

Deconstructing the Time-Travelling Identity

Samir Passi and Ranjit Singh

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS),
Maastricht University

Presented at:

The International Conference on the Philosophy of Computer Games,
Athens, Greece.

7th April, 2011

Deconstructing the Time-Travelling Identity

Samir Passi and Ranjit Singh
Maastricht University

Introduction

Identity, as a construct, is constantly in a state of flux. It can be understood as a simulacrum of one's relationship with reality. It is not only representative of one's individualism, in the sense of a personal conception of one's own identity, but is also representative (of the individual) to the society at large. The scholarship on identity ranges from it being relational to the world you inhabit (Lewis, 1986) or being defined by one's moral commitments (Taylor, 1989), but one cannot refute the fact that the mere utterance of the word identity invokes (and demands) a sense of time and space. Identity, within a computer game and otherwise, is a complex sum of time, space and context. The very act of delineating an identity is time dependant, spatially bound and relative to the observer. With regard to a computer game, the concept of player identity necessarily entails the relationship between the player and the avatar. Thus, before we move on to the particular attribute of identity that is the focus of this paper, it is important here that we explain our notion of the avatar.

There is a lot of scholarship around the construct of '*avatar*' within computer games. Some papers argue that the avatar is a piece of code scripted into the design of the game (Aarseth, 2004) while others argue that an avatar is the extension of the player within the larger narrative of the game (Atkins, 2003). We acknowledge the fact that, from the point of view of the gameplay (media), the avatar is an extension of the player within the narrative and we also accept that at the level of being a game (medium), the avatar is just a piece of code. These are two ways of looking at it with their own set of advantages and disadvantages, and either can be used to answer the different or same set of questions to different levels. The way we construct the notion of the avatar is inspired from McLuhan's conception of the '*media within the medium*'. McLuhan (1965) asserted that the media within the medium acts as another medium in itself. He gives the example of the electric light and says that "the electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no content. [...] For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium Then it is not the light but the 'content' (or what is really another medium) that is noticed" (p.9).¹

For McLuhan, the medium was an extension of our social selves, in the sense that the "message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (p.8) The game is a medium with the narrative as its media, of course, but more importantly it is a particular part of that media (the avatar) that the player

¹ At face value, McLuhan's thesis can be understood as a theory that is congruent with the Ludology camp in game studies: one should study the game for what it is (medium) and not concentrate on the narrative (media) that accompanies it. This would not only be an oversimplification of his thesis but also an acute misunderstanding. This will become clear further in the paper.

sees as his/her own extension (and not the *gaming* medium as such, although it provides for the possibility of an extension). McLuhan emphasizes that a medium, in a society, has far more impact on our world than just the media it contains. This is not a manifesto for sidelining *media* entirely but rather the fact that overemphasis on the media can deteriorate the significance of the medium itself. McLuhan used the metaphor of a “juicy piece of meat” (p.18) for the content of the medium highlighting the fact that the effect of the medium is made “strong and intense just because it is given another medium as content” (p. 18). The medium, in the sense of an instrument or a means, would then be the avatar. Within such a framework the avatar can be understood as the media within the gaming medium which, as a virtual embodiment of the player, acts as a different medium. This new *media-as-medium* embodiment operates at two levels: (1) an augmentation of the player into the virtual gaming world; and (2) as a prosthetic for the player to fulfil desires and fantasies. One can argue here that we are actually saying that the avatar *is* and *is not* the player at the same time; this is wrong. The player is the media residing within the medium of the avatar: how much of the medium can the player embody (and control) is subjective and depends on the game. Let us now move on to the attribute of identity that we wish to focus on: its relationship with time.

The question ‘what is time?’ has intrigued many a philosophers and scientists. One cannot simply reference a particular source for a definitive account of time. There are scholars who treat time as an unreal entity (McTaggart, 1908), as a real entity (Barbour, 1999) or as an a priori institution through which we make sense of the world around us (Kant, 1781). Time is a social construct that scales (and determines) the flow of our everyday lives. Consisting of past, present and future, time is widely understood as a linear impetus that drives the world. The polemics around time and identity are multiple but those are not the focus of this paper. Centred on this relationship of identity and time exist two schools of thought in philosophy: Perdurantism and Endurantism, and within them the discourse around continuum of time, space and identity remains polemical till date. Endurantism caters to the idea that the identity of an object is a wholly persistent three-dimensional attribute at any given time instant (Thomson, 1983; Haslanger, 1994). Perdurantism, on the other hand, contrasts this with the idea that the identity of an object exists in parts as spatiotemporal components and that the embodied identity of that object is the summation of these parts (Armstrong, 1980; Heller, 1984). Let us now take an example to understand it better.

