Playing the code

Allegories of control in *Civilization*

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With the progressive arrival of new media over the last century or so there appears a sort of lag time, call it the 'thirty-year rule', starting from the invention of a medium and ending at its ascent to proper and widespread functioning in culture at large. This can be said of film, from its birth at the turn of the last century up to the blossoming of classical film form in the 1930s and of the Internet with its long period of relatively hidden formation during the 1970s and 1980s and its eruption onto the popular stage in the 1990s. We can say the same thing today about video games: what started as a primitive pastime in the 1960s has experienced its own evolution from a simple to a more sophisticated aesthetic logic, such that one might predict a coming golden age for video games from the present into the next decade not unlike what film experienced in the late 1930s and 1940s.[1] Games like *Final Fantasy X* or *Grand Theft Auto III* signal the beginning of this new golden age. Still, video games reside today in a distinctly lowbrow corner of society and have yet to be held aloft as an art form on a par with the highest cultural productions. This strikes me as particularly attractive, for one may approach video games today as a type of beautifully undisturbed processing of contemporary life, as yet unmarred by bourgeois exegeses of the format.

But how should one approach these video games, these uniquely *informatic* cultural objects? Certainly they have something revealing to say about life inside today's global informatic networks. They might even suggest a new approach to critical interpretation, one that is as computer-centric as its object of study. Philippe Sollers wrote in 1967 that interpretation concerns 'the punctuation, the *scanning*, the spatialization of texts'.[2] And a few years later, Fredric Jameson adopted a similar vocabulary: 'allegorical interpretation is a type of *scanning* that, *moving back and forth across the text*, readjusts its terms in constant modification of a type quite different from our stereotypes of some static or medieval or biblical decoding.'[3] Not coincidentally, both Jameson and Sollers borrowed vocabulary from the digital world – 'scanning' – to describe a contemporary, informatic mode of textual analysis and interpretation.

Indeed this same 'digitization' of allegorical interpretation, if one may call it that, is evident in film criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, concurrent with the emergence of consumer video machines and the first personal computers. This discourse was inaugurated by the 1970 analysis of John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* written by the editors of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Their reading is aimed at classic Hollywood films, so it has a certain critical relationship to ideology and formal hegemony. Yet they clearly state that their technique is neither an interpretation (getting out something already *in* the film) nor a demystification (digging through manifest meaning to get at latent meaning).

> We refuse to look for 'depth', to go from the 'literal meaning' to some 'secret meaning'; we are not content with what it says (what it intends to say)....
> What will be attempted here through a re-scansion of these films in a process of active reading, is to make them say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults in the work ... nor a deception on the part of the author ... they are *structuring absences*.[4]

The influence of computers and informatic networks, of what Gene Youngblood in the same year called the 'intermedia network', on the *Cahiers* mentality is unmistakable. Their approach is not a commentary on the inner workings of the cinematic text – as an earlier mode of allegorical interpretation would have required – but a re-reading, a re-scanning, and ultimately a *word processing* of the film itself. The *Cahiers* style of analysis is what one might term a 'horizontal' allegory. It scans the surface of texts looking for new interpretive patterns. These patterns are, in essence, allegorical, but they no longer observe the division between what in Jameson is called the negative hermeneutic of ideology critique, on the one hand, and the positive hermeneutic of utopian collectivism, on the other.[5]

This is the crucial point: scanning is wholly different to demystifying. And as two different techniques for interpretation they are indicative of two very different political and social realities: computerized versus non-computerized.

Some of Gilles Deleuze's later writings are helpful in understanding the division between these two realities. In his 'Postscript on Control Societies', a short work from 1990, Deleuze defines two historical periods: first, the 'disciplinary societies' of modernity, growing out of the rule of the sovereign, into the 'vast spaces of enclosure', the social castings and bodily moulds that Michel Foucault has described so well; and second, what Deleuze terms the 'societies of control' that inhabit the late twentieth century. The latter are based around what he calls logics of 'modulation' and the 'ultrarapid forms of free-floating control'.[6] While the disciplinary societies of high modernity were characterized by more physical semiotic constructs such as the signature and the document, today's societies of control are characterized by more immaterial ones such as the password and the computer. These control societies are characterized by the networks of genetic science and computers, but also by much more conventional network forms. In each case, though, Deleuze points out how the principle of organization in computer networks has shifted away from confinement and enclosure towards a seemingly infinite extension of controlled mobility:

