own words and meaning' (Mordechai, 2011 Pg. 207). Mordechai's work is vital in making this distinction as he brings a philosophical approach to communication with some theory and notions of Otherness. Breaking down his definition there are three key elements to successfully listening to the Other: to be 'present', to be a 'whole person' and 'creating a space.' In *Persona 5* these three criteria can be located and defined as occurring during a certain event of narrative importance: Persona Reveal. The first aspect 'being present': the party member about to experience this encounter is always present on screen and therefore not only present themselves but also present to the player of the game. Therefore, they are 'there' in as many ways as the game will permit them to be. The characters are 'there' for themselves and 'there' for the player. Secondly, to be a 'whole person' (while slightly more complex) can be demonstrated by further examining the game. The characters in *Persona 5* have multiple incarnations of their 'self': their 'real-world' self, as it exists in the social world of the game, their 'Palace' self as it may manifest in the cognitive world (should their Id overtake their Ego), and finally their Persona that the game calls the 'other self that dwells within' (Hashino, 2017). In each instance of Persona Reveal the character in question is 'whole' present as only their real-world self with no alternate or Other version yet manifest, though that changes as dialogue begins. Thirdly, 'creating a space' is something the player and characters need never really do. The space in question is the cognitive realm made manifest by the

distorted desires of a (often but not exclusively) villainous individual. It is in these cognitive worlds that the character's Persona is solely able to manifest and make itself known, opening the line of communication. Several times throughout the game all these criteria are met, along with other narratological attributes such as suspense and conflict to initiate a scene of Persona Reveal.

Such Persona Reveals bring to mind the feelings of the overtaken colonised societies that are the subject of non-western utopias. The Phantom Thieves were born into their society and have effectively become an Absolute Stranger to all but other members of their group as they grew up; Ruiji has been rejected by his former track meet teammates, Ann is dismissed by other girls for her presumed promiscuity, Makoto is seen as a 'teacher's pet' when in actual fact authority figures are forcing her into their service, etc. In one another they come to see themselves as a small society who are utterly dominated by the present hierarchy of corrupt, empowered figures. In one another they find the confidence to stand up to their oppressors and not only fight back, but express their desires, hopes and dreams. Ashcroft discusses the role of dreams at length in his piece 'Introduction Spaces of Utopia' (2012). He sums up his discourse on the subject by stating 'the Dreaming is perhaps the archetypal demonstration of the infusion of the present and future with the hope of a mythic past, a fusion of time and place, because the Dreaming is never simply a memory of the past, but the focusing energy of the present' (Ashcroft, 2012 Pg. 5). Memory plays a pivotal role in non-western utopias and is brought into the present through the power of dreams. The Phantom Thieves are finally allowing themselves the chance to dream for what they want and believe it is in fact attainable, that they can be free from the unfair stigma's that haunt them and save others from similar fates. Despite not identifying as colonised citizens there is some similarity between the term and the Absolute Stranger, both points result in seeing Persona Reveal as a strong personal experience of utopia.

The game presents several characters with stressful, often life or death situations in which their only cause to survive is to give in to their Ids. Their true instincts and feelings override their Egos and open the channel of dialogue to the Other who exists inside of them. Of course, such an interaction can only take place on the cognitive plane since, in

Buber's view, 'dialogue can only be grasped as an ontological phenomenon - a meeting of one whole being with another whole being' (Mordechai, 2011 Pg. 208). For the Persona to manifest as a whole being, one able to exist corporeally, fight and communicate, the character must be first in the cognitive realm. This happens several times over the course of the game since to be in that realm without a Persona leaves the character virtually powerless. That powerlessness is used against them and often leaves them trapped or unable to save themselves (see figure 12) and in the stress of that situation they are left bare and their Other may manifest. In this process the Persona will often speak to encourage the Id and smother the Ego. One character, Ann Takamaki, when faced with the cognitive version of her abusive teacher is told by her Persona 'forgiving him was never the option… such is the scream of the other you that dwells within' (Hashino, 2017). The Persona is actively making the connection between itself and Ann, noting their motives are now aligned as one, the vengeful Ego stepping forward in her Persona's reveal (as the dominating feminine figure Carmen) and her own appearance transforming into a form fitting cat-suit whose red matches that of her Persona. In this communication 'everything depends, as far as human life is concerned, on whether each thinks of the Other as the one he is' (Mordechai, 2011 Pg. 208). Ann's life in that moment hinged on her acceptance of her Other, her Persona and by 'forcing the contract' (Hashino, 2017) between them she overcomes her powerlessness and transforms from passive onlooker to a powerful instrument of vengeance.

Figure 12: Ann Takamaki held captive, her Persona not yet manifest and unable to defend herself.

The player is not removed from this emotionally intense situation. In *Persona 5* the player exerts agency through the silent protagonist, giving answers on his behalf and making decisions about what he will do. But players are also privy to cut-scenes with other characters while the protagonist is not present, giving them a stronger grasp of the larger factors at play in the narrative. So, when a character such as Ann, who the game has spent considerable time building into a sympathetic party member, reaches this high point of emotional stress, the player is like-wise further engaged, willing her to succeed. Ann's transformation is crucial from a narrative standpoint for her character arc and the utopic sign, but it is moment of satisfaction for the player as well. Immediately after her change the player is thrust into a boss encounter, a chance to now use Ann as a fighting party member. Not only is this indicative of Murray's *Symbolic Drama* in games, it is a moment of great satisfaction for the player. The player can attack and defeat a servant of the abusive teacher and be the driving force behind Ann battling back against him.

This transformation showcases the character's utopian journey. Levitas theorised that such movements towards a transfiguration of the self for improvement (2007) were clearly pulling from Bloch's musing of a utopian existence. This is a physical manifestation of the Persona, exacerbated by the character's intake of the Other's power. It signals a literal transformation from a normal human to a Persona User and, by extension, a Phantom Thief. The Blochian utopia of self-improvement manifests together with Le

Guin's concept of utopia's un-achievability. The moment the character is empowered and free of their Ego in the cognitive world their goal of survival is met. They then must strive forward with a new goal to achieve the best version of themselves and improve the world around them. Ann demonstrates this desire in final speech before her first battle begins. She yells at her abusive teacher 'I will rob you of everything!' (Hashino, 2017). The brief utopian victory of the self and the Other's union has happened and a new goal is immediately set in place to continue the character's journey.

Gain New Persona

For some characters the moment of union between the self and Other does not stop at a single Persona Reveal. In the Persona series from the third game [*Persona 3* (Hashino, 2006)] onwards there has been an ability known as the *Wild Card* that a character, most often the protagonist of the game, will employ. This ability opens the door for a great deal of potential Others to be not only encountered by the Phantom Thieves but also for them to be spoken with, listened to and brought together with the protagonist over the course of the game.

The most important aspect of encountering and gaining new Personas is not violence, as may be first expected since all encounters occur through battle, but again communication. Throughout the game the protagonist and their party will move through different versions of the cognitive world (depending on which person's Palace they have entered) but each world has guards in the form of Persona. These guards have been overwhelmed by the power of the Palace ruler and lost any sense of who or what they were, blindly deferring to the ruler. For example, all Persona in the first Palace (a castle in which an abusive teacher is king) appear as knights in armour and refer to the Palace ruler as 'King Kamoshida.' To engage these Persona in battle the protagonist can either attack them outright or sneak close then proceed to rip off their mask, forcing their true forms to the surface to make them vulnerable. Immediately there is a comparison here as the Phantom Thieves too must rip off a mask in order for their Persona to be made corporeal; the key difference is the Id was struggling to overpower the Ego at that point for the characters whereas no such conflict has yet to occur in these Persona. Therefore, forcing the Id to the surface in this way creates vulnerability in enemies. *Persona 5* balances both ludo and narrative aspects of signs strongly, highlighting the media's power to allow

players to exert agency in a way that compliments narratological decisions without seeming forced.

When the Persona is pushed to its limit and near death the player can enter a 'Hold-Up' situation and from there proceed to negotiate with the Persona. The game details this process as such: 'if you talk to them when they're cornered, they might offer money or items since they don't want to die' (Hashino, 2017). Giving these shadows sentience immediately puts them on par with the Others who exist within the Phantom Thieves, and the player can bring them to their side. This aspect of the battle requires communication skills and 'an encounter in which each individual gives his or her whole being to the other and does not hold anything back' (Mordechai 2011 Pg. 208). The Persona with its life on the line is unlikely to lie at this point since, as the game states, it wants to live. They then put forward a series of statements and it becomes the protagonist's responsibility to put themselves forward and attempt to answer favourably and recruit the Persona. The player is given power in all these interactions as they either succeed or fail to communicate. In the first instance of Persona negotiation the Persona states 'I don't belong to just King Kamoshida. /I'm Pixie! From now on I'll live on inside your heart' (Hashino, 2017). In the process of this text appearing on screen, the words *'I am thou, thou art I'* are spoken aloud, cementing the contract and bringing the protagonist self together with the now freed Other. By doing this the player character's power increases, as they have a new being to use in battle. This increase of power highlights Murray's theory on games as Symbolic Dramas, beginning with little of something and ending with a great amount of it (1997). Kearney notes the difficulty of bridging the gap between self and Other this way noting 'the absolute, unconditional hospitality which this Other deserves marks a break with everyday conventions of hospitality governed by rights, contracts, duties and pacts' (2003 Pg. 69). It is instead a show of complete kindness and justice that is out of the norm for the usual 'us' of the world. This emphasises the special nature of the protagonist (and by extension the player due to their control) and cements the distinction that the won-over Persona is now part of the Phantom Thieves' group. Not only are they now aware of their own sense of self but able to fight against others still trapped in the Palace worlds as well.

Encounters with the other Persona trapped in the Palace run somewhat differently for the Phantom Thieves' party. While they can battle and defeat these enemies there may still come a time in which the Persona are cornered or 'Held-Up' and seek to save themselves from death. The player can still enter a negotiation but this time with different goals in mind: those laid out at the tutorial involving more money and more items. Rather than a negotiation leading a utopic joining and understanding between Self and Other, these meetings are better termed as confrontations in keeping with Mordechai's theorising: although 'the word "confront" might sound a bit harsh/is actually meant to capture a relation in which each person affirms the other's basic difference and still stands firm in his or her own being' (2011 Pg. 209). Essentially, there is no utopian union here. Rather, each side leaves the other alive and well after confirming that no other solution can be reached; the protagonist names their terms and in so doing the Persona meets them and can leave the confrontation. While not necessarily utopic in of itself, these confrontations end more happily should the player be in possession of a copy of the Persona they are battling. Often the money given, or the item received, is of a better quality and the text shows the Persona leaving in a more positive manner, pleased the player already knows them to a degree. So, the movement from utopian awakening and negotiation becomes a more mundane confrontation ending in mutual agreement designed to produce a ludological advantage. This repetition of the same mechanic without the negotiation aspect can become tired or boring. Video games can replicate encounters but with ludological mechanics behind them keep them engaging. Thanks to this, different significance can be found in multiple versions of the same 'Hold-Up' scenario. In all cases, the protagonist's power is increased and in the process their party can become larger with more Persona beginning to share their goals and ambitions.

Phantom Thief Approval

This desire, this need the Phantom Thieves have for an increased love for their cause does not end in the cognitive world. Like many aspects of the game it crosses the boundary between the two and 'bleeds' into the real world of the game. The group takes on the role of freeing the world from 'corrupt adults' and thus they immediately set the precedent that most of the game is focused on, an 'us' vs 'them' mentality. Though in this case the two sides exist on a more wide-reaching and ambitious scale. In the cognitive

space there is a specific enemy (the Palace ruler) and a specific place (the Palace itself) to focus their rebellion. However, by setting the enemy as those currently in power who are using it to their advantage, the group is at an immediate disadvantage. They have no power to stand up to those individuals in the real world, requiring additional support and aid. The way the Phantom Thieves go about gaining this additional support is highly in keeping with the modern reflection of the real world the game is attempting to portray: they use social media. After saving a character, Yuuki Mishima, from the abusive teacher he attempts to show his thanks by creating what he calls the 'Phan-Site.' This fictional website in the game is designed as part writing forum, part request site and (most importantly) an ever-changing model through which public approval can be catalogued and monitored. The game makes it all but constantly apparent how much approval the Phantom Thieves are gaining or losing as it shows the approval bar at the bottom of the loading screen during the start of each in-game day. It is nearly impossible for the player to avoid it. At the same time posts from contributors are flicking across underneath the approval bar, ranging from 'not even worth a laugh' at lower levels to militant, also mob-like exclamations such as 'exterminate his family too!' (Hashino, 2017). These comments showcase the demands of the public escalating with the Phantom Thieves' popularity and them transitioning from 'underdogs against authority' to empowered executioners of their fans' will.

This evolution is in keeping with the group's original motivation as they have that need for validation brought about by being overlooked or not listened to in their pasts. These past experiences range from the protagonist's false arrest to rumours of Ann's promiscuity and Ryuji's (a third Phantom Thief) label as a mere delinquent. Each example shows authority merely stepping over them and pushing them to the side. This form of isolation goes against what people desire on a basic level; 'having preferences that are different from those of people we like and having preferences that are similar to those of people that we dislike are both undesirable' (Izuma and Adolphs, 2013 Pg. 563). The Phantom Thieves as individuals were all people whose preferences, whose needs, were labelled as wrong and thus excluded. In one another they found a connection and from that and their ability to accept their Other selves and the group was born. But the gaining

of new Personas and that small group of acceptance was not enough. They need to have their desires, their 'sameness', echoed by more people since they are so wholly convinced what they do is for the benefit of the city in which they live. The process can be somewhat problematic since, as Levitas states in echoing Le Guin's stance that 'it is impossible to tell which ideas are Utopian until they realise themselves, when they cease to be Utopian' (1979 Pg. 20). By deciding their desires are utopian the Phantom Thieves risk forcing others to accept their view of the world without thinking for themselves.

However, it is not necessarily the result that comprises this sign, more that the sign is met with each increase in the bar's number. Each increase represents a small step towards improvement. If the Phantom Thieves are successful in gaining another small segment of the public's approval, then they are in fact bringing a new person into their utopian goals. Their preferences are aligned and in the same way that a Persona in the cognitive world becomes the protagonist's to take in and use, so too does the public's increasing approval become a weapon to be wielded in the name of bringing their desired world to fruition. A small improvement in that approval number acts not as a completion, but as a step forward, increasing their momentum and drive to see the world changed. It is a prime example of the journey towards utopia rather than the goal of achievement being the true source of happiness. To achieve one hundred percent public approval is an impossible feat in the game, further supporting this framework of understanding. The end goal is not what matters, but the process of getting there. This example shows the malleability of video games. At their core a game is made to be played through and completed yet this task in the game cannot be completed. It is only by bringing in a complex narrative to change the player's view of the task that 'non-completion' does not become an issue. It bolsters the narrative impact by playing with the specificity of the media and instances such as this showcase the need for academic inquiry. More studies into the subject can help further understand how literally 'playing' with this media provides satisfaction.

The back and forth between the Phantom Thieves and their digital admirers serves as an excellent reflection of fan-culture. The fans (or Phans as the game terms them) are brought into this battle against authority and studies of fan-culture note that 'learning

how to engage is part of the initiation, the us versus them, the fan versus the nonfan' (Hellekson, 2009 Pg. 114). It is almost as though the act of becoming a fan is akin to the act of joining ranks with the thieves and thus falling under the umbrella of their utopia and their ideals. There is another motivation for prospective fans to join outside of the cultural hub and exchange fan-communities provide: the ability to request aid. The Phantom Thieves are able to respond to 'requests' sent in by prospective Phans who are suffering, or being made to suffer, due to those in authority. Should the Phantom Thieves accept and fulfil the request (by changing the heart of the subject of the request) then the prospective Phan becomes fully dedicated to the thieves' movement and thus popularity grows, and more requests come to the group's attention. Naturally, each request offers rewards for the group to create a ludological incentive beyond raising the approval bar, making the entirety of the process an accurate reflection of the fan community exchange: 'to give, to receive and to reciprocate' (Hellekson, 2009 Pg. 114). The fans give support and requests, they receive help for their issues, and they move forward, further sharing the Phantom Thieves' message and ideals. This effectively helps to spread the utopia that the group is trying to build at a societal level.

This spreading of ideals does not always end with the video game itself. *Persona 5* was an incredibly popular game and the and many emotionally invested players echoed the plight of the Phantom Thief characters. The need of these players to express and discuss such corruption was so great that a real-life version of the Phan-Site was made (see figure 13).

Figure 13: A screenshot of the real-life 'Phan-Site' made by fans of Persona 5.

The site was designed to mimic how it would appear in the game and contained forums where people could talk (mostly about their love of the game) but also to discuss real-world issues bothering them and received advice and help in return. The site is no longer active, but the fact that *Persona 5* struck at this important, uncomfortable truth regarding our world's corruption speaks volumes to how influential a video game can be. Fans of the game created a real-world replica to express the ideals of the Phantom Thieves, their desire for less corruption and stance on protecting those unable to protect themselves.

Forging/Advancing a Social Link

It is important and necessary to focus on the more individual impact that not the Phantom Thieves, but the protagonist alone can have on the world around him. The more far flung the spreading of their utopian ideals are, the less the game allows the player to see. For example, the game never shows the player which 'Phans' are asking for the player's help and (in most cases) only the cognitive versions of the subject of the request. In opposition to this, the game allows for a much more long-running, emotionally impactful and ludologically rewarding version of gaining approval: the power of social links.

To forge or even advance a social link in the game often requires action: not just imputing commands to a controller but rather the player needing to explore the world of the game and engage in optional activities to further their ludological advantages. This could encapsulate everything from grinding for more experience to searching out and

completing all available social links. In each game the nuances of action are likely to be different in much the same way that what constitutes utopia will also be different. Dewey's notion of 'pragmatic utopianism' serves as an excellent funnel to examine the impact of these social links, their use and impact to the game: 'the essential key to understanding Dewey's pragmatic utopianism is that actions imbue the world with meaning' (Freeman-Moir, 2011 Pg. 206). In *Persona 5,* the player acts through the protagonist to imbue the story-world with meaning. Narratives are begun, explored and completed depending on the player's choices and how they spend their free time interacting with the world. Several social links require a great deal of exploration to be found and some are not available until much later in the game, following several in-game months of play. It is up to the player to seek out and engage with these social links in order to foster relationships with more prominent members of the Phantom Thieves' small, utopia-driven community.

If it is up to the player and the player alone to seek out several of these social links, it stands to reason they would be rewarded for their effort. Games have a fundamental element of ludological structure to follow. RPG games set the precedent of the quest-reward narrative. In keeping with this, the social links of the game can be examined for the same request to reward mentality that the broader requests of Phantom Thief Approval generate. Though with one key difference with social links; they provide aid that transfers from the real world into the cognitive one. By spending time with and progressing relationships, the social link will evolve and rank up a certain arcana that the social link is related to. The arcana each social link is related to often symbolises or reflects the character in question. For example, the prosecutor Sae Niijima has the 'Judgement' arcana whilst a fortune-teller is the embodiment of the 'Fortune' arcana. These different arcana serve as the categories for different Persona and can serve to level them up more quickly over the course of the game. Social links make the protagonist more powerful and further enabling him to achieve his goals. In addition to this, other boons are granted to the protagonist and his party when social link ranks are met. Some examples of these boons can be additional abilities in battle, or discounted rates when shopping. Although the process itself seems to result in emotional release for the social link character, as they

are aided in overcoming trials or coming to peace with themselves, the protagonist is also offered much in the way of rewards. The protagonist's rewards are more pragmatic than those received by the people he helps. In keeping with Dewey's pragmatic utopia, the player is given enhanced power when it comes to crafting and empowering Personas and, should the social link be maxed to its highest level, the ability to create the strongest Persona of any given arcana. There is a great deal of emotional investment in these social links for players to encounter, some of which can be highly impacting. Topics such as abuse, blackmail and parenthood are all dealt with and this will create empathy in the player. If one story impacts them more than others, they have the agency to explore that to its conclusion, foregoing others. This choice allows the player to guide their experience of the narrative, making it personal to them.

For any of these most desirable goals to be reached it is necessary that the player's action be not only exploratory but also well-thought out and planned as best they can. The player is only given a limited amount of 'free-time' in which to make their own decisions (a free day offering them one event to do in the morning and another in the evening) so the player must attempt to find a balance between training the protagonist's social stats, advancing social links, visiting the cognitive world and engaging in optional challenges such as reading, fishing, sports and video gaming. While it is possible to completely max out all social links in a single play-through of the game, it is no simple feat and would require great planning as well as being familiar with the game mechanics beforehand. The player's actions here can vary a great deal depending on their own motivations and investment in the game. As Bostan notes, play can reflect many meanings and intentions such as a 'form of conflict and contest (power), a means of expressing an identity and belonging to a group (identity), as imagination and creativity (the imaginary), and a means of relaxation and escape (the self)' (2009 Pg. 22). Depending on which motivation gives the player the most satisfaction, they may choose to identify with the Phantom Thieves, become invested in the social link narratives and experience success or defeat as they do. Or choose instead to focus on the cognitive world and battling Persona, thus ignoring several social links in favour of seeking out tests of power. While the place of the play is a great deal more obscure (as is almost invariably the case), the protagonist's more

immediate group of social links serves to reflect the growth of his utopian driven community that is forever struggling against authority, skewing the world in its own favour. It is this utopian drive that cements this sign as an indicator of utopic presence in the game as well as an excellent example of the variation of player agency.

Boss Encounter/Battle

Persona 5 establishes the protagonist and all Phantom Thieves as those on the periphery of society, the ones who have been pushed out and vilified, made Others, Scapegoats. Essentially each Phantom Thief is a victim of the 'seemingly ineradicable lust to purify saints by purging scapegoats'(Kearney, 2003 Pg. 33). The game cannot help but make saints of its antagonists. Be they an Olympic winning medallist turned teacher, a would-be humble artist who takes in students or politicians hoping to lead the country to a better place, the antagonists of the game present themselves as those already in authority, in a state of grace and freely given respect by the vast majority of society. These characters make use of The Welfare Trade-Off (WTO) system (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2016) in which a person may choose to give a little and take back a lot or give a lot to have little in return. The latter of these, one with a high WTO, is a person that would be considered objectively kind. The opposition can also apply to people in so much that 'the lower they score, the more we dislike them the characters that provoke the strongest of these reactions should be considered evil' (Robson, 2016 Pg. 612). While the antagonists of the game present themselves as having high WTOs, they are in fact in possession of very low ones. The low WTOs immediately set the Phantom Thieves (and the player) who know the truth against them and further solidifies that 'us' vs 'them' mentality. The Phantom Thieves become the Other scapegoat figures battling for acceptance against the obstacle of an embodied, accepted authority. *Persona 5* makes these antagonists utterly detestable and this has a strong impact on the utopian potential of encounters and battles with them. By giving the players direct agency in these battles, the games provide additional satisfaction.

