INTRODUCTION - VIDEOGAME ADAPTATION: SOME EXPERIMENTS IN METHOD

Kevin M. Flanagan

I. Notes on a Potentially Wide Field

Although videogames have been around in some-form-or-another since at least the early 1960s (and games, that very human pursuit of play and pleasure, have been around for as long as there has been free time), their systematic study is a relatively recent pursuit. In his editorial to the first issue of the journal *Game Studies*, Espen Aarseth designates 2001 as "year one" of this pursuit as "an emerging, viable, international, academic field."[1] While scholars in fields as far flung as computer science, sociology and film studies had previously written about games in some form or another, a journal like *Game Studies* and an editorial like Aarseth's is necessarily interested in carving out some autonomous space for considering what games "are" and what games "do." The desire to advocate for the specificity of games, for the singularity of their study, is an important rhetorical move that definitively signals that digital games have arrived on the cultural scene.

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[1] Espen Aarseth, "Computer Game Studies, Year One," *Game Studies* 1.1 (2001). <http://gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html>. Accessed 19 Jan 2016.

As the intervening fifteen years have taught us, videogames (to stick with the broadly defined object of scrutiny focused upon in this special issue) "are" many things, sometimes simultaneously: interactive narratives made to delight and amaze; ancillary projects designed to accompany the release of a film; simulations of worlds miraculously contained within the impossibly vast innerspace of a hard drive, disc, or flash memory stick; programs to be operated by users that only come alive through play, and whose inert or potential state differs in kind and quality from their experience once run through hardware and engaged by a gamer. Scholarship and commentary have taught us that videogames, writ large, "do" specific things. For instance, they uniquely engage our instincts, cognitive abilities and emotions through apparent player control, whose inputs sometimes approach cybernetic second nature through recurrent use. Some, such as Ian Bogost, have argued that they do not just "do" specific things, but rather can be made to "do" any number of things. In his book *How to Do Things with Videogames*, the supposedly unique game object becomes a chameleonic site of repurposing: games are everything from art to branded content to promotional incentives, with an improbable game like *Sneak King* (2006), a Burger King-designated stealth/puzzle platformer dwelling at the nexus of these functions.[2] Videogames are their own unique object of study, but they inevitably are other things to other people in other fields, and they invariably interact with other media and rise to the challenges presented by different forms and designations.

This special issue of *Wide Screen Journal* is about the rich intersection of videogames (and game-centric theories) and the methodological avenues provided by adaptation studies, itself a relatively new field whose development has intensified apace with games studies over the last 15 years. As Imelda Whelehan points out, adaptation studies (which is simply "the analysis

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[2] Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 2011), 64.

of a text its adaptation," regardless of original or resultant medium) is less concerned with what "version" of a text is better than it is interested in "cross-fertilization and exchange," in what different media, different contexts, and different "takes" on the same material have to teach each other.[3] Adaptation studies is interested not just with texts that exist in a one-to-one relationship-- the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations* (1861) and David Lean's film of *Great Expectations* (1946), for instance--but also with the process of adaptation, wherein several sources, media, and the affordances and constraints of choices made to address multiple exigencies means that texts exist in complicated relationships to and with one another. Adaptation studies is no longer the preserve of literature programs seeking a tentative step towards popularizing dense novels. Instead, analyzing adaptations has been recognized as being very much part of a practical 20th century toolkit for students of the humanities. Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell write that "effective textual comparisons across the literature/media divide demands acute skills of close reading and narrative analysis, as well as good acquaintance with the general debates about the interface between 'high' and 'low' culture."[4] Were there to be a digital game made of *Great Expectations*, adaptation studies as it stands now would not just care about correspondences of narrative and characterization between book and game, but would interrogate the expanded field of studies of Dickens, considerations of game genres, and would look at how Dickens's sense of narrative could be mined for rules or mechanics.

