Using the Concept of Play to Broaden the Reach of Cultural Theory

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Thompson Rivers University, 2016

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore methods of learning and teaching cultural theory that differs from the traditional classroom based methods. Using Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," I designed and created a videogame prototype that engages Derrida's ideas in an interesting and accessible way. This thesis explores how the concept of play can be applied to theory, and how the use of play can allow a deeper and more thorough understanding of theory. These methods were born from a criticism of the elitism witnessed in both contemporary society and academia, as well as a desire to make theory, especially cultural theory, accessible to a wider audience.

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INTRODUCTION

The reading, research and planning that took place in the creation of this thesis have spanned from sometime before 2017 to the day of its completion in 2019. Over these years, the problem that I became most interested in was how ideas – specifically those presented in cultural theory – are engaged with, and kept, by different sectors of society. I became particularly interested in the reactions that many of my peers had towards theories such as Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play." This particular text kept resurfacing in different contexts, and each time it was met with a general feeling of confusion and unease.

One of the major hurdles in engaging with theory is the acceptance of ambiguity. This ambiguity is laced with threats to society, as cultural theory focuses intently on questioning our surrounding world. This questioning is especially true of Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," as this text presents a critical examination of the role of structure within society. Discussions around this text, as well as others, reveal that the process of questioning, and of learning in deep discomfort, was not enjoyed by everyone. At the time, this discomfort meant little to me. However, as I moved through the coursework portion of my master's degree, I became more interested in the question of why such discomfort is present, and how this discomfort leads to disinterest. I struggled with understanding these ideas just as much as my peers did, yet I continued to engage with this struggle.

Although disinterest in relation to theory can be accounted for in numerous ways, some explanations have more relevance to this project. Wendy Brown, an American political theorist, speaks of the recent rise in neoliberal patterns in contemporary society. Brown argues that "contemporary neoliberal economization of political and social life is distinctive in its discursive production of everyone as human capital" (3). The idea of human capital is further clarified

through Brown's statement that "consumption, education, training, mate selection and more are configured as practices of self-investment where the self is an individual firm" (2). In other words, every action taken in a person's life must be justified through the act's ability to add value to an individual's contributions to their economy.

A person's role becomes solely to serve society: to make choices and perform actions that allow society to progress in a very specific manner. Brown mentions education in her list of ways that people increase their value to an economic "constellation" (2). Higher education focuses more on creating a space where individuals can increase their ability to contribute to a functioning economy. This theory gives some insight into one of the possible reasons that some people struggle to engage with cultural theories, as the process of theorizing is inherently open to the possibility that there is no immediate, productive answer or outcome. If the world is so focused on productivity, both from the point of view of survival, and of economic surplus, then something that offers little tangible benefit can be easily overlooked.

Throughout different levels of schooling, individuals are awarded papers and designations, which act as tangible rewards for their participation. Individuals recieve a certificate upon the completion of grade 12, then after they finish their undergraduate degree, and again after they complete any further education. This process of titling is then used in job markets, where businesses can seek out individuals who have invested the time required to achieve different levels of certification. As society shifts away from a general interest in engaging with ideas, and towards learning skills that will allow for successful integration into the workplace, the role of education expands.

What is taught, and where it is taught, has shifted. Exploring abstract ideas and challenging the status quo are still key elements of education, but are now joined by various levels of skills

training. Trades programs allow people to learn skills that will allow them to find employment in fields such as carpentry and mechanics, teaching skills specific to chosen career paths. These programs run both independently and within select universities, situating students of many different skills and interests physically close to one another. Other programs that focus on economics, or business more generally, and allow students to build the skills necessary to succeed in the world's capitalist infrastructure. Some of these programs require students to take courses on critical thinking, or look critically at that which they risk recreating. Frequently, universities shift between advertising themselves as a means to achieve success in a capitalistic world, and critiquing the very structures in which they exist.

In his writings on Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), Louis Althusser highlights the distinct connections between ideologies and educational systems. Althusser suggests that educational ISAs, identified more plainly as public schools and universities, hold the "dominant position in mature capitalist social formations" (1346). This "dominant position" (1346) is due to the expansive reach of educational institutions, such as primary schools, as the majority of the population finds themselves in a school, learning a specific curriculum. It is a "mature capitalist formation" (1346) that decides the curriculum and ideas that must be presented to children who attend schools.

Althusser adds that children are taught how to "read, write and to add" (1337) as well as a variety of other "know-hows" that will "ensure subjection to the ruling ideology" (1337). This description of education is somewhat similar to Brown's description of the individual attempting to make the self as valuable as possible to society's economic prosperity. However, in Althusser's description there is a clear view that subjection takes place without participant's awareness of it. Althusser believes this exposure creates effective contributors to society who are

conditioned to understand a very particular way of being in the world. For Althusser, schools present a unified front in communicating the ideology of the State, a feat which is achieved through a unified curriculum and decided on by ruling governments.

Althusser's ideas can be used to further examine the expected roles of educational systems. Despite individuals within schools working to disrupt and question ruling ideologies, schools themselves still operate because of funding given to them by governments. Universities, especially, depend on student enrollment and funding in order to operate. They must draw in students, and appease the bodies that allow them existence. This creates a wild balancing act, as the university allows for the interrogation of ideas while still upholding the appropriate level of submission to the status quo. All the while, the shifting economic and ideological spheres push people to use education as a stepping stone to reach employment.

