

MURDER IN THE DIGITAL AGE: RETHINKING
CRIME FICTION THEORY THROUGH
THE MEDIUM OF VIDEOGAMES

by

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ABSTRACT

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Videogames are a multibillion-dollar industry. Their high definition graphics and sophisticated gameplay cater to a continuously growing crowd of enthusiastic players. But what is their standing in the academic community? Can games be studied as texts or are they limited by the ludic qualities of their medium? Through a careful application of crime fiction theory to the videogames *Heavy Rain* and *L.A. Noire*, I will demonstrate the genre's ability to expand beyond the media of print and cinema. Features such as interactivity, decision-making, and player immersion offer new ways of looking at existing literary conventions.

The omission of videogames in most comparative media analyses so far is an unfortunate oversight. The unique composite nature of their medium has the potential to revolutionize traditional approaches to textual studies by forcing scholars to simultaneously engage with visual, tactile, auditory, and psychological elements.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, film critic Roger Ebert infamously announced that videogames are not art. He has since continued to stand by his belief and rekindled the debate on the artistic value of games in a new piece titled “Video Games Can Never Be Art.” He attacks the argument put forth by videogame developer Kellee Santiago that this new medium is capable of deep emotional and aesthetic appeal by discounting a presentation she gave at the University of Southern California. The motivation behind playing games is one of the reasons why Ebert maintains videogames are not art: “One obvious difference between art and games is that you can win a game. It has rules, points, objectives, and an outcome.” While works of art and artistic performances can be valued for their creative worth, videogames are almost always dominated by the desire to win, an attitude which according to Ebert, is opposed the fundamental principle of art appreciation. I concede that many games operate on systems of rules and rewards, but I don’t believe that the presence of these elements necessarily negates videogames’ ability to engage players in aesthetic inquiry. After all, a lot of highly acclaimed films succeed in providing their viewers with both entertainment and food for thought, so why should games not be able to accomplish the same thing?

It is important to note that videogame proponents don’t claim that every game ever made is a work of art. Just like books and films, videogames vary greatly in quality and performance. They occupy a large spectrum of styles and genres, and not all of them were designed with the intent to appeal to players on an emotional and aesthetic level. Casual puzzle games like *Tetris* and *Bejeweled* have simple objectives and their main purpose is to provide short-time entertainment and a distraction from daily concerns. Others are meant to test players’ reaction times or shooting accuracy, and do not require much critical thinking. Some games

however, have a deeper rationale and were created to immerse players in a complex and thought-provoking fictional universe. These types of games often have narratives with multiple subplots and engage the player in an artistic experience that reaches beyond the limits of pure entertainment. To avoid acknowledging the artistic values of such games, Ebert dismisses them as not actually being games: “then it ceases to be a game and becomes a representation of a story, a novel, a play, dance, a film. Those things you cannot win; you can only experience them.” Again, I find myself wondering why the concepts of winning and experience have to be mutually exclusive. Videogames like the *Final Fantasy* series revolve around large story arcs that can span over a hundred hours of gameplay. Within this larger narrative, players have to complete quests and fight monsters. It is very much possible to die in battle or fail a mission, but this in-game system of rules doesn’t prevent players from experiencing the story, and it most definitely doesn’t disqualify *Final Fantasy* as a videogame. Since they are a medium composed of different media, videogames have the ability to offer multiple forms of engagement. It is possible for the narrative and various systems of rules to alternate being the lead element in the game. As his argument develops, Ebert’s tone becomes more and more demeaning. For example, when discussing the story of the acclaimed indie videogame *Braid* he says that it “exhibits prose on the level of a wordy fortune cookie.” Such attacks are cheap and lack any kind of support. The critic doesn’t cite a passage from the game, and thus fails to offer his readers a chance to decide for themselves whether or not they find the game’s discourse appealing. He ends this new article by repeating his now notorious claim that “no one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great poets, filmmakers, novelists and poets.” It seems that Ebert doesn’t foresee any change in the perception of games as art, yet only one year after he pronounced his harsh judgment, *L.A. Noire* became the first videogame to be featured at the Tribeca film festival. The developers had the opportunity to exhibit a live gameplay session, and the demonstration was then followed by a moderated discussion (Narcisse). The game mixes cinematic cut scenes with single player

gaming and features a multilayered detective plot. Additionally, *L.A. Noire* has been compared to films noirs both classic and modern, and was nominated for the 2012 BAFTA Game Awards on eight different counts for categories ranging from Design, to Game Innovation and even Original Music (Bafta.org). Awards ceremonies for videogames are slowly growing in popularity and each year the games reach new levels of artistic achievement. I believe that videogames deserve their own recognition programs, but until such events become widespread, film festivals represent a good opportunity to promote games and reward their makers for creative accomplishments.

2011 also marks the year in which the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) changed its guidelines for the Arts in Media category so as to include videogames as part of this group. An article from the Culture section of the Huffington Post reflects on the importance of this amendment: “The new guidelines will not only cater to media that depict more traditional art forms, but also those that have artistic merit on their own [...]. The latter classification would finally qualify some video games as art and developers and gamers have been cautiously excited, if a bit impatient.” This long awaited change is a significant step for videogames because it means that their makers will be able to apply for funding and receive the same treatment as other forms of art. Fans have been proclaiming the merits of this medium for many decades and it is rewarding to finally see videogames receive national recognition. The updated list on the NEA’s website offers an even clearer definition of the new art forms now eligible for grants: “All available media platforms such as the Internet, interactive and mobile technologies, digital games, arts content delivered via satellite, as well as on radio and television.” According to this list, every type of videogame, those made for platforms as well as those played on handheld devices qualify as art. Falling under the art category however, doesn’t make all of them digital masterpieces. The NEA’s decision gives videogames the chance to compete within set standards and allows them to enjoy the perks that come with being a form of artistic expression. It remains the task of the developers and designers to supersede each other and

lay bare the true creative potential of games. As Grant Tavinor explains in “The New Art of Videogames,” games have come a long way since Pac-Man: “In the space of little more than forty years videogames have developed from rudimentary artifacts designed to exploit the entertainment capabilities of the newly invented computer, into a new and sophisticated form of popular art” (1). Advances in computer graphics and sound recording have given videogames new tools to produce higher-quality digital animation. The fictional universes depicted in modern videogames are beautiful and the attention to detail is amazing. Furthermore, as objects of popular culture, they have the ability to reach millions of people and expose them to interactive art and literature-based experiences. Tavinor estimates that the games industry is worth US\$30 billion a year, an astounding number that evidences the rising popularity of this medium (7). It is not uncommon for videogames from major publishers like Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Rockstar Games, and Capcom to have big budgets comparable to those of movies. *Digitalbattle.com* lists the production price of *Grand Theft Auto 4* (GTA4) at a hundred million and that of *Metal Gear Solid 4* at over sixty million. The actual sales figures are equally impressive. Tavinor states that *GTA4* earned five hundred million dollars in its very first week on the market (7). A new game for the PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360 easily costs US\$60, and players therefore have to decide whether the game justifies such a high price tag. Nobody would pay this amount for a cell phone game like *Angry Birds*. Players nowadays expect more than simple entertainment, they want a captivating gaming experience that will last for a period of weeks, if not even months. Immersive environments and superior graphics have become the norm for most platform games today.

After certain states tried to ban the sale of violent videogames to people less than eighteen years of age, the Supreme Court of the United States declared in June 2011 that games are protected under the First Amendment. This is tied directly to the NEA’s declaration, because if game developers are artists, then they should have the right to express themselves freely and their creations should receive the same privileges. The slip opinion for the *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association* case states on videogames that: “Like the protected

books, plays, and movies that preceded them [they] communicate ideas-and even social messages -through many familiar literary devices (such as characters, dialogue, plot, and music) and through features distinctive to the medium (such as the player's interaction with the virtual world). [...] And whatever the challenges of applying the Constitution to ever-advancing technology, "the basic principles of freedom of speech and the press, like the First Amendment's command, do not vary" when a new and different medium for communication appears" (2-3). This decision provides game developers with important legal protection, but it also furthers the artistic definition of videogames by pointing to their ability to communicate ideas and emotions. If games are capable of such achievements, then they can be studied alongside more traditional works of literature and film. I second Janet Murray's argument that "the real literary hierarchy is not of medium but of meaning" and believe that videogames offer an array of interpretative, theoretical, and educational avenues that need to be explored in more detail (274). Their aptitude to combine narrative, visual, and ludic qualities makes them a fascinating new object of study.

In "What Are Videogames Anyway?" Tavinor reviews the two main schools of theory in the interdisciplinary field of game studies. Narratologists, the first group, are preoccupied with the storytelling potential of games and "argue that [they] are a new kind of the narrative structure seen in older cultural artifacts such as films and novels. Because of this, the theories that are used to explain those traditional forms of narrative can be adapted to explain videogames" (Tavinor 19). Narratologists analyze the sequence of events found in games and compare them to the plots and literary devices of traditional forms of art. They also look at the ways in which videogames employ interactivity and decision making tools to give players a sense of participatory authorship. While not all games offer themselves to such a study, those with a strong focus on character development and immersive in-game environments are good candidates for this type of cross media comparative analysis. The second school of thought, ludology, is primarily interested in gameplay and game mechanics. According to Tavinor they

believe that “some videogames are obviously games, having only migrated into the digital setting after being invented in another medium: chess and card games are such examples” (21). This is also true for sports games and certain types of puzzle games. There are numerous digital versions of *Memory* and *Solitaire* in which the medium has not affected the basic rules players need to master in order to play the game. Likewise, when playing *Madden NFL* or *NCAA*, gamers are bound by the rules of the actual games of football or basketball and have to obey them in order to be successful in the virtual game. Ludologists maintain that these sets of rules are present in other videogames and that because players have to follow such a strict system, videogames are not narratives.

Espen Aarseth explains the difficulty of categorizing videogames in “Genre Trouble” and takes the side of ludologists: “Because games are not one form, but many, they cannot be one art form. [...] Some games may have artistic ambitions, others do not. Games are games, a rich and extremely diverse family of practices, and share qualities with performance arts (play, dance, music, sports) material arts, (sculpture, painting architecture, gardening) and the verbal arts (drama, narrative, the epos). But fundamentally, they are games” (47). Aarseth believes that other components such as sound, graphics, characters, and even plot structure, are there merely to provide a context for the gameplay. The player’s progression through the game via the adherence to systems of rules and rewards is what defines a videogame, not the virtual environment or the in-game dialogue. He argues that “any game consists of three aspects: (1) rules, (2) a material/semiotic system (a gameworld), and (3) gameplay (the events resulting from application of the rules to the gameworld)” and that “of these three, the semiotic system is the most coincidental to the game” (47-8). In other words, one could change the setting of a game and its characters without affecting the gameplay itself. The rules would remain the same. I have to agree that gameplay can exist independently of the gameworld, but often the on-screen universe is what attracts players to a particular game and makes them want to engage with its gameplay – and this I believe, is a central aspect of each videogame.

Take the 2010 *Dante's Inferno* for example. It is an action game of the hack and slash category where players control a crusader armed with a scythe and a cross. Different button sequences and action moves need to be learned so that players can fight their way through the different levels of hell. The mechanics are very similar to those of another hack and slash titled *God of War*, but *Dante's Inferno's* unique setting imbues it with a literary and mythical richness absent in other games of this genre. The environment was inspired by Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and just like the protagonist in the written work; the game's central character is guided by the poet Virgil on his journey through the inferno. Other literary and historical figures such as Beatrice and eminent sinners like Pontius Pilate, Emperor Frederick II, Francesca da Polenta and her brother Paolo Malatesta are present. Furthermore, each level in the game was designed with the intention of evoking the sins associated with a certain circle such as Lust, Gluttony, or Greed. Even some of the gameplay itself is linked to the literary text. A mini game inside the major premise allows players to absolve the sinners by entering a new screen where they have to press buttons in order to capture these people's sins. The more sins players capture, the higher their reward. It is obvious that the original work of literature was the main source of inspiration for *Dante's Inferno*. In an interview for the gaming magazine *Gamasutra*, creative director Jonathan Knight reflects on the creative philosophy behind the game: "Well, we were really interested in doing a game set in Hell, and I think that was really the initial impulse: it was to craft an experience around that kind of dark fantasy of Hell as a real place. And I was interested in, specifically, the medieval, Christian vision of Hell, you know, as a place of structure, where sinners go and are punished." The idea for the gameworld precedes the actual structure of gameplay. Knight's statement indicates that developers are very much concerned about providing players with an emotional experience. He was fascinated with the notions of hell, punishment, and sin, and strived to recreate them in a digital form that would appeal to players. After settling on the inferno as the game's fictional universe, the action game concept encouraged the makers to revise the original story: "We knew we were going to make an action

game [...] which needed to have a strong conflict, and we needed a guy who had a background as a warrior, who could fight his way through the nine circles, instead of just talking his way through them” (Knight). They took a 14th century epic poem and adapted its plot to the needs of the videogame medium. The original text was the starting point around which the gameplay and in-game storyline were developed. Players are not readers, and as such they bring different expectations to the table. Controlling a character’s movements, executing jumps, fighting enemies, and leveling up, are all elements that modern-day gamers anticipate in an action videogame. The creators needed to adjust the story to include a lot of combat, but took great care to make sure both gameplay and in-game story were consistent: “there are origin stories about how he gets his scythe from Death, and how that plays out. We wanted the acquisition of weapons and the unholy abilities and so forth to really make sense in the story” (Knight). Combining systems of rules with fictional and literary elements was challenging. The final product is a careful amalgamation of these constituents. *Dante’s Inferno* is an action videogame, but it is also a reimagining of Alighieri’s text. Without the back story and setting, the gameplay would not have the same appeal. In many ways, the medium only reinforces the characteristics of the epic poem by letting player control the hero in his journey through the nine circles of hell. Gameplay here allows players to embark on a quest of their own by exposing them to testing jumping and running sequences, as well as difficult boss fights. What was once a passive experience is now thrilling and engaging thanks to the medium’s ability to combine gameplay and story into one form.

Currently, most games are classified according to the types of actions players perform rather than the game’s plot or story. When we think about videogame genres, large categories such as first person shooters (FPS), racing games, simulation games, and action games come to mind. An organization based on gameplay works well for some games, but is not practical for others. When players pick up a FPS, the setting and story may vary greatly from game to game, but they can make general assumptions about the gameplay, as FPS often revolve around

similar rules of survival, ammo conservation, and sharp aiming skills. However, in the case of games like *Dante's Inferno*, categorizing the game solely as a hack and slash or adventure game, would mean leaving out the underlying tones of the epic poem-like quality of the game. Players who traditionally don't play combat heavy games might still pick up *Dante's Inferno* because they are interested in mythology or digital adaptations of literary works, yet unless this aspect of the game is brought up, they will never know it exists. Widening the classification system presently in place to include a reference to the content of the game and/or its story would expose games to a broader audience and facilitate their inclusion in academic discussions on genre theory, narrative, and adaptation. A FPS such as *Bioshock* could further be categorized as a dystopian work, and fantasy games with an emphasis on relationships and heroic quests like *Lunar: The Silver Star* as a Romance. Many games are either loosely based on literary or cinematic works, or employ similar narrative devices. It would then make sense to use the genre theories of traditional forms of art and apply them to these types of games. Again, I would like to emphasize that this doesn't apply to all videogames. Card games, puzzle games, sports games, and probably racing games as well, are generally not concerned with narratives and therefore would not be well suited for a cross media study of genre. While I share the belief of many narratologists that certain games can be studied as texts, I also think it is necessary to understand how gameplay is used to enhance traditionally passive experiences. The types of gaming players perform affect the ways in which the fictional universe is perceived and therefore need to be taken into consideration.

Based on the aforementioned points, I propose an argument on genre theory, in particular crime fiction theory and the ways in which transmediation from print to digital allows for unique adaptations and expansions of the genre's characteristics. I will make the claim that two recent videogames, *Heavy Rain* and *L.A. Noire*, have successfully adopted the distinctive narrative strategies of crime fiction novels, thus showing that videogames are capable of replicating complex storylines. The games make use of the genre's formulas to expose players

to a fictional world and create suspense, tension, and mystery. Building on the previous statement, I will then argue that the medium of the videogame, thanks to features such as interactivity, immersion, gameplay, and decision-making, revolutionizes the classical way in which the crime is gradually reconstructed through detective work. Both games entrust the player with the responsibility of finding clues, investigating the crime scene, interviewing witnesses and suspects, and eventually arresting the criminal. The adequacy of the player's detective skills is tested and, especially in the case of *Heavy Rain*, has an immediate effect on the unraveling of the plot. While the reader of a crime novel follows the detective's progress, and perhaps tries to beat the protagonist to the conclusion, the videogames mentioned above offer a higher level of participation and intensify the thrill of solving the crime by thrusting the player into an interactive digital world enhanced by visual and audio stimulation. In order to show that videogames represent an exciting addition to crime genre studies, I will rely on comparative work between print and electronic texts, close readings, and theory application. In a first step, I want to sketch the established literary and structural characteristics of different subgenres of crime fiction. Once this has been achieved, I will turn to *Heavy Rain* and *L.A. Noire* and analyze how the games implement these major elements while also relying on the unique attributes of their medium to contribute to and enhance the existing genre formulas.

CHAPTER 2

GENRE CONVENTIONS AND LITERARY FORMULAS

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the ways in which videogames enrich the existing genre formulas it is important to first lay out the defining characteristics of crime fiction. I use the term crime fiction broadly to include all works that deal with the investigation of a murder and the mysteries that surround it. Few literary genres enjoy such a vast array of subgenres. The existence of subsidiaries, and especially their tendency to interrelate, makes it difficult to delineate the characteristics unique to a specific type of crime fiction novel. Many scholars have written about the literary features that differentiate one subgenre from another. I will draw on Carl D. Malmgren's article "Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective, and Crime Fiction" to explicate the distinct features of the three most popular subtypes of this novel genre, and when necessary, supplement his work with additional theoretical literature on the subject. The three most popular types, as already evidenced in the title of Malmgren's piece, are the murder mystery novel, the detective novel and the criminal novel. Malmgren refers to the latter one as crime novel, but I prefer to call it criminal novel so as to differentiate it from the label given to the genre as a whole. Three elements will be of particular interest to me. First, I would like to delineate the narrative techniques which distinguish crime fiction from other works of fiction and which are shared in one form or another by almost all subgenres. Then I will analyze how each subgenre treats story development and plot structure, and finally, I will explore how protagonists and characters are used to fulfill certain demands of the genre. Once these various aspects have been delineated, we should have a comprehensible perception of crime fiction's representational and functioning characteristics.

