
Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30050376

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2012, Continuum.
nvigorating
Play: The Role of Affect in Online Multiplayer FPS Games
Christopher Moore

The first-person shooter (FPS) genre has its origins in the cinematic visual technique known as the first-person subjective camera angle (Galloway 2006, 40). The first-person view is framed by merging camera lens with the character’s eye to create a "rectilinear plane of Albertian perspective" (O’Riley 1998, 18). The visual impression of this "Renaissance pictorial tactic" (Shinkle 2005, 24) produces a subjective view that is remediated through the technologies of photography, cinema, and FPS games as an entirely modern sense of experiencing the world (O’Riley 1998).

Cinema incorporates the first-person subjective perspective through sound and vision to psychologically and cognitively "effect a
sense of alienation, detachment, fear or violence" for the spectator (Galloway 2006, 40). The FPS further expands this experience through the cybernetic feedback systems of the PC or videogame console to include the participant's body, movement, and senses in its operation. The player is directly engaged in the production of both the symbolic and non-representational elements of the game, and while the elongated three-dimensional first-person perspective is still central to the experiences of play, it is less concerned with the identification of a character and more focused on the player's embodiment of the character's "point of view" (Golumbia 2009, 184).

Games studies often privilege the importance of representation, focusing on visual perception and semiotic activity (with the occasional regard to sound), but FPS players not only move and target, they direct movement, monitor sounds, manage inputs, and they experience rapid changes between conditions of excitement, panic, elation, or disappointment. The ideological operation involved in the production of meaning, from the content of the game to its role in the player's larger world beyond the game, is extensive, but it does not exhaustively account for the full spectrum of the player's experience. This is especially true of multiplayer FPS games as online spaces of male-dominated social interaction and competition. (See Taylor in this volume for further examination of the performatividad of masculinity through competitive FPS play.)

In order for games studies to provide an exhaustive account of the full spectrum of the significance and experiences of games, it requires attention to detail that encompasses more than their representative content and ideological capacity; it must also closely examine the context of their production, play, and wider circulation within popular culture. The range of theoretical lenses available to the study of games has broadened dramatically in the short history of the field, and yet news media and other entertainment media continue to frame games in terms of the highly contested "effects." Games critics can respond by expanding their own critical dialogue and understanding of games and play, to consider play as kinetic and embodied actions taking place in real time across simultaneously material and digital spaces with strong affective dimensions that challenge established understanding of meaning and representation (Galloway, 2004).
This chapter examines just a few of the numerous affects involved in the play of FPS games, specifically the online multiplayer component of the dominant military-themed genre, with the aim of contributing to a broader perception of these games and what it means to play them. It proposes that a study of the degrees of affect involved in play of these games is a useful analytical tool for expanding the critical frame of games and their production, play, and players.

Just as feelings have an important but oppositional role to "thinking," affects have a complex relationship with cognition, but affects are not limited to emotional responses. Shouse (2005) considers the non-conscious experience of potential that the human body generates and infolds as it responds to the thousands of stimuli occurring at any one time, as an intensity or affect. In this view, emotions are the subjective translation of affect and effect, registering in the interplay between senses, consciousness, and autonomic functions of the body, which are manifested in games through the execution of intended actions and unintentional reactions. Affects modulate emotions, perceptions, and reactions, and are the "body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience" (Shouse 2005). Online multiplayer games offer a means for re-examining the conventional understanding of the representational strategies of military FPS games, expanding the comprehension of them as simultaneously modulating, transforming, and transmitting the capacities of the player (Shinkle 2005; Massumi 2002).

The military FPS genre makes a considerable case study in terms of the strength of the ideological power operations at work in the content of the games and the organizations involved in their production. (See Miller, Voorhees, and Welsh in this collection for alternative takes on the effects of militarism in FPS games.) This chapter seeks to contribute to the critique of military shooters, by expanding the consideration of the role of affect in FPS play and suggesting how this approach can inform the established discussion of military-themed multiplayer FPS games. To contribute to our understanding of why and how we play these games, this chapter highlights some of the many affective
dimensions of play involved in the current generation of online multiplayer military-themed FPS games, including the America's Army, Call of Duty, Battlefield, and Medal of Honor series. Connecting to this debate, the chapter complicates notions of "immersion," "interactivity," and "realism" in FPS games founded in representational thinking, proposing instead a focus on the role of "invigoration" produced in the affective capacities of the FPS games and their play.

