Gaming Citizenship: Video Games as Lessons in Civic Life

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Citizenship is a relationship between strangers who may have little in common beyond a shared geopolitical space. The strength of a citizenry is dependent, in part, on individuals who are able to envision the larger society, imagine themselves as part of it, and act on that sense of imagined connectedness. Media have long been resources for developing that imagination. This essay looks at the media format of video games to understand how the proceduralism in digital technology can function rhetorically by mimicking rituals of civic life and, in the process, commenting on those rituals. Video games use a combination of fictive worlds and concrete rules to argue for what it means to be a good citizen.

Keywords: Citizenship, Fictive Worlds, Imagination, Procedural Rhetoric, Video Games

The identity of citizen is both a status conferred by the state and a vision of self that must be adopted and acted on by members of that state in order that a society might sustain itself. The process of adopting the identity requires the ability to imagine oneself as a member of a community of individuals among whom there may be very little in common beyond a shared location. At its core, according to Lauren Berlant, "citizenship is a relation among strangers who learn to feel it as a common identity based on shared historical, legal, or familial connection to a geopolitical space." Thomas Bridges depicts the process of seeing oneself as connected to a larger community that extends beyond familial, ethnic, or religious ties as an "extraordinary" act, without which "a liberal democracy cannot be established, let alone flourish." It is the shared identity of citizen that allows a community to act as a body politic and not simply as a collection of autonomous individuals being ruled by a common legislative and judicial system. May Joseph describes citizenship as a "network of performed affiliations private and public, formal and informal through which the neurons of the state are activated with ideas of a polity." The metaphor of citizenship as networked seems fitting at a time when scholars argue that many young people are forgoing traditional routes of civic engagement, such as voting or pro-

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¹ Lauren Berlant, "Citizenship," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, eds. Burgett, Bruce, and Glenn Hendler (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 37.

² Thomas Bridges, *The Culture of Citizenship: Inventing Postmodern Civic Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 19-20.

³ May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

tests, in favor of online political participation through sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.⁴ These sites, and other forms of digital technology, act as a resource for disparate individuals to develop a vision of the existence and will of the body politic.

The identity of citizen is strengthened through the ability to imagine the body politic and orient oneself toward citizenship as a mode of engagement within that body. Much of the imagined connection that makes up a citizenry is maintained through shared actions and rituals, which are portrayed as central to the narrative of moving the community forward. In other words, "we might think of citizenship as performed labor that enables and sustains locality; it helps resurrect the embodied history through which citizens construct their sense of place." Robert Asen, in his discourse theory of citizenship, proposes that "rather than asking what counts as citizenship, we should ask: how do people enact citizenship? Reorienting our framework from a question of what to a question of how usefully redirects our attention from acts to action. Inquiring into the how of citizenship recognizes citizenship as a process." Interactions with technology designed for political engagement may be usefully read through this lens. Technology is not the "what" of citizenship. It does not create individuals as citizen-subjects. Instead, it provides a potential tool for the "how." The design of technology can socialize users to a particular mode of engagement by expanding users' abilities to imagine the larger citizenry and guiding users through a systematic process of civic participation.

This should not be confused with an argument that all technology is enacting a mode of citizenship, any more than one might argue that all engagements with the public sphere reinforce citizenship. Asen argues that individuals do not always act as citizens; citizenship is only one of the identities a person may occupy at any given time. Citizenship is one of many identities that individuals may enact at any given time, and what rhetorical analysis offers us is a chance to explore the persuasive possibilities available when that potential is tapped through digital technology. Citizenship is one of many "modes of engagement," or ways of approaching our interactions with the world. The "multiplicity makes citizenship possible by situating it as something one can take up, rather than as a condition that is always or never present." He further explains that conceiving citizenship as a modality allows us to loosen our understanding of the way it is practiced. Studying citizenship this way requires a recognition that "modes of engagement are not manifest only at certain prescribed times; modes do not arise at regular intervals."8 The identity does not only come forward in traditional civic rituals. It can arise in a variety of places. The mode of citizenship learned through the rituals mimicked and procedures invoked by certain digital technologies flows into one's broader identity of citizenship, which is used to engage the public sphere.

The combination of narrative and rule-based procedures found in one such digital technology, video games, make the format a unique rhetorical tool for imagining oneself as citizen and acting out that imagination. The rhetoric of video games, according to

⁴ Brian D. Loader, Ariadne Vromen, and Michael A. Xenos, "The Networked Young Citizen: Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 2 (2014): 143.

⁵ Ross Louis, "Reclaiming a Citizenship Site: Performing New Orleans in the Superdome," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2009): 282.

⁶ Robert Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 2 (2004): 190.

⁷ Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," 196.

⁸ Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," 195.

Jesper Juul, is a combination of real rules and fictional worlds. ⁹ The visuals (in terms of basic images, symbols related to scoring, and written text), sound effects, and physical interactions through the game controllers, all combine to help players to imagine a world separate from their own, and the rules socialize the players to the appropriate conduct in that world. Video games use a persuasive format Ian Bogost has described as procedural rhetoric, which bears a strong resemblance to James L. Hoban's discussion of rhetorical rituals. 10 In most cases, the rules that govern the system are reinforced repeatedly until the player learns them as procedures for navigating the world of the game. As Bogost explains, these procedures "define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operation of systems, from mechanical systems like engines to organizational systems like high schools to conceptual systems like religious faith." The connection between narrative elements, such as a character's back story, and procedure gives the game a ritualistic quality. Hoban describes rhetorical rituals as "both instrumental and consummatory." In other words, "a fully realized rhetorical ritual merges a subjective experience with an objective display." ¹³ In this case, the objective rules of the game are combined with a fictionalized version of a subjective experience. Games persuade by building a system and using elements of narrative to explain the rewards players receive for navigating that system in a particular way. When the rules and the fiction are both constructed around the mimicking of civic rituals, they work to make arguments about the player's real life engagement with those rituals.

The true rhetorical persuasiveness of the system comes with repeated exposure. Eventually, the gaming process itself becomes a ritual, and the player responds "in a dialectical manner such that their observable reactions mirror their personal and inner feelings." Over time, engaging a procedure begins to impact ways of thinking. In other words:

When we make video games, we construct simulated worlds in which different rules apply. To play games involves taking on roles in those worlds, making decisions within the constraints they impose, and then forming judgments about living in them. Video games can synthesize the raw materials of civil life and help us pose the fundamental political question: What should be the rules by which we live?¹⁵

According to Lev Manovich, this is a tactic used by digital technology in general; users are encouraged to follow someone else's logic and mistake it for their own. ¹⁶ This is not to say that all players will accept, or even process, all the rhetoric present within a game. Aspects of the narrative may be ignored, and the rules may be learned by rote memorization without absorbing the ideologies attached to them. With that said, in order

⁹ Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011). 1.