2.2 General Traits

The main appeal of crime fiction lies in its treatment of narrative organization, in particular, its application of double stories. The genre concerns itself with two elements: crime and investigation. The coexistence of these two elements within a same work, means that the reader is presented with “two entirely different forms of interest” when reading a crime novel (Todorov 47). Depending on the subgenre of crime fiction, these two stories are given varying degrees of emphasis, but their presence in the novel is part of the crime fiction genre's schema and is also what distinguishes it from other fictional narratives. Schemas, as defined by Douglas and Hargadon, are “the building-blocks of information-processing, a cognitive framework that determines what we know about the world, the objects it contains, the tasks we perform within it, even what we see” (154). To put it simply, schemas are an ensemble of identifying characteristics and conventions. We use schemas to make sense of things, and in literature, we use them to tell one genre apart from another. Understanding which narrative formulas are contained in the crime fiction genre is very important because “the presence and nature of schemas in a work, [...], dictate not only the type of genre the work belongs to, but the sort of audience the work attracts and the kind of affective experience that audience may expect” (Douglas and Hargadon 156). Laying out the schemas of crime fiction will help us understand why readers find these works so appealing and what expectations they bring to the table each time they open a new crime novel. The idea that schemas are essential cognitive tools for our reading of the text is further analyzed by Lee Horsley who claims that “as readers/critics of a detective story, we, too, are engaged in an interpretative quest, and our clues to meaning consist both of the details embedded in the narrative and (as we become more experienced interpreters) of our readings of earlier examples of classic detective fiction” (13). Readers superimpose the larger crime fiction schemas onto each new text, thus conducting their own investigation to see how a particular work conforms to the expected norms of the genre. To do

so, they rely on their methodical analysis of the novel, but also on previous reading experiences.

In addition to having a unique narrative structure, works of crime fiction are centered on the search for answers to the *who?* *how?* and *why?* questions. Malgrem presents a thorough analysis of these three points: “The most obvious, and the central question in mystery fiction, is *who?* The answer to this question is a matter of fact; solving the crime thus involves the discovery of Truth. A second enigma deals with the *how* of the crime, the question of Technique. [...] The final form of enigma is *why*, the question of Theory.” (121). One can easily infer that crime narratives which put emphasis on the investigation, particularly those that focus on understanding how a crime was executed, are interested in the *who?* and *why?* questions, while novels that are preoccupied with gaining insight into a killer’s mind or understanding the motives behind a murder are more likely to look into the *why?* question. Because each time they pick up a work of crime fiction readers expect to encounter these questions, they are essential parts of the larger crime fiction schema. In order to answer the three main questions that drive crime novels, Peter Brooks says that works of this genre, especially classic murder mysteries, need to obey another main condition: “the detective [has to] repeat, go over again, the ground that has been covered by his predecessor, the criminal” (24). It is through the close examination of the crime scene and by a calculated assessment of the murderer’s actions and behavior that three enigmas of crime fiction can be solved. The story of investigation is there to uncover the mysteries that surround the story of the crime and replicate as closely as possible the procedure performed by the criminal. This re-examination is very important, because “repetition results in both detection and apprehension of the original plotmaker, the criminal” (Brooks 25). The investigators often act out the actions of the murderer so as to get a better understanding of the sequence of events that lead to the crime. This moment of “acting out” also serves an important interpretative function, as it is often only by going through the particular motions that the investigators come to recognize the true meaning of certain clues.

All three subgenres of crime fiction use suspense and distraction. In *S/Z* Roland Barthes argues that narratives operate under the guidelines of multiple codes. Two of these codes, the hermeneutic and the proairetic code, deal with the creation of suspense and are useful to the study of crime fiction. According to Barthes “under the hermeneutic code, we list the various terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed” (19). Readers of crime fiction take pleasure from looking at the unexplained and searching for answers. They wonder if and how the various elements of the investigation are correlated. The hermeneutic code fulfills their desire for mystery and unexpected plot turns and ends with the revelation of the truth. The proairetic code is focused on actions, more precisely the sequence in which they happen. In his module on Barthes, Dino Felluga explains that “the proairetic code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action. For example, a gunslinger draws his gun on an adversary and we wonder what the resolution of this action will be. We wait to see if he kills his opponent or is wounded himself. Suspense is thus created by action rather than by a reader’s or a viewer’s wish to have mysteries explained.” This code relies on the reader or viewer’s feelings of anticipation and excitement to succeed as an agent of suspense. Crime fiction uses the proairetic code in combination with the hermeneutic code to draw readers in on multiple levels via different narrative devices. Brooks states that “the source of the codes is in what Barthes calls the *déjà-lu*, the already read (and the already written), in the writer’s and the reader’s experience of other literature, in a whole set of interlocking experiences” (19). Codes then resemble schemas in that both rely on the reader’s preexisting knowledge of certain literary structures, be they plot or story related. Readers project the myriad of literary experiences they have acquired onto each new text they read and based on their knowledge, anticipate the narrative to unfold a certain way, or characters to behave according to established patterns.

Heta Pyrhönen cites fragmentation, distraction, and ambiguity as the main narrative devices used to cloud the reader’s comprehension of the crime and other events (50).

Fragmentation refers to the process by which the reader is invited to put together different narrative elements and fill in missing pieces in the most logical way, distraction points to the story's tendency to sidetrack the reader by making him/her focus on the investigation and its procedures rather than the crime itself, and finally, ambiguity is the introduction of multiple possible culprits, conflicting evidence, and other elements which manipulate the reader's perception of the crime story (50). These elements are central to the genre and can thus be considered part of its main schema. Pierre Bayard, in his re-examination of Agatha Christie's famous novel *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd*, looks at these same narrative devices to determine how the reader was carefully misled throughout the story. One way Christie manages to sidetrack the reader from the main investigation is by having private detective Hercule Poirot focus on minor details. Bayard explains that "Poirot's investigation unfolds along two axes. The first consists of resolving a number of secondary mysteries that stymie other attempts. He is determined, for instance, to establish the truth about the time of the murder. [...] All these plot twists, which Poirot resolves one by one, make the problem more complex and disturb the investigation by attracting our attention to suspects whom the detective considers guilty of only minor transgressions" (12). By doing so, Christie tricks the reader into thinking that the person who committed the minor offense is also likely responsible for the murder. This deception works well because the main detective, an individual whom the reader trusts and looks up to, decides to place so much importance on the answers to these minor questions. Readers follow his investigative trail and get excited about small details, thus losing track of the larger question. Bayard also argues that "the advantage of distraction is that it highlights the aim of detective fiction, which makes it unique among literary forms: to prevent an idea from taking shape" (25). This equates to forcibly relocating the reader to a constant state of blindness and ignorance. What is appealing about that? I believe it would be fair to say that aficionados of the crime genre enjoy being deceived and return to these novels for the rush that accompanies the resolution of the enigma. Like addicts looking for their next fix, they are constantly in search for

a new experience of deception. This is why Horsley explains that writers are always looking for ways to “disrupt such apparently predictable elements as the reliable narrator and the reliably ‘fixed’ triangle of characters – detective, victim, criminal” (41). *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* gains most of its mystery appeal by misleading the reader into trusting the narrator. When it is later revealed that the narrator is the culprit, readers are left in a state of surprise and shock. Those who followed established genre schemas and put their faith in the accuracy of Dr. Sheppard’s statements did not anticipate such a deviation from the literary norm.

We have seen that distraction is used in conjunction with clues to divert the reader’s attention away from the central question of investigation. Another manifestation of this narrative device can be found in the mise-en-scene of certain crime scenes and in the modus operandi of the murderer. Bayard cites the example of *The Clocks* to illustrate this idea: “The murderer has placed four clocks near the corpse, all set forward in time. Hercule Poirot refuses to be drawn into this trap, having understood that these clocks are of no interest, their only function being to complicate the mystery” (24). The murderer succeeded in confusing the police officers, but the private investigator, armed with a superhuman sense of keenness, sees through this ruse and manages to get to the bottom of the case. It is also common for the murderer to commit a second, or even a third crime to distract the investigators from the original murder and complicate the investigation.

The topic of distraction goes hand in hand with the notion of disguise. In order to trick the reader, crime novels often disguise the truth. Bayard refers to this as the “principle that prevents the reader from grasping the truth even while it is exposed in full view” (21). It is important for the truth to be indirectly available to the readers. That way, when the truth is finally revealed to them, they experience a moment of clarity. They recount reading about that particular object or person and its connection to the crime becomes evident. Writers of crime fiction transform the truth “in order to make it unrecognizable” or pass it as something else (21-22). The reader is often misled into skimming over a detail, or encouraged to accept something

for what it is not. This could involve trying to make a murder look like a suicide case, or conversely, attempting to disguise a natural death as murder or suicide. Bayard claims that the person most often linked to the concept of disguise is the murderer himself, “since he is the crucial medium of the truth, at once the object and the subject of concealment” (22). To determine who could possibly be the culprit, readers take different elements, such as a person’s character, his/her psychological and emotional state, his/her age, his/her profession, and even his/her relationship to the victim, into consideration. Young children and elderly people are rarely suspected of murder because of their age. Similarly, people with noble professions such as doctors, police officers, or lawyers, because they are supposed to follow ethical codes and considered privileged in society, are not traditional suspects. Writers of crime novels, however, like to put these preconceived notions of innocence and nobility to the test, and may paint a likeable character to deter the reader from thinking of him as the murderer, just to later reveal that he was indeed the guilty party. As Bayard says: “A classic way of creating illusion in the detective novel is to disguise the murderer as a victim, [...] [or] as an investigator,” because it goes against the reader’s natural sense of order and righteousness and thus makes for a surprising narrative turn (22, 23). Another clever way to disguise the murderer is to make it seem like he has an alibi and therefore could not have been responsible for the crime. This assumed incapability is nothing more than a trick to render the actual criminal invisible to the reader’s attention. Correspondingly, some writers choose to create characters that openly incriminate themselves or purposely act guilty so as to throw off the readers. In such instances, “the reader is inclined to think that if the writer is introducing them with such ostentation, they must be innocent” (Bayard 28). The murderer’s behavior seems so out of place, that we naturally assume he is being dishonest. Some might even think that he intentionally attracts attention so as to protect the real culprit. From the start then, the technique of disguise is used to steer the reader towards incorrect assumptions.

Bayard calls the reader's inability to see the bigger picture "psychic blindness," and explains that Agatha Christie "invent[s] different devices each time that aim to prevent the reader from perceiving the truth" (19). Devoted readers of crime fiction internalize narrative formulas, and it is therefore important for writers of this genre to constantly reinvent the way in which "[the] book tells the [...] tale about the blindness of those who read it (Bayard 19). Otherwise readers would not experience a moment of surprise at the end of the work and become weary of this genre. Readers of crime fiction turn to these novels for the pleasure of engaging with a familiar literary structure, but no matter the comfort associated with such an activity, readers also expect to be surprised, perhaps shocked, each time they open a new book. The final resolution, the reassembly of the various fragments, has to be special and unique, or else the genre loses its appeal.

2.3 The Murder Mystery

2.3.1 Plot Structure and Story

Peter Hühn explains that in the traditional murder mystery the story of investigation permits the reconstruction of the story of the crime through careful examination and observation. This combination is referred to by some as the death-detection-explanation pattern (Horsley 12). The first story revolves around the resolution of an enigma, and generally it isn't until the very last pages of the novel that the interrelatedness of the various clues is revealed, thus bridging the gap between the two stories. For the reader, there is a certain pleasure to be gained from seeing how the writer "[makes] the ending reverberate back onto the whole narrative so that, in the light of this ending, [one] can perceive the pattern of interlocking elements, appreciating its skillful composition" (Pyrhönen 46). Enthusiast of crime fiction read for the plot. They want to enjoy the suspense for as long as possible. Bayard complements this idea by saying that: "The [novel] has meaning only if the truth is not revealed until the end of the book, and, if possible, not until the last few pages. This game-playing dimension is essential to the construction of blindness, which is all the more powerful when the veil is lifted at the last

possible moment” (20). Every word on the page adds to the anticipation of the final revelation, and the longer that instant can be pushed back, the stronger the concluding moment of illumination will be. Solving the murder and getting to the end of the story is indeed like a game, and like any good game, it is built on rules. Pyrhönen refers to this strict narrative element as “fair play” and explains that “authors must give readers the chance to arrive at the solution before the detective does. They should show readers the clues needed for solving the case, while simultaneously confusing them as to the correct meaning of these clues” (46). Through imagination and association, readers are encouraged to compete against the investigator in the search for the explanation of the crime.

The world of the mystery novel, according to Malmgren, is a “centered world,” marked by order and stability. He claims that “this guarantee of continuity and permanence is one of the real consolations of the form” (119). Readers can peacefully abandon themselves to the mysteries of the novel because they know that eventually everything will be resolved and order will be restored. In traditional mystery novels, crimes are solvable and there is always a logical explanation for the killer’s behavior and motivation. Despite setbacks, dead ends, and misleading clues, in the end the mystery is cleared up and the plot reaches its climax (119,120). Malmgren quotes Cawelti who explains that the appeal of mystery novels lies not only in recognizing how the various elements of the puzzle fit together, but also “seeing a clear and meaningful order emerge out of what seemed to be random and chaotic events” (120). The reestablishment of order and the reaffirmation that crimes can indeed be solved and elucidated through deduction brings about closure.

Often, mystery novels take place in isolated locations so as to avoid interferences from the outside world and facilitate a “centered world” narrative perspective. Agatha Christie’s works often make use of that tenet. Take for example *And Then There Were None*, set on an island with no transportation to the mainland or *Murder on the Orient Express*, where the passengers are cut off from the rest of the world because of a snow storm. A centered narrative perspective

also makes it easier for the leading detective (if there is one) to shine and come across as particularly ingenious. The latter of the two works previously mentioned exemplifies this very well. The wagon director, Mr. Bouc, who is also Poirot's friend, helps with the investigation, but he is incapable of putting together the various clues necessary to come to the right conclusion. Poirot is the only one skilled enough to filter through useless clues and link seemingly unrelated pieces of evidence together. Bayard states that "this traditional organization of the detective novel, which pits a doltish police inspector against a brilliant detective, offers us two investigations leading to different conclusions. While the police follow a classic line of argument producing a likely murderer, Hercule Poirot advances by means of unpredictable lines of argument toward an unexpected murderer" (11). Isolated locations permit this discrepancy in investigative style to come through even clearer. There is no one present who could interfere and possibly surpass the detective. Horsley argues that the secluded setting of the mystery or clue-puzzle story "prevents it from engaging with the troublesome realities of its own time; and the narrowing of its sphere of concern makes the containment of the crime and the restoration of order far too unproblematic" (18). Since there is no real threat to the investigation, and since the crimes themselves do not reflect the actual crises, or even political and economic difficulties of that era, the story comes across as artificial. The hurdles the detective has to overcome have no basis in reality, they may seem sophisticated, but after close observation, are revealed to be there mostly to enhance his performance as accomplished investigator.

2.3.2 Protagonists and Characters

Malmgren states that because the narrative dominant of the mystery genre is the act of detection, few works take the time to develop round characters and as a result, "the reader's interest in characters –victim, criminal, suspects- is downplayed" (121). The characters tend to be two dimensional and lack individualization and emotional depth. Consequently, the audience is not interested in them as psychological beings but only in the role they play in the disentanglement of the mystery. They exist merely as variables of an equation; their importance

to the reader is directly linked to their contribution to the advancement of the investigation. Some novels of this subgenre, as is the case with *And Then There Were None*, do not feature a main detective, but focus solely on the gradual uncovering of the mystery. When protagonists are present, the reader does not connect with them on an emotional level; rather, he is fascinated purely with their abilities as crime solvers and logical thinkers. This is why Malmgren insists that “the conventions of mystery dictate that its world be pre-eminently rational and its characters psychologically transparent” (121). The inclusion of real-life scenarios and fully developed characters would side-track the reader from the investigation and the enjoyment of recognizing the clever composition of the enigma.

Authors of mystery novels are well aware of these conventions and J. Healy encourages aspiring writers to carefully select settings that will work well with their chosen plot: “Be sure to consider the presence or absence of systems of transportation and communication. If lack of such access is vital to your plot, you pretty much have to avoid urban areas and their cars, cabs, buses, trains, and subways, as well as telephones, radios and messenger services.” He extends a similar logic to the development of characters. First comes the outline of the plot, the fitting together of the various pieces of the puzzle, and characters should be created with the sole purpose of improving the story: “Because you know what information the investigator needs to get from each of them to solve the crime, certain traits for each character are nearly dictated. For example, the plot may require that several major characters have temporary or permanent leg problems to prevent a witness’s account of a limping but otherwise unidentified killer from eliminating central suspects”. Healy’s observations demonstrate the deep thought and careful planning involved in the creation of a mystery novel. It is clear that writers of this subgenre are fascinated with interlocking parts and prefer narrative complexity over character growth.

2.4 The Detective Novel

2.4.1 Plot Structure and Story

Heta Pyrhönen defines detective fiction as “a narrative whose principal action concerns the attempt by an investigator to solve a crime and to bring a criminal to justice” (43). The protagonist conducting the investigation, whether he is an actual detective, a private eye, or just a regular citizen is the focal point of the work. Throughout the novel, the reader is invited to follow his line of thought and vicariously partake in the adventure. The detective’s personality and the world he belongs to often exceed the plot of the investigation in terms of how much time is dedicated to each element of the story. The classic detective novel strongly resembles the mystery story, but stresses the investigator’s crucial function in the solving of the crime. Horsley explains that “the centrality of the investigator’s role creates the characteristic ‘backward’ construction of analytic detective fiction, which throws emphasis on the task of explaining what has happened at some earlier point in time” (23). Readers are not only interested in finding out how the crime was committed; they also want to see the investigator struggle with the case and follow his explanation of the events.