> A control is not a discipline. In making freeways, for example, you don't enclose people but instead multiply the means of control. I am not saying that this is the freeway's exclusive purpose, but that people can drive infinitely and 'freely' without being at all confined yet while still being perfectly controlled. This is our future.[7]

Whether it be an information superhighway or a plain old freeway, what Deleuze defines as control is central to understanding how computerized information societies function. It is part of a larger shift in social life, characterized by a movement away from central bureaucracies and vertical hierarchies towards a broad network of autonomous social actors. As the architect Branden Hookway writes:

> The shift is occurring across the spectrum of information technologies as we move from models of the global application of intelligence, with their universality and frictionless dispersal, to one of local applications, where intelligence is site-specific and fluid.[8]

This shift towards a control society has also been documented in such varied texts as those of sociologist Manuel Castells, Hakim Bey, and the Italian autonomist political movement of the 1970s. Even harsh critics of this shift, such as Nick Dyer-Witheford (author of *Cyber-Marx*), admit that the shift is taking place. It is part of a larger process that is happening the world over.

What are the symptoms of this social transformation? They are seen whenever a company like Microsoft outsources a call centre from Redmond to Bangalore, or in the new medical surveillance networks scanning global health databases for the next outbreak of SARS. Even today's military has redefined itself around network- and computer-centric modes of operation: pilot interfaces for remotely operated Predator aircraft mimic computer game interfaces; captains in the US Army learn wartime tactics through video games like *Full Spectrum Command*, a training tool jointly developed by the American and Singaporean militaries. *New Yorker* writer Peter Boyer reports that DARPA is designing a new tank system which would resemble a group of networked computers, 'a tank whose principal components, such as guns and sensors, are mounted on separate vehicles that would be controlled remotely by a soldier in yet another command vehicle'.[9]

But these symptoms are mere indices for deeper social maladies, many of which fall outside the realm of the machine altogether – even if they are exacerbated by it. For while Bangalore may be booming, it is an island of exception inside a country still struggling with the challenges of postcolonialism and unequal modernization. Computers have a knack for accentuating social injustice, for widening the gap between the rich and the poor (as economists have documented). The claims I make in this article about the relationship between video games and the 'contemporary political situation' refer specifically to the social imaginary of the wired world and how the various structures of organization and regulation within it are repurposed into the formal grammar of the medium.[10]

As the Jameson of *Signatures of the Visible* illustrates, the translation of these political realities into film has a complicated track record. For mainstream cinema generally deals with problems of politics not, in fact, by preventing them, but by sublimating them. Fifty years ago Hitchcock showed the plodding, unfeeling machinations of the criminal justice system in his film *The Wrong Man*. Today the police are not removed from the crime film genre, far from it, but their micromovements of bureaucratic command and control are gone. The political sleight of hand of mainstream cinema is that the audience is rarely shown

the boring minutiae of regulation and confinement that constitute the various apparatuses of control in contemporary societies. This is precisely why Jameson's interpretive method is so successful. To take a recent example, in John Woo's *The Killer* not only is the killer above the law (or, more precisely, outside it), but so is the cop, both literally in his final bloody act of extrajudicial vengeance, but also figuratively in that one never sees the cuffings, the bookings, the indictments, the court appearances, and all the other details of modern criminality and confinement depicted in *The Wrong Man*. Films like *Bad Boys 2* or *Heat* do the same thing. In fact most cop flicks eschew this type of representation, rising above the profession, as it were, to convey other things (justice, friendship, honour). In other words, discipline and confinement, as a modern control apparatus, *are rarely represented today*, except when, in singular instances like the Rodney King tape, they erupt onto the screen in gory detail. Instead, they are upstaged by other matters, sublimated into other representational forms. The accurate representation of political control is thus eclipsed in much of the cinema (requiring allegorical interpretation to bring it back to the fore). This is unfortunate because, despite its unsexy screen presence, informatic control is precisely the most important thing to show on the screen, if one wishes to allegorize political power today.