¹⁰ Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 64; James L. Hoban, Jr., "Rhetorical Rituals of Rebirth," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 3 (1980): 275-288.

¹¹ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 3.

¹² Hoban, "Rhetorical Rituals of Rebirth," 276.

¹³ Hoban, "Rhetorical Rituals of Rebirth," 275.

¹⁴ Hoban, "Rhetorical Rituals of Rebirth," 281.

¹⁵ Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 61.

¹⁶ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 74.

to play a game one must engage at some level with the rules and procedures. That engagement makes it difficult for anyone to escape the ideology of the game entirely. The fictive world of video games serves as a resource for imagining a larger community and understanding ones connections to it. Repeatedly mimicking civic rituals, such as military service or campaigning for public office, has a suasive impact on player's interpretation of those activities in real life. This functions rhetorically to not only develop citizenship as a mode of engagement, but to make larger normative claims about the role a good citizen plays in the foundation of a good society.

Games and Rhetorical Modes of Citizenship

Video games offer a site for studying the way digital technology can evoke citizenship and socialize this mode of engagement. Games rely heavily on a combination of actions and fictive worlds to make arguments. Players learn which actions are needed to earn points, complete a quest, or rise to the next level of the game. Those actions are attached to elements of the fictive world, both simple and complicated, that help the players to give them meaning. Henry Jenkins argues that the creators of game narratives "want to tap the emotional residue of previous narrative experiences. Often, they depend on our familiarity with the roles and goals of genre entertainment to orient us to the action, and in many cases, game designers want to create a series of narrative experiences for the player."¹⁷ These narrative experiences have a procedural quality that Bogost has argued is rhetorical in nature. 18 He states that "procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular." Procedure is the place where the games established fiction and the player's actions overlap giving the game a suasive value. In these actions, we find the potential for games to mimic, nurture, and reinforce modes of citizenship. So much of one's ability to occupy the role of citizen comes from the corresponding ability to envision the larger community. With video games, fictive worlds have the capacity to expand the players' imaginations of the communities in which they are situated.

Video games have the ability to tackle one of the primary obstacles to developing the citizenship identity by utilizing fictive worlds to help players imagine a larger community and see their relationship to it. This essay looks at three specific civic rituals and considers examples of how those civic rituals might be evoked in the gaming format. The first civic ritual considered is military service. R. Claire Snyder has argued that military ritual evokes the trope of the citizen-soldier, such that even those who experience anxiety over actions of the state are able to reinforce their patriotism and citizen identity through allegiance to this trope. While many games make use of army and soldier narratives—notable among that list is *Call of Duty* and *Halo*—few have so completely embraced the ritual of military service in the way that one sees in the *America's Army* game franchise. *America's Army* simulates military training drills and combat missions, as a means of

¹⁷ Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, Game*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, 188-130 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 119.

¹⁸ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 3.

¹⁹ Bogost, Persuasive Games, 3.

²⁰ R. Claire Snyder, Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republic Tradition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 128.

teaching civilians military values. The games emphasize the elimination of individual agency in favor of a focus on what is good for the whole. The fictive experience of the civic duty of service encourages the development of patriotism and nationalistic values, and the larger reinforcement of military values within the procedures of the game argues for a way of engaging larger public conversations about the nature and goals of war. *America's Army* offers a strong example of the way civic identity can be reinforced when narrative and ritual are interwoven in the procedures of a game.

The second civic ritual considered is the presidential election process. Bruce Gronbeck has argued that far beyond choosing leaders or passing a ballot measure, the function of campaigns and voting is to offer individuals a place to envision themselves as citizens and act on that vision. The presidential election process, when considered as civic ritual, has a strong consummatory function. This essay considers three presidential election simulation games: Win the White House, The Race for the White House, and Vote!!! All of these election games use identity play to connect the individual with a larger vision of the polity and to expand notions of civic engagement beyond the singular act of voting. However, each game approaches the civic ritual of elections from a slightly different perspective. What we learn from these case studies is that the integration of ritualized procedures and narrative does not produce a singular argument. Much like other rhetorical forms, game designers may use similar rhetorical techniques to produce vastly different arguments about the nature of citizenship.

The final set of games considered in this essay moves the focus from civic ritual to daily civic life by focusing on citizen identity in times of crisis. To explore this, we look to apocalyptic games from the popular *Fallout* franchise. Citizenship is often defined by participation within government structures. The *Fallout* series offers a vision of what being a good citizen might look like if there were little-to-no governing entities to dictate right and wrong. While the other games considered in this paper mimic traditional civic rituals, this final game offers an example of the way games can greatly expand our ability to imagine community beyond the bounds of government structures. The *Fallout* series posits connectedness as part of a system of morals that are coded into the procedures of the games. In this case, we see civic life mimicked through the integration of procedures and narratives that focus on relatedness and community bond.

The games discussed here demonstrate some of the ways that video games can encourage modes of engagement that develop into a player's imagination of citizenship. What is offered here is not an exhaustive list of games, categories of games, or persuasive tactics within games. Instead, the case studies provide examples of the ways in which procedure and fictive world can work together to mimic civic rituals or civic life in a way that makes arguments about how one engages those rituals in real life. Reading that potential offers a directive for how we might use rhetorical criticism to engage the broader potentials of digital technology. When considering the way that games can rhetorically orient the player toward citizenship as a mode of engagement, the perspective communicated by the design is critical. What distinguishes the games analyzed in this essay is the perspective from which they were produced. Two games may use the same mechanic—press Button A to make the character jump—but the procedures and fictive worlds that situate the mechanic allow the two games to make very different arguments. It is the ca-

²¹ Bruce E. Gronbeck, "The Functions of Presidential Campaigning," *Communications Monographs* 45, no. 4 (1978): 270.

pacity of digital technology in general, and games in particular, to make these arguments that is worthy of further consideration. The community imagined in these fictive worlds, and the orientation encouraged toward that community, makes up a portion of the discourse of citizenship that goes into everyday engagement with the public sphere.