In the study of videogames, one term associated with adaptation (whose associated processes of transformation include translation, transposition, intermediality, and paratextuality, to name but a few that you will encounter in the essays that follow) has a special place atop the

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[3] Imelda Whelehan, "What is Adaptation studies?," *adapt blog*. <https://blogs.utas.edu.au/adapt/2012/04/18/what-is-adaptation-studies/>. Accessed 19 Jan 2016.
[4] "Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, "Introduction," *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, ed. Cartmell and Whelehan (London: Routledge, 1999), 18-19.

heap. Remediation, as defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, partially has to do with the tendency for media to "absorb" and "repurpose" other media forms, for a digital object like a videogame to seamlessly present and contain other types of media experience depending upon need.[5] For example, a videogame can present a book in digital form, or cease being interactive in favor of switching to a sequence of full-motion video, or can play classical music as sound accompaniment to the actions a player controls. In this way, videogames remediate literature, cinema, and whole traditions of music into an interactive package with space to spare. The material edifices of videogames also productively inhabit the possibilities of remediation. For instance, Nintendo is a company whose entire success rests on the practice. According to a 1997 interview with designer Gunpei Yokai, his philosophy--which emerged as something a company wide orthodoxy--could be translated as "lateral thinking for withered technology."[6] For a time, their products were explicitly designed to revitalize and expand old hardware. A "conversion kit" of the failed arcade cabinet *Radar Scope* (1979) let the company salvage thousands of units, and in the process gave the world the company's first major hit: *Donkey Kong* (1981).[7] Games scholars have often privileged remediation above others in the adaptation studies lexicon, seemingly do to the institutional history of their field, which seems to be borne more directly out of media studies departments than English departments or cinema studies programs.[8]

As I have recently argued, and as the authors here demonstrate, adaptation studies can do a lot for videogames, not least of all re-open lines of inquiry between different forms and

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[5] See the roll-out of the term throughout Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Remediation," *Configurations* 4.3 (1996): 311-358.
[6] Gunpei Yokai quoted in Nathan Altice, *I Am Error: The Nintendo Family Computer/Entertainment System Platform* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 28.
[7] *Ibid*. 54-55.
[8] For a survey of uses of "remediation" in relation to videogames, these two examples provide nice bookends from different decades: Paul Ward, "Videogames as Remediated Animation," *Screenplay: Cinema/videogames/interfaces*, eds. Geoff King and Tanya Kryzwinska (London: Wallflower Press, 2002, 122-135 and Matthias Stork's video essay *Transmedia Synergies: Remediating Films and Videogames* (2012). <https://vimeo.com/43326496>. Accessed 19 Jan 2016.

platforms that the diehards of media specificity might wish to deny.[9] Videogames are constantly adapting from other sources and negotiating territory claims with other media. From the transformation of textual material from a movie franchise to the regional and discourse specific practice of localization (the translation process that makes games intelligible in different markets around the world), videogames engage the adaptation process at all levels of their invention, programming, playtesting, marketing, and reception. The goal of this special issue, therefore, is to expand the applicability of "adaptation" as a mechanism of analysis for comparative game studies. In what follows, I provide a brief example of the scope, remit, and wide-applicability of this claim with a discussion of how games interact with associated paratextual materials (that is, an exploration of how their meanings are tied to and adapted out of their relationships with frames of reference that are in some senses removed from the autonomous "object" of the game itself). I demonstrate how the public face of a videogame is constructed by how other texts frame the experience of their consumption. My aim here is to demonstrate how and why videogames have *always* been subject to the textual concerns of adaptations studies.

II. Videogames and Narrative Paratexts: The Uses of Instruction Manuals, from *Adventure* (1979) to *Shovel Knight* (2013)

Videogames have relied upon extratextual materials to form game worlds since their initial popularization in the 1970s. Given the inherent technological limitations of early console and PC games, designers and developers have had to rely on supplemental instruction and storytelling as a means of guaranteeing a game's intelligibility. I want to highlight this changing historical relationship between games and the objects that attend to a player's experience as an example of the degree to which videogames adapt to changes in their size, programming, and

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[9] See Kevin M. Flanagan, "Videogame Adaptation," *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Tom Leitch (New York: Oxford UP, 2017), forthcoming.

circulation.