**Representation and the Military FPS**

A military FPS game typically includes physics and damage systems, a weapon or item in the foreground of the screen, and the accompaniment of non-diegetic (non-narrative) elements, such as the heads-up display (H-UD), overlaying two-dimensional information on a three-dimensional simulation. Manovich (200) describes how this structure involves the player in a complex cyclical visual experience, a "temporal oscillation" between two distinct states: the illusionary and the interactive (20). The player moves between the competing concerns of perception and action, space and information. The simulation elements of FPS games are produced in the audible and visual information available to players control via keyboard and mouse, or wireless controller, as they mediate the doubled mode of perception of the modern soldier: video cameras, head-mounted displays, GFS, radar, microphones, earpieces, telescopic sights, and other weapons, vehicles, and technologies.

The result is a highly mediated perspective structuring the parameters of time, place, and space of the soldier's experience in a permanent state of preparation and anticipating of combat (Virilio 2002, 39). Virilio (1989) considers the systems of simulation that operate as the visible technologies of warfare (weapons, vehicles, troops, flying drones) to be entangled in the organizing structures of logistics, software, and interfaces, the same "invisible" structures that organize traffic and taxes (77). Stahl (2010) further suggests videogames are an active participant in the "interactive war," in which war-themed games constitute the player as a subject in the military discourse.
The release of new installments in the *Call of Duty* franchise is a massively popular cultural event, dominating the console and PC games charts. The debut of *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch 2010) exceeded the worldwide sales record of $550 million set by the previous incarnation of the series, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (Infinity Ward 2009), and reports from publisher Activision indicated sales exceeded US$1 billion soon after the game's release (Raman 2010). The *Call of Duty* series began on the PC in 2003, with multiple titles later developed for console and mobile markets. These games are not military simulations in the same sense as flight or tank simulators, but they market their own sense of "realism," advertising the fidelity of weapon and physics models, photorealistic patterns of light and particle rendering, dynamic weather effects, and other environmental details. (See Welsh's further discussion of this series later in this collection.)

The blurring of historical and mimetic realism is central to the advertised experience of the multiplayer setting. In *Medal of Honor* (2010) two human teams compete to eliminate each other and carry out various military-themed objectives. The games unfold across multiplayer "maps," sections of modeled terrains and buildings simulating the locations of battles in the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan. The Cold War fantasy setting of *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) samples a diverse range of historically and politically significant locations, such as the Berlin Wall and the Hanoi Hilton, to stage competitive battles, in game modes such as Capture the Flag (CTF) and Team Deathmatch (TDM).

The complex overlay of mimetic authenticity and historical realism rendered by the software, shaped to fit the generic conventions of the FPS game, result in what Galloway (2006) calls "realisticness" or that which is held up to representation as a "yardstick" to determine its authenticity.

> Realisticness is important, to be sure, but the more realisticness takes hold in gaming, the more removed from gaming it actually becomes, relegated instead to simulation or modelling. (73)

These regions of difference are collapsed in the connections made between military training and ideology, recruitment and propaganda,
simulation and entertainment in what J. C. Herz (1997) refers to as the "military entertainment complex."

Games have long been used as simulations of military conflict and strategy (Detering 20'0), but military FPS games, suggest Hunteeman and Payne (2009), are key elements in a post-Cold War phenomenon that further blurs the line between entertainment and militarism (4–5). Through the process of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999), videogames have appropriated multiple sources of mediated military ideology and propaganda, combining them with multiple levels of discursive reinforcement via the operation of the simulation. Detering (2009) regards the videogame simulation as "blackboxing" its ideological and mechanical operations, obfuscating and naturalizing the embedded relations between militarization and videogames as part of what Der Derian (2009) calls the "military-industrial-media-entertainment network."

