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Playing at History: Resurrection Man and Historiographic Game Design

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PLAYING AT HISTORY:
RESURRECTION MAN AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC GAME DESIGN

by

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ABSTRACT

Playing at History: *Resurrection Man* and Historiographic Game Design investigates historical representation in video games and argues that two types dominate: 1) a semantic approach that engages players with the past via visual expressions; and 2) a cause and effect simulation approach that positions players in the context of historically situated possibilities. However, the author posits that the expressive power of video game worlds and mechanics afford deeper potentials for historical engagements. The author pursues a game design approach that takes seriously representations of the past and places player inquiry at the forefront of the gameplay experience.

The historically contextualized video game is frequently discussed in the context of documentary discourse. However, the author posits that this is an insufficient label and suggests the descriptive term *historiographic*. The author explains that, in contrast to traditional documentary media that privilege preservation, games are interactive experiences that offer to players a space of possibility in which to investigate and interpret micro-historic behaviors, actions, and events.

The author concludes with a discussion of her prototype video game, *Resurrection Man,* in which players assume the role of a slave purchased by the Georgia Medical College in Augusta, who procured fresh corpses from a cemetery. The author/designer discusses the alpha and beta versions of this concept and explains specific design choices to demonstrate how video games function as historiographic media in order to educate players and invite their consideration of a particular micro-historic instance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC ....*Assassin's Creed*

DW ....*Dynasty Warriors*

GUI .... Graphical User Interface

HUD.. Heads Up Display

RM ....*Resurrection Man*

ROTTK ....*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

CHAPTER 1

VIDEO GAMES TO MAKE PEOPLE INTERESTED IN HISTORY

History-themed video games abound. Their pervasiveness is evident as one browses the shelves of a local video game retailer or peruses the best selling video games list on amazon.com. As of December 2013 Amazon's list of best selling video games includes titles such as *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (Amazon, 2013, December). The manufacturer description on the game's Amazon product page announces:

> It is 1715. Pirates rule the Caribbean and have established a lawless pirate republic. Among these outlaws is a fearsome young captain named Edward Kenway. His exploits earn the respect of pirate legends like Blackbeard, but draw him into an ancient war that may destroy everything the pirates have built.
> (Amazon, 2013)

Certainly, it is not uncommon for commercial entertainment titles to embed a game's narrative into a specific moment in time. In such video games, history serves as a backdrop against which the narrative's play and conflict unfold. Likewise, video games frequently feature narratives set in a specific era for the exclusive purpose of highlighting a species of conflict commensurate with a particular historic moment. Amazon's product page for *Assassin's Creed III* includes this description:

> The American Colonies, 1775. It's a time of civil unrest and political upheaval in the Americas. As a Native American assassin fights to protect his land and his people, he will ignite the flames of a young nation's revolution. Assassin's Creed III takes you back to the American Revolutionary War, but not the one you've read about in history books.
> (Amazon, 2012)

The appeal of unfamiliar territories and time periods renders history marketable for game designers and developers. The *Assassin's Creed* (AC) series is just one popular example of the industry capitalizing on historic conflict to establish a game's setting and to deliver a robust play environment.[1]

The marketability of historically-contextualized video games is also attributable to the past being unfamiliar—exotic even—because it allows players an opportunity to interact with a unique place and time in a way that is more inviting than "the one you've read about in history books" (Amazon, 2012). In contrast to text and film media that position audiences as spectators, video game players are invited to interact with content via direct control of a protagonist or gameworld.[2] In this way, the past is dynamically explored and investigated as particulars of the era are visually presented to players.

Series such as *Assassin's Creed* feature historically-informed weaponry, fashion, architecture and lifestyles, which differ greatly from the everyday experiences of players who may be less likely to read a history book or view an educational documentary. At the moment of this writing, the video game medium benefits from comprehensive cultural appeal and popular accessibility, due in large part to its success in the entertainment

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[1] The popularity of historicized narratives is not surprising. It is efficient for designers because it provides them a pre-existing set of resources, such as characters, conditions, and environments upon which to base the story as opposed to purely fictional narratives that require the development of unique worlds and characters. World building and original character creation take an enormous amount of time and creative power, even when poached from the history books.

[2] I use gameworld to refer to a game's space of possibility. Players manipulate a gameworld through their control of characters and/or the "camera," which allows them to traverse the virtual environment, as well as their interactions with game objects such as non-playable characters, weapons and other items.

industry. With a projected industry growth to $87 billion by 2017,[3] many players of video games like AC are, in fact, introduced to a historical topic for the first time by *playing* through it rather than reading or watching about it.[4]

1.1 HISTORIOGRAPHIC VIDEO GAMES

Commercial video games tend to subordinate history to the foregrounding of gameplay, action hero characters, and grand-fantasy narratives. While this approach is instrumental in bringing to light historically relevant topics and events, I propose that video games, especially those made by independent and serious game developers, might pursue more complex uses of historical fact. The design approach that I propose utilizes

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[3] Gaudiosi, John. (2012, July 18). New Reports Forecast Global Video Game Industry Will Reach $82 Billion By 2017. *Forbes.* Retrieved December 8, 2013, from http://www.forbes.com/sites/johngaudiosi/2012/07/18/new-reports-forecasts-global-video-game-industry-will-reach-82-billion-by-2017/.

[4] The *Assassin's Creed* series prides itself on historical veracity despite featuring a story that revolves around the fictional feud between two ancient organizations, the Assassins and Knights Templar. The over-arching narrative obviously involves a great deal of fantasy and fiction. Creative liberties aside, Ubisoft, the series' developer and publisher, hired journalist Colin Woodard as a historical consultant for *Black Flag*. Woodard, author of *The Republic of Pirates,* collaborated with the lead scriptwriter and checked the script for accuracy. He corrected counterfactual dialogue, such as characters discussing capital cities of countries not yet in existence, and revised the use of modern-day slang (O'Rourke, 2013, November 1). Ubisoft's concerns for historical integrity in the AC script demonstrates that they strive for an authentic experience even if other liberties are taken with plot and gameplay. It is apparent that the designers strike a balance between historical accuracy and authenticity of gameplay to make their games appealing to players. I think that this is an important point; if historically situated games privilege accuracy above all else players will not play them due to, for example, complexity and/or confusion. If games are not played, the message does not disseminate; essentially, games that are not played have little to no relevance and make no profit. Accessibility is crucial and this is what many commercial games do for history: make it more accessible and relevant to a generation of audiences reared on digital media.

the expressive power of video game mechanics to imagine the historical past in such ways that ensure that a variety of possible histories are open to player engagement. In this respect, the spectacle of the game and its play assumes secondary, but not necessarily subordinate, role in relation to the history it represents.

It is necessary to remember that histories are *written*. If we understand the video game as a repository, or archive, of facts and artifacts for enacting narratives through play, then game play becomes a kind of historiography. A player's approach to playing a video game ensures that a variety of outcomes and interpretations of the game's story and characters are possible. Historically contextualized games offer a simulative environment that encourages player interpretations of a historical figure, event, or era.

I contend that video games afford different, and potentially deeper, understandings of the past than other, more traditional forms of historical representation. I do not suggest that video games *replace* the textual accounts or film representations of the past, merely that they might complement and augment these more traditional forms. In this regard, I propose that *historiographic* games provide an alternative means for representing the past in the context of history's existing media ecology. I also argue that there is real merit and meaning in playing historically contextualized games and similar interactive media that adopt the historiographic approach.

