

VIDEOGAMES, THEIR TEXTUAL OBJECTS, AND
THE IMPORTANCE OF A MULTI-MODAL
NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper was developed from my reflections on an interdisciplinary critical making experiment in which I, visual artists, and computer programmers wrote, designed, and made a videogame, entitled *Anathema*, and a "Complete Companion" for the game that served as its booklet. I argue for the importance and continuing relevance of booklets and other textual objects accompanying videogames as there is no established scholarship on the topic and no ongoing debate or dialogue on the issue within the field of game studies. I demonstrate the ways that multiple modes of media, i.e. the game and its external objects, allow the narrative to break free of the individual media's constraints and overcome the perceived binary between mechanics-oriented and narrative-oriented videogames. I examine the evolution of booklets' roles in videogames by looking at key examples from early, millennial, and contemporary examples, including *F-Zero*, *Diablo II*, and the *Mass Effect* series. I also compare examples across genres, markets, and distribution methods, including independently produced and digitally distributed games. Finally, I draw on my own work on *Anathema*, the relationship between form and content within that project, and the role of the booklet therein to demonstrate the narrative and mechanical advantages of a multi-modal videogame. I conclude that while innovative mechanics can contribute to a multi-modal narrative in-game, the incorporation of both analogue and digital textual objects facilitates a more complete interaction with the art form.

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I: Introduction

Over the past decade, through the development of larger disc capacity, more efficient data compression, and digital distribution, the role and even the very presence of booklets accompanying videogames has been in decline, evidenced by videogame cases that contain only discs and the countless games offered through digital distribution. This decline suggests that the videogame industry and related culture no longer values booklets and their contributions to games' narratives. This paper argues for the importance and continuing relevance of booklets and other textual objects accompanying videogames as there is no established scholarship on the topic and no ongoing debate or dialogue on the issue within the field of game studies. It demonstrates the ways that multiple modes of media, i.e. the game and its external objects, allow the narrative to break free of the constraints, whether they be technological or market-driven, of one medium or another and overcome the perceived binary between mechanics-oriented and narrative-oriented videogames. I arrived at this critical position through a critical making experiment, in which I wrote the story and dialogue and designed the booklet for the beta prototype of a videogame titled *Anathema*. The paper examines early games, such as Nintendo's *F-Zero*, whose accompanying booklet contains all of the games' narrative; millennial games, such as Blizzard's *Diablo II*, whose booklet contributes to and expands on the game's narrative; and contemporary examples, such as Blizzard's *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* (*SC2* hereafter) and Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (*Skyrim* hereafter), whose textual objects complement and contextualize their games' narratives. It also examines games, such as BioWare's *Mass Effect*, that have digitally internalized the narrative elements generally found in a booklet, and those, such as Big Huge Games' *Bastion*, that are digitally distributed without booklets, to demonstrate alternative methods of multi-media narration as well as the formal limitations of single-medium narration. Finally, the paper reflects critically on my own work on *Anathema*, the relationship between form and content within that project, and the role of the booklet therein. My interpretations use as a contextual framework scholarship on ludology, narratology, and the relationship between these modes of thought. Through the compromises made to both the narrative and game mechanics, *Anathema* facilitates a critical reflection on the relationship between form and content and the importance of multiple media in videogame narratives.