Examples of in-battle agency are found in the process through which the Phantom Thieves engage the antagonists, the Palace rulers, as they meet them. There is a great deal of importance to be found in the notion of talking and negotiating (Beatty, 1999; Mordechai, 2011) not just with characters met in the real world but even during battles

where a more confrontational dialogue (Mordechai, 2011) is found. Regarding the Palace Rulers, this is not the case. The Phantom Thieves may have a cut-scene prior to the battle in which the Palace ruler lays out their plan for the world in detail, but it is never something that can be disputed or dissuaded. One Palace ruler tells the Phantom Thieves 'there is no room for negotiation, you will know soon enough. Now, come at me!' (Hashino, 2017). The game makes a point of informing the Phantom Thieves, and the player, that in this instance talking is a fruitless endeavour. These characters are far too certain their path to power is the best despite it only suiting their needs at the cost of those around them (a low WTO). Even in cases during a boss battle in which a negotiation path could be opened, as the game terms it a 'hold up,' there is no dialogue given by the boss, merely '…' to indicate their unwillingness to talk. Should the player attempt to go further with an attempt at negotiation then the 'hold up' advantage is cut off, wasted, and the battle resumes. At no point is it possible to negotiate with a boss.

With this more utopian route for success blocked off, these battles take on a meaning entirely different than any other encounters in the game: they become a battle of wills. Segal gives the deliberately vague definition 'the allegedly perfect society' (2012 Pg. 5) regarding utopias and perfection is akin to taste in that it will vary from person to person. The Palaces of the game are just that, perfect, to the minds of the rulers, yet highly dystopian in the eyes of the Phantom Thieves. This leads them into battle in the first place. The Phantom Thieves in their battle against authority seek to tear down the so-called 'utopian' worlds of the Palaces and their rulers to try and improve lives through their own cause. Meanwhile the rulers wish them to endure so they may continue to remain in their authoritative position. What this new interpretation of the conflict brings is a battle of wills for differing interpretations of utopia. The Palace ruler seeks to continue with the current status quo while the Phantom Thieves seek to tear it down in place of a new one. Take this conflict, bring it together with the inherent power of video games to affect players on an emotional level (Oliver et al., 2016), the ability games have to foster identification between player and protagonist and this battle of wills can easily affect the player too. Players may become invested and wish to see the villains fall for the sake of the Phantom Thieves' vision of utopia. Given the length of the game and the importance it

places on narrative tension building it is also reasonable to assume that the suspense will be at its zenith by this point, heightening player enjoyment and engagement (Zillmann et al., 1975). Boss battles represent a conflict of utopian wills. The Palace ruler's established authority is literally beaten back by the Phantom Thieves and the Palace crumbles around them. The player is likely to be highly invested by this stage and will experience immense satisfaction when they emerge victorious. The infrequency of these battles also helps to add to their impact and furthers their importance as both narratological and ludological milestones to be overcome.

Conclusion

The place of the Other, of Sameness, of Aliens and utopia are all complexly woven into the narrative and game mechanics of *Persona 5*. Through an engaging narrative the game seeks to bring the player not only into the nuanced story-world but to bring about their investment in branching side-narratives and their desire to empathise with the Phantom Thieves and their cause. This process involves multiple game elements such as the heightened moments of Persona Reveal in which the protagonist and all other Phantom Thieves come to see and embrace their respective Others. Each Phantom Thief then becomes a Persona user and obtains the power such people possess in the cognitive world. This is far from the only time such a process will occur and the game sheds a utopian understanding upon the power of negotiation and communication. Not only with the Other to the Self but with dozens of Others trapped under the framework of a villainous individual's cognition. It is this approval, this justification for their goals and desires for a better world that drive the group not only to liberate or negotiate with the cognitive world's Personas but to work to attain the approval of the public in the real world. By helping them and developing a fan culture around themselves and their desires, the Phantom Thieves work to spread their message across as much of Japan as possible.

To offset this more impersonal 'fan-celebrity' relationship, the game also offers the deeper narratives of social links and the motivation of ludological rewards for their narratological progression. This entices the player on multiple levels, such as narrative and ludological, and shows characters on a more visceral state aided by and supporting the Phantom Thieves. The benefits of the support garnered over the course of the game work to truly showcase the Phantom Thieves as the rejected scapegoats of society and in

their rebellion for an improved world their utopian drive is made manifest. Thus, all utopic signs for this case study have their roots in rebellion and change. The conflict that naturally follows challenges to power only emphasises the impact the gameplay has upon a player and justifies *Persona 5*'s choice of medium.

Chapter 4: The Microtopias of Dreaming

Introduction

Bloodborne is the most overtly dystopian case study in this project. The analysis of its story-world focuses on the dystopian elements and seek to show the utopias within them. The Hunter displays Le Guin's *Utopiying, Utopiyang* (2016) over the course of their journey through the narrative, acting as an agent of both utopia and dystopia to differing parties as they go. Le Guin's essay, written as an accompaniment to a republishing or More's text, contains several of the authors thoughts regarding utopia and dystopia; in particular, her thoughts on the relationship between the two terms. Le Guin writes 'every eutopia contains a dystopia, every dystopia contains an eutopia' (2016 Pg. 195). It is this simultaneous duality that The Hunter reflects as they move by the player's command, speaking with agents of the game world, killing them or fulfilling their quests. The Hunter possess the capacity to be either a utopic saviour or a dystopic end. Given 'the apocalyptic trope is one of our culture's most resilient metaphors, having been part of our collective consciousness for several millennia' (Murphy, 2013 Pg. 234), its strong thematic presence in *Bloodborne* is examined. The world of *Bloodborne* is split between the Waking World (the real world) and Dreams, outside dimensions created by entities known as The Great Ones. This chapter argues that the apocalyptic Waking World locations possess greater utopic potential than the dream areas because of the struggle in attaining any happiness in them. By contrast, the dream areas are given manifestation by the Great Ones to fulfil the desires of either an individual or group of people. The dream worlds then afford a manifestation of their desires immediately. Le Guin argues that once utopia is achieved it ceases to hold a utopic state (2016). The Dreams examined here become heavily dystopic presences in the game because of their forced continuation. In every case, the Hunter must then enter and destroy for the good of all within it.

This chapter discusses work from several theorists in schools of apocalyptic studies (De Wildt et. al., 2018, Steward and Harding, 1999 & Murphy 2013) to better understand *Bloodborne's* story-world. Theory on Dark Tourism is brought into the project to examine the interloper status of the Hunter (Stone, 2013), and work on microtopias that will be applied to the Dreams world in the game (Edwards, 2009). An examination of the Waking World areas, Yharnam Old Yharnam and Upper Cathedral Ward, will be investigated first to examine the utopic potential of singular societies and a lack of action. Following this

attention will turn to the dream world areas, The Hunter's Dream, The Nightmare of Mensis and The Hunter's Nightmare, to investigate the most dystopian areas of the entire thesis. The work will demonstrate how and why a utopic place is unlikely to be created with the ability to last. Finally, the chapter will conclude with some final thoughts on the ways in which *Bloodborne* manages to manifest utopic elements while still being dominated by an overarching dystopian narrative and showing the importance of the player in the construction of both utopia and dystopia.

The Waking World

Yharnam

The central location, and main area, in which the player explores the world of *Bloodborne* is the city of Yharnam. The city is somewhat reminiscent of an early twentieth century London with sprawling, interconnected architecture. It creates a flowing environment that serves to augment challenge as well as explain the world state. The Hunter is a foreigner to Yharnam, and it should be noted the citizens of the place do not welcome outsiders. A fellow outsider notes in a dialogue 'You must have had a fine time of it. Yharnam has a special way of treating guests/Yharnamites don't share much with outsiders. Normally, they wouldn't let you near this place' (FromSoftware, 2015). At once the player is made aware that Yharnam is not as it should be during the time of the player's exploration. This is because the Hunt is on: a day when Yharnamites arm themselves and venture out to do battle against swarms of beasts prowling the streets. With this event comes a change in Yharnam itself: from normal place to 'Other Place'. A term better used to describe this change is Heterotopia, which, as Stone notes, 'literally means, "of Other Places"' (2013 Pg. 3). Foucault argued that heterotopias inject a sense of 'alterity into the sameness,' (ibid). The 'sameness' in this case being Yharnam's function as a large urban city transformed into a battle ground come the night of The Hunt. Furthermore, 'heterotopias are spaces of contradiction and duality' (ibid) and this description meshes well with Yharnam itself and the Hunter's role in it. The Hunter battles the beasts threatening the citizens and opens themselves up to the influence of beast-hood in the process. In addition, Yharnam, a place of wondrous healing via blood ministration, has become a battle-ground rife with death and madness caused by that very

blood. Yharnam's, and the Hunter's, current duality of place and action resound with the notion of a heterotopia and a strong sense of The Other.

The Place of Yharnam has experienced a societal flux. Place is not a term given solely to one school of academic thought. Cresswell notes 'place is not the property of geography – it is a concept that travels quite freely between disciplines and the study of place benefits from an interdisciplinary approach' (2014 Pg. 1). This project has already pulled from several disciplines and place will fit amongst them to highlight how utopia may manifest and be consumed. That place can vary so highly in video games is testament to their ability to create and maintain complex story-worlds affecting players on an emotional level. Further analysis of Cresswell's approach shows place to be loosely defined as space in which meaning is found and that attracts groups of people to fulfil a purpose or a function (2014). Therefore place, like utopia, could come to hold importance based on the meaning it is given and the function it serves.

Some of the world's most notable areas – grand cathedrals, imposing factories, pyramids and palaces – all existed not only to be grand locations but also to fulfil a task. Places of worship, places of work, places of ascension or places of ruling all are arguably given definition by their function and their function so given by society. This naturally means that any definition of a place is subject to change in the same way that society can change over time. Pyramids are no longer only resting places for pharaohs but areas of archaeological and historical significance. The most famous palace of all, Buckingham Palace, is more of a tourist destination now rather than a place from which the monarchy rules the lands. Even grand industrial buildings are now no longer places of work, but rather fashionable apartment buildings designed for city living and relaxation.

Yharnam is subject to this change in place as well. The grand sprawling city is no longer defined by the boons of blood ministration, as a place of healing, but is now all but devoid of sentient life and characterised by vicious beasts haunting the streets. As figure 14 shows, Signs of 'The Hunt' was the single most prevalent sign found when coding *Bloodborne*.

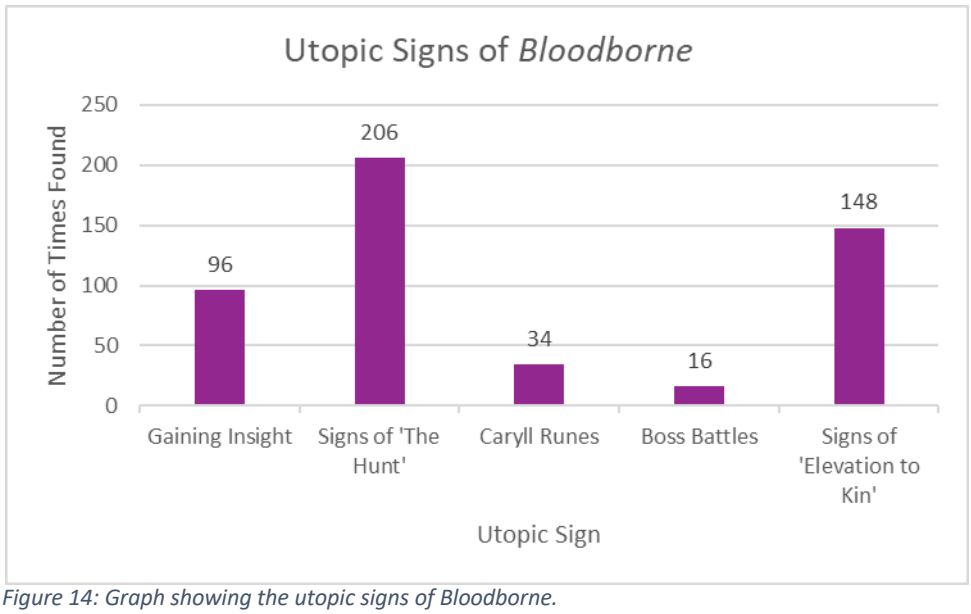

Figure 14: Graph showing the utopic signs of Bloodborne.

The results of coding the game provided insight to the prevalence of 'The Hunt' in *Bloodborne.* Yharnam is in the grip of beast-hood and the player cannot help but see this as they progress. The overwhelming ratio of beasts to men characterises the landscape. All gates are at first closed, piles of chained coffins are stacked in corners and barricades put against doors and windows. Yharnam is no longer a welcoming place of healing but a dystopic location overrun by dangerous foes. Upon death a 'Citizen Hunter' enemy utters the words 'this town's finished' (FromSoftware, 2015) cementing Yharnam's change in status. *Bloodborne* gives a history to the space it has created, meanings both past and present to heighten the impact the place has upon the player. The specificity of games goes further and puts the player in the centre of Yharnam. They deliver killing blows to hear those chilling words, they must edge carefully around corners to avoid bestial foes, they explore and come to understand the city. They are set upon a journey of survival and exploration, functioning as the Other in this beast-led place. *Bloodborne* casts the Hunter as the Other and gives the player insight into a society experience of 'otherness' they may otherwise never have.

The Hunter progresses alone in Yharnam but the citizens of Yharnam clearly see one another as an allied group, an 'I'. Meanwhile the beasts of the city are viewed as the 'Them' and The Hunt takes on a new meaning. It is a not a massacre of evil bestial creatures but a crusade to protect the humanity of the city. To investigate the notion of 'evil' with more depth Kearney argues that '[with the arrival of Kantian ethics] evil ceases

to be a matter of abstract metaphysical accounting and instead becomes an affair of human practice and judgement' (2003 Pg. 87). The people could hide in their homes (as many do) with beast repelling incense burning yet instead choose to venture out into the night, hunt, kill and string up beasts as warnings to their kin. By engaging in this choice to kill, changes come over the citizens and they begin to develop more bestial characteristics themselves, striking out at the Hunter (a fellow human) and further pushing the boundary between beast and man. This battle-driven series of events is what has changed Yharnam into such an apocalyptic state. Beasts, and bestial hunters, roam the streets and those with any humanity are lacking by comparison. In a sense this change affecting the citizens has made it so they cannot be told apart from the beasts they hunt. The Hunter is attacked by both sides, escalating ludological challenge and highlighting their estrangement. The Hunter could have at one point been accepted by the citizens and fought with them but the change in society has made it so that is now impossible. By extension the player now sees both beasts and citizens as enemies, leaving the Hunter moving forward alone.

Yet even in a city so changed elements of utopia can be found. The most utopic action that can be taken by the few remaining citizens of Yharnam is to do nothing. The player comes across several non-playable characters (NPCs) throughout the game and can send them to one of two locations: Iosefka's Clinic or Cathedral Ward. The Chapel Dweller NPC is the character who urges the Hunter to send survivors to Cathedral Ward and is of particular note in that his own 'utopian ambitions [are] modest, and informed by experience rather than the fabulist excesses of storytelling and superstitious rumour' (Edwards, 2009 Pg. 775). Unlike several other characters whose grand ambitions (to battle beasts, put down rogue hunters, save the sick, survive the plague or ascend to god-hood) lead to their unhappiness or death, the Chapel Dweller merely seeks to house those who are still surviving and progress through the night until dawn. To survive The Hunt. The Hunter may aid in the Dweller's endeavour and send citizens to him. Should they do so, the Hunter is rewarded with the following dialogue:

> Ah, the Hunter! Alive and well at that, another one you sent made it here safe and sound. This place is a haven now for so many, thanks to you. I'm… overjoyed, really, that you'd even give me the time of day. I don't suppose there's anyone out there worth saving anymore, but you did all you could, and so many owe you so much, amazing, really. Not cause you're a hunter, but because you're you. (Laughs)

> Ahh, makes me think once dawn breaks maybe I can just, y'know, start over? Makes it easier to bear all of this you see; you've made life easier, thank you. If you please, Kind Hunter, when the night of the hunt passes, suppose we could be… friends? Maybe? Now, I know I hardly deserve it but, well… I had to just, ask y'know? Out of line, yes, perhaps so. But, well, give it a thought. If you wouldn't mind o'course. (Laughs).
>
> (FromSoftware, 2015)

It is perhaps one of the few occasions in the game where the Hunter (an outsider to Yharnam) is spoken to so kindly. The simplicity of the request harkens back to the achievable utopic ambition Edwards discusses and the methods employed to achieve these goals. Yharnam is not as it was, nor likely ever to be again, and in the face of such dramatic changes the most utopian action taken by characters in this location is to endure. To survive the night. In these choices the power of the utopic journey is seen.

The place of Cathedral Ward is affected by sending NPCs there. The location is also termed Oedon Chapel in *Bloodborne* and this hints at its original function. The place used to exist as a place of worship to Formless Oedon, a Great One. Now it has changed and this new function is reflected in the dialogue of the Chapel Dweller, 'this place is a haven now for so many' (FromSoftware, 2015). The chapel like almost everywhere else in Yharnam serves a new function given to it by these few remaining members of the city's society. It is no longer a place of worship but a place of survival to endure until the night passes. This is the peak utopic goal of this group, their journey to survive until dawn. It is notable because the journey towards a goal is Le Guin's primary aspect of utopia and the game always ends with the night of the hunt passing. The most a player will ever see the night following the hunt is dawn just beginning to break. These NPCs are progressing on their utopic journeys and most fail, dying before dawn. But by having the Hunter aid them in their journeys they have had a hand in creating a utopic place out of Oedon Chapel. The player can experience the overwhelming joy the Chapel Dweller feels when his place is given this new utopian function via their emotional and identifiable relationship with the Hunter. That result being directly caused by the player's agency in Yharnam gives that strong sense of satisfaction, of fun and emotional impact. The specificity of games to employ utopic action in a complex dystopia space, affecting place meaning, leads to a powerful emotional impact. This is something unique to video games

and justifies why study into the media is necessary, to better understand societal actions, utopic place and player emotional investment.

Old Yharnam

Old Yharnam is an example of society not struck down by an apocalypse, but one that has evolved from it. An apocalypse has come to mean a disaster or, more accurately 'it came also to refer to any revelation, prophecy, or vision of the end of history and the current world order, or to the end time events themselves' (Stewart and Harding, 1999 Pg. 286). Old Yharnam located beneath the current city of Yharnam in *Bloodborne* was once a thriving area until the beastly plague overtook it to the extent that all that could be done was to set the place aflame and seal it away. This left the place to its end time as Steward and Harding term the event. Old Yharnam is an example of man 'underestimating the extent of nature's power or overestimating the technology used to control it' (Murphy, 2013 Pg. 236) as the city never developed a method of curing the disease of beast-hood. It has come to have a new meaning to the story-world of the game by providing proof of what would happen should the ever detested 'Other' of the beast fully take over the city, which it nearly has. Knowing this, the Player would enter the town expecting to come face to face with an end of times environment. The town still has multiple fires burning (testament to the flames that ran through the place) and several crucified (still burning) bodies of beasts are visible for the player to see whereas Yharnam itself has only one such similar crucifixion on display. This reflects the difference between the two locations and the vicious desperation Yharnamites employed to try and control the beastly scourge.

In regard to apocalyptic fiction, 'typically these works are set in either one of two distinct temporal time frames related to the apocalyptic happening—either during the event itself or after the calamity has occurred' (Murphy, 2013 Pg. 234). The former (during) reflects Yharnam itself while Old Yharnam represents the latter, having moved beyond the point of its collapse. In comparison to Edwards' analysis of Doris Lessing's work, Old Yharnam showcases a 'relentlessly brutal post-apocalyptic landscape' with the continual fires burning, the smoke of which obscures visions and beasts lurk unseen in corners. Despite this overwhelming dystopian imagery setting and narrative, or rather because of it, the utopian elements of Old Yharnam can be explored. It is from this apocalyptic nature that these forms of utopia have risen (Murphy, 2013). Old Yharnam has

a protector, Djura who calls out to the player upon their entering Old Yharnam. 'Old Yharnam, burned and abandoned by men, is now home only to beasts. They are of no harm to those above. Turn back...' (FromSoftware, 2015). The character clarifies that with the loss of man peace has instead come to the place. In the battle for Yharnam it has been argued the 'I' and the Other are engaged in a fruitless battle determined to leave one side extinct. In Old Yharnam the extinction has already occurred and following that loss of an enemy the beasts ceased attacking. Kearney notes that 'society could confirm its own sense of unitary consensus by virtue of its contemplation of outcasts' (2003 Pg. 115) yet, insofar as Old Yharnam, there are no outcasts, no strangers nor agents to the contrary. In a place such as this the words of Djura hold true, the beasts are no threat to humanity. They simply live and are instead protected by a human.

It is no mistake this land of beasts is found directly following the player exploring Yharnam. Old Yharnam serves to highlight that 'man' is by no means without fault. The Yharnamites brought destruction upon themselves via overuse of a substance they did not fully understand. This is a fear constantly reiterated in modern society as humanity develops new chemicals and compounds. Looking at texts such as *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002), *I am Legend* (Matheson, 1954) and *12 Monkeys* (Gilliam, 1995) it is easy to find instances of humanity destroying itself with some form of chemical weapon in fiction. *Bloodborne* takes this understandable fear further by forging it as an experience for the player. This experience is crafted by the Hunter they control coming upon a post-apocalyptic space forged by the overuse of healing blood. The Hunter then moves through the space exploring and hunting as the game has conditioned them to do and even in this isolated, separate society (a common trope for physical utopias often employed in the works of Jules Verne) peace is fragile. The beast enemies are clearly injured, covered in bandages (see figure 15) and recoil at the sight of flame, all hints to past attempts to destroy them all. One Hunter entering is enough to disrupt this utopian space and plunge it into a dystopia and the player is the cause of this change. They have (perhaps unwittingly) destroyed a space that managed to find peace in the aftermath of an endeavoured extinction. This could cause a strong emotional response in the player as the game subtly changes the experience from 'hunted hunter' (the citizens & beasts of

Yharnam attacking the Hunter) to the experience of 'hunter hunting' (the Hunter moving unwanted into a peaceful space and slaughtering all within). The Hunter is no longer protecting Yharnam from the threat of beast, but instead destroying a place that had become a haven for them.

Figure 15: A Beast Patient enemy

It is a total contrast to Central Yharnam where the Hunter creates that haven. Their isolated journey, their microtopia of the self, allows these completely disjointed actions to come together and act as movement towards their utopian goals. By using environmental storytelling to display the function and history of place *Bloodborne* crafts an experience of microtopia reflecting relevant fears from modern society that the player must move through and bear the responsibility of. It is a far more impacting experience due to the specificity of its media forcing the place to the centre of narrative and gameplay.