In addition to focusing the narrative on the main protagonist, the hardboiled version of the detective novel also sets itself apart from traditional mystery stories through the usage of real world settings. Malmgren explains that this type of “detective fiction breaks with the dominant discourse by presenting readers with the “real” world, a decentered world, defined in terms of difference from the world of mystery fiction” (123). Detective fiction criticizes the predilection of murder mysteries for isolated and centered locations, claiming that by placing the action of the novel in such an unlikely setting, the writers avoid dealing with the real life conflicts and impediments that accompany crimes. Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler are among the most prominent authors of this subgenre and made a point of separating their works from the classic mysteries produced in England during the Golden Age of crime fiction. Andrew Pepper in “The ‘Hard-boiled’ Genre,” argues that “what links Raymond and Hammett, and by

turn characterizes an important aspect of the hard-boiled, is his insistence on laying bare the venality of the world and the grimly exploitative nature of human relationships and not giving up in the face of both bureaucratic indifference and the banality of evil" (146). These two writers wanted to imbue their texts with harsh realism and were not afraid to expose the unpleasant aspects of human nature. Hardboiled detective novels are known for rejecting order and stability and embracing the chaos and uncertainty of everyday life. Writes of this subgenre openly express their discontent with current political, social, and economic instabilities, sometimes turning their works into a form of condemnation of their contemporary society. To illustrate just how unpredictable the stories of this subgenre are, Malmgren once again turns to Cawelti: "Everything changes its meaning: the initial mission turns out to be a smoke screen for another, more devious plot; the supposed victim turns out to be the villain; the love ends up as the murderess and the faithful friend as a rotten betrayer; the police and the district attorney and often even the client keep trying to halt the investigation; and all the seemingly respectable and successful people turn out to be members of the gang" (124). The reader cannot trust the detective to always find a satisfactory conclusion and establish order, since there was no order to begin with. The real world is composed of unpredictable events and people, obstacles which the detective must take into consideration during the investigation. Crime, especially murder, is not perceived as an unexpected interruption of what would otherwise constitute a stable environment; it is instead regarded as intrinsic to human nature, an inevitable occurrence in an imperfect society. The announcement of a new murder does not come as a surprise to the detective; in some instances he will even search out crimes in need of investigation or launch his own private investigation alongside the police. In hardboiled detective novels, the further the detective proceeds, the greater and the more complex the mystery becomes. As Hühn states, "in the course of the detective's interpretive operations, the mystery shifts and expands so that a wide net of connected crimes is gradually brought to light" (461). The detective may start out with one unsolved murder which is then revealed to be connected to a series of more serious

incidents. In a situation of snowball effect, the mystery surrounding these initially unrelated cases thickens as the plot progresses, often creating multiple subplots that are all interrelated.

The story of the investigation is constantly evolving, forcing the detective to reevaluate his reading of the story of the crime and putting a strain on his mental capacities. The hardboiled detective novel was the main source of inspiration for films noirs, a genre, which according to Barry Grant “indicates a darker perspective upon life than was standard in classical Hollywood films and concentrates upon human depravity, failure, and despair” (221). This definition echoes the characteristics of the decentered worlds found in the works of Hammett and Chandler. Keith Grant makes a point of delineating the difference between these two distinct subtypes of the detective novel: “The British model presumes a benign society into which crime erupts as an aberration [...] hardboiled fiction, to the contrary, presumes a corrupt world in which crime is an everyday occurrence. Its characters are often driven by destructive urges that they can neither understand nor control. Although a detective may solve the story’s motivating crime, he entertains no illusions that his small victory makes the world a better place” (222-223). His deeds cannot even out the corruption and violence entrenched in society. That’s why these works are often accompanied by a “cynical, doomed, and grimly poetic tone” (Grant 223). There is a sense of hopelessness and futility in every action these characters perform. In classic detective fiction, readers can rely on the genre’s schemas and expect a resolution at the end of the text, but they don’t have this same guarantee with the hardboiled detective novel.

While it is not unusual for the investigator to make and name the murderer, often he is incapable of revealing “the whole truth” (Malmgren 125). When this happens, the reader’s curiosity is mollified, but not fully satisfied and he is encouraged to accept that certain truths are beyond the reach of the detective’s analytical abilities. Hühn cites a number of reasons for the detective’s failure to bring about justice: “The scarcity of irrefutable material evidence and the extreme complexity of the interconnected crimes, his professional dependence (he cannot turn in a client, if the client is revealed as the culprit) as well as his personal involvement (he wants

to avoid hurting an innocent person or one for whom he cares), the general corruption of society and of the police” (462). Hühn’s enumeration testifies to the overwhelming presence of a decentered world. In the hardboiled detective novel, the investigator often has to surrender to the social and political corruption that is ingrained in the real world. Although he may uncover the truth, many reasons make it impossible for him to share it with the public and see justice be exercised.

In both types of detective fiction, the detective’s investigation sometimes takes place in parallel to that of the police, thus leading to a friendly competition between the two parties engaged. The presence of the police is crucial to the plot structure of the novel, for it is by opposing himself to these investigators that the detective succeeds in establishing himself as a superior form of authority. The police, pressured by society to find the perpetrator, often rush to conclusions. This can lead to misinterpretation of evidence and wrongful convictions. This is the moment when, according to Hühn, the detective gets to show off his talent: “He destroys the premature closure imposed by the text-disproving tacit assumptions, discovering new clues, and generally reconstituting the multivalence of everyday reality, if only temporarily” (457). This moment is important in the narrative because it shows that the detective is the one in charge of the story of the investigation. He is the one providing the reader with answers and the story ends with his recounting of the crime. Hühn explains that “in the figure of the detective, the novel formulates its own meaning. His final explanation-disclosing the criminal’s story as well as the history of his detection-closes the meaning of both [stories] effectively” (458). This scenario is mostly true of classic detective novels and some famous private investigators who always outshine the police are Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes. They are known for their brilliant mind and ability to think outside linear modes of logic.

2.4.2 Protagonists and Characters

The detective novel, as its name suggests, focuses on the protagonist and relegates the plot to an inferior role. J. Colbert, unlike Healy, believes that a well-developed character

should be the basis for any detective novel and states that “a clever plot helps, certainly, as does a strong sense of place, but those elements are secondary, best used to show how the central character thinks and responds to events and environments”. While the mystery novel uses characters to enrich the plot, the detective novel relies on the presence and personality of the protagonist to make the plot come to life. The detective is the one making sense of the various leads and signs in the investigation. He works as an intermediate between the reader and the story of investigation. Malmgren claims that “detective fiction [...] articulates an ethos of the Individual” (125). Indeed, the persona of the detective is the center of attention and the reader’s interest is directed towards the adventures of the protagonist and his analytical skills. The reader admires his talent to solve complex problems and think outside of the box. As Hühn explains “One essential factor in the detective’s eventual success is his ability to question preconceived notions and break through automatized modes of perception: because the clues normally appear in suggestive contexts that automatically trigger (erroneous) assumptions about their significance, the master-detective consciously frees himself from such suggestions, thus being able to formulate an unorthodox interpretation of the mystery “(455). He distinguishes himself from ordinary people by his keen sense of observation and his knowledge of the criminal mind. He is suspicious of obvious clues and maintains that correlation does not imply causation. However, despite these almost superhuman attributes, as noted earlier, the detective must at times surrender to the injustice and corruption of the real world. Because he operates in an intractable and dangerous world, the detective of the hardboiled variant isn’t “reluctant to draw [his] guns [and is marked] with a readiness to resolve to violence” (Horsley 73). Although he knows that his chances of success are slim, he is willing to risk his life to take down corrupted organizations. The detective frequently takes the form of a ‘tough guy’ and according to Horsley, is “in his most familiar incarnations, aging, bruised, booze-sodden, and betrayed, but his gift for streetwise slang enables him to project a coherent self in the face of the chaos that threatens to engulf him, and in defense of his own manifest weaknesses” (73). This

makes him an anti-hero and at times, readers may disapprove of his tactics and investigative methods. He does not always play by the rules and his morality is ambivalent. However, as Malmgren explains in "The Pursuit of Crime," "The quest may fail, but the Knight soldiers on. [...] The detective's most impressive trait, [...], especially given the slippery and fluid world he moves through, might well be the ability to see through all the facades and impersonations and to read people and situations" (159). Even though readers might despise him on occasion, the private eye's ability to recognize the corruption around him and expose injustice whenever possible, makes him a likeable character in the end. He is one of the few good men left and can see through the lies and disguises of others.

2.5 The Criminal Novel

2.5.1 Plot Structure and Story

The most striking feature of the criminal novel is its ability to bridge the story of the crime and the story of detection into one multifaceted narrative. Pyrhönen's explains that the crime novel was born as a counterpart to the traditional mystery novel and thus rejects the latter's strict adherence to logic. The proceedings of the investigation are pushed into the background and instead, the story focuses on the behavior and the state of mind of the criminal, who is also often the narrator (44). Malmgren's definition is a little broader and states that the story can be told from either "the perspective of the criminal or of someone implicated in the crime" (127). Despite minor differences in characterization, both scholars agree that it is the reader's interest in the protagonist that drives the plot, not the investigation. "Readers want to know how (or if) the criminal protagonist will implicate himself and get caught. [...]"

Centeredness insures that guilt must finally attach itself to the perpetrator, that the criminal Self must be punished by Society, that some sort of justice prevails" (Malmgren 128). While this is the more common variant of the crime novel, alternatives which favor a decentered world view exist as well. In those instances, "caught up in the confusion of appearances and reality, unable to distinguish between acting and being, the Self can no longer guarantee honesty, integrity,

moral standards” (Malmgren 129). The reader gains an insight into the troubled mind of the protagonist. “The unstable Self, incapable of truth, caught up in duplicity, wracked by mental illness, subsumed by its own vacuity, reflects the world that it inhabits, a shifting world at once perfectly enigmatic and hopelessly corrupt” (129-130). Elements of the outside world are projected onto the character, turning him into a representative of a larger social evil. The depravity of the city becomes that of the individual and the deep psychological nature of the criminal novel is gradually uncovered.

The story is often told from the perspective of the criminal, thus giving the reader a direct connection to the crime itself. This is a drastic change from the typical mystery and detective novels as the story of the investigation is only of secondary importance, giving way instead to a narrative of self-incrimination. In Hühn’s words: “Through the inversion of the perspective the reader is enabled to follow the criminal’s planning and executing [...] of the crime story [...], with particular attention to the (successful) measures taken by the criminal to preclude a correct reading of his story (planting misleading clues, disguising the timing of his activities, and so on)” (462). Readers get to experience the story of the crime in a radically different way. They are no longer at the mercy of the police or the detective, but get to share the criminal’s point of view of the development of the events, functioning like accomplices. Because the murderer exists within the context of the decentered world, his crime is bound to be uncovered at some point. When this happens, the criminal “becomes aware of the reading attempts on the other side, and he tries to read the police’s story of detection” (Hühn 462-463). He too then engages in a form of investigative reading and distantly follows the investigators’ attempts at solving the crime. This is where the plot reaches a new peak. According to Hühn: “The success of his first story has made the criminal over-confident of his skills as a writer and a reader and consequently somewhat careless in their exercise. The reader of the novel is thereby placed in a position to obtain a clearer picture of the actual progress of detection as well as to develop doubts about the actual efficacy of the crime scheme” (463). He already has the

criminal's information about the story of the crime and now he gets to observe how the investigators try to make sense of both the real and fake evidence left behind by the culprit. This duality can result in conflicting sentiments in the reader as he doesn't know whether to side with the investigators or the criminal. Hühn believes that this type of narrative device "forces the reader into a contradictory attitude, inducing him to sympathize with the protagonist in terms of perception and to be repelled by him in terms of morality" (463). From a structural point of view, the reader now has to deal with two different stories, each attempting to decipher the actions of the other. Hühn explains that "the alternating narration of the two stories is used [...] to foreground the efforts of undertaken by each side at writing its own story, at reading that of others, and at foiling the other side's attempts to read its own side's story." (463). Each side wants to be in charge of storytelling, but only one will prevail in the end. Either the criminal gets away with murder, or he is arrested by the police.

2.5.2 Protagonists and Characters

Crime novels of this subgenre are preoccupied with the why question and often investigate the moral and psychological aspects of killing. Malmgren confirms this idea when stating that "the narrative dominant for this form is the character of its central protagonist, the person fingered by the crime" (127). While the protagonist of the classical detective novel can generally be trusted, the same cannot be said of the main character in the criminal novel. The protagonist is often troubled and emotionally unstable. "Even as it invites readers to identify with its central character, this kind of fiction calls into question his or her integrity, honesty, or stability, thereby undermining the Self as a stable sign" says Malmgren (127). The reader becomes an accomplice or a passive bystander. It becomes more and more difficult for him/her to distinguish between truth and lie, fiction and reality. The mad world of the criminal's mind merges with the violence of the physical world. This results in a sense of disorientation for the readers: "They feel anxiety because they identify with the protagonist even as he or she commits criminal actions. It is an uncomfortable, sometimes untenable position" (Malmgren

130). Such novels invite readers to reevaluate their emotional attachment to a character. When they realize what horrible crimes the protagonist has committed they are torn between loyalty and their inner sense of justice. In Malmgren's terms "it calls in question ideas of innate goodness or the essential Self and invites readers to experience vicariously various forms of psychopathology" (131). This reading experience is not for everyone, and some readers will be disappointed by the lack of resolution and comfort at the end of the novel. Christiana Gregoriou in *Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction* explains that "novels focusing on the murderer in this manner intend to shock the reader into accepting that there are people for whom cruelty, in both its physical and psychological sense, is a normal way of life" (60). These works expose readers to an individual who thinks and acts in ways that are incomprehensible to the average person. Criminals of this kind have no remorse and commit brutal crimes without worrying about the consequences of their actions. As dreadful as these murders are, some readers are actually attracted to this type of evil characters. Gregoriou believes that they are fascinated with: "that which is monstrous, dependent on the purely personal motivation and disturbed psychological condition of the single criminal figure" (60). The protagonist in these novels is so unlike anything they are familiar with, and his actions seem so outrageous, that readers are curious about his psyche. They like the appeal of being able to temporarily be immersed in a completely dissimilar lifestyle, be a part of something they would never dare to act out in real life.

It is possible for the criminal novel, or as Malmgren calls it, the crime novel, to focus on the psychological distress of the victim. Dick Francis's novel *The Danger* follows protagonist Andrew Douglas in his job as a hostage negotiator and a significant part of the narrative is dedicated to understanding the victim, Alessia Cenci, and her struggles as a survivor of a kidnapping incident. The book delves into the psychological turmoil that she experienced both while she was kept hostage and after she was freed. In this excerpt, Alessia recalls hearing music while she was locked up in a tent, naked, with only a bucket to relieve herself in:

"Those first days I thought I'd go mad. Not just from anxiety and guilt and fury...but from boredom. Hour after hour of nothing but that damned music...no one to talk to, nothing

to see...I tried exercises, but they after day I grew less fit and more dopey, and after maybe two or three weeks I just stopped. The days seemed to run into each other, then. I just lay on the foam mattress and let the music wash in and out, and I thought about things that had happened in my life, but they seemed far away and hardly real. Reality was the bucket and pasta and a polystyrene cup of water twice a day..." (154-155).

Alessia paints an awful picture of her time in captivity and the reader is invited to sympathize with her situation. *The Danger* offers an insight into what happens after a crime has been solved. How do the various people involved in the kidnapping case move on once Alessia has been safely returned to her family? Is that the conclusion, or is there more? Francis shows that crime novels don't necessarily have to end with the resolution of the enigma. The story of recovery that follows is just as moving and captivating as the telling of the hostage negotiator's exploit. Reading about Alessia's emotional distress puts the readers face to face with the horrid reality that accompanies crimes and invites them to think about the larger consequences such actions have not just on the victim, but also the other people involved in the case.

2.6 Conclusion

Crime fiction sets itself apart from other works of fiction thanks to a series of unique narrative devices that revolve around an enigma and its resolution. Its characters can be flat or well-developed depending on the particular subgenre one is looking at. The fictional universe in which the investigation takes place also varies greatly from one type of crime fiction to another. The mystery novel is preoccupied with the reestablishment of order, the hardboiled detective novel deals with a world that's uncertain and therefore may or may not bring closure to its enigma, and finally, the criminal novel concerns itself primarily with answering the why question and understanding the psychological motives behind the murderer's actions or the emotional damaged caused to the victim. Crime fiction uses different modes of concealment to prevent the reader from discovering the truth before the novel has reached its final pages. This technique is at the origin of the genre's popularity and constitutes its main characteristic. The story of the crime and the story of detection are the most distinctive narrative marks of this genre and are found in works of crime fiction across different types of media.

CHAPTER 3

HEAVY RAIN, PARTICIPATORY POWER, AND DECEPTION

3.1 Expansion into a new medium

Crime fiction is appealing for many reasons. Ken Worpole states that “it is surely partly because, in common with much ‘formulaic’ literature, a familiar narrative structure is of great reassurance and support in the activity of reading” (27). In classic mystery and detective novels, readers can freely abandon themselves to the intrigue because there is the general assumption that the detective will solve the mystery, catch the criminal, and restore order and stability. Worpole also believes that the popularity of the genre is due to its clever use of semiology “in which nothing is what it appears to be and everything is a shifting world of signs and meanings” (27). There is a certain addictive quality to interpreting clues and solving mysteries that brings readers back to this genre time and time again. Especially when current social and political events paint an uncertain future, readers find comfort in the methodical narrative structure of such novels. Peter Hühn confirms this and supplements Worpole’s idea with the argument that “the concluding narration of the crime, revealing the origin of the disruption, identifying its individual agent(s), and predicting as well as entailing the proper ending may be taken as a powerful confirmation of the significance of stories and, indeed, of traditional literature, as fundamental social ordering structures” (464). To a certain extent, we project our lives onto the stories we read, and if these stories have satisfying endings, then this positive sentiment is reflected back onto our own reality. In the same way, after watching a horror movie some viewers might think it necessary to double-check the front door locks, because they inadvertently transported elements of fear from the diegetic world back onto their life. Our lives resemble works of fiction and therefore these novels influence our perception of reality and

social order.

But there is more to crime fiction than just the pleasure of engaging with familiar literary conventions. In many ways, crime fiction is a game. Hühn supports the idea of crime fiction as a form of entertainment when he states that: “[The] social motive is probably supplemented by the inherent appeal, for such readers, of watching their special professional skills of interpretation exercised in a thrilling and playful manner and of being at the same time invited to participate in the game” (464). Through the act of reading, fans of crime fiction participate in a game of uncovering symbols and collecting clues. They get to put their detective skills to use and gradually uncover the answers to the who? how? and why? questions. As Horsley puts it: “readers [are challenged] to put a fictional world in order by the act of being, simply, a ‘good reader’” (14). The goal of the game is to identify the murderer, perhaps even beat the detective or central protagonist to it. During this game readers also judge the writing skills of the author. The longer the resolution of the mystery is delayed, the better the intrigue and the more superior the writer. Readers want this game of investigation to last as long as possible and if the author reveals the identity of the culprit too early, then they will feel cheated out of a chance to solve the enigma for themselves.