What is so interesting about video games is that they essentially invert film's political conundrum, leading to almost exactly the opposite scenario. Video games do not attempt to hide informatic control, they flaunt it. Look to the auteur work of game designers like Hideo Kojima, Yu Suzuki or Sid Meier. In Meier, the gamer is not simply playing this or that historical simulation. The gamer is instead learning, internalizing and becoming intimate with a massive, multipartite global algorithm. To play the game means to play the code of the game. To win means to know the system. And thus to *interpret* a game means to interpret its algorithm — to discover its parallel 'allegorithm').
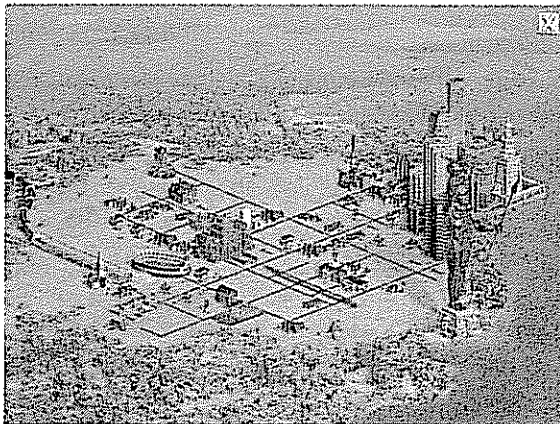
So today there is a twin transformation: from the modern cinema to the late-modern video game, and from traditional allegory to what I am calling horizontal or 'control' allegory. I suggest that video games are, at their structural core, in direct synchronization with the political realities of the informatic age. If Meier's work is about anything, it is about information society itself. It is about knowing systems and knowing code, or, I should say, knowing *the* system and knowing *the* code. 'The way computer games teach structures of thought', writes Ted Friedman on Meier's game series *Civilization*,

> is by getting you to internalize the logic of the program. To win, you can't just do whatever you want. You have to figure out what will work within the rules of the game. You must learn to predict the consequences of each move, and anticipate the computer's response. Eventually, your decisions become intuitive, as smooth and rapid-fire as the computer's own machinations.[11]

Meier makes no effort to hide this essential characteristic behind a veil either, as would classical cinema. The massive electronic network of command and control that I have elsewhere called 'protocol' is precisely the visible, active, essential and core ingredient of Meier in particular and video games in general. You can't miss it. Lev Manovich agrees with Friedman: '[Games] demand that a player can execute an algorithm in order to win.' 'As the player proceeds through the game, she gradually discovers the rules that operate in the universe constructed by this game. She learns its hidden logic — in short, its algorithm.'[12] So while games have linear narratives which may appear in broad arcs from beginning to end, or may appear in cinematic segues and interludes, they also have non-linear narratives that must unfold in algorithmic form during gameplay. In this sense video games deliver to the player the power relationships of informatic media first-hand, choreographed into a multivalent cluster of play activities. In fact, in their very core, video games present the political realities of computerization in relatively unmediated form. They solve the problem of political control, not by sublimating it as does the cinema, but by *making it coterminous with the entire game*. In this way video games achieve a unique type of political transparency.

Buckminster Fuller articulated the systemic, geopolitical characteristics of gaming decades before in his 'World Game' and World Design Initiative of the 1960s. The World Game was to be played on a massive 'stretched out football field sized world map'. The game map was 'wired throughout so that mini-bulbs,

installed all over its surface, could be lighted by the computer at appropriate points to show various, accurately positioned, proportional data regarding world conditions, events, and resources'. Fuller's game was a global resource management simulation, not unlike Meier's *Civilization*. But the object of Fuller's game was 'to explore for ways to make it possible for anybody and everybody in the human family to enjoy the total earth without any human interfering with any other human and without any human gaining advantage at the expense of another'. While Fuller's game follows the same logic of *Civilization* or other global algorithm games, his political goals were decidedly more progressive, as he shows here in a jab at von Neuman:

