Propagaming
Uncovering propaganda in war videogames

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the issue of propaganda in contemporary war themed videogames. Considering the current geopolitical situation on one hand, and the pervasiveness and widespread use of the videogame medium in general, and war videogames in particular, together with the collaboration between the military and the videogame industry, part of the wider military-entertainment complex, on the other hand, it cannot be excluded that military propaganda might be present in such digital media.

This study explores through which persuasive techniques is propaganda manifest in war-themed videogames. The answer is achieved using theories of rhetoric and persuasiveness in videogames and by conducting a textual game analysis of 10 different war-themed videogames.

A great number of persuasive techniques at work were found within the videogames, each of them working based on certain principles identified by previous literature. Through a limited set of options, players are exposed to the normalization of morally questionable acts such as civilian shooting and torture of enemy prisoners.

The war videogames in question are not neutral in their playworld, mechanics, and playformance, and heavy and widespread use of propaganda can be found within them.

Keywords: videogames, war, propaganda, persuasion, persuasive techniques, rhetoric, game rhetoric.
First and foremost I would like to thank my parents for supporting me both morally and financially throughout these two years. I hope I made them proud and I hope that I’ll be able to give back even just half of what they gave to me.

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1 Introduction

I remember the first time I played videogames. I was about six, at a friend’s house, we plugged in his Nintendo 64 and started playing F-Zero X (Nintendo EAD). I have a vivid memory of the speed of the hovercars racing amongst each other, the pounding soundtrack, the spectacular crashes and falls from the levitating tracks. I was “hooked”. My grandparents bought me the same console for my next birthday (most probably against my mother’s better judgment) and I started becoming an avid gamer. I started with the classics of my generation: Super Mario 64 (Nintendo EAD), Pokémon Stadium (Nintendo EAD), Starfox 64 (Nintendo EAD). The characters in those games were friendly, cartoonish, and overall “fun” and “safe”, so it is no wonder that to this day they continue being fan favourites among young players (and older ones too). Throughout the years, I became the proud owner of a number of other consoles, and my tastes in videogames changed. I started getting interested in more mature content. One of the most common of such themes, not only in the videogame medium, is war. As many other teenagers (especially boys) I was a consumer and a fan of media portraying war: movies, television series, books, comics, even music. Not that I liked war, or supported it in any way, quite the opposite actually, yet I thoroughly enjoyed watching movies like Rambo and listening to cheesy heavy metal bands singing about “honour on the battlefield”. This reflected also on my taste in videogames. My friends and I had numerous discussions on “how epic that mission in Call of Duty: Big Red One (Treyarch) was, where you take control of Sicily against German and Italian axis forces”. What is common to the games, and the other forms of media portraying war that I was a fan of, is that they represented somewhat time-distant conflicts (either Vietnam, WWII, any Medieval war). This started to change after the 9/11 attacks. With the beginning of the “War on Terror”, there was a focus on the representation of contemporary conflict, either with a real setting or one intended to replicate it, arguably very politically motivated and resembling in many ways the not openly stated, but clearly anti-communist propaganda movies of the 1980’s. The change was very apparent in videogames, and countless titles were published
representing American and allied troops in Middle-Eastern settings, and I indeed enjoyed playing them. I did so a-critically, without questioning what I was doing, I simply enjoyed the fun factor of playing the game. Fast forward 10 years, and I am a Digital Media and Society Master student with a passion for videogames, now acknowledging messages are being sent through every type of medium, videogames not being an exception. War themed games are still dominating the industry, with graphics getting more realistic year after year. But just how they convey their meaning, is what I intend to find out, more specifically if war themed videogames can be a channel for propaganda, and if so, how is this propaganda manifest.

1.1 Setting the context

The videogame medium is currently at a crossroad. While their cultural role could be argued to still be marginal compared to the status of the fine arts, literature, cinema, or even television, there is an undeniable increasing critical discussion around videogames, and the medium is often featured in both printed and electronic media. Furthermore, there is a growing interest in videogames by academia (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 118). User demographics have changed from the stereotypical adolescent boy of the 90’s. Based on its own demographic research, Sony suggested that the average age for Playstation (the company’s first home console, published in 1994-95) user was 20-21 (Newman, 2004, p.49). Research by Interactive Digital Software Association, reported by Newman, show that in 2000-2001 60% of all Americans played console and computer games on a regular basis, with a majority of them being 18 and older, and an average age of 28. Much has been written about the gender issue in videogames, which socializes boys into misogyny while mostly relegating girl to objectified positions. Jenkins (1998) addresses this topic while describing a growing corpus of videogames with a feminist background, headed by the Girl’s Game movement. A 2015 report by the Entertainment Software Association seems to go against the stereotype of videogames as a male dominated activity (at least in the U.S.A.), indicating 44% of total game players as female. Furthermore the report shows a total number of videogame players of 155 million, with four out of five households owning a device used to play videogames and an average of two gamers in each game-playing households. 42% of Americans play 3 or more hours per week. The average age is increased compared to the last decade, now being 35, with the most active age group being 18-35 (30%). 26% of game players are under 18. Adult women account for 33% of the game-playing population, while boys 18 or younger are 15%. The average age for female players is 45.
These numbers are impressive and probably attributable to the spread of mobile smartphones and tablets. Mäyrä (2008) writes about how videogames are gradually leaving the children’s room and arcade halls and conquering the living rooms, while stepping out of the computer screen and into multifunctional devices, such as smart televisions and mobile phones (p. 13). He also speaks of the concept of game culture, which is central to understand how games convey meaning. Culture is to be understood as a system of meaning, which in games is related to actions and images, as much as it is to words (id.) Meaning in games is therefore created in playful interactions that take place within specific cultural contexts, and is related to both symbolic communication and non-symbolic meaning inherent in the act of playing and in the overall gameplay experience. Cultures are structures of meaning, underlying language, thought and action of people sharing them (pp. 27-28).

It is thus safe to say that videogames are a powerful medium able to convey meaning and important results can be discovered by researching and analysing them.

While videogames are becoming more and more popular and accessible, the apparently unrelated realm of global politics and international relations is facing instability with no apparent solution in sight. One can think of the tragic conflicts in the Middle-East, terrorist activities in Europe, the tensions between the USA and North-Korea, and between Europe and Russia at the eastern NATO borders, to name just the situations that get more media coverage nowadays. One thing that has always gone hand in hand with conflict is propaganda, with some dating its origins back to the time of Ancient Greece (Taylor, 2003, p. 15). While propaganda has been widely acknowledged as working through traditional media (e.g. printed media, film, radio) (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011) and more recently through the new media (one can think of how ISIS uses social media) (Farwell, 2014), not much has been said regarding the possibility of propaganda appearing in videogames. This might be because propaganda in itself is not so easy to identify when present.

1.2 Propaganda, Persuasion, and Rhetoric

But what exactly is propaganda? While I will come to back to this concept to identify its main definitions and the way it has been researched in the next chapter, for now the reader can think of propaganda as the «systematic and deliberative attempts to sway mass public opinion in favour of the objectives of the institutions (usually state or corporate) sending the propaganda message (Snow, 2010, p. 66). Propaganda has a very tight relationship with persuasion, but while persuasion
is usually defined as a communicative process involving two parts, a sender and a receiver, with the former trying to convince the latter in adopting certain ideas or behaviours, with both parts having something to gain from the persuasion act and both needs being spoken (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p. 33), in propaganda it is only the propagandists/sender who gains something by convincing the receiver in adopting a certain idea or behaviour (Soules, 2015, p. 3).

Conversely, persuasion has a very tight relationship with rhetoric, defined as «the use of argumentation to persuade» (Walton, 2007, p. 2), or «the art of communicating effectively and persuasively in a particular context (Soules, 2015, p. 3). It refers to the use of language and speech to persuade the listener. While readers might easily connect “rhetoric” to concepts such as “deception”, “trick”, “empty” (referred to speech), this was not always the case, with rhetoric having a noble, though not uncontroversial, philosophical origin in ancient Greece. (Walton, 2007). Persuasion and rhetoric are so intertwined that Wenzel (1990) writes that «the purpose of rhetoric is persuasion» (p. 13).

It would seem that there is link between the concepts of propaganda, persuasion, and rhetoric. Walton points this out (2007), writing that «propaganda involves rhetoric» (p. 106), for it aims at persuasion, although it is admittedly a “degenerate form of persuasion” (p. 107). It would therefore appear that by using speech in specific ways it can be possible to deceive the receiver and persuade him to adopt a certain behaviour or idea that would benefit the cunning rhetorician (and only him). Bryant (1953) writes that «the major techniques of (…) propaganda are long known rhetorical techniques gone wrong» (p. 415).

Clearly there seems to be a link between the three concepts, although the link itself is not as clear. Jowett & O’Donnel (2011) refer to propaganda as a subset of persuasion, the former sharing techniques with the latter, and going beyond the aims of simply convincing and persuading the audiences (i.e. there is no reciprocity of needs fulfilled), while both relying on rhetoric to achieve their aims (p. 49). Soules (2015) sees persuasion and propaganda as opposite ends of a spectrum built on the foundation of rhetoric. Persuasion aims at changing attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours, with mutual interests being met, and it shifts to propaganda when it is consciously misleading or exploitive, benefiting only the propagandist (pp. 3-4).

Regardless of whether propaganda is a subset of persuasion, or if it is its “evil brother”, it appears clear that the concepts are necessarily linked, and both rely on rhetoric.
1.3 Gaming Private Ryan – the Military Entertainment Complex

The military-entertainment complex can be thought about as the synergy between the military and the video-game industry, where the military finances private gaming companies and offers technical expertise, and in exchange developers and game companies offer their technology and technical consulting (Mead, 2013).

Lenoir and Lowood (2005) write about how, during the Cold War, the American military industrial complex was commonly critiqued for being a hybrid with one foot in the military and the other in the enterprise system, and propose the military-entertainment complex as a new model born in the early 1990’s, i.e. a collaboration between the military and the entertainment industry. This is most apparent in the way the military grooms its soldiers adopting new technologies, notably videogames, as part of a new emphasis on simulation as «the training ground for what we might consider the post-human warfare of the future» (p. 2). More specifically, the authors do not think there was a real switch from a military-industrial to a military-entertainment complex, as much as there was a gradual, but natural shift, dictated by the reduced need for large government research projects dedicated to traditional industry after the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent discussions among policy makers on how to reorient defence research funding in ways which could benefit both national security and the commercial sector. In the case of the videogame industry, one of the most successful efforts in this sense was the development of America’s Army, the first videogame ever to be fully developed by the U.S. Army, capable of competing with the most successful commercial titles in terms of quality, and notoriously designed as a recruitment tool. The game was developed with technology originally produced by the commercial game industry, and serves as just one example of how the entertainment industry can be both a major source of ideas and means, while being a training ground for soldiers of the future.

Stockwell and Muir (2003) see the American military-entertainment complex as an extension of the information warfare, the strategies and technologies adopted by the army for data-processing purposes, which have been adopted heavily since the first Gulf War. The authors identify the military-entertainment complex as «the close co-operation – and sharing – of ideas and resources: between computer games producers and the military, particularly on pre-training prospective candidates for the US armed forces; between Hollywood producers and the US government on
language and concepts post September 11, 2001; and between the military’s propaganda machine and the entertainment industry’s thirst for manufactured and timely “reality” that precludes the possibility of the critical representation of the real».

Keeton and Scheckner (2013) note how the military-entertainment complex goes beyond a mutual collaboration between the military and the entertainment industry, and speak of a military-media-entertainment-industrial complex with deep implications for the arms industry in the USA. They do so by giving an historical analysis of films, documentaries, TV dramas, and videogames, released since the Vietnam War, with a special focus on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and how they negotiate the complexities of war, class, and the failures in the Middle-East.

The existence of a link between the entertainment industry (and the videogame industry in particular) and the military proves two things. First, that the videogame industry has reached technical capabilities of a considerable degree, to the point that the military is interested in them (which is relatively uninteresting in the context of this thesis). Second, and most importantly, that the military is aware of the potential hidden in the videogame medium to shape opinions and behaviours. I believe this warrants a study of how videogames may be used as a channel for propaganda.

In a 2010 non-peer reviewed article published originally on Gamasutra, dealing with the issue of propaganda in videogames, McClure writes that it may be indeed very difficult to establish if a videogame is a propaganda piece, and that the same game might be considered propaganda by some while not by others, due to the fact that while white propaganda might be fairly easy to identify, grey, and black propaganda (respectively, propaganda coming from a clear source, propaganda coming from an unclear or not coming from any particular source at all, and propaganda designed to appear as being carried out by a different source, often one opposed to the actual propagandist), are by their very nature elusive, but this does not mean that since the origin of the propaganda in question is not easily identifiable, a reasonable judgment regarding whether a game is a propaganda piece cannot be done after conducting a serious analysis. The author however warns that where a message does not exist, it should not be looked for at all cost, but at the same time also writes that just because a message is not clearly visible it does not mean it is not there. The author gives some criteria to establish whether a game can be considered a piece of propaganda. Specifically a researcher should ask her/himself the following questions: 1) Does the game contain any explicit underlying message?; 2) Is the message expressed coherently throughout the game?; 3) Do the
various elements which carry the message have to be the way they are?; 4) How are various groups and ideas presented?; 5) Who has commissioned the game?; 6) To what extent do they stand to gain from players absorbing the underlying messages?; 7) Does the message make sense in this context?; 8) If the commissioner is not accurately identifiable, does the message act as political speech in favour or against a recognisable viewpoint?; 9) Is the message expressed using time-honoured propaganda techniques?

Later during the discussion section of this thesis, I will come back to these questions since I believe it valuable to keep them in mind when discussing my findings.

1.4 Relevance of the topic and Aims

The videogame industry is probably one of the biggest entertainment industries today, enjoying a total revenue of almost 75 billion dollars worldwide. It had a constant grow in the last years (54 billion dollars in 2011), and is expected to reach over 90 billion dollars in revenue in 2020 (Statista). It is currently worth more than the entire movie and music industries in the USA (Nath, 2016). According to a 2013 Spilgames report, the total number of game players in the world is 1.2 billion, thus meaning that 17% of the total world populations is playing videogames. These are impressive numbers, which clearly warrant the need for videogame analysis. Messages are being sent through videogames, as they are through any form of media, which are important to understand and require tools for their interpretation, and, if necessary, challenging. The stereotype of the teenage gamer living in his parent’s basement is most probably something of the past, with the age group 18-35 being the most active players and the female population engaging with videogames more than ever before (Bogost, 2007), but young children are still playing videogames in massive numbers and they may lack the critical sensibility required to play games without being subjected unknowingly to certain messages.

Furthermore, Media Representation and the way certain groups are represented can have important social impact. Considering the pervasiveness and diffusion of the digital media in general, and videogames in particular in the context of this particular thesis, it can be suspected that players subjected to certain biased representations of particular groups, issues or events, might end up thinking that those representations are not biased but, on the contrary, based on objectivity and adopt a certain world-view which benefits those behind the faulty representation.
More specifically my research will deal with the issue of propaganda in videogames. A great deal has been written about propaganda in the past, but most research has focused on the more traditional forms of propaganda: songs, books, pamphlets, posters, and, more recently, radio and movies (Taylor, 2003). However I was not able to find extensive literature on precisely how propaganda manifests itself in videogames (i.e. through which techniques).

The goal with this work is twofold. On one hand I intend to stimulate the non-gamer readers in thinking differently about videogames, and engaging them in reflecting on their potential for persuasiveness and propaganda, while providing the “initiated” with means to reassess and reevaluate critically the content they are subjected to when playing certain type of videogames. On the other hand I intend to speak and place myself between the two fields of Game Studies and Media Studies, by contributing to the former with an analysis on a topic (propaganda), which probably deserves more attention in that field, while providing the latter with an insight into a relatively novel medium which can indeed shape opinions, values, and behaviours through persuasion and propaganda, and is worthy of academic interest.

1.5 Research Question

With this thesis I intend to explore how propaganda works in videogames. Although it may be argued that propaganda might find ways to express itself through various genres of videogames, my focus will be on war themed videogames, since I suspect that certain recurrent themes in that specific genre are best suited for propaganda purposes. Furthermore, although a number of war videogames which may be considered propaganda were developed in the Middle-East, the focus of my work will be on Western propaganda, therefore I will be analysing games developed in the West, and more specifically their single player campaigns¹, since that is where the narrative component of videogames is more clearly expressed (as opposed to competitive player versus player modes²). The previous section showed the tight relationship between propaganda, persuasion, and rhetoric. Considering this, I think it is adequate to explore the propaganda included

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¹ game mode where the player follows a narrative through a series of levels or stages, and plays against enemies controlled by the AI (artificial intelligence).
² game mode where the player plays self-contained, time-limited, competitive matches, either online or offline, against other real-life players.
in videogames through the lenses of theories dealing with how rhetoric and persuasion happen in videogames. Taking this into consideration I am able to formulate the following research question:

**RQ: Through which persuasive techniques is propaganda manifest in war themed videogames?**

The nature of this thesis will be empirical, and I will try to answer the research question by selecting a number of games and analysing them. The games will be chosen based on date of publication and sales, aiming to strike a balance between recentness and impact. This means that major titles will be selected, since it is my belief that if propaganda is to be found, the places where to look for it are those places reaching the most people. I will successively try to identify the techniques through which propaganda is manifest in the videogames.

### 1.6 Disposition

In order to give an answer to my research question I conducted a literature review to understand what other authors wrote on the topic before me. I searched for publications exploring propaganda, its relationship with the videogame medium, and the depiction of war in videogames. I also looked at literature on videogames and how they can affect behaviour. This literature review is presented in Chapter II of this thesis. Chapter III includes the adopted theoretical framework for conducting the analysis of the collected empirical data. The author will be able to read about theories of persuasion, rhetoric, and most importantly game rhetoric, and principles upon which propaganda techniques are based. I conclude the chapter explaining how I adopted the theories and how propaganda will be studied in this thesis. Chapter IV is dedicated to the methodology adopted in this research, presenting literature dealing with methodology in general and the specific method adopted for collecting the data for this research in particular. Chapter V presents the gathered data and its subsequent analysis in relation to the theoretical framework. Finally, Chapter VI, will conclude this thesis by giving a brief summary, presenting my results and their relation to the theoretical framework and research question, acknowledging the limits of this study and advancing further research opportunities.
2 Literature Review

2.1 Research on Propaganda

Many different definitions of propaganda have been given in the past, but it is usually intended as a way of communication trying to achieve a response from the receiver, which furthers the desires and intentions of the sender, and is often accompanied by terms like “spin” and “news management”. The etymology of the word is Latin, from the verb “propagare”, which has different meanings, stemming from agriculture, and meaning originally “to sow” or “to disseminate”. Other meanings are “to propagate”, “to amplify”, “to transmit”. We can thus relate the term to the idea of “disseminating” something and waiting for it to grow, or “amplifying” or “transmitting” certain ideas. Regardless, the term indicated an act originating from someone and directed to someone else with the intention of obtaining a certain desired outcome. The term appears to have a neutral connotation in its original meaning until 1622, when the Vatican established the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, a congregation intended to propagate Catholicism to the Americas, and was subsequently often used in a pejorative way (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p. 2).