TV shows like *Law and Order* and *NCIS* have adopted these principles and paired them with the excitement of visual art. Readers have become spectators. They sit back and watch attentively as the detectives, crime scene investigators, and medical examiners gather evidence and try to draw the profile of a murderer. Similarly to readers, they make use of logical reasoning and follow the main characters in their investigation of the crime. The use of visual and sound effects adds an exciting dimension to the telling of the story. Gunshots, screams, gore, and sudden shifts in camera angle are used to increase suspense. Additionally, the spectators project themselves onto the main characters and share their apprehension and desire to reestablish order. Both readers and spectators are invited to participate in a game of investigation, but in each case (except the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books) their

participation has no bearing on the development of the story. Even when they solve the mystery before the main protagonist, they have no way of influencing the outcome of the plot. This is where videogames like *Heavy Rain* come in. They combine critical thinking with the thrill of moving images and add to it elements of agency and power. *Heavy Rain* takes crime fiction's practice of reading for the plot and amplifies its appeal by putting the player in charge of the story threads. Players get to experience a deeper level of involvement than readers or spectators by controlling the on-screen characters and making plot-related decisions. They are not just following the plot, they engage with it and their on-screen behaviors can result in sudden and unexpected turns of events. The mere fact that players have to hold a controller in their hands means that they will be in constant communication with the game. Unlike a person watching a show on TV, players are regularly expected to return some form of feedback, either by clicking through dialogue or making the on-screen character move. Videogames then, reinforce the participatory aspect of crime fiction by involving players both physically and mentally in the story of detection. *Heavy Rain* makes a bold promise on the back of its cover: "The Origami Killer has taken a new victim. In a terrorized city, the hunt for a child will lead four unconnected people to ask the same question: How far would you go to stop a killer? Play all four roles in this psychological thriller where every action you take has consequences. How this story unfolds is entirely up to you." It is important to note that *Heavy Rain* announces itself as a thriller more so than an action game and invites buyers to influence the plot of story, thereby intimating that games can indeed be narratives. Players are given the opportunity to control the four main protagonists in a fictional setting that imitates real life situations. These characters, who are also the main investigators, are: Ethan Mars (the father of a missing boy), Scott Shelby (a private investigator), Norman Jayden (a FBI agent), and Madison Page (a photojournalist). Each of these characters has a unique way of approaching the investigation and will deal differently with the who? how? and why? questions; in this manner exposing players to different emotional and objective struggles. The power to choose one action over another is what

provides players with a sense of agency and sets them apart from readers of traditional crime fiction. This becomes evident in another tagline on the back of the cover which reads “your smallest decisions can change everything” indicating that players will constantly have to evaluate the characters' actions.

But exactly what types of actions are we talking about? A brief look at the game's user manual reveals the different forms of “gaming” the player will perform. The mastering of these various skills is crucial to the player's successful participation in the investigation. The basic feature of the game is the ability to control the movements and behavior of the on-screen character. This can be broken down further into deciding where to walk, selecting a dialogue topic from a series of choices that appear above the character's head, picking a particular thought to focus on, again presented to the player as a group of words above the character's head, and finally, performing actions. These elements are essential to the story of *Heavy Rain* since players have to use them in order to make decisions and progress in the plot. Thoughts for example, can help the player understand the feelings of the on-screen character and in turn make informed dialogue and action choices.



Figure 3.1. Ethan's thoughts.

After the death of his son Jason, Ethan and his wife divorced and he began to suffer from depression. In the above screenshot, Ethan just picked up his other son, Shaun, from school and is wondering what to do next. The four different thought options are: "Shaun," "Rain," "Go Back," and "Home." Each of them is associated with a particular button on the controller indicated on the right. If we select "Shaun," Ethan will think out loud and say: "I know he doesn't like being the last one left at school". We learn from this thought that Ethan was late to pick up his son and that it wasn't the first time this happened. A new thought option titled "Talk" appears on the screen and if players choose it, Ethan will say "seems like he doesn't really want t talk..." thus letting players know that his father-son relationship with Shaun is not at its best. After these two thoughts, Ethan becomes agitated and starts pacing. Clicking on "Go Back" results in him anxiously saying: "Shaun's waiting for me in the car," a thought meant to encourage the player to get Ethan into the car and drive home. The longer the player lets Ethan stand outside in the rain, the more impatient the character will become and Ethan's relationship with his son

will be impacted in a negative way because of the player's choices.

Thoughts and especially dialogue options can have a direct impact on the way in which the story unfolds. This is true for both, the events related to the four protagonists' lives and their individual stories of detection. *Heavy Rain* then combines into one game, the classic mystery's emphasis on the story of investigation with the crime novel's focus on character growth and psychological development. The game's decision-making system interlocks the story of the crime with the private lives of the main characters to where, at times, they become indistinguishable from one another. In the screenshot below, detective Scott Shelby is talking to the mother of one of the victims. She appears to have useful information but seems hesitant to share it. In this instance the dialogue choices don't provide players with an insight into the character's mind, but are there to personalize Scott's conduct of the investigation.



Figure 3.2. Scott's dialogue choices.

The dialogue options for this scene include “compassionate,” “persist,” and “convince,” all of which refer to the ways in which the character can address the victim. The player must choose which type of behavior is most appropriate for a given situation. If the victim looks scared, then “persist” is probably not the best choice of behavior. In this situation, the woman, Lauren, is a prostitute and Shelby, who first pretended to be a customer, just revealed that he is a private detective and asks her to help him with the investigation. “Convince” would be the best choice because it appeals not only to Lauren’s emotions, but also her sense of justice and righteousness. If the player selects this option, Shelby explains that the murderer is still walking around free and that if she doesn’t assist him, the origami killer might never get caught. Despite Shelby’s compelling argument, Lauren still refuses to cooperate. “Persist” therefore becomes the next logical choice. Shelby raises his voice and points out that there will be other innocent victims unless she cooperates. The last two dialogue choices in this scene are “trick” and “buy.” If the player selects the first one, Shelby creates a dramatic comparison between Lauren and the mother of possible future victims, thus tricking her into feeling guilty and selfish for not agreeing to provide assistance with the murder case. If players follow this sequence of dialogue choices, Lauren eventually consents to answering Shelby’s questions and the player learns important information about the events surrounding her son’s disappearance and the murderer’s modus operandi.

As demonstrated through the two examples above, a player’s choice of thoughts and dialogue will have a strong impact on the development of the plot; however, from a gaming mechanics point of view, these types of actions are not challenging. As we observed in the scene between Shelby and Lauren, they test the player’s detective skills or as was the case with Ethan earlier, the player’s interest in the emotional well-being of the character. Such action and decision moments shape the story, but in some instances, they are there primarily to assure the player’s involvement in the events on screen. As iterated in the game’s manual, some of these actions are context-specific and are included to give the player a sense of participation in

the character's everyday tasks: "Specific movements often mimic the movement your character will need to make on-screen – to open a window, you might need to push the right stick up, to shake a carton of juice you may need to move the wireless controller vigorously up and down" (5). These actions are part of the constant feedback that distinguishes players of crime fiction from readers or spectators of the same genre. Players are invited to invest themselves in the game on multiple levels—emotionally, intellectually, physically, and by constantly paying attention to what goes on in the story. During the first episode of *Heavy Rain* (episodes are the equivalents of chapters in a novel) the player is given tips on how to perform the various behaviors and actions. Afterwards, different buttons and movements will be indicated on the screen and players will be expected to independently perform context-related actions such as opening a door or walking up to a person.

To make players feel part of the on-screen action, and to convey that there is something important at stake, *Heavy Rain* uses complex button sequences that test the player's abilities as a gamer. Also referred to as interactive sequences, these actions are not only a type of decision-making, but are meant to recreate real life action scenes and built up suspense during critical plot moments. Lark Anderson, in a review of the game for *gamespot.com* observes that "this unconventional control scheme does a fantastic job of grounding you to the characters and their emotional states. Your actions approximate theirs, and the often short amount of time you have to react to new situations mirrors their own reaction time." His comment indicates that the developers of *Heavy Rain* went to great lengths to create realistic characters and action scenes.



Figure 3.3. Norman walking down a slope.

The above screenshot of FBI agent Norman Jayden is a good example of how the game's controls try to mimic real life. The player has to direct Norman as he is going down a slippery slope. In order to do so, the player must alternately press the buttons L1 and R1, each representing one of the character's feet. Repeatedly pressing the buttons in this sequence mimics the act of walking. If Norman loses his balance, players will have to press the up arrow to prevent the character from falling, another example of the way in which the game controls were designed to naturally represent actions.

Some of these button sequences can be very challenging, requiring players to hold down multiple buttons and use motion sensitive controls such as moving the wireless controller up and down, all while watching an action-packed scene on the screen. Missing buttons in such as a scene can have plot-related implications of varying degrees ranging from missing a clue to getting one of the main characters killed. While minor button sequences can be attempted

several times, to further reinforce the real life aspect of the game, *Heavy Rain* uses an automatic saving mode which doesn't allow players to retry some of the more difficult button sequences. By doing so, the game forces players to live with the consequences of their actions – at least for a given play through. These sequences also give the game the needed “mechanics” or “skills” element that is characteristic of the medium. Making it through a button sequence without missing a single button is difficult and if accomplished successfully, is meant to be a rewarding experience for the player. These fast-paced button sequences can be compared to the traditional reward systems often found in videogames. Players who complete the sequence without any mistakes feel like winners, while those who fail are left with a sense of disappointment and failure - they lost. However, because every action does result in a particular narrative turn, players are not punished in the traditional “game over” sense. Even if one of the main characters dies, the plot continues. The player never has to start over again. In an interview with Brandon Sheffield for the online gaming magazine *Gamasutra*, Guillaume de Fondaumière, the co-CEO of the studio that produced *Heavy Rain*, explains that he intentionally stayed away from the traditional win/lose and game over scenarios: “So we have absolutely no mechanism to gauge the successfulness of a story. What's very important to us is, whatever the outcome, it must be interesting. I'm always using the example of the fact that in *Heavy Rain*, you have no game over. You have four playable characters, and you can lose the characters; now, if you lose all four characters, you're still going to have a game over, [but] it's the end of the story. There is a very, very subtle but important difference between a game over, something that implies that you have to do it again to succeed, and the end of a story. All story threads give you a satisfying ending -- satisfying in the sense that it can be sad; it can be happy; you may know or not a number of answers to the questions that you have while playing the game. But it's a fitting ending to the story. [...] If you lose all four characters, it is going to be the end of the story; it's a sad ending, but we hope it's going to be a satisfying experience because it ends not just on an end screen asking "why?" No, you perfectly understand why it's so, and that's

very important to us” (Sheffield). As such, the button sequences and other interactive features of the game, while to a certain extent they are there to test the abilities of the player, are mostly present to direct the plot in one direction or another. Failing a button sequence may feel like a defeat, especially if one accidentally pressed the wrong button, but that is in itself a reproduction of real life situations. Bad things happen even when we don’t always mean for them to happen. In this sense, *Heavy Rain* also employs the decentered world view found in the hardboiled detective novel. The fictional in-game world is not idyllic in anyway. Dreadful things happen to good people. Early on in the game, Ethan’s eldest son is run over by a car and there is nothing the player can do to prevent this from tragedy from happening. The game thus invites players to understand that certain events are out of our control. Learning to live with the consequences of one’s actions, be they conscious or unintentional, is part of the central message and game design of *Heavy Rain*. This idea is illustrated in the interactive action scene between Madison and the evil doctor Adrian Baker.



Figure 3.4. Madison vs. Baker.

If the player fails to complete the button sequence from which the above screenshot is taken, Madison Page is murdered by the doctor and her character is no longer playable. This is a very powerful moment in the game. If *Heavy Rain* were a movie, viewers would tense up and anxiously stare at the screen hoping that Madison will be able to fend off her aggressor, some might even be disgusted by the amount of blood and violence present and decide to look away. Players don't have this same luxury; whether Madison lives or dies depends entirely on their skills as gamers. Such action scenes require a lot of attention and precision, as well as a quick reaction time. Players have to press various buttons in a specific sequence; and sometimes need to hold them down simultaneously, all while listening to the awful sound of the drilling machine held by the doctor who is about to kill Madison. If the character is nervous or in a state of emotional distress, the buttons shown on the screen are fuzzy and jittery, thus making it harder for the player to read them and select the most appropriate one. The synchronization of all these actions causes an adrenaline rush and empowers the players. As I was playing through this scene I was constantly asking myself: "Will I be able to cut Madison free? What object will I use to fight back? How many more buttons are there in this sequence?" *Heavy Rain* thought me to quickly evaluate different options and to be ready for anything. If I wanted to be in control of the development of the plot, I had to carefully watch the events on screen and always be prepared for an action sequence to start. Otherwise, I might have lost one of the main characters and the story could have taken an unsatisfying turn. In his review of *Heavy Rain* for the gaming website *ign.com*, Chris Roper agrees that it is the action sequences and decision making moments that set this game apart from others. He praises *Heavy Rain's* use of suspense as well as the game's requirement for constant concentration: "What's really interesting is that *Heavy Rain* manages to always keep you on your toes, and if you don't pay attention and keep your cool, you'll pay for it. There are action sequences that happen when you least expect them, and if you're not ready, you may "fail" them. In other cases, the opposite is true: events can happen very quickly and your gut instinct may be to react to them, when the

best option may have been to wait for a better opportunity (or not react at all)". Roper supports de Fondaumière's idea of multiple satisfying endings and explains that approaching *Heavy Rain* with the conventional idea of winning is not ideal, since the game will not always reward you with a positive outcome just because you reacted quickly. Sometimes clicking on a seemingly unimportant dialogue choice will result in more options popping up on the screen, which will then lead the character to an important discovery or realization. Its unpredictability is what makes *Heavy Rain* so fascinating.

Of course, some players like to dare videogames and might intentionally pick bad answer choices to see how the character will be punished or how bloody the scene will become. While it is possible to play with such a mindset, this type of gaming is opposed to the intention of the creators of *Heavy Rain*. De Fondaumière expresses his opinion of what his group intended to achieve: "I think that the most important goal for us is to show that video games can be more than just shooting, driving -- that games can be meaningful," he then goes on to say that "the sets are very interactive; you can talk to people... I think we're trying to make sure that, whatever the context of what the player has to do, we're giving an awful lot of choice to players so they can really go their own way. But of course, if someone wants to just ruin the experience -- but who would want to do that?" It's interesting that Fondaumière anticipates the existence of gamers who don't want to explore the true potential of the game, but doesn't take the time to speculate about the reasons for their behavior. *Heavy Rain* was meant to be realistic. The creators wanted to confront players with real life problems and decisions and engage them in critical thinking. If a player purposely defies this intent and constantly makes the characters act badly, he defeats the purpose of the game. Such a player never second guesses his decisions or stops to think about the implications of his actions. The meaning behind *Heavy Rain* will be lost to him and he will miss out on an incredible interactive experience.

3.2 Not So Different after All?

Because it has a strong focus on narrative, to the discontent of many gamers, *Heavy Rain* was marketed by some advertisers as an interactive movie. Fondaumière has been asked many times to discuss the cinematic elements of *Heavy Rain* and to comment on whether or not the game shares characteristics with the film genre. His responses are always similar to this one: “In a movie, you are passively looking at the story. You see a perspective to certain events; you see one single possibility. What we're doing, we're really giving you a choice. We're setting a strong context; we're setting a number of possibilities. We're presenting to you different kinds of characters, but what really happens depends on your choices. If *Heavy Rain* was a movie, it would be ten, twenty, thirty movies, and that's what's interesting.” The game does have a lot of cut scenes and dialogue between characters, but because the player can control the development of the plot, it is not a movie in the traditional sense of the term. What *Heavy Rain* does respect throughout its various stories however, are the formulas of various subgenres of crime fiction.

Although it makes use of the interactive qualities of its medium to get players involved in the progression of the story, in many ways the narrative or narratives of *Heavy Rain* (since there are multiple endings) resemble those of traditional works of crime fiction. Like a mystery or detective novel, *Heavy Rain* revolves around the duality of the story of the crime and the story of detection. The player learns that a serial murderer, known as the Origami Killer, has been abducting children and drowning them, leaving behind an origami figure and an orchid flower as his signature mark. The player gets information about the story of the crime through the television, the radio, newspapers, as well as his interactions with other in-game characters.

Like the reader of a traditional mystery novel, the player of *Heavy Rain* wants to find out who the perpetrator is, but the game's story of detection is rendered more complex because of its subdivision into four distinct stories, each with its own central character. In order to understand how the various elements of the puzzle fit together, players must combine clues and

pieces of evidence gathered by four different characters (Ethan, Norman, Madison, and Scott) in four different types of investigation. The telling of the narrative is further complicated by the fact that all the main characters can potentially die in the course of the investigation; causing players to lose one of their chief investigators and the plot to take a new turn. For the player to arrive at what most people would consider a satisfactory ending, that is, save the child and arrest the criminal, at least one of the main characters has to remain alive. If all the characters die, then there is no more story of investigation and the narrative comes to an abrupt end. Also, while readers of crime fiction may be trying to beat the central protagonist to the solution, players have a personal investment in the characters they control. One can argue that the four protagonists are an extension of the player's self and that he/she will therefore try hard to keep them alive and complete the various stories of investigation as thoroughly as possible.

Heavy Rain draws on multiple subgenres of crime fiction, more specifically the mystery novel, the detective novel and the crime novel, and combines their various characteristics to form a complex interactive narrative of the larger crime fiction genre. It shares the detective novel's strong emphasis on well-rounded characters and relies on the presence and personality of the four protagonists to make the plot come to life. A lot of in-game moments were created with the sole purpose of getting players to care about the protagonists and develop an emotional connection to them. For example, in the first two episodes, players control Ethan Mars and perform a series of everyday tasks in that character's life such as taking a shower, setting the table, and playing with Ethan's children. While these events have no direct connection to either the story of the crime or the story of detection, they are an important part of the narrative because they make the players feel like they know the character on a personal level. Later on, when Ethan's son Shaun gets kidnapped, players share his emotional distress and feel obligated to help Ethan find his son and restore his life back to normal.



Figure 3.5 Ethan with his sons.