The experience of the beasts in Old Yharnam would seem alien, wrong or other to those above it in Central Yharnam. Yet these need not be negative terms. Alienation has come to be seen 'as a relatively enduring experience of dissatisfaction and rejection and defined in terms of discrepancy between what is real and what is utopian or ideal' (Barakat, 1969 Pg. 8). Those alienated have become so out of rejection of the norm and a desire for something else, something better, and this can be something utopic. While this is obvious in the lifestyles of the beasts (they are not human and thus have differing needs to be fulfilled) it can also be seen in their protector. Should the Hunter take a different, half-

hidden route into Old Yharnam at a later point in the game they may encounter Djura as a friendly character rather than a hostile one. Following this, if the Hunter agrees to leave the beasts of Old Yharnam be he will say 'There's nothing more horrific than a hunt. In case you've failed to realize... The things you hunt, they're not beasts. They're people' (FromSoftware, 2015). While this realisation is nothing new to the Player having it put directly into words is. Djura as a character is alienated from the society of Yharnam out of his desire for a utopia in which beasts may go un-hunted. He instead watches and only becomes hostile to protect them from the Hunter. In a rather steadfast comparison to the Chapel Dweller, Djura is also at his most utopic when he is idle. Djura's ambition is, to a degree, achievable insofar as his desire to protect extends only throughout Old Yharnam, a place all but forgotten by those above it and left to fade from memory. Old Yharnam's function is now redefined just as Oedon Chapel's was. At his core, Djura's motivations are to survive though it is not himself that he seeks survival for, but the beasts around him. The player has no way of knowing this during an initial blind (having no prior knowledge of the game) playthrough. Should the player take the path of least resistance and proceed through Old Yharnam killing beasts they make an enemy out of Djura. The agency of the player's exploration could lead to two very different results, showcasing the power they have in directing the narrative and events of the night of The Hunt.

A Utopia depends on the motivations behind it, the more varied the motivations the more difficult it becomes to craft a utopia that can cater to all the required needs. In both cases the Chapel and Old Yharnam were in states of utopia because of the actions of humans. Though it may come from an apocalyptic event that leaves only a handful of people or a single species behind, the utopia is still more easily able to come to fruition should circumstances render its creation simpler. The Hunt itself may not be inherently utopic, but it possesses qualities that allow it to be part of a utopian journey. The Hunt created a need for both of these spaces but in keeping with the transience of utopia (Le Guin, 2016) and the main goal of a video game to be completed (Murray, 1997) they cannot last. By the time an ending is reached Old Yharnam may have been destroyed, its protector killed, and the Yharnamites in Oedon Chapel will be dead or mad. The strongest incarnation of utopia found in this game is that of the Hunter. The player moves this

character through the story-world and the media forces them to the centre to bear responsibility and the emotional fallout of their actions. Video games such as *Bloodborne* offer a small insight into how it may feel to be an isolated figure in a dystopian world. This experience of Otherness and how it may affect different players would be hugely important to areas of sociological and psychological research.

Upper Cathedral Ward

Multiple Others exist in the diegesis of *Bloodborne* and 'one must be careful to discern, in some provisional fashion at least, between different kinds of otherness' (Kearney, 2003 Pg. 77). The Beasts in *Bloodborne* were once human, but the Kin enemies in the game were also once human. These humans were experimented on for the express purpose of becoming something more. Kin are described by in-game items as 'inhuman Kin of the cosmos, brethren of the Great Ones' so at once these creatures are shown to be something non-human. Yet they are also given relation to something else: Great Ones. The utopian aspect behind the Kin's creation is easily found in Quarta & Procida's *Homo Utopius:* the need to ascend and become more than what we as humans are (1996). The location in which they are found reflects the particularities of this form of Other just as Old Yharnam and Yharnam did for the beasts. The area in question is called Upper Cathedral Ward. Where smoke from fires served as an element of environmental ambiance below, in this area full of Kin there is simply fog hanging in the air. Fires were used to herald hunts (successful or not) regarding beasts yet this environment of the Kin rellies a great deal more heavily on darkness. The only light given is that which is provided by the player or by the bioluminescence of the Kin creatures themselves. Even the beasts in this area have glowing blue eyes in the dark that are absent elsewhere.

The difference in this form of Other is great and by extension the utopic elements differ as well. Kin were not created as a side-effect of imbibing healing blood, but instead were created expressly to help humanity ascend to the level of the Great Ones. In the game this overall goal failed yet the Kin themselves still gained an environment where humans were absent that has become a place of worship. It has been argued that 'fiction-based religion is a staple in video games and provides frequent narrative background and ludic contexts to make games meaningful for players' (De Wildt et al., 2018 Pg. 2) and this religious connotation is also found in the example used by Quarta. He uses the story of

Eve's temptation to enlightenment, to 'more' by the serpent in the garden (1996). This connection helps to bridge the creation of Kin with elements of utopia. The overall desire of humanity to move on and evolve to something greater than itself that is of a level worthy of worship. In-game descriptions note that The Choir (a group in Yharnam researching evolution above humanity) were permitted 'to have audience with Ebrietas' (FromSoftware, 2015), Ebrietas being a Great One. To 'have audience' is similar diction that would be used if a person were meeting a monarch or a person of a higher level. This further reinforces the idea of worship and an aspiration to evolve. Since this form of evolution and communion with Great Ones was what the Kin were created for it stands to reason they would continue to follow these desires even if there are no longer humans nearby to benefit from their actions. The simplicity of this desire and communal nature of Kin-only environment makes a space in which utopia may manifest. 'Most secular utopias that achieve some longevity still have a spiritual dimension' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 10). And while the Great Ones may not be inherently spiritual, so much as they are simply a more evolved race, humanity has chosen to interpret and interact with them in such a way. That desire has left behind a secular utopian environment.

The function of Upper Cathedral Ward was originally a research facility. People (mainly orphans) were taken in and experimented on so that humanity could evolve. Cresswell's work on place shows that the function of this space has changed with the absence of humanity and made the space alien to the Hunter. There is no more research happening in Upper Cathedral Ward, instead it is a space of worship. It is almost ironic that the change in function has moved from science to spirituality and the progression of time led to this transformation. Abazi and Doja note that 'the idea that time flows with a direction, and that there is a past, a present and a future, is a mental construction based on cognitive functions like object recognition, spatial location and temporal reconstruction' (2018 Pg. 240). This equates time with the cognitive functions of humans in relation to their surroundings. It is difficult to create a sense of time in *Bloodborne* overall, but Upper Cathedral Ward is one of the most complex. One way the player can interpret the place is to use the environment to understand the change in function. Carrion beasts and Kin foetuses move around outside the orphanage, beasts have invaded inside the building and

claimed it as their own. There is no light inside either. Most spaces in *Bloodborne* have fires burning (like those in Old Yharnam) that help guide the player but there are none to be found in almost all Upper Cathedral Ward. This hints at its abandonment over a long period of time. These environment queues help to infer this passing of time but demand some cognitive interpretation from the player. Time passing led to a Kin-dominated environment and this space took on a new function, a new meaning, and became a new place. The meaning given by any form of society to a space is incredibly important. Complex games crafting equally complex societies (in this case not even a society of humans) leads to these narrative rich places for players to explore. The experience of the player is paramount. They impacted on a cognitive level due to trying to solve environmental clues but also on an emotional level too. Having to explore this horror-filled place in which Kin creatures are the norm and the Hunter the Other forces the experience of being hunted due to an uncontrollable difference upon the player. Not only does this echo an issue rife in modern society but it does so in a way designed to evoke visceral fear. Eventually, the Hunter reaches the peak of the orphanage and comes upon a lit area. In the centre stands a burning figure posted with arms outstretched (see figure 16) forming a pose entitled 'Make Contact'.

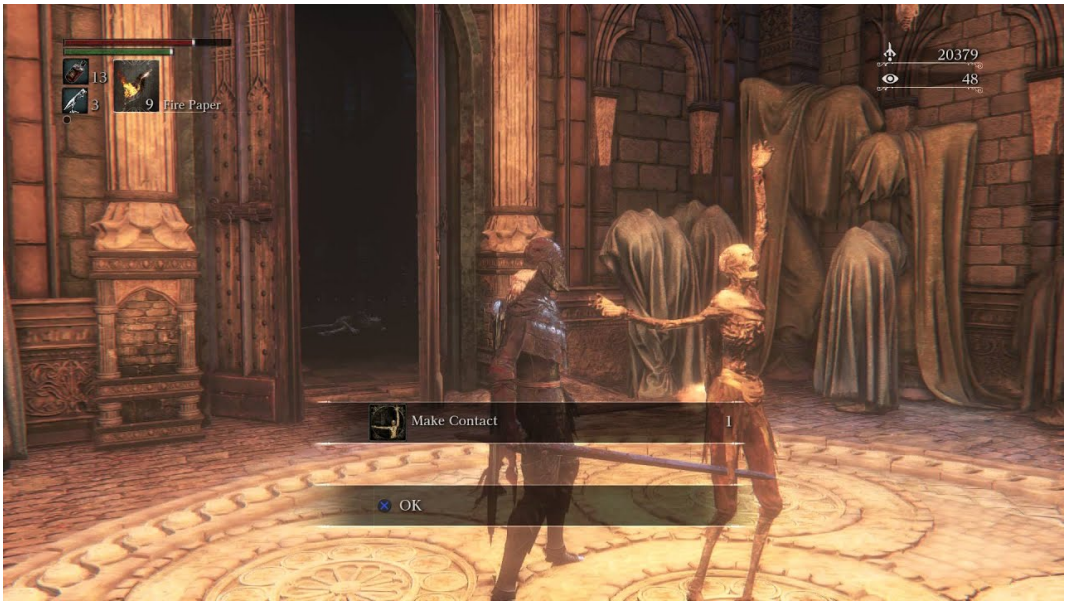

Figure 16: A statue forming the 'Make Contact' Gesture.

This highlights the change to a religious space since the most well-guarded area of the entire Upper Cathedral Ward houses a figure attempting to communicate with Great Ones. As in Yharnam and Old Yharnam there is nothing for the Hunter to find an alliance

with and they must continue alone. The use of place to infer time progression and experience of the player within highlights a video game's power to represent complex societies and create experiences that indirectly relate to problems in modern society while still encapsulating Juul's need for fun.

Iosefka's Clinic

There are several other places in the game where Kin creatures are found but one of note is Iosefka's Clinic. The NPC in this area acts as a reflection of the Chapel Dweller in that she too asks the Player to send her people claiming the clinic to be a safe space. This is a lie as the NPC is in fact a member of The Choir who experiments on the characters sent to her and transforms them into Kin. At her heart this imposter seeks the evolution of humanity, to transcend and this is reflected in her dialogue, 'We must find a way. To surpass our own stupidity' (FromSoftware, 2015). In this desire there is a shift in the place of the Other. Regarding the beasts the Other is a monstrous fate to be battled against and destroyed. Whereas the Other regarding Kin highlights a desire for improvement, for ascension. In its own way there is an argument to be made for the utopic journey of ascending beyond humanity to Kin out of a desire for something new. This is proven to be possible as the Player can make this journey throughout the game depending on the choices they make. When they do ascend the game will end with a brief cut-scene showing the new body the Player now inhabits before fading out. Whether this ascension is a utopian desire is ultimately uncertain, but the game does present it as such. The utopic experience is only that which the player attains over the course of the game, their journey. The moment they reach that next level of evolution the game comes to an end and nothing more is added to the narrative. Rather than explore the outcome of this event it is instead left forever unknown and the player can never be sure if what followed was utopic or not. All that is certain is the journey up until that point with the destination never clear, highlighting that utopia is 'as More said in naming it, Nowhere' (Le Guin, 2016 Pg. 166).

Where utopia is found is in the people of any given location. The beasts and Djura of Old Yharnam, the citizens of Oden Chapel, the Kin worshipping in Upper Cathedral Ward and the Imposter Iosefka experimenting in the clinic. Each group provides a meaning to their space giving it form as place. By doing so they add a function to it that matters to them (to survive, to ascend, etc.) and these goals are utopic to them. The Hunter

acts as an individual society and blank slate for the player's own actions and feelings. By moving through each different place, they either help or hinder the utopias therein in the name of their own journey. The places take on meanings the Hunter (and by extension player) gives them. The Hunter makes Odeon a haven or Old Yharnam dystopic. All the while they are consistently reminded of their otherness, the ultimate minority in Yharnam. Providing that experience for a player in a rich narrative with deep levels of engagement makes the journey they undergo more emotionally effective. The Waking World of Yharnam is highly dystopic but small instances of utopia have been found, given meaning by the small groups clustering around them.

Dreams & Nightmares

The Hunter's Dream

There is another realm of existence in *Bloodborne's* story-world that fits some criterion of utopia. Current theory suggests 'that contemporary representations of utopia demonstrate a "tendency to shift the utopian ideal (and its inverse) from the domain of state institutions to the domain of individual subjectivity"' (Edwards, 2009 Pg. 764). Some forms of utopia are experiencing a 'scaling down' of sorts creating a more viable environment where they can thrive. These utopias built for one or few people have been termed 'microtopias'. The reason several areas in *Bloodborne* could be considered utopian communities was because of the similarity in desire the inhabitants showcased. In *Bloodborne* there does exist a method to make an environment purely from the desire of an individual (or a group) that functions on the need those desires created. The Great Ones have the ability to create environments called 'Dreams' via communion with an individual or group using an item known as 'One Third of Umbilical Cord'. These Dreams are, in some ways, examples of a collective unconsciousness. Carl Gustav Jung described the collective unconscious as 'a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals'(1981 Pg. 43) and it must be an identical desire that crafts these Dream-spaces. For example, the Nightmare of Mensis was designed to be a place where the School of Mensis came together to express their desire for further insight and knowledge, however it can be inferred from the sight of some Mensis members chained to their chairs and the existence of a spy named 'Edgar: Choir Intelligence' within the Nightmare that this was not a uniform desire and thus the Dream

became a Nightmare. In contrast, the citizens of the Fishing Hamlet were uniform in their desire to create a world that punished hunters for their transgressions against them; thus, the Hunter's Nightmare fully serves its purpose.

The player visits these locations over the course of the game. Each Dream exists from the desire of the one who communes with a Great One and the place remains that way, unchanged if the dream endures. The first Dream the player encounters is at the very beginning of the game and is called The Hunter's Dream. All characters who chose to have a dream created for them did so out of a desperate need. Gehrman (the old hunter) communed for The Hunter's Dream because the hunters were becoming obsolete and with them the workshop that he headed. It is the need, 'the impulse to reach out to what ought to be' (Quarta and Procida, 1996 Pg. 160) that drove the character to act. Gehrman needed himself and other hunters to be needed, to be useful and strong and the dream catered to these desires. These elements hold an inherently ludological service, such as levelling up a character, levelling up weapons and buying items but, when examining the narrative of the game the Hunter's Dream seems unquestionably utopic to Gehrman and Gehrman alone. He desired the location and the function it would serve. Much like the Hunter, Gehrman served as a one-man society to build the place and deem it a utopia.

As the player progresses through the game several elements come forward exposing the Hunter's Dream as a place that cannot move forward or progress. The area remains constant save for the characters moving within it. Utopia is malleable (Greene, 2011) in the same way humans are with needs evolving and changing. The dream is incapable of change and Gehrman's dialogue reflects how unhappy he is with his choice: 'Oh, Laurence... Master Willem... Somebody help me... Unshackle me please, anybody... I've had enough of this dream... The night blocks all sight... Oh, somebody, please...' (FromSoftware, 2015). A change as occurred from inhabitation to imprisonment, from happiness to sadness, 'Every eutopia contains a dystopia' (Le Guin, 2016 Pg. 195) and by prolonged exposure Gehrman has found his. The dream locations represent an excellent opposition to the Waking World and the Hunter is the only character in the game who can walk both. Due to this the differences between both places are made clearer. There is a lack of enemies within the Hunter's Dream. It is one of the few locations where regular

enemies do not appear. Despite this the area becomes incredibly dystopian places by means of the very reason it became utopic. The Hunter's Dream was crafted from the desires of a single person and as those desires changed with time the only person there began to see it as a prison. Consequently, the Hunter's Dream is a utopia no more. Segal notes that 'false utopias, seek changes in only one or components, such as/ prisons' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 6) and the prison of the Hunter's Dream only offered to fulfil Gehrman's desire of feeling useful, neglecting all other desires.

One great weakness of utopia is its transience. 'No single model fits cotemporary utopian endeavours any more than it fitted their predecessors' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 249) because utopia is a reflection of the needs and desires of the people experiencing and within it. Utopia is not an independent nor autonomously evolving unit. The Hunter's Dream fails because it will not change to Gehrman's new desires revealing that the offer of an easy utopia was not wholly for his own benefit. Once the player has progressed so far as to kill a Great One there does come a change in the Hunter's Dream. The workshop in the dream is set aflame and burns continuously, symbolising the dream's true purpose has been fulfilled. The change was not triggered by Gehrman but by the Great One who created the dream to begin with. The severe change from a serene area to one of burning chaos shows the game's tendency towards an apocalyptic end but in this case, there is no after. No post-apocalypse space where like-minded groups can come together. Instead, as dreams do, it will end and nothing will remain. Gehrman's final words upon his death are 'the night, and the dream were long' (FromSoftware, 2015), indicating the length of time he'd been trapped in the unhappiness of his own desires. To kill him and end the dream is perhaps the most utopic solution. The dream cannot continue onwards, but Gehrman can, and in that single moment of realising his own demise, comes the utopic experience Le Guin discusses (2016) that fades the moment it is attained.

The Nightmare of Mensis

The Nightmare of Mensis exists to show a character who revels in their stagnating utopia. Dreams can be forged from the desires of an individual or a collective, provided the collective are of the same desire. The School of Mensis are an enemy to The Choir despite sharing similar ambitions for evolution beyond humanity. The Choir experimented on people as seen by the member in Iosefka's Clinic but The School of

Mensis instead sought direct communion with a Great One using a Third of an Umbilical cord. The game's environment shows not all members agreed with the plan as some were handcuffed to their chairs and the division between members could have resulted in the dream becoming a nightmare. Microtopias require only a single negative addition to see their entire structure ruined. Some School of Mensis members did not desire communion with a Great One and the conflicting desires likely caused the creation of a nightmare instead of a dream. Nightmares are found on the dream level of existence separate from the Waking World but are infested with hostile enemies. The Nightmare Apostle enemies are likely the remnants of School of Mensis members (see figure 17) but have lost any sanity or higher intelligence.

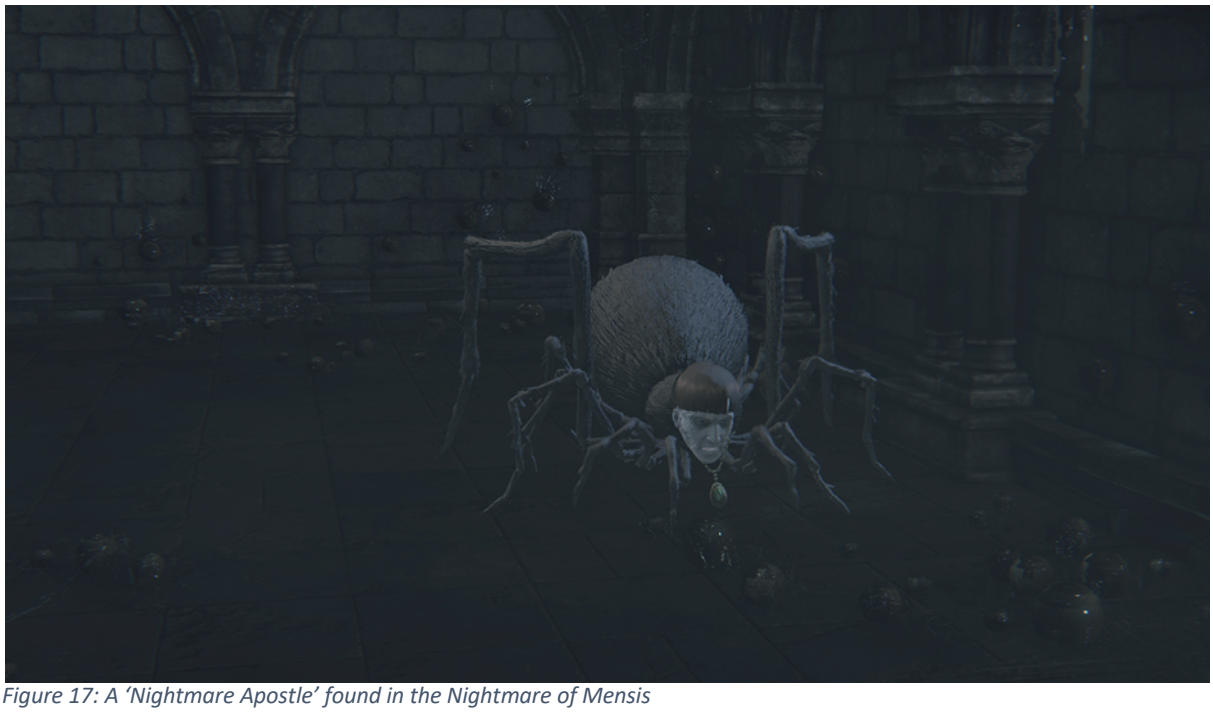

Figure 17: A 'Nightmare Apostle' found in the Nightmare of Mensis

The school's attempt to commune with a Great One failed and is described in-game as 'resulting in the stillbirth of their brains' (FromSoftware, 2015). The word 'stillbirth' implies death and by extension the loss of any intelligence or cognitive understanding for the school members. The Great One could only cater to a single, strong desire when creating a space on the dream plain and used the strongest desire it could find in the school. All other desires were excluded, and the other school members transformed into mindless monsters in the nightmare. Their human heads and name 'Nightmare Apostle' are the only remaining hints of their original nature. There is a price to be paid for the

creation of a microtopia and that is the exclusion of members who do not conform to the desire behind it and the function it meets.

The Great Ones in *Bloodborne* are described as 'sympathetic in nature' (FromSoftware, 2015) to humanity. A sympathetic nature explains why an infant Great One (Mergo) attempted to answer the School of Mensis' attempt at communication. Despite the original intention for the School of Mensis to work as one, only a single member achieved a dream-space: Micolash, Host of the Nightmare. As his name implies rather than be trapped in a nightmare like his fellow school members, Micolash embraced the nightmare and became its host. Micolash functions as a change from Gehrman since it is implied that he is content in his nightmare whereas Gehrman could not remain steadfast in his desire and sought escape. One reason for Micolash's ability to endure the nightmare could be his madness since the process of communing with a Great One cost him his sanity. The natural aspect of humanity to change and fluctuate their desires is halted by Micolash's insanity and he remains enthralled by the Nightmare. His dialogue when first encountering the Hunter reaffirms this: 'No, we shall not abandon the dream. No one can catch us! No one can stop us now!' (FromSoftware, 2015). As the leader of this stagnant microtopia Micolash demonstrates that a sane human cannot endure the lack of change. In his own twisted understanding, the Host is experiencing a constant state of utopia that cost him his fellow school members and his life in the Waking World. The Great One Mergo gave Micolash what he desired and since both his desire and the location cannot change the microtopia endures.