Propaganda has been often times described as “organized persuasion” (DeVito, in Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p.3). The organization element is noted by Sproule (in Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p.3), who adds that propaganda’s aim is persuasion through poor or total lack of reasoning. There is therefore the idea that propaganda is something organizations of a certain size engage in, typically government agencies, terrorist networks, military leaders, corporations, or companies, among others, attempting to instrumentally alter or maintain a balance of power, supported by a clear institutional ideology and goal (id.). XXth century totalitarianism caused a surge of interest for propaganda and many authors wrote about it in relation to the nazi-fascist and communist regimes of that time (Kecskemeti, 1950) (Cassinelli, 1960) (Unger, 1975). However Lasswell et al. (1979) argue that propaganda has been long established as a way of supplementing military and diplomatic efforts to build civilizations, tracing it back to the beginning of recorded history, although they acknowledge that its use escalated in the late XIX and XX century. Taylor (2003) also traces propaganda back to the Trojan War, and characterizes it as war waged in the collective mind as consequence of physical wars (pp. 25-26).

Doob (1948) described propaganda as the «the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behaviour of individuals towards end considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a
particular time» (p. 390). He also speaks about “subpropaganda”, i.e. the long-term effort by propagandists to build a frame of mind in the audience towards accepting a certain world-view. Martin (1971) speaks about subpropaganda in terms of “facilitative communication”, activities designed to keep “doors open” on future possibilities spaces where real propaganda efforts will be needed, and is most commonly expressed through financial aids, radio broadcasts, press releases, books, periodicals, films, and seminars, among others. Doob later rejected a clear definition of propaganda, seeing an insurmountable complexity of concepts such as behaviour and the contingencies of time and space related to it (1989).

Ellul (1965) thinks that practically all biased messages in society are propagandistic, even when biases are unconscious, and focuses on techniques and types of propaganda, identifying 4 categories: a) Political versus Sociological propaganda: political propaganda is always organised by a centralised body with specific goals and has a political agenda. Sociological propaganda is more loosely organized and originates in entertainment and media, which shape fashions, trends, values and ethics, exporting them abroad as advertisement for national culture; b) Agitation versus Integration propaganda: agitation propaganda aims at “activating” the receivers and making them participate in certain actions (i.e. wars, revolutions, uprisings, etc.), while integration propaganda aims at conformity, adjustment, and acceptance of authority, and is especially contributed to by intellectuals and religious leaders; c) Vertical versus Horizontal propaganda: vertical propaganda is a direct exercise of authority from the power elites, directed towards the masses, while horizontal propaganda stems from grassroots movements and volunteer organizations; d) Irrational versus Rational propaganda: irrational propaganda is constituted by false logic, arguments to emotion, appeal to beliefs, myths, and symbols, while rational propaganda is presented as scientific evidence, logical reasoning, realism, and common sense. Common to all types of propaganda is their main objective: «to solve problems created by technology, to play on maladjustments, and to integrate the individual into the technological world» (ibid. xvii).

Herman and Chomsky (1988) propose a model for propaganda based on systemic biases in the mass media, chiefly caused by structural economic causes. The private media are seen as businesses selling products (readers and viewers) to advertisers, while “feeding” them corporate and government information and propaganda. Chomsky further develops his ideas regarding propaganda in an introduction to Carey (1997), who also writes about propaganda in the corporate world as «communications where the form and content is selected with the single-minded purpose of bringing some target audience to adopt attitudes and beliefs chosen in advance by sponsor of the
communication» (ibid. p.2). More specifically Chomsky believes that «the twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy» (ibid. p. ix).

Taithe and Thornton (2000) see propaganda as essentially a form of political discourse always articulated around a system of truths, expressing logic of exclusive representation, and aiming at convincing, winning over, and converting. Furthermore, propaganda promotes the ways of the propagandist’s community as well as defining it. O’Shaughnessy (2004), stresses the co-production potential of propaganda, in which receivers are willing participants (p. 4). Already in 1962 Qualter noticed the importance of audience adaptation for propaganda, in the sense that it must be seen, remembered and acted upon (in Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011).

Attempts to define propaganda have been made also from fields such as psychology by Pratkanis and Aronson (2001), who define propaganda as «mass “suggestion” or influence through the manipulation of symbols and the psychology of the individual» (p. 11), describing a number of subtle propaganda techniques, with the goal of recognizing propaganda as more than mere deception and giving necessary tools to the readers in order to counteract it. In the field of communication studies, Jowett and O’Donnel (2011) give a definition of propaganda focused on the communication process. In the authors’ view propaganda is «the deliberate, systemic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist» (p. 7).

Clearly, propaganda is not an easy term to define, with many authors having different opinions regarding its nature. Keeping in mind Ellul’s definition of sociological propaganda, we can think of developers producing war themed videogames as part of the entertainment industry, clearly not political decision makers, yet subjected to those unconscious biases spoken about by Ellul, thus effectively producing biased messages which are to be considered propaganda.
2.2 Research on Games and Videogames

2.2.1 What Is a Game?

It is safe to say that most people do not require to understand what a game is in order to enjoy it. However a definition of games is essential in order to conduct a scientific analysis of games. Wittgenstein (1958) speaks of games with family resemblance. Game A might have a certain resemblance with game B. However game C might have resemblance with game B, but no resemblance with game A. He thus concluded that there were no common features of the game object (pp. 31-34). It should be noted that Wittgenstein conducted his research in German, a language that does not differentiate (as for example Swedish does) between playing a structured game with rule (“att spela”), and playing an informal game played by children (“att leka”). Huizinga (1949) speaks about the “magic circle”, separating game from the outside world. Players within the magic circle submit to a system with no effect on the outside world and whose rules apply only within the circle. Caillois (1958) spoke about the 4 essential qualities of play: games are voluntary, uncertain, unproductive, and consist of make-believe. He indicates 4 categories of game: agon (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (imitation), and ilinx (vertigo). Notably he also differentiates between paidia (play not bound by rigid rule) and ludus (a system with formalized rules). McLuhan (1964, pp. 315-317) describe games as «popular art, collective, social reactions to the main drive or action of any culture» and does not think of games as separate from the outside world, on the contrary, games are tied to the culture they are part of and they can reveal its core values. Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) wrote that games are what we decide them to be, and our definition of them will be dependent of the purpose. Games are in general finite, fixed and goal-oriented, and are «an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrium outcome» (p. 7). Mead (1934) indicates games as an ingredient of process of genesis of the self. Salen & Zimmerman (2004) define game as «a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome» (p. 80). Juul (2003) sees the game as «a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequence of the activity are optional and negotiable» (p. 11).
2.2.2 What Is a Videogame?

In informal talk the terms “videogames”, “digital games”, “computer games”, are used interchangeably (Perron & Wolf, 2009, pp- 6-8). The use of the prefix “video” does indeed imply an inherent visual component, however “videogames” is an appropriate term to indicate “digital” and “computer” games as well (Karhulahti, 2015). Defining what games and videogames are is no easy task. This is mainly because of the several different existing approaches to research games (e.g. ethnographic vs. technological approach). Aarseth (2014) speaks about two different videogame ontologies: (1) formal or descriptive ontologies, dealing with the functional characteristics and components of videogame objects, and the relations between them; (2) existential ontologies asking what videogames are and what kind of existence does a videogame have. Videogames can be both objects and processes (e.g. “I bought a videogame” vs. “I played a videogame”). For Bogost (2006) procedurality is possibly the most important characteristic of videogames. Other research stresses the importance of interactivity (Mäyrä, 2008, p.6). With the development of the field, there has been an influx of scholars from different disciplines favouring a more humanistic approach to the study of videogames, which gave rise to the “ludology vs. narratology” debate (Kokonis, 2014). Ludology was a term introduced by Frasca (1999) calling for a discipline dedicated to studying games and play activities with its own theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Juul (1999) pointed out this necessity as well, noting that videogames devoid of any narrative elements do in fact exist, that being the particular strength of the medium. The debate has since lost much of its impetus, with researchers not willing to negate the potentials for narrations on one side, and pure gameplay on the other side (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 10).

Aarseth (1997) proposed a general model, which he calls “ergodic” communication, including all works or systems that require active input or a generative real-time process in order to produce a semiotic consequence. Videogames are a primary example of these “cybernetic texts”. Perron and Wolf (2003) identify 4 essential characteristic of videogames: graphics (i.e. changing and changeable visual display on a screen, involving pixel-based images); interface (i.e. the necessary equipment to play a videogame – screen, joystick, keyboard, as well as the on-screen elements such as buttons, scroll bars, cursors, etc.); player activity (i.e. input by means of the user interface); algorithm (i.e. the program containing the set of procedures controlling the game’s graphic and sound, the input and output engaging the players, and the behaviour of the computer-controlled
players within the game) (pp.14-17). Esposito (2005) defines videogames as «a game which we play thanks to an audio-visual apparatus and which can be based on a story». Travinor (2008) writes that «x is a videogame if it is an artefact in a digital visual medium, is intended primarily as an object of entertainment, and is intended to provide such entertainment through the employment of one or both of the following modes of engagement: rule-bound gameplay or interactive fiction». Leino (2010) speaks about the ability of videogames-artefacts to change their material properties as a consequence of player action, possibly making it impossible to continue playing (p. 128). Karhulahti (2015) also describes videogames as artefacts with the ability to conduct performance evaluation as the main characteristic distinguishing them from games in general. Iversen (2010, p. 33) thinks that the only differences between games and videogames is the ability for the latter to handle a vast amount of information in a very short time, and the machine’s position as referee as well as definer and executioner of the mechanism. Frasca (2001) describes videogames as «any forms of computer-based entertainment software, either textual or image-based, using any electronic platform such as personal computers or consoles and involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment» (p. 4).

2.2.3 Influencing Player Behaviour – Serious Games

Serious Games was a concept introduced by Abt (1970), indicating simulations and games designed to improve education in a number of different scenarios. While the term didn’t involve videogames, which were in their infancy at the time, it now includes them. The term was updated in 2002 by Sawyer (in Djaouti et al., 2011) whose definition is based on the idea of connecting a serious purpose to knowledge and technologies from the videogame industry. Chen and Michael (2006), define serious games as «games that do not have entertainment, enjoyment or fun as their primary purpose» (p.21). Zyda (2006), defines serious games as «a mental contest, played with a computer in accordance with specific rules that uses entertainment to further government or corporate training, education, health, public policy, and strategic communication objectives» (p.26).

Serious games have been used extensively by the military. Lim and Jung (2013) write about serious games for military training purposes, noting how they can be used for PR, behaviour transition, and training, while Mead (2013) dedicates a chapter in his book to describe how they are implemented by the military as a tool for treating mental health issues such as PTSD in homecoming soldiers.
Videogames have been used also in education settings. A 2012 meta-analysis by Young, Slota, Cutter, Jalette, Mullin, Lai, Simeoni, Tran, and Yuhhymenko (in Ferdig, 2014) explored the impact of videogames on academic achievement when used in the K-12. The researchers found out that each videogame had affordances and constraints based on the content area in which it was implemented, and that videogames were useful in the classroom when they integrated good teaching. The Federation of American Scientists (2006) acknowledged that «the success of complex videogames demonstrates games can teach higher-order thinking skills such as strategic thinking, interpretative analysis, problem solving, plan formulation and execution and adaptation to rapid change» (p. 3).

Mitgutsch (2012), writes that while we do know that players learn while playing, and we have insights on why they are motivated and engaged, we have no clear notion of how they are learning. According to Gee (2008) this happens through: 1) the interpretation of the relationship between situated reasoning and goals; 2) the adaptation to new situations; 3) immediate feedback by which players can recognize and assess their failures and anticipations. Games also lead players to improve their interpretations of these experiences and to learn from other people’s experiences (pp. 22-23), while Lave and Wenger (1991) think that people learn through videogames by engaging with abstract content and information within a stimulating environment.

2.3 Research On War And Propaganda In Videogames

Berents and Keogh (2014) write about the intense production of war themed videogames in the early 2000’s in the context of the “War on Terror”. They claim that videogames can be an interesting medium through which to analyse how war is conceived by, and produced for, Western audiences: war videogames are reductive playgrounds hiding collateral damage and sidestepping questions of war crimes. Videogames effectively avoid depicting the messier and more dramatic sides of war, and when they do, the actions taken by the gamer are depicted as justified by the “greater good” and the needs of “high politics”. Sample (2008) writes about the problematic representation of torture in videogames set in the context of the War on Terror, represented as a legitimate act that must be executed to progress in the game.

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3 The sum of primary and secondary school in the USA.
Clarke, Rouffaer and Sénéchaud (2012) write about how certain actions represented in war games are shaping player’s perception of what is permitted during conflict, while affecting soldier’s behaviour making them acknowledge prohibited acts as standard behaviour.

*America’s Army* is an interesting case of a videogame, developed by the U.S. Army, in that it aims specifically at shaping player’s perception and affecting soldier's behaviour by offering the most realistic representation of soldier conduct possible in a videogame. Susca (2014) writes about the pedagogical function of the game, while expressing concern for its role as a recruitment tool, and observing that, when treated as a propaganda tool, the game creates an active audience maintaining the legitimation and extension of the military-entertainment complex including adolescent’s entertainment products, thus having a certain influence and effect in cultivating a certain type of consciousness among its players. The author also observes how the dedicated online forums are a fertile ground for xenophobic and nationalistic online messages. Šisler (2005), writes about *America’s Army* as well, as an example of persuasive and ideological videogames, which can be used as means of propaganda, be it in political campaigns (e.g. U.S. presidential elections), to re-imagine recent historical events (e.g. battle over Fallujah, or the Palestinian Intifada), or recruitment propaganda entering the political real-space, as the aforementioned *America’s Army*.

While the aforementioned authors studied *America’s Army* as an example of persuasive videogame favouring those in power, their goals, and their means (i.e. war) other have studied how videogames can be used persuasively to go against those same ideas. Robinson (2012) identifies examples of videogames critical towards this tendency, providing arenas for social protest and modder activism (activists who implement modifications in computer games to send a message). The modders are able to implement mods in the game code to allow sharing anti-war and pacifist messages in *Counter-Strike* (Valve L.L.C., 2000), but the author identifies also mainstream titles openly critical about war. The author also writes about videogames developed in the Middle-East, describing them as offering a radically different perspective and representation of conflicts compared to western videogames, and potential for empowerment for those players directly affected by the depicted conflicts has been brought forward by a number of scholars. Souri (2007) also writes about pro-Arab videogames as a response to Western hegemony, but expresses concerns regarding the fact that while in the West it is common to discuss the issue of how virtual violence may seep into social and political life, for Arab gamers (and especially children) the issue should be the fact that

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4 Short for “modification”. It indicates the alteration of a videogame, by part of a modder, who takes the code of a videogame and changes it.
violence in videogames is posing a threat to the almost non-existing spaces for nonviolence available for Arab children, who are living as homeless in their own home. Pro-Arab videogames effectively serve as “digital memorials” reconstructing Palestinian space and history and preserving them for younger generations. Annandale (2010) points out examples of American games, which may be read as a critique of the Bush administration characterized by its national security paranoia. Robinson (2014) found that videogames can be very useful in interrogating and debating theory and critiquing certain foreign policies, even by playing videogames that apparently endorse those same policies. He also writes that modern videogames can shed a light on the military-industrial complex, although whether they are critiquing it or re-affirming it is highly debatable.

Suchman (2016) explores the topic of realism in official war simulators from a feminist technoscience perspective, noting that sensorial presence (which is often presented as a key asset of such simulators) cannot be separated from the political, economic, historical, technological, and linguistic realities governing the sense we make of them. The simulation’s intent is to expose the soldier to unfamiliar situations in order for her/him to be able to react to new and unexpected situations in real war scenarios. However, the simulation also has the effect that the soldier’s view will always be the one from “her/his” side.

Often times, war videogames are marketed as being extremely realistic, that being one of their main assets. Pool (2007) writes about how the detail in physics and graphics in modern videogames is resembling more and more the “real thing” (p. 85). Schubert (2013) thinks that today’s videogame industry is obsessed with realism. However, Payne (2012) notices how the “realism” advertised in war videogames is actually different from “realisticness”. The images, sounds, locations, weapons etc. depicted in games may be extremely similar to the real world, but videogames rarely portray the actual everyday life experience, harshness, emotional struggle and hardship experienced by soldiers. Kingsepp (2003) also notices how in videogames death is often portrayed as mechanical and efficient (with bodies disappearing in certain cases), as opposed to the often hyper-realistic and brutal way in which death is often portrayed in movies.

Research directly acknowledging propaganda, or at least its possibility, in videogames is somewhat scarce. Bogost (2007), writes about procedural rhetoric, and how games can act persuasively through their rules and mechanics, ideally in a positive way, but he does not seem to acknowledge that procedural rhetoric and persuasive videogames might be used as a channel for propaganda, and speaks about America’s Army’s particular representation of war (e.g. no dismemberments and no
graphic violence) not as trying to convey a particular persuasive message about war, but as a way to avoid criticism and censorship. In his 2008 book “Videogames and Education”, Brown has a subchapter dedicated to what he calls propaganda games, but he does not develop further and he does not differentiate between propaganda and persuasion, using the terms interchangeably.

2.4 Contribution to the field

The previous research included in this literature review showed how propaganda has an intrinsic persuasive element, and how it acts through different types of media. I suspect this is true also for videogames. I have explored how videogames can influence players’ behaviour (serious games), and how the military is aware of this, to the point of having developed its own games as recruitment tools. I have also explored how representing certain aspects of war in particular ways can shape players’ perception. It seems however that while previous research acknowledges the possibility for propaganda to be present in videogames, there has been no study on how exactly does propaganda manifests itself in the videogames (i.e. through which techniques). This is an opportunity for research and I hope this will be this thesis’ contribution to the field.

3 Theoretical Framework

My research will be focusing on propaganda in war themed videogames. It is therefore necessary to adopt a certain theoretical framework able to explain how certain messages and ideas are conveyed through videogames and instilled in the gamers. I will therefore explore a number of theories that do so and how they relate to my research question, explaining how I intend to adopt them.

3.1 Persuasion

Persuasion is usually defined as a communicative process aimed at influencing others in voluntarily adopting a certain view or behaviour. Andersen (1971) describes persuasion as a communication process where the communicator seeks to elicit a desired response from his receiver (p.21, in Perloff, 2017). O’Donnell and Kable (1982) describe persuasion as «a complex, continuing,
interactive process in which a sender and a receiver are linked by symbols, verbal and nonverbal, through which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behaviour because the persuadee has had perceptions enlarged or changed» (in Jowett & O'Donnel, 2011, p.32). For Smith (1982) persuasion is a symbolic activity eliciting the internalization or voluntary acceptance of new cognitive states or patterns of evident behaviour through the acceptance of the persuasive message (in Perloff, 2017, p.22). Bettinghaus and Cody (1987) think of persuasion as a conscious attempt by a sender to produce a change of attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours of a receiver through the transmission of a persuasive message (in Perloff, 2017, p.22). For O'Keefe (1990) persuasion is a successful intentional effort aimed at influencing another’s mental state through persuasive messages elaborated by a sender, with the persuadee enjoying a certain degree of freedom (p.4). Perloff (2017) speaks about persuasion as a symbolic process where those producing and sending the persuasive message try to convince other people to change their behaviours and attitudes around a certain issue, in an atmosphere of free choice. They key features of persuasion are its being a process (as opposed to product); relying on symbols; involving the communicator’s intent to influence; requiring the transmission of a message; assuming free choice; and entailing self-persuasion. Of these features, the most important is the last one: in the end, the author thinks, we are persuading ourselves and we are deciding to change our own minds (p. 28).

Persuasion is also interactive, in the sense that not only the receiver of the persuasive message sees the fulfilment of a personal or societal need or desire if the persuasive purposes is adopted, but also the sender gains something if the receiver accepts the persuasive purpose. According to Soules (2015) persuasion «seeks to change attitudes, values beliefs and behaviours, with mutual needs being met (p. 3). For O'Reilly and Tennant (2010) persuasion always involved the presence of a contract, in the sense that some benefit is expected and promised.