America's Army: Using Rhetorical Ritual to Develop Virtual Citizen-Soldiers

America's Army, conceived as a public relations and recruitment tool for the United States Army, is a video game franchise that simulates the experience of being a member of the armed forces.²² The first version was released as a computer game in 2002, and in the ten years that followed there have been twenty-six new editions of the game. ²³ On its face, it is a recruitment tool disguised as an example of the popular first person shooter genre of gaming. In America's Army, players learn military procedures and values, experience camaraderie with a unit, and see very little of the harsh realities of military life.²⁴ In terms of recruiting, the game seems to be effective. One survey found that for high schoolers who identified as pro-military, 30% credited America's Army with the attitude. 25 Henry Jenkins points out that *America's Army* is more than a recruitment tool; it is a form of branding designed to persuade the general public of the positive nature of the military's methods and missions. 26 Research shows that even for players who do not choose to enlist, experiencing the game leads them to be more patriotic and to identify strongly with nationalistic values.²⁷ Citizenship requires that members of a community are able to envision themselves as connected to each other and to the goals undertaken by the group. In this game, the rhetorical rituals of training and missions connect the players both to each other and the subjective values espoused by the US Army. The game connects players to the daily actions of the military, not just to convince them to enlist, but to re-frame the violence that takes place in war as but a small part of a larger patriotic mis-

Many games in the first person shooter genre use the subject position of the soldier, but *America's Army* is designed from top to bottom to encourage the player to take on that position as a civic ritual of US citizenship. This parallels what Asen describes as citizenship as a mode of engagement, where "representing does not proceed in a valueneutral and transparent manner, but invokes the social values, beliefs, and interests of participants in public discourse. Representations work with the symbolic materials of specific cultures." By drawing on both cultural and technical knowledge of the military,

²² The analysis in this section is based on the third edition of *America's Army*, which was released in 2008. At the time of writing, *America's Army 4* is currently in beta, so this analysis stems from the most recent and fully developed version of the game.

²³ Marcus Schulzke, "Rethinking Military Gaming: *America's Army* and its Critics," *Games and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2013): 60.

²⁴ Alexander R. Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming," *Game Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): http://www.gamestudies.org/0401/galloway/; Brian Kennedy, "Uncle Sam Wants You (to Play This Game)," *New York Times*, July 11, 2002, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/11/technology/uncle-sam-wants-you-to-play-thisgame.html.

²⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Makes Culture Where Old and New Makes Culture Culture*.

²⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 77.

²⁶ Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 74.

²⁷ Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 76.

²⁸ Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," 193.

America's Army immerses players in an evocative representation of the fictive world of battle, in order that those players might imagine themselves as connected to that world even if they never choose to participate in it. The values learned here, and the connection built to the armed forces, become part of how the player engages with political discussions and decisions in public life.

Ideologically, each aspect of America's Army is designed to generate trust in military procedure and a belief that war is about community and camaraderie. The following section focuses on two parts of the game which go into making these arguments. First, there is the training portion of the game. Much of the game is spent learning military protocol and going through training drills. The player must learn the system and protocols before engaging in the battle and mission portions of the game. A lot of video games will allow the player to skip over instruction at the beginning. In America's Army, training is not considered merely a set of instructions to help one play the game. Training is the game. Roger Stahl has argued that in much the same way that physical boot camps produce citizen-soldiers, military simulations can create citizen-soldiers who take this identity into their deliberations in the public sphere.²⁹ With this simulation, mimicking the ritual of training reinforces the military message that combat is not random violence, it is ordered and precise. The player, through the training in the game, is oriented as a citizen soldier to view military action through this lens. Second, there is the way protocols learned during training translate to the missions. New players play in teams with more proficient players who are better at following the protocol of the game. The structure of the game places a strong emphasis on not holding back ones' team. Jeff Parker Knight, in his writing on the performative function of military training, argues that a heavy emphasis on group responsibility is a component of the military's overall indoctrination regarding conformity.³⁰ The game uses military tactics of punishing everyone for one soldier's failure to emphasize the need to be a good member of the system. As Knight explains, the conformity that is drilled into soldiers comes with the message that individual agency is dangerous and must be sacrificed for the good of the larger group. 31 The result is a strong argument about not just what it means to be a good soldier, but what it means to be a good citizen during a time of war.

A central focus in the *America's Army* games is military combat training, which works to teach the player both the protocol and the values involved in being a member of the armed forces. In most first person shooter games, the player training takes place as a part of the actual combat of the game or in brief instructions at the beginning of the game. By contrast, in *America's Army* the game explicitly has the players start off as though they were actually new to the army. We players start the game at the lowest possible rank: the recruit. In the training phase, the player is drilled repeatedly to develop a sense of both the game procedures and their corollary military procedures. Bogost argues that in gaming, "procedural representation takes a different form than written or spoken representation. Procedural representation explains processes with other processes. Procedural

²⁹ Roger Stahl, "Have You Played the War on Terror?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 2 (2006): 125.

³⁰ Jeff Parker Knight, "Literature as Equipment for Killing: Performance as Rhetoric in Military Training Camps," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1990): 159.

³¹ Knight, "Literature as Equipment for Killing," 160.

³² The exception being if the player uses cheat codes to unlock the ability to play the game in advanced mode, it is possible to skip over the training.

representation is a form of symbolic expression that uses processes rather than language."³³ The procedures a player has to follow to achieve the larger objective of the game function as a larger commentary about the right and wrong way to accomplish a task. In this case, by starting at the lowest possible rank, the player learns the Army's chain of command, training programs, and the corresponding core values.

In skills training, much like real life basic training, tasks are related to core Army values. In most games, the player earns points and advances levels by making kills, defeating higher level bosses, or completing quests. In America's Army, the player earns points by demonstrating skills in seven categories, each represented by a letter in the acronym "LDRSHIP." In the game, each letter is explained to the player over the course of training, the player is provided with examples of what this would mean in-game, and given a chance to practice the skills needed to achieve in each category. The first category is Loyalty. In game, this equates to using teamwork, sticking together, and operating as a unit. The second category is Duty; in game this equates to completing mission objectives and treating the mission as a first priority. The third category is Respect; in game this equates to respecting one's fellow soldiers and following the plan. The fourth category is Selfless Service; in game this equates to treating injured soldiers and leaving no man behind. The fifth category is Honor; in game this is the average of all other values. When the player excels in all other categories, it translates into Honor points. The sixth category is Integrity; this is the only category from which a player can both gain and lose points. It focuses on the player's understanding of the Rules of Engagement. The player can lose points from this category through friendly fire, damaging army equipment, and harming incapacitated enemy soldiers. Finally, the last category is Personal Courage; in game this is about one's ability to engage the enemy and take calculated risks. These categories give structure to the training portion of the game, and work to communicate the notion that achievement in the game is about embodying these core values. Throughout game play, points are awarded and players advance by succeeding in these different categories. Even if players do not complete their mission, they can still gain experience and achievements that increase their rank as a soldier. This is critical, because "the U.S. Department of Defense wanted to use the game not simply to simulate military processes but also to inculcate values."³⁴ The rhetorical argument that players leave with is that the military is not training soldiers to fight and kill; it is training them to be leaders who act with honor and courage.