> In playing the game I propose that we set up a different system of games from that of Dr. John Von Neuman whose 'Theory of Games' was always predicated upon one side losing 100 percent. His game theory is called 'Drop Dead.' In our World Game we propose to explore and test by assimilated adoption various schemes of 'How to Make the World Work.' To win the World Game everybody must be made physically successful. Everybody must win.[13]

So there is a shift between media in which films about the absence of control have been replaced by games that fetishize control. But there also is an inter-medium shift, happening predominantly within the cinema. What Jameson called the conspiracy film of the 1970s (*All the President's Men*, *The Parallax View*) was no longer emblematic by the turn of the millennium. Instead, films of epistemological reversal have become prominent, mutating out of the old whodunit genre. David Fincher is the contemporary counterpart to Alan Pakula in this regard with *The Game* and *Fight Club* as masterpieces of epistemological reversal. But one need only point to the preponderance of other films grounded in mind-bending trickery of reality and illusion (*Jagged Edge*, *The Usual Suspects*, *The Matrix*, *The Cell*, *eXistenZ*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Wild Things*, and so on; or even with games like Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear* series) to see how the cinema has been delivered from the oppression of unlocatable capitalism only to be sentenced to a new oppression of disingenuous informatics. For every moment that the conspiracy film rehashes the traumas of capitalism in the other-form of monumental modern architecture (as with the Space Needle at the start of *The Parallax View*), the knowledge-reversal film aims at doling out data to the audience but only to show at the last minute how everything was otherwise. This genre offers a type of epistemological challenge to the audience: follow a rollercoaster of reversals and revelations, and the viewer will eventually achieve informatic truth in the end. I see this fetishization of the 'knowledge triumph' as a sort of informatization of the conspiracy film described in Jameson.

But how exactly does the gamer 'play the algorithm'? This happens most vividly in console games in which intricate combinations of buttons must be executed with precise timing in order to accomplish something in the game. Indeed, games like *Tekken* or *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* hinge on the gamer's ability to motor-memorize button combinations for specific moves. The algorithms for such moves are usually documented in the game sleeve using a coded notation similar to tablature for music ('Up + A–A–B', for example). Newcomers to such games are often derided as mere 'button mashers'. But let me return to Sid Meier and see what it means to play algorithm-ness at the macro-level.

CREEP RUSH 1	⊂⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙	DOUBLE EXPLOSION 1	⊙(⊂⊙)⊙✦⊙+⊙
BERMUDA TRIANGLE	⊙⊙⊙	JAB TO MID KICK	⊙⊙✦⊙
SPIDER KNEE	While rising ⊙	SLICER	⊃⊙
BLONDE BOMB	➡⊙+⊙	RAY HANDS	⊂⊙+⊙
JAIL CRUSHER	⊙⊙⊃⊙⊙	DOUBLE SHOT	During sidestep ⊙⊙

After the initial experience of playing *Civilization* one passes through three successive phases on the road to criticizing this particular cultural artefact. The first phase is often an immense chasm of pessimism arising from the fear that *Civilization* in particular and video games in general are somehow immune to meaningful criticism, that they are somehow outside criticism. Yes, games are about algorithms, but what exactly does that matter when it comes to cultural critique? Perhaps games *have* no politics? This was, most likely, the same sensation faced by others attempting to criticize hitherto mystified artefacts of popular culture – Janice Radway with the romance novel, Dick Hebdige with punk style, or Roland Barthes with the striptease. But often it is precisely those places in culture that appear politically innocent that are, at the end of the day, the most politically charged.

Step two consists of the slow process of ideological critique using the telltale clues contained in the game to connect it with larger social processes. For *Civilization*, the political histories of state and national powers coupled with the rise of the information society seem particularly relevant. One might construct a vast ideological critique of the game, focusing on its explicit logocentrism, its nationalism and imperialism, its expansionist logic, as well as its implicit racism and classism.