Slavoj Žižek explores the idea of ideology in "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?" One of the major ideas Žižek engages is how the understanding of ideology is linked closely with an individual's beliefs. He uses an example from a Kaniewska film titled Another Country, in which two friends, Judd and Guy, discuss communism. Guy states that Judd is "not a Communist because [he] understand[s] Marx, [he] understand[s] Marx because [he is] a Communist" (40-41). Žižek focuses on this particular line, and explains that "Judd understands Marx because he presupposed in advance that Marx is the bearer of knowledge enabling access to the truth of history" (41). A key idea being communicated here is that although ideologies can be engaged with and explored, in each learning process there will be a certain level of ease depending on an individual's pre-existing understandings. This idea relates back to education, especially in terms of Althusser's critiques of the limited types of ideas education exposes.

These works can be used to create a deeper understanding of the different layers which make cultural theory difficult. Theory is difficult both because it is presented in a complex manner, ripe with jargon and complex words, and because it presents ideas that offset the dominant ideology. It is important to recognize that there is something deeply unsettling about the disruption of the dominant ideology. This discomfort is further explored by Žižek through the idea of the "fantasy-construction" (45), a phenomenon he connects with the need to look at particular structures and organizations as if they are true and undeniable. For Žižek, ideology is a "fantasy-construction which serves as a support for 'reality' itself," as something that "masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel" (45). This means that ideology's function is not simply to operate on the level of functionality, but rather to protect people from seeing beneath it. Ideology's roll is double: to operate and to hide that which is unpleasant. This makes the role of complacency within, or full commitment to, a system vital to existence. What exists beneath ideology is "traumatic" (45), which makes adherence to ideology crucial, and resistance to ideology's corruption vital.

Again, this reading of ideology and its place in people's life demonstrates why theory can be seen as opaque. Within the dominant ideology, people are encouraged not to engage critically with ideology, as this critical approach threatens the status quo. Interrogation of the ideologies that make up a structure can result in the crumbling of the power structures that reside within, and create, it. The idea that someone can interrogate this ideology also threatens ideology as true and fixed, two things upon which power structures rely heavily. Althusser and Žižek both present ideas suggesting the existence of ideologies and power structures which differ from those appearing most frequently in the world. In the context of this thesis, "ideologies" are defined as sets of ideas that guide individual's choices.

The act of engaging with critical theory, and critiquing existing ideologies, works against the neoliberal desire to 'collect' skills that will enable success within a certain ideological framework. Those who approach theory from the neoliberal mindset of gaining skills to be useful may struggle to understand the point of engaging with such threatening ideas. Theory is not only difficult because it has a tendency to use obscure or unusual language, but also because it attacks the root of what we know. When engaging with theory, many of the ideas accepted as true are interrogated and destabilized. This leaves the reader with a distinct lack of comfort.

This idea of discomfort ended up being one of the major forces in deciding how I would present a theoretical work. I chose to use a medium traditionally considered to bring pleasure, enjoyment and engagement: the videogame. Ian Bogost, a predominant games scholar, warns of "gamification" or the commodification of games into a medium that allows for them to be used as tools to persuade consumers. This hollow use of games as a mere tool with which to engage a consumer is one of the major pitfalls I hoped to avoid when taking something complex and attempting to translate it into the form of a game. I did not want to create a hollow, instructional take on Derrida, instead I hoped to create something meaningful that could be accessed by a more diverse audience.

The finished game[1], which is discussed in more depth in Chapter Six, uses shapes and colours to lead the player through three levels. The finished product strayed quite far from my original plan, but I was still able to create something that interacted with Derrida's theory. The shapes and images I used allowed for an interpretation of Derrida's text which plays with the boundaries between forms.

[1] The finished videogame can be found at: https://studentweb.uvic.ca/~mairirichter/

I chose “Structure, Sign and Play” in part because I am somewhat familiar with this text. I have read and studied this work on multiple occasions, and each time I encounter it, I understand something more. This text also serves as an example of a difficult text, as my own struggle with understanding the ideas put forth in “Structure, Sign and Play” is shared by others. The element of struggle allowed me to explore the questions of engagement and understanding, and the elements of this text can be focused both narrowly and more broadly, allowing its relevance to the idea of a game. A major component of choosing this text was its complexity, and the related discomfort many people experience when engaging with the text. Furthermore, this text contains elements I felt could be explored in the form of a game, a medium many people associate with fun.

The ideas of discomfort and access are explored more fully in Chapter One, where I propose the videogame as an alternative method of engaging with theory. Chapter Two explores more fully the text I chose to use as a basis for designing my game, Jacques Derrida’s “Structure, Sign and Play.” Chapters Three and Four discuss the process of learning to code, and explore the connections between “Structure, Sign and Play,” and the game itself. Chapters Five and Six discuss the game in more depth, and illustrate the steps required for creation. Chapter Six speaks to the game and how the finished elements are supposed to represent different elements of Derrida’s text.

Throughout this thesis, the major question addressed is how cultural theory can be engaged, and how restrictions of access can be challenged. Exploring these questions led to the creation of videogame, and the discovery of unexpected connections between theory and the videogame design.