To imply that game designers, developers, and even players might *write* history in the act of making and playing games is a serious proposition. In what follows, I endeavor to elucidate what constitutes ludic historiography and how it might be recognized as a relevant and productive form of a player-authored interpretation of history. I encourage

game designers to embrace historiographic design and gameplay so that video games will

be taken seriously as a medium for historical engagement and inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

TWO KINDS OF HISTORY

When asked "Do you think video games are an appropriate medium for getting

people interested in history?" journalist Colin Woodard replied:

> I think video games are enormously powerful, perhaps the most powerful,
> gateway to do that [to tell us about our past and how it informs our
> present], because you're so immersed in the world. You're actually
> adventuring within it and taking on the guise of a character and you have
> an audiovisual experience that's extremely powerful, artistically rendered
> and meant be [sic] immersive. I think the power that has, is hard to match
> in any other medium.
> (O'Rourke, 2013, November 1)

Woodard's discussion highlights the strength of video games to engage players with

histories they might not otherwise come to know. Woodard, who served as a historical

consultant for *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag,* also acknowledges that video games have

their limitations for historical engagement and suggests that to "go deeper" one must

consult the source text.

I share Woodard's perspective that most commercial games present history only

at a superficial level, insofar as they typically represent history in one of two ways. On

one hand, as the AC series demonstrates, they may feature historically contextualized

settings, individuals, and other elements indicative of a specific time period. Or, as a turn-

based strategy game like Tecmo-Koei's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* exemplifies,

they may also demonstrate abstract, cause and effect processes via rule-based

simulation.[5] In the former case, history serves a predominately semantic function in which the narrative events transpire within the gameworld. The latter approach reveals decision-based possibilities and related consequences that extend across periods of time within the gameworld.

To demonstrate these two types of historical representation commonly employed by commercial video games, I refer to Tecmo-Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* (DW) and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (ROTTK). These two franchises are based on Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a historical-fiction novel set in China's Three Kingdoms period, 169 AD to 280 AD. Both series are developed by the same Japanese company but are also popular throughout Asia, the United States and Europe. Through their globalized distribution, these games present Western players with historical narratives and figures outside of the public education curricula in the United States and Europe that focuses on a Westernized perspective.

What I find interesting about DW and ROTTK is *how* play serves to inform the history of China's Three Kingdoms period. Despite sharing the same basic plotline, historical context, and figures, the two game series could not be more different from one another. DW is not realistic; these games are of the *hack and slash* variety, a genre that

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[5] Games for education advocates such as Kurt Squire and Jeremiah McCall favor the simulation genre for teaching historical processes in the classroom. While simulation games demonstrate procedural cause and effect relationships overtime, they often feature long playing times, tedious menu navigation and complex controls that often limit their accessibility to niche audiences.

emphasizes combat action during gameplay.[6] The objective of each battle is to eradicate the opposition army's general.

Featuring a cast of eccentric, anime-styled characters and over-the-top combat, DW is a poor simulation of ancient Chinese war tactics and culture. However, the game successfully engages many players with the historical context. At the start of each level players, who assume the role of the warrior-character, are briefed by the commanding officer about the battle and informed of the current political situation. During play characters engage in conversation with enemies and allies, which provides players with an understanding of their relationship to one another. Furthermore, the occasional cut-scene also provides situational context.[7]

Romance of the Three Kingdoms, on the other hand, is simulative, insofar as it models a real-life system using a virtual one.[8] As a strategic turn-based roleplaying game,

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[6] In each installment the player controls a warrior-character from the third-person perspective on a battlefield environment. The player *mashes*, for lack of a better word, a series of buttons to perform powerful attacks upon swarms of enemy soldiers. *Mashes* generally describes an unrefined play-style, a tactic that involves rapid presses of buttons on the game controller, as opposed to methodically timed presses and memorized input combinations. Mashing is often the opposite of strategy and is commonly employed by players unfamiliar with *hack and slash* and fighting games. However, it is not an entirely unsuccessful method when a player is unaccustomed to the controls. These types of games, such as DW, are often completed using button mashing on the easy difficulty setting.

[7] To supplement the combat-based play, *Dynasty Warriors* features a browse-able encyclopedia accessible from the main menu. The encyclopedia includes character birth and death dates, biographies, synopses of major events and battles, and a timeline. While likely ignored by casual players, the information is accessible for the hardcore fan's deep engagement and interpretation.

[8] For my own design purposes, I also use simulation broadly speaking to consider how digital games imitate real-world operations virtually (e.g. another system, a character's physical actions, human behaviors, etc.). Gonzalo Frasca takes this further to suggest that simulations are representational forms that do not necessarily require a "real referent"

players control a warlord, or another ranking figure, to manage their territory's resources and command armies to wage war on neighboring regions. They also influence political decisions such as forging alliances, arranging marriages, and negotiating diplomatic outcomes. The player chooses the most opportune moment to invade other territories, but certain battles and events are inevitable based on the documented history.

While both series feature a particular historical context of the Three Kingdoms period of ancient China, they mobilize history very differently.[9] Each, in its own way, demonstrates the "gateway" (Woodard in O'Rourke, 2013) approach to piquing interest in players. Many American and European fans are introduced to this particular era of Chinese history through these games and have the opportunity to learn more with the aid of online resources, dialogue with Chinese players and other historically savvy fans, and

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(2004, 93, note 1). The simulation *genre*, however, is marked by player deployments of strategy, planning, and resource management and often provides players a top-down perspective over a landscape, usually a geographic domain that they maintain. The top-down point of view is successful for this type of strategic play; however, I contend that it also distances players from the intimacies of the historical account to such an extent that it is not an ideal perspective for the type of game design that I advocate.

[9] It could be argued that *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is more realistic than *Dynasty Warriors* because the former places players in a leadership role in which their strategic decisions, such as cultivating crops, training soldiers, exploiting weaknesses of the enemy and so on, affect the degree to which their efforts toward conquest succeed. Through play, the game simulates the cause and an effect relationship brought forth from ruling and demonstrates the multitude of factors involved in nation building. Conversely, DW represents war as a one-versus-one-hundreds scenario in which victory is achieved primarily through an individual's strength, skill and determination; an enemy commander can be eradicated within minutes, which serves as the win state. Far less realistic than ROTTK, it nonetheless sutures players to their historic character-general. The unique characters in DW interpret each scenario, or levels, as the player controls them though the battlefield. Characterizations in DW are essentially one-dimensional anime tropes but are far more memorable than the static portraits and text that represent historic figures in ROTTK. Each game appeals to different audiences thus widening the reach and accessibility of the source material.

by reading the source novel for themselves. In fact, the novel is available electronically and features over 13,000 reader annotations on the webpage's margins.[10]

Commercial video games like *Assassin's Creed*, *Dynasty Warriors* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* feature historical settings, characters and events made accessible to players. I contend that these games are useful ways to expose audiences, particularly younger players, to histories and eras that they would otherwise not know of or have investment in. Exciting as this may be for the commercial sector, I explore how independent game developers might represent history, not as a backdrop of a particular period in which to establish an entertaining narrative and/or combat simulation, but rather, in a way that brings awareness to and interpretation of micro-historical accounts to the forefront of the player's experience.

Tracy Fullerton discusses an emergent genre of video games called "docu-games." The term "docu-game" describes historically situated digital games that are primarily conceived for purposes other than pure entertainment or profit (2008; Bogost and Poremba, 2008; Mather, 2006, Raessens, 2006). She proposes that these types of games serve as documentary records of the past. In keeping with Fullerton, I propose that designers strive towards a historiographic approach to game creation. This perspective suggests that video games may serve as a repository of historical content available for

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[10] *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is available online at http://www.threekingdoms.com/. Furthermore, Koei Warriors is a popular fan-website for *Dynasty Warriors, Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and similar video games. The website's discussion forums have over 32,000 registered members and hundreds of members are online daily to engage in conversations about the games, characters, and history and source novel. Koei Warriors website is available at: http://koeiwarriors.co.uk/. The discussion forums are accessed at: http://s13.zetaboards.com/koeiwarriors/index/.

player engagement and interpretation. The development of historiographic game design

complements the expanding media ecology of history that includes text, film, games,

mobile applications, augmented reality, interactive museum pieces and other forms of

interactive   digital   media.[11]

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[11] Arguably, these media representations of history have larger public appeal than traditional texts, which are often weighed down with academic language and dense contextualization.