One powerful way to encourage citizenship as a mode of engagement is to create a system where players need to learn values and procedures from one another in order to succeed. In *America's Army*, during actual missions players have to use each and every skill that they learn in the training sessions. This makes it fairly difficult, even for players that are familiar with first person shooter games, to jump right into an actual match with veteran *America's Army* players. There are quite a few movement buttons and strategies that one has to remember alongside remembering what actions should be taken in order to rack up more points for moving up the ranks. It is clear that the players have to understand quite a bit about the Army's chain of command, acronyms, structure, and weapons in order to feel comfortable navigating the game. People that will succeed at this game feel comfortable in the Army setting and recognize the need to work cooperatively. The

³³ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 9.

³⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 77.

most difficult part of this game is having to train both in the designated "training" singleplayer parts of the game and by trial and error in the actual missions. It is important to note that while some multiplayer games will have special sections for beginners, in America's Army there are no designated servers for new players, so a player must rank up alongside more seasoned players within the multiplayer part of the game. This means that players end up dying a lot, and may feel like they are not contributing very much to their team. The process uses peer pressure to encourage players to follow the system as it has been designated in the game: "the military had built the game to get young people excited about military service. They had created something more—a place where civilians and service folk could discuss the serious experience of real-life war."³⁵ Rules of engagement specifically prohibit harassment or any kind of bad-mouthing in the game, but a player cannot help but feel as though they are letting their team down as a beginner. One of the strongest motivators within this game, for someone who is not very knowledgeable about the military, weapons, or the Army specifically, was not to gain a more advanced rank for the character, but to try to help out the team and not feel like dead weight within the missions. One of the writers on this project felt that the most fulfilling actions she completed within the individual missions with online teammates were related to being a medic. Through simply sticking by teammates and healing them when appropriate, even if a player was fairly useless as a marksman, one could still actually contribute to the team.

Some first-person shooters allow, and even reward, players turning on their team. In contrast, in *America's Army*, "players are never to be rewarded for killing virtual American soldiers. Each player sees the members of his or her own team as American and the opposing team members as enemies. Fragging teammates would be grounds for immediate expulsion from the game. On the other hand, the game was designed to reward players with increases in rank and access to more advanced missions when they respect the military code of conduct." Killing is simply a thing that must be done to complete a mission. The real goal is to develop oneself as part of a team. This team focus is what identifies the rhetoric of *America's Army* as oriented towards the development of a mode of citizenship.

America's Army repeatedly reinforces the message that being a good soldier includes an unquestioning allegiance to authority. This corresponds to the larger way that the Army would like citizens to interact with their operations. In this fictive world, a good citizen defends the nation against any threat, without consideration of the larger political context in which the defense takes place. Much has been written about the role of killing within America's Army. Typically, in a first person shooter, players receive their primary points for killing the enemy. In this game, players receive more points for training, skill proficiency, and team work. Players identify most strongly with their team, and the enemy is relatively faceless. In America's Army "there is no reasonable explanation of enemy behavior, it is merely evil and therefore deserving of hostility." Missions are divorced from their political context and the reward comes from simply completing service. Robertson Allen has argued that the effect of the "unreal enemy" in the game is to

³⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 215.

³⁶ Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 77.

³⁷ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 78.

³⁸ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 79.

reinforce the specter in American culture of the outside force constantly threatening our safety. This depiction of duty, honor, and singular global political truth as a desirable worldview. This depiction of the enemy as simply evil and other is seen in other war games as well. Aaron Hess notes in his analysis of the World War II game *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, that the Japanese enemy is depicted as crafty and evil to the point of being inhuman. The unreal and evil enemy in these games further cements the values and rightness of the mission. Engaged citizenship is not about diplomacy, debate, or discussion. Instead, it is about unflinching and unfailing service.

While immersed in the fictive world of the game, *America's Army* allows players to imagine themselves as part of an armed forces unit fighting for their country. Players who learn to see themselves as part of the *America's Army* gaming community, leave that community with a framework for understanding military action that impacts the way they engage in political debate about the military. Roger Stahl has argued that over time the rhetorical call to "support the troops" has created a public sphere where war needs no justification because citizens who question war are depicted as disparaging the troops. As a branding tool for the US Army, *America's Army* expands and reinforces that rhetoric by framing military action in a way that avoids the consequences and casualties of war in favor of an emphasis on the character of the soldiers in battle. That rhetorical framing conditions citizens to approach conversations about war in the dissociative way that Stahl describes. Engagement with civic rituals in the fictive world of the game lays the groundwork for larger political discourse.

Presidential Election Games: Developing a God's Eye View of the Political System

So today's central act of democratic citizenship (voting), is a small ritual of neighborly cheer and personal disappointment. People want it to feel like a Frank Capra film, but the experience rarely obliges, if only because it is so forceful a reminder that in the last act of the campaign drama, there is no heroism left for the individuals, only a small duty to perform.⁴³

In the opening chapter of his book *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*, Michael Schudson describes the disillusionment of working at a polling station during the 1996 presidential election.⁴⁴ He reflects back to the mid-nineteenth century, where voters would often have to overcome fisticuffs to get to the ballot box, but his own experience at the polls contained no such drama. It was just a few people, on a cold day, going into a private booth, and performing their civic duty. The problem arises, as Schudson tells us, when these acts disillusion more than cement one's image of belonging to a republic. The presidential election process has the potential to produce more than a leader. By engaging

⁴¹ Aaron Hess, "You Don't Play, You Volunteer': Narrative Public Memory Construction in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 4 (2007): 353.

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³⁹ Robertson Allen, "The Unreal Enemy of *America's Army*," *Games and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2010): 38-60.

⁴⁰ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 79.