II: Definitions and Theoretical Context

Before proceeding, a few key terms must be defined to provide theoretical context. One important distinction is between "book," "booklet," and "textual object." By "book" I am referring to a set of pages filled with text and/or illustrations occurring in analogue or digital form, whereas by "booklet" I am specifically referring to the small books that accompany videogames. A "textual object" is any object, analogue or digital, that bears or contains text. For example, the collector's edition of *Skyrim* contains a booklet, a book of art, countless digital books within the game, and a textual object—a sculpture of a dragon bearing writing. Digital books are of particular interest because they represent a second medium within the audio-visual videogame. A "narrative" is a "sign with a signifier (discourse) and a signified (story, mental image, semantic representation)" and the "narrativity of a text is located on the level of the signified;" however, it is "not coextensive with literature," and popular literature, in which I include videogames, "is usually more narrative than avant-garde fiction" (Ryan). These distinctions are significant in understanding the ideas behind a 'literary' or narratological approach to videogames and their textual objects. A "critical making" is a project whose goal is to "use material forms of engagement with technologies to supplement and extend critical reflection and, in doing so, to reconnect our lived experiences with technologies to social and conceptual critique" (Ratto 253). I will borrow Scott Cassidy's distinction of "core, 3D computer and videogames" from "digital versions of traditional games like chess" (n303). Cassidy defines narratology and ludology, respectively, as the work of "scholars who conceptualize videogames as primarily a medium of narrative and ... those that focus on game mechanics" (292). For the purposes of this paper, I will be examining ludology and narratology as the studies of videogames' form/mechanics and content/narrative, respectively, as well as their booklets' structure, content, and intent.

While the debates on narratology and ludology in videogames are extensive, their lack of consideration of the role of booklets therein is a significant gap in videogame theory. Studies of videogames as narratives and the arguments "for the legitimacy of literary approaches to video games" emerged at the turn of the millennium from the 1990s wave of digital theory (Nielsen et al. 190-1). However, more recently "there has been a cultural turn in video game studies" wherein "scholarship that touches upon the issue of narrative does so from a cultural perspective" (192). For example, Carr's discussion of "Narrative Theory and *Baldur's Gate*" focuses on the

player's choices, their influence on narrative, and the way they "cross the line between narrative and gameplay" (38-43). Rudek's thesis compares "making a choice in an RPG [with] making a choice in the real world" and the cultural and personal results of "creating narratives in video games" (3). Throughout these developments, there has been a "clash of paradigms ... between ludology and narratology" (Nielsen et al. 195). Leading ludologist Gonzalo Frasca's argument has shifted from the idea that "ludology could be used along with narratology to better understand videogames" (1999) to one that "games cannot be understood through theories derived from narrative" (2001). He later argued that the two modes of thought do not form a simple binary and that ludologists do not "radically reject any use of narrative theory in game studies," as is commonly misconceived, and that the "debate has been fueled by misunderstandings ... that generated a series of inaccurate beliefs on the role of ludology" more so than by the actual theories of ludology (2003). One of the results of this clash are hybrid approaches, such as Frasca's intention to "writ[e] a paper on the role of narrative in videogames ... for conveying simulation rules" (2003) and Cassidy's argument that "videogames should be conceptualized in a way that draws upon both approaches, but prioritizing their narrativity" (292). However, despite this extensive scholarship on videogame narratives, mechanics, and the relationship between them, very little has been written on the role of games' booklets and other external textual objects. This paper aims to rectify this absence with a preliminary analysis of booklets' roles and potentials, demonstrating the textual objects' cultural and theoretical relevance and the ways that multiple media can bridge the gaps between games' mechanical and narrative components.

III: Early and Millennial Videogame Booklets and the External Narrative

I would now like to examine early videogames and the role of their booklets to contextualise my argument historically, using as a key example *F-Zero*, a futuristic racing simulator published by Nintendo in 1991, whose booklet contains the entirety of the game's narrative and reveals an awareness of the formal advantages and limitations of both print and videogames. The game itself is entirely mechanical. It features no text other than the options on the title screen and data on the records screen, no plot beyond the player-character's progress through races, and no context beyond that suggested by the vehicles and tracks. Substantial dialogue and even early realisations of cut scenes were very possible at this point in videogame history (i.e. Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* series, which incorporates both), suggesting a conscious

separation of narrative and mechanics in *F-Zero*. While this separation may seem to reinforce the perceived binary between form and content, it is more so an example of a work in which both media are used for the sake of a more mechanics-oriented game. The absence of internal text allows the entirety of the cartridge's hardware and coding to be devoted to game-play, which heavily featured the new Mode 7 visual effects (Parish 107), while the lengthy yet simple "Instruction Booklet" allowed for a well-developed external narrative. This narrative bridges the gap between story and game-play most explicitly in the section titled "The Machines & their Pilots" (14-17), which introduces the game's playable characters but also relates their machines to play style and mechanics. This section of the booklet is significant because it relates to the idea that people must "enjoy interacting with [a game] and operating it" so as to facilitate a player's appreciation of the game's "expressive digital system which suggests narrative" (Montfort 175); if players do not understand and enjoy a game's mechanics, they are less likely to interpret a narrative that is suggested through game-play. This type of narrative is particularly evident in *F-Zero*, wherein the game-play is depicted to be a continuation of the booklet's narrative, which capitalises on the booklet's form to deliver a narrative through comics that is not possible within the game.

