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Hyperreal Battlefields: Individual Action and the Composition of Enemy in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 1 & 2*

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**Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Perley Isaac Reed School of Journalism
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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in
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Abstract

Hyperreal Battlefields: Individual Action and the Composition of Enemy in *Call of Duty:*

Modern Warfare 1 & 2

Jeff Yeager

Speculative fictions present us with stories that ask the question “what if?” In the past decades there has been a noticeable increase in the amount of speculative fiction in Western popular media. War-themed video games represent one of the most popular interactive texts that have embraced the speculative fiction genre. There is a multitude of research that examines non-fiction war games and those based loosely on some actual or historical conflict. This research diverges from that path by analyzing the narrative and structure of a series of fictional war games set in the modern era. The game presents a narrative structured much like that of a theatrical performance. Characters, settings, and conflicts have foundations based on reality that help develop a hyperreal simulation of international conflict in a fictional gameworld. Through the use of narrative analysis, along with an examination of the game’s structure, this research shows how concepts of modern socialization, popular war themes, and recollections of past enemies combine to create a fictional portrayal of modern war. The research reveals how the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series attempts to create a balance between a realistic depiction and a culturally idyllic version of contemporary warfare centered on individual action and those outside Western socially constructed worlds.

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Introduction

The video game stands as one of the first and most popular forms of electronic interactive media and has become a prevalent part of Western culture (CEO: Video Game Popularity, 2009; Berger, 2002). We see games everywhere; they represent a long standing form of cultural communication. Video games are a niche market that has penetrated into every avenue of cultural communication in the forms of television shows, movies and literature.¹ References to video games can be found everywhere in popular culture. One of the more popular styles of video games has become the first-person shooter (FPS). First-person shooters like *Halo* have spawned a cult following resulting in countless numbers of books, films, and fan generated content. This research analyzes a games series similar to that of *Halo*, but instead of a simulation based of a sci-fi fantasy it examines a simulation which attempts to replicate the reality of modern warfare. In an era that seems to be enveloped in constant conflict it is critical to examine cultural artifacts which allow gamers to simulate the war experience. Video games represent an open forum to construct meanings for a multitude of aspects to human life. A video game can be made to show anything the artists and developers choose. As the games title suggests, *Modern Warfare* strives to create a fun, immersive and playable modern war environment. This research examines how that world is constructed and conveyed to the player through simulation.

Activision's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series stands as one of the most successful FPS titles in the past 10 years. The first installment of the series sold approximately 3.04 million copies in the U.S., the second 4.2 million (NPD: 2007 U.S. Game Industry, 2008; NPD: Top 10 Games, 2009). The most recent part of the series, *Black Ops* (2010) – whose tagline, “There is a soldier in all of us,” suggests an

¹ The cable television channel G4 provides the gamer with everything they would want to know about video games old and new. Numerous magazines and websites, such as *GameInformer*, *GamePro*, *PC Gamer*, and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, are dedicated to games. Movies like *Resident Evil* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* are based on video games.

inherent militancy in Western society – is already on track to surpass the sales figures of its predecessor (Call of Duty: Black Ops Sales Figures, 2010). Although some will argue that the online multiplayer modes are the driving force behind these games' widespread popularity and not the storylines, an analysis of the series' narrative makes interesting commentaries on leisurely warfare in Western culture. As video games have become more popular they no longer represent empty vacuums of space used solely for entertainment purposes, but now possess tremendous potential as vehicles of learning and influence through digital story telling (Gee, 2004; Sayre & King, 2010; Berger, 2002). This research attempts to uncover how these products of Western entertainment culture portray modern warfare and define the composition of enemy for generations of players.

Literature Review

Video Games as Cultural Artifacts

Like the novel, music or a movie, video games are cultural artifacts that can reveal characteristics, beliefs, theories and fundamentals of modern cultures and their “human experience.” In an analysis of the movie *Blackhawk Down* (2001) and the video game of the same name, Machin and van Leeuwen (2005) reveal that at times, various major political discourses are not interpreted in the act of politics itself, but in the popular media that envelop Western culture. In a review of the 2007 movie *Lambs for Lions* (2007) Roger Ebert describes the movie as a “talkathon” concerning U.S. action in Iraq (Ebert, 2007). The movie makes commentary on the war through a variety of character's perspectives: a student, a professor, a journalist, two soldiers, and a senator. These examples suggest a slow shift away from Capitol Hill as the location for education and information concerning political policy and toward the television and movie screen.

More than ever the popular culture industry now informs how we think about government and politics. Various researchers have commented on the cinematic features found in movies which have now become essential parts of most video games. (Fogu, 2009; Kingsepp, 2006; Klien, 2005). Bogost (2006)

proposes that some video games are designed to “editorialize, teach, and make political statements” (para. 33). Video game analysis can reveal the importance of these interactive media as “cultural artefacts that can reveal social, political and other insights about contemporary life” (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006, p. 3). This research provides insight into a modern sense of existence that is now almost completely dependent on some version of digital immersion.

These games illustrate socially constructed realities and socially shared themes. Meanings are implanted more deeply through digital interaction. Wulf Kanister (2007) viewed the modern digital era as a time where interactivity and immersion into the digital would replace classical meaning-making institutions. The previous claim relates to what Fogu (2009) tells us that, “video games represent the most sophisticated and popular form of interactive remediation” (p. 106). In comparison to a book or a movie where the reader or viewer is just a hapless bystander, while playing a video game the player takes on a role of their own - this role is experienced instead of simply viewed (Aarseth, 1997). As the gamer is immersed in the digital world they enter into a reality which is only a replication of an already culturally stylized reality: A hyperreality. According to Baudrillard (1983), hyperrealities refer to the differentiation between the real world and the digital or contrived world, and the person’s inability to distinguish between the two. The immersive qualities of a war video game and the game’s hyperreal nature act as powerful tools of socialization. The game series this research analyzes presents an imaginary, immersive world where the audience or player is blinded to the reality of modern warfare.

When playing a war game, the immersive qualities of these games give players a feeling of authenticity, as if they are part of the conflict (Kingsepp, 2007). The subject matter of these games can be internalized by the player creating “social and ideological dimensions of identity.” (Johnson & Kivel, 2009, p. 114). The identity that is formed is based on a simulation, something that is not real. These studies speak to the fact that like movies and other forms of media, video games are viewed as locations for critical cultural theory and analysis.

Video Game Theory and Methodology

The academic study of video games has a conflicting variety of terms. The most popular debate on how to classify gaming studies is between ludology, the study of games on their own (as all parts of the game, with nothing being excluded from analysis), and narratology, which treats games as highly interactive stories (Tavinor, 2008). Tavinor attempts to find reconciliation between these schools, defining game studies as “a conjunction of two necessary conditions - the *digital/visual medium* condition and the *entertainment* condition - and a disjunction that summarizes how the former necessary condition instantiates the latter: *rule-bound gameplay* and *interactive fiction*” (Sec. 6). In this, Tavinor argues that one needs the other. Similar observations have been made by Murray (2005), who suggests that the two schools draw on some of the same premises. The purpose here is not an attempt to solve to the debate between ludologists and narratologists, but it is important to note that the approach taken in this study leans more towards narratology. This research concentrates on the interplaying conditions of narrative, structure, entertainment and interactive fiction.

In attempting to solidify a better methodology of qualitative game studies, certain layers of the game text need to be taken into consideration. Konzack (2002) suggests that elements such as meaning, referentiality and gameplay are important parts of the video game’s text. *Meaning* takes a semiotic look at the game, attempting to interpret the apparent or abstract signs within the gameworld. *Referentiality* compares the game to other games and interactions we have with media outside of the gaming world. This is an important part of the analysis because it looks at how the game responds to cultural artifacts outside of it. *Gameplay* analysis is the basis of ludology, taking into account a variety of game factors such as space and time, goals and rewards.

This study merges Konzack’s game elements with the set of three game dimensions described by Aarseth (2003): Gameplay, Game-structure, and Gameworld. *Gameplay* involves the player’s actions and strategies, mostly how they interact with the game. *Game-structure* refers to the rules the player must adhere to within the gameworld, or the rules of simulation. *Gameworld* is the digitized world the player

is immersed in. This includes the fictional content, settings design, and most of the aesthetics of the game. This study focuses primarily on Gameworld: the history and culture presented in the game; the fictional story the game tells. A secondary focus is on Gameplay, the sociological, ethnological and psychological portions of the game, and the actions, strategies and motives involved. Meanings and references found within *Modern Warfare* are inherently attached to the elements of gameworld, gameplay and game-structure, connecting these features of the game is the only way to develop a clear picture of how modern warfare is conveyed.

Game studies have begun to look for different kinds of meaning that can be taken from a game, how games comment on our lives outside the gameworld, and the rules that restrict the gamer within the gaming world. Gottschalk (1995) states that video games contain basic assumptions about the world that can buffer “problematic ideological themes;” he goes on to identify this process as an essential part of postmodern culture (p.1). Before the term ludology even existed, Provenzo (1991) explored the potential of video games as “instruments of a larger, political and social hegemony” (p. 115). Rockwell (2005) also emphasized a need for game theory; he believed too many game studies focused on the effects games have on a population rather than how the games work. Rockwell developed a theory which he called “poetics.” This theory attempts to separately analyze pieces of the game and then reconstruct them to show how they create meaning.

Modern scholars have come to understand video games as art, another form of abstract communication, capable of disseminating a multitude of meanings. Ebert (2010A) argued that video games are not art because they contain an outcome which can be manipulated. Ebert’s interpretation of art does not expand far enough to envelope the cultural significance of video games, their structure, narrative and images. In his article he is steadfast in his position that games are just things that are played for enjoyment. This seems to go along with a refusal to accept new art forms because of an unreasonable grasp on that which has been classically defined as art. However, after a short period of time Ebert adjusted his argument due to the fact video games presented a subject matter that he was not overly

familiar with. After an onslaught of contradictory comments Ebert admitted that he “should not have written that entry without being more familiar with the actual experience of video games” (2010B). Ebert also referenced the fact that he did not give ample attention to the future of video games. In the end Ebert concluded he could not find a definition of art that would completely exclude video games. He stated that art is not “what it’s about, but how it’s about.” The goal of this study is to examine how a modern warfare game delivers its messages.

Game studies offer “an examination of computer games and game cultures as critical locations for understanding the role of digital technologies in mediating and constituting the social interaction and organization of subjects in late modern information societies” (Simon, 2006, p. 66). However, from these discussions we can see that game studies are a new, thriving and somewhat contested portion of academia.

Market statistics have shown that digital gaming has become a large and popular part of American lives. In the past ten years video game sales in the United States have seen huge incremental increases, from \$6.6 billion in 2000 to \$19.66 billion in 2009 (a drop from \$22 billion in 2008) (Wikia Gaming, NPD sales figures, 2002 - 2010). Since its inception, the digital gaming industry has made leaps and bounds, every year reaching new pinnacles of innovation. Highly interactive, modern-day video games have created worlds of simulation which integrate “knowing and doing...effective social practices, powerful identities, and shared values...” (Shaffer, et. al., 2004, p. 7). These practices all represent important segments of day-to-day life.

War and Video Games

Much of the early research on video games has focused on effects studies (e.g., Anderson, 2001; Sherry, 2001). Aside from these, most other video game research has been in relation to perspectives of race and gender in the virtual gameworld (Jing, et. Al. 2007; Leonard, 2003). The exploration of video games as tools for learning has also seen a good amount of attention, especially in the early years of the

video game industry's prevalence (Gee, 2004; Shaffer, et. al., 2004). Not until recently have scholars begun to investigate into the narratives and structures of games along with their rhetoric. (Squire, 2002).

Historical to contemporary war simulations. Due to the genre's increasing popularity, many scholars have begun to study games that cover the subject of war. The majority of war video games fall into two categories: Those that attempt to reenact some historical event, and those based on a modern or futuristic fiction. There are significant differences between war video games that portray a modern or advanced era and those that attempt to recreate a historical event or conflict. In her research Kingsepp (2007) establishes a connection between World War II games and postmodern society by citing Baudrillard, who states "history has retreated," and that we bring history back to fulfill a void in our lives (367). She goes on to say, however, that WW II games are not true simulacra: "There is an imperfection; something is missing" (370). Modern fictional war games create a more intimate simulation of reality because they are a replication of a modern age in which the player is actively living. Games that attempt to duplicate modern international conflicts, or are based on fictional "what-if" scenarios create what Roger Stahl (2006) calls "the virtual citizen-soldier (133). Stahl states that the virtual citizen-soldier represents an area in which being a good citizen means willingly becoming militarized. In comparison to Kingsepp's analysis of World War II games, we can see how modern war games' ability to present a more realistic, livable portrayal of warfare can lead to greater immersion and produce stronger, more immediate meanings.

Military – entertainment complex. The game developers' goal is to make a profit from the sale of their game, which is evident in the growth of the video game software industry and the \$4.9 billion it contributed to the GDP in 2009 (Video game industry growth, 2010). However, a game's popularity within a culture can be understood as a reflection of shared consensual meanings in that society. The games and their relation to the "military-entertainment complex," the convergence of pro-military themes and popular media, illustrate how socializing institutions use a variety of media to reinforce, explain or describe ideologies and dominant beliefs (Ouellette, 2008; Stahl, 2006; Galloway, 2004). Lenoir and

Lowood (2003) describe the military-entertainment complex as a “training ground for what might be considered...the warfare of the future.” (p. 428). Halter (2006) and Der Derian (2001) have written extensively on the relationship between the video game industry and the military. Der Derian describes this as “concerted efforts and mixed results of powerful public and private institutions, seeking to adapt new global challenges within the exigencies and bound up power of the sovereign states” (p. xix). He extends his theory even further to elaborate on what he termed the military-industrial-media-entertainment complex, or MIME. Der Derian goes onto to describe this collusion between technology, industry and the military as a “virtuous war,” where virtual technologies bring the war home, putting the public at the center of the battle. It has been proposed by some researchers that investigations into the theories and concepts which drive war video games and the institutions behind them is absent or inadequate (Ouellette, 2008).

The creation of the home gaming console and specialized gaming systems “provided a forum for the naturalization and incorporation of military technology into everyday life.” (Power, p. 275 – 276). In reference to the game developed by the U.S. Army, *America’s Army*, Halter (2006) exposes the game as the definitive example of the military influence on American popular culture. The game *America’s Army* alone has spawned a variety of papers and discussion over the military’s intrusion into the leisurely world of the video game connoisseur (Galloway, 2004; Nieborg, 2004; Zyda, 2005; Halter, 2006).

