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Lifted: Intertextual Meaning and/as Spatial Narrative in *Thirty Flights of Loving*

Abstract

Explorable videogame spaces can be examined in terms of intertextual citations that act upon the subject when confronted with meaningful imagery, and player understanding of videogames are tied to the subject's relationship within any given ludic space. This paper investigates Brendon Chung's videogame *Thirty Flights of Loving* (2012) to examine the role intertextual citations play in reframing game spaces. Chung deploys numerous textual fragments and references lifted from other works including the films of Wong Kar-wai and a demonstration of Bernoulli's Principle. This strategy both supplements players' deep-rooted assumptions about videogame narrative and destabilizes and subverts this familiarity, proposing a fresh approach to spatial storytelling and interaction. I investigate Michael Nitsche's evocative narrative elements and Henry Jenkins's evocative spaces and embedded narratives, proposing that the game weaves dense intertextual threads to imbue significance to coded objects by virtue of their presence within the game space, thus prompting an inquisitive and interpretative mode of play that rewards cultural literacy.

In considering explorable videogame spaces—the very mise-en-scène of a game—scholars must confront the complex relationships between player-subjects and these digital environments. Examining these game spaces as intertextual and acting upon the subject with evocative imagery requires that we reframe our understanding of spatiality and narrative for an interactive medium. In this paper, I closely focus on Blendo Games's 2012 release *Thirty Flights of Loving* (henceforth *TFoL*), to examine the role intertextual citations and games spaces play in shaping narrative. Written and directed by Brendon Chung, *TFoL* entwines intertextual elements that build upon or even subvert preexisting expectations and assumptions of narrative. This paper investigates how the game deploys allusions to other texts, invoking what game theorist Michael Nitsche terms "evocative narrative elements."[1] Nitsche's concept itself synthesizes Henry Jenkins's notion of "evocative spaces" and "embedded narrative."[2] Both Nitsche and Jenkins propose distinct forms of spatial design to express narrative, and their concepts gesture towards intertextual devices that recast familiar materials and prior cultural experiences

in a new assemblage. Game design has much to learn from the stylized spaces of theme parks that similarly play upon familiarity with generic motifs—what conceptual designer Don Carson terms "environmental storytelling."[3] Accounting for a complex network of influences and allusions allows us to rethink questions of player agency and how game designers assume an ideal player-subject fully receptive to their citations. In my analysis, I propose new frameworks for reconciling the vast array of styles and references embedded within these spaces, arguing how cultural literacy and intertextual reading broadens our understanding of the medium.

"A Dialogue Among Several Writings": Methodology & Scholarly Contexts

What do game developers achieve in drawing from a variety of outside texts, anywhere from cinema to theme park design? How do scholars reckon with the constitution of a certain kind of player-subject that is assumed to be fully receptive to these intertextual citations? To answer these questions I undertake a close textual analysis of

TFoL, borrowing concepts of narrative and spatial construction from literary and film analysis, bridging them with the specific language of videogames. Games like *TFoL* that are proliferous with intertextual citations, run the risk of assuming an ideal, universal player-subject, so well versed in popular culture that he or she can identify every outside reference. What is critical is how the player-subject is created in hegemonic ways that align with the expectations of game developers and the ontological assumptions they have of these players.

TFoL rewards diverse player experiences and literacy across media texts. The game's storytelling strengths lie in processes of subjectivization in which different players form different interpretations of the game. Meaningful environments and the objects placed within these spaces induce inquisitive and interpretative gameplay. By scattering intertextual citations throughout, the game (re)prioritizes the act of looking. The meaning of the text is amplified when perceptive players recognize these allusions on the basis of their cultural experience and knowledge. A sense of play emerges not just in typical gameplay actions like running or jumping but also when players generate their own meaning from these spaces.