CHAPTER ONE

The discussions of Althusser, Žižek and Brown have provided a rather negative reading of how ruling ideologies influence educational institutions. However, there are individuals who interrogate ruling ideologies, demonstrating that there is still space where dominant ideologies and discourses are questioned. These people exist both within and outside of university communities, and the ability for these communities to engage each other in discourse would allow for an even more meaningful interrogation of the status quo. After all, there seems to be a crisis afoot, and the division of minds does not allow for the creativity needed to face crises.

I propose that we start to think of different channels through which to present and expand on theories and interrogate ideologies. The use of different forms to allow for an engagement with ideas will, in turn, allow for different people to be included in the discussion. Increasing involvement in these discussions allows for the discussions themselves to become more meaningful, as different people add different perspectives and lived experiences.

Previously I discussed how the rise of neoliberalism has increased the need for education and actions to amount to some recognizable goal, specifically in relation to people's ability to get a career and survive. This constant desire to add economic value to the self that has become deeply entrenched in Western cultures, and is a major reason why I wanted to see what I could do with the form of the game. Games can be used as a method to explore ideologies, as they offer responsive means through which people can play with ideas. Games are both places of engagement, and places of failure and fun. When playing games, there are different expectations than when completing an assignment for a class. Failure in games is not just a possibility: it is expected. I know many people who put hours upon hours into a single videogame, attempting to pass a single level. This could be seen as a waste of time, or as an opportunity to question

motivation. There is something in the format of the game that allows for engagement with ideas differently than they would in an academic setting. This different type of engagement signals an opportunity to include a more diverse group of people into discourses.

The opportunity for people to engage in a challenge that will, more often than not, result in failure is an important aspect of why games could get more people to engage with theory. By lessening the negative associations of failure, the discourse is widened, and the discussion becomes more nuanced and complete. In his paper on failure and creativity, Keith Sawyer presents the idea that "rather than a sudden moment of insight that drives creativity, small ideas occur frequently as single moments in a longer process, and although these small ideas sometimes fail, those failures nonetheless drive the process forward toward eventual success" (2). Games give people the opportunity to be creative, test different theories and ideas, and fail. Sawyer's insights on creativity demonstrate how there is a small process that takes place in solving puzzles within games. Ideas do not just come into being, but are constructed through a series of interactions and processes.

I chose to focus on videogames because of their ability to be widely distributed, and because I wanted to create something in a medium I was somewhat unfamiliar with. The videogame allows me to push the ideas of creativity and playful engagement, two approaches I don't believe are often connected with cultural theory, but do link to Derrida's work on the concept of play. In "Structure, Sign and Play," Derrida speaks of how play is the force that allows for diversity. There are a finite number of points within the world, but each of these points can be defined in different ways, depending on how they relate to the center. This shifting relationship between the points is what allows for play.

Throughout this thesis, I will be using the word “play” more generally to refer to the act of recreational enjoyment, as well as more pointedly to refer to Derrida’s concept of play. Derrida’s “play” refers to the substitution of parts within a whole, where each part relates to the center of the structure differently. This definition of play allows for the exploration of structure, and will be addressed more fully in relation to the game in chapters five and six. However, when speaking of games more broadly, and the reason for choosing games as a medium to explore Derrida’s work, “play” is used more broadly in the sense of enjoyment, or to engage with something so as to bring about a positive reaction.

Because many theoretical articles are written from an academic position, they will likely be approached academically. However, limiting theory to an academic setting prevents some people from engaging freely with the text, as the focus remains on academic progress. Theory challenges ideologies and contains within it a certain rejection of the expected. Approaching theory playfully, and expecting creativity, will allow people to enjoy the process of discovery. The playful approach will also allow more academically minded people to accept the role of failure, while creating a space for those with less academic experience to engage.

Cultural theory is deeply rooted in a dissatisfaction with the world, and is driven by a curiosity and desire to uproot and explore ideology. This process of interrogation can be creative; and by situating theory within a creative medium, I hope to communicate the possibility of theory existing closer to the reach of more people. Most of all, I hope to grapple with the idea that theory exists only in guarded cells of academic investigation, available only to those with extensive training. I want to challenge this assumption from the perspectives of both the insiders and the outsiders. The aim of this particular endeavour is to look at the different ways in which understanding can shift, and ideas can bloom regardless of academic training. If theory truly

interrogates the status quo, then it should be accessible to more people, as change takes place through mass interrogation.

In the context of this thesis, and the concept of "accessibility" is used in an attempt to bring awareness to the layers of training undergone by many academics before they engage with abstract theoretical texts. When I say I want theory to be accessible, I am referring to a process of giving people who have not had extensive academic training the chance to engage with these works in a more direct way. People have many different approaches to understanding the world, and by creating a videogame, I hope to create a set of tools that can be used by people with or without academic experience in order to engage and understand theories.

A possible result of theorizing is making sense of something previously taken for granted. Once this understanding has taken place, the question remains as to what will happen next. When writing essays and formulating thesis statements, one of the ways that teachers attempt to get more complete ideas from students is to ask them what their claim is contributing. In a similar way, it is important to look at who is able to engage with these theoretical works, and to what degree is this engagement can take place. The ability to think critically about one's surroundings, as well as engage in critical conversations with others, are important aspects of human existence. However, connection is key to an individual's dissection of the world, and engagement with discussions that will allow deeper understanding and the potential creation of new ways of being.