Just as medieval scholars used the existence of contradiction in a text as an indication of the existence of allegory, *Civilization* has within it many contradictions that suggest such an allegorical interpretation. One example is the explicit mixing of ahistorical logic, such as the founding of a market economy in a place called

Civilization	Commercial	Expansionist	Industrious	Militaristic	Religious	Scientific
Americans		X	X			
Aztecs				X	X	
Babylonians					X	X
Chinese			X	X		
Egyptians			X		X	
English	X	X				
French	X		X			
Germans	X	X				
Greeks	X					X
Indians	X				X	
Iroquois		X			X	
Japanese				X	X	
Persians		X				X
Romans	X			X		
Russians		X				X
Zulus		X		X		

'London' in 4000 BC, with the historical logic of scientific knowledge accumulation or cultural development. Another is the strange mixing of isometric perspective for the foreground and traditional perspective for the background in the 'City View'. The expansionist logic of the game is signified both visually and spatially. 'At the beginning of the game', Friedman writes, 'almost all of the map is black; you don't get to learn what's out there until one of your units has explored the area. Gradually, as you expand your empire and send out scouting parties, the landscape is revealed.'[14] These conventions within both the narrative and the visual signification of the game therefore reward expansionism, even require it.
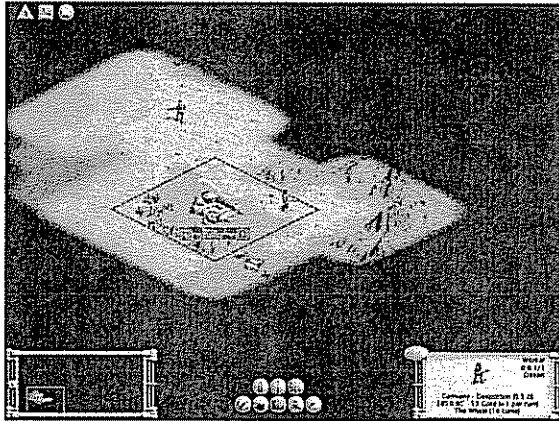
Meier's *Alpha Centauri* mimics these semiotic conventions, but ups the ante by positioning the player in the ultimate expansionist haven: outer space. This has the added bonus of eliminating concerns about the political correctness of expansionist narratives, for, one assumes, it is easier to rationalize killing anonymous alien life forms in *Alpha Centauri* than it is killing Zulus in *Civilization III*. And of course expansionism has historically always had close links with racism. The expansionism of the colonial period, for example, was rooted in a specific philosophy about the superiority of European religion and culture over that of the Asiatic,

African and American native peoples. Again we turn to Meier, who further developed his expansionist vision in 1994 with *Colonization*, a politically dubious game modelled on the software engine used in *Civilization* and set in the period between the discovery of the New World and the American Revolution. The American Indians in this game follow a less than flattering historical stereotype, both in their on-screen depiction and in terms of the characteristics and abilities they are granted as part of the algorithm. Later, with *Civilization III*, Meier expanded his racial stereotyping to include sixteen historical races, from the Aztecs and the Babylonians to the French and the Russians. In this game one learns that the Aztecs are 'religious' but not 'industrious', effecting their various proclivities in the gamic algorithm, while the Romans are 'militaristic' but, most curiously, not 'expansionist'. Of course this sort of typecasting is but a few keystrokes away from a world in which blacks are 'athletic' or women are 'emotional'. That it tactfully avoids these more blatant offences does not exempt the game from endorsing a logic that prizes the classification of humans into types and the normative labelling of those types.
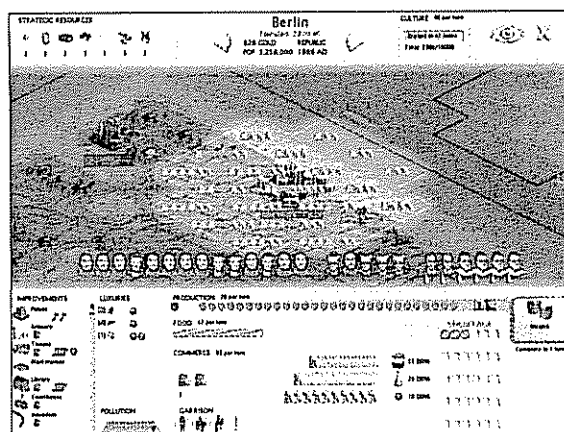
Worse than attributing a specific characteristic to a specific race is the fact that ideological models such as these ignore the complexity, variation and rich diversity of human life at many levels. The *Civilization III* algorithm ignores change over time (tsarist Russia versus Soviet Russia); it erases any number of other peoples existing throughout history – the Inuit, the Irish, and so on; it conflates a civilization with a specific national or tribal identity, and it ignores questions of hybridity and diaspora such as those of African Americans or Jews. In short it transposes the many-layered quality of social life to an inflexible, reductive algorithm for 'civilization' – a process not dissimilar to what Marxists used to call reification, only updated for the digital age. (The reason for doing this is of course a practical one: to create balanced gameplay,

