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THE AMNIOTIC SAC: INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND
AFFECT IN COMPUTER GAMES.

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Film, Television and Media Studies,

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS:

The Amniotic Sac: Intersubjectivity and Affect in Computer Games.

Presently, academic criticism of games approaches them either as vehicles for the expression of narrative, or as ‘ludic’ experiences where any aspects of traditional narratives are purely incidental to playing the game itself. Drawing on current critical work on videogames, theories of immersion, varying perspectives on narrative in games and on what games *are*, I argue that narrative theory is insufficient to deal with gaming. The interest of this thesis lies in the way that games enable narratives which are different in kind from narratives in other media, and in what gaming may have to teach us about more traditional forms of narrative. I use elements of actor-network theory and cybernetic studies in two case studies, *Planescape: Torment* and *System Shock 2*, to explain how narratives function in games through the ‘mechanical constitution’ of the subject or agent of the game. I argue that computer games achieve a different affect than other media by establishing a different relationship with their users through the mechanical constitution of a hybrid identity. Because of this different affect, games enable narratives which cannot be duplicated in other media without severe alteration to suit those media. The recombinant logic found in the hybrid causes the loss of the subjective element as a hybrid is created, hence narrative-theory cannot be usefully applied to games. I offer an alternative approach to narrative-theory, called the amniotic sac, which consolidates previous critical theories of the experience of gaming. In linking the immersive amniotic sac to previous studies of affect, such as those found in Reader-Response theory, I suggest that games are entering a post-narrativist space where affect replaces narrative in relevance.

To my family, for being there while I found the path I wanted to walk.

To my friends, for walking it with me.

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CONTENTS.

ABSTRACT.....	iii.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v.
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii.
CHAPTER 1: THE PLACE OF NARRATIVE IN GAMES.....	1.
ABANDONING NARRATIVE.....	1.
EVOLVING DEFINITIONS.....	5.
CRITICAL CONSOLIDATIONS AND THE AMNIOTIC SAC....	12.
CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING GAME CRITICISM.....	16.
INNOVATION OF FORM.....	16.
THE AMNIOTIC SAC VERSUS INTERACTIVE CINEMA.....	20.
CHAPTER 3: THE STORIES CYBORGS TELL.....	28.
BECOMING ENCODED.....	28.
CONSEQUENCES AND AFFECT.....	33.
CHAPTER 4: WHAT HORROR CAN TEACH.....	42.
CONSTRUCTING A HYBRID.....	42.
APPLICATIONS OF HYBRIDITY TO MANIPULATE.....	46.
AFFECT.	
EXPERIENTIAL STORYTELLING AND NEW HORROR.....	51.
CHAPTER 5: INTERROGATING THE AMNIOTIC SAC.....	56.
LEARNING FROM THE AMNIOTIC SAC.....	56.
DISCUSSING CONSEQUENCES.....	58.
THROWING OPEN THE GATES.....	61.
FINAL WORDS.....	68.
WORKS CITED.....	71.

LIST OF FIGURES.

<u>Figure:</u>	<u>Page:</u>
1 -1	A comparison image from the SS2: Rebirth Project.....64.