Think of a cottage made up of planks of wood. Now over time, the wood constituting the cottage would wither and tear but then assume that as every plank of wood goes bad, it is replaced by a new one. Now the question is: after some of the planks have been replaced: is it then the same original cottage? For the endurantist, the cottage appears everlasting and unchanged over time but the perdurantist will argue that it is not the original cottage anymore as its identity has undergone a change. These, and more, interesting questions become even more intriguing when one tries to analyse the identity of the avatar/player and their relationship to each other. For example, consider that you are playing a first person shooter

(FPS) game and within the game, sometime after a particular check point² (and before the next one), your avatar dies in a battle. Now when you reload the game from the saved check point, one can say that the avatar has no conception of what happened before that. It is only the player (as the person embodying the avatar) that knows more than the avatar about the game and thus guides him through with that extra bit of knowledge. So the question at hand is: has the avatar changed after he has been killed (and the game reloads)?

While one ponders over these kinds of questions, one can move forward and say that gaming itself began with the idea of fantasy. A large number of gaming components are extensions of everyday concepts and desires such as violence, immortality, role playing, time travelling and playing God. Although the art of gaming caters to the fulfilment of human desires, the contemporary focus on reality dilutes the flavour of arcade within games. With the advent of contemporary modelling and simulation engines, games are on their way to achieve congruence with reality itself. Games like FIFA 2011™ and Need For Speed™ are not just detailed but the inclusion of physics within their gaming engines tries to bring the player closer to the reality of the virtual through game experience. Game experience, along with the concept of player-avatar identity, is interlocked with the medium of the game (and its subsequent possibilities). The medium not only operates at an ontological level wherein it provides the mapping of relationships and in-game contexts (how the player reacts with other bots/players in the game; or how the bots in the game react to the player and the environment) but also at a hermeneutical level of culture and textuality (what are the attributes that make for a good survival horror game and the fact that the players' heartbeat rises while playing the game; or the blurring out of the vision within the game when the heartbeat goes up). The game is simultaneously an augmentation and prosthesis of reality for the player. Within such a framework it is interesting to see how the conceptualizations of identity of the player (in regard to the avatar) with reference to the concept of time travel (that the narrative of these games caters to) evolve and develop through the game experience.

This paper aims to philosophically examine the concept of time travel, identity and conceptualization of self (of the player) within the game experience. Structurally taking *Day of the Tentacles* (1993), *InFamous* (2009) and *Final Fantasy VIII* (1999) as case-studies, within individual sections of the paper, it will expound on the conceptualizations of time travel in relation to identity of the player and the players conception of his/her own self. The paper concludes by highlighting the inherent deconstruction elements present within the thesis of this paper.

² A check point within a game is a point in the gameplay when the progress of the player is stored digitally into a file so that it can be reloaded later. It is also famous by the option: "Save Game".

Day of the Tentacle

“*We may not live to see yesterday!*”

- Hoagie, Day of the Tentacles

Being 200 years back in the past, Hoagie meets George Washington in person while he is conducting meetings for the framing of the Bill of Rights and has a conversation with him. Among the speech options available for Hoagie’s conversation, the player needs to choose, “Whoa, you’re like George Washington!” and then, choose “Is it true about you and the cherry tree?”, and finally choose, “I bet you’ve lost it. You couldn’t cut down a tree to save your grandmother.” George Washington will go on and cut down a tree, and four hundred years into the future Laverne drops from the tree on which she has been stuck from the beginning of time travel in the game. The player can now operate in three distinct times, 200 years back in the past as Hoagie, the present as Bernard and 200 years into the future as Laverne.

The game being introduced here is *Day of the Tentacle* (DOTT), a 1993 graphic adventure game developed and published by *LucasArts*. The game’s plot follows Bernard Bernoulli and his friends Hoagie and Laverne as they attempt to stop the evil Purple Tentacle — a sentient, disembodied tentacle — from taking over the world. The player embodies the three and solves puzzles while using temporally separated avatars to explore past, present and future. The choice of this game, while being imperative to the concepts around temporal parts within the Perdurantism school of thought, owes a lot to the simplicity within the game narrative that lures the player into a suspension of disbelief and creates an immersive game space that has been featured among the top-rated games of all times by Adventure Gamers (Dickens, 2004) and IGN Entertainment (2005).