The nexus of entertainment and ideology in FPS games is an extension of the connections between warfare and media industries made by Virilio (1999), and FPS games mark an important stage in the development of these connections. Everything in the videogame industry may have at some point been financed by US military research (Wahrman, in Herz, 1997, 205), but innovations like Marine DOOM, the US Army's modification of the FPS game DOOM II (id Software, '94), and the FPS multiplayer game America's Army, reveal multiple directions in which remediation occurs; Marine DOOM was a transformation of the "high octane violence" of the original game to fulfill the role as training simulator (Richard 1998, 341), while America's Army mediates the basics of US military training in the first-person perspective in order to promote its agenda.

Falter's (2006) analysis of the links between videogames and the US Army argues such games are created explicitly to further nationalist propaganda and considers America's Army to be directly aligned with recruitment by encouraging the player to "try on the army for size" (Wardyinks, in Delwiche 2007, 92). America's Army is described by Nieborg (2010) as a "strategic communication tool" functioning as an "immersive advertisement in the form of entertainment," combining educational, ludic, marketing, and propaganda elements in an FPS shape to promote a highly politicised recruiting
and public relations agenda more dynamically than traditional forms of mediated and branded edutainment (54).

It is through the tandem operation of propaganda and ideologically aligned experiences in America's Army that Stahl (2010) argues videogames are increasingly both the medium and the metaphor by which we understand war “taking up quarters in our hearts and minds” (112).

The two-way traffic between computer gaming and military simulations in the military-entertainment complex signposts a significant moment in the pure war tendency, one in which a further stage of the merger between the sphere of military and domestic activity and concerns is reached. (Crogan 2003, 280)

The concern is not only the militarization of entertainment as propaganda, but also the virtualization and digitalization of military ideology, as an extension of the conduct of war, by pure simulation and a sanitized geopolitical rendering of war (Der Derian 2009).

The “realistiness” of the simulation of America's Army minimizes mimetic and historical realism and lacks the more extensive photorealism and graphic violence of Medal of Honor and Call of Duty. Players in the multiplayer matches of America's Army are only ever able to see themselves as US Army soldiers; both sides see themselves as American soldiers, while the opposing team are always rendered on-screen as the opposing force. A variety of races and uniforms is available in Call of Duty: Black Ops, and players in multiplayer version of Medal of Honor are split into the Coalition and the Opposing Forces, in a stylized and “realistic”—if not accurate—reproduction of Taliban uniforms and clothing.

Bogost (2008) considers all simulations as subjective representations that communicate ideology, but argues the “interpretation of a game relies as much or more on what the simulation excludes or leaves ambiguous than on what it includes” (105). As Stahl (2010) suggests.

Presenting war in the guise of a game alone is not sufficient to play at war, the presentation must also be absent the horrors a high-tech military machine can effect (111).
It is not only the full horror of weaponized violence that America’s Army and other military games omit, as The Onion (2009) parody of the “next generation” Call of Duty game teases, it is also the “realism” (or naturalism) of hauling equipment, filling out paperwork, cleaning mess halls and “standing outside a photorealistic warehouse for hours” that are missing. The result of omission, argues Stahl (2010), is the extension of mainstream American news coverage, offering the player the opportunity to “fight a war largely without human consequence” (126).

**Affects and Multiplayer FPS games**

To paraphrase Grossberg (1992), videogames exist in an unpredictable, but productive, relation with those who play, operating in the domain of affects. Attention to this domain is crucial to a full understanding of the power of play and games which incorporate specific representations and realities (Grossberg 1997, 83). A simulation does not simply deploy its ideological content to the player in a predictable manner:

... audiences are not made up of cultural dopes; people are often quite aware of their own implication in structures of power and domination, and of the ways in which cultural messages can manipulate them. (Grossberg, 1992, 53)

Affects are fleeting experiences and articulated in the practices which form relations between audiences and texts, economies, lives, and politics. They register in the participatory media cultures of FPS players producing online video, wikis, podcasts, mods, levels, maps, and weapons, running online servers and communities, and in the everyday play of gamers.