In order to be successful persuasion necessitates a certain numbers of “anchors” upon which to act. These anchors can be “beliefs”, “values”, “attitudes” “behaviours”, “group norms”, or “resonance” (O’Donnel & Jowell, 2011).

A “belief” is a perceived link between two aspects of a person’s world (Fishbein & Ajzen, in, Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p.35). For example a belief between two things might be: “I believe that eating pizza will make me lose weight” (indeed beliefs can also be false). A belief between a thing and one of its characteristics might be: “I believe that pizza is tasty” (a very true belief indeed). A
persuader needs to work on someone’s pre-existing beliefs if s/he wants her/his message to be successful in creating new beliefs. The stronger the belief of the receiver, the more likely it is to influence the formation of a new belief (O’Donnel & Jowell, 2011, p. 34). A “value” is a belief of a higher order, not easily subjected to change, and is used by an individual as a guideline for her/his behaviours. Values are concepts such as right/wrong, good/bad, desirable/undesirable (e.g. “eating pizza is the right thing to do, it is good, and definitely desirable”) (ibid. p35). An “attitude” is the responsiveness, readiness, or internal state of feeling towards, an idea, object, or course of action. It can take the form of evaluative response as well (e.g. “this pizza is amazing”) (ibid. p. 36). A “behaviour” is not only an expression of a way of being, but it also expresses itself through predictable patterns, which can be used as persuasive anchors. Behaviours with both positive and negative outcomes can be used (e.g. “I eat pizza every day and that makes me happy”) (ibid. p. 37). “Group norms” are beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours derived from membership in groups (e.g. “everybody is eating pizza, I should have a slice too”) (id.). “Resonance” is adopted as an anchor by the persuader when s/he knows that her/his particular message will “click” with the audience, and they will not perceive it as imposed on them, but as coming from within them instead (ibid. , p38).

3.2 Rhetoric

Rhetoric can be considered the art of using speech persuasively. Up until the beginning of the XXth century rhetoric was used as a synonymous for persuasion (O’Donnel & Jowell, 2011, p. 39). Today the term “rhetoric” is often used in a negative way, with people often speaking of “empty rhetoric” referring to a deceiving or bland speech (Bogost, 2007, p. 15). However it was not always the case. The word derives from the Greek term “rhetor” (ῥήτωρ) meaning “public speaker”, rhetoric thus meaning the art of communicating effectively and persuasively in a public context. Greek citizens (especially in Athens) engaged in public speeches on a daily basis, with trials and lawsuits being
everyday occurrences in the life of the city-state. Greek citizens were required to participate directly in the political life and were not afforded professional representation in court, having to defend themselves (or finding somebody willing to do so) instead (id.). The citizens soon saw the need for training in public speeches.

The Sophists were a group of teachers and professionals dedicated to do just that and offered their expertise in exchange for a fee. Isocrates and Gorgias, the two most famous ones, placed heavy emphasis on style. Their intention was giving practical knowledge to anyone who could afford their tuition. The most important philosopher of that time, Plato, despised the Sophists for seeking immediate approval by “selling truth”, a supreme value in his view. Rhetoric was not philosophy (Perloff, 2017, pp. 53-54). Despite his distaste for rhetoric, Plato contributed indirectly to its development through the work of his disciple Aristotle. His work “Rhetoric”, is considered the most important and significant work on persuasion ever written (Golden et al. in Perloff, 2017, p. 55). Aristotle developed the first scientific approach to persuasion aimed at reconciling Plato and the Sophists, recognizing the importance of truth on one hand, and the practical utility of persuasive communication on the other. (Perloff, 2017, p. 55). Furthermore, he claimed that the goal of rhetoric was not finding truth, but convincing the public to make the best decision about a certain matter (Cooper & Nothstine, in Perloff, 2017, p.55). Aristotle effectively developed the first theories of persuasion, identifying 3 modes of persuasion: logos (reasoned discourse, including logic and dialectic); pathos (appeals to the emotions, sympathies or imagination); ethos (the speaker’s moral character, as perceived by the audience) (Soules, 2015, p. 22).

Burke (1950) is one of the most important contemporary theorists of rhetoric, and one of the first ones to acknowledge the persuasive potential of non-verbal forms of expression. He writes that by identifying with the audience, both good and deceptive communicators could persuade the people, who are “symbol-using” beings. Identification is a central concept in Burke’s rhetoric, which he defines as the «art of persuasion, or a study of the means available for any given situation» (p. 46). A speaker persuades an audience through the use of stylistic identifications, by causing the audience to identify with the speaker’s interest, while the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish a relationship between her/himself and the audience. Identification is so important for Burke, that he does not see how “persuasion”, “identification” and “communication” (the nature of rhetoric as “addressed”) could be considered separate (id.). Language is still central but rhetoric is
expanded to non-verbal domains, as explained by Burke’s quote: «wherever there is persuasion there is rhetoric, and wherever there is “meaning” there is persuasion». (p. 172). McLuhan (1967), when saying “the medium is the message” also meant that the ways in which something is communicated is more important than the communication itself. Noticeably, McLuhan (1951) also does not sound optimistic when he wrote these words about the dangers of media saturated with persuasive messages and advertisement: «ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best trained individual minds have made a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit control is the object now. And to generate heat not light is the intention» (p. v).

Barthes (1977) contributed to the development of rhetoric dealing with non-verbal domains with his essay *Rhetoric of Image*, in which he analyses how advertisement images may contain meaning and how they may be used in persuasive ways.

Other contemporary views on rhetoric are more critical, such as Foucault, who questions rhetoric itself, claiming that language and rhetoric are inherently biased and prone to advantage the dominant groups in society (in Bean, 2010), while Campbell (2001) adopts a critical feminist perspective, pointing out that traditional rhetorical studies have always excluded women.

Visual rhetoric is a recent type of rhetoric focusing on images. Visual rhetoric was born from the need to understand the rhetorical figures and forms of the new non-verbal and non-oral media of the XIXth and XXth century. Helmer and Hill argue that visual rhetoric is important in the face of globalization and mass media (in Bogost, 2007, p. 21) Hill argues that images are more vivid than text or speech, and are therefore more prone to manipulation and do not favour reflexion, a characteristic that is often exploited by advertisers (id.). Nevertheless, visual rhetoric remains an emerging discipline, but the very notion of it reinforces the idea that rhetoric is a general field of inquiry, applicable to various media and modes of inscription (p. 24). More importantly, in the context of this thesis, visual rhetoric could potentially be present in videogames, but it does not deal with the rhetorical function of procedural representation, and is therefore too limited.

More closely connected to the digital realm, Digital rhetoric focuses on the text and image (e.g. email, websites, message boards, blogs, wikis) a machine (e.g. computer) might host and the communities of practice in which that content is created and used (p. 25). Zappen claims that studies of digital rhetoric help explaining the ways traditional rhetorical strategies of persuasion
function and are reconfigured in digital spaces (in Bogost, 2007, p. 25). However much of the research on digital rhetoric is focused on applying literary theory to technological phenomena without considering how technological theories could elucidate new media texts (Losh, in Bogost, p. 28).

Directly related to videogames is procedural rhetoric, described by Bogost (2007) as «the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures» (p. ix). This particular type of persuasion is typical of computers, since they run processes, and is not therefore exclusive to videogames, but videogames are able to express it in a way that other software do not. Ordinary software (word processor, photo editing applications, etc.) is commonly used to create expressive artefacts, while videogames are computational artefacts that have meaning as computational artefacts. (id.). However, as Sicart (2011) and de La Hera Conde-Pumpido (2014, p. 74) point out, procedural rhetoric may be valuable for having started academic interest in persuasive videogames, but focuses on just the persuasive potential of the mechanics of a videogame, disregarding its other components and the player.

3.3 Rhetoric In videogames

3.3.1 Game Rhetoric

Frasca defines play and game rhetoric as «the use of play (and game) activities in order to communicate meaning, form attitudes or induce actions through signs, rules and player performance» (p. 88).

Frasca differentiates between game and play, the former being an activity structured by rules, while the latter refers to play activity which are not necessarily rule bounded, however the core concepts of the two types or rhetoric are the same (p. 88). In the context of this thesis I will refer to game rhetoric since the focus is going to be videogames. It should be noted that while Frasca refers to “game” rhetoric, his theory is largely applicable to videogames (many of his examples are in fact derived from videogames, and the author is a videogame developer himself), though not limited to them, since also physical games, board games, and any type of games can be analysed through game rhetoric.
Frasca writes that he understands rhetoric in the broad communicational sense given by Burke, as such not limited to persuasion, but certainly tightly related to it. Thus, game rhetoric provides tool for better understanding how game activities form attitudes or induce actions in the players. Forming attitudes and inducing actions can be framed as persuasion and even manipulation, but also as the basis for effective communication in a broad sense. Frasca also argues that game rhetoric needs not to be limited to serious games, but it can be extended to “entertainment games” since rhetoric overlaps with poetics and aesthetics in attempting to recreate experiences in order to augment its argumentative power (p. 88).

Game rhetoric is applicable to both ludus and paidia games, as previously identified by Frasca (2003) Ludus games provide an “organic whole” which can only be explored through a secluded set of rules defined by the author. Ludus games are strongly related and ideologically attached to the idea of a centralized author. Paidia games on the other hand are “open-ended”. There is no win-or-lose logic behind the conclusion of the game (that being the case for ludus games, which provide only two endings: winning or losing). The author uses this for explaining why ludus games often represent fantasy or science-fiction settings. Fictional environments make it easier to provide a dichotomical representation of a system, where things are either black or white, good or bad, therefore the conclusion is either victory or failure. When games deal with human relationships, distinctions are not as clear, and paidia games, by offering open-end “conclusions” and going beyond the winner-loser dichotomy, provide a better representation of human affairs. (p. 229-230)

The choice between developing a ludus or a paidia game is highly ideological, because the two carry different agendas. Ludus games might seem more coherent because of the fact the goal of the player is made explicit. The player must do a certain action to reach a certain objective. Reaching the objective is a necessary condition for winning the game, and is therefore desired and morally charged. If such are the rule of the game, the player does not have a choice if not to follow them, since the alternative is not preferable (i.e. losing the game), granted that there is a possible alternative. An example in a war game might be killing the opponent as opposed to surrendering. According to Frasca, ludus simauthors (simulation authors) have moral certitudes (a certain character or faction is good, the opponent is the enemy, bad by definition). Defined goals leave no space for self-reflection on the goal in question (the case for many war games) (pp. 230-231).

Paidia games, on the other hand, may seem less modernist, but this does not mean that they do not convey meaning or that they are less ideologically charged. They may not have identifiable
conditions for winning or losing a game (e.g. in *Sim City*, the player’s task is to build a city, without any particular goal. The way a city will look, how big it needs to be, etc., is left to the player to decide), but ideologies are conveyed through the rules in the game which allow the player to do a certain action. Frasca makes the example of *The Sims*, a paidia life simulator, where the player controls a number of avatars and needs to “live a life”, building a house, going to work, engaging in relationships, having a family. In the game the player can control characters from different age, gender, ethnicity. This is mostly done through representation of those qualities. The player is also able to control a gay character. This is not only done through representation (which could be for example allowing players to place gay banners on their yard), but through rules. Same-gender relationships are possible in the game. This conveys a message of tolerance by part of the developers (pp. 231-232).

Frasca (2007) identifies three dimensions through which play rhetoric expresses itself: playworld (the materiality included in the game: its objects, space and time), the system of rules (which he calls mechanics) and player playfomance (i.e. player performance both physical and mental) (p. 93).

### 3.3.2 Playworld

From a rhetorical point of view, the playworld is the dimension most similar to literature, film, drama, music, sculpture, and the visual arts, and includes every visual and textual sign included in the play activity. In the case of a videogame this would include setting, characters, dialogues, cut-scenes, soundtrack, but also game-length and how time is manipulated in games (slow motion, flashbacks, flash forwards, etc.). These audiovisual elements work on a semiotic level, meaning that they are interpreted by the players (Frasca, 2007, p. 93). Usually, the playworld is identified as “narrative” by game reviewers and players (ibid., p. 94).

### 3.3.3 Mechanics

The mechanics of a game are the rules of the game. Frasca identifies 4 different types of rules: 1) model rules (what a player “can” and “cannot” do), grade rules (what a player “should” and “should not” do), goal rules (what a player “must” and “must not” do), and meta-rules (what the player “could” do). Model rules state how the playworld works. In the context of a war game this could mean whether a gun can be manipulated, modified, how many bullets it contains, whether it can jam. It also includes the physics of a game; 2) grade rules deal with any characteristic of a game
that is measured within its system (e.g. scores or bonuses). In the context of a war game this could for example indicate whether players are encouraged to collect more bonuses, whether they gain more points by shooting more precisely, or whether they lose points if any of their companions are killed; 3) goal rules indicate what the player must do in order to win the game. In the case of a war game this might be taking control of an outpost or killing the enemy commander, and, conversely, not getting killed; 4) meta-rules indicate how and if a game can be modified through modding activities (Frasca, 2007, pp. 118-119).

3.3.4 Playformance

Playformance has to do with how the gamer plays the game, and it conveys meaning through “interpretation by doing” (Frasca, 2007, p. 137). This is best exemplified by the role of any object’s design, and how enjoyable it is to use it. By using and performing with a certain object we are able to determine its usefulness or enjoyment. While Human-Computer-Interaction and design theory assume that the user is always after a positive experience, this is not always the case and Frasca exemplifies this by drawing a comparison with architecture. Not all buildings are created to be useful, cathedrals are meant to impress, banks are meant to show stability, labyrinths are meant to confuse, horror houses are meant to scare (ibid, p.139). While a horror house conveys messages through signs (e.g. spider-webs), it does so also through the performances they allow and encourage or vice-versa. In order to clarify more his position, Frasca uses the concept of haptic system, defined as «the sensibility of the individual to the world adjacent to his body by the use of his body» (Gibson, in Frasca, 2007, p. 141). The haptic dimension of playformance is to be analysed through haptic semiotics. The author explains this by making the example of a toy gun that might be interpreted as a gun, not only for its shape, but also for the performance it allows, resembling the tool it represents. A toy gun can be held, pointed at things, its trigger can be pulled, it may shoot rubber bullets, it may have the same weight and colour of a real gun, it may even be made from the same material (ibid., p. 144). In videogames haptic systems are involved in the creation of meaning most commonly through the use of force feedback in console gamepads (the devices uses to for command input). In the case of a war game, a console gamepad might for example vibrate when the character pulls the trigger, representing the gun’s kickback (ibid., pp. 147-148). Playformance rhetoric is also to be connected to how a gamepad responds to command input. For example in the case of a war game the commands might not respond if the character’s gun gets jammed.
3.4 Persuasion Techniques to Maximize Effects and Their Principles

Typically propaganda involves the use of specific persuasive techniques that aid the propagandist in getting the receiver to behave in a certain way or to adopt a certain state. Aristotle, in discussing rhetoric (the gateway to persuasion) advised the persuader to use all the available means of persuasion (in Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p. 299). Jowett & O’Donnell (2011) identify certain principles on which persuasive and propaganda techniques may rely:

- **Predisposition of the Audience: Creating Resonance** - Messages have a greater impact when they exploit and are in line with existing opinions, beliefs, and dispositions. Messages that are supportive of commonly held views are more successful than those going against those views (p. 299).

- **Source Credibility** - people have the tendency to look up to authority or expert figures to get knowledge and direction. Therefore the source and the agent of the propaganda are important factors (e.g. what is the audience’s opinion of the source? Is the propaganda agent a hero? Does he have familiarity with the audience? How does the agent create identification with the audience? (p. 300).

- **Opinion Leaders** - working through those who have credibility in a community (i.e. the opinion leaders) (p. 300).

- **Face-to-Face Contact** - live contact as a separate activity of following an event (e.g. meetings after video screening, libraries where to access information, etc.) (p. 301).

- **Group Norms** - the propagandist exploits people beliefs, values, and behaviours derived from membership in groups (p. 301).

- **Reward and Punishment** - a propagandist may use threats and physical inducements toward compliance (e.g. displaying of public torture), or sending “foreign aid” to shape recipient’s attitudes more than helping the foreign economy (p. 301-302).

- **Monopoly of the Communication Source** - when a communication source is monopolized and the content of the communication is consistent and repetitious, people are unlikely to challenge the contents (p. 302).

- **Visual Symbols of Power** - visual symbols (e.g. flags, logos, posters, buildings, etc.) are easily exploited by the propagandists to convey a certain image of her/himself (p. 302-303).
• Language Usage: propagandists will use verbal symbolization to create a sense of power, adopting language associated with authority figures, and which tends to deify a cause, while satanizing the opponent. Often times language will make use of exaggeration and innuendo (p. 303).

• Music as Propaganda - music often easily touches the emotions of the audience, and the propagandist can exploit this. Examples are overly patriotic anthems, which signify nationalist pride (p. 304).

• Arousal of Emotions: propaganda is associated with emotional language and presentations, which are used to arouse a certain emotional state in the audience.

We can find these principles reflected in the techniques identified by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, founded by Miller and other academics in 1937. In the second monthly bulletin published by the Institute How to Detect Propaganda (1937), the Institute describes these 7 “propaganda devices”:

1. “Name-Calling”: using words like “racist”, “sexist”, traitor”, “terrorist”, “homeland”, “communist”, “fascist”, etc., which carry powerful overtones and cause perceptions of the individual named is such way to be warped.

2. “Glittering Generality”: associating something with a “virtue word” (which are often ambiguous by nature) to make it acceptable and approvable without examining the evidence.

3. “Transfer”: translating the respect and authority of something or someone respected to something else to make the latter acceptable (works also in revers, i.e. associated something with something disrespected, to discredit the former).

4. “Testimonial”: having somebody respected or hated, endorsing or criticizing something.

5. “Plain Folks”: trying to convince the audience that something is good because it is “of the people”.

6. Card-Stacking: presenting facts, falsehoods, data, statistics, logical or illogical statements, in order to present just one side of an issue in the best or worst light possible.

7. Bandwagon: trying to convince the public of something by saying that “everybody does/thinks/wants so”.

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A great number of techniques were successively identified by other scholars (Cole, 1988; Marlin 2002), relying on those principles outlined above. An extensive list of these techniques would be far too long to include in this thesis, but they will be very important for the analysis, and the reader will be able to find a detailed list including names of the techniques and their description in the appendix.

3.5 How Will Propaganda Be Studied in This Thesis?

The RQ of this thesis asks through which persuasive techniques is propaganda manifest in war themed videogames. The reader will probably have acknowledged in the previous chapters how propaganda relies on persuasion of the audience to accomplish certain goals. To achieve them, propaganda has several techniques at its disposal, many of which are abused rhetorical devices. Rhetoric is in fact the basis of persuasion (and conversely propaganda), therefore it makes sense to study propaganda in videogames looking at theories of rhetoric. In order to do so, I will adopt Frasca’s game rhetoric, which looks at how games set up persuasive arguments through their playworld, mechanics, and playformance. Game rhetoric is however not solely concerned with persuasiveness, but building on a conception of rhetoric deriving from Burke, it is also interested in how games convey meaning and the symbol-interaction involved in its creation (i.e. how certain things are presented in games). By analysing the selected videogames for this study, through their three dimensions (playworld, mechanics, playformance), I will search for ways in which they convey meaning and mount persuasive arguments in a rhetorical way akin to the persuasive techniques commonly adopted in propaganda.

4 Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the selected methods to conduct my research. More specifically the reasons to conduct a qualitative analysis of videogames considered as text, what this implies, what are the advantages and disadvantages of such a method, and why it was an appropriate choice for this research. I will discuss about game analysis, the different ways to approach the study of videogames, and my choice in particular. I will also discuss about possible ethical issues and the
limitations of this study. I will conclude by presenting the selected cases for my study and the how I will proceed analysing the data.