It is not until the Hunter enters the nightmare, as outside force impacting this microtopia that conflict follows. The Hunter is cast as an Other in the nightmare, since they were not drawn into the nightmare during its creation and attacked by the creatures in it. The conflict creates a separation between Micolash and the Hunter and a clash of microtopian wills follows with neither able to understand or accommodate the other. In the nightmare both sides see the other as 'those others who really do seek to destroy and exterminate' (Kearney, 2003 Pg. 10). The aggression and violence in the nightmare present an opposite to the Hunter's Dream and the appropriate naming of both locations. While dream and nightmare may seem more synonymous with utopia and dystopia respectively

there is in fact a switch between which areas best create and maintains their utopic status. The nightmare has the aesthetic of horror and terror, full of gore, darkness and enemies. Some enemies in the nightmare even inflict the frenzy status ailment described in-game as 'falling to madness' (FromSoftware, 2015) reflecting Micolash's own insanity. Whereas the Hunter's Dream is devoid of enemies, has peaceful music playing and NPCs who guide the Hunter but the people within those dreams define the function of the place and whether it is utopic or not. The Nightmare of Mensis is far from wholly utopic but, in terms of longevity, it succeeded far longer than the Hunter's Dream did at maintaining its utopic state because of the meaning given to the place by the characters in the game.

The fall to dystopia in the Nightmare of Mensis is found when the player encounters and battles Micolash. Unlike most bosses in *Bloodborne* he is vocal as the player hunts him down, chasing him through labyrinthine passages. Similar to Kearney's metaphor, 'so the pursuer confronts the monster' (2003 Pg. 57) Micolash sees the Hunter as the interloper while the Hunter views Micolash as yet another monster of the nightmare. Micolash's dialogue is telling of his wanting more in the Nightmare: 'Ahh, Kos, or some say Kosm... Do you hear our prayers? As you once did for the vacuous Rom, grant us eyes, grant us eyes. Plant eyes on our brains, to cleanse our beastly idiocy' (FromSoftware, 2015). The Great One Micolash is praying to (Kos) is not the Great One who drew him into the nightmare. He has experienced enlightenment and is pleased with that yet wishes more, craves to be cleansed. He seeks *Homo Utopius* (Quarta and Procida, 1996) yet cannot be granted it in the nightmare since (as with the dream) it exists as a singular, stagnant place unable to move forward or evolve as the Waking World can. Micolash is still fulfilled by what the nightmare has given him but this dialogue hints at his further desires. The fruitlessness of Micolash's pleas is evident since his near-constant repetition of the same prayers yields no result. Dystopia eventually prevails in the nightmare. Micolash lacks the further true knowledge he desires, and he cannot be given it.

As with Gehrman, Micolash falls by the Player's hand. His final words display that, unlike Gehrman, he achieved at least some happiness. Micolash laments 'Now I'm waking up, I'll forget everything...' (FromSoftware, 2015). He was given great knowledge from his communion with Mergo and as the Hunter kills him in the nightmare Micolash will forget

that precious knowledge and lose the place where he attained it. Removing Micolash from the nightmare is the ultimate dystopia for the character and the result of a clash of wills where the Hunter prevailed. The two microtopias could not exist together, for the Hunter's journey to continue, Micolash's nightmare had to end. It could be possible that, had they never come into contact, both microtopias could continue to exist in harmonious ignorance of one another; like civilisations who had yet to meet they would be unable to form opinions based on the goals of their own microtopias. But, for the purposes of the game to continue, they must meet and their goals are directly conflicting; Micolash desires to wallow in stagnation, his madness providing him and him alone pleasure within the Nightmare. The Hunter seeks progression, to move forward and end the Nightmare. Based on these differing goals any form of coexistence is impossible and The Hunter emerges victorious. Given Micolash's dialogue already hinted towards a yearning for an impossible more, this is the best ending for the character.

The Hunter's Nightmare

The Hunter's Nightmare was created with a specific goal in mind, to torture all hunters drawn into it. Long before the events of the game, several hunters experimented on the citizens of a fishing hamlet when the corpse of a Great One (Kos) washed up on its shore and began to affect them. In pain and anguish at what they endured the citizens came together as one and cursed the hunters, begging a Great One's help to do so. A Great One grants the fishing hamlet citizens what they desire and communicates this to the player in the following rhyme: 'Curse the fiends, their children too. And their children, forever, true' (FromSoftware, 2015). The rhyme sounds when the Hunter enters the nightmare for the first time. Crook notes that 'a critique of the existing social order can proceed from a projection of either its worst or its best features on to an imaginary society' (Crook, 2000 Pg. 210). The Hunter's Nightmare begins in a distorted version of Yharnam (specifically Cathedral Ward) where blood-drunk (mad) hunters are slaughtering beasts who are weak, injured and cowering in terror. This presentation of the hunters is exactly as the citizens of the fishing hamlet saw them and those hunters are trapped within a never-ending rage against the beasts, never to stop or rest. The Nightmare makes clear who deserves to suffer in this dystopian setting. The Hunter, an interloper to this nightmare, draws the aggravation of both the weak beasts and strong hunters alike. This

nightmares hosts a pure war mentality since '"pure war" refers to the potential of a culture to destroy itself completely' (Borg, 2003 Pg. 57). The culture of the nightmare lends itself to near constant conflict between man and beast. The conflict serves as a reflection of Yharnam's worst aspects and is an acute dystopian representation.

The Hunter's Nightmare is a form of memory; it was crafted from the memory of several spaces by those pulled into the nightmare. Cathedral Ward is a nightmarish memory of Yharnam for the blood-drunk hunters who will endlessly battle beasts. The Research Hall and Astral Clocktower stand as a ghoulish memory of the experiments done to the inhabitants of the Fishing Hamlet and a desperate attempt to hide the hunter's worst crimes by Lady Maria. And the Fishing Hamlet itself functions as an outlandish form of a once peaceful town for its inhabitants and the Orphan of Kos who created the Nightmare. Importantly, none of these places accurately reflect the areas they are embodying; a player can deduce this since they will have traversed through and explored Cathedral Ward in the early stages of the game and know what it looks like and its layout. The Nightmare's version of Cathedral Ward shares some similarities but is not correct in several of its geographical markers. If the Nightmare is a combination of a memory fuelled curse and utopian/dystopia space then Ashcroft's point about memory is useful to further understand it: 'memory is not about recovering a past that was present but about the production of possibility' (2012 Pg. 6-7). These places are productions of possibilities; they are spaces in which the Fishing Hamlet citizens can have their revenge upon hunters and show how they saw spaces like the Research Hall. The memory is 'not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to a horizon' (Ibid) and having the chance at a different scenario. One that showcases the duality of utopia and dystopia very well by highlighting what is utopic to the Fishing Hamlet citizens is in fact dystopic for the hunters.

Despite the number of mad hunters in this nightmare there is one NPC who the player can speak with that acts as a guide on their way, Simon. He is a hunter drawn into the nightmare yet has retained his sanity (and is akin to the player in that respect). Simon seeks to uncover the source of the nightmare and end it, setting the hunters free. Both Simon and the hunter are embarking upon the hero's journey. 'Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms,

where he must survive a succession of trials' (Campbell, 1949 Pg.89). True to the dystopian form this nightmare is presenting Simon never completes his quest and instead succumbs to wounds close to the goal of his journey. His final words lament the nightmare's existence, '…So our forefathers sinned? …We hunters cannot bear their weight forever… …It isn't fair, it just isn't fair…' (FromSoftware, 2015). Simon's words show the true effects of the Nightmare upon hunters, they are trapped in a never-ending battle and the only sane character failed in his mission so close to save them close to the end. The Hunter becomes the only force for change again on the dream plane. Unlike the previous dream locations, the Hunter's Nightmare plays this element of the narrative out more explicitly, having a greater impact by doing so. Simon and the Hunter never battle as the Hunter does with Gehrman and Micolash. The only reason Simon would attack the Hunter is if the Hunter attacks him first and this is because they are not subject to contesting utopian goals. Simon seeks to end the nightmare. The Hunter, through the player's desires, seeks to explore the nightmare and discover the source of it. Only by finding the source of the nightmare can it be stopped so both can progress on their utopian journeys without a need for conflict. The example of Simon and the Hunter proves that two parties on separate utopian journeys can co-exist without conflict despite the rarity of scenarios in the game. It is consistently the source of the dream worlds that seeks to destroy the Hunter since they are already trespassing in the dream world and represent an Alien figure perceived as threatening. By increasing the physical scope of their microtopias to encompass the entirety of any one dream plane, conflict remains investigable.

The creator of the nightmare is discovered to be the unborn child of the Great One Kos, named The Orphan of Kos. The Orphan crafted the nightmare for the citizens of the fishing hamlet but those citizens, the only ones who would view it as any sort of utopia, are not present in it. The Orphan, despite being a formidable boss, is eventually revealed as little more than wisps of smoke clinging to its mother's corpse. When dispatched the wisps move from the shore into the sea as another rhyme is narrated. '… Ahh, sweet child of Kos, returned to the ocean… A bottomless curse, a bottomless sea, accepting of all that there is and can be' (FromSoftware, 2015). The use of the ocean in this nightmare is

indicative of utopia as 'every historian and essayist researching the phenomenology of utopia acknowledges the catalytic role played by the sea and seafaring discoveries in the birth of utopia, both as a genre and a general term by which to refer to an indeterminate hope in the future well-being of humankind' (Silva and Reis, 2006 Pg.10). Bloodborne highlights the importance of large water bodies in its story-world with Caryll Runes. Several runes afford powers to large bodies of water such as the Deep Sea rune noting 'great volumes of water serve as a bulwark guarding sleep, and an augur of the eldritch truth' (FromSoftware, 2015) Despite the highly dystopian construction and actions of the Hunter's Nightmare there could be a glimmer of utopia in its end. The sea to which the Orphan returns is a bulwark, a defence, perhaps even a safe place or home. Like the hunters the Orphan too was trapped within the nightmare and set free via its death to return to what might be a better place. Silva and Reis talk about the ocean's value for hope in mankind's future and the Hunter's Nightmare was created to punish Hunters for their past sins. The Orphan's return to the sea could infer a more utopian future exists on the horizon for humanity to discover. The opportunity for a future utopia suits the term perfectly since utopia is found in the journey towards it. Both examples show that despite the depth of the nightmare, utopia still found a place to manifest. As with all the dream spaces in Bloodborne the Nightmare was built for the express purpose or torturing hunters. But those who demanded it were never able to witness the manifestation of their desires. All figures in the dream experienced nothing but dystopia until the dream's end where the Great One is 'returned' to the sea, a place that has historically been of great utopian importance.

Conclusion

There are elements of utopia to be found in the dystopic story-world of *Bloodborne*. They are found when examining both the kind of utopia and the people in that utopic place. The Waking World is where the most prominent utopia can be found though not always with humans. The beasts of Old Yharnam exist in an antithesis to the beasts in Yharnam in that they are a protected, singular society able to continue onwards with their communal desires met. The Kin in Upper Cathedral Ward are similar in this regard yet have the added advantage of a purpose that they can continue working towards having evolved and changed the function of their home. The humans of Yharnam find utopia in

survival. Considering the state of the world around them and the forces working for beast and Kin they are powerless to affect change and can only continue to exist, to survive, if they do nothing and let the world around them move forward. To compare their situation to the dream worlds reinforces how vital it is that the world be able to progress. A microtopia is appealing, especially to those who are in desperate for immediate happiness. But the stagnation of a world unable to change or advance leaves little more than a dystopia in the future for the only person it was designed to please. The Hunter having the ability to walk between all these worlds is in constant state of flux between acting as an agent for utopia and agent for dystopia. As Le Guin discusses the prevalent relationship between dystopia and utopia must be acknowledged for either to be fully appreciated and *Bloodborne* uses its environments, its characters and the Hunter the player controls. As the Hunter moves citizens to a place where they may wait in safety, chooses to safe beasts, communes with Great Ones or puts trapped people out of their misery the Hunter is affecting the state of utopia and dystopia with every action, their agency undeniable.

The outcomes of all these different actions affect the player due to them projecting onto the Hunter and moving through the game. They are placed at the centre of ludological challenge and emotional conflict as they progress from beginning to end. The player has been guided by Gehrman throughout the game but needs to battle and kill him in some scenarios to give him peace. The player needs to venture through the nightmares and destroy the stagnant microtopias in them. At the same time the player decides whether to aid humans in the Waking World and offer them a chance at survival. The player acts through the hunter, experiencing narrative highs and lows and witnessing the small moments of utopia found in the grander dystopian story-world. *Bloodborne* uses that emotional link between player and game protagonist to heighten the impact felt when a decision is made. With the player's ludological skill and choice progressing the game the necessary fall of the dreams and the chance for survival in the Waking World is found. Utopia, like the Hunter, must be allowed to evolve, change and adapt to the space around them, serving whichever function is most needed to show its true value.

Chapter 5: The Wolf Among Us: A Refugee's Utopia

Introduction

The plight of the refugee does not appear at first instance to contain any utopian elements. However, this chapter seeks to demonstrate just the opposite. Despite the harrowing experience many refugees must endure utopia can be found therein if examined closely. *The Wolf Among Us* will be the primary case study used to analyse the refugee narrative cultivated in the Fables' escape from the Homelands and subsequent inhabitation of New York. Two main groups who embody more traditional Fable culture and more progressive advancement will be assessed for the methods they employ to improve themselves and seek out that difficult to find utopia. The key argument here will be to demonstrate how a deeply fractured society, like a refugee camp with multiple sovereigns battling for control is incapable of housing an enduring utopia. Instead, utopia can only be experienced by the Fables in New York in short moments as they journey towards their end goals. Sustainable happiness is, for them, impossible and therefore it is in the process of moving towards their goals that they experience a momentary utopia.

To aid in this examination critical theory examining refugee culture (Boyle and Ali, 2010), reception (Valtonen, 2004), definition (Agamben, 1998) and the use of space (Massey 2005, Ramadan, 2013) will be employed. This theory highlights how the Fables' situation in New York has evolved and affected those living there. Following this, conclusions will be drawn on the self-serving nature of power dynamics in refugee culture before establishing ways in which Le Guin's *Utopiying, Utopiyang* (2016) encapsulates the gradual fall of those grasping for power. Finally arguing that in the process of seeking to aid only themselves several Fables experienced utopia at the cost of dystopias to those around them and that an enduring utopia cannot exist in such a fractured society.

What is a Refugee?

Refugees are grouped under the umbrella of migrants since, at their base level, they are a group of people who have moved from their place birth to a new country (Williams and Berry, 1991). The notion of movement and change are at the core of migration and these are themes that will become increasingly prevalent. To explore further, a refugee is a migrant who fits a specific set of circumstances surrounding the reason for their movement. Essentially, the movement in question is not made by the refugee's choice. In most cases the opposite is true and 'if given the choice, most refugees would prefer to

remain in their countries' (Williams 1991, Pg. 632). This disparity in reasoning and motivation creates a new experience for refugees setting their process of movement apart from voluntary migrants. By extension it introduces new problems that are faced and different stresses that are put upon refugees (Boyle and Ali, 2010) that are central to understanding the term. Refugees have a unique experience of space and place because of their forced movement and this makes the process of settling a great deal more complex. There is an emotional struggle to try and accept then give meaning to a new space that has never been their own.

New York City, the setting for Telltale's *The Wolf Among Us*, has many refugee characters who several times throughout the game reference a place known as 'The Homelands.' This is the land where these characters were born and lived for several centuries of their lives, establishing initial relationships with one another. Elements of fondness and melancholy colour mentions of The Homelands when Fables interact and discuss the place. Bigby Wolf and Colin the Pig interact early in the game and reflect upon their past in The Homelands. The pair reference several elements of the 'The Three Little Pigs' fable and Bigby jokingly justifies his actions with the words 'I was hungry' (Telltale Games, 2013) provided the player chooses that dialogue option. Even when discussing a near-death experience at the hands of a one-time enemy, Colin responds with sarcasm. Colin's attitude towards Bigby and their shared past showcases the powerful nostalgia The Homelands has over many Fables. Their desire for The Homelands is so great that Fables romanticise death and violence since it is a part of the land they were born into. Memory serves to keep The Homelands alive. Cresswell discusses the impact of memory on place through public memory (2014). A landscape becomes a place through meaning and meaning can be found in the memories of those who impact the place or in their descendants who inherit those memories. The memories of The Homelands are all the Fables have left of the place and this separation is what romanticises and cements Fables' nostalgic relationship with it. To Colin and Bigby their past life-or-death struggles now seem fond experiences since it was natural for them to assume those roles in The Homelands. Both characters knew their positions in The Homelands, understood their culture but the loss of their lands ripped that stability from them.

A multitude of causes and events can trigger a loss of lands and the disruption of a home country brings with it dramatic changes at all levels be they societal, economic or personal (Boyle and Ali, 2010). Combinations of these factors leave the citizens with no choice but to flee for their own safety. The forces behind a refugee fleeing their homeland can be 'because of fear of persecution for their beliefs, politics or ethnicity' (Williams and Berry, 1991 Pg. 632). Pre-existing societies fall victim to persecution when new powers begin to enforce their own ideas of how the lands should be constructed and who should be permitted to thrive in them. One example of such circumstances would be the civil war in Somalia beginning with the fall of Barre government during the mid 1980s. Ali and Boyle note that 'the war is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Somalis. The war destroyed market centres and huge numbers of livestock, making it impossible for survivors to continue with their regular livelihoods' (2010 Pg. 57). The battles taking place in the country disrupted the land to the point where even those who were not directly fighting in the civil war felt their lives in imminent danger prompting their need to flee the country. The combination of a lack of resources and a hostile environment highlights the prospective safety of new lands outweighing the risks of beginning somewhere new. Indeed, the potential risks of being 'isolated, ostracised and impoverished' (Williams and Berry, 1991 Pg. 632) are high for refugees attempting to find a life in a new country so the chance for an easy transition for such groups is by extension low. Overall there are many factors that categorise a person as a refugee but just some are the lack of choice or options on behalf of the refugees; the loss of homelands and security and familiarity they offer; upheaval in their homelands threatening a loss of life or enough stability to feel safe; the lack of possessions or forms of wealth they can take with them; and the risks and potential outcomes of attempting to seek asylum in a new country.

The Fables of *The Wolf Among Us* were forced from The Homeland because of events like those described above. They are a group of refugees forced from their birthplace and must set up a new society in New York City as best they can. The game rarely references the Fables refugee movement directly and instead leaves the player to investigate dialogue options and infer what happened to them. The Fables fled their homeland in order to escape the totalitarian regime of a being known simply as The

Adversary (who is identified as Geppetto in the comic series) and the violence of that conflict chased them to the very edges of their borders. The upheaval was so intense that several of the Fables were unable to escape. Bigby references a Fable called 'Red' (Red Riding Hood) noting that 'she didn't make it out' (Telltale Games, 2013). Meanwhile other characters such as Beauty and Beast highlight how much many Fables lost as they tried to flee with their lives. When the Fables who survived settled in New York some had none of their possessions with them as they had been left behind during the escape. Now many are left attempting to piece together some form of new life while desperately clinging to romanticised notion of The Homelands. Overall scenarios faced by the Fables mimic the plights of refugee communities in the world; the Fables attain refugee status because of this.

Refugee experiences are crucial events affecting the world in current times. The wide-reaching impact of video games is shown in their ability to curate experiences like refugee narratives. A person native to their country will not have had the difficult experience of forced migration and understanding the trials of it is immensely difficult. A recent study by Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) notes that the European media follows a strict hierarchy when it processes stories about refugee experience and narrative. Often refugee experience was misrecognised where '"our" political leaders monopolized the explanations and emotions around the crisis over bot citizens and refugees themselves' (2017 Pg. 631). The propensity for media to effectively silence or mute refugee voices takes away the supportive environment needed for their concerns and stories to be heard, accepted and responded to by a wider society (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). The individual experience is not offered to citizens of the native country to help inform their own thoughts and opinions. Video games have an more mature audience then they did some twenty years ago and research has shown adults are not immune to influence by social media (Neely, 2019). Therefore, a person could be influenced on this macro level by hierarchical journalism voices but, if offered a more personal example, say a single-player video game experience, there comes a chance for individual thought and feelings to impact an overall choice.

Neely discusses the moral nature of several video games and the extent to which a person's ethical choices affect game characters within a game world (2019). But, more interestingly, she goes further to discuss something called Extravirtual Harm which examines how a player's in-game choices may cause 'moral harm or benefit outside of the game world' (2019 Pg. 8). Neely notes that for one person to cause moral harm to another they must harm their 'interests' (ibid) which conversely implies a person may do moral aid by spreading or further understanding the interests of another. Refugee interests are highly difficult to spread among the native citizens of a country due to media coverage (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). Video games possess a vast audience and games such as *The Wolf Among Us* present a refugee narrative that highlights struggle and loss and rely upon player decisions. Forcing a player to interact with the narrative at these deeper levels could affect their moral understanding and feelings towards refugees beyond that which mainstream journalism displays and offer valuable insight to their experiences.

Refugee Acculturation

Given that refugees are often forced to leave their homelands en masse it is reasonable to assume that going through stressful experiences may result in new elements of culture forming and enduring. Similarly it stands to reason that most if not all refugees are fleeing to a land very different from their own in terms of values, economic and social structure and overall culture (Williams and Berry, 1991) that could attempt to force changes upon them. There is an encompassing term given to this experience known as acculturation; Williams and Berry define the concept, noting 'acculturation is now widely used to refer to the changes that groups and individuals undergo when they come into contact with another culture' (1991 Pg. 633). The term is applicable and essential to a refugee's experience and can serve to make their acclimatisation to their new home even more challenging both on a group level and at an individual level. The experience can 'entail changes in behaviour values and attitudes, and identity' (Williams and Berry, 1991 Pg. 633). These changes occur in response to the new society that refugees find themselves in and often reflect the differing values of that new society. In contrast the traditional culture of the refugees can begin to diminish since their new home does not value or place emphasis upon their pre-existing societal culture. The Somali refugee influx following the

fall of the Barre government highlights this as 'the illegality of polygamy forced some refugees to make changes in family structure and renegotiate family roles' (Boyle and Ali, 2010 Pg. 49). This could be another provider of stress for a family to bear through while adjusting to life in a new and unfamiliar environment compounding the difficulty of the process.