Game paratexts, following Gerard Gennette, might be understood as supplemental textual material that provide narrative and world-defining characteristics that cannot be contained by, represented with, or relayed through the played text of the videogame itself. For Gennette, these threshold textual materials prompt a zone of "transaction" between reader and text, wherein a reader's (or player's, or viewer's) experience of content is mediated by information not necessarily created by the author of the text on its own.[10] In his expansive *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts* (2010), Jonathan Gray argues that any contemporary media experience is the product of advertising, promotional materials (from the press release to the guerrilla marketing campaign), ancillary objects like toys and apparel, and internet banter. It is nearly impossible to experience a television show, movie, game, theme park ride, or musical without encountering paratextual material. He writes: "and rather than simply serve as extensions of a text, many of these items are filters through which we must pass on our way to the film or program, our first and formative encounters with the text."[11] While Gray argues for the general increase in paratextual forms in our age of a hyper-accelerating mediascape, this proliferation should be qualified: as some paratextual designations become more common, others become obsolete and disappear, their former function hoisted onto one or several newer forms. Such is the fate of the videogame instruction manual.

For videogames, paratextual materials do not just enhance a play experience, but often serve as correctives or buttresses that address and deflect any necessary limitations within a game's programming. One such paratext is a videogame's box, whose physical presence was the

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[10] Gerald Genette , "Introduction to the Paratext," trans. Marie Maclean, *New Literary History* 22.2 (Spring 1991): 261-262. For a survey of how the concept of a paratext gets deployed for visual media, see Dorothy Birke and Birte Christ, "Paratext and Digital Narrative: Mapping the Field," *Narrative* 21. 1 (2013): 65-87.
[11] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 3.

initial anchor of meaning on most console and PC games sold between the early 1970s and the

early 2000s. For early home videogames, such textual framing was invaluable. For example, in

Carl Therrien's account of *Haunted House* (Atari VCS, 1981), the box is one of the main
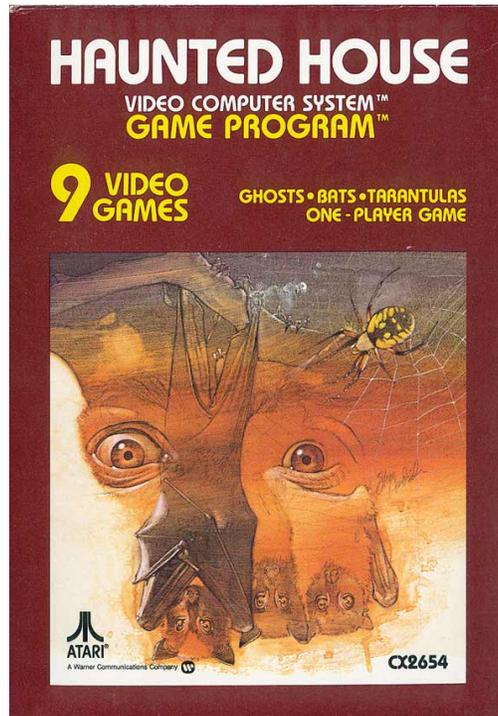
Figure 1: Box of *Haunted House*, via Atari Age (http://www.atariage.com)

enforcer's of the game's supposed horrific content:

> It is unclear just how supernatural the bats and tarantulas of *Haunted House* (Atari, 1981) really are—the proportions at this early stage of visual development being impossible to read—but at least one element of this alleged first horror game puts it under the 'marvelous' category. The back cover of the retail box clears-up any potential ambiguity about the white collection of pixels moving on the screen: "*Ghosts*. Bats. Tarantulas One-Player Game" (emphasis mine).[12]

Since the dawn of the console era, instruction manuals—little books or pamphlets packaged with

a new cartridge or disk—have served both as a guide for technical operation (they explain how to

play a game) and as a kind of imaginative supplement that outlines the full stakes of a games'

narrative and the world in which it takes place. For Mario de Govia, they explain "the basic