There are many types of “affect” and the term is often used as a synonym for emotions or feelings, but affects are different to purely cognitive functions and they transform our game experiences in unique ways. Emotions are produced in the articulation of signification and affect (Grossberg 1992, 1997) and the social and linguistic reordering of the quality of an experience (Massumi 1997,
2002); they are the displays of biographically constructed feeling that are broadcast, contrived or sincere, to communicate internal states (Shouse 2005). Affects are a modulation of investment; they register in the pitch of sensation that energizes emotion, meaning, identity, creativity, and relationships, and they provide tone to everyday life (Grossberg 1992, 56). Affects complement and complicate the semiotic and the social experience of an FPS game, “texturing” the processes of the experience.

... texture refers to the qualitative experience of the social world, to embodied experience that has the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection (Hemmings 2005, 549).

Affects are also directly involved in the intensity of gameplay as an “incipience” of action and expression (Massumi 2001, 3) which challenges the way we typically approach concepts like “realism,” “immersion,” and “violence” in games.

In Parables of the Virtual, Massumi (2002), describes the “mystery of the missing half-second” (28), a recursive physiological ordering, a latency, or what FPS gamers would call a “lag” between “the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression” (29). The half-second is not an empty moment, but an excess, just as cognitive functions are amplified and imbued with violation, performances of other reactions of the body occur in the brain, parallel to consciousness they are invigorated “between brain and finger but prior to action and expression” (ibid).

Massumi’s half-second plays an important role in multiplayer FPS games, where it is referred to as the “twitch,” the involuntary reaction of the body to events before the cognitive interpretation of action can occur. In the multiplayer environment the body’s actions are anticipated in the software code that attempts to compensate for the time it takes for signals to travel across networks. The twitch is part of the kinaesthetic pleasure of the cybernetic system operating with the body, between brain and finger, controls, hardware processors, game engines, rendering software and to the controls, fingers, and brains of other bodies involved in the game. It is a fleeting trace of affect, like the excitement, pitch, or tenor of a voice, or dramatic volley between players of opposing teams.
Affects leave a residue in the body, a lasting impression that accumulates over time and practice, like a muscle memory, producing particular kinds of bodily capacities to affect and to retain the potential to be affected; it shapes subjectivities, gathering in the materials of experience. Like the creativity of the dancer or professional athlete, games like sports leave traces of invigoration, or “innervation” as Swaiweil (2008), following Hansen’s use of Walter Benjamin’s term, prefers: the creative conversion of somatic and motoric stimulation into new forms of action through the kinaesthetic involvement of affect required to “master” the game (86–7). As with the movements of a dancer or surgeon, the movements of an FPS gamer are not just the result of an accumulation of practice but the products of acts of invigorated creativity and spontaneous emissions from that range anywhere from elation to frustration, and through the processes of timing, repetition, and memory possessed by the body in combination with their affective and cognitive capacities, the player brings into being something new. Although more subtle, the movements of the gamer’s body are just as crucial to the performance of the game.

Game scholars have only just begun to explore the potential for expanding the understanding of the play of games as events that involve visceral and bodily experiences (Carr 2006; Shaw and Warf 2009), but these accounts still tend to emphasize the degree to which “realism” and “immersion” have primacy in the understanding of FPS games. The games industry elevates “realism” and “immersion” by attracting attention to the visual and acoustic authenticity of its products, particularly in the FPS genre. This notion of “realism” contributes to the cycles of moral panic over videogame “violence” to a degree that often goes unrecognized by videogame critics, perpetuating the cause-and-effect view of the Columbine theory. The trap of the Columbine theory, argues Galloway (2006), is the proposition that games not only appear to be “realistic,” but also generate “realistic” effects that are limited to the desensitizing of the player to acts of violence and the converse increase in aggression (78).