In contrast to this, the Fables in *The Wolf Among Us* faced a very different experience since they were invisible to the natives of New York when they arrived and have remained so ever since. The Fables refer to any humans as 'Mundies' (taken from the word mundane) and seek to avoid any and all contact with them to mitigate the chances of problematic encounters. The main location for the Fable government and authority is a building known as The Woodlands Luxury Apartments where there are no human residents. This decision highlights how the Fable community works to isolate itself and will not engage with the 'Mundies' of New York unless necessary or accidentally. There is only a single interaction in the game that shows a Fable to human encounter and it is swiftly ended when the Fabletown Deputy Mayor (Ichabod Crane) intervenes by using a memory spell to force the human involved to forget the experience. The people involved in this encounter are members of the New York Police Department and the actions of the Fables here show how little they care for human involvement or interaction. Even the justice upholders and enforcers of the land where they are now residents are not worth engaging with or respecting. It is far more important to the Fables to so maintain their own societal values, governance and laws.

The Fable society, despite its attempts to endure, has experienced a great deal of flux over the course of the Fables' migration process. Societal shifts are a common side effect of the migration process. Williams and Berry note that 'socioeconomic status is a factor. One's entry status into the larger society is often lower than one's departure status from the home society' (1991 Pg. 635). This can be due to several factors such as any losses experienced by the refugees in their haste to escape. Somali refugees could take nothing with them as their homes had been destroyed and this experience is echoed in *The Wolf Among Us* specifically via the characters Beast and Beauty (taken from the original fable Beauty and the Beast). In the Homelands Beast was a prince and Beauty by marriage a

princess. Both lived a highly affluent life in luxury but lost all their possessions while fleeing from the Adversary. Bigby Wolf, however lived as a wild animal and had nothing in the way of possessions or wealth to bring with him but did possess employable skills. His physical prowess, investigatory instincts and past reputation provided him with resources he could make use of in the Fables new society as a detective (Williams and Berry, 1991). Whereas Beast could only find less well-paid work in labour and refuses to let Beauty work, determined to maintain the hierarchy of the Homelands where he was a king who provided everything for his wife. Due to this both Bigby and Beauty and Beast live in the same apartment block over the course of the game. This societal shift reflects both parties ability to adapt to their new home in New York.

A great deal of stress is caused in refugees who experience this societal shift (Williams and Berry, 1991) and it can affect a refugee's ability to cope and thrive in their new environment. The likelihood of this stress is made higher for the Fables due to their self-imposed separation from the citizens of New York. In most cases of refugee experience 'humanitarian aid provides immediate relief' (Dreher et al., 2019 Pg. 128) and thus can help alleviate some of the stress felt by these groups attempting to go through the process of acculturation. By denying themselves any attempts to even ask for aid, several Fables have been unable to effectively establish themselves. The game shows that some Fables still live in near poverty despite several decades of living in New York. Meanwhile a small number of Fables still live in luxury highlighting an extremely wide wealth gap in their society that brings some of its corruption to light. With several of the Fable refugees lacking employable skills (an acceptable assumption in the case of Fables fleeing the Homelands for New York) the likelihood and propensity for some of them to turn to crime increases. In a recent report detailing the effects of UK refugees between 1990 and 2000 it was noted that they (refugees) 'had relatively few economic opportunities, as they were barred from working for six months. This may have raised their propensity to commit property crimes relative to immigrants with immediate work-eligibility' (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2018 Pg. 5). Therefore, it stands to reason that several criminal groups in the Fable community formed from the combination of a lack of aid from their fellow

refugees, their new environment and their lack of employable skills to help them generate a viable income.

The protagonist of *The Wolf Among Us* serves as an example of successful acculturation over time to contrast with those who are struggling. Bigby was made the sheriff of Fabletown because of his skills and moved from a position as a chaotic monster roaming woods to a protector of order. This position came with pay and a place to live providing Bigby with the basic survival needs of any person (Maslow, 1943). With those immediate needs met Bigby is in a stable position to establish himself over time. Time is a complex term to apply in academic study (Starkey, 1989) but simplistically it involves 'a past, a present, and a future, is a mental construction based on cognitive functions like object recognition, spatial location and temporal reconstruction' (Abazi and Doja, 2018 Pg. 240). Time makes use of spatial and temporal components similar to coherent story-worlds (Ryan, 2012) and cognitive functions such as generating and attributing meaning. Knowing how long Fables have been settled in New York will aid in understanding time regarding the story-world of *The Wolf Among Us*. Based on dialogue found in a Fables comic *Fables: 1001 Night of Snowfall* where Snow White states Fabletown is being established close to 'New Amsterdam' (Willingham, 2006) the town must have been built by 1664. The game gives little information to establish the age of Fables, merely Colin the Pig stating 'we live a long fucking time' (Telltale Games, 2013). A review of the game states *The Wolf Among Us* is set in 1986 (Clark, 2014) meaning that by the events of the game Fabletown must have existed for at least 322 years. Pulling information from all these separate texts builds a strong conclusion on Fabletown's age and concepts of time for Fable society.

Fabletown's 300 plus years of existence puts the continuing plight of Fables living there in a new context. Despite having hundreds of years to establish themselves and begin to thrive in their home very few have changed their ways. Colin informs Bigby early on in the game that many people are still terrified of him (Telltale Games, 2013). Fables, as a society, are not inclined to change and since time is dependent on commonalities in groups (such as occupation or shared experience) to generate meaning (Starkey, 1989) a passing three centuries could mean little to them. Humanity changes a great deal more

with passing time a single decade can result in new laws, new cultural niches and changes in landscape. These conflicting status' regarding the important of time are one more element that would make acculturation difficult. Not only does Bigby struggle to change the views his fellow Fables have towards him, he is also unable to fully interact with the Mundies in his new home. Despite this, his position and work for Fabletown has earned him some comforts while he yearns for more, telling Colin he's 'doing his best' (Telltale Games, 2013) to improve himself in the eyes of his fellow Fables. Overall the Fable society in New York resists acculturation to a large degree, remaining in its early stages of financial vulnerability, stress and struggle even after centuries of having built their refugee settlement. Their cultural view of time and lamentation for the Homelands further impacting their inability to truly settle.

Refugee Settlement

The next step in the Fable's journey as refugees is to fully settle in their new home and deal with their new environment. Challenges abound in this process for refugees regardless of their origin point as examples of refugee groups from Somalia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Iraq and Iran (Valtonen, 2004) all detail. In *The Wolf Among Us* there has been a period of 300 plus years to do this yet still the task proves difficult. Outside factors can bolster groups and locations towards utopic states despite them never having been intended for a utopic nature (2012). Much like the real-world examples of the Somalian civil war (Boyle and Ali, 2010) and Middle East War (Valtonen, 2004) where the citizens of both societies were reluctant to leave and only did so on order to ensure their survival, these examples did not set off on a grand journey in the hopes of finding a perfect utopian lifestyle elsewhere. The new societies that welcomed these refugees were certainly not flawless as they could not match the culture and exact needs they had. Instead, the refugees settled in these locations due a lack of any other choice and from there a new trial began: their settlement into that new environment. In the process of settling into their new homes it is natural for the refugees to be nostalgic for what they no longer have, even if they had only been indifferent to their homeland before. Le Guin comes to the conclusion that 'it is of the very essence of the rational or Jovian utopia that it is *not* here and *not* now' (2016 Pg. 166). In terms of the physical, a tangible location that can be touched, walked upon and lived in, a refugee's homeland becomes even more desirable (and by extension,

utopic) by virtue of it no longer being accessible to them. Cutting off contact completely, especially in such a traumatic way as war erupting in the land, can foster feelings of nostalgia in refugees for their homeland. This will only be further exacerbated by their current home not reflecting the same qualities as the place where they lived before.

A nostalgia for an origin point is seen in *The Wolf Among Us* by many characters throughout the game. This nostalgia does not manifest as a simple longing for the Homelands but in other ways such as their continued employment of only their own cultural values. A study has shown that 'culture based values and religion can lead to continuity, coherence and structure to life conditions in resettlement' (Valtonen, 2004 Pg. 83) and Fables have clearly employed this to cling to the familiar and help them to cope with their current situation. The Fable's main apartment block, The Woodlands, (which also serves as an administration office and home to the government) is magically enhanced in several ways such as more floors than it presents having to the mundane world and several rooms being larger than would be physically possible. By bringing magic into their everyday environment Fables are clinging to that nostalgia in New York. When they leave the Woodlands, residents are aware that a haven of familiarity will be waiting for them upon their return. Despite being so geographically integrated in New York this portion of the Fable community are in fact manifesting an example of cultural retention brought about by the desperate nostalgia for the Homelands they cannot return to. The Fables have also constructed their own government, laws and regulations (such as the laws of magic and glamour use) as an extra coping strategy for the environment they still deem alien (Valtonen, 2004).

There is another, separate group of Fables who are not seen in *The Wolf Among Us* but are referenced several times: The Fables of The Farm. The game's Book of Fables describes The Farm as:

> The Farm is home to Fables who cannot pass as human - giants, goblins, animals, etc. It is located in upstate New York, far enough away from the mundies to avoid detection. Some of its residents resent their confinement to The Farm, despite its size and comforts. To them, The Farm is a prison. They would be allowed to leave The Farm if they could purchase a glamour, but many don't have the money for something so expensive. Though some, like Colin, sneak out into the city anyway.
> (Telltale Games, 2013)

'Prison' and 'expensive' are the key elements to extract from this definition. There is a strong element of exclusion that can be attributed to the Fables on the Farm and it provides further insight into the trials they face as a refugee group and the struggle to fully integrate with others in Fable society. Valtonen defines integration as 'the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural and political activities without having to relinquish one's own distinct ethnocultural identity or culture' (2004 Pg. 74). By the factors of this definition the Fables of the Farm are arguably not integrated with those in New York and this rift in their society is the root of tension in the game. Some Fables are threatened with the Farm (such as Mr. Toad) for failing to keep up their glamour and contextualising the place as a punishment only serves to further the fissure. Despite the length of time the Fables have been settled both in and close to New York there are still several elements of their society that are far from stable. Discord among them regarding cultural integration and integration as a cohesive community has left several Fables unsatisfied and left them open to new and alternate methods of finding stability and happiness.

Refugee Camp Governance

Fabletown can be considered a refugee camp based on the Fables' methods of conducting their lives and the circumstances that led to their community forming. Refugee camps are space of 'hospitality, identity, exception, insecurity and violence' (Ramadan 2013 Pg. 65), challenges to and displacements of power structures occur in them often. Meaning must be added to move the categorisation of a refugee camp from space to place. The Fable society dictates how their settlement will manifest and it is already understood how resistant the community is to change. Over several centuries the Fable community has yet to change their opinion on Bigby Wolf and still refuse to interact with humans. Their refugee camp is a place defined by both its isolation and its yearning for The Homelands. Bloch talks about a state of yearning towards something more (1995) and this ties in well with Le Guin's theory of the utopic journey (2016). The meaning the Fables gave their refugee camp at first was a utopic one designed to hold to their original culture and bring as much of the Homelands to New York as they could. Challenges are made to the existing power structure as the game begins and Bigby must attempt to maintain

order. These challenges are common occurrences in refugee camp settings and further emphasise the Fable's status as refugees in New York.

A refugee camp, despite being considered a temporary solution until a more suitable alternative is found (Ramadan, 2013) can have an extended lifespan equal to the length of the crisis that caused the upheaval and displacement and the length of time the new host country takes to find a housing solution. In the case of the Fables this crisis is ongoing despite centuries passing. An instance set in current times would be the Palestinian situation. This example 'challenges conventional understandings of both refugees and camps. Palestinians are the largest (and oldest) refugee population in the world, their refugee status has now lasted more than 60 years' (Ramadan, 2013 Pg. 65). Throughout that time period refugee camps have been set up and destroyed while the overall designation remains the same. Ramadan notes there are three durable solutions to refugee status: refugees' 'voluntary repatriation to the country of origin/ local integration in the country of displacement/ and resettlement in a third country' (2013 Pg. 66). The Palestinian refugees failing to reach any of these three solutions causing them to remain severely displaced confirms their enduring refugee status and the continued existence of evolving refugee camps. Each criterion when set against the Fable community of New York is seen to not be met. Voluntary repatriation to the country of origin: The Fables are denied this option as should they return, they would face death at the hands of the Adversary. Local integration in the country of displacement: The Fables refuse this option as their integration with the humans (mundies) is minimal at best and totally avoided at worst with the citizens of New York unaware of their presence. Resettlement in a third country: The Fable community didn't choose to come to the human plane and lack the desire to travel to another place and a country wherein humans are still the dominant inhabitant (essentially all of Earth) would create the same environment and situation for them. In much the same way Palestinian refugee camps have become increasingly complex over several decades; Fabletown has built a highly nuanced system of power in their refugee camp.

Ramadan describes the situation for Palestinian refugees as one that is a 'permanent-temporary reality' and refugee camps by extension as 'permanent-temporary

landscapes of exile' (2013 Pg. 66). These place designations are made more applicable to the Fables due to their increased lifespans. There is no advancement in their generations to create a new 'New York Native' generation of Fables (that can be seen in the game despite several centuries passing since their fleeing the Homelands) and the stagnation in their evolvement from refugees to citizens is at a standstill. Due to this the Fables are permanently fixed into what should be a temporary situation hence the 'permanent-temporary.' The purpose of the Fable's home (and any refugee camp in history) is 'its biopolitical role to sustain life' (Ramadan, 2013 Pg. 68). The first aspect of this biopolitical role is successful. Throughout the game despite several Fables living in less than ideal conditions, especially in comparison to some of the more affluent members of Fable society, there are no direct examples of a Fable who is experiencing starvation or homelessness. The basest of biological needs, such as food and warmth (Maslow, 1943,) are met for all New York Fables who are seen in the game.

The Wolf Among Us' refugee utopia is highly complex and relies on examining the political aspect of Ramadan's 'biopolitical' function. Due to their unstable nature, conception and endurance a typical structure of governance and political ruling struggles to exist in a refugee camp. Instead, the term Sovereign has been used by multiple researchers over several years (Agamben, 1998; Ramadan, 2013) to describe those who hold and implement political power in a refugee camp environment. To define the term, a sovereign is described as a person or group that is simultaneously 'outside and inside the juridical order' (Agamben, 1998 Pg. 15). Or rather, a person, persons or group of people who enforce rules and laws yet have the power to declare themselves or others as exempt from them at any time. 'Originally intended as an emergency procedure for the protection of the state' (Ramadan, 2013 Pg. 67) sovereign power adapts well to an emergency such as a refugee camp situation whose primary function is to protect and sustain life. However, the complexities of a refugee camp, especially one as long-lived as the Palestinian example Ramadan analyses or the case study of the Fables in New York can lead to 'more complex and multiple sovereignties' (Ramadan, 2013 Pg.68). As they emerge each sovereignty enforces (or attempting to enforce) their rules and exceptions over the others.

In Fabletown there are two key sovereigns that employ differing methods to gain and make use of power in the Fable community, eventually coming to blows as they struggle to maintain leadership. One is comprised of more 'traditional' Fables who held power in the Homelands and are steadfastly clinging to the qualities the Homelands displayed. These Fables are characters such as Ichabod Crane, Snow White and Bluebeard who wield power from the Business Office in the Woodlands. The other group is comprised of Fables who make use of poorer Fables' vulnerability and unrest to gain power and favour with others less able to make use of the 'traditional' Fables' help. Characters such as The Crooked Man, Bloody Mary and Georgie Porgie fit this group. There are no 'outside' characters who hold power in these groups and this subverts the common narrative trope of the outside villain (Robson, 2016) in favour of making the narrative more complex. Neither group are completely good or completely bad, but all have been forced from their homes and are attempting to thrive as refugees. The lack of a concrete villain (such as those seen in *Persona 5*) reflects the multifaceted nature of sovereign power structures in refugee camps. Both sides are striving towards their best selves and conflict follows since neither side will concede to the other.

Traditional Fables

The physical space the Traditional Fables call home is The Woodlands and even Fables who aren't currently living in the building are required to attend and wait in order to be spoke with the sovereigns there. The specific area these interactions take place is called The Business Office and reasons for Fables visiting range from financial aid request to matters of crime or familial concern (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Several Fables queuing to be seen at the Business Office

One example seen in the game is Grendel visiting the Business Office out of worry for a missing friend, Lily. Because of this gathering of people, the space the Traditional Fables have chosen as a seat of power comes to have meaning. The Business Office, the place of power, cannot exist until a mix or group of differing 'identities / entities and their relations' come together; only then does the space become 'co-constitutive' (Massey, 2005 Pg. 10). Essentially, the place exists as a seat of power for so long as the Traditional Fables and others view it as such. This 'product of interrelations' (Massey, 2005 Pg. 9) is natural for the Fables to come together and create. A fleeing group of refugees' experience an unparalleled amount of chaos, loss and instability. A common need arising from such trials is a near-desperate desire for stability, a place of aid and (if needed) comfort. The few Fables who escaped the Homelands with their wealth, and by extension power, intact became beacons of these qualities to the Fables who have little or nothing. Therefore, the Traditional Fables claiming power in this refugee place and many other Fables needing power form the interrelations necessary for the Business Office to become a utopic space all its own. Much like the concept of utopia, the space shall only remain utopic if the Fables consider it so and are striving to use it to achieve their safety and happiness. Once their problems no longer exist, they'll have no more use for the place, and it will crumble to nothing.

Ideas such as Massey's 'product of interrelations' (2005) and Cresswell's 'meaning denotes place' (2014) blend with utopian scholarship. At their core a society will have goals that must be fulfilled and the larger the society the more complex those goals will be. The Business Office came into existence because Fables with power joined together. This need to join pulls from Kearney's Other scholarship as the Fables recognising one another as powerful created the 'Us' that denoted other Fables as 'Them' (2003). But unlike previous examples the empowered Fables chose to make space for the Other Fables who came requesting their help and due to this decision, the society devoted new meaning to The Business Office. It was not just a place for empowered Fables but a place where power was governed and shared out. Fables could journey there with a goal, struggling through New York and other obstacles to reach this place where they could be given what they needed. Utopia is found in the journey towards it, yes, but there must be a destination and

journey's end of some kind to signify achievement. By joining as a singular society, interrelated but not the same, and giving meaning to the Business Office as a place where desires are fulfilled, and needs met it becomes a utopic destination. A place that exists as utopic in the journey towards it and ceases to be once a need is granted. As is the case with many utopias the physical incarnation cannot last, and the Fable society began to fracture. This withdrew the power and utopian status from the Business Office and left it intangible to be made whole again by another. This rapidly building conflict is seem in many real-world events such as those experienced by refugees from Palestine and those escaping the fall of the Barre Government. *The Wolf Among Us* is reflecting the trials faced by refugees, giving a player agency to experience and impact that situation and show how important utopian spaces are to refugees attempting to survive.

The Traditional Fables are experiencing a rapid change of meaning to their utopic place. As another place of power (another sovereign) gains more influence they must lose it and along with that lose their utopic status and societal influence. The methods employed by the Traditional Fables are rooted in inter-personal connections; a Fable is much more likely to be seen and given aid depending on who they know rather than how severe their issue is. This can be seen in the game's first episode when Bluebeard walks into the Business Office demanding help without needing to queue or wait while Fables with missing friends and family members go unseen. Humans, and by extension Fables who are incredibly human-like in their relations will employ the same social desire of like attracting like (Wood, 2003). The wealthy Fables holding power will cling to it desperately and be much more open and willing to help other Fables who hold that same power. In contrast they will be less willing to reach out and use that power to help a Fable with no such connection to them. Not only are the Traditional Fables isolating themselves from the mundies around them, but as more and more time passes, they are isolating the Fables around them who do not hold the same power and social position as they do.

A drive towards a utopic existence is seen behind the actions of the Traditional Fables. Those with power are driven to seek and horde it all, further empowering themselves into a continually charmed existence no matter the cost to those around them. If many must suffer so that the powerful few may continually live in luxury, then so be it.

That is the price of utopic existence that some of the Traditional Fables are willing to pay. Power and aid being continually isolated from the majority of Fables so that an empowered few may endure reflects Le Guin's *Utopiying, Utopiyang* concept: 'every eutopia contains a dystopia, every dystopia contains a eutopia' (2016 Pg. 195). The Business Office cannot retain a wholly utopic status since several in the space only want to keep that power for themselves at the cost of others around them. Refugee camps in the real world experience the same scenario with some groups taking charge of keeping and distributing aid and this can have mixed results, some cases seeing and improvement in the refugees' quality of life and others a detriment (Dreher et al., 2019). By choosing a protagonist who is a member of the Traditional Fables the player is given power in deciding who is helped and how. The game attempts to mimic the difficulty refugees experience and show how difficult it is to maintain any kind of utopic status.

The Business Office is a magical location containing a labyrinthine library that can only be navigated by Bufkin (a flying monkey hailing from the land of Oz). It contains all the past records of Fables, alive and dead as well as their books of spells and knowledge of one another. The Business Office is also the home of the Magic Mirror who is often employed to show the Traditional Fables whatever, or whoever they desire. This power further cements the control they have over Fabletown. In terms of power, influence and information the Business Office is as close to the Homelands as the Fables can possibly be. This attempted mimicry of place proves the Traditional Fables' desperation to cling to their old ways. The Traditional Fables are actively resisting interacting with the Mundy world around them, instead relying solely on the power of memory and small aspects of it they can make use of (like the library and the magic mirror) to try and move towards a better future. However, in doing so they push away those who lack the status or power to share in their vision and suffer from 'lack of communal imagination/to realise it' (Pordzik, 2006 Pg. 127). Despite memory existing at the core of their utopian vision and ideals, other Fables are not in a position to join them and this effectively begins to isolate them from others in their community.

Because of this overpowering nostalgia they continue to isolate other Fables around them, mistakenly believing that other Fables can do nothing else but endure their

situation. To conclude upon this point, the Traditional Fables of the Business office came into existence out of the desperation of the Fables to have a space of safety, security and power. With the passing of time the Traditional Fables grew to be their own most paramount concern and by neglecting the rest of their society only served to pave the way for another's rise to power. By attempting to further their own utopic status, the Traditional Fables ended up losing the support of the society who gave them that status to begin with. Utopia is dependent upon meaning and from the moment the Fable society began to fracture that meaning became muddied. Setting the game at this moment in the Fables timeline forces many difficult decisions upon the player as the Business Office is corrupt but is still attempting to serve its citizens. There is no clear way to 'win' which goes against traditional ludological structure but fits well with the malleability of utopia and serves to reflect the huge struggles faced by real-life refugee communities.