Ideology in war video games. Through a critique of games developed by the Western gaming industry, Galloway (2004) found that many of these games contained nationalistic ideologies and elements, such as a belief in political and military superiority. Hess’ (2007) review of the game, *Medal Honor: Rising Sun*, found that the game’s narrative worked to retell a Western-centered heroic version of World War II. This selectivity of the game’s narrative created what he called “a critical blindness regarding modern war” (352).

A comparison of two games, one developed in the United States (*Delta Force*) and the other by an Arab country (*Special Forces*) illustrated some striking differences, but also some similarities in the

way they presented ideological messages (Machin & Suleiman, 2006). *Delta Force* was developed by the American based company Navalogic (who is also a contractor for the U.S. Military) and *Special Forces*, developed by the Hezbollah Internet Central Bureau. The games cover the same subject matter and create an interactive experience of the same event, but their content and story are intrinsically different.

Through analysis and interviews, Machin and Suleiman were able to conclude that the games are useful in defining and disseminating political ideology and cultural values concerning conflict resolution for either culture. However, the structures of the games are essentially Western. This study reveals game structures are uniform but meanings are strictly interpretive. This establishes the cultural relevance of the modern war video game and leads to larger questions of how modern warfare and enemies are defined in fictional conflicts with no foundation in historical reality.

Citizens: Objects and subjects of war. Aside from war games which reenact some point in history, there has been a proliferation of games which allow the player to engage in more recent Western military actions, such as the Gulf wars. With the major influx of post 9/11 games involving themes such as the “war on terror” Stahl’s (2006) definition of an emerging society of “virtual citizen-soldiers” seems more like a reality. Stahl explains that these games can be used to combat feelings of helplessness in an age of doubt and fear of foreign aggressors. A product of “Netwar” or Information Age warfare, Stahl defines this as a kind of warfare which takes place in the home of the average citizen, where they are the “object” of war. Through the media, the citizen can also become the “subject” of war; an active participant in warfare via video games or other simulations. The comparison of the movie and video game versions of *Blackhawk Down* (2001) showed how these simulacra of modern warfare placed the audience and player in the positions of citizen and soldier (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005; Klein, 2005).

The establishment of Russia as one of the main antagonists in *Modern Warfare* has interesting implications into the idea of players as subjects and objects of war. The Cold War era stands as the most recognizable time span which featured Russia as an enemy to the West. Though, for a young digital generation lacking an intimate connection to this conflict the conclusion of this non-violent war seems

murky at best. As Stahl points out war games can be used to deal with certain anxieties concerning international conflicts. *Modern Warfare* may stand as a narrative that gives a pseudo closer to the Cold War conflict.

Research has shown that when digitized, either on the movie screen or on your Xbox, history becomes flexible (Kingsepp, 2007; Fogu, 2009; Klein, 2005; Rejack, 2007; Hess, 2007). There have been a large number of investigations over video games which allow players to simulate battles that are closer to the surface of our collective memories. These engagements include anything during the Gulf War era to post-9/11 operations. However, the amount the amount of reputable research concerning war games depicting modern day fictional conflicts is lacking. The research presented here is unique in the fact that it will be examining war games which attempt to replicate a Western version of modern warfare in a contemporary age using enemies you will not find on CNN or FOX News. The conflicts portrayed in the game have never taken place, but their themes and ideologies are very real. This study attempts to breakdown the structure and narratives used in a simulation that pits Western powers (mainly American) against an old Russian foe in an attempt to achieve an authentic representation of modern warfare.

War is Popular Culture

Warfare being an established part of human life is interpreted and understood by the diverse cultures of the globe in a variety of ways. Some cultures embrace warfare as a means to achieving greatness; others do their best to avoid international conflict all together. This research attempts to explain representations of a Westernized version of modern warfare through elements of modern socialization found within a video game. However, the goal of this research is not to show how video games act as tools of socialization, but to describe portions of the games' narrative and structure that illustrate these socialized concepts.

War as entertainment. Allusions to war are rampant in Western culture. They have become a part of our daily lives, presiding over literature and film to things we do for leisure on a lazy weekend (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005; Klein, 2005; Fogu, 2009; Kingsepp, 2006; Jansen & Sabo, 1994). Sports

teams are said to go into battle on Sunday afternoons; boxers are referred to as modern day gladiators. Movies such as *Rambo*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Inglorious Bastards*, glorify and romanticize war, insulating the population from the grim realities of the battlefield. These substitutes or what Lacan (1957) would call metonyms (something that stands in for the concept of war that is not identified as war) illustrate an interesting aspect of Western culture: Warfare as a tool of entertainment.

War as a game. Video games offer the player the opportunity to take the action into their own hands. Whether they fight a historic enemy or a fictional antagonist, they experience a form of digitized warfare from the safety and security of their homes. This then becomes a simulacrum of warfare, a copy of an idealized version of war; the reality of the conflict is masked or lost. This reliance on an ideal interpretation of modern warfare expands the hyperreality of the modern age which Baudrillard says we experience on a daily basis. War video games illustrate that an understanding and acceptance of righteous warfare is a necessary part modernized Western culture, even at young ages (Halter, 2006; Der Derian, 2009). This is not to suggest the impacts of modern war video games on Westernized youth, but rather to illustrate their elevated position in Western culture.

Call of Duty history. Few video game console franchises have experienced the same level of success as the *Call of Duty* series. *Call of Duty* represents one of the longest standing FPS franchises still producing new games, introducing new formats, and new immersive story-lines. One of the largest characteristics that set *Call of Duty* apart from its other FPS predecessors is its ability to truly create an immersive battle environment. This is accomplished through a variety of visual and in-game effects, but most praise is lauded on the use of multiple game characters and the addition of allied AI.

The earlier *Call of Duty* games: *Call of Duty*, *Call of Duty 2 & 3* and *Call of Duty: World at War*; stick strictly to fighting that took place in the European and Pacific theaters of World War II. These four games represent the main bulk of what can be termed the “World War II Series.” The player plays as a variety of characters including Army Rangers, the British Special Air Service (SAS) and members of the

Polish Armored Division. There are also a collection of expansions and spin-offs based on these four WW II themed games that cover much of the same material.

Eventually, the developers of *Call of Duty* left the past in the past and put WW II behind them. The first game in the *Modern Warfare* series was released in 2007, the games story taking place in 2011 only a few years into the future. The second part of the *Modern Warfare* series was available to the public in 2009 and takes place five years after the end of the first game. These would mark the first games in the *Call of Duty* franchise that did not cover World War II.

Many of the same gaming elements transferred over from the historically based games to the contemporarily themed games, such as multiple character control and AI controlled team members. However, the new era game opened up fresh possibilities for game interaction, storyline and immersion. The addition of modern war technology allowed game developer Activision to create a more realistic modern war experience as Infinity Ward studio head, Grant Collier explained in an interview with IGN (Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare AU Interview, 2007). Collier highlights “elite divisions” who can “rapidly deploy to multiple locations” as some of the key features of the modern based games. The fast moving pace of conflict that the game emulates is something that could not be duplicated in the older WW II based games. Aside from the high level of technology available in modern warfare, a totally unique enemy and storyline was also a leap away from past games in the *Call of Duty* franchise. One of the challenges developers focused on was creating a new enemy which did not exist in the real world. In an interview with IGN, Collier discusses some tactics used to create a believable enemy in a fictional war game:

“We really wanted to make a much more story driven game, and when you don't have the Nazis you're required to create a bunch of back story for your villain because we want it to be a black and white sort of struggle. So you've got to build up a bad guy early on in the game, in some of the first few missions, make him do some really horrible stuff, because we don't want 'he's a really bad guy' in the manual, we want to use the missions to drive home the point that this guy and his lackeys are all really really nasty guys. So it created story-telling avenues, and it was just sort of like the story was actually there, and we were like archaeologists knocking the dust off it, and all the blocks fell into place and it really came together.”

The second part of the Modern Warfare series is a continuation of the *Modern Warfare 1* story. This represents another departure from the WW II games that only shared a connection through the conflict itself. The main focuses of this research looks at how the connected “story-telling avenues” of each of these games goes about portraying modern warfare and the modern day enemy. This will not attempt to highlight the reasons behind the change from games based on the popular WW II scenarios to simulations of modern warfare. However, the analysis will take into consideration the difference in conveying ideology through history and how themes are presented in a fictional simulation of modern war.

Multiplayer option. It is necessary to point out that these games include a number of play options outside the basic story mode. *Modern Warfare 1 & 2* both feature an online multi-player mode. In multi-player there are a variety of different game scenarios but they all follow along the basic *ludic* structure - team one versus team two in a fight to the death. In both of these modes the player has no choice as to what side they play on. Depending on game type you are randomly sorted into teams, playing as OPFOR, (Opposing Forces), SAS, Marines, or Russian *Spetsnaz*. The multiplayer option is loosely connected to the narrative of the game only in defined sides and settings. There will never be a scenario where the Marines are fighting the SAS or OPFOR against *Spetsnaz* and many of the maps used in multiplayer are taken from missions in the campaign mode. Multiplayer lacks many of the basic elements of the campaign narrative like characters and events, in this sense multiplayer can be quite *paidaic*, it can be played continuously with infinite outcomes.

An analysis which includes the different multiplayer modes, objectives and options could uncover a more detailed description of the modern warfare simulation. This study however, is primarily concerned with the campaign mode. However, even in multiplayer mode a clear division between antagonists and protagonists is established. It is beneficial to point out that there are other options offered in the game which are loosely connected to elements of the series' overall narrative.

The rules and simulation of most FPS war games, as Frasca (2003) and Aarseth (2001 & 2003) point out, are quite basic. To advance in a war game the player must kill. These games do not provide some sort of diplomatic, nonviolent alternative to conflict resolution. In this sense the bulk of the game is indeed a *ludus*; there is only one direction it can take you. This study focuses on uncovering how the narrative makes adherence to these rules a legitimate and acceptable form of play.

Social Constructionism

This analysis pulls from the schools of ludology and narratology. All forms of cultural texts differ in a variety of ways; from literature to video games. At times research must apply a variation of methods to uncover the meaning of a text. This study incorporates an analysis of the game's narrative along with theoretical elements of social constructionism. The research focuses on the fact that video games are not just stories that are read or watched, but are interactive.

Social Construction of Reality

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), socialization is an ongoing process that occurs from birth to death; even the idea of life and death has a place in the socialization of every human being. The bulk of their theory on the social construction of reality is based on the earlier work of German sociologists Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim and Edmund Husserl. It is from these theorists that Berger and Luckmann developed their driving concept, the *sociology of knowledge*; "whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity ... is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 9). Whether one plays a game in solitary

or with others they are engaged in a form of social mediation. During gameplay whatever messages are conferred, regardless of truth; suggest ideological world-views to the participants.

Foundations. In his interpretation of the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim (1952) expanded upon the relation between society and thought, the roles society and cultural play in what we think we know about the world. More clearly stated Mannheim began looking at knowledge as something that is “socially conditioned.” Mannheim attempts to divide ideology into the sociology of knowledge and cultural progress, asserting he is more concerned with “when and where social structures come to express themselves in the structure of assertions.” (p. 266). However, the social assertions Mannheim is referring to take place more in the theoretical realm and are not as closely linked to the “everyday life” as discussed by Berger and Luckmann. In an attempt to separate from the strict methods of one “empirical science,” Berger and Luckmann looked to Husserl. Husserl’s work was a theory based on the combination of psychology along with an analysis of cultural (Embree, 2009). However, Husserl’s research was more concerned with intrapersonal relations. Berger and Luckmann’s theory not only speaks of society in terms of interpersonal relations but social constructionism in its totality of the human experience. Social constructionism is useful in examining how the meaning-making institutions of our society not only legitimize warfare and militancy, but also make it a source of entertainment and cultural education. This is critical in examining how ideology, what Baudrillard (1994) identifies as a “false representation of reality,” is conveyed in social situations (p. 12 & 13). They are not focusing on how society is created, but on how aspects of a social interaction combine with a shared knowledge of the world to help form or construct reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 4).

It is important to understand how war video games, which act as tools of social constructionism, have helped proliferate the acceptance of the military-entertainment complex (Lenoir, 2000). Like the military-industrial complex, the military-entertainment complex refers to a symbiosis between two autonomous establishments. Althusser (1968) states the function of these social institutions is the realization of ideology. The military-entertainment complex defined within this research stands as an

institution in itself that works to condition the Western perceptions of warfare and its meaning in Western culture. However, Baudrillard (1983) would argue that the reality created by these post-industrial modern institutions is not reality all at but a hyperreality.

Institutional perspective. Berger and Luckman (1967) state basic reality is formed through one's day-to-day life, during interaction with "significant others" and varying associations. Through these relationships, communally, there is formed a "social stock of knowledge ... typificatory schemes required for the major routines of everyday life." (p. 43). Unlike the "extra-theoretical" features of knowledge proposed by classical sociologists such as Manheim, this is "primary knowledge about the institutional order," what Berger and Luckmann call "pretheoretical" knowledge (p. 65). We constantly access this bank of knowledge it is what gets us through most of our waking hours. Berger and Luckmann's idea of a "common stock of knowledge," a derivative out of the sociology of knowledge, is a consequence of earlier sociological research done by Schut and Husserl. Embree defines this culturally construed knowledge as "constructs in common sense" (p. 133). By looking at this social process, we can say that the subject of war or conflict with the "Other" is defined intersubjectively in our culture. People cease existing as individuals and become the subjects of reality in relation to the world around us.

The collusion between the entertainment and military industries make a very powerful tool for meaning making. At this juncture is where ideology, typifications and thus social realities are created. These institutions are proactive and reactive to what Marx termed, the base, the organization of production. There are specific elements within the games that act as codes, which the player is to utilize to make meaning in accordance with their socially constructed idea of the world.

Socialization

Before we can begin to understand how reality is being socially constructed, we must define socialization, which is at the core of this theory. At its most basic of levels, socialization is needed for any person to become a functioning, contributing member of society (Clausen, 1968). Clausen defines socialization as "the process of learning one's culture and how to live within in it." (p. 5). More germane

to the discussion here, he describes it as a relationship between people in a society and those who wish to exert their influence over them. Much of what we understand about post-industrial socialization can be derived from Marx who initially began to relate the way society developed along with its means of production. In *The German Ideology* (1846) Marx claims human production and the means by which things are produced, the division of labor and class systems, says more about humanity and who we are than anything else.