F-Zero's booklet's use of comics allows the game to tell a contextualised multi-modal narrative. While the booklet's comics are by no means 'high art' and may even contribute to the ideology that "words and pictures together are considered, at best, a diversion for the masses, at worst a product of crass commercialism" (McCloud 140), they do incorporate the "interdependent" type of word/picture combination, "where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone" (155). Thus, while *F-Zero's* booklet does not achieve McCloud's desire that comics break free of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" that "the combination [of images and words] is somehow base or simplistic" (141) due to its cliché dialogue and flat characters, it does transmit narrative. The comics' dialogue develops the game's playable characters by establishing conflicts between them; Captain Falcon is a bounty hunter rivaled against Samurai Goroh (21-23). Through the science fiction images of cityscapes and the introduction of the "wild-running killer [alien], Pico" (25), the comic creates a narrative that contextualises the game's races and the culture built around them in details and colours not possible with the Super NES's 16-bit graphics. The comic finishes with the start of an *F-Zero* grand prix race (27-28), suggesting that playing the game ultimately determines the outcome of

the presented narrative, a simple precursor to games in which the player determines the narrative's outcome. Ultimately, the booklet is an example of an awareness of both media's capabilities and limitations and of an early innovative use of the booklet to create a narrative that directly contributes both to the game and its play without compromising mechanics.

A decade later many games, particularly action and mechanics-oriented ones, continued to use booklets to complement the game's narrative while remaining relevant to game-play, further bridging the gap between narrative and game mechanics and demonstrating the advantages of a multi-modal narrative. *Diablo II*, Blizzard North's horror-themed action role-playing game published in 2000 is an ideal example because of its limited internal use of text, extensive booklet, and developed external narrative. Like *F-Zero*'s "Instruction Booklet," *Diablo II*'s contains background information on the playable characters, elaborating on who they are, where they are from, and why they are invested in the game's plot (48-52). Within the narrative for each character class is a section on "Traits and Abilities," wherein the class's characteristics are related to play style, blending the game's narrative and mechanics. This blending is further carried out in the chapter titled "Skills and Abilities" (53-91), which contains both the effects and the lore of every ability that can be used within the game. It is necessary that this information appear in the booklet and not the game proper because the amount of text, averaging six to twelve lines per ability, would clutter the screen and detract from the game's pace and mood. This chapter also contributes to the game's narrative. For example, the entry for the Barbarian's Whirlwind skill tells of how his people's "Tribe of Thunder was the first to draw upon the primal forces of the weather" and "as time went on and the tribes intermingled, the ability ... was passed down to all of the Barbarian people" (65). This information becomes significant in the game's fifth act, which set in the Barbarian's homeland of the Northern Steppes. Thus, the conscious use of an alternative medium for certain narrative elements allows for richer detail and facilitates a relationship between the game's narrative and mechanics.

Diablo II makes further use of booklets' narrative potential by facilitating meta-narrative and meta-gaming, and also further breaks down the mechanics-narrative binary through the incorporation of digital textual objects within the game. The chapter of the booklet titled "Ex Libris Horadrim" (104-11) contains "first-hand accounts of the hunt for the three exiled Prime Evils" (104), providing additional lore on events leading to the game's narrative. It is significant that this component of the game's narrative be delivered through a booklet because it contains