CHAPTER 3

DIGITAL MEDIA AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

John Tosh defines historiography as "the study of the writing of history" (2010, p.65). Understanding historiography as the process and practice of writing history acknowledges the interpretative work of the historian and the subsequent written text. New modes of writing history are now possible with the affordances of digital media.[12] As Stephen F. Anderson explains in *Technologies of History*, newly available technologies challenge the conventional methods of historiography. Likewise, he argues, that the role of the historian changes according to the context provided by such technologies. While the historian traditionally was/is expected to write historical analysis grounded in facts, Anderson views this traditional practice of historiography to be problematic. Moreover, he points out that historical writing is deeply embedded in the prevailing ideologies and literary conventions of the respective time.

From Anderson's perspective, we might understand that all history, written or mediated by any form, is neither neutral nor impartial but rather, biased from its inception. History is informed by an expert's *selection* of particulars from primary

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[12] The practice of writing history must be critically examined, especially in light of the interpretations of past events that change over time. History is, through the practice of writing—or, as I contend game design—mutable. John Tosh discusses the writing of history as a thoroughly complex and contested practice; different approaches to historical writing as description, narrative, and/or analysis have pros and cons and often offer divergent interpretations. Tosh also states that primary sources must be interpreted: "For it is in the act of writing that historians make sense of their research experience and bring into focus whatever insights into the past they have gained" (2010, p.149).

materials. Selection, here, is key because it acknowledges that history is constructed in the moment it is written. Selection necessarily means that some information is left out, that is, made absent. In which case, writing history is necessarily, indeed inescapably, an imperfect—because it is incomplete—practice. This means that historical accounts are variable and the histories that gameplay produces are likewise variable.

Anderson's understanding of history is insightful and highly relevant to the changing nature of historiography. He proposes that digital historiographies afford creative interpretations and/or transformations of historical data (2011, p.122-126). His position that the past can be conceived differently, beyond the preservation role of the database and textbook, with the augmentation afforded by interactive technologies is applicable to my discussion of historiographic game design and gameplay.

In his discussion of remediated history via digital formats, Anderson uses the example of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as represented in film, documentary, and serious game. In contrast to traditional forms of historiography, he argues that digital remediations afford more flexibility for spectators' and/or players' engagements of this historic event. Divergent interpretations of the event, in which the Warren Commission is frequently critiqued and the status of Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone gunman are often challenged, results in a paradox:

> The combination of more information and increasingly powerful tools for organizing and accessing that information does not necessarily lead to greater certainty regarding the assassination itself. Indeed, these tools and their associated historical data make it possible to imagine a vast range of histories that do not necessarily move toward more accurate visions of the past.
> (Anderson, 2011, p.134)

Anderson acknowledges that the proliferation of data may complicate, rather than clarify, any established knowledge of an event, such as the Kennedy assassination.

Anderson contends that digital interactives allow users and/or players to experience alternative and counterfactual histories while respecting the conventions of historical linearity and causality (2011). Typically, *what* happened is preserved and uncontested in textual renderings: It cannot be disputed that President Kennedy was shot and killed on November 22, 1963 at Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas. In a serious docu-game such as *JFK: Reloaded*, how it happened is played and negotiated by the player. The *how* is flexible. The game evaluates the player's score based on the accuracy of their shot to that of the trajectory established by the Warren Commission. This invites players to 1) scrutinize and reevaluate the notion of Lee Harvey Oswald as the single shooter, 2) accept the Warren Commission's report as valid, or 3) developed their own hypothesis. Interactive digital media afford alternative points of view that challenge established ideologies of historical truth; players are encouraged to think critically as they come to understand what underpins an accepted historical outcome.[13]

Similarly, historiography recognizes that what constitutes historical accuracy or an accepted outcome may be contested, revised, and altered based on new evidence

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[13] The assassination of President John F. Kennedy has never been an *unmediated* event. Kennedy's motorcade route was published in local newspapers the day before the parade. Abraham Zapruder and other civilians filmed the assassination. Zapruder's film was purchased for distribution of the still images in *Life* magazine. Numerous documentaries have circulated and discussed the footage for public consumption. The Warren Commission report attempts an accurate version of the past but remediations of the Kennedy assassination foment a past that is flexible and open to interpretation. Digital platforms such as Traffic's self-ascribed docu-game *JFK: Reloaded* and virtual reconstructions of Dealey Plaza in the online community *Second Life* encourage a different mode of participant engagement than is afforded by text and filmic media. They offer a space in which to explore alternative scenarios and question *how* events happened and *how* they are framed by the status quo.

and/or by a new generation of thinkers. The discovery of hidden or unknown documents, or the release of previously concealed government files may reveal a great deal of information regarding individuals' contributions, communications, and policies informing or belonging to particular eras. Competing interpretations and near constant revisions of history imply that "accurate visions of the past" (Anderson, 2011, p.134) are a utopian ideal rather than a reality. Digital media offer ways for individuals to negotiate, interpret, and comprehend. This is what historiographic game design and play strives for.

3.1 HYBRID SPACES THAT ENCOURAGE NEW INTERPRETATIONS

With respect to data storage and accessibility, the hybridization of physical and virtual spaces through augmented realities is worthy of discussion. David Mather discusses a not-yet-produced augmented reality (AR) experience called LifePlus Project. It is envisioned to superimpose computer graphics over the archaeological site of Pompeii. In conception, a visitor to the site carries a computer in a backpack that simulates graphical overlays of people living their lives in the ancient city (2006, p.242). In this way, the profound loss of life that followed the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius is made tangible for the visitors.

Similarly, *Ghosts of the Horseshoe* (*Ghosts*), a mobile application for iPad that features AR, weaves together virtual and physical realities so that users may reimagine a space. I cite *Ghosts'* faculty mentors Heidi Rae Cooley and Duncan A. Buell who assert that digital, interactive media offer dynamic possibilities for participants to engage critically with established structures of knowledge (2012).[14] The *Ghosts* app brings to

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[14] Buell and Cooley propose the term "critical interactive" to specify informative, interactive experiences that feature game-like elements but do not necessarily evoke fun or entertainment. Critical interactives endeavor to employ ludic, interactive elements to

visibility the unacknowledged history of slavery at the University of South Carolina

(USC) and its historic Horseshoe as a surprisingly intact landscape of slavery (2012).[15]

This application encourages new ways of thinking about USC's historic Horseshoe and

the role of slavery during the history of the institution. While explicitly not a game (the

application is referred to as a "critical interactive"), *Ghosts* does feature playful elements

to provide immediate feedback with onscreen text, images and audio.[16] These elements

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engage participants "with socially and politically sensitive, indeed, controversial, subject matter" so as to "challenge habitual pleasures" (Cooley, 2012).