In this scene the player learns some of the basic controls by playing with Ethan's two sons. Such an approach allows players to become comfortable with the commands of the game without fear of failing a task and also allows them to share one of the main protagonist's intimate family moments. It is even possible for the player to decide how Ethan should interact with his wife Grace. Little behaviors like kissing her when she comes home or helping her put away the groceries are left up to the player. Chris Roper praises *Heavy Rain's* realistic rendering of human interaction, claiming that "[...] the dialog is generally spectacular. Most every line is natural and written in an unforced manner, lending a great deal more realism to the characters." The diegetic world is familiar and accessible, thus making it easy for the player to settle into the characters' lives. Ethan, Madison, Scott, and Jayden are given full existences. They have jobs, families, hobbies, and like every human being, they also have character flaws. Take Norman Jayden for example. He is a well-respected FBI agent, owns special ARI (Additional Reality Interface) glasses which provide him with a virtual office and help him identify

evidence, but he is addicted to Triptocaine and sometimes lets his addiction affect his work. Madison Page is a photojournalist with strong communication and people skills. But she too, has unusual behavioral traits. She suffers from chronic insomnia and has paranoid fears of falling into an eternal sleep. When these moments set in, the only places she can fall asleep at are motel rooms. This, paired with her need to help others, leads to her meeting Ethan at the Cross Road Motel, and subsequently, getting involved in the murder case.

Another characteristic of crime fiction which *Heavy Rain* effectively adapted from printed works is the search for answers to the *who? how? and why?* questions. The game progressively builds up to the resolution of the mystery and cleverly demonstrates how the various clues fall into place. Although the game has four well rounded protagonists, it is not an open-ended life-simulation game like the Sims, where players act out daily activities and create fictional communities for their characters. The search for the killer and the rescue of Ethan's son Shaun are the central plot elements, not the characters' every day activities. Scott Shelby's investigation consists of interviewing the families of the victims and searching for identifying clues, Ethan and Madison are mostly interested in saving Shaun, and FBI agent Norman Jayden focuses on both, stopping the killer and rescuing the boy. He is the character most focused on actual detective work. He has special ARI glasses that when activated, make footprints, DNA traces, tracks, and other possible pieces of evidence appear fluorescent and easier to detect.

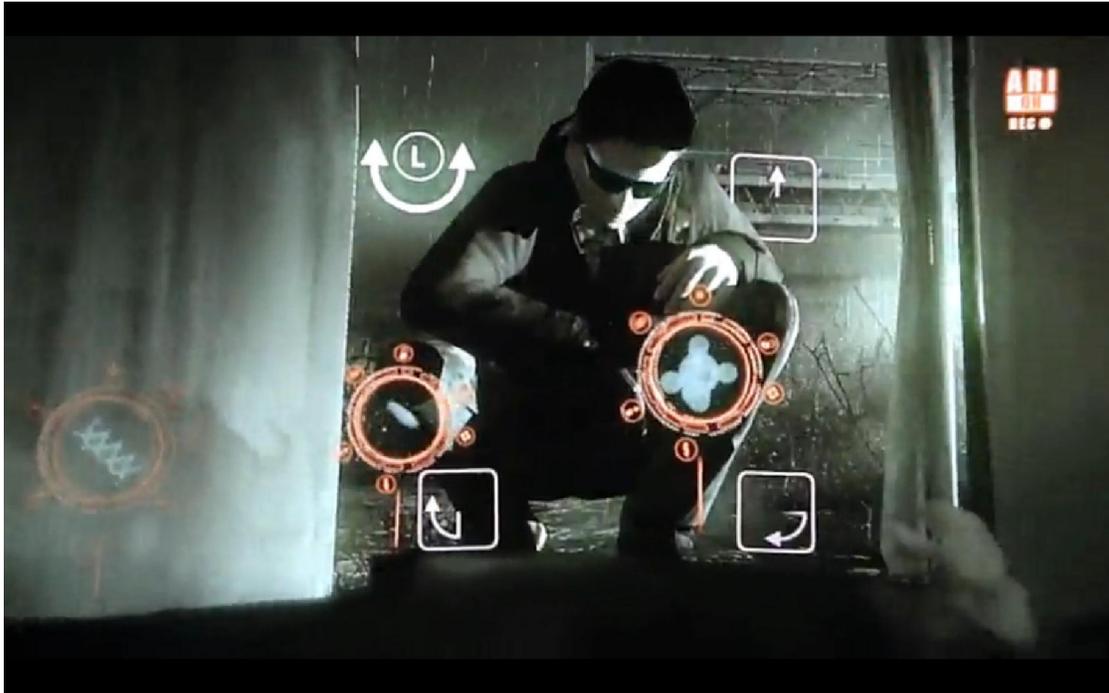


Figure 3.6. Norman investigating.

This screenshot shows Norman at work. When controlling him, players have to investigate crime scenes in search for possible clues and interrogate witnesses. Items that could be clues are highlighted with an orange circle and can be examined up close. In this screenshot, there are three items that can be inspected more closely and the arrows next to them indicate which movement the player has to make with the joystick in order to get Norman to study them. The item on the far right is orchid pollen. Thanks to his ARI glasses; Norman can calculate its concentration and determine how long it has been present in the air. This allows him to deduct when the killer was last on the scene. The item in the middle is a footprint, Norman can store a particular print cast in his ARI environment and then later compare it to others to find out if they were made by the same person.



Figure 3.7 Norman's office.

This screenshot shows Norman at work in his virtual office. Players can choose the background of this imaginary space and call up the various pieces of evidence gathered at the crime scene to examine them in conjunction with each other. For each item, Norman can do a geoanalysis which lets him see the item and its location on a map. This is helpful in determining how far away from each other certain clues were collected. By selecting “analyze” from the menu on the left, players make Norman give a detailed report on the item. Sometimes one has to go back and forth between geoanalysis and regular analysis for Norman to make deductions about the characteristics of an item and the place where it was collected.

One of the first things players learn about Scott Shelby is that he is a private investigator hired by the families of the victims. As such, players expect to be doing mostly detective work when controlling this character, but this is not the case. *Heavy Rain* works hard to present each protagonist as an individual with unique abilities and personality traits. When

Scott Shelby finds the mother of one of the victims at home, lying in the bathtub with her wrists cut open, the player enters a series of button sequences in which Shelby rescues the woman, applies bandages to her wounds, talks to her, and finally helps take care of her baby.



(a)

(b)

Figure 3.8 (a) Scott helping mother, (b) Scott taking care of baby.

These two screenshots are an example of how players get to know a more emotional side of Scott Shelby. These are not the typical responsibilities of a private investigator, and yet the game makes players perform these actions to remind them that there is more to each character than his or her role in the investigation. From a crime fiction theory point of view, this could be classified as “distraction” since the players are temporarily sidetracked from the main investigation and made to focus on seemingly unimportant tasks. Shelby, who puts on a tough façade when dealing with criminals, comes across as caring and compassionate. It is only towards the very end of this episode that he asks the woman questions about the disappearance of her son and refocuses the plot onto the search for the origami killer. The revelation that the father of the dead boy left behind a cell phone that the mother had never seen before is presented as just a secondary piece of information. Shelby doesn't question her thoroughly; instead, he asks about her family and friends, giving the player the impression that he is more concerned about her personal well-being than with the development of the investigation. Players can collect the phone, but Scott Shelby doesn't comment on its

acquisition, thus encouraging the player to think that the murder case is only of secondary importance to him.

Heavy Rain respects the crime fiction genre's conventions of including distraction and ambiguity and employs these techniques on multiple occasions. Players may control the actions of the characters on screen, but they don't have full insight into the characters' minds. This is especially true for Ethan Mars and Scott Shelby. Even though players have the opportunity to engage with these characters in personal settings, certain aspects of their personality are purposely given little weight or left unrevealed. After the death of his first son, Ethan goes through depression and is sent to a psychologist. The player participates in therapy sessions and has to answer questions which will help determine whether or not Ethan suffers from schizophrenia. The knowledge that Ethan is mentally unstable forces players to question his actions. At some point in the game, Ethan wakes up in the middle of the night, wandering in the streets, his clothes drenched, and an origami figure in his hand (See screenshot on the right). This scene, and other moments in which the player watches Ethan struggle with memory loss and self-doubts were included with the intention of misleading players into thinking that Ethan is the killer- a move typical of many works of crime fiction, no matter their medium. He is the red herring of the story. Numerous elements point to his guilt and sometimes Ethan's own thoughts indicate that he is unsure of his innocence. When the police interrogate him about the disappearance of his son, Ethan is nervous and all the dialogue options are jittery. Some of the questions are very specific like "At what time did you arrive at the park?" or "What was your son wearing?" and most players will not be able to answer them correctly. This means that Ethan's answers to the police will be vague and he will come across as not trustworthy. It's the inclusion of moments such as these which lead the player to doubt Ethan's innocence.



(a)

(b)

Figure 3.9 (a) Ethan thinking, (b) Ethan with origami figure.

The screenshot on the left shows some of the thought options for Ethan after his son Shaun has been kidnapped. Clicking on them will reveal just how conflicted Ethan is. If one selects the option “Innocent,” Ethan says: “This doesn’t make any sense. I couldn’t have been me. I couldn’t ever have done that.” At first, players might feel relieved to hear those words, but if they decide to press the square button for the “Killer” thought, they will quickly change their mind about Ethan’s rationality: “I’m the Origami killer. I black out- and then the murdering starts...I know it’s me.” The presentation of such conflicting thoughts makes it difficult for players to gauge the lucidity of the character they control. When making important plot related decisions, players will now have to take into consideration the fact that Ethan may be the killer and act with caution. Ethan is a very ambiguous character. He cannot answer the police’s questions with certitude, but he is determined to risk his life to save his son. He constantly vacillates between two extremes, causing the player to be wary of his true intentions.

By keeping certain things from the player, despite the appearance of control and agency, *Heavy Rain* stays true to the narrative devices that make works of crime fiction so popular and their game of investigation so enticing. The videogame waits until the very end before revealing the interrelatedness of the various clues and bridging the gap between the story of the crime and the story of detection. Players, just like readers, watch by with surprise when it is revealed that private investigator Scott Shelby is the Origami Killer. However, due to the medium in which the story is told, this revelation comes as a double shock. Not only were players wrong in thinking that Ethan was the criminal, they were also wrong in thinking they were in control of Scott Shelby's actions. A series of flashbacks reveals that by controlling Shelby, players were actually an accessory to crime. What they thought was a private investigation was actually the murderer's attempt at covering up evidence and picking up items and clues that might possibly incriminate him. They are now encouraged to rethink through the entire plot to realize when and how they were tricked. Letting one of the main characters turn out to be the killer is a common trope in works of crime fiction. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and Agatha Christie's *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?* are two famous examples of this unique narrative technique. *Heavy Rain's* story, and especially its unexpected ending, demonstrates that the videogame medium can effectively be used to create new modes of storytelling without giving up the distinct characteristics of crime fiction. By making the player an active participant in the development of the story, *Heavy Rain* challenges the conventional way in which the crime is gradually reconstructed through detective work, yet demonstrates that even in a videogame, players are not truly in control of the game of investigation. *Heavy Rain* takes full advantage of the mechanics and narrative possibilities offered by its medium, but it operates within the established principles of crime fiction narratives.

The medium of the videogame changes the way in which the story is told - the "how" element of the investigation. Players, unlike readers, actively participate in the development of the plot and can impact the events within the diegetic world, thus also determining the "what" or

“story” aspect of the game. However, both the “how” and the “what” are limited by the parameters set by the designers of the game. As Janet Murray explains, “there is a distinction between playing a creative role within an authored environment and having authorship of the environment itself” (152). While the *Heavy Rain* developers created alternative scenarios for each episode, and many possible endings to the game, as a player one could envision hundreds of other scenarios and endings, none of which can be acted out. The player can only operate within the limited freedom given to him by the makers of the game. Throughout the game, players think their choices are affecting the storyline, but in reality, they play out one of the many different story threads envisioned by the developers. Inevitably, these limitations caused frustration in players and many complained about the fact that they were unable to make Ethan call the police once he received the letter from the origami killer. They thought that this was the responsible move to make in such a situation, but the game never offered it as an option. Then there is the problem of incoherent plot structures. By taking on the roles of multiple characters, players soon learn that each time a boy was abducted by the origami killer, the father of the child came into the possession of a cell phone and a shoe box with instructions on how to find out the location of the missing boy. Yet, the local police men don’t seem to be aware of the existence of these items, resulting in gamers like Daniel Weissenberg from *gamecritics.com* to express their disappointment at seemingly illogical actions and behaviors: “The cops don't seem to know that either of these things occurred. Try to imagine a situation in which, during an intensive police search for the victim of a serial killer, during the dozens of conversations the grieving mother and distraught father must have had with the police, neither of these subjects came up. It's impossible. Why didn't they volunteer this information to the police? Why didn't the police ask?” Weissenberg’s frustration is understandable, but the incompetence of the police is a common theme in crime fiction theory, and therefore makes sense in the greater scheme of things. A good example of an ineffectual cop out of the literature realm would be detective Athelney Jones from the Sherlock Holmes mystery *The Sign of the*

Four. Jones is part of the Scotland Yard Police and stands out by his incompetence, his clumsiness, and his tendency to jump to wrong conclusions. He even goes as far as arresting innocent people. The police officers in *Heavy Rain* may seem a bit disorganized and dim-witted to some players, but this characteristic should not come as a surprise to avid readers of crime fiction. In detective novels the police are often portrayed as obstructive, constrained by law enforcement regulations and procedure guidelines, and as having a limited intellectual capacity. Their investigation takes place in parallel to that of the private eye and it is essential that they be inept so that the private detective or the amateur sleuth can shine and come out victorious in the end. In the case of *Heavy Rain*, the police's uselessness also means that the players get to feel good about their abilities as crime solvers and logical thinkers. The incorporation of this narrative device is not an indication of *Heavy Rain's* failure as work of crime fiction; it is instead proof of the game's ability to successfully adopt literary formulas into its interactive narrative.

3.3 Conclusion

Heavy Rain is a videogame, but because it adheres to the genre's conventions, it can also be classified as a work of crime fiction. Perhaps the best way to bring together the elements of the videogame medium and the characteristics of crime fiction is to look at them as two different schemas merged into one collaborative interactive narrative- a meta schema so to speak. Douglas and Hargadon explain that "schemas [...] entail scripts, sets of tasks, or actions appropriate to certain schemas" (155). The broader videogame schema then includes scripts about player agency and in-game reward systems. When players start a game, they bring these expectations with them. Although the content and gaming mechanics of videogames vary greatly, there is always the general assumption that players will be in charge of the characters and occupy a position of power within the game. The schema for crime fiction is also composed of numerous scripts. When we start reading a mystery novel, we search our memory for past examples of detective work and apply this acquired knowledge to the current text. In Douglas and Hargadon's words : "Our schemas for mysteries [...] tell us that the author will dangle as

many false leads, innocent suspects, and red herrings as she possibly can before us, all tactics to delay our resolving the mystery's central puzzle until the book's ultimate pages" (155). The schema of crime fiction is diametrically opposed to the one of videogames. Readers of crime fiction look forward to being tricked and misled, while gamers anticipate being in control of the on-screen character's actions. *Heavy Rain* managed to merge these two seemingly incompatible schemas and the result is absolutely astounding. People who approach the game from a traditional gamer's perspective are shocked when they find out they were not truly in control of the characters' behaviors and actions, and those who expected the game to be like a traditional work of crime fiction are taken aback by the amount of player participation the game requires. No matter the expectations with which you enter the game, *Heavy Rain* will surprise you because it operates within two very distinct schemas. Agency and deceit are put side by side to force players to rethink notions of guilt, power, and trust. This aspect also testifies to the game's command of the concepts of distraction and fragmentation. Gameplay elements like decision making are used to produce doubt and confusion. Suddenly, players are not just following the detective's investigation, but are themselves responsible for the collection of clues and the interrogation of victims. Continuously being in the middle of the action makes it hard for players to see the larger network of connecting clues. *Heavy Rain* always requires some form of feedback from the player, thereby limiting the time he/she can spend on trying to piece together the various elements of the case. Gamers who are also familiar with the literary conventions of crime fiction might try to rely on their foreknowledge of the genre to make sense of the events in the game, but the presence of a radically different videogame schema complicates this task. They are dealing with a new medium, and in the process of transmediation certain features had to be altered to meet the requirements of a digital game. Consequently, there is no assurance that their predictions will be accurate. For example, in classic mystery stories it is often the lead detective who solves the murder. In *Heavy Rain*, any of the four protagonists, and even one side character, can, depending on the player's choices, be the person to crack the case.

Interactivity and the mechanics of the game add a sense of participatory power to an otherwise passive reading experience. Letting players' choices affect the outcome of the story however, is not the only way in which videogames enhance existing genre conventions. As I will discuss in the next chapter, immersion, free roam, and the re-creation of historical settings are other ways in which videogames use their medium to revolutionize how we think about crime fiction.

CHAPTER 4

L.A. NOIRE, BODY SUITS, CAMERAS, AND DETECTIVE FICTION

4.1 Introduction

Videogames use different techniques to immerse players into their digital universes. *Heavy Rain*, as we just saw, predominantly relies on button sequences and decision-making tools to keep players engaged and give them a feeling of agency and control over the development of the plot. Its setting is a generic city, and players never get the opportunity to roam the streets or interact with other non-player characters (NPC) outside of the designated story paths. Because it is strongly narrative-driven, players' journeying around the in-game world is limited. The search for the Origami Killer and the psychological state of the four protagonists are the foremost interests of the game. Other videogames, as is probably best exemplified through the famous *Grand Theft Auto* series, make the exploration of the diegetic city a central part of the game's premise. Players can complete the main missions or take advantage of the numerous in-game extras and interact with NPCs, visit certain locations, or even partake in simple everyday activities like eating at a fast-food restaurant, going to the gym or buying clothes. Because these types of games allow the player to decide how he interacts with the in-game world, they are often referred to as "open world" or "free roaming" games. Take *Grand Theft Auto 4* for example; one of its many online multiplayer modes lets the hosts of the game modify certain city settings such as the number of police cars on patrol, or the density of traffic, to make the gaming experience more challenging. The game also gives players the opportunity to complete side quests like the city jump stunts where one has to drive up ramps in either a car or motorcycle and land at a certain distance. There is the supposition that the diegetic world has an existence beyond what players experience through the main storyline.

The city isn't there merely to fulfill the requirements of the plot; it is an interactive entity of its own.