The division of labor and production leads to the foundations of what Marx and Engels termed the “base” and the “superstructure” (Marx, 1978). The base represents individuals, sources of production within a society. The superstructure emerges from the base in the form of culture, political power, institutions and so on. Simply stated, social order is formed by people. A more contemporary conception of base and superstructure developed by Williams (1991) states that the relationship between base and superstructure are not as deterministic as Marxist socialization may have claimed. Williams asserts that the base is not a static being and can be influenced by the superstructures. No longer does the base always determine the formation of culture, but the base can be reactive to what culture is or does. The notion of a symbiosis between base and superstructure, people and culture, again, adheres to the idea that what we know and think of the world around us is constructed not only by people, but the institutions and establishments which have been created by people.

Collective Memories forming Hyperrealities

Though the time frame for the game is contemporary, much of the narrative uses the collective memories of old foes and past conflicts. The primary mechanism behind the description and legitimization of enemy and warfare is the use of real world referential data. Memory is one of the most basic of social activities, in social relations and all interaction; we are constantly accessing the databanks of our memories and those of the groups we associate with. Those same groups and cultural institutions develop many of the shows we watch and the games we play.

Halbwachs developed the notion that collective memory is not passed down from generation to generation, but rather it is socially constructed. A perfect example of this theory can be seen through Zelizer's (2002) work with pre-to-post World War II images of the Holocaust and Nazi concentration camps. Zelizer examined how perceptions of what actually happened during the Holocaust, or the belief that it even took place, have fluctuated according to society's needs at that time. When the images lacked referential data people could only see them as subjects of a larger story. Along the lines of Halbwachs, Zelizer suggests that collective memory challenges what we thought we know of the past. Through our collective memories we think of memories in ways we normally would not.

Zelizer (1995) proposes that "Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms and social interaction as with the simple act of recall" (p. 214). Zelizer also alludes to the fact that popular culture has had an evident impact on collective memories, even to the point of molding recollections to "popular representations of memory" (p. 217). It has been proposed that the gaps between, public memory, cultural memory and collective memory should be studied more closely.

Collective memories are a social product and can be used to explain events happening in the present. Somewhat ambiguous events, such as the Cold War can combine with other references to create new Russian enemies in a fictional portrayal of war. Through this fictional simulation original meaning is lost; the memory itself is a false memory, a copy of a copy. This illustrates Baudrillard's (1983) concept of a hyperreality. A false reality formed from collective memories based on an ideology of warfare manufactured by social institutions. When delivered via the medium of a video game this becomes communication on the social level, what Berger and Luckmann refer to as everyday face-to-face communication or mass communication.

Using social constructionism as a framework allows this research to describe how the notion of an enemy has been resurrected from the past. In this unique simulation enemy is defined through a culturally constructed memory of a historical foe. The design of the game and the style of war it

promotes shelter the player from the grim reality of war through cinematic and romantic simulation. The player is not engaged in the reality of warfare, but a version of warfare that is a replication, a misconception in place not only to obscure the truth of modern warfare but to legitimize a specific version of international conflict resolution.

US-Russo Relations

The video game industry and the military's interest in digital simulations to train for and fight war coincided with the outset of the Cold War (Halter, 2006). This has special significance to this study considering how *Modern Warfare* describes the state of affairs between Russia and the United States. *Modern Warfare* sets the stage for a resurrection of a hostile and combustive relationship between these two world powers. To understand more clearly how the game works in developing the Russian enemy it is beneficial to examine the evolution of US-Russo relations.

Almost directly after the closing of World War II tensions between the United States and Russia would develop into what would be called the Cold War. Right before the Cold War began, M. Brewster Smith (1947) developed a process of gauging public opinions through questionnaires which analyzed subject's attitudes and cognition towards a current issue, but which also placed emphasis on personality traits. The population of this study consisted solely of males, which could lessen the validity of this research. However, considering the time in which this work was published, directly after the closing of WW II and the beginnings of unstable relations with Russia, this research does make interesting commentary on how opinions of rival countries are formulated.

A majority of the males surveyed had unfavorable views towards Russia, mostly concerning the spread of communism and "the lack of freedom and democracy inside Russia." (p. 510). However, their views tended to lean more towards the favorable side when asked about Russia's role in the conclusion of WW II. Smith's study shows how the perceptions of those who were well informed led to concern and openness to information, whereas those who were not well informed had conditioned unfavorable Russian

stereotypes and a “relative lack of concern about Russia.” (p. 515). This analysis describes how easily Russia can be accepted and depicted as an enemy when there is no immediate concern regarding Russia in present American mass media or culture. It is beneficial to note that this study also provides a foundation for claims against more generic enemies.

In an article written in the midst of the Cold War, Bronfenbrenner (1961) revealed that perceptions between Russians and Americans were representative of “a mirror image in a twisted glass.” (73). The previous statement being somewhat cryptic, he analyzed a number of perceptions Americans and Russians shared about one another and how the perceptions differed in ideology but were similar in subject. Bronfenbrenner looked at shared perceptions between Americans and Russians during the 60’s such as: “they” are aggressors, “their” government exploits and deludes the people, “their” people are not supportive of the current leadership, “they” cannot be trusted, and “their” policies are mislead and deranged. As a psychologist, Bronfenbrenner came to the conclusion that people have an aversion to “assimilate new perceptions to old, and unconsciously distort what one sees in such a way as to minimize clash with previous expectations” (76). In this sense, he is saying that although relations between these two countries may have shifted and their perceptions of each other might be diluted, the original animosity will remain so as to keep the status quo. Research has shown that the majority of Russians in the modern era still prefer to keep U.S.-Russo relations at the status quo, lobbying for neither closer nor more distant relations (Majority of Russians Continue, 2010). This is done by “obliterating distinctions and organizing the world into terms of artificially simplified frames of reference” (p. 76). Bronfenbrenner states that this method of strictly defining things as good and bad by old frames of reference is more powerful when experiencing moments of emotional stress and external threat.

This mechanism of thought is still in place today, in an era of fear and helplessness; it is easy to view the Russian as an enemy because anything else could be disruptive to our cultural conditioning. This is illustrated in contemporary American popular culture, where most Russians are vilified, representing obstructions to Western perceptions of freedom. Tsygankov (2009) identifies this

Russophobia as something that is not only a political issue but a cultural one as well. For example, the 1984 movie *Red Dawn*, which tells of a Russian invasion of America, is being remade for a 2011 release. (MGM, 1984). Though the Cold War atmosphere that this movie grew out of has long passed, Russia still represents a viable enemy. In the “twisted mirror image” many Russians still see Americans as imperialistic aggressors (Majority of Russians Continue, 2010). Relations have changed but popular perceptions have remained the same.

Almost 20 years after the end of the Cold War the relationship between Russia and the United States is still one of questionable stability. In a 2010 interview, Stephen F. Cohen, a professor of Russian Studies at New York University, discussed the current relationship between Russia and the United States (Journal of International Affairs, 2010). He comments on the policies of each country towards each other and the debate, or the lack thereof, concerning those policies. Cohen believes that the current Russian state is overwhelmingly in a “Stalinist Renaissance” compiled of mainly the Communist Party and ultra-nationalists (p. 193). Although Russia is a democratic state, American policy towards Russia has been an obstruction to the country’s progress towards modernization and true democracy, as well as a mutual diplomatic partnership with the U.S.

Cohen views one of the largest obstructions to solidifying relations with the Russian state is illustrated by the American tale of “triumphalism” leading up to the end of the Cold War, along with the U.S. inability or refusal to accept and understand Russia’s different geopolitical circumstances. He argues that since that world superpower is no longer a communist state, American political leaders feel there is no need to be concerned over the diminishing relations with Russia. Or could it be that the government, media and popular culture is so caught up in the war on terror in the Middle East that other, possibly more pertinent foreign relations have taken a back seat?

The lack of discussion over U.S. - Russo relations at higher levels might be indicative of the lack of resources concerning “John and Jane Citizen’s” perception of Russia and its people. How is the average American to develop a clear perception of Russia when coverage or discussion over American

relations with Russia is non-existent or obscure? An article investigating the sustainability of teaching U.S. history in Russia states that some American policies toward Russia have produced a new anti-American sentiment (Kurilla & Zhuravleva, 2010). The authors noted that the number of Russian students studying American history fell drastically from the early to mid 2000's.

Popular culture flourishes with the new, exciting and diverse. Perhaps the contemporary enemy to the West has become too common place; we are tired of fighting the same scenarios. To maximize entertainment, maximize profits, we must find ways to devise new enemies to freedom in a cultural and political system that thrives on international policies of dividing foreign states between "good" and "bad." Video games have established a new region of cultural meaning making. Along with the powerful military-entertainment complex enforced by a sound historical basis of tension between countries, this simulation of modern warfare is able to reestablish an old Other as a contemporary enemy for our entertainment purposes.

As modernized cultures advance so does the critical dependency on digital technologies. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), as early as 1944 deduced that in a capitalist system such as that of most Western societies, especially in America, "the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest" (p. 95). Alberts and Papp (2004) suggest that as these technologies change they also change the people. Technologies change perspectives on life, race, culture and how we as human beings define existence and maintain meanings in an ever shrinking world. In an era where information travels instantaneously, insulating all parts of society, it can be said that digital technologies have become a necessity, like the air we breathe.

This research brings to the surface some of those questions concerning digital simulations of reality. Warfare has become one ever-growing popular digital experience, especially in Western cultures (Halter, 2006; Der Derian, 2009). From our couch we can watch as a missile sent from thousands of miles away hones in on its target, or we can play as a member of a special operations force infiltrating a terrorist

cell on a home gaming console. This examination of digitized warfare through a video game helps answer question concerning the subject of warfare as entertainment, how it is presented and described.

Methodology

Narrative Analysis

A narrative is an organizational tool that we use to explain and make sense of our lives. It is almost impossible to find a narrative that is not steeped in the reality and relativism of some culture. Riessman (1993) has stated that many researchers are moving closer to the idea that the narrative represents the base principal for organizing human life. Stories and narratives present constructions of our lives, from the past and into the present. Through narrative analysis, Riessman seeks to not just discover the unique usage of language to create a meaning, but why it was organized the way it was. Narratives are “not merely information storage devices, narratives structure perceptual experience, organize memory,” divide and split life into stages of growth and conceptualization (p. 2). This can be accomplished through researching video games which contain narratives, not only by looking at the game and the rules that bound the player’s interaction to the gaming world, but by dissecting the story that carries the player through the game.

Riessman clearly states, “Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself” (p. 1). A narrative analysis takes apart elements of a story, analyzes each and then reconstructs them to find meanings that lay beneath the story’s surface. Labov and Waletzky (2003) propose that narrative analysis looks at the technique in which narratives are created and how they function. In analyzing the narrative of a game it does not tell you what the game is about but as Ebert stated “how” it goes about being. For the purpose of this research Franzosi’s (1998) definition is most applicable – a methodology that connects relations not only between words and texts, but also texts and social realities. What does the story tell us about the subject matter it covers in relation to the world we live in?

There are a number of elements in narrative analysis that can help answer questions as to how a simulation of modern warfare institutionally defines enemy. Advances in game technology and graphics

machines have allowed video games to become less rudimentary and static, more vivid and cinematic. These innovations in game development allow for more detailed stories to unfold in games. Imagery, sound, characters and settings are more vibrant, increasing the player's awareness of each of these dimensions within a narrative and thus becoming more relevant parts of the game as a whole (Kingsepp, 2006).

Aside from the strict applications of narrative analysis, others have discussed at a more personal or ethical approach to narrative analysis. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) say one of the first things one needs to consider in narrative analysis is the inquisitor's relation to the subject. They call this the "negotiation of entry," the established relationship between researcher and subject. Although they are referencing interpersonal narrative inquiry, the same can be said about a researchers approach to a text. The researcher needs to give space to the text they wish to analyze. Jasinski (2001) recommends researchers use a "process of abduction" when doing rhetorical criticisms such as narrative analysis. By this he means moving from point to point, from text to underlying concepts. By using this "tacking" method our understanding of the concepts we are looking for in the text and those we discover over the process of analysis become more apparent.

This research engages the games from two perspectives. I have been playing FPSs since the mid 90's; of the games in the entire *Call of Duty* library I have played close to all of them. Though, with a theoretical background I am able to look at these games with an analytical eye. From this dual perspective the inter-textual references within the *Modern Warfare* series become more evident. Analysis of this narrative uncovers subjective indicators and describes how objects might be coded from the perspective of researcher and player.

Philosophy of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis was pioneered by Walter Fisher (1985) who posed that the human act of storytelling or narration formed the base for all human communication. He founded this idea on what he called the "narrative paradigm." All human communication takes its form in some style of storytelling, visual and verbal. According to Fisher, the value of a narrative should

be based upon its relevance to the meanings found in human existence. This marks a separation from the early narrative structuralism proposed by Propp (1968). Propp claimed that stories follow a certain formula and all contain similar structural elements that can be found across cultures. Postmodernists soon argued against the overlapping cultural themes postulated by Propp. Though the impact of Propp's work on narrative analysis should not be disregarded as having had no part in the development of methodologies which view stories as keys to cultural and social understanding.

We use the stories we tell, including the ones told by others throughout everyday life, as reflections that guide and aid us in interpreting our own reality. These stories will vary from person to person and culture to culture. This is illustrated by the movement away from a purely structuralist vision of narrative analysis. Theorists such as Derrida (1982) who pose that there is no transcendental meaning to language or symbols played a large role in this methodological shift away from structuralism. Fisher called his approach to narrative analysis a "philosophical view of human communication" (p. 351). The dimensions of coherence and fidelity set the organization of most narrative criticism; all other aspects of stories depend upon those criteria. This is not to say that if a story is fictional then it is not worth analyzing, but it states that whatever a story is about, there must be some sort of relevance to the human condition if it is to be meaningful.

Foss (2004) states that narratives play a critical role in not only the meaning making found in everyday life, but the functions of those institutions which construct much of the reality of our worlds. A narrative helps reveal meanings to specific experiences and how these meanings are all linked to human life (Foss, 2004). She explains there are basic elements to every narrative, whether in the form of a book, movie or video game. A narrative is made up of events; these are given structure through their sequence in time. Narrative events must somehow establish a relationship to each other, and lastly, a narrative addresses a fused subject (Foss, 2004, p. 334).

Narrative analysis is versatile, it can be applied to a variety of text and if used correctly has limitless possibilities. This should not be taken to mean that it is a "one size fits all" methodology and

therefore inferior to more specific and segmented methodologies, but rather should illustrate the heightened position the narrative still has in human communication.

Narrative analysis applied.