information that a player's character could not know within the game and therefore contributes to a meta-narrative that, in subsequent years, is developed through the publication of external texts such as *The Book of Cain* and *The Sin War* trilogy of novels. Comparably, the "Encyclopaedia Sanctuaria" chapter (113-23), provides the player with lore and information on the game's kingdoms and creatures. These entries are presented as reports from survivors of each region, delivered "so that travelers and heroes alike may be better prepared to encounter these foul beasts" (114) and therefore contribute both to the game's narrative and play, but are found exclusively in the booklet. Advance knowledge of creature information allows the player to meta-game, to incorporate external knowledge of the game's mechanics into their play. Without the booklet, it would have to be delivered to the player through a breaking of the fourth wall, again interrupting the game's pace and mood, or be delivered audibly upon encounter, as the advanced technology of the game's sequel permits. *Diablo II* also incorporates within the game short digital booklets in the form of tomes that can be read to expand the game's narrative, both through lore and by providing new quests such as "The Forgotten Tower," a quest triggered by reading the Moldy Tome in game. This feature further breaks down the form-content binary through the embedded nature of the media and by connecting a narrative element directly to the game's mechanics. While this feature was not revolutionary at the time,—the original *Diablo* as well as Bethesda's *Daggerfall* had made use of internal books—the use of multi-modal textual objects demonstrates the value of texts in developing a complex narrative, setting the stage for the next generation of narratological videogames.

IV: Contemporary Videogame Booklets and the Challenge of Relevance

Approaching the present, videogame developers, and therefore the booklets they produce, become less concerned with contributing original material to the narrative and are satisfied with simply contextualising it, often with redundant text due to games' practically limitless content facilitated by modern technology, with varying degrees of success and narratological value. The "Quickstart Guide" for *StarCraft II*, a science fiction real-time strategy game published by Blizzard in 2010, is an example of a booklet that follows such an approach and falls short of contributing to the game's narrative. While the majority of the booklet is dedicated to a summary of the events of the original *StarCraft* (8-12, 15-18), most of the significant details can be learned through the interactive dialogue of *SC2*'s campaign. It is also through in-game textual objects, hologram databases accessed between the campaign's missions, that the player acquires game-

play information, as opposed to the encyclopedic section of a booklet seen in *Diablo II*. Furthermore, the entire narrative contained within *SC2*'s booklet is delivered in audio form with accompanying illustrations during the game's installation, undermining its presence in the booklet and therefore the booklet's narratological role. Due to the significant advances in videogame technology, booklets appear to no longer be necessary components of a game's central narrative or play. However, videogame narratives are limited by their medium, and developers must be aware of these new limitations so as to incorporate external textual objects that facilitate a richer multi-media narrative and art form.

Skyrim's use of both external and in-game textual objects demonstrates how videogames can make the most of a variety of media to deliver the fullest narrative possible without compromising form or mechanics. This game, released in 2011, is a medieval fantasy role-playing game set in large open world that contains "820 item codes corresponding to books" including Skill Books, Spell Tomes, Quest Books, Journals, Letters, Recipes, and Black Books, many of which directly contribute to game-play and the central narrative, but others are flavour texts, peripheral texts not fundamental to the core narrative ("Books (Skyrim)"). These internal digital books fulfill many of the roles filled by booklets in early videogames, including bridging the gap between mechanics and narrative, by providing information essential to progressing through the game's character development system and central narrative. As a result, the external textual objects -- a large hardcover volume of concept art and a dragon sculpture bearing phrases in the dragon language invented for the game -- are introduced to complement the game's narrative and expand on the artistry and experience of the game and videogames as a genre. Thus, the game is aware of its own textual and linguistic significance and its ability to transmit that significance through multiple media both in-game and externally. While the fact that the external objects are part of an optional limited edition does suggest that the core game is directed at a single-medium and game-play-oriented audience, the development of both the internal and external textual objects suggests a consciousness of the value of a multi-media narrative and its relationship to meaningful play in videogames.