4.1 Different Approaches to Studying Videogames

Game Studies is a fairly novel field. Furthermore, it is a multidisciplinary field, with researchers presenting background in social sciences, the humanities, engineering, design, to name a few. This creates an issue in terms of established methodology for conducting research in such a field. Mäyrä (2008) notes how in game studies there is no established paradigm (in the "kuhnian" sense) yet, and therefore no accepted views on the subject of study, no proper way to structure research questions, no established methodologies or interpretations of results. The game researchers must therefore construct their own methodological toolkit (p. 156).

Mäyrä (2008) identifies three main areas within game studies. The first one aims to study games and their structures (involving analyses of individual games or cultural interpretation of their significance with methodologies often rooted in the humanities), the second at studying game players and their behaviour (often involving traditionally social scientific methodologies), and the third at researching game design and its development (involving usually methodologies deriving from technical and computer sciences, and approaches in art and design studies), although he recognizes that there is often much overlap (p.156).

This particular thesis will not be dealing with the technical aspect of videogames or with the study of game players and their behaviours. Instead, the goal for this thesis is to observe, if (and if yes, where) propaganda is present in war videogames, and if so, how it manifests itself. If we were to utilize Mäyrä’s categories of the main areas within game studies, we could say that my approach is placed within the humanities approach.

4.1.2 Humanities approach – Textual analysis

With regards to the humanities approach to game studies, Mäyrä (2008) writes that much of contemporary research in game studies with such a tradition involve some of the conceptual tools and underlying philosophies derived from semiotics and structuralism, therefore analysing games by identifying the constituent elements and underlying structures, as well as describing the rules for their combination within the subject of study. (p. 157)
This kind of methodology is known as textual analysis. McKee (2003) defines textual analysis as «a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world […] (and) to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live» (p. 1). The author defines text as something we can make meaning from. «Whenever we produce an interpretation of something’s meaning – a book, television programme, film, magazine, T-shirt or kilt, piece of furniture or ornament – we treat it as a text» (ibid. p. 4). All cultures and sub-cultures have different ways of making sense of the world. A radical vegan might find cooking shows on television involving the preparation of beef stew offensive and distasteful, while for a meat-eating spectator the same show might be an entertaining way to learn how to surprise dinner guests with new cooking skills. We can see differences in sense making on a large-scale (e.g. between different national cultures) as well as on a small scale (e.g. between neighbours living on the first and second floor respectively). There is clearly no way for a text to be interpreted in the same way by everybody. McKee (2003) indicates three approaches to textual analysis: a “realist” approach, which assumes that one’s own sense-making practice is the correct one, while the others are wrong, a “structuralist” approach, which aims at looking for common deep structures that underlie these different systems of sense-making, and a “post-structuralist” approach, which accepts that different cultures experience reality differently (p. 29). No text can be considered completely “true”, accurate, unbiased, realistic, since there are always different representations of the world, which might be considered equally, accurate, “true”, unbiased, realistic. By analysing a text originating from a certain culture, we can therefore understand how a certain culture makes sense of the world (id.). Within post-structuralist textual analysis (which is the approach adopted for this thesis), a researcher (and a reader) must acknowledge that there is no such thing as a description of a text, what is taking place instead is an interpretation, and there is always more than one possible interpretation. McKee (2003) warns that while this is indeed true, at the same time it does not mean that any interpretation is as valid and reasonable as any other. There are limited numbers of reasonable interpretations available in a given culture at a given time. There are ways to provide evidence that a certain interpretation is reasonable, namely other texts that can clearly show that other people might have made that same interpretation (p. 70). Interestingly, an author’s interpretation is not necessarily the correct one, only one of the reasonable interpretations, but it may become the canon interpretation when the audience adopts it (ibid., p. 80).
4.1.3 Game analysis - A practical toolkit for game textual analysis

Consalvo and Dutton (2006) write that while there has been a steady increase in the number of qualitative, critical analysis of games as texts, little to no effort has been made to develop a methodological toolkit, and propose their own template. They begin delineating their methodology by stating the non-trivial fact that any game analysis of game as text must include play by part of the researcher, as noted before by Aarseth (2003), Brooker (2001), and Konzack (2002), but this is not sufficient and it must be followed by careful analysis of the various component of the game itself. More specifically, the authors provide four areas of analysis, which must be explored by the researcher: Object Inventory, Interface Study, Interaction Map and Gameplay Log.

Object Inventory includes the role of different objects within a game, how they can be manipulated, acted upon, sold, bought, etc. The researcher is therefore encouraged to create and object inventory, with categorizations such as: whether objects are single or multi use; the interaction options for objects: do they have one use (and what is it)?; do objects have multiple uses (and what are they)?; do those uses change over time?; the object’s cost; a general description of the object. By creating a log, the researcher can answer questions such as: what role or importance do objects have in the game?; Is the player encouraged to collect “stuff” for the sake of having it, or is there utility in most objects?; What can be inferred about the economic structure of the game from pricing of objects, their relative scarcity or abundance?; Are objects valued more than people or interactions in the game? (Consalvo and Dutton, 2006).

Interface study refers to the analysis of the game’s interface defined as any on-screen information providing the player with information concerning the life, health, location or status of the character(s), as well as battle or action menus, nested menus that control options such as advancement grids or weapon selections, or additional screens that give the player more control over manipulating elements of gameplay. From analysing the interface, the researcher can understand the information and choices that are offered to the player, as well as the information and choices that are not communicated, how free are players to experiment with options within a game, what information is privileged, and what information is absent or difficult to find (ibid.).

Interaction Map is a more dynamic category compared to the previous two, and includes the choices that the player is offered in regards to interaction with non-objects, i.e. interaction with other player
characters and Non-Player Characters (NPCs). In order to study the Interaction Map, the researcher must record (either through recording technology or through pen-and-paper) relevant dialogue occurring in the game. The dialogue should be relevant to the research question. Questions which the researcher may ask her/himself when studying the Interaction Map might be: are interactions limited (is there only one or two responses offered to answer a question)?; do interactions change over time?; what is the range of interaction?; are NPCs present, and what dialogue options are offered to them? Can they be interacted with? How? How variable are their interactions?. This way the researcher can understand the degree of freedom afforded to the player in shaping the game experience and outcome. The researcher can also determine if traditional stereotypes (gender or racial) are being perpetuated. Included in the study of the Interaction Map is the story of a game if present, in order to pose questions about narrative or the ideological implications of the plot (ibid.)

The Gameplay Log includes the gameworld and the emergent gameplay that takes form within it. The researcher must look for unexpected aspects in gameplay and how open the game is for players (i.e. how much influence they have on the gameworld). The gameworld includes elements such as the construction or deployment of save points or saving mechanisms in the game\(^5\), presentation of avatars in the world, and the overall “look and feel” of the complete world that the game constructs. Some questions that the researcher can pose her/himself while studying the Gameplay Log may be: how does the game allow players to save their progress? Are there restrictions to the activity? How and why?; is “saving” as a mechanism integrated somehow into the game world to provide coherence, or is some more obtrusive method offered?; are there situations where the avatars can “break the rules” of the game? How and why?; are there situations that appear that the producers probably did not intend? What are they and how do they work?; does the game make references to other media forms or other games? How do these intertextual references function?; how are avatars presented? How do they look? Walk? Sound? Move? Are these variables changeable? Are they stereotypical?; does the game fit a certain genre? Does it defy its stated genre? How and why? (ibid.).

\(^5\) Modern videogames tend to be very long, some reaching hundreds of hours of potential gameplay. Saving mechanisms allow the players to “save the game”, finish the gaming session, and start a new gaming session, starting from the previous save-file.
4.2 Choice of methods and critical reflection

Method selection is a crucial part in any research and it can have a series of important implications. When faced with having to choose a method, I considered my research question and I asked myself how to best answer it.

With regards to the RQ, my intention is to find out through which persuasive techniques is propaganda manifest in war themed videogames. Propaganda is ultimately a communication process, where the sender tries to persuade the receiver to act (or not to act) in a certain way, and to frame the receiver’s way of looking at the world (i.e. the meaning-making processes of the receiver). Treating videogames as a text has a double advantage. It allows the researcher to interpret how the author of that text makes sense of the world, and which messages s/he is sending, as well as making it possible to understand how the receivers make sense of that text and interpret those messages. By conducting a textual analysis and reaching a reasonable interpretation of the text I will be able to give an answer to the research question. While I believe that textual analysis is the best option with regards to method for answering my research question, I also must acknowledge its limitations. Textual analysis necessarily involves interpretation on the researcher’s part, and that interpretation will necessarily be subjective. This does not mean that the results of the analysis will not be relevant, but it must be noted that they will be relative to my own social, cultural, personal, historical and geographical context.

Another method which might have been used for this research could have been content analysis, although it would have been perhaps best suited to answer questions related to the frequency of propaganda in videogames, and not necessarily to the way it manifest itself sensu stricto. I therefore stand by my decision of adopting textual analysis as the better option for this particular thesis.

4.3 Methodological Implementation

4.3.1 Data Collection

The empirical data which was collected will provide the answer to the research question. This data was obtained by conduction a game analysis on a number of videogames.
10 games were chosen. Certain criteria were considered when choosing the games: a) the games were to be war themed – this means that war was going to be a central theme in the game; b) the games could have a sci-fi tone, but not an outlandish one (e.g. war between alien races), or a pre-contemporary setting (e.g. ancient era, medieval era, Napoleonic era); c) the games were to have a single player campaign (i.e. a non-multiplayer game mode, where the player follows a story through a series of game levels or stages).

It should be noted that my interest was in researching games with a wide impact (i.e. the most sold games). For this reason I looked for lists of top 10 most sold games for every year in the time period 2010-2016. The lists were gathered from business newspapers and magazines’ websites such as Forbes and the Fiscal Times, and from dedicated videogame media outlets’ websites such as IGN, Gamespot, Gamesradar, and from website Statista. It should be noted that most of these lists focused on the US market, however, by comparing them with lists referring to the European market, I believe my final choice in game selection to be appropriate in relation to the games’ impact on the overall Western market. I must admit I have doubts regarding the accuracy of such lists, since they cannot take into account the number of copies sold on the second-hand market, and the actual user base of certain games might not reflect the number of sold copies due to pirated games. Nevertheless, I am confident in saying that, based on the comparison on different top 10 lists from different sources and the online “buzz” which the publications of those games created, the selection was appropriate. Notably, the 10 games are all part of 2 franchises: Call of Duty (Activision) and Battlefield (Electronic Arts), more specifically 8 part of the former. The most sold game of the selection was the 2011 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 with over 30.5 million sold copies worldwide as of today, according to Statista.

The single player campaign of each of these games range between 6-9:30 hours. I had to take this into consideration when conducting the textual analysis, due to time limitations. Another factor to take into account is the price of AAA videogames. Such titles can commonly cost between 500 sek and 700 sek on launch day, with prices decreasing throughout time, and sensibly lower prices on the second hand market. I did not personally own many of the selected videogames prior to this research, so this also played into the decision of limiting the research to 10 games. The data gathering process consisted in playing the game and taking vocal and written notes, following the method suggested by Consalvo and Dutton (2006), and focusing on the persuasive dimensions as

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6 industry slang for games with high development budget and promotional level – a “blockbuster”
illustrated by Frasca (2007). The videogames were played on either and Xbox One or Playstation 3 console. All of the selected games are multiplatform (i.e. there exist copies for different consoles and PCs), and the game device selection was based on pure convenience (they are the most up-to-date game devices I happen to own).

I therefore set out to play the games and identify the three persuasive dimensions of videogames as identified by Frasca (2007). I identified the 10 selected games as *ludus* games following the categorization given by Frasca (i.e. games which provide an “organic whole”, clear losing and winning conditions, explorable only through a secluded set of rules given by the authors, presenting a dichotomical representation of a system, where things are clearly either good or bad, black or white, etc.). This allowed me to identify with reasonable certainty a series of elements for each persuasive dimension, which were then analysed to reach an answer to my research question. The playworld can be thought of as the dimension most similar to literature, film or the visual arts, and includes every visual and textual sign included in the play activity. It therefore includes characters, stories, sounds, music, dialogues etc. For this dimension I identified the following elements: playable character/s; “good guys” or allies; “bad guys” or enemies; starting scenario; soundtrack (i.e. sound effects and music); dialogues; time (i.e. the chronological order in which the game presents its narrative and whether time can be manipulated); objects (i.e. which objects can be manipulated by the player); camera (i.e. how and which images are portrayed on the screen). With regards to the mechanics dimension (i.e. the rules), I identified four categories of rules, as by Frasca’s indication, namely: model rules (i.e. what the player can do); grade rules (i.e. what the player should do), goal rules (i.e. what the player must do); metarules (i.e. what the player could do). Lastly, with regards to the playformance dimension, I resorted to Frasca’s suggestion, thinking in terms of haptic system, or «the sensibility of the individual to the world adjacent to his body by the use of his body» (Gibson, in Frasca, 2007, p. 141). I therefore looked at how the player interacts with the game through the use of his body. This brought my focus to the controller, its button layout, how the player interacts with it and the game’s feedback.

Once I identified these elements, part of the persuasive dimensions of games, I proceeded in my analysis by interpreting how they convey meaning in persuasive ways and looked for certain indicators, namely the principles upon which the persuasive techniques rely included in chapter 3.4, successively trying to identify the specific techniques they referred to and how they were adopted in, and adapted to, the three persuasive dimensions. Most, if not all of the techniques, are traditionally adopted in more traditional media, and while they may be easily applicable to elements
of the playworld, which resembles closely those traditional media, I looked for ways in which those traditional techniques were adapted to the mechanics and the playformance, dimensions, which are exclusive to (video)games. One of the first problems encountered by propaganda in capturing the audience’s attention, or how to get a certain public to be subjected to a particular propagandistic message (Marlin, 2002, p. 97). I therefore tried to identify techniques in videogames achieving this. Successively, propaganda must associate itself with something that is already valued, and finally, to get people on the side of the propagandist, it must raise anxieties and show strength (Cole, 1998). Technique through which this is achieved in videogames were looked for. Propaganda usually works by relying on emotional appeals, whether these are hatred against the enemy in war-time, or the fear of being left out and not participating in an activity, as is the case for beer and tobacco commercials. Emotions can be effectively used to distract people from evaluating evidence (Marlin, 2002, p. 98). I therefore looked for techniques that allow this in videogames. Propaganda very often relies on credibility (i.e. who says something is often more important than what is said), and one major goal of propaganda is, accordingly, to seek some kind of authoritative backing for the belief being propagated (Marlin, 2002, p. 99). Examples of such instances happening in videogames were searched. Propaganda very often exploits language and its ambiguities. Some positive or negative buzz-words can be attached to a project, person, ideology, action, party, etc., to either creating a favourable image of it or discredit it (as can be other images, people, ideas, etc.) by working through “analogies”, and similarly the same event can be portrayed in different ways by describing with morally evaluative language (e.g. a break into an animal testing facility by animal rights activists may be described as an exercise for the triumph of justice or as a violent display of extreme integralism, depending on somebody’s moral assessment of the justification for the protest) (Marlin, 2002, pp. 99-100). Examples of such analogies were searched for in the chosen videogames. Propaganda must be seen, remembered and acted upon (Qalter, 1962, p. xii), therefore techniques enabling this were looked for in the selected videogames.

4.3.2 Validity and Reliability

The method adopted for this research clearly has some shortcomings and limits, namely the fact that it largely relies on my own subjectivity and interpretations. With regards to the persuasive dimensions of the videogames, I believe that thanks to my relatively extensive personal experience as a videogame player on one hand, and modest experience as a student on the other hand, I was able to successfully identify and differentiate between the elements of the three persuasive
dimensions. That means that I have a reasonable certainty that by following my same method, another researcher would probably concur with me that elements which were assigned to either the playworld, mechanics, or playformance, are in fact properly assigned to those dimensions. The fact that the selected videogames were ludus games certainly helped, in the sense that their dimensions, and their respective contents, are quite clear-cut and easily identifiable, and I have reason enough to believe that other researchers would agree with me. However, these elements and the related data were found based on a subjective interpretation (i.e. post-structuralist textual analysis). This means that I cannot be sure that another researcher would identify the same categories as me. I believe this is particularly true for the playworld dimension, where another researcher might have perhaps identified more or less elements than me.

The propaganda techniques were also identified based on interpretation, and this also means that another researcher might or might not have reached my same conclusions. This is very true, since propaganda is subjective: what might be considered propaganda by me, might be simply considered the truth by somebody else (Silverblatt & Zlobin, 2015, p. 45). I therefore must acknowledge this as a limit of my study. However, as limiting as it may be, it is also the strength of my thesis at the same time. If I am to reflect on myself as a researcher dealing with the issue of propaganda in videogames I can see how I clearly have no relationship with the developers of the selected game, so there is no conflict of interest involved in this research. I furthermore do not come from any of the countries depicted as the enemy in the selected videogames, so I can be reasonably objective in my analysis. A researcher coming from one of those countries might see propaganda even when it is not present. On the other hand, that might be her/his strength, since s/he might have a higher degree of sensibility when it comes to identifying distorted representations of her/his nationality (e.g. stereotypes). Likewise, if I were to come from one of those countries usually represented as the “heroes” in the videogames (which I do not), I might fail to see propaganda where it is in fact present. A post-structural analysis of a text will never provide an absolute and ultimately correct interpretation of a text, since different cultures and subcultures will always have different ways of making sense of the world (McKee, 2003, p. 29). What my analysis can provide is the interpretation of propaganda included in war videogames from the perspective of a European Digital Media and Communication student, with all the related merits and limits. This does not mean that my interpretation will be necessarily right or wrong, but it will be one interpretation from a particular perspective. It will be a likely interpretation, which future research will hopefully confirm, or on the other hand refute.
4.4 Ethical Considerations

I believe this thesis meets all the necessary ethical standards required to conduct research. The data was collected without relying on interviews or observation of people, and was collected by playing the games directly, thus it can be considered “first-hand” data. Another time-sensible solution would have been to collect data by just watching some play-through videos online, but I believe this would have made me miss a lot of valuable information and would have not treated the games as an organic whole composed by playworld, mechanics, and playformance. The analysis was also conducted relying solely on self-reflection on my part. If any skewness in the results is present it should be attributed solely to my shortcomings and inexperience, but not to any consciously unethical research procedures.

5 Data and Analysis

I will now proceed presenting the data gathered through the game analysis. The data was gathered by playing 10 games. The games will be referred as G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6, G7, G8, G9, and G10, following the chronological order of their publication.