As part of the national debate on videogame violence and the lack of an R®8 category for videogames in Australia, the Attorney-General’s Department commissioned a review of the literature
on the relationship between playing videogames, violence and aggression. The report concluded that the divided nature of the research reduced the literature's relevance to policy, as even the statistically "small to moderate range" for increased aggression in the short term after playing violent games did not indicate harmful effects in the long term, and that some studies demonstrated "cartoonish" violence was just as likely to have the same result as "realistic" violence (Attorney-General's Department 2010, 42). The debates over definitions and measures of "aggression," "violence," and "realism," and the failure to account for a fuller range of experiences when playing, belong to a regime governed by signification that attempts to organize understanding of the body's response to the play of FPS games confined within a narrow model of stimulus and response.

All military FPS games offer similar physics simulations, accurate weapon details and sounds, avatar models, and environmental textures, and they all feature standardized multiplayer game modes, yet each game plays and responds differently and each has its own "feel." The "weight" of the weapons as the player moves in the game, the depth of the menu and characterization interface, or the variation of the sounds, all produce very different player responses, even between games in the same series. This is also true of the way games play across different networks and platforms: not only the code differs but player styles and strategies also vary.

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 (2010) and the online multiplayer version of Medal of Honor (2010) were both developed by EA DICE Creative Entertainment (hereafter DICE), a Swedish games developer, with the Frostbite game engine. They each feature a range of playable classes for short, mid and long range combat that upgrade over time as the player earns experience points to expand their weapons, armor, and special abilities. The differences between the two games are apparent as soon as play begins and they make themselves known in the representational elements of the game, from the Kubal marketplace battles of Medal of Honor to the more anonymous military outfits and locations of the Battlefield games. Despite their common heritage in designers and code—or perhaps because of it—each game still takes time to adapt to; they each render terrain, lighting, accuracy, and weapon damage differently,
forcing players to re-evaluate their tactical choices and playing styles. The games play and feel differently and result in individual, if similar, experiences, like two different codes of the same sport.

Promotional material for the 2010 “reboot” of the Medal of Honor series, published by Electronic Arts (hereafter EA), reveals the two-team structure of the multiplayer version was to split players into the “elite” US Special Forces and soldiers of the Taliban. This was not an unexpected set-up for those players who had been reinventing terrorist and counter-terrorist roles in Counter-Strike (Valve 2000) for a decade. Several weeks prior to launch, EA bowed to political and media pressure and withdrew the name “Taliban” from the team options, replacing it with the military designation for the “opposing forces” of enemy combatants, OFFOR, a move which Bogost (2010) considers to have undermined the legitimacy of the games industry’s claim to freedom of speech in general and EA’s specific claim to realism in the experience of play. Players on the OFFOR still have access to the Taliban-style uniforms, sound effects, and weapons, making the play experience of that side very distinct from the US “Special Forces.” Removing the signification of the name, however, does not overly detract from the affective sensations that emerge through play of what remains.

Being an FPS gamer does not automatically align the player with the positive or negative ideological strategies embedded in the representational or simulated structural elements of the game to be naturalized without interrogation, but involves a complex set of competing concerns. The forms of engagement and investment a player has with a game can be considered in a mode of operation of what Grossberg (1992) calls a “sensibility” (54)—an investment within a particular cultural context, or “apparatus,” that identifies how games and play practices are experienced. For example, to be a gamer—someone who seeks out games to play—indicates a special affective relationship with games, a sensibility involving an investment similar to that of a fan’s relation to a sport, team, or cultural text. Investment in FPS games involves an active negotiation with meaning and subjectivity that produces a different sensibility to that of non-game texts. Despite the stereotype of the average gamer, this sensibility does not preclude interesting and informed public discourse in the digital and network spaces of the military.
FPS genre. I have enjoyed *Call of Duty* games against self-described "Anarchist-Marxists" and read enthusiastic in-game text chat debates between pacifists and enlisted soldiers while playing *America's Army* matches. Snider et al. (in this collection) consider the shift involved in FPS "griefers" who deconstruct the representational and ludic functions of games, abstracting the metagame experience, as a form of creative user action that undermines the strategic elements of gameplay (rules, objectives, structures) through a tactical engagement that utilizes the effects of surprise, anger, humor in the construction of an alternative gamer persona. (See also Moore, 2011 for a discussion of the role of affect in creating online gamer persona.)