The *Modern Warfare* narratives focus on the characters and their battles, strength and bravery in the face of evil, rather than the issue of international conflict and diplomatic solutions. The player watches the action on the screen, follows along the story, but also takes place in the fight to preserve freedom. Not only does the audience absorb these tales, but they are given an active part in making them a reality. Lewis (1987) found that narrative analysis helped uncover similar themes in the speeches and rhetoric of former president Ronald Reagan. He noticed a discrepancy between Reagan's skills as an orator and the public's perception and support of his policies. Lewis claims that Reagan incorporated two separate styles of story-telling to deliver his rhetoric, anecdotes and myth. In his narratives Reagan's speech focused on a link between characters and actions instead of a connection between problems and solutions. Lewis went on to say that the most important element to Reagan's stories was placing the audience in the position of character, much like the player is the character in the war game. This same structure is seen in the modern war video game. As the gamer is immersed into the game they play the roles of audience, narrator and character in a modern myth of Western militant legitimization and dominance.

A number of studies have used narrative criticism to illustrate meaning found in war games. In his analysis of the game *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, Hess (2007) describes how narratives in a historically based game create an interactive memorial. He goes on to state that through playing a simulation of historical battles the players begin to develop their own memory of an historical event, what he calls the "electronification of collective memory" (p. 341). Hess divides the game into two separate narratives, the meta narrative, in which the game "becomes a digital museum," and the personal narrative that "valorizes individual action in the name of nationalism." By dissecting the game's narrative Hess was able to describe the game's attempt to reconstruct history and develop a perception of the American

solidier or the self presented in the game: “morally and technologically superior, heroic and nationalistic” (p. 353). These themes are duplicated in the *Modern Warfare* series.

Other research has looked at the semiotics involved in the story telling of war games. Kingsepp (2006) examined historical immersion in a World War II game, finding that elements within the game presented an inaccurate retelling of WW II. The historical narrative created a “frame that signals authenticity” but was something more closely related to the Western popularization of the WW II conflict. In comparison to the aforementioned study, Rejack (2007) commented on how some WW II games attempt to give a more precise reenactment of the conflict. However, the narrative and characters presented in these games failed to live up to the developers’ hopes of creating an authentic World War II experience which is also fun to play.

From these examples we can see how a blend of ludology and narratology can be used to analysis the stories told in video games. The goal here is not to judge one method to the standards of the other. Simply stated, there are benefits to using elements of ludology, looking at the game as a text which stands on its own merits, and narratology, a focus on the link and progression of causal events, characters and themes. This collusion of methods will reveal the portrait of enemy to Western culture and society in the age of modern warfare.

Narratives in video games. Although this research does not attempt to bridge the gap between the schools of narratology and ludology, it is important to discuss the role of the narrative in video game research. Video game narrative analysis represents a very young thread of academic study. Video games were not released to the public for home use until the early 1970’s. However, it did not take long for them to become recognized as powerful and influential texts. Even still, the stories told in video games were not considered by the majority of academia as serious cultural artifacts worthy of investigation until around the turn of the 20th century (Aarseth, 2001 & 2003).

Games provide the audience with numerous options: “Do I go through the door on the left or do I climb the ladder; shoot the unaware guard or sneak past?” Most traditional stories are extremely linear;

they go in one direction. They are temporal; they have a beginning and an end. A linear story follows a number of events of which the audience has no control over, nor can they alter the outcome of the narrative. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a good example of a popular linear story exhibiting basic structural elements. There are villains, heroes, helpers, false heroes and so forth. The story works through a progression of events that culminate in a tragic ending. There is nothing inside or outside of the narrative that would have had the power to change this outcome. *Modern Warfare 1 & 2*, represent linear narratives as well. Once the dichotomy between good and evil is established the player must follow a variety of missions with fixed objectives to win. Although, the player is given the option to play outside of the rules of the narrative, for example shooting allies, the game cannot be completed without adhering to the rules prescribed by the storyline. Games can also be played multiple times and can result in multiple outcomes. In the *Fable Series* the main character is given a variety of choices (Fable, 2002). The decisions you make effect a variety of elements within the game including your characters appearance and attributes, as well as the games conclusion.

The aforementioned games are examples of *ludus* (*Modern Warfare*) and a *paidia* (*Fable*). Frasca (2003) discusses the difference between simulations in the *ludus* and the *paidia* structure. The former is more linear and deterministic, whereas the latter consists of an open ended format. The games analyzed lean more towards the *ludus* structure. Frasca goes on to say that “all military games are *ludus*” (Aristotle on the Holodeck, para. 6). To succeed and to find enjoyment in these games you must follow a prescribed direction. It is for this reason this research will be focusing heavily on the narrative of the game. The narrative is what drives the game; the player cannot be fully immersed in the gameworld if they do not adhere to its structure and narrative. The player must become an active subject in the game's story.

Aarseth (2003) loosely describes the linear gaming format found in most war games as “kill, explore, kill some more” (p. 4). Though, there is not a whole lot to explore in the *Modern Warfare* gameworld, space for deviation is very limited. The gameplay is based on the adherence to the story not the players attempt to manipulate the gameworld and explore alternate narratives. It is for this reason the

narrative of the game takes precedence over other elements. This is not to say that other video game elements are not necessary or important in translating the meaning conveyed in the game, but for the purposes of this research, more attention is given to the narrative as the critical point in the simulation. The game cannot establish a sustainable enemy if the player is not successfully immersed in the narrative. There must be a reason to fight, to kill and destroy. Those elements can only be found in the story and are not bound too closely to the rules of game; though, rules are in place to keep you on track, to kill correctly.

Application to *Modern Warfare*

Narrative criticism has grown to be a viable method of rhetorical criticism, which has its uses in a multitude of arts and forms of expression. In his analysis of ABC's news coverage over terrorism, Dobkin (1992) used a narrative critique to show how the coverage presented a "romantic quest ... an emotional, ethical drama with clearly demarcated protagonists and villains" (p. 146). This research takes a similar approach, revealing digital heroes of Western civilization and the villains who wish to rob the world of its freedom.

In this case our narrative covers a number of events that lead to a war between the United States and Russia. This interactive narrative of war is told from the Western perspective and follows along the lines of how modern warfare is rationalized and legitimized, how it functions and to what ends. Narrative criticism is useful in analyzing the story line of a modern warfare game because it answers questions such as why we fight and how the ones we fight are identified as objects of aggression. How various elements of the game are referable to the real world plays an important role in this analysis. The time frame, within which this series takes place, a modern more immediate age, separates this game from other war simulations.

Whatever meaning the audience derives from this amalgamation will depend heavily on their cultural and social settings. This research examines specific elements to this narrative that play major roles in conveying those meanings. The primary dimensions are identified as characters and settings.

This research also focuses heavily on examining conflicts and events which represent a vital part to understanding the modern warfare story.

Characters. The games include a multitude of characters from both sides of the conflict, though few if any are neutral. One of the most important aspects of the character analysis is the characters' actions and how the game depicts each character in relation to their potential foe, their expressed opinion not only of their own comrades but also of those who they are fighting against. This can be found within the characters' speech and narration. Not only is it important to investigate the characters dramatic performance in the game but also their appearance. The race, clothing, physical features and language of characters help describe how ethnic diversity is manifested in the games, if it is hidden or a focus of the narrative. Certain levels inhibit the player's control of their character. These levels are important in explaining ways in which gameplay is manipulated to further immerse the player in the narrative. The analysis also differentiates between lead characters and supporting characters, the roles played by these characters and how they impact the narrative.

Character types. The character which the player controls is defined as a player controlled character. Other characters such as companions and main enemies throughout the game represent lead or supporting characters. All other AI controlled individuals are background characters. It is interesting to note that the player controlled character rotates throughout the game. These varied experiences make commentary on the style of modern warfare seen in this simulation. All characters involved in the narrative of the game are addressed; their actions and representations are analyzed down to the droves of soldiers you fight, to the citizens who run for cover.

Narration/dialogue. The narrator is a key portion in the analysis of most war games. Most of the narration takes place between levels of action and cut scenes. *The Modern Warfare Series* contains a variety of narrators; one voice does not dominate the telling of this story. Analysis takes into consideration which characters are narrating and at what points in the development of the story are their

voices heard. What are they saying that is different from other narrators and how much control do they have over what they can reveal about the narrative?

Most dialogue takes place in the cut scenes, although there is dialogue that occurs during gameplay that the player cannot control. This investigation considers the character who is speaking, when and what they say, as well as what is happening on the screen as they speak. The use of different languages also adds specific elements to character definitions. What they say in the game and how they say it opposed to the protagonists helps illustrate how the game defines enemy. This also applies to the description of protagonist soldier characters, what kinds of themes are present in their speech.

Appearance. How the game visually portrays “good” characters and “bad” characters is an important element of the character analysis. This looks to question if they have any outstanding physical features that may point to a character’s ethnicity and cultural diversity. In this study the cultural differences between enemies and allies is critical to examine. How much effort did the developers put into the characters’ costumes and uniforms when judging between heroes and villains? What kind of weapons and technology do they possess? This element not only looks at the characters as one large group, but also distinguishes between primary and secondary characters. Which characters are important in developing and why? Do the characters have uniforms or are they some sort of unconventional, para-military force? The character’s appearance in the game may also stand in as representation of that faction or country as a whole.

Setting. Since this is a game that tells a story about a modernized version of international conflict the change in settings, fighting in one country to another, is vital to the analysis. Settings of conflict make important statements on the nature of modern warfare, the relationship between enemy and territory, defender and invader. The time frame and relation to space in the gameworld is also important. When is this action taking place? Where do we fight and why? Location is a major part of the analysis as the game makes the claim that all these different areas are potential hot spots for modern warfare.

Narration/dialogue. By analyzing the description of setting in the narration and dialogue this research attempts to uncover how each location is described through different perspectives. Is there a negative, neutral or positive connotation attached to the character's description of each place? Throughout the game each setting is introduced to the player with cinematic quality. What the player is seeing on the screen accompanied with the narration is essential to enhancing the player's immersion into the simulation. How does the game work to give the player the feeling that they are actually fighting in this area? Most of all what does the game say about why this country or region has been chosen as a battle ground.

Imagery. Look and feel of the setting is portrayed in the opening cut scenes of a level but also throughout gameplay. Most games developed recently have benefited from advanced graphic machines which make the environments more lifelike. What makes up the setting and how does the battle ground change from level to level? How does the game signify location to the player, through landmarks and maps or in other ways? When looking at the detailed given to a setting we can see how the game manipulates locations to create a preferred battle environment, how it interprets the modern soldiers visual battlefield experience across the globe. Setting design also acts as a guide through the level as well as the story.

Conflict. A narrative must contain conflict; it is one of the key elements of a story. Stories lacking adversity, obstacles, or a clash between protagonists and antagonists would be nothing but chatter. The absences of conflict would mirror an absence of application the real world. The series contains a variety of conflicts that twist and intersect throughout the modern warfare narrative. Conflicts are designated as highlighted events in the game's narrative. Foss (2004) says events can be broken down into *kernels* and *satellites* or major events and minor plot events. This portion of the analysis describes how these conflicts are played out and how they are structured within the game. These conflicts represent the reason you play, the reason you fight; they are the essence of the story which makes this

stylized warfare seem real, applicable and believable. The events that lead up to the war, legitimize the war for the player, and explain the cause of the war all possess a high level of relevance to this study.

Narration/dialogue. The conflicts are presented within each cut scene through narration. It is important to look at who is explaining the conflict and how they describe it. What kind of language is used to give the player the feeling that this conflict is legitimate and believable? How is conflict established in a cut scene; is it done through imagery, rhetoric or both?

Level of conflict. The various battles are separated into major and minor conflicts. The game sets a hierarchy to each conflict. Where these conflicts stand in relation to the game and the objectives simulate what is a priority in modern warfare. Mission objectives are fused directly to the level's setting, but also map out progression of conflicts. To show how the game's narrative goes about establishing indicators of a developing storyline with protagonist and antagonist, players' mission objectives are taken into consideration. Portions of the game such as this relate directly to Aarseth's focus on "Gameplay" and "Gameworld."

Resolutions and outcomes. Solutions arise out of the conflicts. These can also be classified as objectives, strategies and motives. As the game's title suggests, warfare is one viable solution to modern international conflicts. This will also look to analyze solutions to smaller issues. How does the game describe the decision or cause of warfare, whether it be small covert forces or open land battle? These elements also look to find evidence of non-violent solutions and if they are mentioned throughout narration, cut scenes or gameplay.

Finally, the outcomes to these solutions are taken into consideration. This is quite important as it creates a check on the game's validation of warfare. Did the players achieve their goals and to what end?

Other important aspects to consider while doing narrative analysis include the audience and the theme. Who was this game developed for, and what features of the narrative reveal that? What is the dominant theme of this game, and how is that dominant theme communicated? Different themes can be taken from different players who come from various social and cultural backgrounds. Revealing

variances in culturally defined themes is not the purpose here but would make for another interesting study. This research looks to reveal parts of the narrative that describe the dominant Western idea of enemy and how that ideal is perpetuated through the themes of a modern warfare simulation.

Narrative Analysis - Call of Duty: Modern Warfare

The structural elements of the game set the base for everything else that is analyzed. Game-structure and themes help position all the other elements, such as characters and conflicts within the narrative. At times elements can break away from the overall structure representing substructures that work to develop specific messages. Once the game's foundation is laid an exploration in the more precise details can begin. This process breaks apart the game from the bottom up, starting with a broad overview of the narrative and ending with a precise dissection of elements such as characters, settings, and conflicts.

The conflicts portrayed in *Modern Warfare 1* take place in 2011, four years after the game's release. The story centers on two separate conflicts. On one side is the SAS, a British Special Forces unit whose main objective is to uncover the evil plot of Russian Ultranationalist Imran Zakhaev² in the midst of a second Russian Civil War. The other conflict takes place in a fictional Middle Eastern country as U.S. Marines attempt to capture the leader of an insurgent force, Al-Asad³. Towards the end of the narrative these two conflicts fuse to reveal a more sinister plan that could possibly lead to nuclear warfare and the rupture of Western society. The first game ends with the death of Imran Zakhaev at the hands of the SAS.