[15] *Ghosts* aims to fill in gaps that perforate an established history of the Southern United States. Hundreds of current and prospective students, faculty, and members of the general public traverse the grounds of the Horseshoe daily but hardly take notice of the brick structure that delineates the historic campus. The completed version of *Ghosts* is envisioned to prompt civilians on mobile phones and/or iPad devices via GPS signal when they enter the Historic Horseshoe. When signaled they are invited to download and access the *Ghosts* application. Once initiated it displays mapped locations on the Horseshoe and available sites of participant interaction. The historic Horseshoe at USC lies at the heart of the modern campus and consists of eleven antebellum buildings constructed between 1805 and 1860. This historic landscape is enclosed within a brick wall that once stood at seven feet tall to deter rowdy male students from defying campus curfew. Enslaved individuals made the handcrafted bricks and built the structure which stands today as a testament to their labor. Slaves also cooked and served meals, cleaned facilities, maintained the grounds, chopped wood and performed other daily tasks for students, faculty and for the campus at large. This information is published as an online resource thanks to the research of Dr. Robert Weyeneth and a team of Public History graduate students from USC's Department of History. The website is available at http://library.sc.edu/digital/slaveryscc/index.html. The website is hosted by the university's libraries and is not exactly easy to find unless specifically searched for and does not necessarily lessen the absence of recognition for enslaved labor contributions elsewhere on USC's official website. Cooley and Buell point out that the physical landscape of USC's Horseshoe lacks commemorative placards or other signage to acknowledge publicly the contributions of slaves to the historic campus (2012).

[16] These participatory sites employ the affordances of mobile touchscreen technology to display augmented reality (AR) interfaces, 3D models of razed slave cabins and extant structures, paintings, photographs, audio and features the voice of a slave interpreter.

intend to elicit empathy from participants as many of them encounter the history for the first time (Cooley, 2013). The interaction with the application, physical site, and within the mind of the participant as they reconsider the campus' history suggests that the process is ludic as it strives to change how they perceive it.

Importantly, USC's *Ghosts* and the proposed LifePlus Project at Pompeii contribute to understandings of the past in contemporary public memory. Writing about public memory, David Mathers explains:

> Memories and history are stored not only in the mind but also in the outside world; they are woven together through internal and external systems… these contemporary visualizations can invent, augment and even defy human memories… some applications emphasize historical accuracy, while other applications are designed as flexible, interactive scenarios.
> (2006, p.242)

One's internal memory of a specific history or event as assisted by external technologies and inhabited places is indeed a powerful force for remembrance and reevaluation. Mathers' analysis prompts us to ask, in what *ways* do specific applications iterate "accuracy," while others perform "flexibility"? Accuracy denotes that there is one truth while flexibility suggests alternatives. As mentioned above, it is the *how,* or the interactive moments afforded by technological applications, that are flexible in digital historiographies. In this regard, I believe it is important to distinguish the differences between "accuracy" and "flexibility" in pursuit of historiographic design.

Applications such as *Ghosts* strive for accurate content but offer modes of flexible engagement that allow users to access the data according to their personal interests. In

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Contextual information is paraphrased in condensed format from the Slavery at South Carolina College website.

17

this way, *Ghosts* provides participants with the data they are most interested in discovering as they simultaneously navigate the technological platform in the context of the physical site. I contend that it is the flexible nature of *Ghosts'* interactivity, not its accuracy per se, that marks it as historiographic media. Despite featuring authored content linked to the landscape and buildings, the participant has the ability to navigate, interpret the encountered data, and in the process, draft a historically informed account of the past.

Video games share this capacity to create purposeful and informative experiences as historiographic media. Augmented realities mix physical and virtual data to give new meaning to a space. Similarly, a virtual gameworld provides possibilities that are otherwise impossible to achieve in the real world in order to espouse players' critical thinking. Flexible possibilities in a gameworld via simulations are what make the medium an attractive choice for serious engagement, persuasive messages and representing the past.

CHAPTER 4

SERIOUS, PERSUASIVE, AND DOCUMENTARY GAMES

Scholars from an array of disciplines analyze the various ways in which video games represent socio-cultural issues, news events and histories in order to persuade, inform and educate players. In his seminal text *Persuasive Games,* Ian Bogost sets forth the theory of the rhetorical function of video games, or what he calls procedural rhetoric. Procedural rhetoric, as Bogost defines it, is "the art of persuasion through rule-based representation and interactions" (2007: ix).[17] In other words, Bogost claims that video games that successfully mount procedural rhetoric through a particular mode of engagement have the ability to intervene with the status quo, challenge thoughts and even induce players to question notions of verisimilitude and their commitments to dominant ideologies (Bogost 2007, 2011; Flanagan, 2009). Two genres that tap into this rhetorical power are serious and persuasive games.

Bogost categorizes serious games according to their educational content and/or intent to train players via simulation. Serious games are designed to instill specific outcomes in players; they are generally not open-ended and anticipate expected results. Examples include a flight simulator that instructs the operator how to fly a plane and a

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[17] Rhetoric is procedural in digital artifacts because the code written by a programmer creates rules that generate a type of representation. Behaviors are generated in these procedural environments based on the rule-based models, producing many outcomes that conform to the same overall guidelines. Bogost asserts that video games, and other computational media, that mobilize game mechanics rhetorically have the capacity to disrupt and change players' attitudes and beliefs about the world (2007: ix).

surgery game that introduces medical students to an open-heart procedure. These types of games are commissioned by the likes of government, business, military, health and science organizations. Bogost points out that serious games support the current interests and goals of these sectors. Conversely, he asserts that persuasive games may debate or counter the ideologies promoted by institutions and suggest alternative points of view or outcomes (2007, pp.54-58).

The historiographic game is not serious according to Bogost's definition because it is neither interested in training nor indoctrinating players. The historiographic game is only serious to the extent that the events it represents may be sober. However, I posit that a historiographic game may be persuasive. Like persuasive games, a historiographic game may have an author-intended message or present certain information to evoke a particular response, such as questioning, from players.

The discussion of the historically contextualized serious and/or persuasive game has occurred in the discourse of documentary (Fullerton, 2008; Bogost & Poremba, 2008; Raessens J., 2006; Mather 2006). Broadly construed, the documentary game, or docu-game, affords players the experience of interactive history. Crucially, Tracy Fullerton defines docu-games as a genre distinguished from fictionalized media by their "historical accuracy" (2008).[18] Fullerton analyzes video games that demonstrate, to various degrees, the fundamentals of documentary as outlined by Michael Renov. His fundamentals of the practice include: "(1) to record, reveal or preserve; (2) to persuade or promote; (3) to

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[18] Tracy Fullerton dismisses Gonzalo Frasca's claim that because games always carry a degree of uncertainty ("what could happen") that they are ill suited for historical narrative. She asserts that this line of thinking assumes there is only one historical truth and that it disregards a player's ability to explore and engage with the game as a representation of a specific moment in time (Fullerton, 2008).

analyze or interrogate; (4) to express" (in Fullerton, 2008, p.216). While Fullerton

explains that the first is the "most problematic" when applied to games, (2008, p.217), I

take issue that none of these fundamentals account for interaction, or the *how,* within the

gameworld. Fullerton overlooks that "to record, reveal or preserve" predominately

functions at the semantic level via a gameworld's *mise-en-scene* and narrative

cinematics.[19]

I propose, in response to Fullerton's position, that the documentary label not be

readily applied to video games because it is an insufficient one. Interactivity affords more

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[19] While Fullerton embraces the historical accuracy of *Medal of Honor's* visuals, James Campbell argues that first-person shooter (FPS) video games like *Medal of Honor* fail to represent history realistically by engaging players in inaccurate ludic combat (2008). He distinguishes the real from the representational, as such: real war as recounted in the Second World War was without rules and it was chaotic; friendly fire accidents and civilian casualties were common, as were incidents of panic and mistakes. Games, however, impose rules on warfare: good and bad are clearly identifiable; friendly fire is impossible or controlled; and medical packs instantaneously heal players. The type of war represented in video games is less about unpredictable mistakes than ensuring a player's win or lose status as based on their skill and performance. In this way, video games commonly represent war as formulaic and predictable (Campbell, 2008). The ideology of FPS gameplay is so pervasive that the controls and expectations deviate very little within the genre. In these games, combat is simplified, sanitized and glorified to the extent that it is out of touch with the reality of warfare. Campbell explains that war-themed, FPS games, "May overtly pay tribute to the actual people and events of the Second World War, [but] they also domesticate the tragedy and brutality of the war. They attempt to inject the world of computer games with the reality of history, but in so doing they also make history unreal" (2008, p.198). Here, I interpret Campbell to indicate that the procedural rhetoric of FPS games has failed to represent historical combat realistically. According to him, the procedural logic established by the FPS genre deems warfare purely playful and contingent on rules; as such, these games cannot accurately represent and/or simulate war or history. While I agree with Campbell to an extent, I believe that such conclusions strip away the player's agency to make interpretations of the video game as a constructed and remediated artifact.

opportunity than documenting or preserving[20]; it invites new perspectives on and interpretations of history. In place of the docu-game label I suggest historiographic game as an alternative.[21]

4.1 PLAYER-AUTHORED PROCEDURAL HISTORY

In a historiographic game, the interactive experience afforded by a gameworld engages players within a historical instance, in context and the conditions of its possibilities, and this leads to new insights and perspectives regarding the past. My design approach considers the actions of play as player-authored processes of interpretation. A historiographic game provides structure, like a database or textbook, from which a player makes his or her meanings of a particular represented history.