4.2 Aiming High: L.A. Noire and Period Immersion

L.A. Noire, made by the same people who developed *Grand Theft Auto*, is a detective game set in 1947 Los Angeles. Described by Charlotte Stoudt as a “single-player detective thriller,” it makes use of various forms of interactivity and cinematic techniques to draw players into the period atmosphere of the game. *L.A. Noire* mixes exciting car chases, fighting scenes and meticulous detective work to produce a captivating, yet complex story arc. The game's graphics are very advanced and facilitate the immersion into the on-screen world. In her article “How the L.A. Noire Makers Re-created the City of 1947,” Stoudt states that “the standard for the production design was very high. The game uses MotionScan, a new technology that captures an actor's smallest facial movements.” The makers' efforts are clearly visible in final product. When characters talk, we see not only their lips move, but also their eyes, brows, and entire body react to their change in attitude. Their movements are not clumsy or overly exaggerated, but mimic natural human mannerism and gesticulation. As seen in the composite of screenshots below, appropriate hand and body gestures accompany the suspect's gradual change in tone during interrogations.



(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 4.1 (a) McColl: back against booth, (b) leaning forward, (c) arms crossed.

In the first shot, McColl (the suspect) is distrustful of detective Cole Phelps (controlled by the player). He leans his back against the booth and doesn't smile. He seems rigid and uptight. Then, in the second shot, after Phelps hints at him being the killer, McColl leans forward and raises his voice. This position is more intimidating and the character's facial expression shows that he disapproves of the detectives' interrogation methods. In the last shot, the suspect has calmed down again. He sits in an upright position and puts one arm on top of the other. He is still a little hesitant, but he is cooperating with Phelps and his face conveys a more relaxed expression.

The designers of *L.A. Noire* wanted to outdo other games in terms of character graphics, especially facial animations since these are the hardest to create. This is evidenced in a short behind the scenes video titled "L.A. Noire the Technology behind Performance," in which the developers of Rockstar Games and Team Bondi go over the state of the art technology used in *L.A. Noire*. Writer and director Brendan McNamara explains that they strived to achieve a high level of realism to make the detective work conducted by the players seem authentic: "We've been able to make buildings that look good, we've been able to make cars that look very real, [but] the level of realism goes up and up. With the previous kinds of technologies you would use facial motion capture, we didn't really have a feeling that we could pull that off [with *L.A. Noire*], you could never really tell whether someone was lying or not [...] The story is a detective story so the believability of the actors' performances is linked to gameplay." While motion capture techniques are excellent for capturing general movements and body language, they cannot record small facial details like blinking or eye contact evasion. Since the narrative of *L.A. Noire* revolves around players interviewing suspects and studying their reactions to decide whether they are lying or telling the truth, the game needed to be able to convey changes in mood and tone through different facial expressions. This also meant that the makers had to look into new technologies capable of rendering such minute details.



(a)

(b)

Figure 4.2 (a) Aaron Staton, (b) Detective Cole Phelps.

In the above shots we have *L.A. Noire* detective Cole Phelps on the right, and actor Aaron Staton (best known for playing account executive Ken Cosgrove on the TV show *Mad Men*) on the left. Staton was the model and voice actor for the character, and in the same video, discusses the challenges of transferring human movement and mood onto a three dimensional virtual character: “It’s really acting a scene in two parts. [First there’s] the motion capture and then the motion scanning.” The motion capture, as explained my McNamara, “captures all the body movements and where people look, so it gives you all the outlines.” While performing scenes for the game, actors had to wear a special body suit that allowed their movements to be rendered onto a three dimensional map. This is illustrated in the first screenshot below, where we see Staton bending over to examine an object. The white dots on the suit are sensors that record every human movement with great precision and then transmit the data to a computer. The result of that transmission can be seen in the second screenshot. The cluster of white dots in the center is actually the reproduction of Staton’s kneeling movement in the first shot. Motion capturing is an extensively time consuming and expensive task. Actors have to be brought to the studio in order to record scenes for the game. Everyone of Cole Phelps’s movement had to

be captured via sensor first. Even side characters are based on real people, which meant that a lot of extras had to be cast.



Figure 4.3 Aaron Staton wearing body suit.

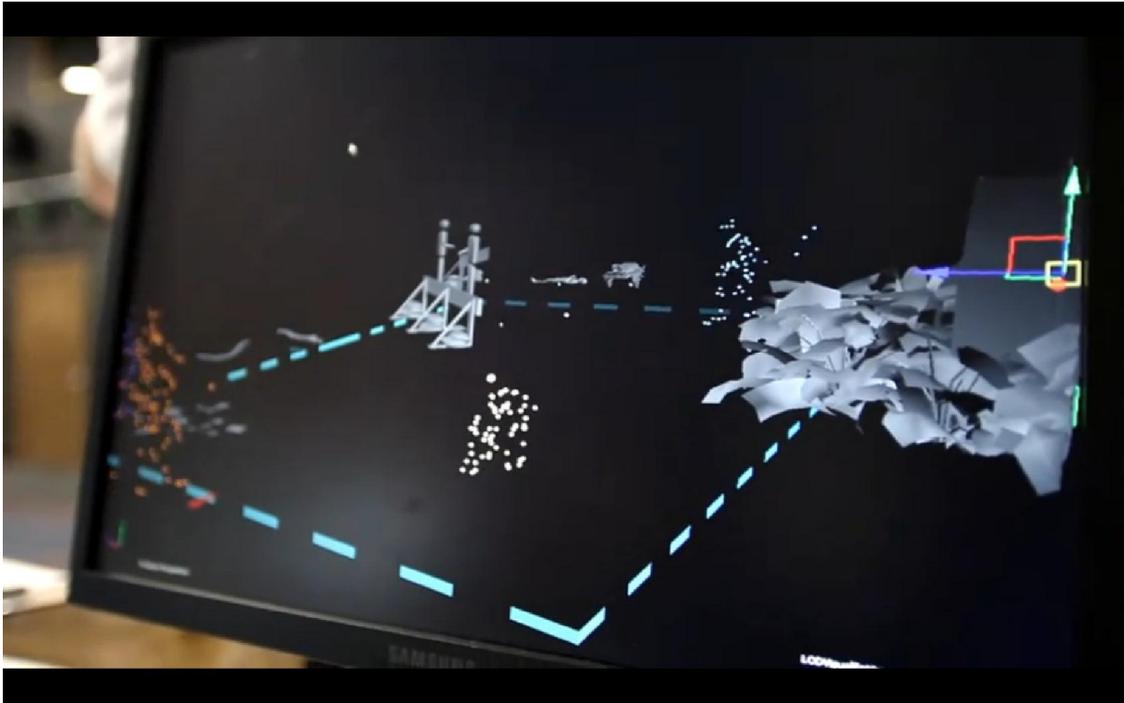


Figure 4.4 Motion capture.

In his article “Xsense Technologies Capture Every Human Motion with Body Suit,” Dean Takashi explains how such suits motion capture suits work and presents the argument put forth by Chris Edwards that “Xsens MVN technology is particularly useful in previsualization, or the stage of production when directors are trying to set up a scene.” Indeed, seeing Staton’s movements on the 3D map gives the game developers a feel for the mise-en-scene of *L.A. Noire* and allows them to make changes to the arrangement of the scene before the final production phase. They get to see which movements render well and which ones are too complex to reproduce even with the help of sensors.

Once the motion capture has successfully been recorded, the actors move on to the motion scanning part. This process is illustrated in the next two screenshots and is what sets *L.A. Noire* apart from games like *Heavy Rain*, where the characters are created only with computer graphics. In the making of video, McNamara explains that “this is where an actor would typically go into make-up in the morning and then have their hair done in 1940s hairstyle.

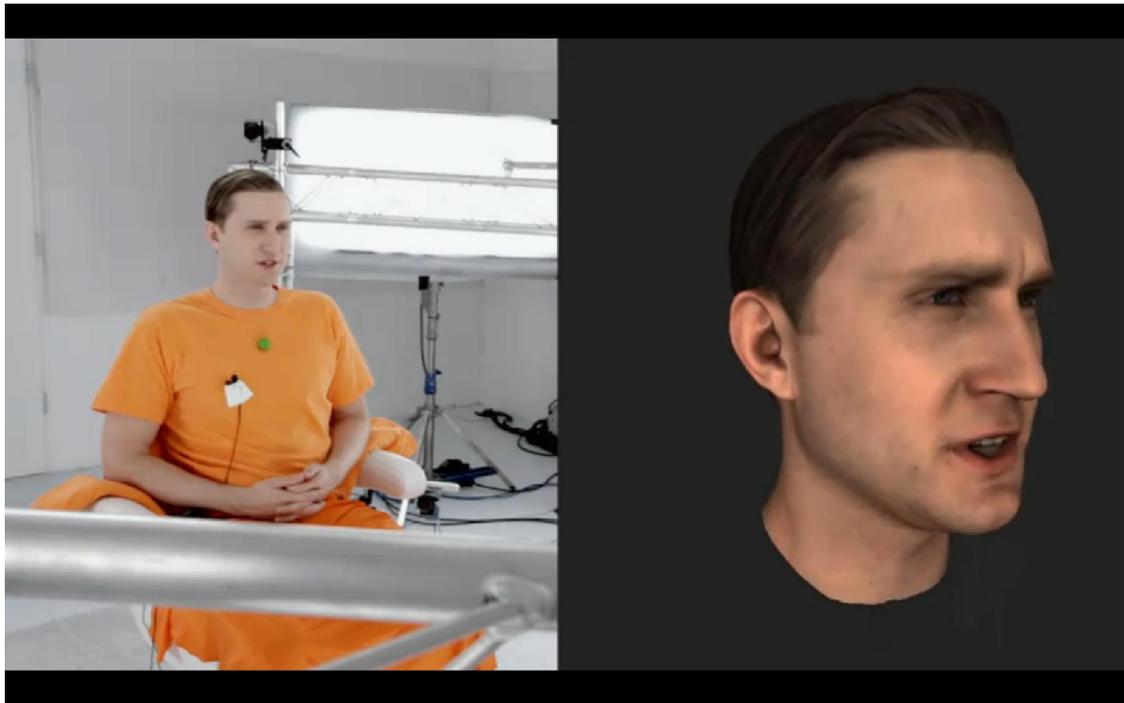
Then they [...] sit in the seat [...] and what the rig does is capture a volume around them. [The actors] deliver their lines and as they talk they get processed and turned into 3D." What McNamara refers to as "the rig" is an ensemble of 32 cameras that capture the actor's expression from multiple angles. Staton reflects on the importance of these different angles in connection with the game's main premise: "A big theme of this game is dishonesty and to detect when people are lying, you couldn't have done that in the past. [...] you've got cameras not only around but also looking upward and downward. [...] So any kind of movement is going to cut out some of the information." It is only by having so many cameras capture the same movements from different perspectives that the makers of *L.A. Noire* were able to infuse the game with a remarkably high level of realism. As Oliver Bao, head of R&D, explains: "having this realism really helps, you're literally talking to that person and then see how they behave by asking questions." Recognizing the meaning behind certain facial expression is something players know from real life situations. The game's challenge was to recreate these familiar mannerisms in a 3D mode without losing any of the subtle details of the human physiology. Mark Millian in "The Amazing Facial Capture Technology behind L.A. Noire," explains that "MotionScan was born from necessity. McNamara wanted to revive the detective-thriller genre, which has produced such movie hits as "Dick Tracy," "Se7en" and, yes, "L.A. Confidential," but virtually no great games. He figured that if gamers were to become virtual gumshoes, they'd need to be able to read the characters' faces to evaluate when someone is lying." The desire to faithfully adapt the detective genre to the videogame medium is what prompted the use of such high-tech tools. The makers of *L.A. Noire* were confident in their abilities to construct a believable city since they had already done similar projects in the past, but they had to innovate when it came to making life-like facial expressions.

The depth analysis room (another name for the rig) pictured beneath contains multiple HD cameras that can capture delicate features which traditional motion cameras would not be able to detect.



Figure 4.5 The rig.

The screenshot below shows Staton in the middle of the rig on the right and the 3D image of his head on the left. The degree of detail in the computerized rendering of the actor's face is astonishing.



(a)

(b)

Figure 4.6 (a) Staton in the rig, (b) Facial expression.

Milian states that this process, “feels in some ways like a Hollywood set. [...] Actors must plan on several hours to go through hair and makeup. [...] If a character has taken a beating, black eyes are applied with powder and eyeliner; for especially bad smack downs, the actor chomps on a blood capsule. [...] [And] once an actor is in the rig, MotionScan requires him or her to stay mostly stationary [...] or else the software loses the full picture.” The makers of *L.A. Noire* needed MotionScan to capture only facial details. That is why the actors had to sit in a bright room, wear an orange suit, and stand still during the recording. Capturing entire body movements would have been more than the technology could handle, and these restrictions allowed the cameras to focus on just the face.

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the *L.A. Noire* makers went to great lengths to recreate facial expressions and natural movements, and when it came to the creation of the city of Los Angeles, they approached the task with the same attention to detail. Because of its

meticulous reconstruction of the city and its use of cutting edge technology to produce believable characters, *L.A. Noire* “was the first videogame to be accepted at the Tribeca Film Festival (Stoudt). It was entered as a “Feature Narrative” and marked with the tags “film noir” and “thriller” (TribecaFilm.com). The game’s appearance at such an event testifies to the medium’s growing acceptance as a legitimate form of art and proves that games are capable of employing cinematic and narrative techniques just like films.

In order to achieve an authentic reproduction of 1947 L.A., production designer Simon Wood and his team had to get well acquainted with the history of the city and its architecture. Stoudt describes their work as “a massive scavenger hunt” and retraces the group’s main steps: “[They] started at the Huntington Library, digitally stitching together scanned Works Progress Administration maps from the 1930s to create a sprawling cityscape, with commercial and residential zones distinguished by color. They overlaid topographical information from the U.S. Geological Survey to delineate elevations.” This allowed them to recreate neighborhoods in accordance with the original divisions of the city. The topographical maps were then combined with air photos to get a full picture of the city’s various characteristics. They got a feel for the traffic and the number of people in the streets at different times of the day. *L.A. Noire* is not the first work of crime fiction to use a real city as the setting of its plot. The term “mean streets” was coined by Raymond Chandler and is often used to refer to “the grittiness and the chaos” that accompanies realistic hard-boiled detective novels (Efron, 330). In her article “Fictional Murders in Real ‘Mean Streets’” Malcah Efron states that recently, “[an] increasing number of novels in both the hard-boiled and the clue-puzzle subgenres [...] are set in real cities. [...] The settings are presented with near-cartographic accuracy, so the novels practically serve as street atlases” (331). *L.A. Noire* thus follows a larger trend toward the recreation of actual cities in fictional works. TV shows have also adopted this movement. A brief look at the numerous variants of the TV police procedural CSI reveals a lot of major US cities like Miami, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and New York as the chosen locations for the different shows. Real cities make for appealing

settings because they give an added element of believability to the story. In the case of *L.A. Noire*, the detailed high definition reconstruction of a bustling city also gives the game a “wow factor,” as the realism of the city furthers players’ immersion into the game.

While diligent readers of detective fiction often approach narrative details, even purely descriptive ones, with the thought that they must be related to the investigation, Efron insists that “the topographic details provided in the detective narratives that describe real city settings do not participate in the narrative on the level of “potential clue,” as the streets and highway exits help articulate neither the problem nor the solution” (332). Their purpose is to “describe not a realistic setting but a real setting” (Efron 332). The distinction between real and realistic is very important. In her review of Barthes, Efron explains that in 19th century literature, descriptive details were generally included to create an effect, an impression of realism, not to reproduce an actual existing city. Fake street names were used to imbue the story with a realistic feel and the objects mentioned in these novels had no existence outside of the text. The makers of *L.A. Noire* researched aerial and topographical information about Los Angeles because they wanted to go beyond “effects.” The city map players see in the final version of the game is equivalent to the original layout of L.A. in 1947. In other words, it’s the real city, not a fictionalized or romanticized version of it. The designers opted for actual actors instead of computer generated characters because they sought to recreate natural human expressions. Simon Wood, a member of the production team, reflects on the development of the city in relation to the MotionScan technology: “We didn’t want these amazingly subtle faces in an environment that didn’t match. We knew that the game had to be a time machine” (Stoudt). They set out to rebuild a historical environment based on physical data collected across multiple archives. Drawing the city map was an objective process and the result is a facsimile of the real Los Angeles.

Although Efron argues that “the physical environment [...] presents concrete, if not permanent, evidence that can be catalogued at least quantitatively” she also concedes that it

can be used as a “means of creating a representation of the daily existence understood as the authentic experience” (335-336). Actual physical locations become the backdrop for the fictional adventures of the protagonists. The verisimilitude attached to the city is, to a certain extent, projected onto the characters and “establishes a believable basis for the events in the novels” (337). Since the location is real, readers are more willing to engage in suspension of disbelief and accept other events and actions as plausible. Knowing the city’s organization wasn’t enough for the *L.A. Noire* developers. They used the objective topographical information and paired it with the subjective analysis of period items such as photographs and clothing to create an authentic experience of life in 1947. In order to know what it was like to live in that era, they had to look at photographs of people and extract meaning from the image’s content and composition. Stoudt, in her recital of their archeological-like work states: “[They] donned white gloves to sort through UCLA’s exhaustive news photo archive. “One photo at a diner tells you so much,” Wood says. “What the men were wearing. How they served coffee. What the specials were that day.” [...] The noir city wasn’t just a metaphor. A fog of manufacturing chemicals and soot from incinerated trash choked downtown in a permanent cloud.” The developers and designers were very dedicated to the reproduction of an authentic atmosphere and they invested a lot of time and effort in acquiring the information needed for such an exhaustive project. *L.A. Noire* is not just a system of streets; during the game players visit bars, apartments, parks, and interact with the locals. These elements, even if acquired through subjective and highly interpretative means, are given a high level of plausibility by their association with the real layout of the city. To make the virtual city come alive on screen, the makers included all the major landmarks, even the set of D.W. Griffith’s movie *Intolerance* pictured here with detective Phelps in the foreground.



Figure 4.7 Intolerance set.

This next screenshot is a street view of the neighborhood around the L.A. police department. The designers of the game included different types of facades, cars, people walking on the sidewalk, store signs and other details to create the atmosphere of a living city. They had to combine factual data and subjective interpretation and design to create the authentic experience of 1947 Los Angeles. The buildings in the original city looked similar to the ones pictured below, but the ones seen in the game are not exact renderings of the houses and shops found on that specific street in 1947. They are representative of the era's architectural style and facilitate the player's immersion into the in-game world.