Modern Warfare 2 begins five years after the end of *Modern Warfare 1*. Russian Ultranationalists have achieved victory in the Second Russian Civil War and Imran Zakhaev is now celebrated as a martyr, his militant likeness erected in Red Square, Moscow⁴. Eventually tensions

² Victor Zakhaev, Vladimir Makarov and Imran Zakhaev. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki/>

³ Al-Asad. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki/>

⁴ Statue of Imran Zakhaev. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki/>

between America and Russia culminate in the Russian invasion of the eastern U.S. seaboard. Later in the game it is revealed the masterminds behind this conflict are a Russian terrorist, Vladimir Makarov¹ and a high ranking US military official, General Shepherd⁵. Conflicts expand the globe and involve characters from a variety of armed forces; Army Rangers, the CIA, and members of Task Force 141⁶. The game ends with the death of General Shepherd. The character's fate and the result of the US – Russo conflict is left to speculation. The third installment of the series, *Modern Warfare 3*, which follows immediately after the events of the second game was released November 10, 2011.

At the time of its release in 2007, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 1* represented a speculative fiction. The first game develops a sound structure of major and minor game elements for developing conflicts and enemies in a fictional contemporary war setting. *Modern Warfare 2* follows along the same lines, the gameworld and narrative relying heavily on this structure to support a fictional simulation of modern warfare.

Game Structure. *Modern Warfare's* structure closely resembles that of a play or dramatic performance.⁷ Between the two games they contain a prologue and six subsequent acts which contain a varied number of scenes, or what the game calls missions. There are three key elements to the *Modern Warfare* narrative: characters, actions/events, and settings.⁸ To successfully develop a fictional enemy and a conflict with no directly visible references to the real world, *Modern Warfare* had to create an element hierarchy in the game. The structure that runs throughout both of these games divides these elements into the specific and the generic. This distinction helps develop the “us” and “them,” but also creates new believable enemies from older ones.

⁵ SAS members Gaz, “Soap” MacTavish and Ghost. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki/>

⁶ A Task Force is special joint military unit made up of military personnel from other countries. In this case Task Force 141 is composed of American and British soldiers.

⁷ Frasca (2003) has shown that narratives in video games use a variety of theatrical techniques and elements.

⁸ This relates directly to the dimensions of games Aarseth (2003) points out, gameplay, game-structure and game-world. The analysis attaches many of the game elements to these distinct dimensions.

These three elements of the narrative can be broken down into subcategories. Characters include lead characters, supporting characters, background characters and the player-controlled character. There are major and minor events, along with specific and generic settings. All of the game elements have a specific purpose, some work together to further develop the structure. Certain characters in the game act as support for other major characters, and characters can also represent a faction and their war ideologies. Major and minor events support each other in the same way as characters do, but also play an important role in character development. Settings also reflect the specific/generic game structure. Locations are either given specific names, visible structures and landmarks or are glossed over by referencing a general area of the globe.

All of the parts of the narrative (characters, settings, and conflicts) are important not only in developing game structure, but also the many themes that create the *Modern Warfare* gameworld. Like the game structure, various themes of war act as a blue print to the series. These themes help develop characteristics of enemy and ally, here and there. Themes give life and color to the conflict, the why and how of modern warfare. Where game structure helps establish the general and specific, themes provide for a more realistic portrayal of the story and conflicting ideological elements.

Modern Warfare Themes. The themes of *Modern Warfare* are mainly expressed through character and conflict; what the characters say and the causes and effects attributed to their actions. The prevalent themes that run through the narrative are closely linked to why and how real modern war happens. Themes such as the justification of violent force, vengeance, power, deception and sacrifice all function under similar concepts and are part of a larger social stock of knowledge. Other themes include the battle against insurgency and terrorism, defining enemies through an individual, omission of privileged information and specialization of armed forces. These themes are used to present an idealistic version of modern warfare to the player, a version they may understand as relevant and legitimate.

Game Elements

Characters. Characters are the most critical element in the *Modern Warfare* series. The themes and ideologies presented in this narrative of modern-day conflict are personified by characters and their roles in the story. Various recurrent themes and concepts of warfare are utilized and portrayed by different characters in different ways. A character's appearance can make commentary on their side of the conflict, ethnicity and nationality. Character actions and dialogue help separate the good and bad, the here or there.

The top level of character is the lead character; these are characters that are given a large amount of emphasis throughout the game. Below them are the supporting characters, these characters play smaller roles in the narrative, they mainly act as support to a lead character. The bottom level of character is the background character. Not to be disregarded as having less importance than the previous two types, these characters act as extras would on the scene of a movie. They are rarely given any emphasis or attention but are used to give the gameworld a more realistic feeling and appearance. Any civilian presence, such as Middle Eastern inhabitants running from OPFOR soldiers or Brazilian civilians fleeing the streets of Rio de Janeiro amid gun fire, are defined as a background character.

Depending on the mission and its location you play as a variety of characters. The player assumes the role of all forms of combatants, from Sergeant Paul Jackson of the U.S.M.C First Recon, to a nameless Thermal Imaging TV Operator aboard an AC-130H gunship. The playable character is a somewhat minor character in relation to the construction of the gameworld but is an important part of gameplay, the player's immersion into the gameworld. The playable character does not fit within character hierarchy but is not completely detached. The player creates their own personalized category of character within the game structure.

Character appearance. Part of being a soldier is the uniform. However, in modern warfare not all the characters are your traditional soldier and not all of them wear a traditional uniform. By creating distinct and generic looking characters the player becomes aware of what characters are important to the story and what characters act as filler. While this is an important part of the player

understanding character roles in the game, different looking characters also refer to different sides of conflicts.

The majority of lead characters do not wear uniforms and are more detailed in appearance. These characters have costumes instead of uniforms. In this regard the game establishes them as exceptional pieces by visually distinguishing them from other characters. However, the leader of the OPFOR faction, Al-Asad, looks just like other OPFOR background characters. This goes against the structure of a visually distinct lead character, but it enforces the idea of a generic Middle Eastern enemy. The main Russian characters, Makarov and Zakhaev, each have distinct, non-military costumes rather than the generic military features seen on other lead characters.⁹ These characters represent the Other by their distinct clothing. Whereas lead characters' representing the Western military forces, such as Captain Price¹⁰ all include some kind of specialized military gear and camouflage. This specialization of costume is not only seen in Captain Price, but other members of the SAS and Task Force 141¹¹. These soldiers represent a highly trained unit and therefore they require specialized gear. However, specialized gear does not separate them from a legitimate western military force, but rather enhances its elevated position in the narrative.

Like the lead characters, supporting characters are visually distinct. All of the U.S. Army characters¹² play supporting roles. Lieutenant Vasquez and Sergeant Griggs appear in the first game, and Sergeant Foley¹³ and Corporal Dunn in the second. They all wear the same basic camouflage, military uniform with a helmet and other tactical attachments. The American army is portrayed as uniform,

⁹ Viktor Zakhaev, Vladimir Makarov and Imran Zakhaev <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

¹⁰ Captain Price. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

¹¹ Gaz, "Soap MacTavish and Ghost. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

¹² Sergeant Foley, Corporal Dunn and Staff Sergeant Griggs. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

¹³ It is worthwhile to mention that both of these American officers are racially diverse. This racial diversity is something that is not present in a lead or supporting character for any other faction in the game.

organized and multicultural. SAS supporting characters however are a bit different. Their uniforms and gear usually change along with the environment they fight in and include some non-traditional, stylish accessories such as sunglasses and Mohawks haircuts¹⁴.

Background characters are usually made up from a few basic skins or character models with slight variations in between them¹⁵. Any organized force such as US Marines or the Russian army wear some version of fatigues. Description of the Russian “Loyalist Army” is almost impossible due to their low visibility in the game. Brazilian and Afghanistan militia wear civilian dress accompanied with military accessories. Many of their faces are covered with bandanas or sunglasses. Though these two militias are located in different parts of the country their appearances are very similar creating equivalent perceptions of their fighting force. This in contrast to other background characters such as Shepherd’s personal army, Shadow Company, and Makarov’s hired mercenaries¹⁶ who all wear specialized gear and possess advanced weapons. This bottom level of character represents the bulk of the force and also makes commentary on settings and cultures. The mass of background characters emphasize to how the enemies’ forces are to be understood and accepted.

Visually, all characters fall between the generic and the detailed. Distinctions can be made between sides of a conflict by looking at character organization. The Western forces all have a concrete character hierarchy illustrating a well organized, professional army. Their leaders are diverse and their secondary characters are adaptive. Lead antagonists are either generic or unattached to any semblance of an organized military force. Every enemy faction suffers from the lack of a strong supporting role. The

¹⁴ The majority of Task Force soldiers that stand out in the game are British.

¹⁵ OPFOR characters usually wear pea green fatigues and have a combination of more or more of these accessories; shemagh, flack helmet or a red beret. Ultranationalist character are usually seen in gray fatigues or winter camouflage, they also wear shemaghs. They will either be accessorized with ski masks or gas masks. US Army and Russian Army characters wear uniform fatigues. Green for the US and red, urban camouflage for the Russians.

¹⁶ Later in the game one of Makarov’s men is discovered dead at the scene of what could be an attempt at covering up a connection between General Shepherd and Makarov. The game makes mention of the characters tattoos, inferring that Makarov’s men have criminal backgrounds. This reference to Russian criminal culture is also used again in a visual description of Private Allen, who goes undercover as one of Makarov’s men (Baker, 1999).

distinctions between character's appearances adheres to themes in modern warfare that separate highly specialized, organized and well trained Western forces from terrorists and insurgents with no links to a legitimate military force. A more detailed examination of how conflict is portrayed through character can be seen by analyzing character's actions and the links between minor and major events.

Character conflicts and actions. All conflicts are the result of events or actions that entail some kind of inter-character struggle. Conflict in *Modern Warfare* is represented at two levels, large scale and small scale. Large scale conflicts are similar to what one would see on the television, two large mechanized forces battling against each other. A small scale conflict usually requires stealth and results in fewer numbers of casualties for the protagonist side. These small scale conflicts represent the major confrontations in the story. Essentially, large conflicts create the backdrop for smaller more important ones. This adheres to the overall structure of the game. All conflicts come are a result of the actions taken by of one or two lead characters signifying the elevated position of the individual.

Small conflicts usually include a specialized, investigative force whose mission is the apprehension of those one or two individuals. The missions to uncover evidence implicating these characters take precedence over the conflicts they caused. One of the exceptions to this rule is the Marine invasion of the fictional Middle Eastern country. During this mission the apprehension of one individual results in a large scale conflict¹⁷. Since there is a strong precedence for this type of conflict in the real world the game structure allows for small shifts when establishing this generic clash. However, the individual remains the focus of this conflict, apprehension or elimination of that character is the only resolution. In comparison to the large scale U.S. – Russo conflict which focuses on defense.

The actions taken by characters in response to events and conflicts provide much of the reasoning behind fighting and how it is accomplished. Many of the conflicts that take place represent a vengeful response to an infliction caused by another. Marines attack a fictional Middle Eastern country because

¹⁷ This fails, due to Al-Asad detonating a nuclear device killing 30,000 members of the invading Marine force. After the large force fails a smaller specialized force is successful in capturing and killing Al-Asad. Adhering to the idea of small Special Forces used to capture key individuals.

the insurgent Al-Asad has assassinated the incumbent president.¹⁸ The Russian invasion of America is done in retribution to a supposed American backed act of terrorism on Russian soil.¹⁹ No other background information is provided leading up to this conflict. A majority of the large-scale conflicts are a result of deceptions. Zakhaev deceives the Western forces into shifting the focus of their objective on Al-Asad and Shepherd deceives entire countries fomenting a war²⁰. Al-Asad displays the same willingness to sacrifice the innocent at any cause when detonating a nuclear weapon in his own country.

The enemies in *Modern Warfare* all share a similar characteristic; they are motivated by personal needs, mainly vengeance. Shepherd's agenda is focused around punishing the world for what he sees as indifference to a great tragedy²¹. Imran Zakhaev launches nuclear weapons at America in retaliation for the death of his son. In general most conflict is the result of actions taken by the enemies. Large scale conflict never arises out of a need for vengeance or retribution perpetrated by the protagonist. The motivations behind the actions of Captain Price are more directed towards concepts such as truth - moral, humanistic values not seen in any of the other lead characters. Price seems to be the only lead character who personifies ideals such as this through his actions. His expertise and individuality sets him apart from all other characters in the game. Price is the ultimate soldier.

¹⁸ During a level called "The Coup" the player takes on the role of President Al-Fulani and fully experiences the assassination. This type of interactive cut scene happens again in the mission "Aftermath."

¹⁹ In the controversial level "No Russian" the player takes part in a massacre at the Zakhaev International Airport in Moscow. The player is given the opportunity to skip this mission but it is a critical part in understanding some of the motivations and ideologies behind the American – Russian war.

²⁰ Shepherd betrays a CIA operative by revealing his identity to Makarov before the airport massacre. Makarov kills Private Allen and his body is found by the Russian authorities. The Russians believe the massacre is a US backed act of terrorism which ignites the war. Shepherd not only sacrifices his own men but American and Russian civilians. Shepherd also uses members of the Task Force to cover up his betrayal then kills them to destroy the evidence. This is an interesting aspect of enemy considering he represents the larger American force.

²¹ At the time, General Shepherd was the commanding officer of the 30,000 Marines killed in the nuclear blast. His motivation behind starting the American – Russian war is revenge on the ultranationalist faction that provided the nuclear material, Ultranationalist being represented by the character of Imran Zakhaev.

The importance of inter-character conflict is revealed by examining the relation between the lead characters; Captain Price, General Shepherd, Vladimir Makarov, Al-Asad and Imran Zakhaev. All enemies use deception as a means to personal gratification. This is illustrated by Shepherd's deception to satisfy his need for revenge and Zakhaev and Makarov's deception's allowing them to wage their personal wars against the West. Price stands alone as a beacon of truth and is also positioned closest to the player throughout the game. The breakdown of character conflict and actions helps distinguish their importance to the narrative and also connects ideologies to the factions they represent. The game enhances this by retaining information from the player leading them to make further assumptions about characters and conflicts that are obscure in reality. All of the characters exhibit war themes through their actions but more can be said about their motivations by examining their speech.

Character dialogue. Much of the description of conflict and character is delivered not only by their appearance and actions, but also by what they say. Dialogue is presented either in the form of a monologue or inter-character conversations. Conversations between characters are essential in developing inter-character conflict and creating distinctions. Many of the concepts that drive this simulation of warfare can be dissected by looking at what the soldiers on the battlefield say. Speeches given by lead characters and colloquial language from all levels of character not only make audible the justification behind war, but give conflicts and factions realistic personalities.