One way of exploring the relationship between media, medium and the player with respect to DOTT is to understand the underlying game tree that defines its game experience. The game tree for a game starts at the initial position of the player and contains all possible moves of the player from each position; thereby ultimately defining the correct set of moves that a player needs to make to successfully finish the game. Despite the fact that DOTT operates in three different times and it pioneered the idea of experiencing game environment without the fear of getting killed in the process (Kasavin, 2004), the puzzles presented in all the three times in which the player could play have a sequential order of solution. As explained in the story with which we started this chapter, Hoagie has to get the tree cut down by George Washington in the past to enable Laverne to start playing the game in the future. Bernard cannot influence the cutting of the tree.

Time travel, as a construct, is used to create three distinct, but not mutually exclusive, plotlines (game trees) which need to be followed in a certain sequence by the player to solve the puzzles and proceed further in the game. The player has three spatiotemporal identities in Bernard, Hoagie and Laverne that can be accessed at any point during the game. Hence, after completion of puzzles, the player can switch between these embodied avatars and share

certain small inventory items between them by placing the item into the “Chron-o-Johns”, modified portable toilets that instantly transport objects to the other time period, or just leaving it at a place in the past which can be picked up by avatars in a future period. Changes made to a past time period will affect a future one, and many of the game's puzzles are based on the effect of time travel, aging of certain items, and alterations of the time stream. It must be mentioned here that the three embodied avatars in the game, in totality, constitute the ‘*avatar*’ in its understanding as a gaming concept. The player, as media, constitutes the medium of the avatar in three parts.

At a certain level, DOTT is three games put together in a larger narrative of a single game where the player plays as a God in the game environment controlling his spatiotemporal identities and influencing the behaviour of one avatar based on inputs from the other two. This idea is enhanced by the third-person point-of-view with which the game is played. “In third-person point-of-view games, the player is given an embodied representation in the space with all that an embodied representation entails, including the physical relationship of the character to the space and objects around the character and a contextualized presence in the game space so that the player can experience the space through the [avatar] as other than simply a geometric construction.” (Taylor, 2002, p. 28). This notion is extended in the game through the construct of time-travel. Not only does the player control the game space, he also controls actions in distinct timelines within the larger narrative of the game essential to the successful completion of the game.

DOTT has also been instrumentally designed to minimize the complications of paradoxes that accompany the notion of time-travel. Following causality of events, the simplest of these paradoxes could be explained with the age old question of what would happen if you killed your own grandfather. To keep things simple, the avatars do not move back and forth in time. The player embodies three different avatars in three different times. At the level of game logic, it only allows small inventory items to be exchanged between time periods and restricts game play to solving puzzles instead of killing game characters to accomplish tasks. This simplicity enables the player to be in a state of situated immersion within the game narrative. This *situated-ness* is not only a function of the experience of game space as a spatial and narrated space, but it is also a function of variation in its representation in different time periods. This immersion requires a certain amount of consistency in game behaviour, such that the future is not completely altered by actions in the past. The game narrative is predictable in the sense that while the player is playing a certain time period, the other two are simply unchanged (paused) until the player decides to send something to a different time period or shift to a different avatar. Even if the player does send in new items to different time periods, the presence of these items do not influence the nature of the game space in that time period.

DOTT belongs to the league of games around simpler conceptions of time travel following the logic of cause and effect that what happens will change the present day. It does not invoke the conceptions of alternate realities and timelines that splinter off from the original creating a whole new universe such as Command and Conquer: Red AlertTM. At the

level of game play, the player identity is expressed as a combination of three distinct avatars with different personalities finding affinity with the Perdurantism school of thought. The player is continuously reminded of the spatiotemporal parts of his identity with constant shifts in time as the player chooses to play as Bernard, Hoagie or Laverne. The player's game space is typically four-dimensional where his actions in different times, influences his actions in space, thereby making the identity of the player to be a four-dimensional construct. The player, while as a virtual embodiment, *perdures* through time within three temporal parts of which the 'avatar' (as a gaming construct) is the whole. The player while playing with the avatars is in three different timelines at the time of playing the game. Hence, Bernard, Hoagie and Laverne are virtual embodiments of the same player in the game space at the same time, which could be explained by the "perdurantist account of temporary coincidence [with] the claim that, while it is bizarre to think that two [or three] distinct objects [the avatars in this case] could entirely coincide, there is nothing bizarre about two objects partially coinciding by sharing a part [the player]" (Hawley, 2010).