A further development of digital internal booklets is found in the *Mass Effect* trilogy, a series of science fiction role-playing games in which the narrative elements generally found in a game's booklet are contained within a massive series of textual/audio files called the Codex. This Codex includes "13 subcategories which define different areas of interest within the game that

are key to the storyline" and "27 subcategories which elaborate further on more specific areas defined in the Primary Codex. While these are not critical to the storyline of the game, they do help expand the perceivable universe that the game encompasses" ("Codex"), much like the art book and sculpture that accompany the collector's edition of *Skyrim*. While this appears to transcend the need of an external booklet, the Limited Collector's Edition of the game includes the "Galactic Codex: Essentials Edition 2183," a booklet containing some of the in-game Codex's narrative as well as additional information on the game's races and "a greater insight into biotics," facilitating meta-gaming ("Galactic Codex"). Comparable to *Skyrim*'s external textual objects, *Mass Effect*'s "Galactic Codex" suggests an awareness of the value of booklets and multi-modal narratives despite a lack of innovative use in this case.

V: Booklets in Independently Produced Videogames

In the genre of independently produced or "indie" videogames and the popular technology of digital distribution are games such as *Bastion*, which, despite their innovative internal narratives, are even further limited by the singularity of their medium. *Bastion* is internally self-reflexive, featuring a "unique narration system [that] actually reacts to the player's actions within the game;" artistically conscious, incorporating a "hand-painted art style" for the level design; and conscious of the relationship between form and content, evidenced by the iconic way the floating world is built around the player as they move through it (Graft). Despite the game's artistic self-awareness, highly praised innovative narration, and use of multiple internal media, its lack of any textual objects, external or internal, is narratologically limiting. While *Bastion*'s reactionary narrator, much like the lore in *Diablo II*'s booklet, allows the game to avoid the interruption of game-play, it limits the player to a single source of and perspective on information regarding the game-world and its characters. *Bastion* does this to replicate certain literary tropes such as selective disclosure or the unreliable narrator. However, these narrative elements can still be accomplished while incorporating external media into the game-narrative; *Skyrim*'s art book does not give away any element of plot yet complements the game's world and characters with lore, and the dragon sculpture's engraved text only adds to the mystery of the invented language. Ultimately, a return to videogames complemented by booklets that contribute both to narrative and game-play and thus bridge the gap between form and content is required to achieve a more complete narrative, even in the case of innovative uses of form and/or content.

As a critical making experiment developed by a team comparable in size to *Bastion's*, *Anathema*, a cooperative action role-playing game featuring game-play comparable to Square's *Secret of Mana*, facilitated insight to and reflection upon the production of independently produced videogames, their booklets, and the narrative advantages of external textual objects. I will not pretend to think that *Anathema* is a revolutionary experimental work of 'high seriousness' and I will certainly not argue that it is a better game than *Bastion* or other innovative indie games. However, it is a work whose art, code, and narrative were closely considered in relation to form, and whose narrative and critical potential are amplified through the incorporation of an external booklet. It is at this point that my argument becomes a self-reflexive criticism, for parts of this article are developed from the "Reflections" section of *Anathema's* "Complete Companion" and therefore contribute to the booklet's own demonstration of narrative potential, but also booklets' potential for artistic reflection and criticism, which is the ultimate purpose of a critical making (Ratto). When I first began the project and started thinking about form and content, I naively believed that they would have minimal impact on one another. I assumed writing the game's dialogue would be similar to writing a teleplay, and that the form would just be a different, more interactive way of transmitting the same narrative as an episode of a cartoon. I also assumed that the "Lore" section of the booklet would simply be complementary material for gamers who wanted to know more about the game's world, races, and characters. As the project developed, the programmers and I began to realize the inseparable nature of our game's form and content, the way both had to compromise for one another, and the drastic, though often positive, impacts they had on one another. Connections between *Anathema*, its booklet, and the broader discussion of form and content in art may be drawn by examining several elements of the game-narrative and booklet and how the latter had an impact on the relationship between form and content as it was designed and written over the course of *Anathema's* development.