Video games, through player-controlled interaction, do more than simply present a past; they may in fact, facilitate interpretations of the past. Historiographic games strive to address more than the semantics of an era or simulate abstract processes. Such a game critically engages with past events through gameplay mechanics. Historical elements in commercial video games are often subordinate to gameplay and narrative. I posit that the

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[20] Assuming that documenting or preserving is the prime value embraced by documentary.

[21] I acknowledge all video games as representational and simulative. No video game, or other media representation for that matter, will *authentically* duplicate war, combat, or even history. A war-themed FPS that deviates from the ideology of the genre can certainly be made, but even then, it would still fall far from the real experience. I believe that game mechanics, despite their inauthenticity and dependence on players' connotative participatory actions, still provide serious engagements with historical representations.

game mechanics of and interaction within a historiographic game reinforces historical engagement and players' interpretations.[22]

In new media and video game discourses, interaction is typically defined as an onscreen response prompted by the actions and/or commands of a user (Manovich, 2001). Lev Manovich, in his discussion of new media technologies, suggests that interaction is also about the changing attitudes, thoughts, and decisions of the user as they control/participate with media (2001, p.57). Similarly, Torben Grodal offers that interactivity in video games is more than the agency afforded by simulated worlds. Informed by psychology, Grodal contends that interactivity is also about the changing emotional state of the player as produced by the experiential flow of their actions (2009).

Manovich's and Grodal's cognitive definitions of interactivity apply to the player-centric game design that I suggest for the historiographic approach. These alternative definitions of interactivity are integral to understand how virtual worlds and gameplay

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[22] Action games such as *Assassin's Creed*, *Dynasty Warriors* and *Medal of Honor* may not authentically represent war and combat; however, they still express a place of possibility for players. There is no reason to suggest that because a simulation is a poor representation of reality that the meaning is entirely lost to players. Users of media suspend their disbelief in order to be entertained and engaged. The eccentric combat of DW and the creative liberties of AC may be implausible and counterfactual, but the games still engage players with a historic context. Similarly, FPS games like *Medal of Honor* may diminish the seriousness of war in favor of entertainment, but this does not necessarily mean that the player is unable to understand the historical perspective and recognize the sacrifices of soldiers. I also want to assert that the procedural rhetoric of many commercial historically-based video games does not necessarily complement the historical subject matter. The gameplay mechanics of *Assassin's Creed* or *Dynasty Warriors* could very well be transferred to a purely fictional setting and/or narrative and remain unchanged. The simulative play of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* may be based in a range of historical or fictional settings and also remain unaltered.

may be constructed for the purpose of informing history, insofar as player awareness is instilled and promoted. Gaming and gameplay within virtual worlds is understood as a process of negotiation and interpretation when interaction is acknowledged as the player's cognitive and affective responses to onscreen occurrences. I suggest that effective historiographic games strive for moments of interactivity onscreen that *affect* the interactivity within the mind of the player.

The historiographic game, as I posit it, mounts a critical mode of interaction that draws attention to certain behaviors or actions specific to the historic moment to encourage player awareness. For example, methodically reloading a Springfield Rifled Musket in a Civil War video game may not necessarily be fun or conducive to quick fire gameplay common to most contemporary first-person shooter games. However, it would procedurally engage players with the challenge faced by Union and Confederate infantry on the battlefield and elicit a different—because it is historically-informed—response to particular modes of combat and conflict.

Suggesting that interactivity is the player's emotional response to the game challenges the authorial control of the designer to enforce absolute meaning and outcome. Players bring to games cultural assumptions, life histories, personalities and past playing experiences, all of which influence what they get out of the experience. Research has also shown that games provide rules that structure the play as interpretative experience but do not determine it (Ito, 2009).[23]

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[23] Players, perhaps especially children players, interact with games in surprising ways. Mizuko Ito's *Engineering Play* shows how children appropriate and un-play educational children's software for their own purposes. Her research stresses that the design of an educational game has a structuring, not a determining, effect on how children will receive and play it. For example, Ito discusses contexts in which children try to break the games

Others have critiqued the limitations of procedural rhetoric in video games. Miguel Sicart's criticism of procedural rhetoric stems from his advocacy for a player-centric approach to game design.[24] He views procedural rhetoric as a theory for understanding how video games effectively convey messages, especially political and ethical ones; but he challenges the idea that it is the rules of the game that provide meaning for the player (2011). Sicart understands this as flawed:

> Proceduralism, with its call for systems at the core of the essence of games and its disregard for expressive or ineffective play, turns the act of playing a game into a labor-like action, into work towards an externally decided, predetermined, and rational outcome designed by others than the players. Play becomes *external* to the player and play context.[25]
> (2011).

Sicart's critique of procedural rhetoric is valuable for understanding how political and ethical messages in video games are negotiated and challenged by players.

The example of *JFK: Reloaded* is worth examining again for this purpose. As discussed previously, players assume the role of Lee Harvey Oswald to recreate the infamous assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The awarded score is evaluated by

in order to win with minimal effort. She also explains that they take pleasure in the destructive qualities of games such as *SimCity* rather than drill-based learning (2009).

[24] Miguel Sicart shows that Bogost and other proponents of procedural rhetoric overlook how the effects of persuasive media on players might be measured (2011). Are the effects quantifiable via survey? Qualified through observation of and discussion with players? How might the desired outcomes of procedural rhetoric be proven? These questions and the inspired methodologies seem more appropriate for anthropology or sociology rather than the field of game studies. However, these suggestions are not so strange when understood in the context of Sicart's critique of procedural rhetoric.

[25] Sicart defines games from the proceduralist tradition as often "single player, puzzle or resource management games, with only few 'operations' available to players, and a very limited space of possibility in which players can express themselves" (2011). The designer has carefully selected the options for player action and, according to Sicart, "*plays* the player" (2011).

comparing the player's aim to the trajectory of Oswald's shots as assessed by the Warren Commission. The higher the score in the simulation, the more accurate it is compared to the shots fired by Oswald.

The developers, Traffic, claimed that the game was designed to quell conspiracy theories that suggested more than one shooter was involved in the president's death (Bogost, 2007, p.128). Fullerton remarks that it is challenging to make the shots and receive a full-score based on accuracy. She even suggests that the extreme difficulty in reenacting Oswald's shots may do more to disprove the Warren Commission's claims than it does to support it (2008). This apparently goes against the logic of Traffic's design for *JFK: Reloaded.*

Bogost makes a similar statement in *Persuasive Games* (2007). Bogost's and Fullerton's conclusions suggest that despite the encoded message of the game, players may interpret negotiated or oppositional positions. After playing the game, a player with the inclination to believe Oswald was a patsy or hired a second gunman to shoot from the infamous grassy knoll might be further swayed toward these positions. Conversely, a player that believes the Warren Commission conclusion is valid might come to understand that Oswald was a highly skilled marksman or that the game is simply flawed or inaccurate. This analysis of *JFK: Reloaded* makes it evident that the authorial position of procedural rhetoric can be undermined by player-authored actions in the gameworld and their subsequent interpretations of the outcome.