InFamous

“My brain lurched, unable to accept that Kessler and I were the same person, that he’d come back in time to mould me into the saviour he failed to be”

- Cole, InFamous

InFamous, an action packed open world game, was developed by *Sucker Punch Productions* in 2009. The game has a complex storyline of which time-travel is an inherent but subtle constituent. You play *Cole MacGrath*, an everyday guy living in the fictional Empire City, who goes on to become a modern-day superhero acquiring electrical powers during gameplay. The game begins when Cole, who is a messenger by profession, opens up a mysterious courier and triggers an explosion that wipes out a substantial part of the city. The courier had contained a mysterious device called the *Ray Sphere* which when activated drains out the electrical energy from the surroundings and gives it to the person holding the sphere. The game proceeds from there on with *Cole* trying to make sense of his powers and completing a set of mission including saving his best friend Zeke in the game. It is only in the final part of the game that the notion of time-travel comes into play. The antithesis of the game, a character named *Kessler*, is actually the future version of *Cole*. In the original timeline in the game, Kessler (Cole) is shown to have developed superpowers naturally over time. However, a powerful conduit³ known as *The Beast* attacked Empire City. Cole, who had the powers to fight him off, cared more about the lives of his family and friends and thus fled the city. Later, *the beast* kills his wife and kids and by that time Cole is no longer powerful enough to defeat him anymore. Cole then uses his biggest power (time travel) to go into the past and change his (to-be) self and prepare him to confront *the beast* but in doing so, he then becomes an antithesis to his (old) self.

In an overarching way the game follows a standard narrative but a closer look reveals that the narrative provides for the possibilities of alternate universes within the game. In the sense that there is a central arrow that defines (and drives) the gameplay but you have the option of (re)directing the arrow. This has large implications on the player-avatar embodiment within the game. Usually in a RPG⁴ there are a set of *correct* actions that need to be carried out by the player (through the avatar) for the successful completion of the game. In this sense, the game tree of such a game would contain a *singular* solution (in a strict sense). There is a sense of correctness (if one may use the word) within the gameplay that needs to be maintained. Of course, even in such a game the identity of the avatar is partly influenced by the player, for the player provides the media for the avatar’s actions and movement but the personality of the avatar (in the psychological sense) remains untouched (or scripted/coded). The player virtually embodies an entity based on a certain set of rules: you get to embody someone else but you also have to live like them. The player is, yet, only a partial media within the medium of the avatar.

³ A Conduit, within the game narrative of InFamous, refers to a person with superhuman powers (developed through any means).

⁴ Role Playing Game

InFamous takes this to the next level by incorporating the use of *karma* within the game. At some points in the game, the player has to choose from two options: good and evil. For example, once you have defeated a particular group of opponents in the game you may choose to either take all the provisions that they dropped or you can let the people in the game take them. There is no *correct* choice here; depending upon your choice the game would continue in a different fashion from here on and your karma level would shift to one side or the other. In the context of game trees, it means that the game tree of InFamous is fuzzy and has multiple *solutions* instead of a single *solution*. InFamous gives the player the opportunity to *explore* distinct sub-plotlines that can be invoked with a set of choices (as opposed to the three well-defined plotlines in DOTT). The game tree of InFamous represents an adventure in space while the game tree of DOTT corresponds to a puzzle in time. What this provides for is the inclusion of the *identity* of the player within the avatar (and subsequently the gameplay). Not only do you get to virtually embody *Cole* but you also get to incorporate a part of your own imagination (and choices) in *Cole's* life. It is still arguable that irrespective of all of this the player, still, has only part of his media in the avatar but even then the relationship between the player and the avatar goes one level deeper in InFamous, as compared to other games of its genre. The player gets to employ a richer media within the medium of the avatar. *Cole's* morality within the game is now the media of the player. This controlling of morality is what deepens the player-avatar embodiment.