Over the course of production, many changes were made to the game's mechanics, game-play, art, story, and dialogue; some were simple while others changed one or more member's entire conceptualization of the project. First and foremost was the script in general. Many of the ideas I had for the game's story ended up not working with the game's mechanics or simply slowed the pace too much for the target audience of action role-playing game fans. Most cuts made to the script were 'flavour text' that would ideally be incorporated into the game as optional

dialogue, either through voice-overs or cut scenes. Currently, this additional dialogue is found only in the complete edition of the script in the booklet; thus, due to the mechanical limitations of production and the project's consciousness of audience, multiple media are required for a player to experience the entirety of the core narrative. Aside from the script in general, there were several internal and external changes that stemmed from form-content interactions. One minor change that nonetheless affected the game's content and my writing in particular came up when the programmers were designing the playable characters' special attacks. They wanted to give the protagonist, Ana, some ranged attacks and therefore decided to give her the ability to shoot lightning from the tip of her sword. My concern was a lack of continuity in the game since at no point is it implied that Ana is a magic user; in fact, according to her characterisation in the booklet, she is of a race to which magic is entirely alien. In compensation of this concern, I made a brief addition to the party's magic-user's back-story, also found in the booklet, and justified his use of magical knowledge to empower Ana's sword with elemental energy.

Two larger, more significant changes came up early in pre-production, while I was constructing the story's outline. As noted in the booklet's "Production Diary," my original medium of choice was a series of short stories. The original premise was to have a steam-punk setting that paid homage to Victorian culture and maintained a high level of realism with the exception of the historical path of industrialization being directed towards steam-powered mechanics fueled by a fictional source.¹ However, the programmers wanted a more fantasy-oriented steam-punk universe for the game as this would promote a greater diversity of monsters and character abilities, facilitating more role diversity between player-characters and a more action-oriented game-play. Thus, I created several new races, including the Denker and Erbauer, easily comparable to Tolkien's elves and dwarves, respectively; the Avians, winged humanoids; and the Helfer, who are more comparable to gnomes or J.K. Rowling's house elves. While I was initially frustrated by this shift in genre, I soon realized its potential to facilitate the discussion of additional social issues within the text. There were now numerous historical and political relationships to explore that were not only economic, as the strife between the Xente and the Südländischers was, but also racial and religious. Having cultural diversity within the playable party also created more distinct character dynamics within the narrative's dialogue. The races and some of their attributes are referred to throughout the in-game narrative, but as their mannerisms

¹ This approach was inspired by the Vinci civilization in Big Huge Games' *Rise of Legends*.

are common knowledge to the characters within the game-world the player is alienated from them. Detailed descriptions of the races and their nature is found in the game's booklet, developing the narrative externally for more immersive play and a deeper understanding of the characters and their world.

The second major change concerned the ending. I had originally planned three different possible endings depending on the player's performance in the game's final conflict.² When I came up with the idea I thought that I was contributing to the form directly through the content. Regrettably, the programmers did not have the time or resources to program such an ending and I was left having to choose which of the three endings I wanted to use in the game. Regardless of my choice, the narrative, the message it conveys to the player, and that player's experience within the game would not only be changed, it would be substantially more fixed. If a player was dissatisfied with the narrative's outcome, there was nothing formal that could be done to ameliorate the experience. This prospect caused me some anxiety as I was concerned that limiting the game to a happy ending would yield a predictable narrative whereas limiting it to a dark ending might convey pessimism, cynicism, or other negative social criticisms more strongly than intended. Thus, I ultimately decided on a bitter-sweet ending, hoping to appease fans of the plot twist without compromising a social commentary that encourages the player to approach the game's narrative with a hermeneutic of suspicion. The alternative endings are included in note form in the booklet's "Appendix B: Original Plot Outline" and not as additions to the script because they were never fully developed and so as to not create a conflict with the 'canonical' narrative. Once again it is the form of the booklet that allows this distinction to be made and also allows, returning to the self-reflexive criticism, this reflection upon the artistic intention and outcome of such decisions to be made.