When discussing how to make theory accessible, especially in the case of turning a theoretical work into a videogame, the question arises as to whether the work is being dumbed down. The first point I would like to make in response to this criticism is that by taking a different approach to the discussion of this text, I hope to allow different kinds of engagement. I do not want to make theory easy, rather to allow people to approach it from different angles and

with different expectations. The opportunity to approach theory as something more organic and malleable will, hopefully, allow people to approach theory without the external and internal expectations they would be faced with were they engaging theory academically.

Using the videogame to communicate theoretical ideas offers a benefit beyond creating a more approachable format. In 2019, especially in my peer groups, there is a general feeling of discontent and unease when faced with the prospect of the future. Employment is uncertain, housing feels unattainable, and no matter how much we try to be kind to one another, there is always something horrible just around the corner. One of the major ways that these feelings are avoided is through electronics. Many people can become almost immediately immersed in games, whether on their phones, computers or other gaming consoles. Games provide an escapism that allows for people to leave behind the world they live in and trade it in for something else entirely.

When faced with the idea of neoliberalism presented by Brown, the use of games creates an opportunity for people to engage with ideas in a format that is not driven by increasing a person's economic contribution to society. Although games present sets of rules and ideologies to the player, they also provide some freedom to the game's creators. This freedom, especially in terms of independent games, comes from the opportunitires the game's creators have in terms of how they chose to explore different ideologies. There are still restrictions within game creation, especially when these game are being created for profit, but these restrictions can be teased out. Because of this freedom, games are able to exist as places of escape, places of discussion, and places of interrogation. Games become a structure of duplicity where both engagement and escape are possible, and where people can think while distanced from their everyday lives.

Games also have the ability to provide both solo and communal experiences, as people can play together or alone. Eric Barone's *Stardew Valley*, a farming game in which you play as a farmer who has recently moved onto his or her grandfather's farm, began as a single player game. You work alone, cultivating the land and exploring the mines. However, as the game rose in popularity, there was a demand for a multiplayer experience. A multiplayer beta was released, and people were able to host friends on their farm, as well as visit other farms. This allowed a division of labour to take place, and through this division the creation of a communal game. This seemingly small change in the structure of the game allowed for a fundamentally different gaming experience.

There are a few ways that a player can use the multiplayer feature in *Stardew Valley.* The first is to host someone on an existing farm, the second is to be hosted on an existing farm, and the third is to create a new farm on which all players start at the beginning of the game. If you are travelling to another player's farm, a player must create a new avatar[2] which then joins the game and helps the other player to farm. However, in making a new avatar, none of the progress in a player's main game is translated. For example, in my main game I have upgraded my tools to the third tier, but when visiting my friend's farm I have to start back at the beginning. Then, any progress I make in my friend's game stays in that game. This structure breaks the desire to move forward in your own game, and transfers the focus onto a more co-operative play. You are participating in the creation of your friend's farm, or they are in yours, which signals a very dramatic change from the singular focus of the original game.

Stardew Valley provides an example of how something as conceptually simple as changing the game from single- to multi-player alters the player's approach to the game. The fact that such

[2] An avatar is used to represent the gamer in the videogame's playing space. Usually, people have the opportunity to create their own avatar and can change the character's appearance.

a small change can cause such dramatic shifts in the game's structure demonstrates how the structure of a game allows for the exploration of different social expectations and constructs.

Another benefit of videogames is wide availability, both in terms of formats and devices. Games available on phones allow for a portable experience where gameplay can interrupt everyday life. During a break at work, for example, someone could pull out their phone and enter into the world of a phone game. These games are frequently coined as idle games, and are structured around repetitive tasks and puzzles. These puzzles can range from the classic *Bejeweled* and *Tetris* type games, to more story based games. This massive range allows for gamers to enjoy a diverse gaming experience on a diverse range of devices.

One particular set of phone-based games I was particularly impressed with are two indie games designed by Amirali Rajan called *A Dark Room* and *The Ensign*. Although *A Dark Room* can be played both on a computer and on a phone, my first interactions with it were as a mobile game. *A Dark Room* is the first of these two games that I played, and the unique development of the story, as well as the unfolding of the mechanics within this game, opened my eyes to a new game format. The phone games that I was used to revolved around the matching of similar images. In *A Dark Room*, this form was replaced by a minimalist presentation of three colours, no images and many words.

The iPhone version of the game begins with a black background and a few lines of white text. The text, which reads "light fire," can be pressed, which then triggers a chain of events that leads into the gameplay. In order to progress through the game, the player needs to venture into the forest to gather resources, build huts to draw in villagers, and build infrastructure to transform resources into more complex materials. For example, after building the workshop the option for creating weapons out of the resources is unlocked. The weapons then allow you to

venture out into the world, which appears on a separate screen and is represented by symbols and letters. Each aspect of *A Dark Room* is distinctly minimalistic, yet the story and gameplay come alive as the story progresses. Although there seems to be only one way to progress in the story, each action and choice made alters the story and the emotional approach to the gameplay.