Time travel, in a traditional sense, is not a part of game play though it is an important part of game experience. At the end of the game when Cole battles Kessler and defeats him, Kessler uses the remaining bit of his energy to transfer his thoughts into Cole's mind. It is then that Cole (including the player) learns that Kessler is actually a future version of himself. The player, through the avatar, remains three-dimensional in the game within the linear structure of game time. Within the game, at certain times, the *media* of the player is endured within the medium of the avatar. There is a single instance of the avatar that the player embodies virtually and at any given time instant this embodied medium exists wholly in three dimensions. Irrespective of the existence of Cole's future self in the same timeline, the concept of temporal parts is not invoked herein because of the simple fact that till the end of the game Cole does not have the requisite information allowing him to see himself as a fragmented being. The identity of the player (as a conceived notion of his/her own self), within such a setting, finds affinity with the Endurantist school of thought where the identity is a three-dimensional construct. The embodiment of the player, as the avatar, *endures* itself through time by wholly existing at any point in space. Kessler influences as much a part of Cole's conception of his own self as is done by his friend Zeke.

Let us now move onto the third and final analysis, as a part of this paper, of *Final Fantasy VIII* that problematizes the notion of time travel as a philosophical construct and also brings forth certain issues relevant to the Endurantism/Perdurantism distinction.

Final Fantasy VIII

“I don't want the future. I want the present to stand still.”

– Rinoa, Final Fantasy VIII

Final Fantasy VIII (FFVIII) is a RPG released for the PlayStation in 1999 and for Windows-based personal computers in 2000 by Square Enix as the Final Fantasy series' eighth title. The game's story focuses on a group of young mercenaries who are drawn into an international conflict, and seek to protect the world from a sorceress manipulating the war for her own purposes. Unlike the other two case studies, the plotline of this game requires a more detailed exploration that is beyond the scope of this paper; hence, we assume certain knowledge of the story of the game throughout this section. Though we would like to point out that the narrative elements that have been used in exploring the possibilities within time-travelling identity of the player within this game have been explained in broad strokes as and when required.

FFVIII could be seen as a party system game where the player embodies several characters at once (the 'party'). “These games do not allow the player to manipulate objects from a point of contact within the game space because the player must act as an outsider controlling a group of characters. Playing as the controlling force of a group is not the same as playing within the game space: in party system games, the player plays as a controlling external force which acts on the party, and the party then acts within the game. In party system games and simulation games, the player plays as a god, general, or director figure, that is a force outside of the game that directs the actions of the game” (Taylor, 2002, p.7). The difference between DOTT and FFVIII, both of which employ the player as an outside force, lies within the construction of the timeline of the narrative. While DOTT has three timelines operating together in which the player embodies one avatar each, FFVIII has a single timeline in which the player embodies eleven avatars. This in turn, influences game experience because “the player never directly identifies with any one character, because the characters only function as members of a unified group” (p.9). While in games like DOTT and InFamous, there is always a one-to-one relationship between the player and the avatar that he embodies at a certain point in time within the game, FFVIII provides for a one-to-many relationship with the avatars. Here, the player does not constitute the '*avatar*', as a gaming construct, in eleven parts; he constitutes the avatar as a unified group that is pervasive within the game narrative.

Within FFVIII, the narrative employs the concept of time travel with all of its inherent contradictions; to the extent that the narrative ultimately does not offer a conclusive reasoning behind why does the evil sorceress, named Ultimecia, wants to compress time. Time Compression within the context of the game implies compressing time from past, present and future so all times exist at once in one unending present. This can be facilitated within the game by a non-playable character named Ellone in the present or a device called Junction Machine Ellone in the future, that have the ability to take people back through time, though not in their physical forms, as DOTT does with a time machine, but through

transference of consciousness into the psyche of other characters in the past and controlling their actions. Using Junction Machine Ellone, Ultimecia influences the behaviour of characters in the present from the future. While being an essential part of the game narrative, the player has no control over this aspect of the game and it is not a part of his game play, though his game experience revolves around the influence of this factor on various non-playable characters and his avatars in the game.