By investigating the coupling of spatial design and narrative in videogames, we can identify the implicit political project of the game as well. *TFoL* diverges from the typical "first-person shooter" game,[4] by sidestepping the enactment of violence in military shooters like *Battlefield 1* or the colonizing act of excavating and plundering natural resources like in *Minecraft* or *No Man's Sky*. Militarization and empire-building are subverted, and player agency is challenged by the sole actions of looking

Fig.1: The opening title screen for *Thirty Flights of Loving*.[5]

and navigating. Enjoyment comes not from accumulating points or manipulating environments, but in simply reading a space. Thus, by eschewing storytelling modes involving spoken dialogue or cutscenes, *TFoL* draws upon the less frequently studied areas of theme park and museum design—a visual-centric videogame experience that evokes its strategies of spatial narrative.

Investigating the intertextuality of videogames yields differing perspectives on the purpose of games. In the past few decades, games with abundant storylines and themes have proliferated, and these in turn, are frequently referenced or reimagined in the production of new games. For instance, Braid subverts *Super Mario Bros.*' storyline of rescuing a princess in a castle and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* makes gags out of references to its predecessor.

Despite these cultural exchanges within the field of gaming, game theorists like Espen Aarseth have claimed that "games are not intertextual… games are self-contained."[6] Aarseth overlooks the narrative potential of games and their representational power by instead foregrounding gameplay and challenge. An underlying claim that frames Aarseth's perspective is that games are *not texts*. However, I suggest that even seemingly simplistic games like *Tetris* and chess contain meaningful stories; not only are videogames and the spaces within them loaded with representational power, they also augment meaning by referring to other cultural contexts.

Interestingly, Aarseth's earlier theorizations of game space seemingly dispute his wariness in applying narrative theories to game studies. Grappling with Henri Lefebvre's theorization of space,[7] Aarseth concludes: "computer games are both representations of space (a formal system of relations) and representational spaces (symbolic imagery with a primarily aesthetic purpose)."[8] For Aarseth, space is both "conceptual and associative," the latter description evoking the notion of intertextuality and the creation of meaning via a text's association to another, even if he does not fully accept this sentiment.[9]

The term "intertextuality" is widely attributed to literary theorist Julia Kristeva, developed both in her early writings and in her 1966 essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." Kristeva defines intertextuality

as "a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*."[10] Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on meaning-making and aesthetics, Kristeva invokes the concept of the "literary word," defining it as "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning)… a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context."[11] Kristeva shares Bakhtin's notion that texts are fundamentally interwoven with broader social and cultural dialogues, and that meaning is dependent on "constant interaction."[12] Individual objects, texts, images and gestures can be taken as comprising a greater milieu. To understand something as both interactive and as interconnected to the other arts like videogames demands that we acknowledge a wealth of outside influences in shaping meaning. We must look, as Kristeva asserts, "at the intersection of *language* (the true practice of thought) with *space* (the volume within which signification, through a joining of differences, articulates itself)."[13] A videogame like *TFoL* consists of objects and texts embedded within videogame space, the surrounding environment around the player-character. Thus, the subject's interaction with space serves as one of the game's crucial forms of articulation.

The Referential Game Design of *Thirty Flights of Loving*

Intertextual exchange bridges the gap across numerous works, and *TFoL* encourages a wealth of individual player experiences. Unique phenomenological experiences emerge as varied players interact with the game; each player will have different cultural contexts and knowledge brought to the gameplay experience. Although *TFoL* serves as a loose successor to Brendon Chung's 2011 entry *Gravity Bone* and occupies the seventh spot in his *Citizen Abel* series, its story largely stands apart with an eccentric and fragmented plot full of non-sequitur dead ends. Theorists Colleen Macklin and John Sharp identify the central conceit of *TFoL* as "navigating and looking as the primary action in a story-driven experience," but within this fifteen-minute, nonlinear storyline, players are left to piece together their interpretations of a coherent narrative from its lack of dialogue or conventional story

arcs.[14] Nevertheless, we can still ascertain a loose plot summary revolving around a trio of criminal booze smugglers—the unnamed player-character, Borges, and Anita—in a humorous, surreal world of Prohibition legislation, avian police forces, and international criminal syndicates.