Figure 4.8 Street view.

4.3 L.A. Noire and Detective Fiction

The driving force behind the motion capture, motion scanning, and in-game world design, was the aspiration for a new form of detective fiction, one that would immerse players into an authentic period universe and invite them to participate in a thrilling game of investigation. *L.A. Noire* undoubtedly accomplished something unique in the realm of cinematic techniques and computer graphics, but does its narrative and characters live up to the genre characteristics established by literary and cinematic work of crime fiction?

The game is built around a complex story arc that is itself a combination of various subplots. Players have to solve a series of crimes which are later revealed to be interconnected and part of a larger circle of violence and corruption. The pattern of the double story, where the story of investigation unveils the story of the crime, is found repeatedly throughout the game. The main schema of crime fiction is thus present in the game. Players control detective Cole Phelps and in each case they are assigned, their mission is to catch the culprit and understand

how the crime was committed. To achieve this goal, players have to investigate crime scenes, collect clues, talk to witnesses, and interrogate suspects. The Who? How? and Why? questions are central components of the investigation.

L.A. Noire also adheres to crime fiction's use of suspense and fragmentation. Music is present in almost every scene, and during the search for clues, a special system of chimes is used to let players know when they are near a new piece of evidence and when they have collected all the necessary items. The music keeps players alert and on the lookout for possible clues. Suspense is furthermore created by the alternation of game styles. While examining crime scenes is certainly a fundamental element of the game's premise, *L.A. Noire* also lets players participate in car chases, fist fights, suspect pursuits, and dangerous cross-fires. Sometimes an interrogation may appear to go smoothly and then suddenly the suspect heads for the door. Unexpected action scenes like this one force the player to think and act quickly. The fact that they can appear at any moment keeps players on edge and encourages them to contemplate different scenarios.

During their work as detective Phelps, players have to put together pieces of evidence in the most logical way, and sometimes, they have to interpret the meaning of a particular clue. For example, in the case titled "The Quarter Moon Murders" players have to decipher the meaning of various letters and poems in order to find the location of the next clue. Each written clue holds a metaphorical description of an important Los Angeles landmark like the L.A Public Library or the L.A. County Art Museum, where players then find the next piece of evidence. Moreover, fragmentation is achieved by the coexistence of multiple parallel cases. The further players progress in the game, the more complex and tortuous the narrative of *L.A. Noire* turns out to be. It becomes increasingly difficult to keep track of all the suspects' names and understand how small incidents are interconnected on a larger scale. This, paired with the fact that sometimes there are multiple suspects to one crime, all of which could be charged with the murder, makes the player second-guess his decisions and fills the story with ambiguity.

One of the most predominant characteristics of the crime fiction genre found in *L.A. Noire*, is the concept of disguise. Throughout the game, numerous protagonists hide their true intentions or pretend to be someone they are not. From the start, players are lead to believe that Cole Phelps is a war hero and a genuinely good guy who cares about justice. However, as players move up the ranks of the LAPD, certain unpleasant truths about the protagonist are revealed and he becomes less likeable. For example, we find out that Phelps has been cheating on his wife with a German singer and that he is not the war hero everyone initially claimed him to be. He also doesn't stand up against the corruption within the police department, even though he repeatedly expresses his contempt for their brutal interrogation techniques and later discovers that he himself helped put innocent men in jail just to appease the uproars of the press. Such incidents leave the player frustrated and confused. In true film noir fashion, *L.A. Noire* “[applies] the tropes of madness, despair, and disorientation to the world of “normal” middleclass experience” (Grant 223). No one can be trusted; one of Phelps' partners turns out to be involved in drug trafficking, and the police chief is also caught up in corruption and money scams. Just like Captain Dudley Smith in the film *L.A. Confidential*, James Donnelly, Captain of the homicide department in *L.A. Noire*, is not afraid to use physical force to extract a confession from a suspect; and when it is revealed that a series of murders were actually committed by a family member of an influential politician, he covers up the truth so as to avoid a press scandal. Like any noir text, the game “[is] marked by the eruption of physical violence or, more precisely, the discourse of law and criminality” (Orr 22). Characters don't operate according to Christian codes of morality and supposedly “good guys” are often revealed to be depraved.

As evidenced in the above paragraph, *L.A. Noire* fits the characteristics of the hard-boiled detective novel outlined in the first chapter, a literary genre which had a strong influence on films noirs of the 1940s and 50s. Since the videogame medium is a combination of different media, it is natural to find within it both literary and cinematic elements. Christopher Orr argues in “Genre Theory in the Context of the Noir and Post-Noir Film” that one can define genre either

according to the specific traits found in a text during a particular time, or based on the audience's expectations of a work. I find it necessary to draw on both types of genre definition to grasp the cultural and formulaic patterns in *L.A. Noire*. The makers of the game were concerned with realism and therefore recreated an atmosphere that approximates the feel of the original 1947 city. The in-game world contains a lot of traits unique to that particular time and place, and tries to advance itself as belonging to that era. The designers aimed for authenticity but by doing so inevitably also tied themselves to the audience's expectations of a period thriller. Generic characters like the femme fatale and the corrupt police officer were included in the game not because cultural circumstances required it, but because that is what the genre convention calls for. Players come to the game with preconceived notions of both film noir and detective fiction and expect the game to follow certain established formulas. *L.A. Noire* is set in a real-world setting where order and stability are constantly disturbed by crimes. Woody Haut explains that for many writers of the hard-boiled school, "creating an artifact indistinguishable from reality became the preferred way to depict society and the conditions by which people are driven to extremes" (128). Murder is accepted by the members of the LAPD as an inevitable occurrence and the police are prepared to recourse to immoral practices to charge suspects and close cases. Every day, they witness the excessive brutality and cruelty that human beings are capable of. Although Phelps puts many criminals behind bars, at times, he must surrender to the schemes set in place by the head of the police department and the district attorney. Like the detective protagonist in hard-boiled fiction, he finds himself incapable of exposing the whole truth. And in accordance with noir tradition, the game "portray[s] the city not as the site of the American dream, but as the epicenter of an all-consuming nightmare [...] a malignant space" (Haut 179). Phelps comes back from the war hoping to start a new career and settle down, but he finds himself ensnared in a web of lies and deceit. Los Angeles is roaming with criminals and its corruption permeates all levels of society.

4.4 L.A. Noire: A Case Study

I could delve into a more detailed discussion of the multiple ways in which *L.A. Noire* adheres to the conventions of the hard-boiled detective novel while also making use of the interactive nature of its medium to enhance genre formulas, but I believe that walking the reader through one of the cases of *L.A. Noire* will prove a more effective exposure to the game's mechanics and in-world atmosphere. A common feature in recent videogames, the auto-save mode, enables players to quit the game at any moment without losing saved progress, thus allowing for short periods of gaming. Although it is possible to play *L.A. Noire* in a very fragmented manner, the best way to approach the adventures of Cole Phelps is to complete the game one case at a time. Players have to work their way through five department desks (Patrol, Traffic, Homicide, Vice, and Arson). Each of those includes four to six different cases of varying degrees of difficulty and playtime. In his review of the game for *The Guardian*, Steve Boxer states that “[L.A. Noire] is roughly equivalent in length to two seasons of a TV series [...] and has all the period charm of *Boardwalk Empire* or *Mad Men*,” supporting the idea that the game is best approached as a compilation of individual cases, united by an overreaching story arc. One could envision playing one case per week to recreate the broadcasting schedule of crime shows, and make the gaming experience last longer.

Each case has a title, announced at the beginning of the investigation in capital bold white letters set against a black background. The simple yet elegant style is reminiscent of early film noir posters of the 1940s and 1950s. The case I have chosen to examine is called *The Red Lipstick Murder* and is the first in a series of homicides that the player will have to solve.



Figure 4.9 Opening.

After a few seconds of display, the title dissipates to give way to an opening sequence in which players get a glimpse of the actual murder. A car drives up to a hill in the middle of the night. We see a man in a suit drag a woman out of the backseat of the car. She is screaming and begging for mercy, but the man pulls out what looks like a tire iron, or perhaps a pipe, and beats her to death. Blood splatters high up in the air. The scene is dramatically staged and makes use of the chiaroscuro lighting technique to create an ominous atmosphere. The bright full moon in the background and the shadowy figure of the killer in the front come together for a classic film noir *mise-en-scène*.



Figure 4.10 Moonlight.

The opening sequence or introduction is a cinematic convention still found in many modern-day TV shows like the Law & Order series. Often, it is the viewer's first contact with the story of the crime. In this instance, we get to see the killer in action, but we don't know who he is or why he decided to commit this crime. Nevertheless, watching this scene gives the player useful information the in-game characters do not yet possess, thereby placing him in an advantaged position. Just from watching this brief opening scene, we know that the murderer is male, left-handed, well-established (he drives a nice car and is well-dressed), and we also know what type of weapon he used to cause blunt-force trauma to the victim as well as what time the murder happened.

The game then cuts to a new scene. We are now at the Los Angeles police department and Phelps and his partner Rusty Galloway are assigned to the case. The player controls the on-screen movements of Phelps and his first assignment is to go the crime scene. Players have the choice of driving the car via Phelps or letting Rusty take the wheel, in which case they don't

have to do anything. A mini map in the bottom left corner of the screen indicates the character's location in relation to the current destination. Phelps police car is designated by a blue blip and the destination by a yellow flag. The map also includes the names of surrounding streets and indicates enemies with a little red figure. This is very useful and allows the player to circumvent areas with conflict, or seek out a criminal to arrest, depending on his/her plan.



Figure 4.11 Car and mini map.

During the drive, the two protagonists talk about the case and it is revealed that the crime has been attributed to “The Werewolf Killer.” This case is a direct reference to an actual murder that happened in Hollywood in 1947, and which Carolyn Kellogg calls “one of the city’s most famous unsolved murder cases [...] involving a serial killer murdering women.” She goes on to explain that one of the dead women, found “naked, washed of all blood, elegantly coiffed and cut in two,” was coined “The Black Dahlia” in reference to the movie *The Blue Dahlia* that was playing in theaters at the time (Kellogg). This nickname, alongside “The Werewolf Killer,” is used in *L.A. Noire* to refer a series of cruel killings where the female bodies are left out in the

open, unclothed and brutally battered. The inclusion of this reference shows the great care the developers took to recreate not only a geographical copy of the L.A. of the 1940s, but a world that also alludes to contemporary events and news.

The murders have been accumulating for the past six months and the police have not been able to find any solid leads. It is as yet unclear whether or not the case Phelps and Rusty were given is linked to the Black Dahlia, but the bodies bear similar marks and Phelps believes there might be a connection. Reporters are waiting near the site, hoping to catch some exciting news about the famous killing spree, but Phelps tells them off and proceeds to investigate the crime scene. The police has already taped of the site and secured the perimeter, as well as marked the location of major pieces of evidence with little yellow number tags. A few such markers can be seen next to the body on the left side of the screen shot.



Figure 4.12 Crime scene.

The player has to navigate the crime scene; collect all the clues, inspect the body, and talk to the people involved in the case such as the coroner and the police officer who first discover the body. While the player walks around, a soft music is playing in the background. Each time the player walks near an object that he can interact with, the controller vibrates and a two note chime rings. Once that object has been inspected properly, the next time Phelps approaches it there will be only one note to the chime. The background music continues until all the clues have been collected, when the player has found all the leads, a different chime rings and then the music ends. Phelps is accompanied by a partner for each case. If players are at a loss as to how to proceed, they can make Phelps interact with his partner and even ask him for help by pressing the button square when near him. The partner then gives suggestions or points to the next logical step in the investigation.



Figure 4.13 Clue.

If the examination of an object or person leads to a clue, a message appears on the left side of the screen and the clue is added to Phelps' notebook. It is common for the main character to comment on his actions and think out loud, like in this screenshot. Phelps's remarks can be looked at as additional leads. Sometimes he connects different pieces of evidence or proposes to go to a specific location to gather more information. It is therefore in the player's best interest to be attentive to these messages.

Upon closer examination of the dead body, we notice the words "Fuck you," "B.D" and "Tex" written in red lipstick on the woman's stomach. B.D could be a reference to Black Dahlia, but nothing can be deducted with certainty. As the Coroner points out, "Your guess is as good as mine. Could be something to it, or could be the killer's trying to throw you off the scent." The time of death is estimated to be sometime after midnight; this seems to be in accordance with what players saw in the introductory scene. It is evident that the player will have to delve deeper into the mysteries of this case before finding a satisfactory answer to the many questions raised during the visit to the site. Among the various items collected near the crime scene was a lighter from the Bamba Club. The next move in the investigation is to go to this bar and find out if anyone saw or interacted with the victim. During the drive Phelps and Rusty once again talk about the case. Rusty thinks that they are dealing with a copycat, not the actual Black Dahlia killer; Phelps, on the other hand, insists that they need to remain open to all possibilities and begins profiling the murderer. Because of the mutilated condition of the female bodies, he believes the killer has power issues and that he feels the need to demonstrate his strength by attacking women. Rusty ignores these observations and sticks to his belief that the Black Dahlia murderer left the L.A. area and will never be found. This last comment is obviously another reference to the actual unsolved murder of the 1940s.

After a brief talk with the bartender, we learn that the owner of the club is a close friend of Celine Henry (the dead woman). The player now has to interrogate him and enters one of *L.A. Noire's* most exciting interactive moments. Phelps pulls out his notebook and on the right

hand side players are given a set of questions that they can ask. The three questions for this case are: "Suspect seen with victim," "Ring stolen from victim" and "Knowledge of husband." Based on the information given in the notebook, Phelps formulates a more articulate version of the questions when he addresses the club owner. On the left, under the title "Person of Interest" we have information about the interviewee's physical appearance and his occupation, as well as a sketch of his face.

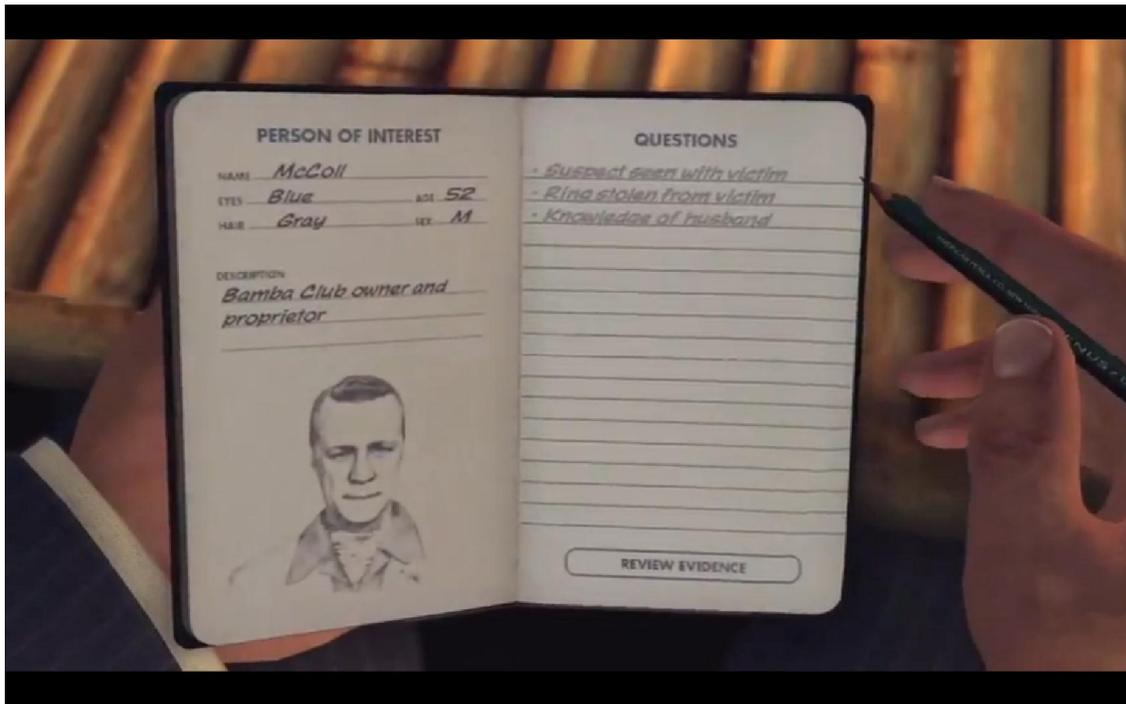


Figure 4.14 Notebook.

Players can choose in which order to ask the questions and often, the sequence provided in the notebook is not the most logical one. Strong detective skills and good intuition are needed to determine which question to ask first.



Figure 4.15 McColl Interrogation.

After the player has listened to the interviewee's answer, he/she needs to determine whether to accept the answer as truthful, doubt it, or accuse the person of lying. Each option is indicated by a different button on the top left corner of the screen. But before making a decision, players can consult their notebook and review information about the person and the investigation. If they have accumulated enough intuition points, they can use this tool to either remove an answer (Truth, Doubt, or Lie) or ask the online community for help, in which case the percentage of people selecting a particular answer choice is indicated next to that answer. Intuition points are accumulated by moving up the ranks of the LAPD. It's not easy to acquire them and players should think carefully before drawing on this special in-game help feature. Since questions can be asked in any order, players have to decide whether they are independent or interrelated. Sometimes the answer to the third or fourth question holds information which will help the player determine whether the suspect is lying in his response to the first question. One has to look ahead and carefully plan the order of the questions.

The game's manual encourages players to "listen closely to the response given and also pay careful attention to the facial expressions of the person you're interrogating. Even the best liars can give something away subconsciously, if you know what to look for" (13). While the player decides which answer to select he can choose to observe the suspect and watch that person's reaction. This provides a momentary pause in the game and lets players think without pressure. However, if a player stays on this screen for too long, the suspects will become impatient and the player will be prompted to make a selection. According to the manual, three types of behavior deserve particular attention and a few tips are provided to help the player with the interrogations: "1. A person who is lying may often avoid direct eye contact. 2. Most people will feel uneasy telling a lie, so look out for signs of discomfort such as fidgeting or scratching. 3. If you challenge a person who is lying they may become momentarily angry or upset and then try to cover it up" (12). This means that, in addition to carefully listening to the content of the answer, players also have to gauge how the answer is presented and whether or not the suspect is being honest. If players opt to accuse a suspect of lying, they need to have hard evidence to back up this accusation. Clues can be reviewed in the notebook at any point during the interrogation and if testimonies don't match up or if a piece of evidence contradicts what the suspect is saying, this information can be used to point to their dishonesty. If the player selects the "lie" option but doesn't choose a piece of evidence with which to support the accusation, he still has the option of backing out. When in doubt, players should not go for the "lie" choice as wrongly accused suspects become angry and stop cooperating.