Progressive Fables

The neglect that most of the Fable community (particularly those of a lesser financial status) faced is the strongest driving factor in the manifestation of a second sovereign rising to challenge the established Traditional Fables. This conflict between the two most powerful sovereigns forms the crux of the plot in *The Wolf Among Us* and their differing methods but similar motivations cause challenge for the players as they progress through the game. The second sovereign is made up of Fables who've adopted more criminal elements likely influenced by the mundy world around them to improve their success. While the Traditional Fables stood for harkening back to their original culture the Progressive Fables form new ways of bringing help to those who need it. This creates instability and allows the Progressive Fables to 'become in some way sovereign, by contributing to the suspension of the law in the camps or controlling its conditions' (Ramadan, 2013 Pg. 72).

The 'law' in this specific case is the production and distribution of a substance called a Glamour. A Glamour is a spell, crafted by witches housed in the 13th Floor of the Woodlands apartment building, designed to hide a Fable's true form and make them look human. It is a vital necessity for Fables in New York as without a viable Glamour they run the risk of being discovered and sent to the Farm. The Farm is a highly undesirable place that Fables are loath to go. The witches who craft these Glamour spells live in the

Woodlands building, the same place that the Business Office is housed in, and therefore the production and distribution of this magic is highly controlled by the Traditional Fables. This leads to a struggle several Fables face as they must pay a great deal of money to remain poor in New York rather than be relegated to the Farm. The character Mr. Toad notes in the game's first episode 'Do you have any idea how much it costs to have an entire family in glamour?' (Telltale Games, 2013) immediately highlighting the financial plight faced by those already lacking wealth. The law and controlling conditions the Traditional Fables have created around glamour is a mainstay of their power and its exploitation greatly shifts the power dynamic.

The progressive Fables are led by the Crooked Man, a Fable who had little in the way of wealth or status in the Homelands but is intelligent with powerful aid in the form of Bloody Mary. Before the game begins, the Crooked Man has spread his influence through Fabletown by helping Fables the Business Office turned away or neglected. One such Fable is Auntie Greenleaf, whose magical tree he helped bring over from the Homelands, and another is Beauty, by giving a loan to help her and Beast maintain their lavish lifestyle. In both cases The Crooked Man's actions provided help the Traditional Fables didn't give so that Greenleaf and Beauty could have some part of their lives in the Homelands back: Greenleaf's magic and Beauty and Beast's regal living conditions. This provides an interesting mix of harkening back in search of a lost utopia and working with the new environment to further influence and power. The Crooked Man's influence, his sovereign, is in strong competition with the Business Office due to his previous actions now allowing him to reap rewards, such as Greenleaf's assistance and interest on Beauty's loan. These examples and more combined have allowed him to begin producing his own Glamour spells at much discounted rates.

Glamour to the Fable community's survival and for their individual utopic journeys is paramount. *The Wolf Among Us'* utopic signs were coded, catalogued and compiled in figure 22 below:

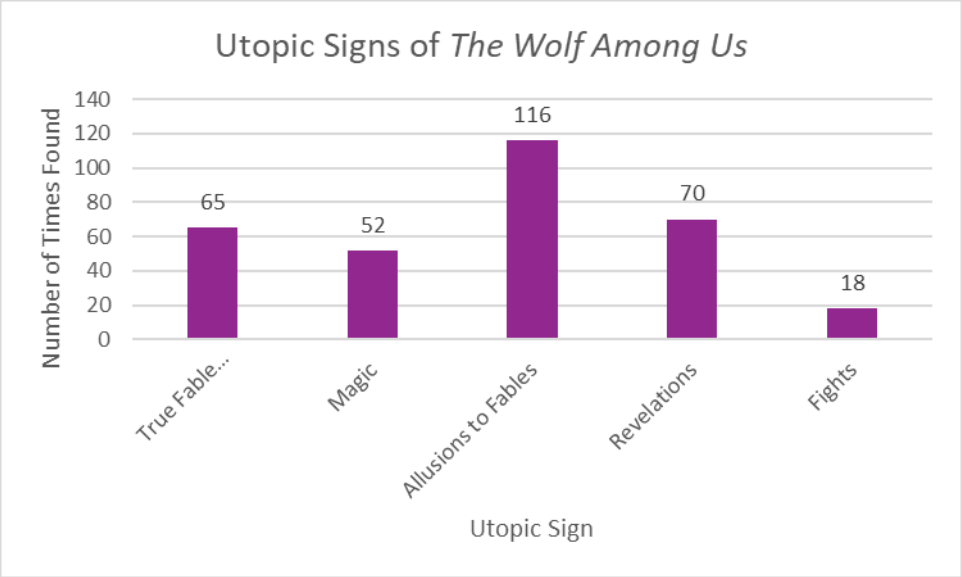

Figure 19: Graph showing the utopic signs catalogued in The Wolf Among Us

While 'Allusions to Fables' is by far the most common, justifying the strength of desire many Fables have regarding their lost Homelands, at this point 'True Fable Appearance/Behaviour' and 'Magic' present a useful point regarding Glamours. Both signs can occur as the result a Glamour's use or appearance, either one that is employed or one that is dispelled. Without Glamours a significant number of Fables would be cast back to the Farm and this loss in population would in turn weaken both the Business Office's and Crooked Man's sovereign control. In contrast the refugee flow (Dreher et al., 2019) could pave the way for an entirely new sovereign in the farm to form as the Farm would be in home to the majority of Fable kind. Greater meaning would be given to the space on the Farm if it housed a greater amount of the Fables' population and this could threaten the existing power structures in New York. Use of glamours keeps the Fables present and controllable and this control over a large amount of the Fable population enables better hoarding of wealth and power. Much like the symbolic dramas of games, obtaining a valued commodity is an end goal. Whichever side the Fable society chooses to get a Glamour from is given more power and wealth. For the Crooked Man, and several Business Office Fables amassing as much of both as they can functions as their utopic journeys. Magic is a part of Fable culture and using it to remain hidden is another way Fables harken back to something familiar. These different elements when put together show both sovereigns are using nostalgia to amass power and retain that power by

controlling its distribution. A utopia for either sovereign will come at the cost of happiness for the other groups in Fabletown.

Despite his power and influence the Crooked Man is much more secretive about his identity than the Traditional Fables, working from his home that is constantly moving and can only be entered by those who can find his symbol. Much like the refugee place in which they live, access to the Crooked Man 'is intimately bound up with a temporality of liminality and enduring temporariness' (Ramadan, 2013 Pg. 72). He is constantly vanishing and reappearing on the edge of the Fable community, empowering himself and leaving once more. This method directly opposes the Business Office that has a fixed location that has endured since the Fables arrival in New York. The Crooked Man's methods are a direct contrast as well since he gives to those who have nowhere else to go regardless of social standing. After help is given, he demands recompense that if not supplied as and when he desires can lead to the death of those who have crossed him. Similar actions cannot be undertaken by the Traditional Fables as they are in the eyes of the Fable community and risk ostracising themselves beyond repair if they do. The Crooked Man's concealed nature is his strength opposing the utopic place the Business Offices aspires to be. Overall these two differing sovereigns are opposites, yet both have a singular aspect in common: their mistreatment of the other Fables.

Despite his vastly different approach the Crooked Man is no better, and perhaps even worse, in how he gives out aid. He is more willing to help the weaker Fables ignored by the Business Office, but he is a great deal harsher with those who are unable to pay him back. His exacting and illegal methods begin the central plot of the game when he orders the killing of a prostitute (Faith) who tried along with an accomplice to blackmail him for her own freedom. By the game's end, despite the struggle on both sides, the Fables in New York are scarcely better than where they began. Except for the few who have been freed from the threat of the Crooked Man. Overall these two sovereigns battling with one another for control is best interpreted as both sides fighting for their own happiness, comfort and power at the cost of the other Fables, highlighting Le Guin's point of a dystopia following a utopia.

The utopian elements of *The Wolf Among Us* lie in journeys and movements towards the best versions of different selves. The Business Office Fables seek to maintain their own power, The Crooked Man and those under him seek to overtake power for themselves and a great many Fables desire to harken back to The Homelands as much as possible, rejecting the space around them. The fractured nature of the Fables society has created a space where utopia can never thrive or endure. For one side to win another must lose and with one utopia's rise comes dystopia for the rest (Le Guin, 2016). The journey as the moment of truest utopian experience is reflected in Bigby's own journey through the game. The character presents as many utopia signs, Magic, Allusions to Fables, True Fable Appearance/Behaviour and Fights over the course of the game and often ends up protecting other Fables as he does so; Mr. Toad, Holly and Snow White are examples of this. Bigby fulfils his desire for acceptance in those moments and earns more those characters' trust. However, by the games end Bigby's final speech to Narissa hints at his own unhappiness with his situation, 'I just can't win with these people' (Telltale Games, 2013). Regardless of what combination of choices the player chooses for Bigby to do, some characters will end up terrified or hating him. For example, to earn Auntie Greenleaf's trust Bigby must disobey Snow White, making her angry with him. Impossible situations such as these add a sense of realism to the game and echo real-life situations where a clear-cut victory is not possible. For many people living in refugee camps or as refugees in foreign countries incredibly stressful and complex situations affect their abilities to survive and lead to higher rates of declined mental health (Williams and Berry, 1991). The game echoes aspects of this real-life experience by placing Bigby in such an unhappy state despite all the work he had done to save Fabletown. The only instant Bigby, and other characters in the game, experienced fleeting glimpses of utopia were in their journeys through the game, never at their journey's end.

Conclusion

The arguments discussed in this chapter were all designed to highlight the power of the journey. Whether that journey is caused by fleeing from a home or finding a new one in foreign space, it possesses the capacity to cultivate utopic potential. *The Wolf Among Us* is a strong example of a group of people forced from their home into an unfamiliar environment. Thanks to their Fable nature, the game can also give insight into what

prolonged existence in a state of 'temporariness' will have on a refugee group. At the heart of these effects are two things: a deep desire to cling steadfastly to a lost culture and the need to amass power and control.

The first is the search for what 'no longer' and detailed in Le Guin's lost utopia (2016), or specifically, a utopia lost to the Fables. Many characters are willing to do whatever it takes to remain true to that lost culture, going so far as putting themselves in danger to do so; this was the case with Beauty and Beast. The strength and tenacity of these desires embodies Quarta and Procida's utopia of self-transcendence (1996). The Fables in the Business Office are the first to establish themselves as a sovereign. This was a necessity at first to give Fables a place they could apply utopic meaning to and thus experience hope. With time passing the Business Office became increasingly corrupt and let citizens down. By working on establishing their own happiness, their own best present and future, the Business Office Fables in turn created worse-off and outright dystopian situations for the lesser Fables under their care.

The failure to care for others as the Business Office Fables did for themselves is what drives several citizens into the debt of the more Progressive Fables headed by The Crooked Man. It is still the offering of services that entices the citizens to give over their power and to take up deals with him. Unlike the Business Office Fables though, the Crooked Man is established in the game to be just that: crooked. From the start he has worked to improve only himself and others merely help him to do this. The immediate status of self-centeredness rather than the gradual corruption of the Business Office singles out the Crooked Man as the most culpable villain despite him causing improvements in some Fables lives. The Crooked Man's own happiness, his best, his utopia was always designed to come at the cost of those under him. Bigby exists in a place of power won out of fear from past behaviour but works consistently to help all those he meets, making him an ideal protagonist for the player to experience the game through. By trying to help all the Fables he realises it is an impossible task and not even he is happy by the game's end. A society as fractured as Fabletown is incapable of housing an enduring utopia and therefore can only experience the phenomenon in fleeting moments. The Fables are incapable of coming together as one united, their individual needs too complex and varied

to mesh leading to smaller squabbles for power and happiness. *The Wolf Among Us* keenly reflects refugee narratives, offering insight on them to a player and aids into academic inquiry by helping to study utopic manifestation in such groups.

The game showcases a refugee society that has existed for many years (similar to the Somali refugee camps) yet remains separate from the wider society of New York and is unable to interact with or integrate fully into it. The same is often true to the experiences of refugees and this game gives a player not only the experience of existing as a member of that refugee group, but as a member who seeks to keep order and cannot do so without more conflict on both sides. As has been shown the accuracy of some game storylines and elements critically note the difficulties faced by refugees, loss of possessions, lack of wealth, lack of opportunities, vulnerable mental states, etc. and the addition of a game's interactive element forces moral choices upon player. These choices will affect the in-game agents but have the potential to impact a player once they are outside of the game as well by changing their ability to confer moral aid brought about but the narrative experience. This change in attitude goes beyond what mainstream media may display regarding refugee experience and could help on some level to educate players.

Academics can further their own research into utopia through Fable society because of the game's potential to have an emotional and moral impact outside of the experience of playing. Looking deeper into the themes of the game its utopian elements are vast and complex. A researcher focusing on these areas has an unstable society vying for a more utopian lifestyle that can assess and compare to real-world experiences and note the parallels between them as well as the emotional impression the game leaves a player with. Utopia can be a highly personal feeling or understanding but *The Wolf Among Us* is a repeatable experience that can portray several different narratives. Bigby may not be the hero of Fabletown but rather a violent enforcer of his own laws. The town may come together by the game's end or be even more fractured and problematic. Players have the chance to see the outcomes of such actions on Fable society and this offers researchers insight to how a search for utopia may go awry or collapse with no real-world risk beyond affecting their own moral alignment. Video games offering low risk, surrogate narrative

experiences in these ways can produce valuable academic research into how a society may function.

Chapter 6 Persona 5: A Manipulative Utopia

Introduction

The three case studies of this project are vital to establishing the ways in which a utopian world can be established in a video game but are designed to look beyond the media. The narratives presented in each game are ripe for utopic exploration, but other elements and disciplines can be used for further examination. *Persona 5's* utopic sign coding revealed how the social interactions between the game's characters craft a great deal of utopic content. This element highlighted the emphasis the game places upon interactions between different parties and the intentions behind them. Specifically, how the idea of manipulating other parties is used in order to achieve utopic ends. This chapter focuses not only on the forms of utopia a person can experience due to manipulation but also the outcomes of manipulation and attitudes towards them. In particular, this chapter will draw from works by Teun A. van Dijk (2006), Ana Laura Nettel & Georges Roque (2012) and Keise Izuma & Ralph Adolphs (2013) that consider the nuanced differences between the process of manipulation in comparison to persuasion and argumentation. Vogel, et al's (2015) study into the effects of social media upon the assessment of the self and others will further enhance understanding of the effects manipulation has. Using these studies and others this chapter seeks to attain a deeper understanding of the notion of manipulation while preparing to use that information to assess the case study.

With key theory synthesised, elements of the story-world of *Persona 5* such as the antagonists and the protagonist group, The Phantom Thieves, will be closely examined for the ways in which both parties use manipulation to achieve their utopic ends. For example, the antagonists of *Persona 5* displaying the best versions of themselves and the protagonists defeating them. Alongside this an examination of the public in the story-world has been done, focusing on their passive nature and great power. The public are vital since *Persona 5's* story-world is designed to mimic our own, set in modern-day Japan. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue the effects of social media in this video game are likely to display or mimic issues that affect our own society. The most prominent of these issues is the manipulation of the general public by those in authoritative positions and through the use of social media. By establishing the ways in which authority, positions and platforms can be used to manipulate people to the point where they rebel against knowledge that doesn't fit into the parameters of that manipulation this chapter can reach

new conclusions about the idea of a manipulative utopia and whether or not such a notion need be a wholly negative ideal. In order to craft a knowledgeable foreground upon which to build this argument, this chapter shall begin by establishing what manipulation truly is, how it may be employed and the effects it can have on those who are manipulated. Following this, the argument shall then examine *Persona 5's* story-world in depth before moving to conclude that a manipulative utopia can (and does) exist in both the video game and possibly in the real world it mimics.

What is Manipulation?

In the same way that utopia is malleable and oft debated, the notion of manipulation or of being manipulated carries much variation and a need to be clarified. Here, some time is given over to establishing what it means to truly be manipulated, how a person may choose to employ manipulation, and how a person could be affected by such manipulations. Persuasion and argumentation will be examined along with manipulation to ensure a specific understanding of the term alongside similar concepts. By scrutinising each in depth their differences will come to light and the argument may move onto exploring the manipulation process with a clear understanding of the term.

Just as manipulation varies in its meaning, argumentation and persuasion are two more terms that have been employed very differently by several groups for their own reasons. Nettel and Roque in particular have noted the 'complex opposition' between each term and the ways in which it can bring forth other forms of opposition such as 'those between conviction and persuasion, or even reason and emotion' (2012 Pg. 55). The former is strongly tied to conviction while the latter falls in more tightly alongside persuasion. However, that does not mean the two must be employed separately. To argue and persuade is often a multifaceted process with the express intention of changing a person's mind. A person could put forward a highly logical argument that states categorically why they are correct yet a less structured, less reliable, argument that was delivered with passion and emotive language could still be the more convincing of the two. When combined, argumentation and persuasion work to turn a person to a new or different way of thinking that would match the viewpoint of the person stating the case for the different way of thinking.

To argue and to persuade is not the only way these terms are thought of. Wendy Wood quotes the work of Deutsch and Gerard in describing two forms of influence a person can experience over the course of making a decision: informative influence and normative influence (Wood, 2003 Pg. 540). Much as the term indicates the use of informative influence is to rely upon logic, facts and indisputable evidence in order to change a person's initial mind-set. There is a clear link between 'making an argument' and informative influence. Normative influence, however, is a more disparate notion from persuasion. To persuade is to rely on more emotive language and a passionate delivery to an audience/receiver yet normative influence hinges almost entirely upon a person's 'positive expectations of "another"' (Wood, 2003 Pg. 540). What this expansion of the more emotional side of persuasion means is that the mental and emotional state of the person attempting to persuade is just as important as the mental and emotional state of the person who is being persuaded. There is a clear link between both spreading and taking in logic, and both putting forward and receiving an emotional connection. Positive expectations of another rely on the meaning given to one party by themselves and by an opposite party. When both parties agree, a power structure is cemented and the persuasive impact increased.

The differences between persuasion and argumentation, and manipulation are complex since 'the two concepts are often mixed or closely tied' (Nettel and Roque, 2012 Pg. 57). There are two key characteristics of manipulation that make it a wholly different process from argumentation and persuasion; these are intention and unawareness. The first characteristic is crucial as 'there is no manipulation without the intention to manipulate' (Nettel and Roque, 2012 Pg. 57). It could be argued that it is impossible to manipulate someone accidentally since the process of manipulation must be 'in the best interest of the manipulator' (Van Dijk, 2006 Pg. 361). Should this self-serving element be removed the process instead becomes an argument attempting to improve the knowledge of another or a persuasion to turn a person to a similar way of thinking. For a manipulation to be considered as such the intent to manipulate has be present and the actions employed designed to yield a desired outcome. If this outcome is to the benefit of the manipulator then the case to define it as manipulation is strong. However, if a person

were to employ a manipulation that could be in the best interest of both parties then the line is once again blurred and a second characteristic, unawareness, can be looked for.

Nettel and Roque state that 'a manipulative discourse that identifies itself as such is not manipulative' (2012 Pg. 57) and the logic is very difficult to dispute. For example, if person A were to inform person B they were about to manipulate them then it would no longer be considered a manipulation under the definition used in this project. Even if A should succeed it would only be because B wished them to since they would be aware of A's intentions. Based on the assessment of terms thus far such a case would likely fall under Normative Influence since B's desire to please or 'go along with' A prompted their actions. Due to this a true manipulation may only occur when it results in a person 'against their fully conscious will and interests, and that the manipulation is in the best interest of the manipulator' (Van Dijk, 2006 Pg. 361). Van Dijk touches upon another key facet driving manipulation: the benefit to the manipulator. Not only must a manipulation be undertaken with the express intention to manipulate, it must be done so without the knowledge of permission of the person being manipulated. Finally, it must hold some benefit to the person attempting the manipulation. In the same way that to argue with or to persuade a person brings benefits in the form of changing a person's mind or introducing them to a new trail of thought, manipulation can bring about results more expressly designed to benefit the manipulator at no gain, or even a loss, to the manipulated party.

Clearly arguing and persuading can be done with good or neutral intentions on the side on the arguer or persuader. However, manipulation carries with it a more insidious connotation that revolves around benefit for one and loss for another. There is an element intrinsically negative to the process. From this negativity comes many rewards for the manipulating party, such as the 'power and domination' (Van Dijk, 2006 Pg. 361-362) it involves. These are two highly motivational factors in society that many would desire as they not only hold the promise of greater comfort but also one of safety. Studies have shown that 'we [humans] change our preferences/to be more similar to those of people we like' (Izuma and Adolphs, 2013 Pg. 563). Therefore, if a person were to manipulate many

into liking them then the benefits would be greater numbers falling in line with their desires and others approving of them, boosting their social status.

This is only one example justifying why a person would set aside another's needs in favour of manipulating themselves to greater power, but this process is not always easily done. A true manipulation on a grand scale requires a talented individual and a well-thought out and planned approach. The clarifications between these different terms are crucial to the development of the argument regarding manipulation in utopia. By understanding the truest and barest motivations behind the term it can be better applied to *Persona 5* in the hopes of elucidating upon its story-world and the utopic presence within it.

How Does a Person Manipulate?

The methods applied by those attempting to manipulate must be examined to give further light on manipulation and its impacts. Four different elements will be considered here to elucidate the ways in which an individual or a group may attempt to manipulate. These elements are dissimulation, constraint, cognitive balance and social hierarchy, all have been previously examined by a variety of academics regarding their application to manipulation (Izuma and Adolphs, 2013; Nettel and Roque, 2012; Van Dijk, 2006; Wilkinson, 1999). To manipulate a person the manipulator must act without the knowledge (and consent) of the person who is being manipulated. There are a variety of ways a person may do this, but a chief example is dissimulation. As Nettle and Roque note, 'when manipulation is used, the manipulative intent will be dissimulated' (2012 Pg. 57). The reasons for this are to enable the manipulator to conceal their truest desire in favour of displaying an alternate truth or motivation that the manipulated party may find more appealing and accept without question. This method of manipulation is referred to as the 'dissimulation of reasons for the pursued goal' (ibid Pg. 57). Dissimulation is a form of manipulation since is conceals the feelings of the person who is manipulating and therefore takes knowledge away from the manipulated party. This can prevent them from deciding with all the information they would require. In some cases dissimulation can be relatively harmless, such as a father manipulating his son into visiting his grandmother by telling him he's likely to be given cake should he do so (Nettel and Roque, 2012). But this aspect of manipulation could be taken much further, such as an actor encouraging one of

their peers to audition using a certain monologue by informing them it's a favourite of one of the judges. By doing this the first actor ensures their chosen dialogue will not be selected by the second. In both cases the true motivation of the manipulator, their profit, is hidden from the manipulated party to display their actions in a more positive light.