Fig. 2: Characters Borges and Anita seated during a rooftop party.[15]

Told largely through non-linear sequences separated by cinematic jump cuts, the game chronicles the aftermath of a botched mission wherein Anita has betrayed her compatriots and the player-character must smuggle Borges out of a bustling airport. Interwoven flashbacks to an intimate rooftop party develop Anita as a love interest, and intimations of a drunken romantic tryst and love triangle also emerge as points of tension. An extended coda at a museum provides an open-ended resolution and a treatise on Bernoulli's Principle on air pressure, demonstrating how the combination of disparate elements creates flight.[16] Atypical formal devices convey this outlandish narrative, including the aforesaid jump cuts through time. Moreover, meaningful narrative approaches to game space play a crucial and primarily visual, storytelling role. Thus, *TFoL* operates as a game that, as Henry Jenkins puts it, taps "…the emotional residue of previous narrative experiences."[17]

In "Game Design as Narrative Architecture", Jenkins details how narrative information in the form of objects, characters, text, etc. can be mapped onto a surrounding environment., emphasizing spatial exploration as meaningful play. Jenkins' central argument hinges on theorizations of four approaches to videogame narrative: evocative spaces, enacting stories, embedded narratives, and emergent narratives. In terms of the significance of

spatial storytelling, evocative spaces and embedded narratives are the most essential to *TFoL*. Evocative spaces rely on Kristeva's theorization of intertextuality by redeploying familiar imagery and settings to "evoke pre-existing narrative associations" that gamers bring to all texts.[18] These spaces draw upon a collective cultural unconscious that broadens meaning by way of association with other existing works, compelling audiences to reassess their own experience of prior works as it relates to new contexts. For instance, *TFoL* runs on the archaic id Tech 2 engine[19] originally used for *Quake II* in 1997. Since the game runs on a very specific and outdated game engine, players familiar with *Quake II* may recognize familiar assets, sounds, or the unpolished feel of older-style shooter gameplay. By redeploying technology from the late 1990s, *TFoL* evokes a backwards-gazing aesthetic that repurposes old technology, while simultaneously subverting the prior ways the software has been used.

These evocative spaces are also strewn with numerous items loaded with meaning, tying into Jenkins's idea of embedded narrative as well as with Michael Nitsche's breakdown of his term "evocative narrative elements" which builds upon Jenkins's work. Embedded narrative involves "information within [a game space's] mise-en-scène" that enables "the story-constructing activity of players."[20] Any object embedded within an environment can serve as context-clues to invite players to investigate their surroundings, encouraging a process of interpreting its representational significance in the game world. In the game's developer commentary, Brendon Chung highlights the importance of embedded narrative. He says: "I forbid myself from using voiceover, dialogue text, or UI [user interface]. Instead, I tried to tell things through the environment."[21] Nitsche's evocative narrative elements are also key in spatial storytelling, in which visual markings embedded in the game space "…do not contain a story themselves but trigger important parts of the narrative process in the player. These processes can lead to the generation of a form of narrative," thus synthesizing Jenkins's evocative spaces with embedded narrative.[22] Different players will have varied relationships with the game space, as some evocative narrative elements will click for some players but not others. These evocative narrative elements thus rely on a player's familiarity with the outside texts it evokes, and these objects are recognizably intertextual in the phenomenological experience playing the game.

Various intertextual allusions in the form of objects like a box of bullets lifted from the anime series *Cowboy Bebop* or a machinegun hidden under a bar inspired by the film *Three Days of the Condor* frame the particular contexts of this space. These two evocative narrative elements play upon audience familiarities with generic conventions, subtly keying knowledgeable players into the space as a bastion of criminality and identifying the hard-boiled temperament of fellow non-player characters (NPC)[23] Anita and Borges. Different players unaware of these references lose the broader cultural contexts that aid in the understanding of these spaces. Players who fail to recognize the citations lack contextual clues and must interpret the fragmented storyline via other generic signs such as a secret passageway or a stash of firearms that wordlessly insinuate a more general story of criminal conspiracy. Allusions like the bullets play a role in identifying the NPCs as seasoned criminals; they are not objects used in the game like in action-oriented shooter gameplay, but help construct an imaginative sense of personality and place. Since the player never once fires a gun in the game, picking up these bullets suggests a form of role-playing instead. Players engage with these objects out of curiosity, ultimately reinforcing the player-character's role as a criminal. Interacting with objects like ammunition and firearms make sense given the characterization of the protagonist as a criminal smuggler and with the criminal hideout setting, factoring into the game's moment-to-moment narrative beats and valuing the importance of these objects in itself rather than as a means to an end.