game designers require an array of variables that can be tweaked and tuned across the various environments and characters.) And while one needs no further proof of the game's dubious political assumptions, I might point out that the game is also a folly of logocentrism; it is structured around a quest for knowledge, with all of human thought broken down into neatly packaged discoveries that are arranged in a branching timeline where one discovery is a precondition for the next.

In conjunction with these manifest political investigations, the third step is to elaborate a formal critique rooted in the core principles of informatics that serve as the foundation of the gaming format. The principles adopted by Manovich in *The Language of New Media* are a good place to begin: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding. But to state this would be simply to state the obvious: that *Civilization* is new media. The claim that *Civilization* is a control allegory is to say something different: that the game plays the very codes of informatic control today. So what are the core principles of informatic control? Beyond Manovich, the discussion can be supplemented with an analysis of what are called the Internet protocols. These protocols are made up of approximately 3,000 technical documents published to date, outlining the necessary design specifications for specific technologies like the Internet Protocol (IP) or Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). These documents are called RFCs (Request For Comments). The expression 'request for comments' derives from a memorandum titled 'Host Software' sent by Steve Crocker on 7 April 1969 (which is known today as RFC number 1), and is indicative of the collaborative, open nature of protocol authorship (one is reminded of Deleuze's 'freeways' cited above). Called 'the primary documentation of the Internet',[15] these technical memoranda detail the vast majority of standards and protocols in use today on game consoles like the Xbox as well as other types of networked computers.[16]

Flexibility is one of the core political principles of informatic control, described both by Deleuze in his theorization of 'control society' and by computer scientists like Crocker. The principle derives from scientist Paul Baran's pioneering work on distributed networks which prizes flexibility as a strategy for avoiding technical failure at the system level. Flexibility is still one of the core principles of Internet protocol design, perhaps best illustrated by the routing functionality of IP which is able to move information through networks in an ad hoc, adaptable manner. The concept of flexibility is also central to the new information economies, powering innovations in fulfilment,

customization and other aspects of what is known as 'flexible accumulation'.

Flexibility is allegorically repurposed in *Civilization* via the use of various sliders and parameters to regulate flow and create systemic equilibrium. All elements in the game are put in quantitative, dynamic relationships with each other, such that a 'Cultural Victory' conclusion of the game is differentiated from a 'Conquest Victory' conclusion only through slight differences in the two algorithms for winning. The game is able to adjust and compensate for whatever outcome the gamer pursues. Various coefficients and formulas (the delightfully named 'Governor governor', for example) are tweaked to achieve balance in the gameplay.

Flexibility allows for universal standardization, another crucial principle of informatic control. For, if diverse technical systems are *flexible* enough to accommodate massive contingency, then the result is a more robust system that can subsume all comers under the larger mantle of continuity and universalism. The Internet protocol whitepapers say it all: 'be conservative in what you do, be liberal in what you accept from others.'[17] The goal of total subsumption goes hand in hand with informatic control. The massive 'making equivalent' in *Civilization* – the making equivalent of different government types (the pull-down menu option for revolution is certainly the most delicious detail in early versions of *Civilization*), of different victory options, of formulaically equating *n* number of happy citizens with the availability of luxuries, and so on – is, in this sense, an allegorical reprocessing of the universal standardizations that go into the creation of informatic networks today.