For example, as the game progresses the title of villagers is replaced by the title slaves. As huts are built, villagers move to the village and live in the huts. These villagers then help to enlarge your village as they can be assigned different duties such as baiting traps, tanning hides and gathering wood. There is not, however, an option for the villagers to just rest: the default action for the villagers is to gather wood. As the one in control of the tasks of the villagers, the game player is directly implicated in the change in title from "villagers" to "slaves," despite the structure of the game preventing any other course of action. Although the game will force the change in titles from villagers to slaves no matter what, the fact that the designation shifts only after you have started to assign other tasks to the villagers is important, as it suggests the game player's choices as the cause for the shift.

When playing *A Dark Room*, I was made uncomfortable by the changing designations of the characters, as it seemed my actions led to villagers becoming slaves. Upon reflection, I noticed how the shift in titles unsettled me, but did not interfere with the gameplay or my desire to continue playing the game. The designation can be ignored without much effort, as the title of "slaves" only appears on one screen off of the main screen. At this point in the game, there is also a shift taking place in what the player needs to accomplish, and the option of adventuring out is given. This shift allows the player to even further distance themselves from the idea of slaves. So here, even in this small and simple game, important questions of labour and recognition of actions are being presented.

I found it striking that so seemingly simple a game could be so engaging, and that the ideas presented would remain with me for so long. The storyline was compelling, and the game's mechanics allowed for the gameplay to be both engaging and straightforward. The game offered up areas of discussion in terms of the gamer's role in assigning different roles to the villagers. These questions of motivation and sacrifice demonstrates how a game as minimalistic as *A Dark Room* can explore complicated themes and ideas.

Different game formats and plotlines are very diverse, even in the small sample of games that I have played over the course of my life. This diversity in formats and structures allows for a variety ideas to be expressed, and different formats to allow for different levels of engagement. Videogames offer a diverse format that allows for the exploration of many different, both in design and structure. The cultural expectations around videogames also create a space wherein escapism is expected and failure is welcomed. These expectations will, hopefully, allow for a considerably more open engagement with complex and challenging ideas.

While playing the previously mentioned games, I was engaging with theoretical ideas. The transition from workers to slaves in *A Dark Room,* and the shift from working alone to working as a group, both ask the gamer to engage with theoretical ideas. Games allow for cultural theories to be explored, as they set those playing up in familiar settings and challenge their expectations. Using the format of a game allows for theory to be played with, all while destabilizing those presenting the theory itself as an absolute.

CHAPTER TWO

Thus far, I have framed this thesis in terms of the legitimacy of the videogame format in theoretical work. At this point, I will draw attention to the theoretical work itself, overview the main concepts, and relate these concepts to the process of creating a game further on. As I worked through the planning and creation of my game I considered the ideas and processes through the framework of Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Because the process of creating my game alongside Derrida's ideas allowed me to make many interesting connections, connections which are important for readers to become familiarized with.

In October of 1966, Jacques Derrida presented a lecture titled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." This particular lecture has since brought about a sort of revolution in thinking, later coined deconstructionism, which Derrida developed throughout his career. Derrida explores the ideas of structure, particularly how structure necessitates connections and creates hierarchies, and touches on Saussure's signifier-signified notion of language. The connection between language and meaning is a major theme throughout "Structure, Sign and Play," a connection which can be extrapolated into the structure of the culture itself.

I will be working with an English translation of Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," which was originally delivered in French. The fact I am working with an English translation of this text is important, as the act of translating a text has repercussions. There is an element of personalization involved in the translation process, as languages do not have direct equivalencies in meaning. The structure, connotations, and overarching ideas are different in different languages, so the process of moving between languages is complex. The differences between

English and French may not be as drastic as English and other languages, but there are still important differences that distinguish these languages. Therefore, by engaging with these ideas in English, I must recognize that they have been translated, and question what has been lost or confused in the process of translation.

One of the major critiques of Derrida's writing is that in his attempt to engage with such complex ideas, his writing becomes confusing. This critique is especially present in English Literature classrooms, where both the form and the ideas appear increasingly complex. The idea of foreignness may reveal one of the major difficulties of reading Derrida, as most students of English Literature will be approaching the text through English translations. Perhaps, then, the translation itself is unable to reach the intended audience. Perhaps something is lost in the process of taking French ideas and translating them into English. The other possibility is that the ideas Derrida works through are not as readily accessible through the English language.

In order to see this complexity in action, I would like to draw attention the opening section of Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play." The opening is as follows:

> Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event," if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural-or structuralist-thought to reduce or to suspect. But let me use the term "event" anyway, employing it with caution and as if in quotation marks. In this sense, this event will have the exterior form of a *rupture* and a *redoubling*. (1)

This opening is distinctly abstract. Even in the first line the language works to destabilize the reader's expectations, speaking not to a distinct or recognizable point, but instead to a "something" that "could be called an 'event'" (1). Looking at the opening from the perspective of reader engagement, this vagueness may pose somewhat of a risk. However, this opening is vital to the communication of Derrida's ideas within this piece as "Structure, Sign and Play" works to destabilize culture and the ideas it communicates. The process of questioning the status quo is complex, as language both originates from, and reinforces, cultural expectations. This connection makes it nearly impossible to discuss new possibilities while using the language of the culture itself.