Game Design as Narrative Theme Park

TFoL has tight gameplay mechanics in which payer actions are largely limited to walking, looking, and interacting with embedded objects. The carefully constructed spaces of theme parks can offer a fresh perspective in considering videogames' construction of spatial narrative. The "invisible hand" of game designers like Brendon Chung produces an authored experience of play, not unlike enjoying a ride at a theme park. This category of games is termed "on-rails" to designate predetermined paths that players

have to navigate. Writing on theme park design, Margaret J. King likens the dark ride to a camera lens, wherein "they position the visitor to follow a series of vignettes advancing the narrative."[24] This is reflected in Chung's developer commentary for *TFoL*, where he specifically identifies the influence of theme park design. He says: "This was inspired by the various perspective tricks used throughout Disneyland. If you're interested in level design, theme parks and casinos are great teachers."[25]

In "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," Jenkins likens evocative spaces to theme parks, suggesting how authored linear experiences in games lend itself to a form of environmental storytelling. He draws from the writings of Don Carson, a seasoned theme park designer and concept artist who worked for parks like Disneyland and Walt Disney World Resort as well as in the videogame industry, emphasizing spatiality and intertextual design. Carson acknowledges that park guests arrive with certain expectations "collected from movies and books," and that the aim of the theme park designer is to "play on those memories and expectations to heighten the thrill of venturing into your created universe."[26] Carson thus anticipates Henry Jenkins's conception of evocative spaces that similarly relies on intertextual connections across texts. Carson further emphasizes a need for environmental storytelling, which he defines as when "the story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through… It is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell."[27] Using the "Pirates of the Caribbean" attraction as an example, he explains that spaces can invite a sense of mystery, establish a particular mood, and play on audience knowledge of generic elements like that of a pirate story simply in the arrangement of lighting, color, textures, and props. Park designers assume that such environmental designs allow an imagined park guest to "organize their experiences into a clear narrative form," and game designers like Brendon Chung apply a comparable method in sculpting evocative spaces albeit in a virtual world with tools afforded by computers.[28]

The environmental design of *TFoL* is organized like a theme park attraction, with each object, signage, music cue, and lighting scheme contributing to an overall theme. Parks like Disneyland and Busch Gardens Williamsburg represent "symbolic landscapes of cultural narratives" modeled after real or imaginary places, and like videogames, these parks are described in terms of "immersion," or the ability of a space to deeply absorb viewers into their worlds via evocative theming.[29] In *TFoL*, Chung not only populates his spaces with visual markers of criminality and firearms, but also with references to other videogames and films in a form of homage or playful subversion. For instance, the introduction of the character Anita is accompanied with a quick flashback with her dangling outside a skyscraper while aiming a sniper rifle, which Chung acknowledges in an interview as a reference to a similarly preposterous mission in the lighthearted action game *Saints Row: The Third*.[30] These fleeting intertextual references can be easily missed or wrongly interpreted by some players. But this does not hinder progress in the game. Instead, the unique experience that a gamer brings to the act of play reconstitutes the gameplay experience and constantly refashions meaning within the text.

Intertextual markers can even inject certain moods lifted from other works, such as a flashback sequence that deliberately channels the cinematography of Christopher Doyle for Wong Kar-wai films like *Chungking Express* and *Happy Together*. The green-hued lighting and shadowy interiors mimic the visual style of those films, and *TFoL*'s fragmented storyline of suave criminals brooding over unrequited love certainly draws narrative parallels also. The function of this evocative visual style and flashback sequence in the game informs players who are familiar with Wong Kar-wai's films of the game's similar themes of longing, melancholia, and isolation. Those unfamiliar with these movies thus read these moments differently; they may be temporarily perplexed by the rapid changes in style and turn to other visual markers for narrative anchoring. Brendon Chung plainly cites another Wong Kar-wai movie in his previous game Gravity Bone, opening the story with the mambo accompaniment "Maria Elena" by artist Xavier Cugat, which was previously used in the film *Days of Being Wild*. Chung alludes to this work again in *TFoL*, displaying the name "Cugat Airfield" on the back of the luggage cart in the airport sequence, thus linking a variety of intertextual references from film, music, and across his own games to