⁴² Roger Stahl, "Why We 'Support the Troops': Rhetorical Evolutions," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 535.

⁴³ Stahl, "Why We 'Support the Troops,'" 535.

⁴⁴ Schudson, The Good Citizen, 4.

in the day-to-day activities surrounding the election, individuals can develop and reinforce their understanding of citizenship. Presidential election games walk players through the election process in a way that mimics election rituals that may previously have been hidden. Video games establish rules and, through the emphasis on those rules, encourage players to recognize the impact of seemingly innocuous procedures. By overlaying the rules construct onto the election process, the games give players the sense that there is a clear and definable path to winning, even with the office of the presidency. With that said, different games present different rule structures and different paths; each one emphasizes a specific component of the election process. This section looks at three election simulation games, with an eye toward the way the programmed procedures of the process produce fictive worlds with different values associated with civic action and citizen identity.

The use of video games in campaigning and simulating civic engagement is relatively widespread given its recent development. During the 2004 and 2008 presidential election cycles several candidates used games as part of their campaign strategy. When Bogost writes about games and presidential elections, he focuses primarily on these games, which were created for the purpose of campaigning.⁴⁶ One example of this is the game Tax Invaders, which was produced by the Republican Party during the 2004 election.⁴⁷ The game is a remake of the popular Atari game Space Invaders; in this version the player fights tax increases passed by the Democratic Party. The games considered in this case study are not produced by a particular party. Instead of campaigning, these games seek to simulate the election process as a whole. Gronbeck has argued that rhetoricians can divide the functions of political campaigns into two categories: instrumental and consummatory. 48 The instrumental functions of a political campaign are fairly straightforward—convincing people to vote and producing a popularly elected leader. This is closely related to the campaign focused games that Bogost addresses. The consummatory functions of a campaign are of a second order. Campaigns create "meta-political images, personae, myths, associations, and social-psychological relations which may even be detached or at least distinct from particular candidates, issues, and offices."⁴⁹ The election cycle teaches people what the country values and what it means to be a citizen. It offers a picture of what we are striving for as a nation. The election simulation games discussed in this essay move away from the instrumental function of the games that Bogost is talking about to the consummatory function of drawing a relationship between the election process and what it means to be a citizen.⁵⁰

The game *Win the White House* was produced by iCivic, a Washington, DC based organization that has created a variety of games for the classroom. The title of the game points to winning as the goal, but the achievement path set up in the game reflects a deeper set of goals. Players earn points throughout the game by getting to certain achievements. Some of these achievements emphasize the more admirable goals of presidential campaigning. If a player manages to "Take the High Road" by proving they can

⁴⁵ Gronbeck, "The Functions of Presidential Campaigning," 270.

⁴⁶ Bogost, *How to Do Things With Videogames*, 58-63; Ian Bogost, "Videogames and Ideological Frames," *Popular Communication* 4, no. 3 (2006): 165-183.

⁴⁷ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 105.

⁴⁸ Gronbeck, "The Functions of Presidential Campaigning," 268.

⁴⁹ Gronbeck, "The Functions of Presidential Campaigning," 271.

⁵⁰ Bogost, How to Do Things With Videogames, 58-63; Bogost, "Videogames and Ideological Frames."

"make it through the entire campaign season without slinging any mud with negative ads or appearances" they earn points. The procedure here encourages the player to think about the way their actions impact the overall public sphere. Players can also show their knowledge of civic issues through the "On Message" and "The Great Debater" achievements. Some of the achievements focus on the gamesmanship aspect of presidential campaigning. With the "Dough Roller" achievement the player proves their mastery of fundraising events. "It's a Landslide" focuses on the ability to get the most votes in the Electoral College. iCivic allows players to post their final scores to leaderboards that compare their achievements in the game to the achievements of other players. So, while winning the election can be one goal within the game, the player could also rack-up various achievements to become highly ranked on the leaderboard. By creating achievements that go beyond winning, the game reinforces the notion that there are things gained from the election process besides simply winning the White House.

The procedures presented in *The Race for the White House* place a strong focus on figuring out the exact strategies necessary to win the election. The game is billed as an election simulation game. Players can assume the identity of one of the two real world 2012 candidates, cleverly renamed Jack Ohama and Mick Ronney, or they can build a candidate that is a reflection of their own personal identity. Within the game, the player adopts a number of standard procedures for campaigning: creating campaign advertisements, setting up rallies, and participating in debates. Beyond that, the game also allows the players to spread rumors, give kickbacks, and engage in various forms of sabotage. Throughout the process, the player sees opinion polls that let them know how each activity impacts their chance of winning. The goal of the process is to raise the percentages in the opinion polls in order to win on Election Day. There is nothing in the process that encourages the player to consider the ethics of how they are winning. If anything, the system is set up to encourage a "do whatever it takes" attitude. Where Win the White House offers the option of improving your ranking without necessarily focusing on winning the election, this game makes winning the election the only focus. As a result, the player engages the election process as an inherently manipulative and adversarial activity.

During the 2012 election, Epic Games created the game *Vote!!!* As part of a partner-ship with the organization Rock the Vote. The game was designed as an app that was available through Facebook. Players could choose to play as either Obama or Romney. Where the other games focused on simulating the campaign process and developing election skills, this game was created as a "slugfest" where players duke it out in a boxing ring to decide who will win the election. The player gets to dress their candidate using a variety of props and outfits, ranging from oversized mustaches to sombreros, then engage in debates where they hit the opposing candidate over the head with a microphone while a voice over narrates with catch phrases from each of the candidates. When players land a solid punch or hit with the microphone, they score dollars toward campaign fundraising or points in the opinion polls. The game takes the election process down to its most basic level, and winning becomes about literally beating your opponent.

Presidential campaigns and elections are made of a lot of moving parts. It is difficult to fully conceptualize all the components, and it may be even more complicated to see oneself as part of that process. Video games allow the player to take what Thomas

Apperley has referred to as a "god's-eye-view" of the process. 51 The player can pull back to see the whole system and understand the way each particular move within the campaign impacts the outcome. In the case of Win the White House, the choice of strategic movement places the emphasis on skill and particular forms of knowledge. By contrast, The Race for the White House, puts the emphasis on funds and resource allocation. If games are resources for imagining one's connectedness to an overall community of citizens, these two games situate the player in very different ways. Players can see themselves as part of a citizenry that is evaluating political candidates or one that is simply the pawn of a smart campaign manager. By contrast, Vote!!! takes an even more cynical view of the process. Elections are simply brawls, and the winner is the one still standing. It is hard to say how citizenship is situated in relationship to a leader wearing a sombrero and spouting catch phrases to rack up campaign dollars. Schudson notes that in the development of the citizen identity, "Elections educate us. The ballot educates us. Parties educate us."⁵² These games take part in that education, and they have the ability to both develop a mode of citizenship and discourage the player from engaging that mode in the larger public sphere.