5.1 Playworld Data

5.1.1 Playable characters and “good guys”

Most of the games played allow the player to control different characters in different levels of the game: 4 in G1, 3 in G2, 4 in G3, 7 in G4, 6 in G5, 5 in G6, 10 in G9. On the contrary G7, G8, and G10 allow the player the control only one character throughout the game. Noticeably, all playable characters are male, except for G8, where the player gets to choose at the beginning of the game whether s/he wants to play as a female or male character, and for 3 levels in G9. In almost all of the games the player gets to take control of other minor characters that are not named explicitly, usually some pilot or soldier, in specific scripted sections, where the main character and his/her companions require either air or ground support in particularly dangerous situations, or satellite guidance to infiltrate an enemy hideout.
Most of the playable characters in the games are part of the same faction (with some noticeable exceptions of which I will talk about during the analysis of the enemy characters). In G1 and G4 the “good guys” controlled by the player are part of an alliance between Western countries and the player controls a number of US Ranger Regiment soldiers, as well as a number of British soldiers and one Russian operative, part of Task Force 141, a fictional multinational special operations unit. In G2, the player controls a member of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group, a secret special operations unit employed by the USA during the Vietnam conflict, who is later recruited by the CIA. The player also controls in certain levels the character’s CIA superior, and a Russian veteran who is central to the plot and helps the main character in several situations. In G3 the player controls a US Marine soldier and a Russian secret service agent. G5’s narrative unfolds through flashbacks and the game’s present time (2025), and during flashback the player controls the same MACV-SOG soldier of G2 (or one of his companions), while controlling his son, an American Joint Special Operation Commando soldier, during the game’s present time, and a Yemenite undercover JSOC operative in one particular level. G6 is also set in the near future (from 2017 to 2027 – the game was published in 2013), and has a number of flashback sections. In the game’s present day the player controls a soldier member of the Ghost team, a fictional US army elite team specializing in undercover and stealth operations, as the main character, while taking control of other two American soldiers for specific missions set in space, and taking control of the main character’s dog for specific game sections. During flashbacks the player takes control of the main character’s father, one of the original Ghost members. In G7, the player controls a single character, an American soldier who changes factions throughout the game (first a US marine, then a private contractor, and lastly a member a fictional international task-force called Sentinel). In G8, which is based in 2065, the character controls an American soldier part of a team of technologically enhanced fighters, following the orders of the Winslow Accord, a fictional successor of NATO. The single player campaign of G9 is composed by 6 different WW1 scenarios, which can be played in any order, with the player controlling a different character for each scenario. All of the characters controlled by the player are part of the Allied forces.

Virtually every character controlled by the player in the games is part of a regular army or governmental institution, except for the Bedouin rebel in G9 and the dog in G6, although it may be argued that even the dog is a regular member of the Ghost team, since it is equipped with technical gear and based on how the characters interact with it, it would seem as it is regularly employed in military operations (within the game’s world). No civilian is ever controlled by the player expect
for a very brief section as an American tourist, who is killed alongside with his family during a terror attack in London in G4.

5.1.2 “Bad guys”

All of the games have clear opponent/s. In all of them the player will find “generic” opponents (the ones that are fought during normal gameplay), who are usually enemy soldiers or terrorists, who answer to one or more “villains”, the evil “masterminds” behind the crisis the player needs to solve, and who plot against the player’s faction. Most of these characters are fictional but there are some cases of historical characters

In G1 and G4, the main antagonist is a Russian ultranationalist terrorist, aided by a number of other villains: a Brazilian weapon dealer in G1, a Somali weapon dealer, and the villains second hand in G4. In G1 a main villain is also Task Force 141’s leader, a US general who allows Russian attacks on American soil to push more people to join the army to fight the Russian invasion. In G2, there are a number of villains: a USSR general and his second hand, and a German Nazi scientist working for them. Fidel Castro makes also an appearance as a main villain, central to the plot. In G3 the main villains are a CIA asset gone rogue, plotting together with the leader of an Iranian paramilitary group a nuclear attack on New York and Paris, and a Russian weapon dealer who sells them the nuclear bombs. In G5, the main antagonist is a Nicaraguan communist revolutionary (who the player gets to play as during one level and another short section), leader of a worldwide network, helped by his second hand. Other main villains are the USSR general’s second hand from G2, a Chinese general, a mujaheddin leader, and Panama dictator Manual Noriega, central to the plot which unfolds during the game’s flashbacks. In G6 the main villain is an ex-Ghost American soldier gone rogue, now working for a South-American general who invades the USA. In G7, the main villains are a Chechen separatists/technophobic terrorist and the CEO of the world’s most powerful private military contractor, who the main character works for initially. In G8, the main villain is a CIA-developed military AI who takes control of various soldiers and military androids. Other antagonists are a group of Singapore criminals who took control of the city after a military experiment destroyed it almost completely, and the Nile River Coalition, a fictional political entity composed by Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan. Identifying the main villain in G9 is harder. There is no immediate connection between the scenarios the player is presented, and the player is always fighting “generic” soldiers whose personality is not developed or explored in any way. The only exception is that of an Ottoman official during the scenario where the character controls a Bedouin rebel, who is fighting for the independence of her people, and is usually moving by horse. The
ottoman general when facing her, makes a point about this, claiming that technology will annihilate the Bedouin resistance. However the Ottoman official could hardly be considered an “evil mastermind” behind the events unfolding in the game. In G10, the main antagonist is the leader of a separatist group, seeking independence for Earth’s space colonies, alongside with his second in command.

5.1.3 Starting scenarios

All of these games put the player in the role of a soldier of some sort, belonging to a certain army or governmental institution. Furthermore all of the games put the player in the role of a character belonging to a certain specific nation. Enemies and villains are treated in a similar fashion. The plots of the games always unfold around events concerning a conflict between two distinct sides (which may be composed by several factions). The initial scenarios may change (and they mostly do), throughout the game.

G1 sees Western forces, specifically USA and UK against Russian ultranationalists who take control of Russian politics and are helped by Brazilian arm dealers. G4 sees the same factions as the “good guys”, with the adding of French and German soldiers, in particular levels localized in France and Germany, and Czech insurgents, in a level based in Prague, who are helped by the player’s character in taking part in an uprising against the Russians, who are back as the main antagonist faction, aided by Somali arm dealers this time. G2, portray Americans on one side, against Russian, Vietnamese, and Cuban soldiers. G3 portrays America versus Iran and Russia. G5’s double storyline portrays the USA in several scenarios during the Cold War (e.g. in Angola helping Jonas Savimbi against the MPLA during the civil war in Angola, helping the Mujhaeddin against the Soviets in Afghanistan, invading Panama in 1989) and during the fictional “Second Cold War” set in 2025 (as leaders of NATO), against Russia, Cuban, Angolan MPLA soldiers, Central American drug traffickers, and Panama soldiers during the Cold War sections, while during the “Second Cold War” China is leading an anti-NATO coalition, while an international populist movement headed by the main antagonist, whose armed forces are mostly composed by Cuban elite troupes, works in the shadows. G6 sees America as the invaded country, defending itself from a south-American “Federation”, led by a Venezuelan general-president. In G7, the main factions
facing each other are regular US troops on one side and private contractors and Chechen terrorists on the other side. In G8, the player must help Egypt who is being invaded by the Nile River Coalition, while looking for a team of American soldiers gone rogue. In G9, the factions are those known by most people from WWI, therefore we can find allies on one side and central empires on the other side. In G10 Earth is attacked by the Settlement Defence Front, a political entity born from human colonies around the Solar System, which is seeking independence from Earth’s government. The player must retaliate and defend its planet and space dominions.

5.1.4 Soundtrack – effects and music

Sounds are very important for player immersion in videogames. All the videogames have realistic sound reproducing gunshots, explosions, engines etc. The music is also important in setting the tone. All the games are successful in alternating between tense music during particularly intense shootings, epic tunes during heroic moments, and depressive tunes during more reflective and sad moments. Often no music is played at all, the videogames opting instead for just conveying the sounds of weapons and explosions.

A number of particularly noticeable composer collaborated with some of the games (e.g. Hans Zimmer and Trent Reznor, both Oscar winners for best soundtrack, composed the soundtracks for G1 and G5 respectively), and other famous musicians’ songs are also played during the campaigns. Rapper Eminem is present with two songs in G2 and G6, the Rolling Stones have one song in G2, and heavy metal band Avenged Sevenfold, who are notorious among other things for having played for American troops stationed in the Middle-East (Ramanand, 2011), are present with 2 songs in G2, 1 song in G3, and a videogame version of a concert as a special post-end credit “easter egg” in G5. In addition to this, famous songs from prominent artists are frequently used in the games’ trailers.

5.1.5 Dialogues

All the games are originally in English, and as such most of the dialogues are spoken in that language. Some exceptions might be that of Russian enemy soldier shouting orders to each other

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7 “Easter egg” is the term used to indicate small details included in videogames such as cameos, references to popular culture, hidden content, usually treated as an inside-joke.
during gunfight in any of the game where Russians are included as enemy, or some parts where villains speak in Spanish in G2 and G5 where there are prominent villains from Central and South-America. However, it is not uncommon for villains to speak in English amongst each other even when all speaking the same different language.

The dialogues between both playable and non-playable characters are very dense of military jargon in all of the games, to the point of probably not being intelligible for non-initiated. Profanity and foul language is also extensively used.

All the dialogues are scripted and pre-determined. The player does not have any option whatsoever to influence the outcome of the story through dialogue choices. Not all the main characters speak. In G1 and G4 the character is completely silent both during the gameplay moments and during cut-scenes. However, the same characters who do not speak when controlled by the player, do in fact speak in sections when the player is controlling a different character. In G3, and G7, the character/s do not speak during gameplay (although in G3, characters who do not speak when controlled by the player may speak when not controlled by the player), but do speak during cut-scenes. In G6 the character is silent during gameplay and cut-scenes, but speaks during inter-level loading screens. In G2, G5, G8, G9, and G10, characters speak both during gameplay and during cut-scenes. However, the player does not decide what the character is going to say, all dialogue is scripted, and it takes place either through cut-scenes (clips where the player is simply watching actions unfold and has no control over the playable character) or in gameplay dialogue (dialogue happening during sections in which the player has control over the actions of her/his character).

5.1.6 Space and time

Most of the games follow a chronological order with some exceptions. G2 and G3’s plots unfold through the use of flashback presented in a chronological order and only towards the end of the game does the player take control of the character’s actions which unfold in the game’s present time. G5’s plot is double (one part of the plot takes place during the end of the Cold War, while the other during a fictional Second Cold War), and missions while alternate between present and past ones. G9, allows the player to play its missions in whichever order the player prefers, therefore it cannot be said to follow a chronological order proper. Typically most of the games have at least one flashback mission, in which the player takes control of a certain character, usually the main
character’s mentor, and in those flashback missions more is revealed about certain relationships between mentor and villain.

One typical use of time that can be found in the Call of Duty series is the use of slow-motion when breaching a room full of enemies. In specific parts of certain missions, the player will enter a room full of enemies (sometimes trying to rescue hostages), and time will slow down, giving the player time to shoot down enemy precisely. These sections are scripted and the players do not decide when to initiate them. However such an option is offered in G7, where the player has the option to slow down time and aim accurately for a short period of time if s/he has enough “energy” to do it (the player can slow time only when an energy bar is full, and slowing down time will drain the energy bar. Time will start flowing at a regular speed when the energy bar is finished).

As for the space, the games are located in a number of different countries and areas, covering missions in the U.S.A., several European countries, Russia, Afghanistan, Venezuela, the Middle-East, Vietnam, Angola, Egypt, and even other planets of the Solar System and Cyberspace.

5.1.7 Objects

The objects open to manipulation in the games are mostly weapons. All of the games allow the player to carry with her/him a maximum number of two weapons plus two throwable weapons (e.g. grenades, flashbangs, mines, etc.). Most of the weapons will be equipped with technological gadgets (e.g. thermal rifle scopes). In all of the games there are specific sections in which the player takes control of certain combat vehicles (e.g. tanks, jets, jeeps, etc.) or mounted weapons (e.g. machine guns, mortars). In all of the games there are certain sections in which the player can use a communication device (e.g. a radio or a computer) to ask for support, but that option is limited to those particular sections. If the player runs out of bullets he can collect more of them from abandoned weapons or from weapon crates scattered throughout the levels (as in G8, G9 and G10). The player can also choose to pick up an abandoned weapon in exchange for one of the one s/he already owns. In all of the games the player also carries a knife, which s/he can use for melee attacks (except for G7, G8, and G10, where the knife is substituted by a heavy punch delivered with the aid of hyper-technological armoured suits).
5.1.8 Camera

At their core, all the games are First Person Shooters (FPS), a defined genre of videogame in which the players controls the character from a first person perspective, and it is in such a way that the player controls the character. Different games will additionally have different sections in which the camera works in a different way, and where the player has no control over what is happening on the screen. G1, G4, and G6 show a series of images (usually maps, pictures or satellite images) during loading screen while a voice-over from certain characters reveal details regarding the following missions or the outcomes of the previous ones. G2 also has similar loading screens but in addition it also has sections in between game levels (and different from the loading screen) in which the focus is on other characters revealing information or asking questions, as seen through the eyes of the player’s character (without the player having control over him). G3, G4, G7, G8, G9 and G10 has sections in between playable levels where the playable character is seen interacting and the camera adopts a third person perspective.

5.2 Playworld Analysis

5.2.1 Stereotyping

There are several propaganda techniques, which can be found in the playworld. One of the most prominent is stereotyping (Cole, 1998) to portray the enemy and even certain allies. In G1, one mission consists in saving one of your companions captured by Russian forces and being held in a “Siberian gulag” (the game is set in contemporary time). In G2 one mission sees you storming Fidel Castro’s mansion in Havana where you find him in his room with a woman wearing a nightgown, which he uses as a shield, alluding to Castro’s fame as a womanizer and to his alleged ruthlessness. The player kills Castro (fig.1) (which eventually turns out to be a double, but the players does not know it then), and the woman grabs a machine gun and starts shooting the player’s character and his companion, forcing them to kill the woman. The companion says that: «Castro supporters are fanatical in their devotion of him». In the same game one level sees the main character escaping from the Vorkuta labour camp in Russia during an uprising. An uprising did in fact take place in the real Vorkuta labour camp in 1953, but this section
of the game takes place in 1963. In this level the Russian guards are seen beating up and brutalizing prisoners just before the beginning of the uprising. In G3, during a mission taking place in the Iraq-Iran border one character asks rhetorically: «you ever ask yourself why this part of the world gets so fucked up all the time?», to which a marine responds: «I just work here, Dave». One of the first missions of G5 is set during the Angolan Civil War, where the main character is deployed and helped by the controversial National Union for the Total Independence of Angola leader, Jonas Savimbi (fig.2). He helps the main character and his team in the game, but he is shown chopping an enemy’s arm off, and generally showing a certain liking in killing. Activision Blizzard was eventually sued for the portrayal of Savimbi by his 3 children, but won the cause (BBC, 2016). A following mission sees the players being deployed in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, with the objective of helping the mujhaideen resistance. Some of the Afghan insurgents may be seen smoking from a hookah. Later during the same mission, once the Russian leader is captured and interrogated but is not collaborating, your companion/mentor will threaten him by saying: «this is the mujhaideen, they’ll peel your eyes out and leave you to fry in the desert». At the end of the mission, the mujhaideen turn on you. The main character says: «we helped you fight the Russians, we’re on your side», while the mujhaideen leader replies: «no, you are and always will be our true enemy». The main antagonist in G5 is a Nicaraguan revolutionary/cartel leader and may be seen as the stereotype of the typical Latin-American revolutionary leader, with a visceral hate of the USA, and often says phrases such as: «Americans don’t know anything about loyalty»; «Opulence is sinful»; «Einstein once said the economic anarchy of capitalism is the real source of evil». During one of his speeches a red flag with the stylized profile of his face à la iconic Che Guevara icon can be seen (fig.3), which may be interpreted as an example of transfer technique (Marlin, 2002). Another example of stereotype can be found in G6, where the enemy is a South-American Federation, when the main character’s father is captured and brought to South-America. During a loading screen with the main character’s voice over, the player can hear about how the “Amazon tribes have perfected torture in the past”, and the hopes of the main character that his father will resist the Federation’s torture techniques. In G7, the main antagonist has the HQ of his private army based in Baghdad (New Baghdad in the game), which he helped rebuild after the war and is now thriving. When visiting, a character makes a point about how the progress made by the
city is incredible and mostly attributable to the work of the main antagonist (i.e. not to the Iraqi population). In the same game, the villain has a personal grudge with politicians and the United Nations, and at one point states that “politicians don’t know how to solve problems”, suggesting that problems are either solved by use of capital or force, not diplomacy. In a certain mission of G8, the main character and his/her companions need to help an insurgency in Egypt against occupying NRC forces. One of the companions says: «6 months from now they’ll be under a whole new wave of oppression».

5.2.2 Name Calling and Labelling

Name calling and labelling are other techniques that are extensively used in all the games. In G1, during the first level the player can overhear a dialogue between two US soldiers, one asking to the other since when “does a ranger get paid to sit on his ass”, to which the other one replies: «weak man, weak». In G2, during the escape from Vorkuta, the main character’s Russian companion says: «we show the heart of true Russia against fascists». In another level of the same game, when breaching a soviet missile facility, the player finds a group of Nazi co-opted scientists who have been executed. The playable character says: «poor bastards», to which his companion replies: «they are Nazi bastards, they don’t deserve sympathy». During another level, when captured by Vietnamese guerrilla, the main character’s companion shouts to them: «you don’t scare me, communist piece of shit». In G3, one member of the main character’s team is questioning their mission and rhetorically asks: «what are we doing here?», to which another member replies: «stop being a hippy!». In G5 foul language is extensively used when referring to the main antagonist, and when referring to Noriega (fig.4), the main character’s companion will use expressions such as “fat fucking slob” or “old pineapple face”, a nickname actually used by Panama citizens to refer to Noriega (Fox News, 2014). In G7, one mission sees the main character and his team operating in Nigeria, helping the local forces in rescuing a number of hostages. The Nigerian soldiers are portrayed as being very nervous and their commander as being unable to take a decision, to the point that one of the main character’s companion says: «amateurs! Let’s show them how it’s done». This is also done in G8, when the main character’s companion refers to Egyptian soldiers as
“amateurs”. G8 has a quite interesting technological subplot, and sees near future soldier equipped with a “direct neural interface”, a chip installed in their nervous system, allowing them to manipulate machines, robots, and hack into computer systems. Other soldier’s interfaces can be hacked too in order to gain info, at the cost of killing them. When debating with the main character’s companion whether to hack an enemy’s interface, the main character has some doubts regarding the consequences it would have on the enemy. The companion replies: «he’s already dead, besides, he’s a fucking terrorist». During the same game, when being attacked by enemy forces, members of the main character’s team are arguing regarding what the best course of action would be. The main character stops them addressing them as “ladies”.

5.2.3 Appeal to authority and Role Referencing

The appeal to authority (Cole, 1998) as a technique is used very often in virtually all of the games. The details regarding missions and the orders to be obeyed are often given to the player by a high army official (e.g. a general or an admiral). An interesting example is that of G2, where historical figures (fig.5) are adopted for this role, in the specific case President John F. Kennedy and Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, or in G5, where former CIA director David Petraeus is portrayed as being the USA Secretary of Defence in 2025. Curiously, he resigned 4 days before the publishing of the game, although this means he was still in office during development (Totilo, 2012). Another widely used technique is role referencing (Cole, 1988). Nearly all of the games portray a character as part of a team, and in that team there will be a companion representing a mentor or a father figure, and it is usually from this mentor that the player gets suggestions on how to move or how to act during combat (e.g. which weapons to use, when to throw a grenade, where to take cover etc.), often blurring the lines or meshing the appeal to authority with the role referencing. Noticeably, the line of dialogues through which stereotypes, name calling and labelling are performed, are most often carried out by these companion/mentor, and this is especially worthy of attention for games such as

![Figure 5: John F. Kennedy, Robert McNamara, and David Petraeus as portrayed in G2 and G5.](image)
G1, G3, G4, and G6, where the main character either does not speak during gameplay or does not speak at all. This effectively means that all that the player needs to know is told to her/him by these mentors, which by virtue of their status are worthy of trust, while the character controlled by the player does not even have the chance to raise questions or contradict what is being told to her/him. It should be noted that in no game is the player afforded a choice on what her/his character can say, all dialogue is scripted, however, a playable character that does not even reply or raise questions regarding what s/he is doing deprives the player of a considerable source of self-reflection and self-criticism, encouraging the player to effectively adopt whatever interpretation of events, characters, settings, is handed to her/him by the companion/mentor. G6 is an interesting example in that the mentor/companion filling the father figure is the main character’s very own father, while the role of the brother is adopted by the main character’s real in-game brother. In certain cases, role referencing is expressed not through a companion, but through the playable character himself. One of the campaigns in G9 sees the player impersonating an Australian war hero, who takes a rookie soldier under his protection, guiding him and instructing him. In G10 the player is the captain of a spaceship, whose actions are portrayed as inspiring and worthy of praise by his crew.