While the three types of behavior mentioned above can be an indication of untruthfulness, sometimes they can also be attributed to nervousness or shyness. Players must therefore always take all the known facts into consideration before deciding which is the most appropriate answer choice. Right after players have made their selection, a chime plays. There are two types of chimes, one for the correct answer and one for the wrong answer. This feature gives the player immediate feedback on his abilities as a detective. All answer choices are

recorded in a report shown at the end of the case. The player's performance throughout the entire investigation is evaluated and given anywhere between 0 to 5 stars. The higher the number of wrong answers, the lower the player's overall score. This is a way to keep the player motivated while also building tension. Hearing the chime announce that you selected the wrong answer choice can make you nervous, and in turn make it more difficult to focus on the next questions. It's a form of distraction, meant to complicate the investigation by diverting your attention to your personal performance as opposed to the case at hand. *L.A. Noire* then, feeds on the player's self-consciousness and desire for a perfect score to put him on edge.



Figure 4.16 Case report.

A perfect end of the case report card would look like the above screenshot. Players found all the clues, answered all the questions correctly, didn't cause any damage to the police car or the city, and therefore get a five star stamp with the title "valorous." Most players don't achieve such a report card on their first try. One can overlook a piece of evidence by accident,

and when driving in Los Angeles traffic during a pursuit, it's easy to hit a bench or hit another car, thus racking up damage costs.

The interview with the bar owner provides various new leads, the most important ones being the victim's home address and the license plate number of the car who picked her up from the bar on the night of the murder. When arriving at the house, players find that someone broke in through the window, but the house is empty. Phelps now has to collect clues, just like he did on the scene of the crime. The only difference is that there are no physical markers indicating the presence of clues. The player has to rely solely on the chimes and his own investigative skills to find all the evidence.



Figure 4.17 Collecting clues.

This is a time consuming task since the chime rings each time Phelps can interact with an object, but the chime sound provides no guarantee that a given object is also a clue. The screenshot shows Phelps looking at a dresser in the victim's bedroom. He can pick up multiple

items and examine them closer, but the only useful item is the empty ring box, the others are there solely to distract him and make the process of the search longer.

In addition to searching the house for clues, Phelps also has to talk to the neighbors to find out more information about the victim's last movements. After interviewing a female neighbor, we learn that Celine is an alcoholic and that she and her husband recently got into a heated argument. Phelps and Rusty are now starting to think that the husband may be the killer. Our next stop is his apartment. The detectives find Jacob Henry at home, but before they interrogate him, they need to search his apartment for clues. This process is the same as for the previous house. The player has to click on various objects and examine them. If they are indeed clues, an icon will appear on the left side of the screen and the item will be added to Phelps's journal. Once they have collected enough evidence, players can choose to proceed with the questioning. Again, the course of action is similar to the one used for the owner of the Bamba club. Players need to select in which order to ask the questions and for each answer provided, they need to determine whether to trust, doubt, or accuse the suspect of lying. Jacob Henry however, is a little more difficult to read.



Figure 4.18 Henry looking away.

He remains relatively calm, but when asked about his wife's whereabouts his tone changes and he looks away from the detectives. It is clear that he is withholding something. It's up to the player then to decide whether to doubt him or outright accuse him of lying. Since we picked up a lighter from the Bamba Club at the crime scene, we know that Celine was out drinking, but does that mean her husband knows about it too? In order to find the answer, the player has to reflect back to the previous interview. The bar owner admitted that Celine was a regular and he also said that he called her husband and begged him to pick her up, which the husband refused to do. Jacob's answer "A bar, I suppose. Look, I don't know" therefore has to be a lie.

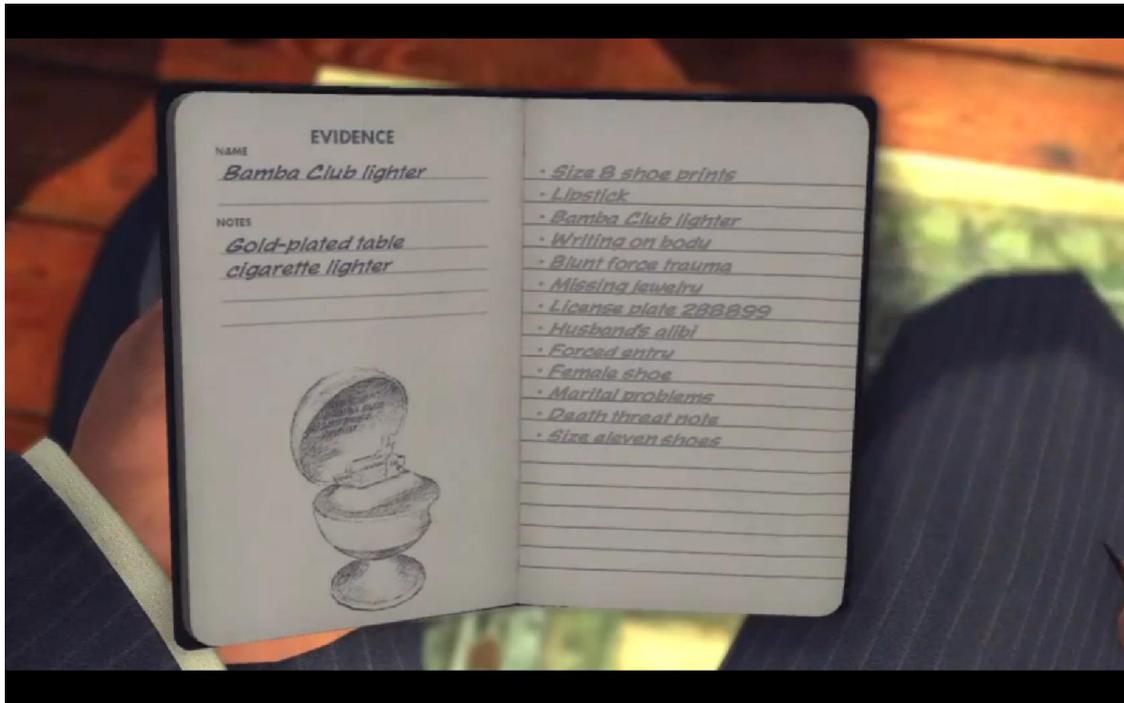


Figure 4.19 Reviewing evidence.

Players have to search through the list of evidence to find the item that will be used by Phelps to prove the suspect's dishonesty. The third choice, "Bamba Club Lighter" is the best option. This clue, in addition to the testimony of the club owner, is enough to get Jacob to admit the truth. He explains that he was tired of his wife's drinking problem and didn't want to indulge her habit by picking her up. The interview seems to be going well, but then Rusty interferes and accuses Jacob of murdering his wife. This infuriates the suspect and he physically attacks Rusty. The game mode changes and the player now has to control Phelps in a fist fight against Jacob.



Figure 4.20 Fighting scene.

This action scene is unexpected and tests the player's reaction time. Unlike *Heavy Rain* where the screen indicates which buttons players have to press, *L.A. Noire* expects players to already be familiar with the various controls of the game. In the above screenshot one has to be able to quickly switch from interrogation mode to fight mode. This means holding down L2 to lock onto a target and then either press X to punch, □ to dodge, △ to execute a grapple move, or O to perform a special finishing move. Based on the action on screen, players need to quickly evaluate which fighting technique is the best for a given situation. It is possible for Phelps to die, but unlike *Heavy Rain*, which forces players to live with the consequences of their actions, *L.A. Noire* allows players to restart from the latest auto-save point. If after a few attempts, players cannot successfully complete an action scene, the game gives them the option of skipping ahead without suffering any penalty.

Jacob Henry is taken into custody for assaulting a police officer and Phelps receives news from the coroner about the autopsy of Celine Henry. It seems that she was beaten with a

socket wrench handle - a conclusion that matches up with what the player saw during the introductory scene to the case. The medical doctor also found out that the victim was sexually abused and the nature of the injuries leads him to believe that the killer is a sex fiend. The last thing Phelps needs to do is look up the license plate of the car in which Celine left the Bamba bar and find the owner of that vehicle. While on the phone with the LAPD, he receives a message from the chief asking him to come back to central to interview Jacob Henry in an official police setting. The chief seems eager to get a conviction and close the case. When Phelps tells him that they have other leads they need to investigate, he replies by saying "Are you questioning my judgment, Cole Phelps? [...] I think with the right kind of persuasion he might be prepared to seek absolution. [...] Let's liberate a confession from poor Jacob and the public will sleep easier tonight." The chief is willing to imprison an innocent man to appease the public, and especially the press. He even goes as far as suggesting that Phelps use physical force to obtain a confession. *L.A. Noire* doesn't leave players any freedom over the plot development of the story. It sticks to the characteristics of the film noir genre and players have to proceed with the investigation even if they disagree with the chief's methods. This is the game's way of immersing players into the postwar atmosphere and exposing them to the corruption and vice of the era. We have to control Phelps and close the case even though we personally may be opposed to this type of behavior. This causes some players to dislike the character and thus distance themselves from him. They may be controlling his on-screen actions, but there is not the same emotional involvement as in *Heavy Rain* because we cannot influence the outcome of the story.

The second interrogation brings new clues. We learn that Jacob works as a mechanic and thus has access to tools. However, he maintains that despite the troubles in their marriage, he truly loved his wife. In order to acquire these new pieces of evidence, the player had once again to evaluate the truthfulness of the suspect's answers. It seems that Jacob is not the killer and Phelps, to the surprise of the player, concludes the interrogation without charging him. This

doesn't please the chief who calls the detective a failure and expresses with contempt that he is "deeply disturbed by [Phelps's] style of police work". Phelps insists that they should follow the license plate lead and decides to drive to the apartment of Alonzo Mendez. The fact that he stands up for what he believes is right, makes Phelps more likeable. However, his partner Rusty is also disappointed and it becomes evident to the player that most cops at the LAPD are more concerned with quick convictions than providing actual justice.

Phelps has the address of the complex where the next suspect lives, but he doesn't have the number of the apartment itself. It is up to the player to look at the different mailboxes and identify which one belongs to Mendez.

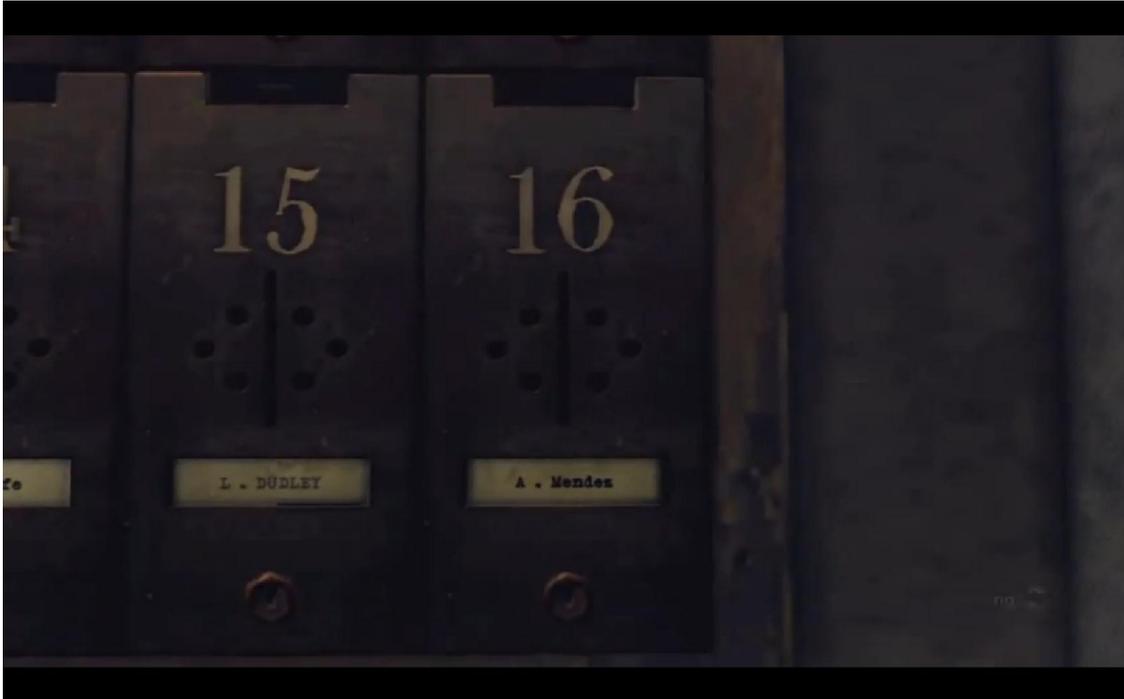


Figure 4.21 Mailboxes.

This may seem like a trivial detail, but by involving players in small tasks like these, *L.A. Noire* helps them focus on the investigation. It is also a good way to train people to pay attention to details and remember facts related to the case.

Inside the apartment, the player proceeds once again to collect evidence. Various items point to the culpability of Alonzo Mendez. A shoe that matches the print found at the crime scene, a used red lipstick, and a blood-covered pipe are all found in the bedroom of the suspect. Phelps is baffled by the seeming easiness and simplicity of this particular aspect of the case. He turns to Rusty and asks “Why keep it? Why not throw it away?” Phelps’s partner just shakes off the comment and tells him to be happy the case is as good as closed. At this moment, the suspect appears in the hallway and the player has to lead Phelps in a foot chase while Rusty runs to the car.



Figure 4.22 Foot chase.

The player will have to complete a series of action sequences. On the mini map on the left side of the screenshot, the position of Phelps is indicated by a white arrow, that of the criminal by a red blip, and the police car appears as a small blue icon. While pursuing the suspect on the run, players need to keep an eye on the map to better judge where to head to. This chase is very tense and the player will have to act fast if he wants to catch the criminal.

The various actions involve jumping from rooftop to rooftop, climbing walls and ladders, sliding down gutters, and continuing the chase via car.



Figure 4.23 Car chase.

If the player doesn't manage to push the suspect's car off the road, Rusty will take out his weapon and start firing at the car. The police violence depicted in this screenshot shows to what lengths the police are willing to go to make an arrest. The two detectives are endangering the people in the streets and causing damage to the city just to catch up with a suspect. The juxtaposition between the good willed intentions of the police and the citizens of L.A. and the actual manner in which they exercise their job. If the gap between the police car and the suspect's vehicle becomes too large, players fail the mission and will have to restart the game from the latest save point. Just like with the fighting scene earlier on, *L.A. Noire* is not concerned with punishing the player or making him live with the consequences of his actions.

As a matter of fact, if a player fails the same action sequence several times, the game will give him the option of skipping it and continuing the investigation from the next point.

The Red Lipstick Murder case is solved with the arrest of Alonzo Mendez. Players are not asked to conduct another interrogation or verify the suspect's identity. The chief is satisfied: "Considering the evidence against your suspect, and the thoroughness with which your report was compiled, I foresee a safe passage through the courts and the DA agrees with me. Brutality on a scale such as this deserves retribution. The people and the press of this city demand it." Though we get the sense that some form of justice was served, the remarkable easiness with which the incriminating pieces of evidence were acquired causes players to wonder if there is more to this case than meets the eye. And indeed, later in the game, during the last homicide case, it is revealed that Phelps and Galloway wrongly accused Mendez and numerous other men of murder.

4.5 Conclusion

They may both be preoccupied with detective work, but *Heavy Rain* and *L.A. Noire* are as dissimilar as can be. The first is narrative driven and captivates the reader's emotions similarly to a psychological thriller. The second immerses players into the crime and corruption that preside over Los Angeles during the post war era and challenges them to work their way up the ranks of the LAPD. To put them into one genre category and refer to it as interactive crime would be doing these games a critical injustice. Although they use storytelling and gameplay in conjunction with each other to reinforce the vicarious experience of conducting an investigation, they go about it in very different ways. *Heavy Rain* does not allow players to retry certain button sequences, thereby forcing them to accept the consequences of their actions. *L.A. Noire*, on the other hand, lets players skip action scenes without penalty if they fail to complete them after a few attempts. The latter game focuses on the player's detective skills and his ability to read the facial expressions of suspects. Logical thinking and acute perception are more important than the mastery of purely mechanical gaming skills. Additionally, the use of MotionScan technology

indicates that game designers are increasingly concerned with conveying realistic representations of human physiology to enhance the thrill of the game of investigation so characteristic of crime fiction. They want to merge audio, visual, tactile, and cognitive features to engage players on multiple levels.

As I intimated earlier, videogames occupy a range of positions on the broad spectrum that is the genre of crime fiction and it would be unfair to classify them purely by medium. *Heavy Rain* counts on players' emotional involvement in the characters and the game's storyline to express suspense and surprise. It combines elements of all three subgenres of crime fiction, shifting the prominence of each depending on which character players control in a given episode. It demonstrates that videogames are not only capable of replicating literary formulas, but also that this new medium can be used to create new forms of trickery and deception. *L.A. Noire* works very differently and relies on an open world and multiple plotlines to communicate feelings of anxiety and hopelessness. It puts players in control of a character who turns out to be an anti-hero, and invites them to rethink assumed notions of justice and integrity. Its real setting and emphasis on the depravity of the city put it on pair with noir detective films and novels of the hard-boiled category. If a new classification of videogames has to be made, then I advocate for one based not on medium or gameplay, but on textual traits and cultural perception of genre conventions. As my close reading of *Heavy Rain* and *L.A. Noire* proves, it is impossible to accurately categorize these games without taking into consideration the larger literary and cinematic conventions they respond to. Their stories clearly bear the influence of crime fiction and a classification according to gameplay that is, action and decision-making, would not reflect the rich heritage of these games. This is why I stress that games can and should be studied alongside literary texts and films. Setting aside a new category for videogames would only accomplish to separate them further from other existing media. Despite the opposition of ludologists to refer to videogames as a form of art, the latest exhibition at the American Art Museum at the Smithsonian indicates a growing appreciation for videogames as

legitimate forms of art. Titled “The Art of Video Games” its aim is to “explore the forty-year evolution of video games as an artistic medium, with a focus on striking visual effects and the creative use of new technologies” (americanart.si.edu). The presence of an exhibition dedicated to the history and artistic achievements of videogames in such a famous and well-respected venue, is yet another testimony to the medium’s significance as a cultural artifact.

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