Apocalypse Games: A Citizenry Without a Government

While it might be easy to picture oneself as a citizen when playing a military character fighting for national honor or assuming the identity of a politician running for office, it may be harder to summon nationalistic pride while fighting mutants in a post-apocalyptic version of America's capital city. The fictive worlds of post-apocalyptic landscapes are typically conceived of as lawless and unpredictable; they lack the political infrastructure and systems that aid the imagination of a connected citizenry. However, when used as a backdrop for a video game, these landscapes, and their accompanying narratives, take on the conventions of the medium. Suddenly, a lawless place has procedures, rules, systems, and defined goals. As a result, the player is able to imagine what behavior should look like in a world where the entities that traditionally govern behavior are gone. Michael Kaplan has argued that for the survival of a liberal democracy "it is stipulated that only social cooperation itself can ground both effectiveness and legitimacy."53 And that cooperation must be freely given by a "normatively autonomous individual agent." ⁵⁴ The postapocalyptic game narrative—seen in game series like Final Fantasy, Gears of War, and Resistance—offers an opportunity for social cooperation outside of a traditional governing structure. As an exemplar of that potential, this section focuses on the popular game series Fallout. The games in the Fallout series combine the feel of a 1950s inspired fear of nuclear technology with a retro-futuristic depiction of nuclear annihilation. Within this narrative, the player is situated as an autonomous being responsible for his or her own survival in a world devoid of the systems that generally provide protection. Players are directed to imagine their place within the communities that occupy this fictive world through systems of morality coded into the procedures of the games, which argue for the

⁵¹ Thomas H. Apperley, "Genre and Game Studies: Toward a Critical Approach to Video Game Genres," *Simulation & Gaming* 37, no. 1 (2006): 8.

⁵² Schudson, The Good Citizen, 6.

⁵³ Michael Kaplan, *Friendship Fictions* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 46.

⁵⁴ Kaplan, Friendship Fictions, 47.

consequences of disregarding the lives of others. This essay considers two games from the *Fallout* series: *Fallout 3* and *Fallout New Vegas*. These games, set in Washington, D.C. and Las Vegas respectively, demonstrate how the proceduralism inherent to the video game medium helps us to envision community outside the bounds of government and makes moralistic claims about the nature of citizenship within the context of an environment where the political systems that typically forge the connections of citizenship have been lost. The fictive world of the game makes a compelling argument for a mode of citizenship based on the values of a liberal democracy.

There are a variety of post-apocalyptic video games on the market today. The Fallout games were chosen for analysis because of the series' extreme popularity across multiple gaming platforms, the designers' approach to developing a moral code, and the overall use of iconic American cities. The series released its first edition in 1997, which was a game depicting Southern California after a nuclear war. To date, six games have followed. The two discussed in this essay are the most recent versions, both published by Bethesda Softworks. Fallout 3 was released in 2008 and was an immediate commercial success. In the first six months it sold 1.4 million units for the Xbox 360, 452 thousand for the PlayStation 3, and it was one of the top 20 most played games on Xbox Live in 2009.⁵⁵ The year of its release, *Fallout 3* won the prize for Ultimate Game of the Year at the 27th Annual Golden Joystick Awards in London.⁵⁶ Released in late 2010, Fallout: New Vegas experienced success similar to its predecessor. The game sold 5 million units in its first few weeks, and Bethesda Softworks reported more than \$300 million in sales across multiple gaming platforms.⁵⁷ It was selected as Roleplay Game of the Year at the Annual Golden Joystick Awards.⁵⁸ Beyond the commercial success of these two games, the games are particularly interesting for the way that proceduralism and fictive worlds work together to create a moral code. Not all post-apocalyptic games attach a moral philosophy to the way players interact with other inhabitants of the game world. Often these fictive worlds are designed in such a way that the player must adopt a particularly amoral outlook to survive. Far from expanding the players' ability to imagine themselves as citizens, the amoral outlook creates the illusion that the only thing preserving social cooperation is the infrastructure established by current political and legal systems. The Fallout games are worthy of analysis because of the development of a fictive world that expands players' ability to imagine the ways in which they are dependent on, and obligated to, their fellow citizens.

Fallout: New Vegas, and its predecessor Fallout 3, draw a great deal of emotional weight from fictive worlds generated out of iconic real world cities. Battling through the ruins of the nation's capital, and navigating the hauntingly familiar Vegas strip, makes it difficult for the player to forget that the world they are playing in is one that was de-

⁵⁵ "NPD: January 2009 Life to Date Numbers," *N4G: News for Gamers*, 2009, http://www.n4g.com/News-298592.aspx; Larry Hryb, "The Top 20 Live Games of 2009," *Major Nelson*, January 11, 2010, http://majornelson.com/2010/01/11/the-top-20-live-games-of-2009/.

⁵⁷ Molly McHugh, "Fallout: New Vegas Flies Off Shelves With 5 Million Units Sold," Digital Trends. November 8, 2010, http://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/fallout-new-vegas-flies-off-shelves-with-5-million-units-sold/.

⁵⁸ Vikki Blake, "Golden Joystick Winners 2011: The Winners!" *GGSGamer.com*, October 21, 2011, http://www.ggsgamer.com/2011/10/21/golden-joystick-awards-2011-the-winners/.

stroyed by human hubris. Bogost argues that one of the powers of alternate reality games is to take spaces that one is familiar with and repurpose them: "The first time a player cowers behind a bus or encounters a destroyed bathroom, the reality of war surfaces in a powerful way."⁵⁹ To capitalize on the game's use of familiar spaces, during 2008, in the weeks before Fallout 3 was released, Bethesda Softworks advertised by posting images from the game all over the Washington Metro System. 60 Riders were greeted by phantasmagoric depictions of the city's capital building in ruins and the Washington Monument falling over. These are the same unsettling graphics that greet players of Fallout 3. A writer for the New York Times talked about the surreal experience of playing Fallout 3 during the 2008 election. Originally, Seth Schiesel said he did not see the connection between the game and the current political environment: "When I sneaked into the ruins of the Capitol and watched a band of mercenaries lob a Mini-Nuke at a raging 30-foot-tall mutant behemoth under the fractured dome of the Rotunda, I wasn't thinking about filibuster-proof majorities."61 The speed and adrenaline of game play can make it possible to disconnect from the real world images that the game draws upon. With that said, for Schiesel, it was not until