5.2.4 Martyr Technique

Role referencing is often brought to the extreme when mixing it with the martyr technique (Cole, 1988). Virtually every game has at least one example (and often more than one) of a character sacrificing her/himself for the greater good (e.g. the outcome of the mission or saving another character). What is important to notice is that the technique aims at providing examples of larger than life heroes, who do what is necessary for the greater good. The focus of the technique is not so much on the fact that these heroes die for the cause, as it is on the fact that they are willing to die for the cause. Therefore a character must not necessarily die to become a martyr. It is sufficient for her/him to take part in a dangerous and reckless, but necessary, action to set an example of what it means to sacrifice oneself. The fact that some character eventually dies is not so relevant as the fact that s/he carried out the sacrifice in the first place. And in fact some characters manage to pull off extremely dangerous and virtually impossible tasks, offering a double role model, one who is willing to sacrifice her/himself and a second one of a superhuman “Rambo” soldier. When interpreted in such way it is possible to find at least an example of martyr in every selected game. The ultimate sacrifice is when the mentor sacrifices her/himself for the greater good, as in G6 where the character’s father refuses to give details to the villain and is therefore executed (during the
following loading screen his figure can be scene ascending towards a light). In G9 and G10 it is not a companion but the playable character her/himself who acts as martyr. G10 in particular is crowded with martyr examples, with at least 5 major characters (including the playable character) sacrificing themselves, plus nearly the entire crew of the spaceship commanded by the main character.

5.2.5 Atrocity Propaganda and Demonizing The Enemy

While the role referencing and martyr techniques are used to portray allies and “good guys”, two techniques, which are often used to portray main villains, enemies and “bad guys” are atrocity propaganda (Cole, 1988) and demonizing the enemy (Cole, 1988). In G1, the main antagonist is a Russian ultranationalist who carries out a terrorist attack at the Moscow airport, framing the attack as if it was executed by the USA. The player gets to take part in the attack through the eyes of an undercover American agent who infiltrated the ultranationalist network (fig.6). The player can decide whether to actively shoot civilians or watch while the Russians ultranationalists gun down their own countrymen, but he cannot intervene in order to, for example, try and stop the massacre. At the beginning of the game the player gets the option to skip the sequence, the game warning about potentially offensive material. No bonus is given for playing the section and no malus for skipping it. This section in particular was cause for discussion in the Russian Duma, where the game has been explicitly described as propaganda (lenta.ru, 2010) At one point in the same game, when preparing an operation, one of your superior will say: «we are not savages, we use precision, we don’t kill civilians», implying that the Russians do. In G2 the Soviets are planning to use a deadly chemical gas, and the inhumanity and ruthlessness of such a measure is stressed more than once by different “good guys”. A deadly chemical gas is also used by villains in G4, G7 and G8, with similar commentary regarding its use. G6 sees the South-American Federation hijacking an American satellite super-weapon and using it against the USA, causing a great deal of death and destruction. In the later stages of the game, the player regains control of the satellite and uses it against the Federation, but the targets are strictly military and not civilians (as opposed to the Federation). In G3, the villain detonates a nuclear bomb in Paris. In G4 Russian soldiers are seen executing civilians in an invaded Prague. In G5, the main character rescues his companion, who has
been captured by Cuban forces, from a container filled with mutilated corpses. In G10 the main villain often times says things such as: «their city will burn from the pages of their history» (referring to Earth cities). One member of the crew commanded by the main character, in speaking about the SDF, says: «the SDF don’t take prisoners». G5 interestingly allows you to take control of the main villain in certain sections. In one of these sections the playable character is practically unkillable, the colours on the screen shift towards red, and the character can be heard shouting in an unnatural way. Furthermore the level consists in what is basically a “machete butchery-gallery”, in which the player has to cut down waves after waves of Panama and American soldiers. This section happens right after the main character’s companion accidentally kills the main villain’s sister, so apparently the mentioned characteristics of the control of the villain were chosen to represent his anger and rage. However, in none of these games there is a similar section from the perspective of one of the “good guys”, despite the fact that characters very close to the playable ones are often killed as well. Good guys are not overcome by emotions and remain rational. Villains give in to rage and become irrational.

5.2.6 The Representation of Torture – an example of false cause technique

In some cases the enemy is demonized by showing how they torture prisoners, such as in G6, G7 or G8, where the NRC are described as “being known for their brutality”. However, torture is mostly shown been carried out by the “good guys”, in what is effectively an example of false cause (Marlin, 2002) technique (i.e. assuming that A caused B, simply because A happened before B). Examples of torture performed by the main character’s side can be found, or hinted at, in G1, G2, G4, G5, G6, G8. The torture is always carried out as part of an interrogation. In most of the cases, the torture scene is scripted, therefore the player does not actively take part in it, but just watches the scene unfold. An exception is G2, in which the player needs to actively press a series of button during the torture scene in order to progress in the game. As far as the propaganda technique goes, the use of torture is never questioned in the game, in some cases it is even welcomed, and it is considered a legitimate way to obtain necessary information. Not only it is considered legitimate, but also effective, (indeed, every time that a prisoner is tortured in the videogame, the player will obtain whatever information s/he needed to progress in the story) and the fact that no other ways of obtaining the information from the prisoners is being represented on the screen, would make it seem as torture is the only way to obtain information. In G5, one case of torture interrogation in which the
main character takes part ends with the execution of the prisoner. The report at the end of the mission states how the prisoner was “thoroughly interrogated”.

5.2.7 Double Speak and Card Stacking

A technique, which is also extensively used, is double-speak (Cole, 1998), which may be mixed with card-stacking (Cole, 1998). In all of the games, the player can hear several lines of dialogues regarding objectives or logistics of a mission, expressed through military jargon. The jargon is often very thick and may very well not be understandable for an uninitiated. However what is being said might be very important in the context of the game. The mix of double-speak and card-stacking happens when what is being said is said in jargon, and is not important, but it appears so for the fact that is being said through very tight and technical jargon, adding credibility to the actions carried out by the main character’s side. Card-stacking is also expressed through the constant portrayal of impressive military technology and war-machines. This is a staple in every game of the series. Every game has at least a section in which the player gets to control a war vehicle (e.g. jet, tank, jeep). In addition to that, the player gets to switch often between special scopes or guns. In G2 the player gets to use a scope, which highlights enemies by detecting their heartbeat. G5, G6, G7, G8, G10 are more futuristic in the setting, therefore the weapons and tech portrayed in the games are not existing (yet) in reality. However, Activision Blizzard employed a number of Pentagon advisors, military experts, and futurologists, and both the company and the advisors were open about the fact that although having a somewhat sci-fi setting, those games were not completely un-realistic and the weapons portrayed in them were imagined and designed based on actual research (Stuart, 2014, 2015) (Lawrence, 2014). What is achieved by the portrayal of such impressive technology and the technical expertise necessary to use it, is to impress the player making her/him think that the main character’s side (usually USA and some of its allies) does indeed have a superiority it terms of technology and know-how. In G5, when assisting the mujhaiddeen, one character points this out: «they have no experience with the weaponry we brought…We do!». In G6 the Federation does not build its own super-weapon, it hijacks the American one instead.
5.2.8 Jingoism

Jingoism (Cole, 1988) is a technique, which permeates virtually all of the games. American flags can be seen very often (for some non-specified reason they can even be seen in G4 in a mission set in Paris). Characters of Marine soldier will very often say Marine corps mottos to each other (e.g. “oorah”, “sempre fi”). In G1, before the start of a mission the player can hear a speech from a commander officer saying that they are “the most powerful army force” in the world. Later in the same game, just after an electromagnetic pulse attack, another commander officer will tell the playable character: «our weapons still work, which means we can still kick some ass (...) we still have a war to fight», and a companion will ask: «when are we going to Moscow?» (to retaliate, since the attack was staged by Russia). In G2, the main character is summoned to the Pentagon, in a scene that is meant to show the high degree of professionalism and reach of the Department of Defence. Robert McNamara, who is escorting the main character to a meeting with the President, asks him: «overwhelming, isn’t it?». G2 ends with one of the main characters companion saying: «we won», to which the main character replies: «for now», while the camera moves to show American aircraft carriers, waving the American flags, while jets speed through the sky to the sound of rock music (fig.7). In G5, the modern day main character is a crewmember of the USS Obama. In the same game, the main character asks his companion/mentor: «nobody like the Russians, eh?», to which he replies: «I don’t like anyone». During the level in which the player must help the mujhaideen against the Soviets, the main character and his companion receive a message, communicating that the mujahideen leader is concerned about losing the fight. The main character’s companion replies: «I don’t give a fuck about his concerns, we’re going to kick ass as always». Later on, during the same mission, the companion will say: «let’s give them one last display of courage». Later in the game, one of the main character’s commander officers will give him details regarding a mission and will say: «if you fail our military supremacy is just a wet dream». In G8, the main character’s companion will say at one point: «let’s do what we do best, kill some bad guys». A big part of G8 consists in hunting down an American soldier gone rogue, and at one point, the main character is asked whether s/he is ok hunting down one of her/his friends, to which s/he replies that yes, s/he is very much ok with it since the rouge soldier leaked information. Clearly not what a good patriot is supposed to do.
5.1.9 Testimonial and Beautiful People

Other commonly used techniques that are often used in combination the testimonial (Marlin, 2002) and the beautiful people (Cole, 1988) techniques. Many games feature famous and recognized actors voicing some of the characters (and in some case acting as well), for example Michael Keaton in G5, Kevin Spacey in G7 (fig.8), or Kit Harington in G10 (and the list could go on), with some even appearing as themselves (e.g. Jimmy Kimmel in a cameo in G5). With regards to the music a number of songs from famous artists can be heard both during specific sections of the campaign and the end-credits. Famous personalities have also been used in the commercial trailers for a number of the games. It is not so important that any of these famous personalities openly endorse what is being portrayed in the game, as much as it is that whoever is playing the game recognizes those personalities and creates a connection between them and the in-game actions. The games always include some military advisors as part of their staff who appear, on the contrary, to openly endorse the games as portraying a realistic depiction of war (Schut, 2008) (Tran, 2010) (The Dominion Post, 2010).

5.2.10 Appeal to Fear

Lastly, the appeal to fear (Cole, 1998) technique is also extensively used in the games. Specifically it works by portraying certain iconic and very meaningful landmarks and locations and having them destroyed in the games. In G1, Washington is being attacked and the player reaches a completely destroyed Oval Office in the White House. In G3, a nuclear device is triggered in Paris. Paris is also attacked and destroyed in G4, with images of the Tour Eiffel collapsing. In G4, the first level of the game is set in New York, which is being completely devastated by a Russian attack, with a section in the Wall Street stock exchange. In G5 Los Angeles is attacked and becomes a war zone. In G6 the player needs to move through the ruins of a post-apocalyptic San Diego, while in G7 every major city in the world is victim of attacks to their nuclear power plants, and a level of the game is set on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, which eventually falls down. In G10 the Geneva UN Offices are attacked.
5.3 Mechanics Data

5.3.1 Model Rules

The model rules, to recall Frasca’s (2007) definition, express what the player can and cannot do in a game (p. 118). With regards to the model rules, all of the games are extremely similar. The player controls one character at a time. The main action that a playable character can do is shooting one of her/his weapons. The weapons have a limited number of ammunitions and in all of the games the player can carry two weapons at a time plus a limited number of throwable weapons (e.g. grenades) or an anti-tank weapon. This means that after finishing the ammunitions for one weapon, the player must either collect new ammunitions from abandoned weapons (in all of the games), collect new ammunitions from weapon crates scattered throughout the level (as in G8 and G10), pick up another weapon (in all the games), switch to the secondary weapon (in all the games), resort to melee attacks, or switch to a throwable weapon (in all the games). The weapons have a limited capacity, which means that after unloading a magazine, the player must wait for a couple of second for the character to reload her/his weapon. The guns are not modifiable in any game except for G8 and G10, where the player gets to choose, before the beginning of a mission, which type of weapon s/he will start the level with, which scope to equip, whether s/he wants a fire suppressor, etc. During gameplay, the player can aim down sights, in order to get a better view of her/his target while firing or shoot without aiming down sights. Other basic actions the player can do are walking, running, jumping, crouching, or going prone. The player has no option to speak whenever s/he feels like, neither to allies nor to enemies. The player cannot surrender.

All of the videogames are played in real time (as opposed to turn-based games), with only inter-level cut-scenes breaking the normal time-flow. The levels of the videogames are closed (as opposed to open-world games). This means that even though the level might seem as an open world, where the player sees mountains on the horizon, buildings with doors, parks, etc., they may not be accessible, and the player is instead limited to a certain space in which the action takes place. These spaces can be quite large, especially in later games like G7, G8, G9, and G10, where the player has a certain degree of freedom on how to move around the playworld, but it is ultimately a closed area. G8 and G10 have a hub area which the player access before every mission, and from

8 Close combat attacks, i.e. using knives or fists.
9 Looking through the weapon’s scope.
where the player can read info regarding characters, modify her/his weapons, change gender (in G8), and modify her/his cybernetic abilities (in G8). Also G7 allows the player to modify his armour in order to obtain bonuses during gameplay. Armour and abilities are modified through points obtained during gameplay by completing certain objectives (e.g. reaching a certain number of kills).

In certain levels the player is able to use a machine, usually a tank, or some form of jet. These machines always have two weapons in all of the games, a machine gun and a heavy weapon, and the ammunitions are infinite.

5.3.2 Grade rules

The grade rules, to recall Frasca’s (2007) definition, are those best identified as dealing with measurable characteristics within a game (i.e. what a player should and should not do) (pp. 118-119). These may include scores, “number of lives”, and anything quantifiable, or what creates a gain or loss in a game.

The number of bullets and throwable weapons are displayed on the screen, so the player knows how many bullets s/he has left. In all of the games the player is afforded an infinite number of lives. This means that there is no limit to how many times the player can “die” and try the same section. There is no “game-over” forcing the player to start from the beginning the entire game. On the contrary, the level is composed by different sections each separated by a reachable checkpoint, from which the player starts over if s/he dies. When shot, the character does not die immediately, at least not at normal difficulty setting (usually the games have 3-4 difficulty settings, each one harder than the one below. The difficulty lies in the number of hits the character is required to take before dying and the precision of the enemies). Instead the image on the screen will shake and blur, while the colours on the screen shift to red, and a distinct red line will appear on the screen indicating the direction from which the character was hit. If the player does not intend to die, s/he will need to take cover and wait few seconds for the image to become clear again and the colours to go back to normal, which indicates that the character is at full health again. No injury is sustained by the character. The only exceptions to these mechanics is G10 which has two additional difficulty levels, one in which the character’s movement and precision are affected after being hit (indicating injury), and a second one in which the player must start the entire campaign from the beginning if killed.
Killing enemies does not afford the player any specific points, except for G7, G8, and G10, where killing enemies in a certain way (e.g. with a specific weapon) or being particularly precise (e.g. reaching a certain number of “head-shots”), affords the player a number of points which can be exchanged for upgrades to their equipment. Curiously, except for certain specific sections in which the player must kill an enemy in order for the mission (and the game) to continue (e.g. in G10, you need to clear the entrance to a shelter in a mission. These sections are very common in all the games, with some interesting exceptions, such as G1 and G4, where there are some instances in which a companion will tell the playable character something along the lines of: «take them down or let them be, it’s your choice»), or in which the player must defend a position (such as in G8), the goal of the mission is usually to reach a certain character or location, not so much to explicitly kill enemies. A player could hypothetically let her/his companions (if present) kill the enemies (and it should be noted that companions do not die, if that is not supposed to be a scripted part of the game’s narrative, so there is no risk of losing them during gunfight), however this is made almost impossible to achieve since the player is “stormed” by enemies most of the time and it is usually not so easy to find cover. Furthermore, playing in such a way defies the ways in which the game was intended to be played, so it could be said that the player should shoot enemies. Conversely, the player should not get killed if he wants to progress in the game. The player is killed when he gets hit a certain number of times which are not explicitly communicated to the player, but the player can understand when s/he is about to get killed based on the blurriness of the image on the screen. The playable character dies when s/he gets shot too many times in a short amount of time, if s/he gets hit by a grenade or by any other explosion (i.e. a car exploding, a missile, etc.), or if s/he falls from too tall a height.

Other ways in which the player can lose the game is by damaging any of his companions or by killing civilians. However, this rule is somewhat inconsistently enforced throughout the games. It is true that if the player does kill companions a message saying «Friendly fire will not be tolerated» will appear in all of the games, but in certain games such as G1 the player cannot kill even one of her/his companions, while in G2 there is some sort of “wiggle room”, in which a certain number of friendly soldiers may be killed (usually one or two depending on the situation, the game is not consistent in that regard). The rule can have different applications even within the same game, as in G5, where in certain levels the player needs to follow it strictly, otherwise s/he loses the game, while in other levels the player is afforded some “wiggle room” (which is never made explicit). The same logic applies to how killing civilians is treated in the games. All of the games have a penalty
for killing civilians (i.e. the player loses the game and has to restart from a checkpoint), but while in certain levels this rule is strictly enforced and not one civilian can be killed, in other levels there is the possibility to kill one or two civilians before a message telling the player s/he is not allowed to shoot civilians appears.

In certain specific sections of the game the player needs to successfully pass “quick time events” (i.e. pressing the correct series of buttons appearing on the screen while action unfolds on the screen. The player has no control over what is happening, but s/he needs to press the exact buttons appearing on the screen, otherwise the game will either not continue or the player will have to start again from the previous checkpoint, depending on the situation).

All of the games allow the players to achieve certain trophies/achievements if they manage to fulfil the requirements for their achievement. These can be, for example, killing a certain number of enemies in a short amount of time, or with one single grenade, or using a specific weapon. These trophies are then displayed on the social profiles for the platform on which the games were played.

5.3.3 Goal rules

Goal rules indicate how the game is won or lost, in other words what the player must and must not do. The goal rules are consistent throughout all of the videogames. The player must reach her/his goal(s) and doing so s/he must avoid getting killed. Frasca (2007) speaks about goal rules also as the conditions that lead to victory or defeat, and to the closure of the gaming session (p. 119). He notes how some games have clear rules that define a losing condition but not a winning one (Frasca, 2007, p. 119). The videogames object of this thesis present the opposite. There are clear winning conditions (i.e. reach a certain location/objective, kill a certain enemy, etc.), but no clear losing conditions. Being killed in the videogame does not equate having to start the whole videogame from the beginning, no “Game Over” screen appears. The player can simply restart from the previous checkpoint. Therefore there are no real losing conditions if not getting utterly bored of the videogame and stop playing, but even that would not mean losing stricto sensu. It would simply mean not finishing or not winning the videogame. In a certain sense, the analysed videogames cannot be lost by the player.
5.3.4 Metarules

Frasca (2007) speaks of metarules, referring to the possibility and conditions for players to modify the rules of the games (p. 119). To my knowledge, there are no possibilities to modify the rules of the game (at least those of the single player campaign which is the focus of this research), and therefore there is no data to present for this particular type of rules if not the very fact that no modifications are possible.