The plot of the game is complicated further by the fact that it revolves around a predestination paradox, which states that a time traveller who influences the past, is predestined to do so, because their actions are vital to the future and they do something that causes the future to occur in the same way that their knowledge of the future has already happened. When Ultimecia sets the events in motion that will allow her to manoeuvre events in her past, she inevitably sets in motion the events that bring about her downfall, as only through her downfall would she be able to begin the process all over again. This ultimately makes one wonder why would she manoeuvre events to bring about her own downfall. But this paradox within the narrative and a lack of explanation around the idea of Time Compression did not influence the reception of the game. Evidently, the Square Enix shipped 8.15 million copies of the game worldwide up till March 31, 2003 (Square Enix, 2004, p. 27). This phenomenal success could be attributed to the fact that the paradox does not influence the game experience and the suspension of disbelief that the game entails, primarily because the narrative operates as a consistent paradox within itself. This consistency ensures the situated immersion of the player into the spatial and narrated game space.

When it comes to placing the player as a media filling up the unified group of avatars as medium, one could consider each of the individual avatars that the player embodies as having an Endurantist relationship with the player's conception of his identity. Looking at each avatar individually, they exist as a wholly persistent three-dimensional entity at any given point in the game. Interestingly, if one considers *karma* as an intrinsic property of the avatars, Edea, who is originally a non-playable character in the game under the control of Ultimecia, acts as an evil sorceress and later on, after her control is broken, joins the struggle against Ultimecia (becoming the possible eleventh avatar) poses a challenge to the Endurantist argument. Is she then the 'Edea' as before? On the other hand, the party as a whole entails a Perdurantist notion of identity. The distinctions become blurry as the player switches between avatars on the battle screen. Sometimes as the player can only embody one avatar at a single time instant, the computer controls the rest of the avatars present on the scene as they fight with computer-controlled enemies. Hence, the media of the avatar and 'avatar', as a gaming construct, is partly a virtual embodiment of the player and partly scripted into the game.

Conclusion

Through this paper we have tried to construct an alternate understanding of the notion of the ‘*avatar*’, as a gaming construct, with regard to the medium of the game and the relation that it has with the player. The paper demonstrates that the understanding of the ‘*avatar*’ as a *medium* in itself not only allows for a middle ground between the Ludology and Narratology camps within game studies but also provides for interesting possibilities in terms of understanding the game experience. The player, as media, fills up the ‘*avatar*’ to a certain extent with what can be labelled as a cultural (and narrative) manifestation of the player; while the remaining part of the medium of the ‘*avatar*’ operates as scripted lines of programming. Analysing the player-avatar relationship as a virtual embodiment that is partly driven by the narrative (which is also a medium) and partly by the game in itself (the code) opens up the avenue for understanding the game experience as being borne out of the narrative (which, to the coding of the game, is a game tree) and the game code (which to the sensorium of the player is a narrative) simultaneously. When you look at the game as just a narrative or just a game, essentially you are looking at two sides of the same coin. This is best summarized by Jesper Juul: “We can examine the rules as they are found mechanically in the game program or in the manual of a board game or we can examine the rules as something that players negotiate and learn [the avatar as code]. We can also treat the fictional world as a set of signs that the game presents, and we can treat the fictional world as something that the game cues the player into imagining and that players then imagine in their own ways [the avatar as an embodiment of the player]” (Juul, 2005, p.2). You can either call it “the game” or “the narrative”, but you cannot disregard the intersection (and sometimes even full overlap) of the two.

DOTT caters to the Perdurantist school of thought by employing three different avatars within different timeline so that the player, at a given moment in time, has a singular relationship with an avatar. But, on the whole, the player is a sum of his own spatiotemporal embodiments within the mediums (the avatars); his identity is a four-dimensional construct. InFamous, on the other hand, helped to focus on the Endurantist philosophy of three-dimensionality. The player, at any given time instant, embodies a particular avatar and exists wholly in three dimensions. In FFVIII the player does not constitute the ‘*avatar*’, as a gaming construct, in eleven different parts. The player’s identity constitutes a unified group of the eleven possible avatars in a single timeline. This allows for a synthesis of the avatars’ Perdurantist and Endurantist relationship with the player’s identity.