Concealing true intentions is a method of manipulation and therefore the concealment of any kind of information could be a form of manipulation. This phenomenon is called constraint. To constrain a person in terms of manipulation is to hide, make unavailable, or even fail to inform a person of, information that could be vital to a choice they are making. Again, this can be a harmless element displayed by one person not informing another, hungry person, that chocolate biscuits are in the cupboard when they are looking for a snack. This is done so the hungry person does not eat the biscuits. But constraint can manifest in worse situations such as 'a salesperson forces someone to purchase an object that this person does not need or cannot afford' (Nettel and Roque, 2012, Pg. 57). This scenario profits the salesperson while possibly putting another in financial jeopardy. In both cases, the motivations of those manipulating were not the element that was being focused on, but rather the information around that person was changed or hidden to limit the choices the manipulated party could make. Hence the manipulated party's options were constrained to the point where the manipulator got what they desired (chocolate biscuits and a sale).

In most cases of manipulation, it is clear to the see the manipulator has a direct effect on the process of manipulation by disguising motive or withholding information. This next method of manipulation focuses less on the direct actions of the manipulator during their attempt to manipulate, and more on their actions leading up to the process. As Izuma and Adolphs state: 'having preferences that are different from those of people we like and having preferences that are similar to those of people that we dislike are both undesirable' (2013 Pg. 573). In relationships then, it is highly likely for a person, or persons, to develop similar interests regarding current trends and fads and for people to further develop a relationship with another who shares similar interests. The term given to this phenomenon by psychologist Fritz Heider is Cognitive Balance (1958). Should the person with a desire to manipulate be aware that another has similar likes/dislikes to

them, and would therefore desire a closer relationship with them, it becomes a great deal easier for this person to complete a successful manipulation. The manipulated party would be seeking a deeper relationship and be less likely to further examine information offered to them making them easy targets for both constraint and dissimulation.

Seeking beneficial relationships is in keeping with the final method of manipulation used here: social hierarchy. After all, why would it be that the manipulated party sought out the manipulating party for a closer relationship if both could be equal? The simple answer is that the relationship was likely imbalanced due to social hierarchy. Whether consciously acknowledged or not it is clear that 'they [social hierarchies] define implicit expectations and action dispositions that drive appropriate social behaviour' (Zink et al., 2008 Pg. 273). Social hierarchies are an unspoken element of social interaction that a strong manipulator could easily take advantage of. A previous example (between a father and son) already has elements of social hierarchy affecting it since a child is likely to respond to the requests of a parent. The parent raised the child and been a figure of authority throughout their upbringing who should be listened to and obeyed. It stands to reason that this same 'power of authority' may be given to another individual dependant on the social situation. The balance of power, or lack thereof, is an element of interaction that can play a crucial role in the success or failure of a manipulation. However, 'this does not mean that children cannot manipulate their parents, or students their teachers' (Van Dijk, 2006) but rather that this approach is a socially constructed benefit some may be able to make use of when employing a manipulation. Understanding methods used to manipulate will provide insight through which to examine the story-world of *Persona 5*. This insight is valuable regarding both the results of the utopic sign coding, the point of view of the player who is witnessing these manipulations play out from outside of the story-world, and indeed having an impact upon them.

The Effects of Manipulation

The person playing *Persona 5* sees best how these methods of manipulation affect those in the story world. But the characters in the game are the real victims of the process. There are specific consequences to manipulation that are most useful to apply to *Persona 5* and these are: upwards comparison; social comparison orientation; loss of social place/power; and loss of self-esteem. These effects have been chosen specifically for the

way they impact a manipulated party and for the way they leave such parties open to further, more damaging, manipulation.

Some effects of manipulation are rooted in all areas the act itself. These are the lead up to, the process of, and the aftermath of a manipulation. One example of such effects is upwards comparisons. Upwards comparisons are 'comparisons between oneself and an individual of higher status' (Zink et al., 2008 Pg. 273), commonly seen with television and social media where only the best of a person can be displayed and their less desirable aspects hidden. Focusing on hiding certain aspects of a self brings out a direct comparison between upwards comparisons and the employment of dissimulation. By showing only their most successful features a person can easily be a desirable friend or a more powerful figure than they truly are. Conversely, this process has the potential to cultivate more negative feelings in the person who is making upwards comparisons. Cognitive balance makes a person more likely to cultivate friendships (or wish to cultivate friendships) with those who both share their interests and those who hold a strong place of authority. This need coupled with upwards comparisons creates vicious cycle since 'individuals with the greatest desire for success have the greatest tendency to make social comparisons with superior others, leading to negative feelings' (Zink et al., 2008 Pg. 279). Essentially, this consequence of manipulation can be long lasting and bring about a great deal of emotional distress in those who suffer from it.

A person is not born making upwards comparisons. The phenomenon is an element of behaviour that can change and develop over the course of a person's life. Indeed 'such social comparative information can be useful for a multitude of purposes' (Vogel et al., 2015 Pg. 249) several of which aid a person's development in society. Cognitive balance need not be inherently negative and used as a manipulative tool, but can help humans to grow closer, forge strong bonds and satisfy their need for a social connection. Because of this, people differ in their tendencies to engage in social comparison and in the 'psychological consequences incurred' (Vogel et al., 2015 Pg. 249). The strength of these comparisons is where more negative aspects of social comparison orientation (SCO) can be seen. In some cases a person, or people, with a high SCO have 'a chronic sensitivity to and awareness of others, and experience more uncertainty and

instability regarding their self-concepts' (Vogel et al., 2015 Pg. 249). This explanation brings the link between upwards comparison and a person's SCO into focus. By continuously making comparisons to those in a higher social standing, or with the appearance of a higher social standing, a person's SCO will increase making them even more aware of the social success of others. They will then become more desperate to improve yet more likely to feel as though they lack the capacity to do so. The power of this self-imposed failure has been strong enough to show links to depression (Vogel et al., 2015) highlighting the severity of its impact.

Another debilitating impact that can be derived from cases of manipulation is a loss of place in society. One negative effect of manipulation can easily lead into another and another to increase the extent to which a person is affected. Research has shown that as humans 'we can be ranked according to ability or skill, as well as economic, physical, and professional standings' (Zink et al., 2008 Pg. 273). All these areas invite some aspect for upwards comparison from others but there is also a chance for the person ranked highly to compare themselves. Due to this a person's view of their place in a social hierarchy could change. The level of SCO can increase to the point that the affected individual begins to perform poorly as their view of others leaves them feeling inadequate. The build-up of these negative feelings could be so strong as to cause the loss of a respected place in a hierarchy since 'dominance hierarchies require that dominance is matched by submissiveness' (Wilkinson, 1999 Pg. 58). Therefore, if one party begins to show submissive behaviour this could be matched by more dominant behaviour in another and the balance of power would shift. Examples of this could be seen in everything from office politics to performance in sporting events.

The final (and perhaps most important) after-effect that can be experienced due to manipulation is a loss of self-esteem. In an experiment conducted by Vogel, et. al regarding the effects of SCO they concluded 'participants high in SCO had lower trait self-perceptions, lower state self-esteem, and more negative affect balance' (Vogel et al., 2015 Pg. 253). From this, the connection between SCO and a person's self-esteem is made clear. Where this can be taken further is to examine the negative effects low self-esteem can have on a person such as the connection between low self-esteem and feelings of anxiety.

Wilkinson states 'central to these social anxieties are processes of social comparison and fears of inferiority and inadequacy in relation to others' (1999 Pg. 58). Having low self-esteem could therefore result in greater feelings of anxiety and as research has shown 'anything contributing to chronic anxiety was likely to affect health' (Wilkinson, 1999 Pg. 49). This connection proves that not only can the after-effects of manipulation impact a person's emotional state but can also have a negative impact upon their physical health as well. Overall the extent to which a person can be affected by manipulation can be wide-reaching and debilitating to their emotional, mental, social and physical well-being. These effects are highly likely to vary from person to person and may not affect all in such a negative way, but the capacity for such consequences is there. The connection between the conscious choice to manipulate, the methods employed to complete a successful manipulation, and the debilitating after-effects being manipulated can cause, show the inherently negative connotation to the very idea of manipulation.

Manipulation in Persona 5

Investigating how manipulation is present in *Persona 5's* moments of utopia will prove vital to understanding both how manipulation can affect utopian groups and how different groups within the story-world come to experience themselves at their best. The notion of 'best' is a key aspect to utopia as it is defined in this project: an action a person takes, or an object they create that is designed to lead to, or evoke the memory of, the best version of themselves. The first group brought to the forefront in this analysis defies another key aspect of this definition while still striving towards the idea of 'best:' the public of the story-world. The faceless public holds more power in *Persona 5* than any other group, yet they do not act. The public are inherently passive throughout most of the game. Despite this, their power and their potential to impact achieving utopia is enormous.

One of the signs coded throughout the analysis of *Persona 5* was 'Phantom Thief Approval' and while this sign was not present as much as others the impact it had is still vital to the narrative of the game. The protagonists are striving to rebel against the established power and, as is often the case in such rebellions, the support of the public is essential to keep the movement going. To monitor this, an in-game social media platform

is used to measure public approval of the protagonists throughout the game (see figure 20).

Figure 20: The 'Public Approval Bar' as seen throughout Persona 5

As the narrative progresses the public opinion can change in favour of the protagonists, but it can also decrease. During one point of the game the approval bar changes to display 'Do the Phantom Thieves Exist' and hits zero; following this, the protagonists vanish from reality as they're no longer recognised by the public and therefore no longer exist. The power of the passive public is demonstrated most strongly at this moment in the game. This example in *Persona 5* shows the power of attributing meaning to something. Cresswell discussed meaning as vital to defining place yet *Persona 5* takes the idea even further, giving it the power to create or erase people from existence. This power has the potential for both great utopia and great dystopia, as it is all but impossible to have potential for one and not the other (Le Guin, 2016). Characters may experience a great sense of validation or pride brought on by such public approval whereas public indifference becomes akin to a death sentence.

The public's impact on the Phantom Thieves is done almost exclusively through their website and the public's posts about it. As van Dijck and Poell note, 'over the past decade, social media platforms have penetrated deeply into the mechanics of everyday life, affecting people's informal interactions, as well as in situational structures and professional routines' (2013 Pg. 3). This extends not only to the general public, but to both the protagonists and the antagonists who utilise. In several cases the antagonists hold enough influence to be visible in the public sphere and thus oft talked about in the story-world's social media. There is a need displayed by the passive public to be involved, to engage in this discourse. Some request aid from the Phantom Thieves, others decry their

actions or even to simply question their existence. All showcase the power social media plays in this story-world to put other's in a state of utopia, at their best, creating an apt reflection of the power and presence of social media in our own realty. *Persona 5's* world of social mimicry is just that: a reflection of the world in which we currently live. In comparison to those in power, or more accurately those *with* power the public appears passive and lacking, yet gaining their support is the difference between success and failure, between an existence of utopia or dystopia.

Persona 5 has the largest society seen in the three case studies; *Bloodborne* is made up of the few sane individuals yet in Yharnam while *The Wolf Among Us* consists of a limited amount of refugee Fables. *Persona 5* utilises a society that deliberately works to mimic the world in which we live. Or, more accurately, modern Japan and has an enormous and dense society, the game often highlights this by showing aspects of modern Japanese life such as incredibly packed train commutes (see figure 21).

Figure 21: The densely packed train commutes in Persona 5.

Showing moments like this adds an additional element of context to the game, constantly and subtly emphasising how many people are living in the city. Several names flashing up as commenters on the public approval bar does this as well. By drawing many of these large groups as literal faceless masses their individuality is removed and their function as a larger unit is emphasised. This can be conductive to establishing a utopian society. Enduring utopias are extremely rare since more complex desires tend to cause clashes and for one group's utopia to continue another must cease (this was the case with *The Wolf Among Us*). With time passing the likelihood of this occurring increases.

Hassard notes in the introduction to his anthology *The Sociology of Time* that the subject area could almost be considered to be a 'time-free zone' (2016 Pg. 6). Though by writing this he does not mean to disregard time, but rather the opposite. His work seeks to rectify the situation and bring together a collection of time-based works in several areas of sociology, including areas of perspective and interaction. Such a chapter on Time Perspective & Social Structure notes that 'related events gain meaning through their location in social rather than merely calendrical time' (Coser et. al, 1990 Pg. 191). This creates a distinction in defining time as more than its colloquial understanding as little more than a measurement of progression from cause to effect. Time holds more depth when examined for how society understands and chooses to give meaning to it. If an event shook a nation or even a smaller group of people, it would affect that sociological group's communication and understanding of time. Coser, et. al use the example 'pre-war' (1990) to highlight this as in an event taking on different sociological meanings pre and post a significant war to a country or group. From this, and time studies with a focus on society, time depends on both the commonalities within groups of people and significant events that have happened to them in order to justify and craft a sense of time beyond counting seconds.

For *Persona 5* time passes and societal views towards The Phantom Thieves and several antagonists change. As the protagonist moves around the game's fictional Japan speech bubbles appear showing what the 'faceless' public are talking about. This is useful to set up context around the current events in the game's narrative but is a useful marker for change in the public eye as well. Speech bubbles change from condemning The Phantom Thieves and praising their enemies to exalting their Thieves' efforts and turning on the antagonists. Passing time leads to those sociological changes and are akin to death sentences in the public eye and elevation to a 'best' figure at the same time. The use of a daily calendar and the public approval bar show how long it take to change the minds of the public, ranging from days to weeks to months, and this variation in time is needed due to the breadth of *Persona 5's* society and to show the spread of in-game social media. The power of the game's huge society is the paramount in the creation of any kind of utopic status. *Persona 5* reflects on current society by doing this and using social media as the

method through which the public makes its thoughts known. This shows how impactful *Persona 5* is and the game's use to studying sociological phenomena, time in society and utopic manifestation.

Those with power (as well as those in power) need to keep the public on-side and orderly to remain successful. The antagonists presented throughout the game all begin in a state of power brought about by either a position of authority or a position of wealth (in some cases both). But most often, these antagonists are in a position of public approval. Often, these characters have manipulated their way into these positions and the player of the game is immediately aware of this. The narrative of *Persona 5* is structured as a series of flashbacks with brief moments set in the present until the narrative 'catches up.' In the moments of narrative exposition in the present each antagonist is introduced and thus the player already knows they are guilty of crimes. This moves the player of the game (not the protagonist) out of the circle of manipulation since they are no longer in the state of ignorance that is necessary for a person's manipulation. Unlike the protagonists and the passive public, the player is progressing through the game and waiting for the truth that they are already privy to come to light. For those in the narrative the antagonists' manipulations are yet to be uncovered and they may first present as likeable figures. The protagonists may have some knowledge or hints of the truth but are unable to confirm it until they make use of their power to reveal the truth via each antagonist's Palace that shows how they see the world.

The Palaces in *Persona 5* establish more traditional ludological features for players to master and work through (dungeon crawling, enemy encounters, health stats, etc.) but also strip away the presence of manipulations to the bare truth. Palaces are crafted from the 'distorted desires' (Hashino, 2017) of the antagonists and show how each antagonist sees the world. The truths brought to light in the Palace worlds are essential to the antagonists since 'needs specify innate psychological nutriments that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being' and these worlds are cognitive constructions of their needs being fulfilled. For example, being viewed as a king; having more money than anyone else; being the most successful artist; and sailing society into a new age to name a few. The strength of their manipulations upon the public are so great

that to their minds these goals have been met and their needs fulfilled. The antagonists as seen in their Palace worlds could be argued to be the 'best' version of themselves having attained all their most important goals. In seeing the antagonists' utopic selves though, the protagonists rebel as the malleability of utopia manifests in the disparity of the goals of both parties. The protagonists decry an antagonist's utopia and do battle with them in their Palace to forever dismantle their utopia.

The protagonists destroy the Palace worlds not by defeating the Palace ruler (though violent encounters between them do take place) but instead, they steal the desires of the antagonists. This process forever changes the antagonist's needs and causes them to admit their wrongdoings to the public. In the same way that the antagonists manipulated their way to their utopic state of cognition, the protagonists manipulate them into losing that state of mind and further still to placing them in a state of misery and self-loathing. For a manipulation to take place it must be done without the knowledge of the manipulated party and so that the manipulating party can gain some benefit or improvement. While the cognitive Palace-self of the antagonist encountered by the protagonists is abundantly aware of what is happening, the true self in the world of social mimicry is not. This true version of the antagonist receives a note detailing that the phantom thieves will 'steal their desires' (Hashino, 2017, p. 5). But the antagonists do not know how this process will occur and they cannot act to stop it. Thus, they are victims of dissimulation and constraint employed by the protagonists fulfilling this aspect of manipulation. In concurrence with this, the protagonist will experience great benefits by causing the antagonists to admit to their crimes. For example, the first antagonist (a schoolteacher who is guilty of abusing his students) wishes to expel the protagonist from school, yet by forcing him to admit his actions they will be allowed to stay. Therefore, this example fulfils the criteria for a successful manipulation upon the real-world version of the antagonist.

This process (named a Change of Heart in the game) shows not only the potential to manipulate an antagonist out of a utopic state, but the potential to manipulate the protagonists into such a state, albeit temporarily. The loss of power and public approval by the antagonist does not remain without place for long and swiftly moves to backing the

protagonists. This is seen through increases in visits to the 'Phan-Site' and public approval of The Phantom Thieves. The power of the public's favour swings to the protagonists and their influence grows stronger. The Phantom Thieves feel the satisfaction of able to make a change in their world for the better, as they see it. So, they are taking actions to lead towards the best version of themselves. The presence of utopia, or of a utopic state is therefore confirmed yet they reached this state much in the same way that the antagonists did: by using manipulation. The exploitation of these methods is shown on both the antagonists' and the protagonist's side demonstrating the power each has and the successful results that can be gained in applying it. Manipulating into power is common in *Persona 5's* story-world and its success only encourages further of use of it by the protagonists.

An instance of manipulation that may not be so obvious to the player (a figure outside of the society) is in fact the greatest indicator of utopic moments in the game: social link progression. Below is a graph (figure 22) detailing utopic signs as catalogued through a single play-through of *Persona 5*.

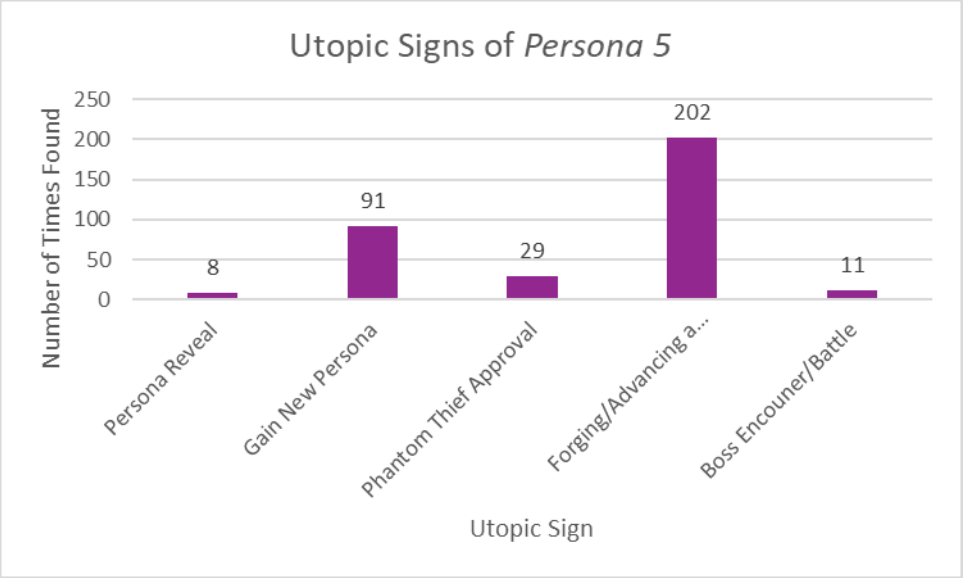

Figure 22: The Utopic Signs of Persona 5.

One sign appeared a great deal more than others and this was Forging/Advancing a Social Link. *Persona 5* has some relationships between characters that evolve naturally throughout the game's narrative increasing from rank one to rank ten and providing several benefits for the player. However, for most of these social links (seventeen out of twenty-one) it is up to the player to initiate and follow them through to their completion.

The protagonist is informed by another of the game's characters, Igor, that the cultivation of social links will serve to aid him on his journey and this serves as a tutorial introducing the system to the player. Another element of this interaction is it removes the protagonist from a space in which they can be manipulated but it also provides knowledge (or more specifically motivation) to wish to befriend the characters around him. At no point in the narrative does the player have the option to reveal Igor's existence and guidance to the other characters in the game (until the final area where he is naturally revealed). So, as far as his friends are aware, the protagonist simply enjoys seeking them out and spending time with them. However, in the same way manipulation was used to displace the power and status of the antagonists, it can be seen at play in these interactions only by the player of the game and (arguably) the protagonist. The social link characters are unaware this is a role they fulfil and that the closeness of their relationship with the protagonist can affect their actions in the cognitive world. Yet by doing so several benefits are accrued by the protagonist and the playable social link characters such as unlocking new moves and even sacrificing themselves so the protagonist may survive another round. The most common indicator of utopic moments within *Persona 5* could in fact be argued to be an example of manipulation by both the protagonist and the player. Given that such interactions benefit both the player and the protagonist from a ludological perspective it would be in a player's instinct to have as many as possible. This desire links to Murray's games as symbolic dramas (1997) once again. By reaching the end of the game in a powered ludological state the protagonist is arguably experiencing their 'best' once again, this time at an unseen cost of interactions with those around him.

In these examples, manipulation is a strong factor in the achievement of a utopic state. But it also is a sole factor in a descent to dystopia. It is clear that where utopia is present, dystopia is not far behind and, much in the same way scales will tip before they balance, a person is likely to swing between zenith and nadir on the road to their best self and further challenges will always appear to either be conquered or failed. The game presenting an experience like this in a world designed to often mimic the real world is no mistake. *Persona 5* offers players the experience of society letting them down and trying to rectify that situation. In a time where scandals and misuse of power by those who hold it

are commonplace this case study gives an experience of fighting back and seeing how powerful a large society joined together can be.

A Manipulative Utopia

The utopias, or utopic states described in the game have been solely for the protagonists and antagonists of *Persona 5*. Yet, the most powerful force at play in the game is the public, despite their lack of inclination to act. This is largely due to the vast numbers making up the public verses the handful of people who are acting with power. In order to gain and maintain public approval they (the public) must be satisfied or happy with the current hierarchy. Should one wish to overtake the current hierarchy they must be even more highly regarded. Masayoshi Shido is a politician in *Persona 5* who is corrupt yet seeks to be Japan's next Prime Minister. Using Shido and his goals, the idea of a utopia existing that a person, or persons have been manipulated is brought forward. The negative impacts of manipulation are experienced by the antagonists upon the defeat of their cognitive selves. However, this aspect of manipulation need not be experienced by all. In fact, a truly successful manipulation is likely never to be discovered by the manipulated party. In the case of Shido, the character seeks the approval of the Japanese public so that he may be voted by them to become Prime Minister. The player and The Phantom Thieves find out as the narrative of the game progresses that Shido accused the protagonist of assault and used his connections to see the protagonist charged despite Shido being guilty of misconduct. In this action his true nature is revealed. The public has no knowledge of this, nor any of the other crimes he has committed and are instead taken in by his passionate speech and the platform upon which he seeks to lead the country. Indeed, Shido even show's aspects of non-western utopian ideals as he seeks to harken back to the glorious history of Japan and sail the country forward into a new age; at once bringing memory into the fluctuating present to impact the future. Despite this, it is obvious to both the player and the protagonists that Shido is seeking to manipulate the public into approving of him so that they will give him even greater power.