The console and PC versions of the current generation of military-themed FPS multiplayer games have access to digital distribution services, including Steam (Valve) on the PC and Xbox LIVE for the Xbox 360 (Microsoft). The player establishes an online identity, a "persona," very much connected to their "real" selves through commercial transactions of these services and based on their player name. The gamer persona is representational element of the affective investment in the game, a pool of collected scores, purchases, player histories, scores, and social interactions. It is an identity that is dominated by player statistics that are displayed in online forums like batting averages and in-game achievements are collected like trophies and displayed via online player profile pages (Moore 2011). Other social networking technologies connect gamers in networks of online "friends," groups and allegiances, supporting online communities often called "Clans" in the FPS genre (equivalent to "guilds" in Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Games) developing further affective investment.

Online personas are collections of digital artifacts and complex traces of networks, relationships, activities, and histories of investment during play. In *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops* players can specialize the standard avatar equipment options available to all by "unlocking" further items in the game, inciting investment and new waves of excitement and interest. By participating, the player earns points to spend on in-game items, cosmetically and tactically personalizing the way their avatar and equipment function and appear to others, in the remit of impression
management (Goffman 1959) the gamer persona gives information to others through the creative use of avatar and abilities, choice of in-game items, and management of the player profile. Information and affect is further exchanged, “given off” and transmitted by the other actions of the player in-game.

**Immersion and Invigoration**

The concept of “immersion,” like the terms “realism” and “realistic,” have become all-inclusive categories that collapse a range of cognitive and affective phenomena which occur when designing and playing videogames. It is typically assumed that the subjective perspective of FPS games increases the “immersion” of the player, meaning the player is “caught up” in the game (McMahan 2003, 86). Immersion is said to be evoked spatially and narratively as a “sense of presence in the virtual environment” expanded by the social forms of interaction that are part of the multiplayer experience (Thon 2006, 244). Murray (1997) considers the phenomenon of immersion to be involved in the sensation of being surrounded completely by another reality. Immersion follows the logic of Salen and Zimmerman’s use of Huizinga’s term the “magic circle” to describe how play unfolds within a specific time and space that suspends ordinary meanings, where the procedures of action and the communication of meaning are governed by modified rules and understandings (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 95).

Refocusing attention to the affects of play, the sense of intensity and involvement of FPS games can instead be considered as “invigoration,” and we can examine FPS games a product of affective alliances invested in the apparatus of the game that are part of the real world, and the everyday activities of gamers. In the multiplayer games like *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, where some game modes only last for minutes at a time, “invigoration” is the degree of modulation that aids the player’s responses, enfolding the body and its reactions in the event. For many gamers FPS play is a casual activity, they come and go, it is part of a series of occasional activities, while for others it is an everyday event that heavily influences their sense of identity and ordering of social life. The
“Vlogging” YouTube practice, known as Road to Commander, is a live recorded commentary of the player’s progress through a Call of Duty game to reach the rank of Commander at level 50 (see Whiteboy 7th St, 2011). The series provides a document of the types, ranges, and amplitude of the player’s invigoration (and its opposite), a record of player’s affects that may be observed in their exclamations, pitch, intensity, and their experiences over the duration of the challenge.