5.4 Mechanics analysis
5.4.1 Rules as Diktat

Identifying propaganda techniques at work in the game mechanics is not as straightforward as for the playworld. The entire mechanics can be interpreted as a form of *diktat* (Cole, 1998), in the sense that the rules tell the player exactly what s/he can, should, and must do, effectively eliminating any other possible choice. The player does not have the chance to speak with an enemy and understand its perspective, s/he cannot surrender. The player most definitely cannot even speak to his own companions when s/he feels like it, s/he cannot question the mission, s/he cannot decide to try and capture a villain instead of killing her/him if that is not an explicit order coming from the authority figure within the game. Practically speaking the player can decide which actions to take solely based on the diktat, in this case represented by the mechanics.

5.4.1 Operant Conditioning and Classical Conditioning

Being subjected to certain mechanics may expose the player to *operant conditioning* (Cole, 1998). For example, not engaging in any way with enemies might make the player think that dialogue is not possible with enemies, or obeying orders without questioning the mission, might convince the player that a good soldier is the one who obeys what s/he is told without questioning it. If we look at the goal mechanic of the games not being losable, the player might think that the side s/he is playing as (usually that of a Western soldier) is simply unbeatable. The idea that the West could in fact lose in a hypothetical conflict against Russia (one of the most recurring enemies in the games) could potentially appear very strange to somebody subjected to this type of in-game operant conditioning. Operant conditioning is also applicable to the mechanics dealing with “friendly fire” and killing civilians. Indeed a good soldier is not supposed to kill any of his fellow soldier or
civilians. However the wiggle room, which I spoke about in the previous section, would seem to indicate that in particularly tense situations, one or two accidental deaths are acceptable “collateral damage”.

The upgrade and trophy/achievement systems may be interpreted as a form of classical conditioning (Cole, 1998). The upgrades and achievements are obtained most of the time by simply finishing the mission, finishing the same mission at a higher difficulty, or killing a certain number of enemies in a certain way. The upgrades and trophies/achievements are a form of gratification for the players, with some achievements being harder to obtain than others. If for example the player manages to kill 20 enemies while driving a vehicle (as in G1), he will feel gratified for obtaining the trophy, and he will feel gratified again if s/he plays through the game again even after already obtaining the trophy.

5.4.1 Martyrdom as a mechanic

Another technique that is present in the playworld, but also identifiable in the mechanics, is that of martyrdom (as intended as providing examples of larger than life role models willing to sacrifice themselves) (Cole, 1998). The combination of the model, grade and goal rules effectively encourages players to act recklessly and “sacrifice” their character to reach their goal. The fact that playable characters do not suffer injuries and that they recover from being shot simply by taking cover for few seconds encourages player to play in a “guns blazing” way (as opposed to trying to cause the least damage possible), because in the worst case (playable character’s death) the player will simply need to start over from the last checkpoint. This is also reflected in the possibility for player to pick up ammunitions from dead enemies, pick up other weapons, or the fact that the player knows s/he will eventually find weapon crates in the level. This encourages players not to worry about wasting bullets. This mechanic, together with the “rechargeable life”, the no-injury, and the checkpoint mechanic, allows for players to simply not worry about the consequences of their actions during gameplay. Whatever happens, they know they will never run of ammunition, if they get hit they can simply take cover for a couple of seconds, and if they die they can easily restart from the last checkpoint. This type of gameplay makes the playable characters expandable, and the player does not worry about the danger or the unlikeliness for success of a certain mission. They player is willing to sacrifice her/his avatar.
5.4.2 Oversimplifying mechanics

The quicktime events are the expression of *oversimplification* (Cole, 1998). Actions like climbing a wall or conducting an interrogation are portrayed as being simple and straightforward as pressing a series of buttons. This is especially worth of notice in cases such as that of G3, where the player must interrogate a prisoner and torture him, or in G4, when the player must strangle the main villain at the end of the game, both through quick time events. If we compare the previous two examples with that of G7, where the player must pay homage to a fallen fellow soldier, through the same type of mechanic, it appears rather troubling, since at a symbolical level it would seem as the process involved in both torturing a prisoner and paying homage to a fallen soldier is the same. And it involves simply pressing a button.

5.4.3 Pensée Unique

Lastly, the absence of metarules can be interpreted as a form of *pensée unique* (Cole, 1998), in that the rules of the game are those given by the developers, and no other rules can be imagined. To be perfectly fair, the developers of G8 have encouraged modding (Iaccio, 2016), but to my knowledge there is no mod available which drastically changes the single player experience (and the developer did not encourage it openly), therefore the pensée unique parallel stands.

5.3 Playformance Data

To recall what the playformance dimension entails, it may be useful to think of it, as Frasca does, in terms of haptic system, defined as «the sensibility of the individual to the world adjacent to his body by the use of his body» (Gibson, in Frasca, 2007, p. 141). In videogames the haptic system is most involved in the way the player manipulates the controller, how he presses the buttons on it, and what type of feedback does the controller and the game itself give to the player.

5.5.1 Controllers and button layout

All of the analysed games have a similar button layout, allowing the player to move with one joystick, while moving the camera with another one. Other buttons are used to switch through weapons, activate objects (i.e. pick up an object, open a door, etc.), jump, crouch, go prone, etc. Typically, to fire a gun the button used is one of the trigger buttons found on the back of the
controller. Usually a controller will have 4 trigger buttons, 2 on the left side and 2 on the right side, and the standard button layout will feature one trigger on either side used to fire a weapon, while the correspondent trigger on the opposite side will be used to aim down sights, while the remaining two triggers will be used to throw grenades for example, or used whatever special gadget is equipped at that particular time (fig.9). It should be noted that the button layout is modifiable in all of the games, but only to a certain extent: the game gives the player a limited amount of pre-defined layouts from which the player can choose (as opposed to letting the player choose exactly which button he wants to push to obtain a certain feedback). Quicktime events are included in every game, which consist, as explained in the previous section, in a series of scripted events taking place on screen while the player needs to push the correct series of buttons as appearing on the screen. When using a sniper rifle the player can keep one of the analogue sticks pressed in order for her/his character to “hold his breath” and have a steady aim.

In all of the games the controller vibrates when the player fires a shot, when the player gets shot, when the player is close to an explosion, when the player jumps or drops from a height, when the player interacts with certain objects, for example is s/he is opening a door violently, or during certain quicktime events, when for example hitting a prisoner during an interrogation-torture scene in G2. To be completely fair, the games were played solely on gaming console, and not on a computer, therefore the controller choice was limited to a joypad, while players who play on computer might prefer playing with mouse and keyboard, therefore not experiencing the vibration feedback. However, the fact that the vibration feedback is not present on every platform is not so important as the fact that it is present in at least one.
5.3 Playformance analysis

5.6.1 A Haptic Operant Conditioning

Trigger buttons are built into the controllers in a way that they are easily pressed by the players, with the use of their index or middle fingers, and while the trigger button to be pressed in order to aim down scope might have been chosen for purely practical reason, since when grabbing the controller the player will naturally hold is index or middle finger on top of it therefore requiring very limited reflex time to actually press it, and this may be true for the trigger button used for firing the weapon as well, the latter one actually resembles at a haptic-semiotic level the trigger of a gun. The player needs to press it with his/her index and the controller reacts to the input by vibrating, recreating the recoil, while the in-game gun fires. This may be interpreted as a form of operant conditioning (Cole, 1998). The players learn that to shoot, one needs to pull a trigger and they can expect recoil. One could easily argue that anybody knows that a trigger must be pulled to fire a gun, yet that same person might not have actually ever fired one, and they simply know this by, for example, movies or television or books. Videogames are not different as a medium in their ability to teach things and convey meaning, therefore the fact that they teach the players that guns are shot by “pulling the trigger” is not diminished by the fact that perhaps a player already knows this, if anything it provides an example of the medium’s potential as a learning (and indoctrinating) tool. Nobody uses their hands while watching a movie, while extremely few videogames can be played without ones hands. In a similar way, the players get to learn that taking a shot as a sniper is not as straightforward as aiming and shooting, but they also need to control their breath.

5.6.2 Quicktime Accidents

The quicktime events are an interesting object of analysis. There are a number of situations, which are solved through this particular type of mechanic. They range from having to press the same button quickly in order to open a hard to open door (as in G7), to pressing a button to pay homage to a fallen companion (in G7), to killing a rat which is biting the playable character’s hand.
while he is crawling through a sewer (in G3), to punching a prisoner during interrogation after putting glass in his mouth (in G2) (fig. 10), to strangling the main villain (in G4). In the case of the torture-interrogation in G2, the player needs to press the trigger button usually used to fire the weapon to punch the prisoner’s face, while in G4 the player must quickly and alternatively press the trigger buttons usually used to aim down scope and to fire the weapon. The controller reacts with a vibration when the main character punches the prisoner and with a continuous vibration for the whole scene in which the main villain is being strangled. The actions depicted on the screen in these two cases involve the playable character using his hands and there is no gun manipulation involved, however the buttons that are pressed during the quicktime event are the ones that are used exclusively for weapon manipulation which are also by far the most pressed buttons throughout all of the games, while using the main character’s hand to manipulate other objects is usually done through another button (usually the one pressed to jump), or, in case of a violent action involving hands (e.g. punching, stabbing, knocking out), these are done by pressing one of the analogue sticks (in all of the games except G3, where these actions are carried out by pressing one of the secondary triggers). Conversely, opening doors, climbing walls, or paying homage, are done through one of the buttons used to do the more trivial actions in the game (e.g. jumping or picking up an object). Aiming and shooting is vital for game progression. In many cases, the playable character and his/her team will be stormed by enemies and there is no way for the player to survive without shooting. Surely enough, there are also calmer sections in the games, for example walking in the woods in G6 or crawling through the Vietnamese jungle in G2 in which the player will find obstacles along her/his path and s/he will be forced to use the jump button, or the game will not proceed. However, in these calmer sections the player is not at risk of dying, since those parts of the game are designed not to have enemies, providing the player with some “time-out” between a gunfight and the next one. The player is not at risk of dying. While this creates a sort of hierarchy in the games, where violent actions are more important and “vital”, than non-violent ones, the question also arises whether the use of frequently pressed and “essential” buttons to torture a prisoner could be considered an example of accident (treating something non-essential as essential) (Marlin, 2002). The player is not at risk in that section, the prisoner is tied to a chair. Just after the torture scene the player gets to know that there are enemies incoming, so s/he frees the prisoner who helps her/him escape, however this is not known during the torture scene, so the player is not “knowingly” at risk, yet the used buttons are still the triggers used during shootings (where the threat is clear, known, and immediate), the ones essential to survival.
6 Discussion and further research

6.1 Answering the Research Question

RQ asked through which persuasive techniques is propaganda manifest in war themed videogames. I believe that after conducting the analysis it is possible to give an answer. I argued that propaganda necessarily involves a persuasive element, although propaganda and persuasion differ with regards to their ultimate goal (i.e. in propaganda it is only one side which has something to gain from the persuasion act, while in traditional persuasion both sides have something to gain). I have then shown how propaganda and persuasion can be thought of as opposite of a spectrum, built on the foundation of rhetoric. In researching propaganda in videogames it therefore makes sense to adopt a theoretical framework explaining how games can be persuasive and convey meaning through rhetoric. Game rhetoric argues that games act in persuasive ways and convey meaning more generally through three persuasive dimensions: playworld, mechanics, and playformance (Frasca, 2007). I then looked at some principles, identified by scholars (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011) on which persuasive techniques are based, and how they overlap with propaganda (pp. 299-304), and successively identified a number of techniques described in the literature (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1937, Cole, 1988, Marlin 2002). I then proceeded in gathering the data by conducting a textual analysis of the selected videogames. I specifically conducted a game analysis, a particular type of textual analysis quite appropriate for conducting research involving videogames. By identifying the three persuasive dimensions described by Frasca (2007) and the element included in them, I then proceeded looking for certain indicators (i.e. the principles upon which persuasive techniques are based) which could help me establish whether persuasive techniques were in fact present in the selected videogames, and which ones were used in particular.

I discovered that persuasive techniques are extensively used in all three persuasive dimensions. The reader might recall the principles on which persuasive techniques are based (see 3.4). Those principles are valid also for the techniques that were found in the games.

Looking at the playworld dimension, I found that the following techniques are often used: name calling; false cause; card-stacking; testimonial (Marlin, 2002); stereotyping; labelling; appeal to authority; role referencing; martyrdom; atrocity propaganda; demonizing the enemy; double-speak; jingoism; beautiful people; appeal to fear (Cole, 1998). These techniques are expressed through dialogues, music, characters, objects, camera, and space. With regards to the mechanics, I
identified the following techniques: *classical conditioning; diktat; operant conditioning; martyrdom; oversimplification; pensée unique* (Cole, 1998). These techniques are expressed through model rules, grade rules, goal rules, and metarules. Finally, looking at the performance, I identified the following techniques: *operant conditioning* (Cole, 1998); *accident* (Marlin, 2002). These techniques are expressed through the haptic properties of the joystick (i.e. the button layout), and the use of buttons in specific sections.

### 6.1.2 The Techniques And Their Principles

It seems to me that the predisposition of the audience (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p. 299-300) is involved in the use of *stereotyping* (Cole, 1998). Stereotypes often involve qualities of group or individuals, which often appear self-evident to those resorting to or adopting the stereotype. It can be therefore said that stereotypes are often in line with existing opinions, beliefs, and disposition.

Source credibility (Jowett & O’Donnell, p. 300) is the principle upon which the *appeal to authority* and *role referencing* function (Cole, 1998). Clearly, the selected videogames are set in a virtual world, even if this virtual world aims at replicating the real one. The *appeal to authority* works also in this virtual world through the use of virtual versions of important and authoritative historical figures (e.g. John F. Kennedy). Even when the in-game authority is not referred to a historical figure, but simply to a companion character, these characters still act as authoritative figures. Firstly, because these virtual characters are part of the military, an important institution and whether this institution is revered or respected is a personal matter, but the inherent “weight” that it carries is undeniable. Secondly, the role they cover is not a random one. They often cover the role of a father, or a mentor, through the use of the *role referencing* technique, which also relies on the source credibility principle. I argue that the *appeal to authority* technique is manifest through these characters for either their “real-life historical weight”, their “virtual institutional weight”, or the role they cover in the narrative of the game in relation to the playable character, or a mix of the three. Likewise, the use of *testimonial* (Marlin, 2002) and *beautiful people* (Cole, 1998) techniques also relies on the same principle. The use of famous actors and personality to portray some of the characters carries a certain weight, mostly artistic in the case of the actors. They do not have any institutional role, therefore their source credibility does not come from having any sort of expertise in military activities, but from the fact that they are very familiar faces, and whatever messages they are conveying in the videogames will be more acceptable for the player. Furthermore, real life military advisor, working with the developers of the videogames, have given interviews and made
declaration of how similar the selected videogames are compared to the “real world”, acting as testimonial in such way. Their position as military professionals make them an important source of credibility.

The visual symbol of power principle (Jowett & O’Donnell, p. 302-303) is partially involved in jingoism (Cole, 1998). There are several instances in the videogames where American flags can be seen waving or where the player takes part in “virtual tour” of buildings of power (e.g. the Pentagon or the United Nations Office in Geneva). Card-stacking (Marlin, 2002), as used in the videogames, also relies on the visual symbol of power. The videogames often show impressive military and technological resources at the playable character and his side’s disposal. This has the effect of giving the best possible scenario for an idea, namely, that the West in powerful.

Language usage (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p. 303) is another principle central for many techniques manifest in the playworld. Language usage involves using verbal symbolization to create a sense of power, deify a cause or distorting and destroying the image of the enemy. It is the principle upon which name-calling (Marlin, 2002), labelling, and some instances of demonizing the enemy (Cole, 1998) are based. Through these techniques the propagandists is trying to use words, which carry powerful overtones and warp perceptions of the individual or group being named (name calling), using negative language to identify a group or person (labelling), or describing the enemy as a terrible entity to be feared (demonizing the enemy). I found extensive use of these three techniques in the selected videogames. Similarly, the double-speak (Cole, 1998) technique, which is also often present in the videogames, is based on the same language usage principle (in this case heavy military jargon). Language usage is also the principle on which the false cause (Marlin, 2002) relies. However, in the cases of false cause I found in the selected videogames, the technique did not manifest itself through language in the strict sense, but through the narrative of the game. Where false cause was found, it was involved in the representation of torture in particular. The torture act in the videogames is carried out as a necessary part of the narrative. The player cannot intervene, or avoid it, and through these interrogation/torture acts, the player always gains some critical information allowing the story in the videogame to continue. However, such a representation of torture might convince the players that torture is a normal and effective method to obtain information from a prisoner, since every time a torturous interrogation is conducted there is a pay-off for the player, while in real life it does not seem to be this way (Bell, 2008). In addition to this, there are also some obvious ethical implications in conducting torture, which the videogames do not seem to explore in ways that could promote self-reflection. Similarly to the false cause, also
the accident technique (Marlin, 2002) relies on the language usage principle, although not language in the strict sense, but mostly through rhetorical arguments mounted through the playformance dimension, with some essential buttons being used for non-essential tasks.

The arousal of emotion principle (Jowett & O’Donnel, 2011, p. 304) is at the base of the appeal to fear (Cole, 1998). The arousal of emotion principle works by associating propaganda with emotional language or presentations. The appeal to fear technique in the videogames is most commonly manifest through the portrayal of iconic locations being destroyed. The events represented and the locations affected by war in the games have the potential to strongly resonate with the players. They experience iconic locations such as New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, being destroyed, they have to stop the enemies from using chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, they experience what a terror attack looks like from the perspective of the perpetrators. Recent and relatively recent real world events such as the 9/11 attack in New York, the weapons of mass destruction controversy in Iraq and more recently in Syria, the wave of terror attacks in Europe might easily come to mind to players while playing the games. Such emotionally charged imagery is only enhanced by the fact that the player is actively engaging in events being represented on the screen. Certain manifestations of jingoism technique (Cole, 1998) are also based on the arousal of emotion principle, by presenting very emotionally charged and nationalistic words and dialogues. Similarly, the demonizing the enemy and atrocity propaganda technique (Cole, 1998) work based on the same principle in the videogames. The portrayal of prisoners being executed affects the player by arousing emotions (in this case negative. One can imagine feelings of rage, fear, or disgust), allowing the propaganda to have a greater effect on them. Another technique, which relies heavily on the arousal of emotion principle, is the martyr technique (Cole, 1998), both as manifest in the playworld and in the mechanics. It provides larger than life heroes to which the players can look up as examples of exemplar soldier, willing to sacrifice their lives for “the cause”.

The diklat, pensée unique, and operant conditioning (Cole, 1998) are particularly interesting for their mechanism in the selected videogames. They work based on the monopoly of the communication source principle (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p. 302). Diktat is expressed through the rules of the videogames: the rules tell the players exactly what actions to take, eliminating any other possible choices. The player has no control over the communication source, in this case the videogame, and its rules (i.e. mechanics), but s/he is subjected to them voluntarily, since while nobody is forcing the players to play the videogame, at its core, playing a videogame means being subjected to particular mechanics. The players can do things, reach goals, and progress in the
videogames solely based on what the mechanics allow and require. Furthermore the mechanics are not modifiable by the players. Many videogames exist, which allow their components (including the mechanics) to be modified. This is not the case for the selected games (at least not the single player campaign on which this thesis is focused). Not allowing for the modification of rules might makes it so that different rules may not even be imagined, reducing them to a form of pensée unique. Furthermore, the fact that no other rules can be imagined, and that the players are subjected to the mechanics solely given by the developers, subject the players to operant conditioning (i.e. learning through imitation), rendered even more effective through the playformance of the player (e.g. firing a gun through the press of the trigger button). This combination of mechanics provided solely by the developer causes actions, which can be expected to be quite complicated in real-life (e.g. shooting, climbing a wall, even torturing), to be reduced to very simple sequences of buttons. This is an example of oversimplification technique, which in this case also relies on the monopoly of the communication source.