We learn most about lead characters and their motivations through their own speech. The dialogue of foreign enemies is uniformly anti-Western, nationalistic and militant. Al-Asad justifies his insurgency as saving his country from leaders who have pandered to the West. He describes his actions as a "noble crusade" and prompts his followers to rise up in the face of "betrayal and corruption." Imran Zakhaev makes similar claims behind his reasoning for a hatred of the West. Like Al-Asad, he refers to disillusionment with the current Russian leadership, their "so-called leaders prostituted us to the West...Destroyed our culture...Our economies...Our honor." The rhetoric used by these enemies is extremely generalized and never cites any specific grievances. In this case the narrative does not attempt

to delve too deeply into some kind of political or diplomatic argument yet relies on a generalized idea that most enemies of the West are such because the West has manipulated their leadership *ipso facto* ruined their cultures. Both of these speeches quickly establish the West as an enemy to both of their countries and culture and provide justification for aggressive action.

In comparison to Shepherd's speeches the diatribes of the enemy are somewhat similar in tone only differing in content. Shepherd justifies violent military action and sacrifice in the name of patriotism but is poisoned with vengeance. He shares the same rationalizations as the foreign adversaries he directs his indignation towards. He describes Makarov as a man with no loyalties; Shepherd believes his deceptions are justified by the flag he wears on his shoulder. All enemies' monologues can be held in contrast to Captain Price. Price speaks about saving history and preserving truth. These concepts do not address the needs of one country or another but are global themes that apply to the world.

In mission dialogue provides even more detail to character and conflict. A large amount of this dialogue takes place during mission briefings and cut scenes. These briefs not only explain objectives and direct the conflict, but they also tell the player what to do and why. In the first game an American commander explains "We get Al-Asad, we end this war right here, right now." Or when the Task Force goes on a mission to find Rojas it is because he provided the weapons for the airport massacre. "He's our ticket to Makarov," explains a Task Force member. This type of dialogue illustrates the focus on the individual.

During fighting characters will talk to each other. The SAS, Task Force, and U.S. Army soldiers will have chummy conversations covering topics like beer and home. In comparison to a dialogue between an SAS soldier and a Russian Loyalist commander²², the British soldier at one point threatens violence towards the Russian commander if he does not cooperate with the SAS mission. During this

²² Sergeant Kamarov is an officer in the Russian Loyalist army. He is a secondary character fighting alongside the SAS in a small number of joint missions. He is also a good illustration of character hierarchy and mission objectives. As revealed in the dialogue, the SAS objectives take priority over the resolution of the Second Russian Civil War.

same cooperative mission between the British and Russians a SAS soldier refers to an ambiguity between the “good” Russians and the “bad” Russians. Inter-character dialogue in these instances works to support a separation between Western forces and Russians, even when they are on the same side.

Background character speech is usually restricted to chatter, background noise – a soundtrack. A lot of the dialogue used by the U.S. soldiers translates into the war experience. It provides an idealistic depiction of what it is like to be a soldier in this modern army. References to American soldiers recording fighting on their handheld devices provide examples of the real world mirrored in the virtual. In certain portions of the game you come upon enemies having normal, every-day conversations. Usually these conversations are held by Russian background characters. Their discussions vary from topics like smoking habits to their reluctance to fight alongside Chechnyans. Right before they are killed by members of the SAS one Russian guard tells the other “You smoke too much. Your lungs are gonna go bad.” The other replies, “Fuck off.” The purpose of this kind of commonplace, everyday discussion is to provide a more humanistic and culturally specific detail to the enemy, if not also to show the extreme stealth of the specialized Western forces. Other enemy dialogue combined with visualizations helps compare differences in morality and ideology between sides of the conflict by describing antagonist confrontations with civilians or protagonists. Civilians are intimidated by Russian soldiers from both factions; Ultranationalists and regular army during various missions. While interrogating a Russian farmer the Ultranationalist laugh at him stating, “This place is a dump.” When the farmer cannot answer any of his questions the Russian soldier replies, “You’re wasting my time,” and begins to pull his weapon on the civilian. Just in time Price orders “Alright, let’s top these bastards before they kill the old man” and the civilians are saved. Dialogue helps illustrate the enemy’s cruelty, disorganization and disregard for the rules of war. While interrogating an American prisoner the Russian interrogator states, “You know, comrade, the Geneva Convention is a nice idea in theory, you know? Why don’t you save yourself the trouble and simply answer my question.” The interrogator then proceeds to chastise his companion for losing a hacksaw before Task Force members burst through the door and kill them. Members of the

SAS are also seen torturing suspects. Captain Price beats Al-Asad demanding he tell him “Why’d you do it? Where did you get the bomb?” Al-Asad’s phone rings, upon the realization it is Zakhaev on the other line he assassinates Al-Asad. Ideology tells us that an exception to the rules of warfare can be made when it serves whatever may be perceived as the greater good.

In relation to the overall game structure, monologues and inter-character dialogues are specific; they play large roles in developing the gameworld and ideology. All other speech is generic, used to develop sides of a conflict or provide general in-game information and instruction. Dialogue is useful in distinguishing between “us” and “them,” giving life to enemies and allies that are not major characters, as well as describing a hierarchy of events. However, dialogue providing specific details or additional background information that may explain international tensions is either non-existent or vague. Most importantly, lead character monologues provide the bulk of information about the motivation and justification behind warfare, driven by the nationalistic, militant and patriotic themes. During the last mission right before he attempts to kill the player General Shepherd states, “Five years ago, I lost 30,000 men in the blink of an eye. And the world just fuckin' watched. Tomorrow there will be no shortage of volunteers, no shortage of patriots. I know you understand.” Imran Zakhaev justifies his aggression by claiming the West “Destroyed our culture. Our economy. Our honor. Our blood has been spilled on our soil.” Character dialogue provides a wealth of information about the game, but makes sure not to divulge too much. Creating privileged information helps develop enemies and add to a realistic military atmosphere. Though the player has no voice the amount of immersion that takes place through other game elements is significant.

Playable character. One of the goals of the game is to successfully immerse the player into the game so much that they see themselves as a character. A number of different techniques are used by *Modern Warfare* to push the level of immersion. The playable character does not have any speaking parts and is usually nondescript. One way immersion into the gameworld of *Modern Warfare* is achieved is through limiting player control during various levels. In “The Coup” they are only able to look through

the eyes of President Al-Fulani up until he meets his fate. During “Aftermath” the player experiences what one might see or “feel” in the aftermath of a nuclear explosion. In this cinematic level the characters heavy breathing is audible, the controls are sloppy, vision is manipulated and blurred giving objects a reddish glow. Both of these levels which take part in the first game are mainly cinematic with no actual goals or objectives. They both also end with a player-controlled character dying, which corresponds with major events in the narrative and introduces larger conflicts. It should also be noted that this same manipulation occurs in the final missions of both games with only a small number of control options directly related to action taking place on the screen.²³ Playable characters lack the dialogue and description given to AI characters but they are a major part of the relaying the reality of the gameworld.

Character actions, appearance and speech combine to form a major part of the structure to modern warfare, the conflicts it entails and the division between enemies and allies. Many of the themes in modern warfare such as power, specialized units, justification and vengeance are portrayed through speech and actions. The construction of character costume supports these themes and also helps distinguish between “us” and “them.” Each conflict is played out in a distinct setting populated with distinct characters. The areas where fighting takes place helps add reasoning and legitimization to each conflict, almost acting as characters themselves.

Setting. *Modern Warfare* stands as the first game in the *Call of Duty* franchise that takes the battle to the North American continent. A shift in the version of simulated warfare has resulted in a shift in settings. This is reflected by the movement away from historical simulations to speculative narratives. Conflicts still span the globe but the areas of conflict are no longer rooted in history but rather realized through contemporary cultural references.

Along with all the other elements in the game settings are placed along the continuum from detailed to the general. Also in the same way the generalized is used to support the abstract. Middle Eastern locations are nonspecific; other locations are usually accompanied with a country of reference or

²³ Screen shot of first-person control manipulation. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

some kind of geographical landmarks. Settings such as Russia, Eastern Europe, Brazil and even America are given more definition. Since most popular depictions of warfare, including the Western media's coverage of warfare, rarely focus on these areas the game utilizes specific referential data. The use of Afghanistan is an example of this separation between commonly known and obscure locations for modern warfare. Afghanistan²⁴ is a more geographically specific setting than the fictional Middle Eastern country seen earlier in the game, but still represents an area of contemporary conflict that is salient for the majority of the game's demographic. At the time of the second game's release the Afghan War had been raging for eight years. Escalation in troop commitment and the unforeseeable end to counter insurgency operations most likely worked to support the game's use of Afghanistan as the opening setting for *Modern Warfare 2*. Conflict in America, Eastern Europe and Brazil do not have such obvious references in a contemporary age. The game structure requires a higher level of detail to be given to these areas of conflict, along with providing the player specific geographical data.

Middle East. Seemingly commonplace conflicts in the turbulent Middle East are used in both parts of the series to support a transition to distinctive conflicts in Russian, Eastern Europe and America. Many of the details that are provided in the Middle Eastern levels play off images that signify the Middle East to a young, Western audience and link to current conflicts taking place there. This embraces the generality given to the Middle East as an area of modern conflict. The yellowish clay, mud-like walls are covered with stencils of machine guns and clenched fists, posters and graffiti that suggest militancy. Some areas are given a small amount of humanitarian touch with colorful banners in Arabic and plants decorating the buildings. Some of the best views of the Middle Eastern setting are available as the player flies into a fictional town during a mission called "Shock and Awe"²⁵. From the perspective of

²⁴ Four of the five missions taking place in Afghanistan are located in American controlled bases. The only mission where the player fights actual Afghanistan militia takes place in what is called the "Red Zone." This is a term used by the military to identify regions of the Middle East that are not safe.

²⁵ "Shock and Awe" is the name for U.S. tactics used in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The tactic was first developed in the National Defense University of the United States by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade as a way to destroy an opponents will to fight with an overwhelming display of power (Ullman & Wade, 1996).

the door gunner the player can look over an expansive Middle Eastern landscape, the ocean and desert dotted with burning oil rigs, somewhat reminiscent of the burning oil wells seen in the during the Gulf War of 1991. As the helicopter approaches inland a number of minarets accent the city skyline, a cultural reference to the area's heavy Islamic populations²⁶.

Modern Warfare plays off what could be perceived as a lack of education in the vast public regarding the reality of contemporary conflict in the Middle East. Astore (2011) claims that there is a lack of public discussion over conflicts in these areas due to their isolation geographically and in the public consciousness. Considering this apparent lack of education, the Middle East represents a strong foundation for the development of purely fictional enemies. The rich diversity of the Middle Eastern setting is pared down into a handful of simple symbols which are easily identifiable by the majority of the *Modern Warfare* audience. In this popular depiction of warfare the game has stripped the Middle East of its unique qualities. This adheres to the same depictions of the Middle East found in Kamalipour's (1995) study of the American media: an area "often lumped together...devoid of any separate national identity, cultural heritage, religious ideology, political philosophy, or global sensitivity" (xx). Once the Middle Eastern enemy is easily established through generic characters fighting in generic settings, a more abstract Russian enemy can be further developed. Specific settings that can be directly connected to a history of conflict provide better referential data when fighting an abstract enemy from obscure areas of the globe.

Russia, Eastern Europe and Brazil. The most powerful way a remote setting can support elements of a story is by connecting the locations with parts of our everyday knowledge. These areas or more descript, and usually include specific geographic locations, landmarks, well known structures or recognizable cities. Pripyat, Ukraine²⁷ stands out as one of the more detailed settings in the series and possesses a distinct connection to the Chernobyl disaster. Like the other Eastern European

²⁶ View of Middle Eastern city from helicopter. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

²⁷ Pripyat, Ukraine is located near the Chernobyl nuclear plant. The mission which takes place here is a flashback to 1996, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union. Ukraine had gained independence from Soviet Russia in 1991.

settings, Pripjat is bleak, overgrown and deserted signifying an impoverished, rural Russian state in grips of a second civil war still recovering from ages of tyranny. The location has a slight connection to a powerful Soviet past; this acts as an aide to developing the Ultranationalist Russian enemy by connecting them to a popular memory of a Communist Russian enemy. Other parts of Pripjat such as the Chernobyl nuclear plant and the Pripjat Ferris Wheel²⁸ push these themes closer to the surface.

The game uses places and events that link to concrete real world specifics, such as communism and the Cold War to develop the Russian enemy. In the earlier parts of the second game Red Square is seen full of people waving Russian flags as a militant statue of Imran Zakhaev, “Hero of the New Russia,” is unveiled. In the background the player can see St. Basil Cathedral, The Kremlin and Spasskaya Tower²⁹. The use of these structures, this historic setting which has played host to many military parades, the unification of Russian people, all suggest high levels of “ultra” Russian nationalism. Massive patriotic celebrations in Red Square and the structures surrounding it refer to a time when Russia was at the peak of their power during Communist reign. One mission takes place in a gulag, a Soviet work camp or prison³⁰. A connection is made between this location and the Soviet purges of the mid 20th century; one prominent figure seated horseback in the foreground of the image can clearly be identified as Josef Stalin³¹. As it happens Captain Price is the only prisoner in the gulag, a good example of how settings can also enhance the individualistic nature of this modern warfare simulation. Out of the large expansive prison, after fighting your way through a maze of corridors and enemies, at the end it is all for one man. “Prisoner 626” as he is called in the game is the one man who represents a threat to Makarov and Shepherd’s plans.

²⁸ Pripjat Ferris Wheel. <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>, <http://politically-confused.blogspot.com>

²⁹ Screen shot of Russian parade in Red Square. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, 2008

³⁰ The gulag was a prominent feature of Communist Russia and usually held political prisoners or those who the government did not want. Many gulags were created during the Great Purge which lasted over thirty decades (Gellatley, 2009).

³¹ Screen shot of Gulag cut scene, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, 2008

The levels in Brazil seem somewhat out of place in the overall structure of the game but act as an extra element to defining between here and there, enemies and allies. The static backdrop of Rio de Janeiro is very detailed; several landmarks are visible such as the Christ the Redeemer Statue, the Corcovado Mountains and Guanabara Bay³². The layout and design of the Rio de Janeiro *favela* is similar to that of the Middle Eastern towns and cities in the first game. The small boxy shacks and junkyards suggest a poor undeveloped country run by armed gangs of militia or insurgents. Many of the *favela* interiors have pictures of Middle Eastern settings. This could be a subtle attempt to suggest a connection between the Middle East and the Brazilian militia. Though there is nothing else in the narrative that would point to that connection other than imagery. Both settings represent an unorthodox force that is not as organized or specialized as the Western armies. The Brazilian level is focused around pursuit of a character with past KGB connections. This acts as an additional connection between the Ultranationalist faction and communism. This setting also gives emphasis to the continued theme of fighting to capture a single individual.