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[12] Carl Therrien, "Games of Fear: A Multi-Faceted Historical Account of the Horror Genre in Video Games," *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, ed. Bernard Perron (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Pub, 2009), 30. For my analysis of the importance of VHS and DVD cover art, see Kevin M. Flanagan, "Browsing for Dissonance: Paratexts, Box-Art Iconography, and Genre," *Media Fields Journal* 1 (2010): 1-13.

operations a player will need to know to begin playing the video game and cover[s] such topics as game installation, controller maps, saving and loading, basic movement, legal texts and warnings and other options available."[13] In narrative terms, such manuals provide names and backgrounds for NPCs (non-player characters) and give justification for antagonistic encounters and obstacles. As related to film and television, a game's manual is comparable in some ways to a film's press kit, which might help to explain a movie's narrative (these sometimes anonymously penned summaries are invaluable for messy exploitation films and films with otherwise incoherent stories, as they provide some possible sense of intention). In non-narrative terms, game manuals occasionally double as guarantors of a game experience. A useful comparison is the short essay, or program note, often distributed in relation to an avant-garde or experimental film, either by the filmmaker themselves or by a curator. These pieces usually tell an audience how to best "read" what they are seeing, either by providing a vocabulary for the experience or by suggesting a context for the film's style, affective regime, and mood.

Games with adventure and role playing elements—that is, games about quest narratives, the accumulation of objects, and the navigation of complex spaces—have always had a close kinship to instruction manuals. While the general trajectory that I outline here (that is, manuals as indispensable, manuals as prestige objects, and manuals as retro-tinged curios) could be taken as true for games of most genres, this investigation focuses on games that share a genre kinship. Their closeness in terms of genre helps accentuate the changing function of these supplemental texts.

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[13] Mario de Govia, "Game Manuals," *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (Westport, CT: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 233. In this piece, ed Govia likewise identifies *Adventure* and *The Legend of Zelda* as important moments in the history of the game manual. See 233-235.

HOW TO PLAY

An evil magician has stolen the Enchanted Chalice and has hidden it somewhere in the Kingdom. The object of the game is to rescue the Enchanted Chalice and place it inside the Golden Castle where it belongs.

This is no easy task, as the Evil Magician has created three Dragons to hinder you in your quest for the Golden Chalice. There is Yorgle, the Yellow Dragon, who is just plain mean; there is Grundle, the Green Dragon, who is mean and ferocious; and there is Rhindle, the Red Dragon, who is the most ferocious of all. Rhindle is also the fastest Dragon and is the most difficult to outmaneuver.

Figure 2: Screenshot of *Adventure Game Program Instructions*, 1.

A representative early case study is *Adventure* (1979, Atari 2600), a fantasy-themed game that has players navigating a maze. Owing to the lack of memory in an Atari 2600 cartridge (a mere 4k for the rom), the bulk of the game's narrative is displaced onto the instruction manual, which explains what the abstract images on screen actually mean. The world of *Adventure* is evocative of fantasy themes, but they stay at such a general level that they read today as deliberate abstraction: an evil magician has stolen the Golden Chalice, which is being protected by three dragons, all of whom must be outmaneuvered in order for the Chalice to be restored to the Golden Castle.[14] The manual therefore bears a heavy burden, as it must not only explain the game's narrative but also must justify the conditions for winning the game, something not

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[14] *Adventure Game Program Instructions* (Atari, 1979), 1-2 (though unpaginated). Mario de Govia points out that the entire narrative and setting is summarized in a mere four paragraphs. De Govia 234.