Historiographic game design acknowledges the multiplicities of history and embraces multiple interpretations based on player-based decisions and outcomes.[26] I modify Fullerton's position that games effectively serve a documentary function and propose that historiographic games actively engage with player agency and interaction inside the gameworld. Writing, or interpreting, history via gameplay is a more active process than simply playing within the semantics of a specific historical context. This approach to designing historically contextualized games is especially suitable to bringing attention to specific behaviors via micro-narratives.

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[26] A historiographic game also pushes historical context to the forefront of the play experience It may also feature multiple win and/or lose conditions that foster dynamic engagements with the past.

CHAPTER 5

HISTORIOGRAPHIC GAME DESIGN: *RESURRECTION MAN*

I address historiographic design and gameplay with my project *Resurrection Man* (RM). RM builds upon the concepts of the serious game and the docu-game to theorize how gameplay might produce historiographic artifacts.[27] It places players in the role of Grandison Harris, a Gullah slave purchased in 1852 from the Charleston, South Carolina slave block by the dean of the Medical College in Augusta, Georgia. It was illegal at the time to educate slaves but Harris's new masters taught him to read, and write, and to dissect bodies. This educational training prepared him for his new task: stealing fresh cadavers buried in the local Cedar Grove Cemetery for use in the medical students' dissections. In RM, players perform the same charge that Harris undertook approximately 160 years ago. Players use stealth to guide Harris through the cemetery and sneak to avoid night watchmen to locate a freshly dug grave, dig through the soil to the coffin, axe it open, retrieve the body, and exit the graveyard to return to the medical school.

Through the locally centered narrative, the game reveals a lesser-known history of slavery in the service of medical practice and education in the 19th century. Play invites participants to question the complex ethics of the dichotomous nature of the bodies present in the game: the body of Grandison Harris, a slave used for labor by the

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[27] I also believe that other designers have successfully produced historiographic gameplay. Traffic, the creators of *JFK: Reloaded* in which players assume the role of Lee Harvey Oswald and attempt to recreate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy*,* is one example*.*

educational institution, and the bodies of the unknown cadavers sold both for Harris's own profit and for use in the university's proliferation of medical knowledge and praxis.

Crucially, *Resurrection Man* does not simply *re-present* the history via accurate semantics but it also serves as a simulation of Harris's task within the historical context. Players interact within the environment and get a sense his labor and its associated risks and rewards. Here, it is important to recall Lev Manovich's and Torben Grodal's understanding of interactivity as not just what happens onscreen but also the cognitive and affective reactions from the player (2001; 2009). The interactivity onscreen and within the minds of players elicits different interpretations of Harris and the practice of a medical institution hiring a slave to retrieve cadavers from cemeteries.

Figure 5.1 An abundance of graphical user interface on the HUD in *Resurrection Man* version 1.0. The integrity bar and similar meters are located in the top-left corner of the screen; the button for body retrieval is positioned center-screen.

The game has changed drastically since the original alpha production in the Fall 2013 semester. It originally featured a heads up display (HUD) that cued players to interact within the environment and in response to enemies. An *integrity* bar located at the top left corner of the game's HUD served as the health system. Harris's integrity bar represented his emotional and physical state to players. The bar was always full at the beginning of play. The integrity bar reduced gradually when the player-as-Harris was within close proximity to enemies, the night watchmen who patrol the cemetery. The diminishing integrity bar attempted to connote Harris's affective response to the close proximity of a potential captor.

The integrity meter also depleted when the player-as-Harris was digging a grave and cleaving a coffin to signify Harris's fatigue. The design choice of a health system (integrity) was implemented in place of character animations of distress/fatigue, such as Harris's arms wavering with the swing of the shovel, that were beyond the capabilities of the author/designer at the time of production. When the integrity bar depleted completely it resulted in a game over and players had the option to try again from the start of the level. These graphic indicators attempted to mount a procedural form of rhetoric about Harris's physical and emotional state that, for the first-time game designer, were otherwise impossible to achieve.

Similar "health" bars and instructions also appeared when players approached a gravesite. The text "Press and Hold E to Dig" prompted players how to unearth the coffin. A "soil amount" bar indicated to players the quantity of dirt that remained to uncover the casket. A similar set of directions and meter materialized when players descended into the grave to reach the exposed coffin. The lid of the wooden casket

disappeared when the "coffin" health bar decreased lower than seventy-five percent "health" to provide the player-as-Harris access to the corpse or skeleton within. A button subsequently manifested onscreen to cue players to "Retrieve Body?" The corpse and/or skeleton disappeared from the tomb to signify that Harris collected the body after players selected the button. These graphical indicators made explicit to players the appropriate interactions in accordance to the represented game objects (dirt, coffin, cadaver). The game was initially designed in this way to compensate for the lack of character animations and equipment models (shovel, axe). The graphical cues provided a structure from which players responded to the established conditions, or rules.

The experience was not easy. Many first time players were not successful in retrieving a corpse/skeleton or exiting the graveyard during the initial play testing phases. It was not uncommon for players to require multiple play sessions to complete the level without getting caught by the night watchmen. The integrity bar often completely depleted, resulting in a game over, before players made it to an actual grave. The difficulty intended to portray the challenge of Harris's task and the associated risks of sneaking into a protected graveyard. The player's struggle with the onscreen interactions, such as avoiding night watchmen to maintain Harris's integrity, aimed to persuade players to empathize with Harris as a person who made a living as a grave robber, not necessarily out of choice, but out of necessity.

The integrity bar health system and other graphical meters no longer exist in the most recent version of *Resurrection Man*. It was decided, after conversations with game designers such as thesis committee member Evan Meaney, that the graphical user interface (GUI) in the form of the multiple "health" bars might confuse and/or distract

players. Environmental cues and animations were suggested as an implicit way to build tension and encourage player interaction in place of the GUI. These new aspects include a soundscape that connotes a dynamic atmosphere through the mixing of environmental sounds such as the snapping of twigs and vocalizations of animals.
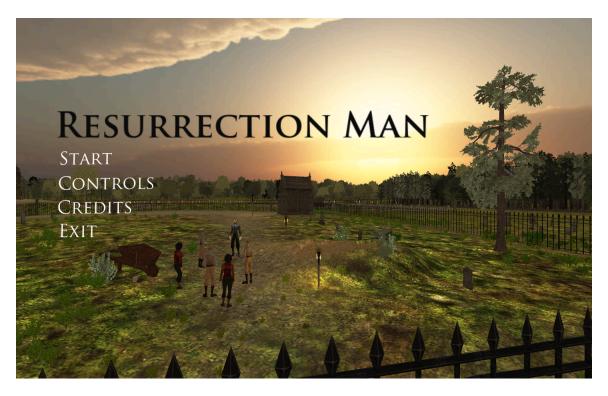

Figure 5.2 *Resurrection Man* version 2.0 main menu features a dynamic rendering of the gameworld.

The main menu dynamically renders a funerary service at the gravesite using the three-dimensional assets from the gameworld. In the first build of RM, the main menu featured static images of medical students posed with cadavers at the dissection table. This menu provided a sense of appropriate historical context; however, the new version is more purposeful because it provides to players the location of the sought-after cadaver in the virtual graveyard. The new menu also features sound to elicit emotion from players. The funeral procession chants the Lord's Prayer to connote the closing of the service and the passage of a life as the sun sinks into the horizon. The title, juxtaposed with the

Lord's Prayer, plays on the meaning of a biblical *resurrection*, and implicitly presents the conflict between religious beliefs and scientific practices at the time. This audio-visual rendering reminds players that the body that they pilfer, as Harris, was once a living, breathing human who was loved and is missed by other persons.