The act of opening "Structure, Sign and Play" with the phrase "perhaps something" (1) serves to destabilize the authority with which Derrida speaks, which goes against the traditional structure of academic papers. In academic writing, writers are expected to make a clear and concise claim about a chosen topic, then spend the remainder of the paper backing up the claim. Instead, Derrida refuses to approach these ideas from the perspective of expert and opts instead to approach from the perspective of curious observer. He does not lay his ideas out as absolutes, but rather presents a series of ideas for the readers to work through. The lack of absolutes challenges the contemporary push for authority, instead supports the ideas this paper presents: ideas of destabilization and decentering authority. Because the remainder of the paper revolves around the idea of destabilized and decentered authority, the free flowing nature of "Structure, Sign and Play's" opening is effective. However, the structure of this text combined with the message and the biases of the audience results in a work more difficult for some people to engage with. Although this difficulty should not be read as negative, it sheds light on some of the resistance faced by "Structure, Sign and Play."

Derrida defines this “something” as an “‘event’” (1), placed in quotations marks which both clarifies and confuses the process of questioning. By identifying “something” (1) as a particular, Derrida grounds his argument in a more recognizable way. However, he challenges the reader by pointing out that the “event” (1) of which he speaks does not “entail [the] meaning” (1) that the reader expects. He is careful to highlight the fact that he is borrowing some, but not all, of the concepts assigned to this particular word. This portion of the text signals a connection to Saussure’s theories on the relationship between signifier and signified, in which the signifier is the word and the signified are the ideas and connotations that the word carries with it. The signified is the essence of the entity, whereas the signifier is used to call upon that essence. By invoking this connection to Saussure, Derrida links his discussion of structure to the structures of language.

Derrida’s focus is not on the sound patterns of language, but rather on how language is connected to thought and meaning. Also of interest are the connections between language and structure. Derrida’s approach to language allows for the relationship between language and culture to be explored, as language exists at the core of culture – both shaping and being shaped by it. Language allows for ideas to be exchanged, leading to the formation of relationships. These relationships transform into hierarchies and systems which enforce cultural rules. Because language and culture are so dependent on one another, Derrida’s discussions surrounding language is also a discussions surrounding culture.

The connection between language and culture, makes the destabilization of ‘event’ even more tumultuous for the reader. The suggestion is there is not a word that accurately conveys the ideas Derrida is trying to communicate. Instead, he is working with words similar to what he is trying to communicate, and highlight the areas in which these words are unable to fully function.

This process reveals both how language is limiting and how words can be altered and re-created, allowing society to both function and progress. The connection between language and the communication of ideas is developed both through the shortcomings that it presents, and through the different ways language can be manipulated and engaged with. Linking language and the expression of ideas allows for Derrida to explore how the structure of language directly influences how people exist in the world.

After outlining his ideas surrounding the destabilization of language and culture, Derrida moves on to discuss the concept of play. First, Derrida speaks to something that he calls the "center" (1), which serves as an orienting point within the structure. Derrida explains how this center acts to control what happens within the structure, while allowing the relationships between parts of the structure to shift. The center acts to "orient, balance, and organize a structure" as well as to "limit… the *freeplay* of a structure" (1). In this way, the center both limits and allows for freeplay. Although the center can create something static, it also provides an opportunity for the center to be switched out, or to create different chains of meaning between different elements. The center operates within the structure, as a point of reference, and in doing so becomes responsible for the entirety of the structure. At first, this system seems limiting. However, Derrida provides an opportunity to move beyond these limitations through the idea of freeplay. The center "permits the freeplay of its elements" (1), as each element that exists within a structure is able to shift, and to operate within the structure differently. A tension forms within the structure, as the forces that work to organize the structure come up against the forces that allow for play.

In an abstract sense, play and structure become somewhat confusing, but when combined with Derrida's other ideas the meaning of this portion of his argument becomes clear. Derrida

lists some of the centers, identifying them as “God, man, and so forth” (1). By identifying these possible centers, Derrida pulls his theory from the abstract into a more relatable set of ideas. The center has a duplicitous role for Derrida, acting “not [as a] fixed locus but a function” (2). Any given structure requires a central anchoring point, which protects the structure’s authority. In essence, for a structure to remain functional, the center must be respected. When the center has been identified as the guiding force of hierarchies, the act of challenging the center become radical. Calling for an engagement with the idea of center, as well as identifying specific instances of structures in the world, allows for a clear and compelling argument to be expressed. Furthermore, the act of a suspicious engagement with the center has resulted in the “redoubling” (1) of the structure, and the destruction of order and authority. These connections bridge the space between abstract and concrete thinking, and allow for meaningful insight into western culture.

However, there is still tension between reader and text. Because “Structure, Sign and Play” moves between outlining and explaining the significance of complex theories, it is easy for a newer reader to find themselves lost in the text and confused by how the ideas unfold. The ideas themselves are also challenging, as they call into question fundamental aspects of culture. The combination of intellectual and social questioning results in some discomfort on the part of the reader, which can result in the disengagement of the reader. This potential for low engagement is disheartening, as these ideas present interesting points of discussion. Therefore, the prospect of engaging different formats is an important starting point in the quest to get more people engaging in theory.