An interesting insight that stems out from this paper, in the section on the case study of FFVIII, is the fact that the Perdurantist/Endurantist distinction remains highly subjective and contextual; you can make a hermeneutical case for either one of them within a case study. This notion could further be extended into the other two case studies. For example, even in InFamous one can argue that because of the inclusion of the concept of *karma* within the game, every decision that the player makes changes the avatar’s identity within the game (if *karma* be taken as an intrinsic part of one’s identity). So, at different times in the game,

the medium of the avatar is a temporal part of the overall identity and at the end of the game, the identity of the '*avatar*' is actually a unified totality of all the three-dimensional temporal parts (just after each decision was taken). This would go on to prove that InFamous actually caters to the Perdurantist philosophy as opposed to the Endurantist version given in the earlier section. A similar opposing case could be made for DOTT as well. The reason for this, we believe, is the fact that essentially both of these camps do not have conflicting viewpoints but rather different points of viewing the scenario. The Endurantists analyse identity from within the dimension of space (taking time as an intrinsic property) while Perdurantists do it from within the dimension of time. FFVIII portrays this viewpoint perfectly as it embodies both of these schools of philosophy within a single game experience.

A computer game essentially acts as a medium for potential embodiment, a space that takes the shape of whatever is placed within it. It is not just something that gamers do, to the game and themselves, it is something that they become in relation to the medium of the '*avatar*'. It is a means to an end (play etc.) but also the post-script to an end (the virtual can have what reality does not allow for). One needs to understand not the *means* or the *ends* but the intertwining of them: the medium (avatar) and the media (player). One can look at the game for what it is or one could look at how the game employs the narrative to create a sense of sensorium within the cognitive imagination of the player. An imagination (avatar) within another imagination (player) creates an intersubjectivity between the microcosm of the game and the macrocosm that concurs with the players' life. This paper was not about resolving the conflict between the two camps in game studies or in philosophy, for at the very core level the difference between them is more about different vantage points rather than conflicting vantage views. One can keep pondering as to which came first, the chicken or the egg but it may very well be, in Marshall McLuhan's words, that the chicken is just the egg's way of getting more eggs.

References

- Aarseth, E. (2004). Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation. In N. Wardrip & P. Harington (Eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. (pp.45-47). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Armstrong, D.M. (1980). Identity Through Time. In Peter van Inwagen (Ed.), *Time and Cause*, (pp. 67–78). Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Atkins, B. (2003). *More than a Game: The Computer Game as a Fictional Form*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barbour, Julian (1999). *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Our Understanding of the Universe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dickens, E. (2004). Top 20 Adventure Games of All Times. *Adventure Gamers*. Retrieved March 21, 2011, from <http://www.adventuregamers.com/article/id,186>
- EA Canada. *Need For Speed*. Electronic Arts, California, 1994.
- EA Canada. *FIFA 2011*. Electronic Arts, California, 2010.
- Haslanger, S. (1994). Humean Supervenience and Enduring Things. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 72, 339-59.
- Hawley, K. (2010). Temporal Parts. *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*. Retrieved March 20, 2011, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/temporal-parts/>
- Heller, M. (1984). Temporal Parts of Four Dimensional Objects. *Philosophical Studies* 46, 323–34.
- IGN Entertainment (2005). *IGN's Top 100 Games*. Retrieved March 21, 2011, from <http://uk.top100.ign.com/2005/051-060.html>
- Juul, J. (2005). *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kant, I. (2008). *The Critique of Pure Reason*. (N. Kemp Smith, Trans.). Blunt Press. (Original work published 1781)
- Kasavin, G. (2004). The Only Good Tentacle is a Green Tentacle. *Gamespot*. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.gamespot.com/gamespot/features/all/greatestgames/p-48.html>
- Lewis, D.K. (1986). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Cornwall: Blackwell.
- Lucas Arts. *Day of the Tentacle*. Lucas Arts, California. 1993.
- McLuhan, M. (1965). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. USA: McGraw Hill.
- McTaggart, J.E. (1908). The Unreality of Time. *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, 17, 456-473.
- Square Enix. *Final Fantasy VIII*. Square Enix, Tokyo. 2000.
- Square Enix (2008). *Titles of Game Software with Worldwide Shipment exceeding 1 Million copies*. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.square-enix.com/jp/ir/e/explanatory/download/0404-200402090000-01.pdf#page=27>
- Sucker Punch Productions. *InFamous*. Sony Computer Entertainment, Foster City California. 2009.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, L.N. (2002). *Video Games: Perspective, Point-of-view and Immersion*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Florida, FL.

Thomson, J.J. (1983). Parthood and Identity across Time. *Journal of Philosophy*, 80, 201–220.

Westwood Studios. *Command and Conquer: Red Alert*. Virgin Interactive, UK. 1996.