The reward and punishment principle (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, pp. 301-302) is the foundation of the classical conditioning technique (Cole, 1998). Through the trophies and achievements that players obtain by completing certain challenges (e.g. shooting a certain numbers of enemies in the head), the players are being gratified for their actions and might be more easily persuaded of the propaganda content.

6.2 What Can These Games Tell Us About Propaganda?

A criticism, which I can expect to be made to my research, is that I am “reading too much into things”. While this may be true to a certain extent, it is just by virtue of this that I am able to draw some conclusions. Propaganda acts, by its very nature, in subtle and often concealed ways, so it is necessary to conduct a deep analysis if the goal is to discover its less obvious messages and mechanisms.

The reader might recall McClure’s article published on Gamasutra included in the introduction chapter of this thesis, in which the author poses a series of questions to be answered when assessing whether a game can be considered a propaganda piece. I believe that I answered questions 1, 2, 4, 10) 1) Does the game contain any explicit underlying message?; 2) Is the message expressed coherently throughout the game?; 3) Do the various elements which carry the message have to be the way they are?; 4) How are various groups and ideas presented?; 5) Who has commissioned the game?; 6) To what extent do they stand to gain from players absorbing the underlying messages?; 7) Does the
and 9, in a way that would confirm the fact that propaganda is included in the videogames. When it comes to question 3, the author refers to aspects which may be wrongly interpreted as propaganda but which are in fact dependent on technical limitations and genre conventions. I believe that this is not the case for the selected games, since messages in the game could have been expressed in a different way (e.g. designing the game in a way which awards the player for avoiding killing enemies and playing without being detected). Questions 5, 6, and 7 are more interesting. The selected games are all extremely successful commercial games developed and published by well-known and established American and Swedish studios and publishing companies. As such, the commissioners of the games would appear clear at a first glance. What is troubling however, is the role of military advisors in the development of the game. Mead (2013) writes about the synergy between the military and the video-game industry, which can be referred to as the military industrial complex: the military finances private gaming companies and offers technical expertise, and in exchange developers and game companies offer their technology and technical consulting. This dynamic makes it so, that establishing the ultimate authorship and commissioner of the game is not as clear-cut as it would appear at a first glance (to answer question 5). It is possible, therefore, to consider the selected games a piece of grey propaganda. Considering this and then looking at question 8, the answer appears clear: yes, the messages appear as a clear political speech in favour of a recognisable viewpoint, specifically affirming the superiority and righteousness of the military endeavours of the West.

Looking now at questions 6 and 7 (which according to McClure are to be answered when the commissioner of the propaganda is known), let us assume that the military is the commissioner of the videogames. To what extent would it stand to gain from players absorbing the underlying messages, and does the message make in this context? If we look at Ellul’s (1965) types of propaganda, and specifically sociological propaganda, that is, propaganda which originates in the media with the intent of shaping fashion, trends, values and ethics, with exporting them abroad as advertisement for national culture, and we look at the videogames in this light, what the propagandists have to gain is to portray the West (and particularly the USA and the UK, since those are the two nationalities the players most typically get to play as) as something superior to the rest of the world and something to which aspire, in a very similar way to how American movies and

message make sense in this context?); 8) If the commissioner is not accurately identifiable, does the message act as political speech in favour or against a recognisable viewpoint?; 9) Is the message expressed using time-honoured propaganda techniques?

11 Propaganda not coming from a clear source.
documentaries were working during the Cold War (Schwalbe, 2005). The use of popular media (in this case mostly printed) as a propaganda tool during the Cold War and beyond, is also confirmed by DiPaolo (2011), in his study on ethics and propaganda in super-hero comics. The author gives a considerable amount of examples of American and British comic books, movies and TV shows, which can be interpreted as propaganda (both conservative and liberal). It is therefore not so far-fetched to assume that propaganda in the selected videogames works in the same way.

However, these games have a considerable player base also coming from the USA and UK, so to what extent does the propagandist gain from having those particular “internal” players play the game? Looking again at Ellul’s type of propaganda we can think of the one contained in the videogames as one somewhere in between agitation, which aims at “activating” the receivers and making them participate in certain actions, and integration propaganda, which aims at conformity, adjustment, and acceptance of authority. While it may have the effect of encouraging some players to actively support their army (e.g. enlisting, giving donations, etc.), I suspect that its integration effects are much more significant. The games may have the effect of not making the players questions the actions being portrayed online by the virtual soldiers of the countries they come from, on the contrary it could make those same actions seem “cool” and “fun”, especially with regards to younger players, which might in the future “activate” themselves and support the army not just passively, a mechanism which resembles what Martin (1971) has described as subpropaganda.

6.3 So what?

I believe these findings to be important in today’s geopolitical context for a number of reasons. On the one hand we can look at the world’s current conflicts and their consequences, the exacerbations of tensions that were previously thought relegated to the Cold War, and the on-going terrorist activities, and realize it is not a soothing activity, with the certainty that these issues are sure to raise many questions and doubts in the public. On the other hand technology is progressing and becoming more sophisticated each day, and the video-game industry, while producing apparently trivial commodities, is at the fore-front of that progress, while enjoying extensive commercial success and reach at the same time. The combination of the geopolitical situation, the innovative nature of the videogame as a medium, its popularity and demographics is fertile ground for propaganda and exactly what a propagandist would wish for. American President Donald Trump recently declared his intention to increase USA military expenditures by at least 54 billion dollars (Shear, Steinhauer, 2017), while at the same time backtracking and reassessing his stance on NATO
after criticizing it heavily, declaring it «no longer obsolete» (Ackerman, 2017), and NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg himself urged European members to boost defence spending (Deutsche Welle, 2017), and this can be expected to happen considering the on-going terrorist attacks in Europe and the tensions with Russia at NATO eastern borders. While clearly not all the money being spent on defence goes towards recruiting new soldiers, at least a part of that can be expected to do so. If we then consider that 56% of players (see introduction) are part of the age group 0-35, we can see how this fits perfectly with the age restriction to joining the army for both the more permissive and stricter NATO members’ national armies age-wise (e.g. USA, UK, France, Italy, Spain).12 One thing to consider is that today’s warfare is in a stage that has been labelled “Fourth Generation Warfare”, a type of warfare characterized by being long term and including tactics such as terrorism, media manipulation, and asymmetric forces on the battlefield on one hand, while making extensive use of long range precision weapons and ICTs on the other hand (Simons, 2010). It is a type of warfare which can make use of videogames as a weapon/propaganda tool, while acting as a direct (as is the case of America’s Army) or indirect (as might be the case for non-explicitly army-commissioned games) recruitment tool, targeting a generation that more than any in the past is accustomed with modern technology, a familiarity which may very well prove extremely favourable for those armies fighting this modern type of tech-intense warfare.

While armies surely have a utility and we should not dismiss their role based on purely ideological reasons, it is also my belief that peace might be more easily achievable without an increase of military expenditures and belligerent propaganda. Whether the military is necessary to defend countries from war, or if, on the contrary, it is wars which are waged to sustain the military is a debate going beyond the scope of this research. However where there is war there is propaganda, and citizens are subjected to it. With this research I hoped to demonstrate that propaganda goes beyond its traditional (books, pamphlets, speeches) and its relatively recent (movie, radio, photo) forms, reaching into the most recent popular and digital media, of which commercial videogames are part. It is therefore important to point out when and where propaganda is present in its most recent manifestations in order to identify it, observe it critically, and question it.

12 http://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/join-the-military-basic-eligibility.html
http://www.reclutamiento.defensa.gob.es/accesible/las-fuerzas-armadas.html
http://www.esercito.difesa.it/concorsi-e-arrouolamenti/percorso/pagine/et%C3%A0.aspx
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Looking back at the aims of my thesis, I stated how I intended to speak to both the players and the non-players, providing the former with ways in which they could reassess and revaluate the content they are subjected to when playing, while stimulating the latter to think about the opportunity for videogames as a platform for persuasion and propaganda. I believe I was able to reach my objective. I hope that the player reader after going through this thesis will have acknowledged just how pervasive and subtle can the propaganda included in the videogames be, and s/he will hopefully be able to recognize it in the future in order to question it and maybe counteract it. I also think I was able to convince the non-player reader about the videogame’s potential to convey persuasive messages and propaganda. At the same time I wanted to contribute to both the field of Game Studies and Media Studies with a research on propaganda in videogames, and while some authors do acknowledge the possibility for propaganda in videogames (either explicitly or implicitly) I was not able to find an in-depth study on the topic. I hope I was able to successfully provide one.

6.4 Limitations of the study and further questions

This study (as any study) is partial and has certain limitations. First and foremost, the selection of games is limited. Choosing 10 games was an arbitrary decision mostly based on time. Considering the fact that I decided to analyse just one genre of game (First Person Shooters), just the most popular titles of two franchises, and that limited resources forced me to play on just two platforms, I must admit that an extensive number of games where ignored, namely the less popular and the vast library of games available for PC. On one hand, I believe that focusing on the most popular and played games of the genre is justifiable by the fact that they are clearly the ones reaching more players who are then subjected to their messages. On the other hand, doing so might give the idea that all war games, apart from being games, are also a pro-war propaganda device, while fairly popular war themed videogames have been developed with the explicit intent of conveying an anti-war and pacifist message, for example This War of Mine (11 bit studios, 2014) or Spec Ops: the Line (Yager Development, 2012). Secondly, the methods I chose to implement are highly subjective and consist mainly in interpretation by the researcher. I do believe however that they were the most suitable to answer my research question, and I believe to have been open about the issues regarding
the choice of method for data gathering and analysis, and that my results can be replicated following the same methods and criteria.

Propaganda has been studied extensively in the past, but propaganda working in the realm of videogames is still understudied. Some ways in which my research could be complemented would be to conduct a content analysis of a number of games to see exactly how many times is propaganda present in order to quantify it and visualize it better. Furthermore, my research dealt with how propaganda is presented and what it is saying, but not with how it is perceived by the players. Therefore conducting a study involving interviews, focus groups, or surveys could give some interesting insight on how, and if, players are conscious of being subjected to propaganda and if so, what do they think of it and how they interpret it.

I have touched upon the relationship between game developers and the military, but a more in-depth study would be required to actually know to which degree do military advisors have a say in what is being represented and how, and understand more about the dynamics of the military-industrial complex in the development of commercial videogames. Interesting would be as well to conduct a study involving new recruits, trying to understand if, and if yes to which degree, have military videogame influenced them in their decision to join the army. This would provide us with insight with regards to the capacity of the propaganda included in games to provoke activation and not only integration.

Lastly, while videogames developed in the Middle-East have been studied, it would be interesting to analyse Russian war videogames. Considering that Russia is often portrayed as the enemy, a research on war videogames developed in Russia could give us insight whether this characterization is reciprocal (i.e. the West as the enemy), or if themes explored in games developed in that region are different.
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Ludography

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Image Sources


Fig. 3 taken from: Naro659 (2013), Call of Duty Black Ops II : Yemeni Militia Battlechatter voices, Youtube, screenshot. Available from: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XR2Q9fDLmA&user=Naro659 (accessed 5 May 2017).


Appendix 1

Full name of the analysed videogames.

G1) Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (COD:MW2) (Activision Blizzard; Infinity Ward, 2009);
G2) Call of Duty: Black Ops (COD:BO) (Activision Blizzard; Treyarch, 2010);
G3) Battlefield 3 (BF3) (Electronic Arts; DICE, 2011);
G4) Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (COD:MW3) (Activision Blizzard; Infinity Ward, 2011);
G5) Call of Duty: Black Ops 2 (COD:BO2) (Activision Blizzard; Treyarch, 2012);
G6) Call of Duty: Ghosts (COD:G) (Activision Blizzard; Infinity Ward, 2013);
G7) Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare (COD:AW) (Activision Blizzard; Sledgehammer, 2014);
G8) Call of Duty: Black Ops 3 (COD:BO3) (Activision Blizzard; Treyarch, 2015);
G9) Battlefield 1 (BF1) (Electronic Arts; Dice, 2016);
Appendix 2

List of propaganda techniques used as indicators of propaganda. Techniques identified in the videogames are highlighted and underscored.

- **Deleted agent of the passive** - rephrasing a sentence from active to passive and deleting the subject, used for obscuring responsibility.
- **Experiencer** deletion - using verbs such as “believe”, “know”, “feel”, “sense”, “touch”, etc. without specifying who is experiencing something (e.g. “it is known that pizza is the best food in the world” – who is saying this? A representative of the pizzerias lobby?). The technique works both ways as well. If I say “an expert believes that pizza is the best food in the world”, I’m not specifying if that expert is hypothetical pizza aficionado “Jeff” or some chef/gourmet/nutritionist/doctor).
- **Deletion of qualifying performatives** - having an authority give a statement on a certain issue, but avoiding reporting his full sentence which might indicate partial endorsement (e.g. a politician saying «I feel immigration might be an issue», reported as «politician says immigration is an issue»).
- **Naming** - giving another name to a certain act attaching to it favourable or unfavourable overtones (e.g. “friendly fire”, “peace keeping operation”, “surgical strikes”, etc.)
- **Name calling** - using words like “racist”, “sexist”, traitor”, “terrorist”, “homeland”, “communist”, “fascist”, etc., which carry powerful overtones and cause perceptions of the individual named is such way to be warped.
- **Glittering generality** - associating something with a “virtue word” (which are often ambiguous by nature) to make it acceptable and approvable without examining the evidence (e.g. an authoritarian regime which claims to be a democracy).
- **Transfer** - literally transferring the authority, sanction, and prestige of something respected and revered over to something else in order to make the latter acceptable, or, on the contrary, transferring some negative aspects of something onto something else in order to discredit it (e.g. a politician being photographed in front of the national flag, or being seen using public transport of cycling).
- **Testimonial** - having some respected or hated person either endorsing or rejecting an idea or program. It is essentially an appeal to authority, which encourages those subjected to propaganda not to question what is being said.
- **Plain folks** - when the propagandist promotes his ideology as being good because it comes “from the people”. It is put into action by exploiting the typical qualities of a certain population (e.g. a Russian politician might show her/himself while playing hockey in Russia), and by “speaking like the people” (i.e. avoiding political and technical jargon).
- **Card-stacking** - the selection and use of facts and falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or the worst possible case for an idea, program, person or product (e.g. “bombing” the audience with one-sided data, statistics and opinions on a certain issue on a talk-show).
- **Band wagon** - the attempt to persuade the public that “everybody” (or all of us) is doing something (e.g. a rally might give the impression that lots of people are involved and worry about a certain issue, but it may very well be a single isolated rally exploited by the propagandist to convey a message).
- **Bold assertions** - dubious claims presented as “unquestionable”, “undeniable”, or “known by everybody”.
- **Selective omission** - avoiding to tell certain facts or circumstances connected with an event, causing those subjected to the propaganda to form a false impression.
• *Quoting out of context* - using selected and isolated quotations from somebody to either discredit her/him or making her/him appear in a good light.

• *Twisting and distortion* - avoiding telling the circumstances in which something was said or done.

• *Meshing facts with opinion* - concealing controversial opinions with apparent facts (e.g. the phrase “Sweden is being invaded by immigrants”, involves the value judgment immigrants – it is not specified whether they are refugees, illegal immigrants, European immigrants, legal immigrants – as well as a second value judgment: the fact that Sweden is being “invaded”).

• *Ad hominem argument* - reject or accept something being done or said by somebody on the base of who they are (e.g. rejecting a good policy advocated by a notoriously bad politician and vice-versa).

• *False cause* - assuming that A caused B, solely on the base that A happened before B.

• *Hasty generalization* - drawing conclusions on a whole class of people based on stereotypes or experience with a restricted number of people (e.g. all Italians eat pasta, and all Spaniards are loud).

• *Ignoring the logical force and direction of an argument* - building a logical and coherent, or passionate and emotional, argument and drawing deceptive but convincing (based on the argument) conclusions.

• *Begging the question* - arguing with somebody in a way that presupposes what is being argued about (e.g. an theist believes God exists because the Bible says so and it was inspired by God, while an atheist does not exist because the Bible was written by men).

• *False analogy* - looking for similarity between different events, while disregarding the differences (e.g. the rise of right-wing populism in Europe recalls the rise of Fascism in the XX century – it may be true or not, but the message might be used for propaganda purposes by those opposing those parties).

• *Accident* - taking something that is nonessential and treating it as essential (i.e. assuming that by building walls, it may be possible to stop immigration).

(Marlin, 2002, pp. 100-113)

• *Ad nauseam* - the constant and tireless repetition of an idea, which may in the end be accepted as the truth.

• *Appeal to fear* - exploiting the fear and anxieties of a population to feed them a certain message.

• *Appeal to authority* – the use of citing or referring to important and influential figures to support an idea, course of action, or argument.

• *Beautiful people* - having famous (and attractive) people dealing with or endorsing a certain idea, product, or action. Those subjected to the message will believe that they too will achieve success if they follow what is being suggested. It as a device frequently used in advertising.

• *Big Lie* - adopting a large untruth as justification for a subsequent action is an extension of the original untruth (e.g. nazification of Germany after WWI as a consequence of the supposed “stab in the back” to Germany).

• *Demonizing the enemy* - dehumanizing the enemy.

• *Oversimplification* - using generalities to provide simple answers to complex problems.

• *Obfuscation* - using vague generalities in order for the audience to make up its own interpretations, while not judging the ideas presented.

• *Atrocity propaganda* - the process of vilifying the enemy as perpetrators of actions against innocent people in violation of accepted rules of war.
• **White, grey, black propaganda** - respectively the dissemination of truth, a mix selective truth and disinformation, and outright lies.

• **Double-speak** - saying a great deal without saying anything substantive, or saying something substantive in such jargonesque and complicated manner that the listener assumes s/he does not understand because of her/his own ignorance.

• **Jingoism** - aggressive and militaristic nationalism or patriotism.

• **Labelling** - applying a descriptive word or phrase to a person or group by which the person or group is negatively categorized, characterized, or stereotyped.

• **Martyrdom** - choosing suffering or death rather than giving up faith or principles, providing in such way a “larger than life” hero figure.

• **Multiple assertions** - messages that include several positive or affirmative declarations about the propagandist’s side, and negatives about the propagandist’s enemy.

• **Scapegoating** - blaming a person or group for a problem, thus distracting from the actual responsible and the measures necessary to solve said problem.

• **Role referencing** - the process by which propagandists or their agents are presented as filling roles analogous to those of parents, casting themselves as role models for those subjected to propaganda undergoing formative experiences.

• **Sensory perception manipulation** - the control and manipulation by part of the propagandist of the sensory perception of those subjected to propaganda. It is a very common technique in propaganda movies and music (e.g. a dark and gloomy landscape when showing enemy troops advancing or a cheering and lively music during a scene of common people back home).

• **Stereotyping** – generically describing a certain type of person or group of people.

• **Unconscious bias** - bias of which an individual is unaware.

• **Diktat** - simplifying the decision making process by using images and words to tell the audience exactly what actions to take, eliminating any other possible choices.

• **Operant conditioning** - learning through imitation.

• **Classical conditioning** - if A is always present when B is present, and B causes a reaction (either positive or negative), the same reaction will successively be experienced when in presence of A without B (Pavlovian conditioning).

• **Pensée unique** - the reduction of a discussion by simplifying its components by using simplifying arguments.

(Cole, 1998).