The invigoration of play has a quantity and a quality that matters according to sensibility and degree of investment in the individual game, the genre, and the act of playing. Unlike immersion, invigoration does not always result in the unnoticed passage of time; it survives interruption and does not require the surroundings to be all-encompassing. The “twitch” is one of many invigorated actions, but it is not a response that can be depended on as advantage in an FPS game as it is unpredictable and often passes without notice. Massumi (2002) considers consciousness and will to be subtractive, making the twitch unfaithful to intent; the body acts of its own accord, limited but rich with texture. The fast pace of Call of Duty: Black Ops online matches and short respawn times means that players are often dropped directly into an ongoing combat, where the twitch is just as likely to result in team kills and other forms of “collateral damage” as it is to aid the player. Similarly, caught up in the affective sensations of game, the opposite of the twitch, the “freeze” also occurs where the player’s affective capacities compete with the player’s cognitive functions, resulting in a split-second pause. Where a gamer’s competitive FPS strategy will focus on maximizing the representational elements (structures, rules, weapons, etc.) to impose an order on the competition, attempting to reduce the randomness of play, their tactics on the other hand are heavily influenced by the invigorated affective responses to the dynamic conditions of play, calling on heightened reactions, charged emotions and attenuated senses. (See Snider et al. in this volume, for a discussion of De Certeau’s delineation between strategies and tactics in relation to the FPS practice of “griefing”)

Invigoration is one of the key dimensions of affect in multiplayer FPS games that complicate the role of ideology and signification. Play already exists in an altered state of engagement with meaning; it is a “meaningful” activity, according to Huizinga (1970/1949), but
one that is spatially and temporally separate from the demands of meaning in everyday life. Game death, for example, does not “represent” death in the actual world (as Welsh describes later in the collection, the player does not in actuality “die” or “kill”), but rather game death is an invigoration and its occurrence preferences the affective reaction over its ideologically embedded representation. Game death occurs when the player’s avatar is “damaged” enough to “kill” their avatar, forcing the player outside of the operational field into player limbo, where depending on the game mode they await their “respawn” into the action of game events where they can view the ongoing match from the perspective of their “live” teammates.

Game death, suggests Richard (1997), is a perpetual tabula rasa, allowing the player to pause and start over to rethink their previous moves and plan new paths, but each death matters as a ludic sensibility of movements, trajectories, and scores as well as being an abstraction of war and violence. Game death is an important part of FPS play, but the representation of death is not experienced or intended in the same way as death in other media, or in “actuality”; while perhaps initially frustrating, together with the respawn function game death becomes a transitive affect halting the state of frenetic activity of the battle, to enable reflection and clear the way for further invigoration.

The “occurrent” narrative of multiplayer FPS games as an event that is stimulated and subdued by the affects that occur during play, which shares a linear but unscripted experience with other sports and public performances. Game death is an embodied perception of the capacity to act and the result of the cybernetic interactions between players and the software and hardware of the networks involved. A highly cathartic event, game death is part of the full-bodied synaesthetic experience of embodied perception involved in play that Shinkle (2005) describes as “incorporating emotions but not reducible to them.” Game death is undesirable, but also pleasurable; cognitive functions recompose the events, while the body deals with the experience of tension and its release. Feelings backfill, allowing the shock of the event to register in its completeness, frustration or elation emerges as cognition is required to take in the proceedings of the event. Game death emphasizes the drama of the occurrent narrative of the multiplayer FPS game and the more invigorated
the player, the more potential they have to invest in the situation. Similarly, unlike warfare strategy, the multiplayer environment of any military FFS is at its most exciting when the two teams are well matched, even in ability and experience; when one team completely dominates another, the dampening of affect in the losing team is usually highly apparent.

Competitive matches are very different and highly regulated experiences when compared to casual public play. The coverage of the largest competitive Call of Duty gaming league in the US, Major League Gaming, remediates US sports and entertainment media to produce their own narrative from a successful broadcast model. Professional gamers, like competitive athletes, train and practice, learn strategy and communication skills. Galloway (2006) considers that to know the system is to win, but gamers also need to develop their own tactical responses, to produce what Massumi (2002) describes as player “style,” small but crucial and embodied ways of directing the flow of events (77). A style, particularly a new style, is “a germinal individuation of the sport” (78) and a highly contagious provocation of the system and the established modes of play.

Many of the innovations in FFS games evolve this way; the classic Counter-Strike (Valve 2000) “bunny-hop” was discovered to exploit the way the system assigned targets making the jumping player hard to hit, the Quake (id Software 1996) rocket launcher was used by innovative players to create the “rocketjump” inverting the weapon to aid propulsion, flying the player across the map rapidly. In online Call of Duty: Black Ops communities, fans debate uses of particular weapon and ability combinations. Some of the game servers ban individual abilities and players harass others for using technically legitimate but socially unacceptable options, shaping the direction of the matches.