Fig.3: The game's flashback sequence channels the cinematography of Christopher Doyle in Wong Kar-wai's films.[31]

Fig.4: The museum exhibit label that identifies the game as "Doom-driven" and a "first-person shooter."[33]

produce a unified theme with a distinct, vibrant world. Such references do not factor into the overall understanding of the narrative but serve instead as tiny pleasures for those who uncover it like an in-joke or a hidden message.

Subjected to Play: Disjointed Subjectivities & Narrative Ruptures

Of course, one need not recognize every single allusion in *TFoL*, as these references merely serve to enhance one's appreciation of the game world and do not inhibit progression through the game. However, *TFoL* also deconstructs the generic form of the first-person shooter (FPS), and disrupts audience familiarity with this style of gameplay by re-contextualizing it within a disjointed, passive subjectivity. In an explorable museum area that doubles as the end credits, players can view a label that doubles as the game's title screen. The label notes the title of the game "*Thirty Flights of Loving*" but also has the noteworthy subheading "first-person shooter," and a crucial reference to the seminal FPS *Doom* further suggests an open dialogue with this generic tradition. The playfully worded pun "Doom-driven" suggests that the game follows a specific FPS formula popularized by a work like *Doom,* but Chung destabilizes this approach, literally crashing the player through a

wall as though breaking through the boundaries of the game space. Michael Nitsche identifies the first-person perspective in games as being "…tied to the view of one fictional character (or object) that operates inside the video game space under the control of an interactor," and *TFoL* plays with this ingrained assumption to comedic and sometimes even dramatic effect.[32]

Unlike first-person shooters like *Wolfenstein 3D* or *Doom*, Chung's work lacks shooter gameplay and even frustrates the typically unimpeded "consistent first-person point of view" and its "lack of editing" by cutting through spatio-temporal frames like a cinematic jump cut.[34] Ostensibly a protagonist of an FPS, the player-character in *TFoL* doesn't even fire a single shot despite the ubiquitous presence of guns and bullets to pick up, and Chung identifies adventure games like *Hero's Quest* as a primary influence in encouraging exploration over killing.[35] Even during the game's explosive gunfight, the player-character can only watch as Borges fires away, sidestepping the action-oriented agency of shooter games to point out the sheer pleasure of passively watching such a scene unfold. For instance, the "bullet ride" effect lifted from the *Max Payne* series, in which the first-person perspective "cuts from a following camera of the main hero to one of the last deadly bullet fired in a fight sequence" occurs twice in the game but not of your own accord.[36] Rather, Chung sabotages the familiar assumption that first-person perspective games give "implicit priority to the concept of unified monocular vision," breaking this tenet of game design with time lapses and even jump cuts to craft new ways of gaming interaction and storytelling.[37]

The jump cut exists as a formal device from cinema, and continuity editing in game space must redeploy these familiar processes with the understanding that time and space operate differently in videogames. The knowledge that a jump cut works to elliptically move through time and space to link associated scenes with one another is necessary to make sense of this rarely occurring device in videogames. The few instances of the jump cut applied during gameplay occur in titles like *The Evil Within* or *Virginia*, and such works gesture towards a cinematic understanding of videogame space and time. Jump cuts in videogames demand a spectatorial subjectivity not often analyzed in an interactive medium. In first-person games, the perspective often remains unbroken throughout, resulting in an uninterrupted, permanent state of real-time as the player-character progresses through space. The introduction of jump cuts produces a fragmented subjectivity with room for agency as players interact and move in the game world.