In contrast to my previous ideological concerns, the point here is not whether the *Civilization* algorithm embodies a specific ideology of neoliberal capitalism, or even whether it embodies the core principles of new media *à la* Manovich, but whether it embodies the logic of informatic control itself. Other simulations let the

gamer play the logic of a plane (*Flight Simulator*, or Meier's own flying games from the 1980s) or the logic of a car (*Gran Turismo*), but with *Civilization* Meier has simulated the total logic of informatics itself.

But now we are at an impasse, for the more one allegorizes informatic control in *Civilization* the more my previous comments about ideology start to unravel. And the more one tries to pin down the ideological critique, the more one sees that such a critique is undermined by the existence of something altogether different from ideology. So where the ideological critique succeeds, it fails. Instead of achieving greater insight, the ideological critique (traditional allegory) is undermined by its own revelation of the protocological critique (control allegory). To use the concept of history as an example: the more one begins to think that *Civilization* is about a certain ideological interpretation of history (neoconservative, reactionary), or even that it creates a computer-generated 'history effect', the more one realizes that it is about the absence of history altogether. 'History is what hurts', Jameson wrote – history is the slow, negotiated, struggle of individuals together with others in their material reality. The modelling of history in computer code, even using Meier's sophisticated algorithms, can only ever be a reductive exercise. So 'history' in *Civilization* is precisely the opposite of history, not because the game fetishizes the imperial perspective, but because the diachronic details of lived life are replaced by the synchronic homogeneity of code pure and simple. (This is an argument about informatic control, not about political control; a politically progressive '*People's Civilization*' game, *à la* Howard Zinn, would beg the same critique.) Thus the logic of informatics and horizontality is privileged over the logic of ideology and verticality in this game, as it is in all video games in varying degrees.

So this is not unique to *Civilization*. The other great simulation game that has risen above the limitations of the genre is *The Sims*, but instead of seizing on the totality of informatic control as a theme, this game does the reverse, diving down into the banality of technology, the muted horrors of a life lived as an algorithm. In Jameson, the depth model in traditional allegorical interpretation is a sublimation of the separation felt by the viewer between his or her experience consuming the media and the potentially liberating political value of those media. But games abandon this unsatisfying model of deferral, epitomizing instead the flatness of control allegory by unifying the act of playing the game with an immediate political experience. In other words, *The Sims* is a game that delivers its own political critique up front as part of the game-play. There is no need for the critic to unpack the game later. The boredom, the sterility, the uselessness and the futility of contemporary life are depicted precisely using the things that represent it best: a middle-class suburban house, an Ikea catalogue of personal possessions, crappy food and even less appetizing music, the same dozen mindless tasks over and over – how can one craft a better critique of contemporary life?
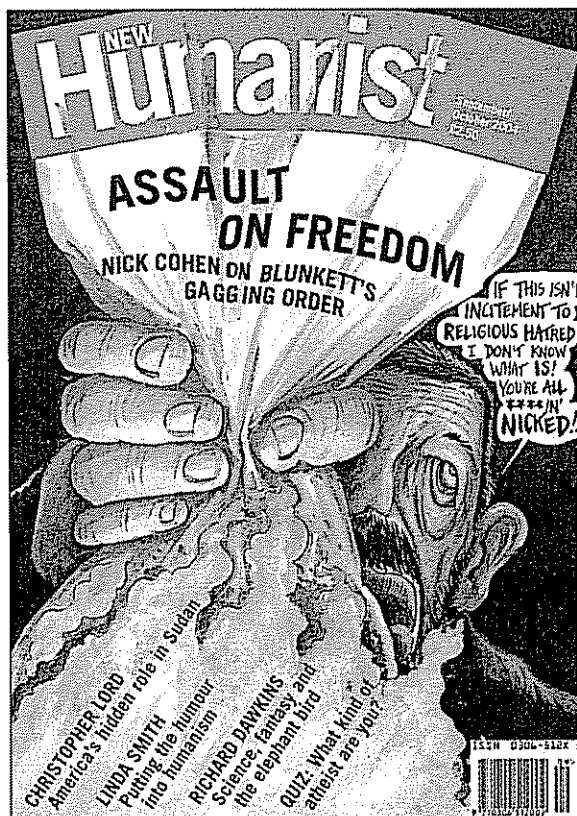
As a genre, the 'first-person shooter' illustrates this allegorical interpretation of infopolitics. The shooter is an allegory of liberation pure and simple. There can be no better format for the encoding and reprocessing of the unvarnished exertion of affective force. I think of *Unreal Tournament* or *Counter-Strike* as the final realization of André Breton's dream of the purest surrealist act: the desire to burst into a street with a pistol, firing quickly and blindly at anyone complicit with what he called 'the petty system of debasement and cretinization'. The shooter as genre and the shooter as act are bound together in an intimate unity. The shooter is not a stand-in for activity; it *is* activity (just as the game is not a stand-in for informatics, but *is* informatics). The experience of the shooter is a 'smooth' experience, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, whereby its various components have yet to be stratified and differentiated, as text on one side and reading or looking on the other. In this sense, the aesthetics of gaming often lack any sort of deep representation (to the extent that representation requires both meaning and the encoding of meaning in material form). Allegory has collapsed back to one in gaming. In fact, the redundancy in the vocabulary says it all: the 'logic of informatics'. The activity of gaming, which only ever comes into being when the game is actually played, is an *undivided* act wherein meaning and doing transpire in the same gamic gesture. And in this one sees a central contradiction between gaming as an art form written in code and the lack of any such coding at the motor level – but that will have to be left for another day.