A critical reading of one last example in which the form and content of the videogame influenced one another demonstrates the potential social and cultural impact of these relationships within textual objects and the importance of external information in making these readings. When developing the villagers of *Anathema's* game-world, there were two different ways of programming the conversations that players would have with them. They could either be programmed to go through a series of conversation in a pre-determined order regardless of which

² This plan was intended as an homage to early games that featured alternate-endings, such as *Metroid* and *Chrono Trigger*.

villager(s) the player interacted with, or the villagers could be individually programmed to have a specific set of lines associated with each of them. Within the game, which employs the latter technique, one masculine villager dismisses Ana's concerns, calling her "m'Lady," telling her not to "fuss," and assuring her that "the guards will handle [the problem]." Having any villager dismiss her concern because of her gender is very different from having a single individual programmed to do so. The former set up generalizes sexism and applies it to all members of the game-world's society over the course of numerous play-throughs whereas the latter restricts sexism to one individual who may then be criticized for his comment. By providing players with this information, the booklet fulfills the role of a 'making of' or 'behind the scenes' external narrative, such as the one on the bonus DVD of the collector's edition of *Skryim*. Without a source of field-specific knowledge, most who read the game narratologically would be unaware of the effects of specific mechanics on the narrative, and therefore booklets and other external textual objects facilitate a blending of theories for a more homogenous interpretation of games, resulting in a more complete understanding of videogames' artistic and mechanical significance and their role in contemporary popular culture.

The schism between the studies of narrative and game mechanics perceived by certain scholars in game theory is also often evident in the medium itself. McCloud distinguishes between form-oriented and idea-oriented comics, which can be extrapolated to apply to mechanics/game-play-oriented and narrative-oriented booklets. The videogame equivalent of this concept would be the "Agency/Destiny Divide" as McDevitt puts it. The implication is that a work can either be formally experimental at the cost of narrative or can use its form as a tool to convey a narrative, like a traditional novel. However, many videogames and booklets have the potential to break down this binary. While *Anathema* may not be experimental in its use of game mechanics, its purpose is very form-oriented as it was originally an assignment for a course on game mechanics. At the same time it is also an idea-oriented game; I have a story to tell and the videogame and booklet are my means of telling it. When first approached to write the game's story and dialogue, I considered taking the artists' book maker's approach and writing a meta-game wherein every aspect of the narrative relied on the characters' self-reflexive awareness of the game's form, its impact on their free will and abilities, and vice versa. In the end I conceded to a traditional narrative in fear that it might not otherwise see the light of day. The resulting compromise of this dual emphasis on mechanics and narrative was that of player agency. Due to

production restrictions the player has little control over the narrative beyond delaying it indefinitely or choosing to succumb to enemies. However, Dan Pinchbeck's experimental videogame narrative *Dear Esther* has shown players can have even less agency than that and still have a positive play experience of "something incredibly beautiful that could not exist without videogames" (Edge) due to the fact that they "allow for pacing and discovery that would be impossible to reproduce elsewhere" (McGee). Thus, this broad discussion of art, form, and content is reduced to two simply aspects: the artist's purpose and the player's experience.

From the programmers' point of view, the purpose of *Anathema* is to demonstrate specific methods and applications of computer programming and is therefore purely mechanical. My purpose with the project was, originally, purely narrative. Thus, the game in isolation is a relatively pure combination of form-oriented and content-oriented intent. This fusion, as well as the linear and relatively passive experience of the player resulting from their lack of in-game agency, is then complicated by the self-reflexive considerations of the booklet. Ultimately, the purpose of the "Complete Companion" is to encourage people to think critically both about the popular culture with which they interact and that they produce, either organically or through an interactive experience with a pre-existing work, so as to deconstruct the boundaries between form and content and better understand the role that videogames play in our culture.

VI: Conclusions

Innovative mechanics can contribute to narrative, creating a multi-modal story in-game; however, by incorporating both internal and external textual objects, videogames can break free of their medium's constraints and facilitate a more complete interaction with the art form. These developments began with booklets, such as in *F-Zero* and *Diablo II*, that blended media and tied external narrative directly to game-play, and evolved into complex multi-media works, like *Skyrim* and *Mass Effect*, that blended narrative and game-play both externally and internally, and textual objects, such as the "Galactic Codex" and *Anathema*'s "Complete Companion," that complement and reflect upon their games. While newer videogames may not require booklets due to their internalisation of flavour texts and game-play information, their narratives can always be complemented by external objects that exceed the limitations of digital media or a game's content, such as concept art, alternative narratives, reflections, and commentary. Ultimately, there is a interdependent relationship between videogames and their booklets that should therefore be extended to the study of the two media, their form, and their content.

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