TFoL undermines the uninterrupted presentation of linear time, employing the jump cut to fragment the story and offer a fast-paced experience in palatable narrative portions. The first jump cut coincides with the opening titles, blasting apart the meandering pacing and relaxed atmosphere at the start of the game and instilling a berserk rush of energy that accelerates gameplay. The numerous jumps through time in the airport convey a sense of urgency and panic, reflecting the narrative context of the botched mission and stirring the player-character to move quickly through space to match this newfound urgency. In a later instance, jump cuts after a night of drinking at a party convey an intoxicated state as though there are holes in memory between one scene and another. *TFoL* successfully executes jump cuts back and forth across time while retaining its first-person perspective, challenging Jesper Juul's notion that "flashbacks are impossible within games, because the game play always occurs in real-time," an argument that he comes to in the context of the *Doom*-like shooter *Quake*.[38] Juul's analysis of interactivity and the possibility of different storylines emerging player-decisions, assumes nonlinear gameplay mechanics that involve branching storylines with multiple written endings. Flashbacks are effective in *TFoL* because there is only one authored storyline, and gameplay is reduced to simply looking and walking rather than making significant decisions that can alter a branching narrative.

Brendon Chung's other games also demonstrate efforts to dissociate audiences from typical gaming vocabulary and to establish novel means of spatial storytelling. Released over a period from 1999 to 2004, Chung's five *Citizen Abel* episodes that precede *Gravity Bone* exemplify his attempts to modify conventional FPS formulae and produce more meaningful ways of expressing a narrative beyond simply mastering combat and defeating anonymous enemies. Sequences involve traversing through zero gravity, eating cookies and milk, and a train hijacking sequence that prefigures a similar one in his later game *Quadrilateral Cowboy*. His later *Barista* series is a quartet of experimental works that further abstracts their traditional FPS source material to investigate methods of film-like editing patterns and disjointed narratives unified by evocative spaces and meaningful object interaction. *Fitz Packerton,* a game Chung co-authored with developers Teddy Dief, Ryan Cousins, and Sarah Elmaleh, primarily relies on evocative narrative elements in the form of a series of bags stuffed with various objects, including masks and walkie-talkies. The game's narrative is conveyed without dialogue, onscreen characters, or cutscenes, leaving only the escalating spatial and material contexts conveying an urgent narrative of a bank robbery and subsequent homicide. Chung employs an arsenal of design inspirations borrowed from cinema, theme parks and literature, and his games even borrow from one another to piece together a narrative. Explosive birds from his game *Grotto King* reappear in *Gravity Bone* as weaponized avian prototypes, only to reappear again in *TFoL* as armaments now used in the field. Seemingly incidental objects embedded in the environment nonetheless carry meaning across a body of work and can only be fully understood by examining Chung's games in relation to another. These intertextual allusions provide a multiplicity of newfound meanings for knowledgeable players, trusting in their individual knowledge and assumptions brought to a game so deeply involved in recognizable formal patterns and sometimes even critical of these designs.

TFoL and other games by Chung rely on familiar objects and spaces to satisfy and sometimes

subvert audience expectations of videogame form. This strategy requires that players be attentive to their surroundings. Perhaps Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins's analysis of Cyan Inc.'s *Myst* can shed light on how carefully considered environmental design affects player disposition. They write: "The artfulness of *Myst* invites us to linger and contemplate, like visitors to a museum."[39] *TFoL* ends with an epilogue in a fully navigable museum exhibit, where disparate props from the game like a police car, a seaplane, and miscellaneous blueprints and documents are literally hung up on a wall to be examined. These displayed props serve as a reflexive gesture that evoke the constructed inner workings of the game that players have just encountered, calling attention to the process of making games from various elements that form a coherent whole. It's no coincidence that this sequence also serves as the end-credits, highlighting the authored design of these spaces and embedded objects.

What the finale of the game suggests is a new kind of videogame subjectivity not unlike a museum guest that navigates and negotiates a space festooned with objects, bringing their individual assumptions and knowledge to make sense of these surroundings. The final exhibit of the museum, a demonstration of Bernoulli's Principle that details the workings of air pressure and flight, suggests the possibility of airborne lift when the right factors come together in harmony. The game explains: "All birds need to fly are the right-shaped wings, the right pressure and the right angle." Similarly, the harmonic combination of the right objects, texts, music, characters, and storytelling techniques from a multiplicity of outside sources shapes a videogame, but more than that, it can give rise to transcendence and exceed preconceived notions of how the medium operates and the assumed possibilities of what games can do.