This last point may be recontextualized through a fundamental observation about games: games let one *act*. In fact, they require it. But when one plays *Civilization*, there is more than a single action taking place. This is the necessary parallelism of allegory. The first half of the parallelism is the actual playing of the game, but the other is the playing of informatics. Games are allegories for our contemporary life under the protocological network of continuous informatic control. In fact, the more emancipating games seem to be as a medium, substituting activity for passivity or a branching narrative for a linear one, the more they are in fact hiding the fundamental social transformation

into informatics that has affected much of the globe during recent decades. In modernity, ideology was an instrument of power, but now ideology is a decoy, as I hope to have shown with the game *Civilization*. So a game's revealing is also a rewriting (a lateral step, not a forward step). A game's celebration of the end of ideological manipulation is also a new manipulation, only this time using wholly different diagrams of command and control.

Notes

1. Markku Eskelinen writes: 'Historically speaking this is a bit like the 1910s in film studies; there were attractions, practices and very little understanding of what was actually going on, not to mention lots of money to be made and lost.' Markku Eskelinen, 'The Gaming Situation', *Game Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, July 2001, http://gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen.
2. Philippe Sollers, 'Programme', *Tel Quel* 31, Fall 1967, pp. 3–7, emphasis mine.
3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1991, p. 168, emphasis mine.
4. Editors, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 'John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*', in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 496.
5. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1982, pp. 291–2.
6. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, p. 178.
7. Gilles Deleuze, 'Having an Idea in Cinema', in Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller, eds, *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998, p. 18, translation modified.
8. Branden Hookway, *Pandemonium: The Rise of Predatory Locales in the Postwar World*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1999, pp. 23–4.
9. Peter Boyer, 'A Different War', *New Yorker*, 1 July 2002, p. 61.
10. For more on the relationship between video games and political struggle, see my essay 'Social Realism in Gaming', *Game Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (forthcoming, 2004).
11. Ted Friedman, '*Civilization* and Its Discontents: Simulation, Subjectivity, and Space', www.duke.edu/~tlove/civ.htm (accessed 14 August 2003). I will use '*Civilization*' to refer to the entire game series. When talking about a particular instalment in the series, I will specify, as in *Civilization III*.
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13. See R. Buckminster Fuller, *Your Private Sky: The Art of Design Science*, Lars Müller, Baden, 1999, pp. 473, 479. For more on the globalistic and synergistic philosophy of the World Design Initiative see also R. Buckminster Fuller, *Your Private Sky: Discourse*, Lars Müller, Baden, 2001, pp. 247–78.
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15. Pete Loshin, *Big Book of FYI RFCs*, Morgan Kaufmann, San Francisco, 2000, p. xiv.
16. For a technical overview of network protocols see Eric Hall, *Internet Core Protocols: The Definitive Guide*, O'Reilly, Sebastopol, 2000; or for a more interpretive approach see my book *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2004.
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