In much the same way as Derrida is re-purposing words so as to better communicate his ideas to an audience, I hope to repurpose the traditional delivery methods of theory, and give

them a new home in the form of the game. In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Bolter and Grusin describe the process of remediation as being the "reproduction of the feeling of imitation or resemblance in the perceiving subject" (55). This idea of something new having a "feeling" (55) of similarity between itself and something that came before gives some insight into my process of creating the game. I was working to find some core idea, and create something new that still contained a core principle that could be found in Derrida's work. However, I was also trying to create something that differed in major ways from the original. I was not wanting to create a new version of something that already existed, but to create something noticeably different from the original in order to better explore the original text.

In her work on speculative design, Kari Krauss identifies that design "demands the ability to see the built environment not as a coherent whole, but as a scrapyard of materials that invite radical recombination" (163). She speaks of how designers must see the pieces of a work in order to creatively use these pieces to create something else. This description of design falls more closely to my process when creating my own game. I focused on fractions of "Structure, Sign and Play," and created a game based on pieces that inspired me, and I felt could be explored in more depth. The idea of "radical recombination" (163) also allows for a connection to be drawn between my game and Derrida's idea of play, in which parts are substituted and interact within a structure.

I wanted to create a relationship between the source text and my own game that encouraged movement between the two texts. The shift in format should serve to destabilize the expectations of the reader, and encourage a freer engagement with ideas. Instead of approaching a text in the way one reads most academic articles, to find something to add to one's argument or to dispute, using themes in Derrida's work to create a game will push players to engage with

concepts in a way that encourages instability. This particular combination of theory and approach will offer up an interesting addition to the discussions surrounding people's engagement with theoretical works.

CHAPTER THREE

As I began to work on conceptualizing and creating my game, I encountered a series of decisions and lessons. One of the major decisions I had to make concerned which software I would use to create my game, as my choice in software would heavily impact the type of game created and the skills I would need to develop in order to bring the game into being.

I had experience working with Twine and Unity, two softwares that allow everyday people to create videogames. Twine creates text-based games in which the player clicks through the story, choosing their path and discovering different information based on their choices. This particular software is designed to be very user-friendly, and requires a limited amount of coding knowledge. Because the coding requirements are less intense, Twine is the perfect choice for creating interactive stories with complex narratives. Twine would have allowed me to create something inspired by *A Dark Room* with its text and story-driven gameplay. Using Twine would have required me to either break down Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" into something that could be represented in Twine, or write a narrative that embodied Derrida's concepts.

At the time of creating the game, I was also interested in relying more heavily on images than words, as I wanted to accommodate different styles of learning. Some people are able to engage readily with text, while others struggle to sit still and read large chunks of text. The basis of my decision was a desire to engage people in different ways, and allow different strength sets to engage with complex ideas. If I were to create a text-based game I was worried that the game would provide similar difficulties as the text itself. One of the major draws of the videogame was its ability to pull people in, and its allowance of control over the interactions with what happens. I wanted to give those who tried to engage with the text a feeling of control, or of importance. I

wanted the player's to be tied to their engagement. Unfortunately, I felt that what I would be able to create using Twine would not allow me to reach my goals. I wanted to avoid the repetition of reading and choosing options, and instead force the reader to operate within a set space. For each idea I set forth, I wanted the constraints to be given in a space that allowed the player to visualize what was happening, and fail without much hassle on their part. The goal was to have the player feel as if they were driving the formation of ideas, and not simply uncovering them. Whether or not I was able to make the player feel more attached to the ideas is left to be seen.

The guiding factor in my choice to use Unity instead of Twine was so I could more readily use the interactions between shapes to represent Derrida's ideas. "Structure, Sign and Play" revolves around the ideas of "center" and "structure" (Derrida 1), concepts that are distinctly visual in nature. When engaging with these concepts I always think in terms of a circle, perhaps because I see the center of a circle as the most concrete example. It was an exploration of these images that I was able to grasp some of the ideas that Derrida puts forward. My use of images and concrete examples to engage more fully with this text allowed me to interact more readily with a text that presents a lot of complexity through relatively abstract language.

Unity allowed for the representation of complex theoretical texts through simple and straightforward images. My goal was not to take something "complex" and make it "easy," but rather to take something complex and present it in a form that would allow for more detailed engagement. Although Unity allowed me a better representation of the ideas I wanted to communicate, it also required considerably more knowledge on my part in order to fully realize these representations. In the previous chapter I discussed how the opening of Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" works against the usual academic structure of an article or paper, and instead presents ideas in a more fragmented and destabilized way. This destabilization is one of

the major areas that I wanted to explore when creating a game out of Derrida's theory, could present smaller fragments in a series of formats and appeal to different audiences.

Gamers are used to puzzles, and being presented with increasingly more complex ideas as they move forward. However, the increase in difficulty comes with an expectation that the information and tasks that a player has been working through previously will have prepared them for the challenges further on, or that challenges will build on each other. When playing videogames, enjoyment can be found in the struggle associated with discovery and progress. Gamers are willing to spend time and energy trying to beat the boss level in a videogame, but not as willing to try and figure out what a theorist is trying to communicate in a ten page article. By directing the drive found in playing videogames towards the understanding of theory, I hope to increase the rate at which theory is interacted with. Working through ideas should be a somewhat enjoyable process, so using a medium frequently associated with fun should lessen the degree to which many people avoid such engagement. If engaging with complex ideas extends beyond satisfying course requirements, and instead offers a space in which more people can voice their own interpretations and engage critically with their own worlds, then theory will be more likely to be developed and finessed by this larger audience.