conveyed within the game world itself. Mia Consalvo points out that "even if instruction manuals describe an objective and detail what characters can do in a game, they don't truly give the player the rules."[15] *Adventure's* manual can provide a frame of intelligibility for the game and can explain it in broad strokes, but in order to know what the game feels like, including how to finesse the interface for success, play is essential.
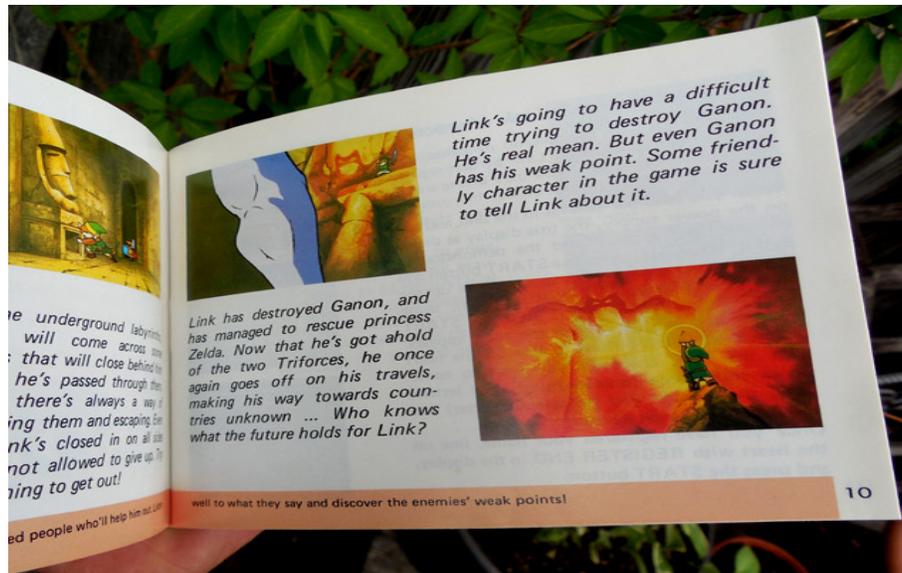
Figure 3: From *The Legend of Zelda* manual. Via dinosaurdracula.com.

The instruction manual of *The Legend of Zelda* (1987, NES) represents an intensification of the case of *Adventure* in that it offers an extensive backstory to the game-world, and prefaces the quest in which the player participates. Several illustrated pages are given over to the story of Hyrule, which players are encouraged to think of as having a history beyond the programmable scope of a game cartridge. Given the games' relative complexity, said manual also functions as a source of hints and "correct" playing procedures, transcending the scope and scale of the *Adventure* manual. The last part of the manual contains what would now be called "walkthrough" material, step-by-step guidance that to some players amount to "spoilers," and a

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[15] Mia Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 85.

general level of hand-holding missing from the game itself, whose hints are relegated to the cryptic sayings of mysteriously robed men. Moreover, given the presentation of the game—a lavish Gold box, replete with gold cartridge and extensive documentation—*The Legend of Zelda* also inaugurates the tendency of manuals to serve as fetish-objects, as material adjuncts to the imagined, multimodal experience of what it means to play a game. The game's map and hint brochure, in addition to the instruction from the game manual itself, constitute more than a set of navigational tools. This mania for print documentation arguably peaked during the late 1980s and early 1990s, with PC role playing games having manuals nearly reaching 200 pages. On the Nintendo Entertainment System, *Dragon Warrior* (1988) and *Final Fantasy* (1990) rivaled *The Legend of Zelda* in the packaging department.

Game manuals continued to be standard pack-ins throughout the last several console cycles, but ceased ubiquity sometime in the last few years because of cost and functional redundancy. All necessary story material, gameplay tutorials, text/dialog, and troubleshooting can now reasonably be expected to contained within a game itself (or can just as easily be outsourced to a series of pages on a website). In fact, many games offer game worlds that are positively overdetermined by lore: in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) or *Kingdoms of Amalur: The Reckoning* (2102), the historical nuances of the the realms in which the action takes place are displaced into environmental objects such as books (*Skyrim* contains hundreds of readable documents; a spreadsheet of all available in-game titles runs nearly twenty pages).[16]

Writ large, information about a given game is now deeply embedded for easy player accessibility, such that companies no longer make instruction manuals for inclusion with each and every game. Nadia Oxford argues that the principle reason is cost, coupled with the ready