I finally battled my way up Pennsylvania Avenue—dispatching mutants with my plasma rifle at every turn to discover only a radioactive crater in the ground behind a twisted, warped yet familiar wrought-iron fence—did I see *Fallout 3* in a real-world context. In this vision of the cost of hubris, the White House is not broken or burned. It is not the home of an evil mastermind. It is just gone.⁶²

The disquieting moment of seeing an American icon destroyed connects the world of the game to the world the player lives in every day. In apocalypse rhetoric, the vehicle of the gaming medium serves as "a prophet or prophetic interpreter that proposes that the world is coming to an end."⁶³ When talking about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Ross Louis observed that "especially during moments of crisis, performance operates as a tool for claiming and reclaiming citizenship. Citizens' performances offer lessons about the fragility of citizenship and its relationship to an embodied, place-based identity."⁶⁴ The threat of apocalypse, when placed in the world we inhabit daily, gives new meaning to our actions as citizens. In the days after a historic presidential election, it was disquieting to see a world with no White House.

The transformation of the nation's capital into a post-apocalyptic wasteland is blatantly symbolic of the possible downfall of traditional American values. Conversely, the world represented in *Fallout: New Vegas*, is one destroyed by values we probably do not want to think of as traditionally American. In the opening cinematic of the game, the camera slowly zooms out from the tiny details of a painting on the wall of a dilapidated casino. Frank Sinatra's rendition of the chart-topping song "Blue Moon" reverberates

⁵⁹ Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames*, 27.

⁶⁰ Lou Kesten, "Post-Apocalyptic Fallout 3: It's Da Bomb," *Star Beacon*, October 28, 2009, http://www.starbeacon.com/archives/post-apocalyptic-fallout-it-s-da-bomb/article_222ec799-0e90-5307-b76b-bfd984d51e1e.html.

⁶¹ Seth Schiesel, "Mad at Washington? What if it Were Gone?" New York Times, November 10, 2008, C1.

⁶² Schiesel, "Mad at Washington?" C1.

⁶³ Stephen D. O'Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

⁶⁴ Louis, "Reclaiming a Citizenship Site," 281.

throughout the empty building. The camera pans away from the scene at ground level, revealing the remains of Las Vegas and the destroyed perimeter of the city. Fallout's rendition of sin city is still reminiscent of its namesake—drunken soldiers and citizens stumble through the Strip, robot police sound their sirens, and neon lights light up the street. However, as the camera pans away from the city, the surrounding area appears devoid of color, and only scraps of civilized society remain intact. The depiction of a downtrodden, war-stricken, formerly powerful American city, as seen in the introduction of Fallout: New Vegas, is representative of "an intense curiosity and awe for the different, morbid, and monstrous" that Simone do Vale describes as "omnipresent" in Western society. 65 The choice of Las Vegas in the game is critical. The city is synonymous with indulgence, debauchery, and excess. do Vale explains that apocalyptic media reflects societal fears, including "the loss of identity," and the repercussions of a "mass-mediated, consumption society." In the real world, the player is likely to have an image of the characteristics of Las Vegas set against bright lights and clean streets. In the game, the city retains those characteristics while looking like a shell of its former self. Ryan Lizardi, in his writing on post-apocalyptic alien games, argues that the reoccurring narrative of invasion in apocalypse fiction is a commentary on American's fear of being taken over and the belief that ordinary citizens can fight back against hostile inhabitants. 67 Part of what makes the environment of the Fallout games so disconcerting is the realization that Americans have done this to themselves. Vegas is symbolic of the end result of American indulgence. Whereas with some games the narrative holds out the possibility that defeating an enemy, driving out invaders, or destroying a hostile force will potentially make things normal again, Fallout does not give players this hope to cling to. If anything, the continued existence of the indulgent behaviors (e.g., gambling and prostitution) in the ruined city, makes clear that, more than cockroaches, American consumerism is the one thing that can survive nuclear annihilation.

The *Fallout* games make use of physical settings that embody the internal moral conflicts that the player must explore throughout the game. Point systems within the game help to make these moral conflicts more apparent. In both games, players can choose a path for their character that defines them as "good," "bad," or "neutral." As they develop that path, the player works to co-create a sense of what "good," "neutral," and "bad" look like in post-apocalyptia. In *Fallout 3*, set in Washington, D.C., the player assumes the character of the "Lone Wanderer." The game uses a system called Karma to decide whether this character is, in general, moral or immoral. Throughout the game, actions or dialogue choices can affect the character's Karma level; these actions are obviously tied to decisions that would be viewed in society as morally "good" or morally "bad." For instance, if the player chooses during the beginning of the game to reactivate a bomb in the center of Megaton, one of the town's fortified settlements, causing the civilians, including both the town sheriff and the Church of the Children of Atom, to die, the player receives a faction bonus from a small group of entrepreneurs, which allows access to more

⁶⁵ Simone do Vale, "Trash Mob: Zombie Walks and the Positivity of Monsters in Western Popular Culture," *At the Interface/Probing the Boundaries* 70 (2010): 194.

⁶⁶ do Vale, "Trash Mob," 197.

⁶⁷ Ryan Lizardi, "Repelling the Invasion of the 'Other': Post-Apocalyptic Alien Shooter Games Addressing Contemporary Cultural Attitudes," in *Guns, Grenades, and Grunts: First-Person Shooter Games*, eds. Joshua Call, Gerald A. Voorhees, and Katie Whitlock, 365-88 (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Company, 2013).

quests and ultimately more money to spend. However, the player also receives negative karma points, which impacts, and in some cases limits, who the player can interact with and recruit for help. If a player were to end the game with a negative Karma level, the ending narration states that "The Capital Wasteland provided a cruel, inhospitable place, and the Lone Wanderer ultimately surrendered to the vices that had claimed so many others—selfishness, greed, cruelty. These were the values that had guided a lost soul through countless trials and triumphs." The narration is followed by a series of vignette-like images that embody the character traits of selfishness, greed, and cruelty, including the faces of the non-playable characters that the player-character decided to kill. Within the game, Karma works to reinforce the impact of player actions on the community where those actions take place.