To a large extent, Shido succeeds in this endeavour, gaining a much public support as indicated during cut scenes where members of the public praise him and scoff at the other politicians running against him. Both the manipulation and the motivation behind it is clear but the outcomes here are worth noting in more depth. The public approve of

Shido, the idea of him in power pleases them, they wouldn't vote for him otherwise. They (the public) truly believe Shido is the ideal candidate to take the position of Prime Minister and lead Japan forward to a stronger position in the world. Several NPCs often say the confidence they have in Shido brings them piece of mind and therefore they feel more secure. In highly turbulent times, the public truly believe that Shido can bring about the best Japan. This story-world is designed to mimic our own and often voters are taken in by passionate political candidates who say they will protect a countries best interests against threats. A utopic state is brought about by experiencing moments such as these. A strong sense that the best of oneself, or in this case one's country, will be achieved. That the people who believe this are being manipulated for Shido's benefit is without question. Yet, regardless of the motivations behind it these citizens are experiencing a utopic state.

The public's belief in Shido, in the utopic he will provide is so great that when Shido himself is manipulated into exposing his crimes and true motivations they are not accepted. The public rebel against the knowledge and several call his outburst a breakdown brought about by the stress of his campaign. This reaction strongly suggests that in *Persona 5* and, it could be argued, the current world, the feelings experienced in a utopic state (or a longer lasting utopia) are valued more highly than the truth. To the point where a member of the utopia is unable, or rather unwilling to accept information that contradicts the state they have been manipulated into. In contrast to this any figure outside of the general public, the protagonists and the player, can see plainly that a manipulation has taken place and the utopia the public believe themselves to be in is in fact an illusion. If a person is manipulated into such feelings of safety and comfort it can be nigh on impossible for them to accept a truth outside of those feelings. Yet those who are aware that a manipulation is taking place will forever be unable to experience this utopic state as they lack the ignorance required to be manipulated into those beliefs.

From this conclusion an interesting and difficult notion emerges: must a person be free to experience utopia? Arguably utopia as a concept holds true with several concepts of freedom. These include the choice of actions to take, the chance to fail and learn and the notion of being unburdened by the world around you to achieve peace. Yet, to move from utopia as a feeling, as an experience and examine it as a physical space instead showcases

that a utopia is a construct a person must join and adhere to certain rules within. The Pansophists' *Christianopolis* (Segal, 2012) is such an example. *Christianopolis* is a place where built so that people could live a utopian lifestyle so long as they used all free time to worship the Christian God. Or John Etzler's technological utopianism which 'seduced followers and patrons' (Segal, 2012 Pg. 79) offering great wealth but only if service was offered to his cause beforehand. In both cases a portion of the public were content to follow such rules under the assurance of a utopic existence. Overall it seems sensible enough to conclude that to live in a utopia, to experience it for more than an effervescent moment will require some form of conformity to rules and living a certain type of lifestyle. A person is never truly free in a utopia, yet if freedom can bring only the promise of pain or struggle than freedom may be an easy thing to give up.

Conclusion

In summation, manipulation is present in *Persona 5* and vital to several of the character's narratives and the state of the story-world. The game portrays a realistic exposure of characters in power abusing their privilege and those in lesser situations suffering for it. However, the game also presents the opportunity for the less powerful characters to fight back, turning societal support to them and showing just how empowering and damaging public opinion can be. This is especially relevant and true when the game uses elements of social media to further its impact. Both the protagonist and the antagonists of the game made use of manipulation in order to achieve their ends and experience a utopic state, yet despite being the few who chose to act they did not in fact possess the most power. The society around them, the general public, proved to be strongest resource yet they were also the force most likely to be manipulated so that the few with power could reign supreme. Especially relevant was the use of this by an educator and a politician in the game, highlighting several corrupt areas that craft and control the general public. Finally, a manipulative utopia was experienced by the general public in *Persona 5*. Given the game's structure that mimics a real-world setting this same kind of manipulative utopia could be experienced by the general public in current society. A manipulative utopia is not a wholly negative ideal in of itself, but the rejection of irrefutable information that contradicts the parameters of said utopia highlights temptation to fall blindly for a peaceful lie over a difficult truth.

Conclusions

The Power of Games

Video games are an increasingly popular form of entertainment in modern society that demand academic inquiry not only for their increasingly complex coding and ludological mechanics, but for their ability to contribute to valuable sociological research. In the past twenty years video games have moved from a state of blurry pixels to in-depth story-worlds designed for individual player experience built around webs of player choices, actions and in-game relationships. Such games have much to offer those who seek them out on a level of engaging pleasure but can also prompt difficult issues which can conjure deeper thought as a player progresses through them. Some examples found in the case studies of this project are manipulation within modern social media, the plight of refugees and post-fallout societies. All three of these examples have been assessed over the course of this project analysing how a player will find them impactful. Beyond that, examinations into the academic value of such topics were included highlighting the sociological, political, and utopian value these video games portray.

Children who were first exposed to technology through games over twenty years ago, (Greenfield, 1994) are now at an age where they will crave deeper, more nuanced narratives in gaming media and in some cases even research them. Having grown up around video games, seeing them develop and the subject matter they consider mature, the aging audience of video gamers will continually seek new, quality content that is respected as both a media artefact and a potential academic case study. This receptiveness from gaming's growing audience only furthers its potential as an avenue for research.

Several video game case studies examined with an interest in the social sphere surrounding them focus only on the social aspect between humans. Online games were often chosen for this and the investigations into the area of research provided a great deal of useful results that could be employed not only in game studies but in several other subjects as well. However, this preference for the social interactions between humans in gaming left investigations into the newer, highly complex story-worlds game produce lacking. This project serves as a necessary examination of the kind of social impact single player game experiences can have. Games can affect not only on a player in the moment of playing, but after the experience has finished. Extravirtual Aid could be enacted by players who find themselves touched by the narrative experience a video game provides

and therefore video games could do a great deal of good if vital stories that need to be told are spread throughout its vast audience. From an academic standpoint, adequate research into this potential impact has not yet been completed. This project provides initial inquiry to this power of games, focusing on the utopian potential they have and how a player may be affected by that potential. Overall this research, in combination with gaming's multidisciplinary nature in academia, is valuable to numerous research fields and could spearhead a vast amount of future projects into the media.

Bloodborne

The first case study examined in this projected worked powerfully to demonstrate the strength of impact a single-player experience could have. *Bloodborne* is a game that cements itself in plight of the individual, focusing on the Hunter and their experiences as they travel through the city of Yharnam. Any form of utopia justified to exist in the game could only be found as a result of this individual experience. The Hunter exists alone, all other characters they meet are victims of the game's post-fallout society and will either be mad, utterly despondent or dead by the end of the experience. Small glimmers of utopia were found in the Hunter attempting to better themselves, move forward and attempt to find some solution, some end to the apocalyptic world around them. Throughout this experience the emotional impact of the differing NPCs comes to light as they slowly begin to fall mad or die. The further levels of isolation serve to increase the depth of relationship that forms between the player and the Hunter. There is a great deal of emotion that builds up and this could easily transfer to a kind of Extravirtual Aid, impacting the way the player sees the world after having traversed such a hopeless space in desperate search for the best ending they could find. Such focus on the individual experience moves away from the more commonly researched social interaction between humans in games and instead brings to light how stable a single person's motivations can remain in the face of utter adversity. The power of the individual's utopic goals can sustain even in the darkest of times.

To achieve goals though is not the most satisfying of endings. *Bloodborne's* microtopias show that if a person is given everything they desire in a single moment of wanting, such a place will never sustain that level of complete utopia. Humans strive to be more, to learn about the world around them and seek out new successes and trials to test

themselves; their understanding of the world is, like utopia, ever shifting. The fall of a microtopia comes in its inability to change or evolve. The Nightmare of Mensis, The Hunter's Nightmare and even The Hunter's Dream all eventually became prisons to those singular desires and degraded into dystopic spaces for their inhabitants. A space like this is all but impossible to find in the current world, humans having explored and built connecting societies in every corner of the world, therefore such a specific space offers a great deal of sociological value. This value is strengthened by the power of the medium to craft such a complex story-world heavily reliant on environmental story-telling. A player must explore and look intently to understand what has come to pass and why so many inhabitants of these worlds fell to despair. Not only is this useful from a sociological standpoint to better understand a variant of human society, but also to gain some insight in the mind of humans and their ever-changing desires, so well linked to an everchanging form of utopia.

The Wolf Among us

Bigby Wolf's desires come into focus early on in *The Wolf Among Us* and serve as one of his principle motivations throughout the game. His status as a post-war protagonist presented in the noir style serves to cultivate a sense of sympathy between him and the player controlling him. This emotional attachment stimulates the player to make decisions that move Bigby through the game and lead towards one of several endings. The game makes it clear that the fate of Fabletown and those within it rests upon the player's actions and not only does this put a sense of pressure and risk on every choice made but that sense of pressure and risk will only increase as the player becomes more emotionally invested in these characters' lives. The combination of this choice-based mechanic together with the deep emotional investment video games can craft creates this highly impactful experience and highlights how far both the player and the characters in the game have come by the end. More than the other case studies in this projects, *The Wolf Among Us* shows the power of the journey and its utopian potential. The qualifier 'potential' is required since Bigby's reception by the other Fables and in the wider story-world is so dependent on the player. Bigby could be the hero of Fabletown, respected by many, or he could be a figure who dishes out his own sense of justice while ruling through fear. The

strength of the medium allows a player the chance to play through this same experience time and time again with different outcomes, exploring success and failure as they see it.

What the player sees and experiences is vital to this case study as *The Wolf Among Us* cultivates a strong refugee narrative based in the experiences of the Fables attempting to find a place for their society within New York yet staunchly remaining distant from it, rarely interacting with the city's human population. Coverage of refugees has been highly skewed in the past by media representation (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017) and often individual voices and first-person accounts are not spread to the host country. This video game bypasses such media restrictions and places a player in the depth of a refugee society, offering the surrogate experience of a person attempting to make their refugee society less corrupt and safer, then discovering regardless of their actions some people will remain unhappy, harmed or even dead as a result. *The Wolf Among Us* gives some insight into refugee culture and how a refugee society may, or may not, evolve. Such content makes the game valuable to a player because of this potential insight and experience it may give them, but beyond that the game could have potential value to academics studying refugee culture and interaction. The game offers a unique experience in that a player may reset the society and all within it to their starting point and play the game again; during a second playthrough a player will have the knowledge of the plot and some choices which were absent before and this could impact the choices they make. The game's repeatability allows both researchers and players to fully explore Fable society and could help yield new insight into the mechanics of refugee culture as well as craft a sense of Extravirtual Aid in a gamer towards refugees that modern news coverage would not allow.

Persona 5

Persona 5 offered its own kind of Other experience and insight that a player would otherwise be unable to have: that of a helpless person in modern society. The game centres around characters who have all been labelled and forced into margins, unable to help themselves and frantic for any kind of salvation. From the protagonist's labelling as a delinquent to Ann's as a promiscuous schoolgirl and others, the game serves to highlight how societal labels can be harmful and lead people to make desperate or dangerous choices. The in-depth plot and character exploration in the game pulls the player in,

making them care and root for these characters, wanting to see the 'underdogs' succeed and, in this way, also crafts a sense of Extravirtual Aid that could be incredibly powerful since *Persona 5* more than the other case studies of this project accurately mimics current society.

But the games goes a step further to examine the downfalls of too much popularity as well as too little. As the Phantom Thieves grow in popularity the frightening demands of the public to steal so many people's hearts escalate and their hubris causes them to make wrong choices leading a significant downfall in the eyes of society. The game demonstrates how current society's reliance on resources like social media and the corruption of current power hierarchies has crafted a very fickle path to acceptance and even fame that can do as much harm as it can good. Public approval can flit between utopian delight and dystopian pain incredibly quickly and a repeatable case study examining that has value to sociology as well as those studying video games and those who play them.

Lawrence noted that social upheaval is a prime time for the emergence of utopian thought (2008) and the Phantom Thieves do take the change in their social position to assert their own utopian ideals on modern society. However, the actions of the Phantom Thieves and the antagonists of the game are all rooted in manipulation. Be it manipulating enemy shadows into becoming allies, forging social links or using a position of power to empower oneself at the cost of those around them, all examples are linked by the definition of manipulation. The power of a manipulative utopia to seduce those within it away from acceptance of irrefutable evidence is incredibly relevant in modern society. From social media influencers to political candidates, so many people with power given over to them from the masses of society use that power to their own advantage and hoard it as best they can. *Persona 5* is a valuable case study since it offers insight into examples of such manipulative individuals (that both a teacher and a political are some antagonists in the game speaks volumes of the modern society it reflects) and shows what would happen if those with less power were to fight back against these manipulations. Most powerfully, the game presents a situation where the entire society comes together as one and this is how that society saves itself from an existence of willing ignorance in a manipulative

utopia. Sociologists, social media experts, academics who focus on politics, all these individuals and more could find value in the narrative of *Persona 5* and the ways in which it showcases how easily a society can be drawn into a manipulative utopia that replies on happy lives over important truths.

Meaning

Each case study of this project was shown to have an arguable incarnation of both utopia and dystopia within it. Over the course of conducting this research the differing utopic signs, schemas and in-depth analyses of the utopias mentioned highlighted the power time, place and society had. These elements affect not only the games' own utopic manifestations but also those the player will see and (more importantly) those the player will support. Video games are often designed to forge and maintain a bond between player and character. So, ensuring that the meaning given to a game's utopia is in-keeping with the over-arching goals of the protagonist (or protagonist party) helps to reach a more satisfying play experience. This experience does not involve just the completion of a game but in the utopic journey a player can experience through their protagonist as they move through the game. This experience is reliant on both ludological and narratological progression to have its deepest impact.

Overall then, this first conclusion on the topic is to state that utopia and dystopia are present in, arguably, all video games but particularly those with strong narratological elements. These elements work to draw the player further into the story-world, cause them to invest and give meaning to the game's time and place. Players will then build relationships with the existing characters and the protagonist leading their progression through the game. In doing so players will find meaning for these characters and how to define them at their best and their worst, they most utopic and dystopic. By working to meet these character's end-goals, doing all they can to seek them out and make it a reality, players will find pleasure and satisfaction. Often, they will encounter failure along the way until they reach their final success and the game ends, making their victory more meaningful both as a narrative and a ludo-centric experience. The relationship, the bond, is broken when a player completes any game and that is perhaps the most dystopic element of engaging with the medium.

Further Research

The conclusions drawn and arguments presented over the course of this project are all far from completed. In fact, several new research questions and branches for further inquiry were found over the course of completing it. One particularly valuable output of this project, though, is the methodology employed. The method of deep qualitative analysis leading into analytical coding on a level beyond word usage and frequency to specific game mechanics and visual signifiers is incredibly useful to assessing a case study in the medium. The greatest strength of this method is that it will provide a researcher with hard quantitative results born from in-depth qualitative investigation and will serve to further illustrate points made. The method will also provide specific, highlightable examples of coded instances in a multimodal case study. This method is not limited to video games but could be applicable to investigations of any heavily interactive media (such as social networking sites) and even films or theatre productions.

However, the importance of noting its applicability to video games lies in the medium's multidisciplinary nature. Over the course of this project video game research from a multitude of different backgrounds including sociology, media studies, psychology, narratology and others were employed. This method could be used by all these academic fields to aid with any projects they undertake that require the analysis of a video game case study. Beyond academia, large Triple A companies will always require research on the projects that develop and put out and this methodology could prove useful to them in noting the common strengths and weaknesses of their products.

Finally, while the project has served to produce impactful conclusions on utopic manifestation within interactive media, one of the key points it made was on utopia's malleability. For each of the three case studies present in this project three completely different forms of utopia were found, catalogued and analysed but there could be a multitude of other incarnations of the term found in any of the hundreds of thousands of existing video games available at present. Further investigation into different kinds of games, for example those from different genres that have a distinct lack of narrative input could yield some new and interesting results if examined. However, taking this methodology that been proven to provide useful data and applying it to case studies that have a distinct multi-player element would be an important step to take in the research.

Ideally examining 'couch co-op' (multiplayer gaming done by two or more people in the same room) to see how that may affect player interaction with any sort of utopic experience would be incredibly valuable to understanding more about the human psyche, how players interact with games and if it is possible for both players to be united in utopic bliss then fall to dystopian arguments moments later. Over the course of this research it has become apparent that one of the largest threats to any sort of utopian stability is the appearance of different ways of thinking and new motivations; placing two players in a single gaming experience would surely test at what point a utopia of the self if flipped to dystopia by the utopic motivations of another.

The study of utopia in games, despite the vast research into the term from other fields, remains unique because of the interactivity intrinsic to the media. Utopian literature/film remains a less interactive field wherein the reader/viewer can only expand trivial effort, moving their eyes across a page and turning it once they reach the bottom or pressing the play button to start a film (Aarseth, 1997). Real life experiments with utopia, from Christianopolis to Brook Farm, are not repeatable. Those who created them had a single chance to make all their decisions and the utopia would fall should they make a wrong one even if it seemed correct at the time. Video games provide what both these examples can offer and more: the emotional attachment that comes from investing in a narrative, caring about characters and their fates; the active agency felt at taking meaningful action to try and bring the best possible world into existence; and the joy of achieving victory after conquering difficult symbolic dramas or game mechanics. Yet in all cases video games are repeatable; a player can restart and try again to achieve a better result than they did before and the only fallout for their actions is likely to be how the game impacts them on an emotional level. Game media is now highly sophisticated, able to code hundreds of complex characters players can aid or harm who then go on to impact a larger storyworld. Video games present the chance to explore highly complex utopian societies players can join and impact on different levels that are low risk surrogate experiences. This unique element of utopia in digital games makes them incredibly valuable to those who study the subject.

Overall this research project sought to examine utopic manifestation within interactive media and in doing so has found that utopia, while always present, exists in so much as it is given meaning. This meaning can come through attribution of time, place, societal grouping, the employment of power or even the act of doing nothing but it is nonetheless reliant upon the meaning that is provided for it. These meanings, like utopia itself are often malleable and contrasting, incapable of existing in the same space at the same time. The resulting conflict differing motivations conjure often causes dystopia to follow in the wake of many utopic endeavours. Both utopia and dystopia exist in a somewhat constant back and forth; as humanity strives for a more utopia lifestyle, potential dystopias are formed. All it takes is a single addition, another person, another time, another place, and the fragile utopia will cease to be. Despite utopias fragility, humanity has shown that it will not stop searching for those small moments of fulfilment that striving for their best selves bring about. Humanity has a deep-seated need for utopia and because of this dystopia will forever be looming, ready to manifest, should a utopia become unachievable.

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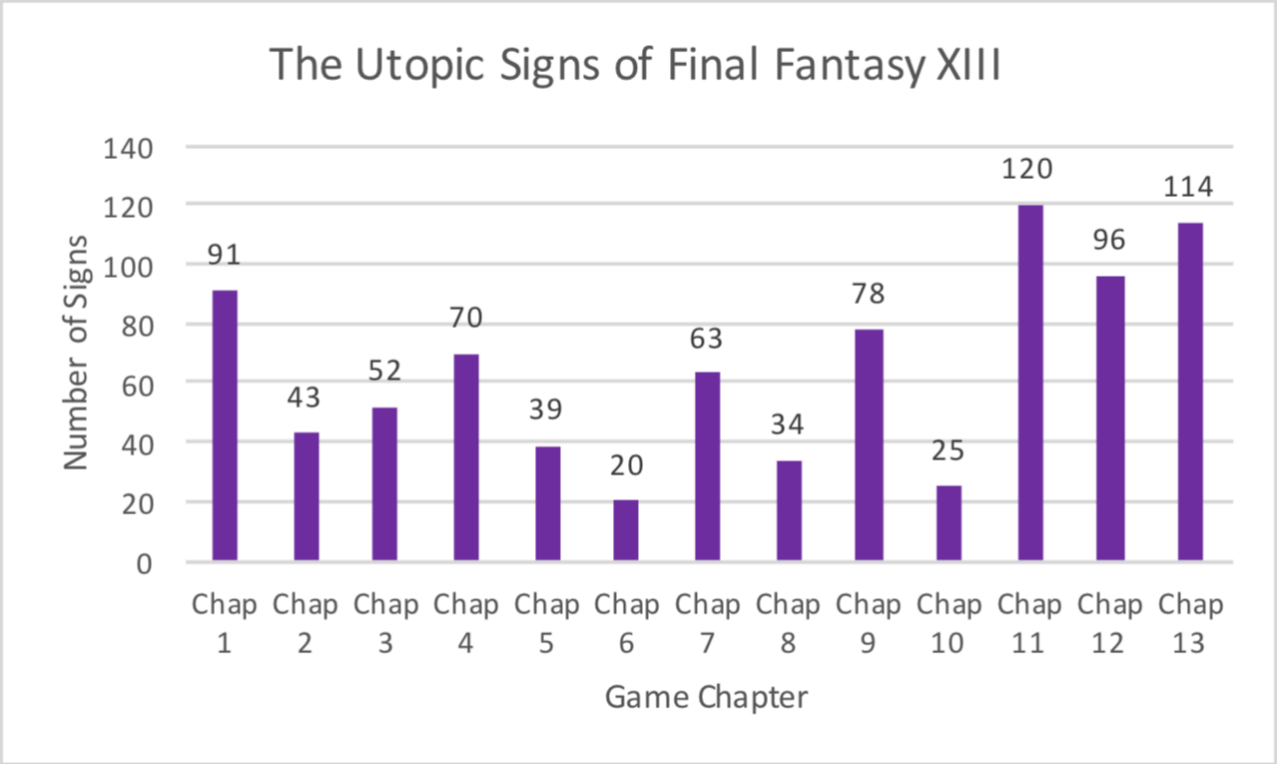
Appendix



Appendix 1: The Utopic Signs of Final Fantasy XIII compiled in the original MA Thesis

'Bloodborne' Schema Sheet

Beginning of Coding:

End of Coding:

Sign Code	Description of Sign

Appendix 2: Example of Bloodborne's Coding Sheet