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[16] See "All Books and Notes: The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim," *The Organized Gamer*, 15 Jan 2015, <http://www.theorganizedgamer.com/the-elder-scrolls-v-skyrim/all-books-and-notes/>. Accessed 8 Jan 2016.

availability of other paratexual guides online, ranging from preview videos to fan-generated

content.[17] Thus, the instruction manual, where it exists at all, has functionally boomeranged back

Figure 4: *Retro City Rampage* Digital Paratexts

to its NES-era niche as a to-be-treasured physical object, yet one that is not "useful" in its older

sense, but rather becomes desirable only as a retro-styled curio. One obvious place to look is

Retro City Rampage (2012), a game awash in nostalgia that imagines the *Grand Theft Auto*

franchise as a 1980s throwback. By pre-ordering the game, or through a current purchase at the

developer's website, players are entitled to the exclusive "extra" of a printable digital instruction

manual. Even though the game circulates entirely in digital spheres and contains onboard tutorial

information, this manual becomes yet another signpost for the game's commitment to its

historical aesthetic (the design of the digital manual is based on NES and Sega Master System

documentation).

Even more recently *Shovel Knight* (2013), a game funded on Kickstarter, showcases the

idea of the instruction manual as an inert reward-object. Backing the project to the tune of $10 in

exchange for a copy of the game does not even include a manual as a matter of course (even a

PDF requires a $5 pledge to fund beyond the basic cost). *Shovel Knight* reserves a printed

instruction manual as a pricey prize for backers who funded the game to the tune of five times its

cost on the open market ($50), making it an expensive and nostalgically wistful reminder of the

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[17] Nadia Oxford, "Where's All the Cool Game Packaging Gone?," *Game Theory Online*, 20 Sept 2010, <http://gametheoryonline.com/2010/09/20/wheres-all-the-cool-game-packaging-gone/>. For more on the rise of *GameFaqs* and the fan-generated game guide, see Consalvo 177-178.

former preeminence of the videogame-as-physical-object.

Figure 5: *Shovel Knight* Kickstarter Page

The *Shovel Knight* manual is an especially compelling case, because it takes us far beyond the compulsory function of *Adventure's* manual. Players of *Shovel Knight* will have no trouble with its interface—gameplay videos acclimate us to how it looks before its release—and the game's story has been chronicled in month's worth of Kickstarter updates and in online news stories. One explanation—the game instruction manual as prestige object—is partially explained by Ian Bogost. In his article "Kickstarter: Crowdfunding Platform or Reality Show?," he writes that when we support things on Kickstarter, we do so in part as a kind of populist form of cultural patronage, wherein "we're paying for the sensation of a hypothetical idea, not the experience of a realized product."[18] Put another way, one does not pay the higher amount for the instruction booklet as a useful object, so much as a gesture of support for the continued production of a game manual at all.

Another possible reading is to see the instruction manual for *Shovel Knight* as a fetish object, in a properly Freudian sense. In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," Freud defines a fetish as a relational substitution that displaces a typical sexual aim onto a fixated object, usually a smaller-scale and localized object or image, that serves as a new locus of sexual

[18] Ian Bogost, "Kickstarter: Crowdfunding Platform or Reality Show?," *Fast Company*, 18 July 2012, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1843007/kickstarter-crowdfunding-platform-or-reality-show>. Accessed 18 Jan 2016.

pleasure.[19] This displacement has the possibility of becoming pathological if the fetishist can no longer achieve sexual pleasure in non-fetishistic ways. The *Shovel Knight* game manual is a fetish object for retro advocates, a compact reminder of the paratexts that used to be part and parcel to a gaming experience. The cult of documentation yearns for its fix by worshipping at the altar of the instruction manual.