There are also scripted events that cue the player's interactions, both onscreen and cognitively. The player is outside the cemetery at the level's start. The gate in front of them is shut and cannot be opened. The gate opens when an animated non-playable character (NPC) exits the cemetery and quickly shuts again. This animation informs the player that the NPC is likely a guest from the finished funeral, that the cemetery is closed for the evening, and that the only way in is to sneak through elsewhere, not unlike the historic Harris.

Figure 5.3 An alternative entrance into the cemetery in *Resurrection Man* version 2.0.

5.1 A Change of Perspective

The original version of *Resurrection Man* positioned players in control of Grandison Harris via third person perspective. The current version, however, positions the players-as-Harris in the first person perspective. My intention in the original design was to emphasize Harris's physical burden as he labored in the landscape; the third-person represents the player-character's actions more meaningfully as it demonstrates a range of actions such as physical labor, bodily stress, corporeal power and weaknesses.[28]

I also believe that third person is more suitable for the historiographic nature of RM. According to game designer Richard Rouse, the first person perspective provides "a blank-slate onto which the player can project whatever kind of personality they want" onto the character that they control (1999). In contrast, Rouse suggests that characters controlled via third person perspective often have stronger, more defined, personalities and that the player perceives the character as their surrogate in the gameworld.[29] For this reason, I believe third person is more suitable for historiographic games in which the player controls a historic individual because the game acknowledges the established, known person rather than seeks to embed the player's personality into the figure.

A common argument for first person perspective as a superior mode for gameplay is that it is more immersive than the third person point of view. Richard Rouse explains

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[28] Third person perspective in video games is common for survival-horror and stealth genres (arguably, *Resurrection Man* has elements of both genres). I believe that third person perspective is more likely to elicit empathy and concern from players because they are able to observe the character's body in relation to the environment and enemies.

[29] Rouse also contends that a first person perspective functions best for trigger-happy shooters, while a third person perspective is superior for action-adventure and puzzle-solving (1999).

that in the third person point of view, "[when player's] view their surrogate [the player's character] performing the actions they command, players intuitively realize that the character doing all those cool moves is very much not them" (1999). Here, Rouse contends that the character's visible performance onscreen serves as a constant disruption to the player's ability to suture to the experience. In contrast, Rouse asserts that first person perspective and its "blank-slate" characterization affords players the opportunity to imagine themselves more deeply invested in the diegetic gameworld and that this results in a higher degree of player immersion. However, because the third person perspective places the character as "surrogate" to the player, I believe that it is not in conflict with historiographic game design. In fact, I argue that because the player is positioned to control a historical figure that "immersion," per se, is not the objective of the experience. As such, an appropriate degree of distance between the player and the character, as afforded by third person perspective, is ideal because it allows players to acknowledge the historic figure as a distinct entity.[30]

The switch from third person perspective to first person perspective in the second build of the game was a choice of convenience rather than one of aesthetics or

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[30] Laurie N. Taylor challenges the assumption that the first person perspective represents the "ideal-player-character" because it affords players the capacity to view the environment through the "eyes" of the character and, as such, is the most representative of "real life" (2002). Taylor points out that, contradictory to what many designers and scholars suggest, first person perspective is unrealistic because the player typically cannot view any part of the character's body other than their arm and/or weapon available for view on the heads up display (2002). In contrast to this, third person point-of-view presents a bodied character within the space; the player is able to perceive the environment and enemies positioned in relation to the character. This perspective compensates for what first person leaves out: the awareness of other bodies in the gameworld that are outside the character's forward-facing, non-peripheral line of vision. As such, Taylor asserts that third person perspective offers a "richer visual presentation" (2002, p.29), a sentiment that I also share.

immersion. Unfortunately for the author/designer, animating a character model to hold a shovel, dig soil, swing an axe, and chop the wood of the coffin, proved to be too much of a challenge under the learning curve and time constraints. As the author/designer, I was reluctant to make the change from third person to first person perspective because I thoroughly supported the original design choice. However, I acknowledged my limitations: I knew that learning to animate a character to perform multiple actions in a single semester would be difficult; I discerned it was far more feasible to animate the shovel and axe models from the first person perspective to simulate digging and chopping, respectively. I decided to experiment with first person perspective and I discovered that, for expediency sake, the sacrifices were worth it. I also realized that the first person perspective provides a more intimate view of the gameworld that the third person perspective lacked. The first person camera angle may elicit unsettling emotions in players in the moment they retrieve the corpse from the grave. There are, however, issues beyond that of immersion for the implementation of first person perspective in *Resurrection Man*.

Figure 5.4 Carrying the corpse from first person perspective in *Resurrection Man* 2.0.

In the final prototype of *Resurrection Man*, I acknowledge that my decision to position players as Grandison Harris via first person perspective poses the risk of racial erasure. I want to assert that this is not my intention; here, I reaffirm that knowledge and time constraints, more than any other factors, influenced my choice to implement the first person perspective. However, I realize that I cannot ignore the sensitivity of this decision because the narrative of RM and its characterization/representation of Grandison Harris are inherently embroiled in the discourses on American Slavery and African-American oppression.

In employing first person perspective I do not intend to evoke notions of "identity tourism" or "cybertyping" (Nakamura, 2000; 2006). Identity tourism, as posited by Lisa Nakamura, is the pleasure that anonymity offers individuals, usually white educated men, when they perform as racially-stereotyped characters in text-based social role playing

games, such as multi-user dungeons (MUDs) and MUDS object-oriented (MOOs). These script-based environments via online servers afford normally privileged groups an opportunity to masquerade as another race, or even gender, through the veil of onscreen text. Nakamura contends that such performances, rather than liberate notions of race and gender in the virtual, merely reinforce existing stereotypes in the real world because they very rarely deviate from status-quo assumptions.

Resurrection Man's characterization of Harris, an African-born slave, might receive criticism from scholars who interpret the player-as-white in the moment it positions players in the first person perspective. Without the necessary contextualization of being told who the player-as-Harris is, some might argue that players may assume that they operate through the lens of a Caucasian male. Third person perspective, as well, is similarly problematic in the moment that white players recognize themselves as a person of color. Nakamura asserts that identity tourism "[reduces] non-white identity positions to part of a costume or masquerade to be used by curious vacationers in cyberspace" (2000). Third person perspective in RM may unintentionally evoke similar notions of exoticizing a minority person. Here, I understand that race, representation, and player perspective are complex issues that a game like RM contends with. However, I want to intervene in these assumptions to suggest that effective and thoughtful representation of a person of color might comprise of additional characterization devices, including but not limited to, voice over narration, simulation of Grandison's hands holding the tools onscreen, and narrative cinematics that demonstrate a deeper sense of his identity.

The player's perspective in a video game that involves the characterization of an African-born slave is not without problematic representation; it will almost certainly

arouse scrutiny. However, the prototype of *Resurrection Man,* while ultimately inspired by the history of Grandison Harris, is more or less representational of any grave robber, be they African-born, white, or otherwise. This, to me as the designer/author, is what is important at the heart of the gameplay experience and player interaction within the game.

I believe successful player engagement via point of view makes visible the character's actions in the gameworld. Performing and bearing witness to the grave robber's actions (avoiding capture, digging graves, pilfering bodies, etc.) enhances the players' interactive responses, both onscreen and cognitively/affectively. When players explore the cemetery as Grandison Harris via first person perspective they may realize the impact of his labor on the landscape and towards the stolen bodies, even if this orientation is not ideal for historiographic games. I acknowledge and account for the first person perspective as problematic for the representation of an African-born slave because it might assume the player's character as white. Third person point of view, not without potential issues, would likely be reconsidered if development of *Resurrection Man* continues. Despite the potential for controversy, I assert that it is the history of Grandison Harris that is placed at the forefront of the gameplay experience; and that in doing so his story is made tangible for a public audience.