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Notes

1 Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 3.

2 Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person: New Media as Story Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 123, 126.

3 See Don Carson, "Environmental Storytelling: Creating Immersive 3D Worlds Using Lessons Learned from the Theme Park Industry," *Gamasutra,* March 1, 2000, Accessed October 2, 2016. http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3186/environmental_storytelling_.php. Carson further develops these observations on environmental storytelling in two more essays for *Gamasutra*, the latter of which reflects on his work for videogames four years later. See Don Carson, "Environmental Storytelling, Part II: Bringing Theme Park Environment Design Techniques to the Virtual World," *Gamasutra,* April 5, 2000, Accessed on October 2, 2016.http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3185/environmental_storytelling_part_.php and Don Carson, "Environmental Storytelling Part III: Lessons Learned in the Virtual World," *Gamasutra,* September, 20 2004, Accessed on October 2, 2016. http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/2138/environmental_storytelling_part_.php

4 A first-person shooter (FPS) game refers to a genre of games in which players engage in combat with firearms in a first-person perspective through the eyes of the player-character. Popular examples include *Doom* (id Software, 1993) and *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward, 2007).

5 Screengrab from *Thirty Flights of Loving*.

6 Espen Aarseth, "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation" in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game,* ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 48.

7 Aarseth is cautious of directly mapping Lefebvre's philosophy onto videogames, instead incorporating ideas from both him and Anita Leirfall in his own argument. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

8 Espen Aarseth, "Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Computer Games" in *Cybertext Yearbook 2000*, ed. Raine Koskimaa (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2000), 163.

9 Ibid.

10 Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

11 Ibid., 36.

12 M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981), 426.

13 Kristeva, 36.

14 Colleen Macklin and John Sharp, *Games, Design and Play: A Detailed Approach to Iterative Game Design* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2016), 83-85.

15 Screen grab from *TFOL*.

16 Birds and wings are a common visual motif across Chung's games as well.

17 Henry Jenkins, 119.

18 Ibid., 123.

19 The id Tech 2 engine is a piece of software developed by id Software as a successor to their 1996 Quake engine, meant to better optimize 3D graphics, animation, in-game physics, sound, video support, stable frame rates, and many other elements of videogame development. Like numerous other game engines, the id Tech 2 engine has been licensed out to other developers for use in their own games, but the company has since freely released the now outdated source code.

20 Henry Jenkins, 123, 129.

21 Brendon Chung, developer commentary for *Thirty Flights of Loving*, directed by Brendon Chung (PC: Blendo Games, 2012).

22 Michael Nitsche, 3.

23 An NPC refers to a character not controlled by any player at any point in the videogame. These characters are computer-controlled.

24 Margaret J. King, "The Theme Park: Aspects of Experience in a Four-Dimensional Landscape," *Material Culture* 34, no. 2 (2002), 3. For more on the intersections of theme park design and videogames, see Bobby Schweizer, "Visiting the Videogame Theme Park," *Wide Screen* 6, no. 1 (2016), 1-27.

25 Brendon Chung, developer commentary.

26 Carson (2000): 1

27 Ibid.

28 Miodrag Mitrašinović, *Total Landscape, Theme Parks, Public Space* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 23.

29 Margaret J. King, 3.

30 Brendon Chung details numerous in-game references and influences in a conversational piece on the gaming website *Rock, Paper, Shotgun* with writer David Valjalo, noting allusions to film, television series, videogames, and more. See: David Valjalo "The 27 Homages of Thirty Flights Of Loving," *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, last modified February 1, 2013, Accessed October 2, 2016. https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2013/02/01/the-27-homages-of-thirty-flights-of-loving/

31 Screen grab from *TFOL*.

32 Michael Nitsche, 102.

33 Screen grab from *TFOL*.

34 Nitsche, 105.

35 Valjalo

36 Michael Nitsche, 98. 37 Laurie Taylor, "Video Games: Perspective, Point-of-View, and Immersion," Master's thesis (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2002), 2.

38 Henry Jenkins, 127. 39 Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins, "The Art of Contested Spaces," in *Game On*, ed. Lucian King and Conrad Bain (London: Barbican, 2002), 9.