Instruction manuals, now that they are obsolete and have largely disappeared, are places to invest psychical and physical energies, as they are a reminder of a whole host of gaming paratexts that no longer exist as such (pack-in posters, monthly videogame tip magazines, call-in chat lines like Nintendo's, which many will remember was featured in a film recollected in tranquility by people of a certain age, the 1989 Fred Savage and Jenny Lewis vehicle *The Wizard* [Todd Holland]). Game manuals, even digital ones, are evocative of the centrality of boxed games and brick-and-mortar stores. Some advocates have found ways to preserve aspects of these old experiences while still admitting the changing essence of game-playing experience. IndieBox, a monthly game subscription service, licenses previously digital-only indie games, and designs chic physical media to accompany them. Their release of rougelike adventure hit *Rogue Legacy* (2013), for instance, contains collectible cards, a CD soundtrack, a print instruction manual, and a box sporting promotional art.[20] Distributer GOG.com's recent re-release of *Pool of Radiance* (1988) preserved the object-aided copy protection of the original disks. Upon initial release, SSI's flagship "Gold Box" game came packed with code wheels, cryptographic devices based in game lore: the game asked you decipher a series of runes in order to begin playing (this prevented easy piracy). The new re-release, while DRM free, provides digital code wheels that

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[19] Sigmund Freud, "Three Essay on the Theory of Sexuality," *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 249-250.
[20] See the listing on the IndieBox store: <https://store.theindiebox.com/collections/frontpage/products/steamworld-dig-december-indiebox>.

prompt the player to relive the older copy protection procedure, an experience attached to the game arguably as memorable as the plot or the characters.[21]

The *reductio-ad-absurdum* of the revitalization of the game manual would be a Kickstarter campaign with the option of pledging for support of a game manual, minus a game to go with it at all. As it stands, game manuals survive, but as odd reminders of older gaming praxis, often lovingly recreated for games that deliberately hark back to dormant styles and genres. As such, the videogame's changing relationship to the paratexts that originally defined their status as intelligible, playable objects suggests a comprehensive kind of adaptation, almost in a biological sense: an ontological redefinition of the videogame, from an interactive object that once needed some kind of textual framing outside of itself, to one capable of storing and displaying almost totalizing self-knowledge.

III. Videogames and Adaptation: Interventions and Gambits

The essays in this special issue are in the spirit of my claims about paratexts and videogames in that videogames will continue to engage with and be shaped by other media, just as they will continue to remediate and/or expand the conceptual remits of the other forms they encounter. This special issue of *Widescreen Journal* takes us through several "moments" or "encounters" in the recent history of adaptation that showcase where videogames productively amend, augment, or supersede other forms or platforms.

Bradley Fest's "Metaproceduralism: *The Stanley Parable* and the Legacies of Postmodern Metafiction" situates Davey Wreden's breakout interactive fiction game into currents of post-1960s American literature. Fest does not merely demonstrate how and where *The Stanley Parable* fits the moulds of self-reflexive postmodern literature, but rather argues that

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[21] See the listing on GOG.com: <http://www.gog.com/game/forgotten_realms_the_archives_collection_two>.

the game adapts many of the functions of this historically bounded form of fiction in order to give videogames something that they have historically lacked: a ludics of irony. While irony is arguably an exhausted critical tool in prose fiction whose usefulness and popularity waxes and wanes with the socio-political tides, *The Stanley Parable's* procedural irony breaks games out of their complicitness with the military-industrial roots of the medium and offers in its place a sense of aspirationally playable utopianism (in short: videogames as way to differentially engage and represent the world).

Kyle Meikle's piece explores how fan production/fanadaptation creates a complimentarily utopian framing for the exchange between videogames and film in contemporary culture. His "8-Bit Goes to the Movies" begins by exploring the YouTube-based CineFix series's 8-Bit Cinema, a popular suite of videos that adapt iconic Hollywood films of the last 40 years into the aesthetic ensemble of an 8-bit videogame (think NES graphics, with rounded edges and a few technologically outsized ideas). But this is just the set-up, as Meikle proceeds to look at the definitional edifices around "videogames" and "cinema," showing how fan or mainstream-industrial engagements with the terms yield hybrid forms that engage consumers multiply. Thus *8-Bit Pulp Fiction* is simultaneously an adaptation of a film, a work of animation, a performance based on a film, a work of cinema in its own right, a simulated game, and...this only scratches the surface. Meikle's larger engagements are with forms, discourses and designations at the heart of this special issue: what are we actually talking about, mapping, territorializing, asserting the relevance of, or even choosing to avoid when we talk about videogame adaptations? Cameron Kunzelman's piece engages with videogames and cinema, but from the other direction. It is a meditation on how videogames of a certain moment--the now distant Playstation 2 era of the early 2000s--are cinematic, either as games that can seamlessly