5.2 THE HISTORY BEHIND THE GAME

A player's simulated grave robbing constructs a loose historical narrative about Harris. The simulated actions in the virtual environment change according to a player's unique circumstances during engagement with the game. Here, I make no claim that what occurs in the game is an accurate representation of Harris's grave robbing, merely that it simulates an idea of what his actions may have been in the historical context and in light

of the given resources. That said, the history that the game presents is not counterfactual or paradoxical. Rather than simply reading about Harris, the game affords the player an opportunity to *experience* enslaved labor, and its potential risks, in the cemetery landscape. Players are encouraged to empathize with Harris and question the ethics behind the work that he, and the medical institution, operated.[31]

The current version of *Resurrection Man* is not a stand-alone piece of historiography. There is no contextualization unless players are, prior to playing, made aware of the illicit body-economy to which Harris contributed in order to make a living. As is, RM provides a virtual space of possibility for players to explore and experience the micro-history that is body snatching. It lacks a fully developed narrative due to the time constraints associated with a thesis project.

Historian Tanya Telfair Sharpe discusses the complex case of Grandison Harris and argues that his unorthodox status sheds light on the often-obfuscated histories of slaves who operated within the system of slavery but achieved a relative degree of power within both white and black communities. Harris's unconventional role at the college

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[31] Grandison Harris labored for the medical school from 1852 to 1908. During this time period it was illegal for bodies to be donated for medical science in the United States. In 1789, New York legislation permitted the corpses of executed criminals to be donated to medical institutions but these instances were so infrequent that the demand for bodies remained near constant. In order to provide students with proper medical education, professors sought fresh cadavers for anatomical instruction (Wilder, 2013). What makes this history particularly complex is that without resurrection men such as Harris, American medical science may not have advanced as much as it did in the early twentieth century. A new generation of doctors learned from and practiced on illegally snatched cadavers such as the ones stolen by Harris. Not only did Harris's dead victims foster productive doctors but he also received profit for each corpse brought to the school. The College also paid for Harris's room, board, clothing, and provided alcohol; whisky was used to preserve bodies in caskets before dissection. (Sharpe, 1997, p.213).

complicates more narrow histories that often represent slavery in the United States as a singular experience across regions, communities, and social classes. Such histories often overlook figures like Harris, who as a slave unwillingly—or willingly—operated within the hegemony of the dominant order (Sharpe, 1997).[32]

Telfair elaborates that Harris's visible wealth and success created his complex position within the black community. Many blacks were aware that his role at the Medical College exceeded standard janitorial duties. For this reason Harris was stigmatized; the combination of fear and awe that many blacks held toward him meant that he was reluctantly accepted as a "tolerated outcast" (Telfair, 1997, p.219).

Harris's affluence and education also meant that many blacks resented his status. Harris had wealth and he exploited his own people to achieve it; a statistically significant number of bones found in the basement of the Medical College belonged to "African American" individuals (Blakely and Harrington, 1997, p.174). This is because Harris knew that the graves of African Americans and the poor were the least protected at the pauper's Cedar Grove Cemetery (Telfair, 1997).

Harris largely remains an enigmatic figure to those who have written about him and for those who have heard his story. His contradictory status as an African American grave robber during and after slavery makes him an interesting historical case study.

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[32] Members of the black community overlooked Grandison Harris's nighttime activities because he had wealth and social status. He hosted lavish parties for the outstanding individuals in the black community, participated in civic leadership within the Pythians Masonic Lodge and his association to the university led many to consider him the first black doctor at the college. Telfair compares Harris's "tolerated acceptance" within the black community of Augusta to the modern day example of drug dealers within poor, urban populations whose members turn a blind eye to the illicit activities of their neighbors as long as they make profit and do their part to contribute (1997).

This is why I believe his story, as a micro-history on grave robbing, is an excellent subject for a historiographic video game.

5.3 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Currently, *Resurrection Man* is a work in progress and it is my intent that it continues development according to the historiographic approach to game design. In order to be realized as true historiographic game it should emphasize Harris's valued role within the Medical College as a mentor to the students and assistant to the staff, in addition to the featured grave robbing scenario. Harris was very good at his job and was a respected figure at the school as indicated by his presence in many of the graduating class photos (Sharpe, 1997, p.214). Harris not only performed the unpleasant duty of corpse collecting, which removed the burden from college faculty, staff members, and students, but he was also knowledgeable in his own right about anatomy and dissection. He often helped instruct students who, in turn, frequently requested his assistance (Sharpe, 1997).[33]

The historiographic approach to game design is best suited for micro-histories, that is, particular moments in time and space, in which activities occur at the local level rather than the global. Engaging with history on the local spectrum still speaks to a larger historical narrative For example, *Resurrection Man* is locally centered on Grandison

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[33] My goal for RM is that it features an additional level that takes place in the medical lab at the college. In this scenario players might instruct students on dissection practices and provide anatomy lessons. In this way players would be confronted with the duality of Grandison Harris's existence: simultaneously resented by members of the black and poor communities who feared he would prey upon the bodies of their deceased family members and respected by students and staff at the medical college who benefitted from his loyal service and knowledge.

Harris and the Georgia Medical College but, at the same time, it adds to the commentary on the history of American medical science in the institutional setting during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A video game like RM could certainly employ a generic grave robber but such a design decision would diminish the impact of the gameplay's historiographic relevance. Giving a *face* to the past makes it more tangible for players. In my envisioned final version of RM, Harris speaks his thoughts to players during gameplay and keeps a record of activities in a journal that players refer to for hints and anecdotes. In this way, players might more easily suture to his identity.

Conceiving a historiographic game is an iterative process. Research is essential as is dialogue with scholars, production team members, and potential players.[34] *Resurrection Man is* essentially the alpha version of the form that a historiographic game might assume. It provides players a space of possibility in which to perform the micro-narrative of the body snatcher Grandison Harris.

It aspires to provide more than the basic semantic elements of the era by simulating an illicit activity that was nonetheless necessary for the contemporary medical institutions. Through play and exploration players are invited to engage with a simulation

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[34] For historically situated video games, commercial designers and developers may hire appropriate expert consultants to assist with fact checking, as Ubisoft did with the *Assassin's Creed* series, to maintain a degree of historical integrity in the completed game. Academics and authors are a great resource for production companies to collaborate with on historically sensitive game projects. Designers and developers may also conduct secondary research by engaging with books, articles and various online resources such as museum websites and topical wikis. They may also step into the role of the historian themselves at a research library or archive to consult with primary documents—letters, diaries, newspaper accounts and other records contemporary to the event in question.

of a moment in space and time. In doing so, players get a sense of the man, his role and his reputation. The interpretation of Harris, his labor and the institution—be it deemed morally good or bad—is entirely open to players.

Resurrection Man is my intervention into and critique of the application of documentary methods for game analysis and design. As I have suggested, the documentary moniker insufficiently describes how history and past events are represented in video games. In place of documentary games, I propose that the descriptive term "historiographic" be used to specify historically contextualized gameworlds, gameplay, and narratives. This approach to game design embraces history, and players' understanding of it, as malleable and subject to re-interpretation. It also aims to foster players' appreciation of the questions that make histories relevant to contemporary ways of thinking.

Media continue to reimagine and remediate hundreds, if not thousands, of histories for a consuming public. Video games contribute to the existing media ecology for history and offer to the public a different way to conceptualize the past. I believe that it is imperative that historiographic games and digital media are analyzed, understood and developed for public engagements and contributions to knowledge.

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45

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