Gibbs (2001, 2008) writes of Gabriel de Tarde’s account of the social life of the crowd as a site of affect contagion, producing mimetic communication between bodies. Gibbs also gives account of Tomkins’ (1962) taxonomy of affect, which acknowledges the way affect is spread, such as the baby’s smile or cry that triggers the affect of distress or enjoyment. Gibbs considers how facial expressions transmits affect televisually, illustrating how politicians use distress, anger, excitement to communicate mimetically to different
social groups, facilitating amplification of the affect in progress. Media become amplifiers of affects, a process which Gibbs (2007) explains as an affect intensified in the degree of its arousal. Tomkins considered the face a primary site of affect transmission but it is not the only site—the voice and movement are also capable of mimetic communication. (See Taylor’s account of the role of verbal communications in competitive *Halo* matches in this volume.) Many PC gamers use third-party software (Knapp 2002) to host their multiplayer game voice chat, for games like *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* on the PC it makes the public matches sound quieter and feel more isolated than when playing the console versions and other games enabled with in-game voice chat.

Games function as sites of affect amplification, magnification, and contagion, but not in the same fashion as television or cinema, and with unpredictable and surprising results. Wendig (2010) gives example of the importance of affect contagion in the events of a game of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, when he writes that in other mediums saturated with adults a twelve-year-old male might be dismissed out of hand as a prepubescent not yet versed with the necessary experience to lead a team to victory, but he found that age, race, or gender matter less when confidence spreads like wildfire. Wendig describes a game in which the boy he nicknames Pip took control of the game not through rage or excitement, but in self-assurance, daring and style.

The affective relationship between gamers and their games accompanies the transition to online services as physical properties give way to digital distribution. The games industry has developed a range of marketing practices in order to capture the player’s investment as affective capital. One of the most effective strategies has been the microtransaction adopted in the FPS genre by Valve in *Team Fortress 2* (2007). (See Manning in this volume and Moore [2011] for the analysis of the affective dimensions of the aesthetics and play of TF2.) Along with the next installment of *Call of Duty*, Activision will offer a subscription service for players to join the “*Call of Duty Elite*” to encourage player investment by gaining access to further degrees of connectivity to other players through social networking and player statistic tracking features, mobile apps and monthly downloadable content (DLC), all designed to expand the
players’ access to new customizations, maps, and game modes and maintain their investment in the game.

**Conclusion**

Affect is one of many non-representational ways of expanding the critical frame for thinking and talking about the transformative aspects of FPS games. This chapter has not rejected the critique of the ideological power of military FPS games, but has sought to expand its frame of reference. Affects are not neutral; if the invigoration of the player is also a politicization of the potential of the player, then its methods of control are equally politicised. Grossberg (1997) reminds us that “affective relations can be disempowering … rendering ideological and material realities behind a screen of passion” (87).

Crogan (2003) also sees a further danger, suggesting that games of war refigure time with anticipatory impulse that encourages action without reflection, leaving out ethical consideration. Galoway (2006) takes this refiguring perspective to the extreme, describing the FPS game as a realization of André Breton’s “pure surrealist act” (103).

Massumi (2002) argues that affect holds the key to rethinking power after ideology, which is no longer encompassing or defining power, but still present and virulent (42). Grossberg (1992) acknowledges affect as the necessary condition of optimism, invigoration, and passion, “necessary for any struggle to change the world,” and considers popular culture as providing a range of resources from which forms of struggle and resistance may be sourced and tested (86). Anderson (2000) suggests the points of “excess” of affect, like those in FPS games, can further the examination of systems of signification to provide “… ontological foundation for the promise of a new way to attend to the social or cultural in perpetual and unruly movement” (62), but acknowledges it is the transitive excess of affect, its intensification and modulation that is precisely the target of new forms of power.
References


http://gamesstudio.org/110/articles/moore


Games