merge with cinema, or as games that can extend the possibilities of a cinematic world using game-specific mechanics. Using ideas about remediation and assemblage theory, Kunzelman looks at how *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* and *Minority Report: Everybody Runs* (both 2002) hail the player on subjective and affective levels.

Bobby Schweizer's essay surveys the wide worlds of videogame adaptations of theme park spaces. He argues that games have to funnel the manifold possibilities of theme parks-- which are overdetermined places that try to encapsulate whole worlds and regimes of life into several heavily manicured acres--into a coherent experience for a videogame operator, a "theme park for one" that replicates aspects of an individual parkgoer's experience. In assessing the architectures, topographies, modes of address, maps, and organizational choices of these games, Schweizer shows just how tricky this multi-media form of adaptation can be.

Theme parks are somewhere between imagined cities and interactive stories. In a sense, they bridge the gap between privileged narrative forms and the world as experienced. Urban spaces prompt similar notions. The last two essays are animated by the seemingly infinite innerspaces of videogames, and their ability to create specific experiences based on a collapsing array of real, imagined, historical and contemporary cities. Real cities like Los Angeles, and imagined ones like D.C. Comic's Gotham City, often dovetail and fold into one another, in the process showing how videogames adapt material from the world into unique confabulations of fact and fiction. Jedd Hakimi's essay connects a hybrid film genre--the "semi-documentary" film or television show of city experience, which could overlap between the city symphony documentary mode and the expressionistic characterization of space found in films noir--to the treatment of city space in Rockstar's *L.A. Noire* (2011). Kalervo A. Sinervo's "Gotham on the Ground" looks at the varied topographies of Gotham, as it travels from comics to film to

videogames (especially the recent *Arkham* series), in the process noting how the place suits (or fails to suit) the demands and themes of the texts at large.

One uniting feature of each of these essays doubles as something of a suggestion for adaptation studies as a field. When it comes to repurposing the idea of adaptation for the always-already adaptive medium of the videogame, what matters less are the ethics (is this a responsible adaptation?) or the taste cultures (is this a good adaptation?) of a particular work or situation. Rather, what I think the pieces in this issue of *Widescreen* suggest is that videogames provide something of a site for textual gymnastics, where adaptation becomes a widely generative way of approaching the multi-tiered, elusive, and pleasingly mercurial process of playing. The strictness of a methodology is less desirable than a willingness to see how thoroughly videogames relate and react to other media forms. The idea of adaptation provides a uniquely flexible banner around which to rally.

About the Author: Kevin M. Flanagan is the editor of this special issue. He is Visiting Lecturer in Film Studies/English at the University of Pittsburgh. He is editor of *Ken Russell: Re-Viewing England's Last Mannerist* (2009, Scarecrow Press). Some of his recent essays on British cinema and culture appear in the *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, *Critical Quarterly*, *South Atlantic Review*, and *Adaptation*. In June 2016, he was a Guest Curator at the British Film Institute, where he co-programmed (with Matt Harle) the "Architecture on TV" season. He contributed essays and an audio commentary to the critically acclaimed Blu-Ray/DVD boxed set *Ken Russell: The Great Composers* (2016, BFI Publishing). In 2017, be on the lookout for editor Thomas M. Leitch's monumental *Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (Oxford University Press), Flanagan contributed the "Videogame Adaptation" chapter!

Contact: kevinmflanagan@gmail.com