America. There is no precedent for large scale conflict that takes place on the North American continent. When considering the entire genre of war games the United States presents a unique setting. Other first-person shooters like the *Tom Clancy's: Rainbow Six* series³³ portray fighting in the United States but on a smaller level. These games focus on small forces revolving around anti-terrorist operations. Not until recently has large scale warfare been brought to the American continent via game console.

The conflict works its way from a suburban setting to a commercial center and finally the National Mall. Unlike other settings this conflict covers a large, closely linked area, going from northern

³² Screen shot of *favela* level, Christ the Redeemer statue in the background. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, 2008

³³ The *Rainbow Six: Vegas 1 & 2* (2006 & 2008) games are the only two games out of the series where the majority of the fighting takes place in the United States. However, other games in the *Rainbow Six* series utilize the same settings seen in the *Modern Warfare* games, Russia, Eastern Europe and South America.

Virginia to Washington, D.C.³⁴. Residential areas as well as the National Mall are highly detailed. Houses have white picket fences with American flags hanging from the eaves; structures in the National Mall such as the White House or Department of Commerce building are precise down to the lobbies. These set pieces enhance the perception of the heroic Americans defending their picturesque homes. The player fights to secure the nation's capital against a deceptive, ultranationalist Russian foe from a bleak, dreary landscape encapsulated in a never ending winter.

To flesh out distinct differences between forces and address ideological connections to the home front, patriotism and nationalism, the American landscape is highly detailed. The setting is chock full of symbols that address freedom, liberty, democracy and capitalism. An attack on the National Mall, the Washington Monument and the White and other areas and structures that signify these concepts illustrate a Russian attack on Western culture.³⁵ The enormity of this conflict allows setting to spread over closely linked areas showcasing varied forms of American life, something not seen in other foreign settings.

Settings along with characters are essential parts to constructing viable conflicts. Once conflicts are established and given locations they represent the climax of the modern warfare narrative. All that is left are the resolutions to these conflicts.

Resolution and Outcomes. The establishment of large scale conflict represents the climax to the narrative. The story's resolutions focus around the apprehension of the marked individual through even more conflict but at a smaller, more precise scale. In the effort to resolve conflict through small scale engagements the levels of death and violence in these missions differ mainly in the fact that there are

³⁴ Some houses suburban areas are more detailed than others and there is also an area called Arcadia which contains a lot of large mansions, displaying distinct class divisions in America. The commercial district has a couple gas stations and a variety of stores that resemble chain restaurants like Burger King, Taco Bell and Fridays. The National Mall setting is almost laid out perfectly; some recognizable structures include the Washington Monument, World War II Memorial and the Capital Building.

³⁵ Screen shots from the battle that takes place in The National Mall.
<http://guides.gamepressure.com/callofdutymodernwarfare2/guide.asp?ID=8728>, <http://callofduty.wikia.com/wiki>

fewer allies to be killed. Due to a larger number of AI enemies present during the large scale battles these portions of the game involve advanced weaponry that leads to higher levels of death and chaos.

The existence of some form of international diplomacy or discourse is only a small part of conflict resolution. It only comes up twice in the game and is usually mentioned after the fact. Most of this information is delivered during brief cut scenes making references to U.N. policies and responses³⁶. There is no political or diplomatic discourse concerning war – sides move directly into conflict. The possibility or existences of diplomatic bodies being used as an alternative to violent responses is given lip service. However, as the name suggests this is a game about warfare, not a UN peace keeping simulation.

The first game poses a large conflict which has become somewhat commonplace in reality as well as digitized simulations: the “righteous” West against the insurgent Middle Eastern dictator/ terrorist. This same scenario is seen in other games such as the *Battlefield* series, movies like *The Green Zone* and is revisited daily by the global media. We are constantly reminded that “over there” in those third world countries people are suffering under the iron fist of oppression.

The major portions of conflict are investigative and lay foundations for developing characters and the unconventional Russian enemy. During the *Modern Warfare* series specialized units reveal information, whereas large conflicts usually resolve nothing. Every investigative mission discovers a new enemy who leads to another new enemy, igniting more large scale conflicts with no clear conclusion. Resolution is only found in the elimination of the individual.

In the *Modern Warfare* narrative war on a large scale is the result of one individual’s need for control over another. Resolutions are fixed to small scale warfare. Individual action is usually justified by a patriotic, nationalistic and militant rhetoric. The justifications for these resolutions are found in the

³⁶ The Russian government covers up the Ultrationalist launch of nuclear weapons at the American eastern seaboard as a nuclear missiles test. A female British reporter states that world leaders quickly denounced the weapons test but the Russian government assured them that they “...fell well within established UN protocol.” In a cut scene taking place after Russia has launched a sneak attack on the United States, a news ticker reads “U.S. CONDEMNED FOR MOSCOW AIRPORT MASSACRE - CIA “BLOWBACK” TRIGGERS HARSH U.N. RESPONSE.”

context of how enemy is defined in the gameworld. Enemies are overly hostile and zealous to the point of fanaticism. They have a general lack of respect for the rules of warfare; they are aggressive towards civilians and have a deep seated hatred for the West and America. The protagonists can do no wrong. The player lies somewhere in the middle of this spectrum between good and evil. The player is not the focus of the narrative, just another soldier immersed in digital warfare.

Discussion

The conflicts portrayed in *Modern Warfare* are original constructs. The enemies and events occurring in the game cannot be found in a history book. Gameplay takes shape at a linear level; there is only one set path that the player can take. Yet the fictional aspects of the game allow the structure to diverge from common formulas found in linear video game narratives. *Modern Warfare* is possibly the most popular war genre video game series that is not based on a historical conflict.³⁷ What makes the *Modern Warfare* series unique is how it goes about creating new enemies and war simulations without a reliance on reenactment.

Other video game research has identified numerous elements used by video games to make them more playable, enjoyable and believable (Aarseth, 1997, 2003; Kingsepp, 2007; Konzack, 2002). As stated by the *Modern Warfare*'s developers, there was no solid foundation for the enemies they created (Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare AU Interview, 2007). To mold the perfect enemy the game selected two major cultures that the West has confronted in past and present. The Russians represent a nationality and culture with a history of conflict with the Western world. According to research the current status of this relationship is something that is uncertain, especially in the public consciousness (Cohen, 2010; Kurilla & Zhuravleva, 2010; Tsygankov, 2009). The generic "Middle East" is presented as a cultural and

³⁷ There is an abundance of sales information that points to this statistical fact (Call of Duty 4 Tops NPD Charts, 2008; Modern Warfare 2 has Obliterated Halo 3's sales Records; NPD: 2007 U.S. Game Industry, 2008; NPD: Top 10 Games, 2009). It should also be mentioned that the next installment in the *Modern Warfare* series, *Black Ops* has continued the series' dominance of the war game genre (Black Ops Tops Monthly, Yearly NPD Numbers, 2011; Black Ops breaks records with \$360M in first-day sales, 2010). However, unlike the first two installments the *Black Op* narrative is loosely tied to the Cold War and Vietnam.

geographically generalized area that has stood-in as enemy to major Western powers for decades. The decision to pose these nations, cultures and geographical regions as enemies illustrates how the game creates a system of reference through the use of symbols and memory.

The separation created between elements such as characters, settings and dialogues help support the function of referentiality, what connects elements of the fictional world to the real. Once the game has successfully created foundations for fictional enemies, it relies on cultural perspectives to distinguish between the “good” and the “bad,” “us” and “them.” Many of the game’s features that connect referential data to enemies also highlight ideological concepts of warfare found in the social constructs of the real world such as vengeful retribution, cultural distinctions, nationalism and militancy. Most of these social constructs are mediated through collusion between the entertainment and military industries. Players are able to act out these ideologies in a fictional simulation on hyperreal battlefields containing stylized settings. They play amongst characters that they can identify within their own social structures and play against those that they indentify as being outside their immediate social communities.

Indeed, on the surface the objective of the game is to eliminate the enemy and come to a clearly defined conclusion, making it *ludic* (a game with a defined end, a winner and a loser, such as chess). On the other hand, the fictional portions of the game, its open ending with no clear resolutions, and a continued enemy presence make it somewhat *paidiac* (a game which has no defined ending and can be played a variety of ways, such as the child’s game tag). Here the game makes commentary on the nature of modern warfare, which sets it apart from other war simulations. Through the speculative themes of the game and fictional narrative we are presented with a type of warfare that is a living, constantly changing, organism. The fictional side of a war is fought under the guise of nationalistic and militant ideologies, there is good and bad, the victor and defeated. The reality of war is used as a foundation for this fiction, though it shows no clear ending and reveals enemy as a constant.

Referentiality

Analysis showed that most parts of the game were structured between the detailed and the general. This separation was most evident when comparing the different enemies included in the game, Russians and the OPFOR or Middle Eastern enemies. More detailed information was usually provided for the fictional Ultranationalist Russian enemy. Their appearance, settings and additional background information were highly stylized for the most part. Most noticeably, Russian character dialogue provided more in-depth information on their motivations, history, beliefs and politics. The Middle Eastern enemy is generic. This is illustrated by the small amount of background information regarding OPFOR, the broad generalities used to signify Middle Eastern culture and the non-descript settings. For the most part Middle Eastern characters all looked alike, including those who played larger roles in the narrative. Locations varied but were also wrapped into the general – specific structure, highly detailed Eastern European and Russian locations and generic, desert, Arabesque settings. The high amount of detail given to the American battlefield and the highly signified setting of Washington, DC (even more specific, the National Mall) paints a clear picture of frames of reference used to give realism to the narrative. This dynamic between the generic and the detailed illustrates how the game used referential data and symbolism to construct a generally strong, basic enemy which laid foundations for an abstract enemy. Contemporary references to a Russian enemy are not as plentiful as they are for a Middle Eastern antagonist. This required the game to reach further back using references out of our collective memories of an older Russian.

Konzack (2002) stated that video games use referential data taken from the real world including other games or interactions we have with different mediums outside of video games. Analysis supported this claim by showing that one of the most useful ways to create a fictional depiction of contemporary warfare that is relevant and fun is by connecting it to things which are tangible in the real world. Each symbol attached to the enemy helps to give that enemy life. The generalities attached to the Middle Eastern enemies through setting and appearance such as religious symbols, images of militancy, oil wells

and *shemaghs* are all referable back to what little the general Western socialized public knows about Middle Eastern culture. On orientalism, Said (1980) writes:

“Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression”

Kamalipour (1997) has written extensively on the vapid perceptions of Middle Eastern cultures presented by the Western media. He applies some of the same socialization theory seen in this research, defining the process he lays out as “mediawork” (74). According to Kamalipour, mediawork creates meaning through a multitude of aspects of Western life including: mass media, popular culture, industry, finance and marketing. During this process “the oppositional other is continually, incorporated, co-opted and domesticated” (74). Middle Eastern cultures are commonly depicted in popular Western media as religious, tyrannical, militant zealots, lacking culture or political structure. Kamalipour also found that this type of Arab and Islamic cultural stereotyping has been part of Western culture since the Middle Ages. This can be seen in other media like the recent *Iron Man* (2008) movie which places a generalized Middle Eastern militant faction as the introductory enemy. Even in the presumably innocent Disney movie *Aladdin* (1992) these cultural stereotypes are evident in the character’s appearances as well as the lyrics to some of the catchy Disney tunes.³⁸ The little amount of data that the general public knows about Middle Eastern culture is collected through media that focuses on religion, the oil resource, and images of militancy and domestic unrest. Symbols that represent a socialized perception of Middle Eastern cultures are simple to recognize. In this way enemy for the majority of the *Modern Warfare* demographic is easily established. This construct follows along the lines of the bulk of the game’s narrative, setting apart the detailed from the general.

³⁸ The soldiers all carry the distinct Saracen Scimitar, a symbol still found on many of regions national flags. The opening tune Arabian nights describes the area as “a faraway place...where the cut off your ear if they don’t like your face. It’s barbaric but hey it’s home.” This verse has subsequently changed after complaints from the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. (The 25 Most Controversial Movies Ever, 2007)

A reference to the Russian enemy requires digging into a history of conflict and tension between Western democratized powers and a socialist Russia. The closest contemporary reference which could be ascertained from the Russian enemy is the concept of Russian Ultrnationalism. Tuminez (2000) argues that in the modern world there are two separate schools on Russian nationalism: The “hardliners” and the “softliners.” Hardliners view radical nationalism as a reaction to frustrations over the collapse of the Soviet Union and a need to return to such a government. Softliners adhere to the belief that this nationalism is good and acts as a tool “to draw effectively on aspects of their own national history and culture that link to visions of the new state and society they are trying to build” (3). Other research (Umland, 2008 & 2005) has commented on the growth and impacts of Russian radical nationalism and its communist and fascists elements. Although it is something that most gamers are most likely unaware of, Ultrnationalism is a functioning political party in modern day Russia. This stands as the most contemporary reference to the Russian enemy used in the game, but it is somewhat obscure to the average player.

Recollection is the most powerful tool of reference used to breathe life into the fictional Russian enemy. Zelizer (1995) and Halbwachs (1992) have proposed that collective memories encompass an array of different uses and purposes in social situations. Zelizer displayed this in her research on images of the Holocaust. However, unlike Zelizer’s analysis on the early reception of Holocaust images, the idea of Russia as an enemy did not lack referential data. Referential data arrives in the form of symbols, locations, historical events and political climates that connect the simulation to the real world. Distinct images of military parades in Red Square and character’s KGB connections refer back to a time when they were at the height of their militancy. Icons such as the Gulag, the hammer and sickle, and a quick cameo from Stalin all point to a Russian enemy that is similar to that of the old communist regime. The existence of a frame of reference shows how collective memories can be directed and shifted to address certain ideas. When the Holocaust pictures had no referential data the public was unsure how to respond, once referential data is provided the reactions to those images could be delegated. Two missions are

spent developing a connection between Imran Zakhaev and post-Soviet Russia disarmament - black market weapons trades via ex-KGB members. This scene suggests that collective memory is useful in constructing the image of a new enemy from elements related to a history of confrontation. This also agrees with Aarseth's (2003) views on the importance of cultural and social references to the Gameworld and gameplay.