Where Fallout 3 uses Karma points to develop a system of morals within the narrative, Fallout: New Vegas uses Reputation. The player's Reputation will determine how other characters in the game respond, and it is not possible to have a Reputation that pleases everyone. Much like Karma, Reputation makes the player continually aware of the way actions impact others. For instance, while talking to Joana, a prostitute working for a major casino, it is revealed to the player that she is being held against her will to work for the casino and has an addiction to MedX, a drug that in the game seems similar to methamphetamines, which she uses to cope with the death of her lover. The character of Joana initiates one of the quests the player can take in the game. How the player initiates that quest, Bye Bye Love, has an impact on Reputation. One way to initiate the quest is by confronting Joana about her addiction and using the player's medical skill to help out. Alternatively, the player can simply ask for information and accept the quest. Either way, the quest will earn valuable resources for the player; the impact on Reputation comes from the way the player connects with Joana. Helping Joana improves Reputation where simply using her for information means Reputation is hurt. Throughout the game, who players work with and how they work with them is one of the key factors that determine their Reputation with the different factions in the game. The fictive world is designed to encourage the player to think carefully about their relationship with the larger community.

In the *Fallout* series, players can win the game regardless of the moral framework they choose. It is possible to be good, bad, or neutral and still be successful. The game does not necessarily argue for a specific way of being. What the game does accomplish, through the settings and the development of systems such as Karma and Reputation, is to make players aware of how their moral framework impacts others. What one sees here is a strong example of what Asen described as the way a discourse of citizenship orients life outside of traditional civic activities. With this mode of engagement, "the radical quality of this perspective on democracy appears in its non-institutional, anti-essential orientation: Democracy is not confined to a set of institutions or specific acts, but appears as a guiding spirit that informs human interaction." The fictive world of the *Fallout* series expands the way players imagine citizenship by creating a sense of connectedness with a larger citizenry outside the bounds of governing institutions.

⁶⁸ Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," 196.

Summary and Concluding Thoughts

Civic education and development of citizen identity takes place in a variety of places. As Schudson reminds us, "political education comes to most people not only from history textbooks or recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance in school but from the presence and practice of political institutions themselves."69 Video games can be used to simulate the systems generated by those political institutions, and in the process, participate in civic education. The civic rituals and aspects of civic life discussed in this essay provide just a few examples of the way technology can integrate procedure and narrative to make arguments about citizenship as a mode of engagement. Similar case studies can be seen elsewhere in the literature on gaming. Henry Jenkins has written about the way that elections in Second Life mirror real world political processes. 70 Constance Steinkuehler and Yoosin Oh have argued that the apprenticeship process that takes place in Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games (MMORPG) is a way of teaching and passing on the communities' core values. The both cases, we can see how citizenship as a mode of engagement is being socialized and practiced. Through the lens of rhetorical criticism, one is able to see the broader arguments this civic education makes about the nature of good citizens and good societies.

Video games immerse players in fictive worlds, which expand their ability to envision the real world they inhabit. When the rituals in the game mimic civic rituals, they have the potential to give new meaning to those rituals. Take, for instance, the contrasting notions of obligation to community proposed in the America's Army series and the Fallout series. Both series reinforce a system of values that argue for a strong connection between player and community. In the case of America's Army, the values reinforced within the game encourage the player to subordinate personal agency in favor of the mission and the team. This is highlighted in many ways by the fact the game is played as a MMORPG. In this game, winning or losing is predicated on functioning as a team. The sense of function as a team is reinforced by the digital community in which the game is situated. This is distinctly different from the Fallout games, where the player is positioned as an autonomous individual, and the value systems within the game encourage one to see how actions impact others. The Fallout games are single player games, and the connection to others is reinforced through the game mechanics as opposed to a community that one plays with. The player can choose to build up Karma or develop a Reputation based on helping others, but that is not necessary to win. Both games use a fictive world to expand the players' ability to imagine connectedness to a larger citizenry. From there, the games make markedly different arguments about the meaning of that connectedness. Strengthening connectedness is one way that video games can encourage players to take up citizenship as a mode of engagement. Another method, seen in the election simulation games, is to focus on an important civic ritual already associated with citizenship. In the case of the election simulation games, the fictive worlds are used to expand the players'

⁶⁹ Schudson, The Good Citizen, 6.

⁷⁰ Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 227-229.

⁷¹ Constance Steinkuehler and Yoosin Oh, "Apprenticeship in Massively Multiplayer Online Games," in *Games, Learning, and Society: Learning and Meaning in the Digital Age*, eds. Constance Steinkuehler, Kurt Squire, and Sasha Barab, 154-84 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

imagination of the real world by providing a "god's-eye-view" of the political process. 72 The games help players to imagine the larger machinery of campaigns and elections. As with the military simulation games and the apocalypse games, the design of the procedures within the election simulation games makes arguments about the subject position of the player within the voting process. When games place an emphasis on skill vs. resources vs. the winner-take-all aspect of elections, they are making arguments about the rhetorical ritual of the voting process. The player is encouraged to imagine the broader world of that process in a very particular way. It is clear with each of these games that the fictive worlds argue for the player's position in, and orientation toward, the broader body politic.

Citizenship—how it is acquired, how it recognized, how it is conceived, and how it is practiced—is a concept often fraught with disquieting contradictions. Ruth Lister notes that the "political history of the twentieth century has been characterized by battles to extend, defend or give substance to political, civil, and social rights of citizenship."⁷³ The way that individuals within a society conceive their identity as citizens largely determines their participation in formal political systems and everyday informal deliberative conversations within the public sphere. To truly conceptualize public affairs, it is necessary to explore the rhetorical arguments being made by the experiential media that act as civic education to develop the identity of citizens. Jeffrey Jones has argued that the study of political media and citizenship has given too much attention to journalism and news media. In order that one might "understand how citizens make sense of political reality, we must first recognize that there is a profusion of media, almost all of which carry some form of political content."⁷⁴ In the case of the games discussed in this essay, that political content provides an important resource for the imaginative capabilities that make citizenship possible. Through a combination of fictive world and procedure, games have the capability to argue rhetorically for the subject position of citizens within the body politic.

Apperley, "Genre and Game Studies," 8.
 Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 4.

⁷⁴ Jeffrey P. Jones, "A Cultural Approach to the Study of Mediated Citizenship," *Social Semiotics* 16, no. 2 (2006): 371.