Referential data is not just used to define aspects of the enemy but also those of the protagonist forces. The game features two main cultures that serve as the Western powers: The United States and The United Kingdom. Yet as we saw during the second game, the enemies' animosity shifts from the generalized West to a more specified hatred for America. Referential data, data connecting the gameworld to the real world, is not as rich for the British side as it is for the Americans, though they both represent the West. Like the Russian foe, the American ally is reinforced by using national icons and areas that reflect popular American ideals. The Russian invasion of the capital and destruction of these patriotic icons is not coincidence but draws on collective memories of a past conflict that may have had similar outcomes.

The symbols and references that connect the *Modern Warfare* Russians to Soviet Russian are also buffered by Western characters dialogue. Though there are Russian allies and Russian enemies, all Russians are all culturally stigmatized. The game does not spend a great deal of time creating a distinction between Ultranationalist and Loyalist Russians, which can be applied to the overall structure the game uses for defining sides of conflict. References to a Russian past that has vague relevance in the present support what Zelizer and Halbwachs say about the utility behind collective memory and the act of recollection: That it can be useful for applying old memories to finding meaning for those things in the present. They also state that collective memory works across cultures and helps direct cultural perspectives towards those outside of an individual's own social and cultural construct. In addition this gives more credibility to Bronfenbrenner's (1961) theory on the assimilation of old cultural perspectives to new ones. This would state that people are more likely to associate Russia with enemy because it is

something that has been established in the past. It is easier to continue a that line of thought than to begin developing new perspectives.

Western cultural perspectives. How referential data was used in the game has implications for how the audience expects the enemy to behave and how war is enacted. An overview of the structuring of enemy in the narrative showed that specific signifiers were used to define sides of a conflict. Once the enemy is identified in the game through reference to the real, contemporary perspectives on cultural ideologies and concepts associated with warfare could be formed creating even further distinctions. The positions taken on these perspectives are generally complimentary to the West. Where reference helped define what was enemy, the narrative used socially constructed ideals to show how enemy goes about being. This enforces the claim that video games stand as unique texts that can be used to make certain commentary on cultures and society (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006; Kanister 2007). This idea also reveals a conflict within the *Modern Warfare* game, a divide between a realistic depiction of war and cultural meanings found in war.

One of the best ways the game distinguishes between sides in a conflict is revealed by observing the different ways they use and interpret the various concepts of warfare, such as vengeance, sacrifice, duty and truth. Berger and Luckmann (1967) referred to the existence of a common stock of knowledge that plays part in an individual's socialization. To make sense of the gameworld and its structure, the game incorporates certain socially constructed themes or better yet, socially defined ideologies. Being that this is a game depicting warfare, militancy and nationalism thrive as themes. While concepts are used differently between factions, a militant world composed of the righteous West and outside belligerents comes to life. How each side uses these concepts and to what ends helps separate the good from the bad. Bronfenbrenner (1961) claimed that it was easier to assimilate old perspectives to newer ones, so it is no coincidence that the Western player finds themselves fighting Russians in a fictional war rather than the Chinese or some other nation.

Retribution is a major theme that runs throughout the story yet is displayed differently by each side. Diplomacy is replaced by justification and righteous vengeance. A strong foundation for the enemies' generic hatred for the imperialistic West is absent from the narrative. Insurgency and unregulated nuclear power justify aggressive military action from the United States and allies. In total both reasons are quite generic, their roots easily identifiable in Western mediated social construction. The message is these groups or cultures want to destroy the Western way of life; they despise freedom, liberty and democracy. This does not prove that the game promotes this kind of thought, nor was that the purpose of this research. However, it does show that the game is a useful artifact in uncovering the application of institutionalized ideologies in the form of virtual entertainment. It also helps clarify the struggle between modern warfare fiction and depiction.

Concepts such as referentiality, memory, and ideology can be used differently by applying it to what we presume to know about the world. The lack of discrepancy between ideological concepts used to develop the narrative reveals this. As modern social science has theorized a common stock of knowledge concerning these concepts is formulated by institutions of meaning making. With its strict adherence to contemporary military technology and tactics, the game represents part of the larger military-entertainment complex as described by Der Derian (2009) and Halter (2006). The developers of *Modern Warfare* went as far as to hire Hank Keirse, former infantry Lieutenant and West Point professor, as a military consultant to make certain their simulation was as real as possible (Call of Duty 4's Hank Keirse Interview, 2007). However, a video game will never be able to truly replicate what a battlefield feels like, and this research shows the concepts behind creating a justifiable, fictional warfare can be defined in various ways.

Simulation

Modern Warfare is part of an institution that did not garner that much attention until the digital era, but as Der Derian (2009) reveals the collusion between the video game world and the military has been around decades before. The conflict between Russia and America is a simulacrum, its representation

of a replication of modern conflict. Along with moving soundtracks and theatrical effects, the collusion between the entertainment industry and the military is clear in *Modern Warfare*. Certain scenes and gameplay are slowed down to provide more drama; control of the player is manipulated to give a feeling of immediacy. The game not only lacks the tactile experience found in war but functions as the experience of one culture. It is a simulation based on an idea. However, the end goal of this simulation is to make a profit from by creating a fun version of modern warfare. Researchers such as Stahl (2006), Der Derian (2009) and Halter (2006) agree that some war games make an attempt to militarize the audience. However, there are portions of the narrative which conflict with that phenomenon. At various points in each game the player character dies. Unlike many war games, *Modern Warfare* does not uphold the *Rambo*-esque ideal of one man taking on an entire army. However, analysis did reveal a large portion of the game focuses on small special force tactics used to overwhelm a large enemy presence. However, these portions of the game focus on the dominant specialized Western forces rather than creating super soldiers seen in some of the less authentic war games. The constant transition between characters also keeps the player somewhat detached from the idea of the virtual soldier. Also, the playable character is not the lead protagonist of this story. Little detail is given to the playable characters; the story mainly focuses on the plight of lead characters that the player has no control over. The majority of these lead characters are also British which does not match up well with the dominant demographic for the *Modern Warfare* series. The game does place emphasis on the player's positioning as a soldier. The soldiering experience is focused more on diversity rather than a pure romanticized version of the virtual citizen-soldier.

Other research has stated that some post-9/11 war games develop the virtual citizen-soldier as an attempt to help the population deal with anxieties concerning war in the modern era (Oulette, 2008; Stahl, 2006). It was proposed that the conflict in *Modern Warfare* possibly gave the public closure to the uncertainty surrounding the Cold War conflict of the mid to late 20th century. The game does give a depiction of U.S. – Russo open warfare, yet at the end of the series the conclusion to this conflict is still

very open-ended. The open ending to the story cause a regression to apprehension as they eagerly await the sequel. Through immersion into the gameworld and their social juxtaposition to the conflicts the player can become the object and subject of war early in the game. In the end, through a deceptive twist, they are forced from that position.

Modern Warfare is not a celebration of war. If anything, underneath the surface it is an illustration of the futility of war as a means to resolving global conflicts. This is displayed by the contradictions identified within in the gameworld and structure. There is a struggle between an attempt to depict the realism of war and the cultural ideals for war. In the portrayal of General Shepherd, Western nationalism and military tradition come under question. Enemy can be seen anywhere, even on your own side. It is the individual who is at the center of modernized warfare. In this case that individual is not represented by the player-controlled character but by characters that are outside the interactive portions of the simulation. The game presents a fictional simulation of contemporary war by reference to historical fact, but finding authenticity in fiction can only go so far before it is inundated with culturally and socially defined ideologies. These ideologies move the simulation farther away from a true representation of international conflict yet make important commentary on the subject of war as entertainment in Western culture.

Limitations

One of the largest draws of *Modern Warfare* and other modern war simulations like it is the multiplayer option. Some people may play this game and never experience the campaign mode therefore may be told a completely different story. It is possible that an understanding of enemy and warfare can be lost or completely confused by different experiences between the multiplayer gameworld and the campaign. Additionally, a researcher who is analyzing the narrative's meanings from a different cultural perspective will most likely find different structures and themes working throughout the game. However,

it is hard to ignore that the game seems to be aware of this one-sided perspective.³⁹ In this case social constructionism cannot make a generalized conclusion on how this game describes conflicts. The conclusions made in this research can only be applied to the specific cultures social institutions which developed the game. When considering social institutions from other cultures the results may vary. For example some consoles also produce a different version of the game; different versions are also seen in different countries according to those countries laws on content and media. In some countries the “No Russian” mission has been completely removed from the game. This level can also be skipped in versions of the game in which it has not been removed. This represents a major event in the narrative and provides most of the Russian justification for invading the United States. To have the player simulate this act of terrorism provides deep immersion into the gameworld and narrative. Taken out this could have a large impact on how enemy is indentified. The approach taken in this research can only make commentary on this specific text. The findings here cannot be applied to modern war simulations in general because it does not attempt to compare the game to similar texts. Future narrative analysis of modern war simulations should attempt to compare multiple stories from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Furthermore the position of the researcher in reference to the game might result in different analysis of the narrative. A researcher with a less intimate knowledge of the game and its history may not consider the differences from the bulk of the *Call of Duty* franchise.

Future Research

Further research in the *Modern Warfare* series and other simulations of contemporary war should include a comparison between the campaign mode and the online multiplayer mode. Considering in most online versions the player has the option to choose sides; this could provide a wealth of information on how players associate with sides of conflict when there is no story. This in turn could lead into an

³⁹ After a player dies in a mission, while he is being “resurrected,” the game will show a variety of quotes concerning war. Many of these quotes are not what you would expect from a war game, e.g., “In war, truth is the first casualty.” – Aeschylus, “My first wish is to see this plague of mankind, war, banished from the earth.” – George Washington and “Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind.” – Albert Einstein.

examination of war gaming communities on a global. Various experiments and ethnographic studies would serve as excellent supplements to this research. Players could be questioned before, during and after completion of a game or multiplayer sessions concerning their perceptions of enemies and warfare. Further research should look at other speculative fictions which include Russians as the main enemy, such as *Command and Conquer: Red Alert* (1996) and *World in Conflict* (2007). Other research could look at games which simulate similar speculative fictions but with different enemies, such as the recent game *Homefront* (2011), which positions a unified Korea as the main antagonist. As with most popular media there are *Modern Warfare* spinoffs and fan created content. An examination of these texts could provide more details and background to the narrative allowing research to see how far the community is allowing the text to delve into their social reality.

The textual analysis and study of war games has endless possibilities. It is a genre that warrants a closer examination considering it is a subject matter that most of the modernized world has embraced as a viable source of entertainment and education. Additionally, this research would benefit from an analysis of war games developed outside of Western culture. Comparing and analyzing different war narratives from Western cultures and those considered to be the “Other” could create a wealth of knowledge concerning the ideologies of war and differing cultural perspectives. Current and future research into video gaming and simulation should begin to trend more towards cultural studies, the analysis of their themes and ideologies, rather than focusing on effects studies. As the video games we play mature so must the research which looks to uncover their social meanings as legitimate forms of art.

Conclusion

Like our collective memories, war has become malleable, made into whatever seems to fit the times. The remodeling of war as a normal convention of Western life has been amplified by the military-entertainment complex. One of the developments of that institutional convergence is the modern warfare video game – worlds where your average citizen can mow down culturally distinct enemies with heavy-duty, fully-automatic weapons while sitting on the couch munching on a bag of chips.

The *Modern Warfare* series is a milestone in war gaming simulation. Financial data has shown that it is one of the most widespread and popular speculative fictions ever produced. It is not a remake, based on another text such as a book or a movie. There are various references throughout the game which give service to other mediums that have tackled similar subject matter, but the story still stands as an original work of fiction. *Modern Warfare* is a representation of how war is conceived from a Western perspective built upon the “sociology of knowledge.” Elements such as nationalism, patriotism, vengeance, righteousness, history, and truth all become part of the simulation of war, yet they are mostly ideologies which can be manipulated. Essentially stating that because of these dual meanings, war is constant as is enemy. The “black and white” struggle game developer Collier described becomes less clear (*Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare AU Interview*, 2007). This becomes somewhat of a compromise: If the game is to be successful, the depiction of warfare must be interwoven into cultural perceptions of warfare through narrative. These experiences are adversaries. The public desires accuracy and realism yet they also want a version of warfare which they are familiar with. This includes how war is fought and how enemies are defined. *Modern Warfare*’s structure pulls out specific elements which lead the player willingly into a world of modern warfare. The game also accepts the fallacies that arise when trying to blend accurate simulation and the everyday life of the gamer.

In the modern digital age some might claim that real warfare has become more like a video game and that the modern media presents a more classical, romantic, “real,” vision of war. *Modern Warfare* strives to present both by creating a fictional war using Western socialized perceptions of warfare that reference current and historical perceptions of enemies. In one of the first commercials for *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* at the end a Russian voice states “*Всякая война враньё*,” which when translated means “Every war is a lie.” This is a rough quote taken from Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, where he states “All warfare is based on deception.” Given that what we accept as real warfare and enemy in a fictional video game is constructed from social perceptions based on cultural and historical references, not only is deception the basis for war as an act but also in representation.

Appendix A: Images

IMG A: Martyr Statue of Imran Zakhaev

IMG B: Al Asad, leader of the OFOR insurgent forces. Imran Zakhaev stands in the background.

IMG C: Captain Price, in specialized battle gear with boonie hat

IMG D: Russian antagonists in the Modern Warfare series; Victor Zakhaev, Vladimir Makarov, and Imran Zakhaev.

IMG E: US military characters; Sgt. Foley, Cpl. Dunn, and Sgt. Griggs in standard military fatigues.

IMG F: SAS characters in specialized gear; Gaz, “Soap” MacTavish, and “Ghost.”

IMG G: General Shepherd

IMG H: The tattoos of Private Allen's undercover identity, Alexi Bordin

IMG I: Tap X to pull out the knife!

IMG J: Middle Eastern landscape

IMG K: Middle Eastern landscape showing *minarets* and a *mosque*

IMG L: The Pripyat Ferris Wheel as shown in the game (left). Photo of the Ferris Wheel (right).

IMG M: Part of visual montage at the beginning of Modern Warfare 2, the unveiling of the Imran Zakhaev statue in Red Square. Notable Russian structures in the background; St. Basil Cathedral, the Kremlin and Spasskaya Tower.

IMG N: Cut scene image of Russian Gulag, Stalin is seen in the inlay window.

IMG O: As the player fights through the Rio de Janeiro *favela* the Corcovado Mtns. and the Christ the Redeemer statute are permanent fixtures to the background.

IMG P: Shots from the US – Russo battle on the National Mall. The Capital building can be seen in the distance

IMG Q: View of the National Mall battle field from helicopter. To the left is the WW II Memorial.

IMG R: The White House with Russian fortified points circled.

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