In *Critical Play*, Mary Flanagan discusses the ways in which games can be used to explore and reveal information about the cultures that surround them. One of the major points that she makes about games is that they "primarily exists as rules systems" (11). When looking at Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," there is a definite relationship between structure and rules. Rule systems drive games: they allow a player to interact with the game space and reach objectives. Similarly, Derrida's idea of structure reveals how cultures abide by rules, rules so deeply ingrained in the cultural psyche that they become invisible. Games provide a different

access point, as the rules they provide must be carefully studied before being engaged with. This is the case for both videogames and board games, as each requires a specific set of interactions in order for the player to succeed in the gameplay. Flanagan identifies games as a "cultural medium" (223), which "carry embedded beliefs within their systems of representation" (223). In this way, Flanagan allows for even more correlation between Derrida's ideas of structure and the creation and playing of games.

The rigidity of these games, these structures, varies through game types and mediums. In board games, the process of learning the rules depends on the player reading through rulebooks, and practicing these rules in the first few rounds of gameplay. There is a separation between rules and gameplay which allows board games to become instantaneously pliable. Rules allow for a carefully constructed experience, but also rely on how clearly the rulebook conveys the rules to players.

I have played many board games with friends and family, but some of my more recent experiences have given me insight into the process of engaging with the rules that board games put forward. My family and I frequently play a board game called *Kingdom Builder,* a board game in which you place little wooden houses on tiles in an attempt to satisfy the most requirements and win the most points. I first learned to play this game with my parents, who explained the rules to me. We played a few times through, and it was enjoyable enough to keep playing, but also seemed rather one-dimensional. A few plays in, my younger brother sat down with us and watched us play. He picked up the rulebook, and after a few minutes of watching, proceeded to ask us what we were doing. Somehow, the rules as they had been understood by my father when he read them were not the same as my brother's reading. At that point, we tried the game again and my brother explained the rules in the way that he understood them. This version

of the game was considerably more balanced, and had increased complexity. This gap, resulting from the ability for language to be open to interpretation, allowed for a series of different versions of the game to be played, some of which made considerably more sense than others.

Another game I recently learned to play is *Fog of Love.* Although the game itself is relatively straightforward, there are many elements to understand before the game can begin. As the game uses cards for the telling of the story, rules are presented using this system of presenting smaller doses of information in a specific order to explain the. This allowed for a tutorial in which the gameplay was stopped and started when the rules needed further explanation. This gradual introduction to the rules allowed for a clear understanding of how each element of the game interacted with one another. This way of developing the rules also asked a different amount of attention from me, as a player, as it interrupted the first play through heavily, but also made the play through logical. This relationship with the rules was quite different from other games that I have played, and I found it quite effective in its ability to both engage and inform me as a player.

Videogames operate with a different relationship to the rules. Although hard copies of videogames come with instructions, it is not as vital for the player to read the manual before playing the game. In fact, many games use similar mechanics for the game's controls. The joysticks result in movement, and some combination of the letters or shapes on the right-hand side of a controller will result in various interactions with the outside world. Computer games frequently use arrow or A/S/D/W keys to trigger directional character movement. These standards in input allow the player to work through a game's basic controls using trial and error, instead of reading through detailed instruction manuals. In *Overcooked*, a co-op computer game, the basic controls appear on the loading screen, and when new layers of complexity are added to

the gameplay a brief set of instructions appear at the start of the level. Videogames also insert tutorials into the gameplay itself, making the learning of the rules an immersive experience. This way of introducing new rules as the player progresses is quite similar to the way rules were introduced in *Fog of Love*. In each case, the presentation of the rules allows for the player to meaningfully engage the game.

Choosing Unity as my game software meant that I had to learn not only coding, but also a series of rules surrounding the creation of in-game visuals. I needed some sort of rulebook that would allow me to meaningfully engage with Unity. Learning how to create 3D objects, and import these objects into Unity, would allow me to assemble the visuals of my game. I used YouTube tutorials to learn how to make 3D models, as well as how to code and assemble the final game. The software I used to make the 3D models is called Blender, and I learned how to use it by watching a playlist by YouTuber Blender Guru. There were two major playlists: one for beginners, and one for more advanced users. I started with the beginner tutorial.

The beginner tutorial led me through the steps in making a rendered image of donuts and a coffee cup, and allowed me to learn the basic functions of Blender, such as keyboard shortcuts and different methods of rendering. This process enabled me to familiarize myself with the elements of interaction which lead to structure of the software. Following the actions of the YouTuber in their tutorial, I was able to develop my own skills and learn from Blender Guru's experience. My final render (Figure 3.1) contains some errors: the donut on the far right seems to be pressing into the middle donut,

Figure 3.1: 3D Model of Donuts and a Coffee Cup

and the middle donut is floating above the plate. There is also a strange shadow on the back left wall, and a gap in the mug's handle. Despite these flaws, the image still makes sense. More importantly, the process of making these mistakes allowed me to test my skills when faced with the rules of this software, and carry my newfound understanding of these rules forward with me into my other projects.

After creating the donut image, I worked through a second 3D model tutorial by the same YouTuber. This video series detailed how to make an anvil, and employed considerably more detailed images and approaches to 3D modeling. Through this increased difficulty I built on the skills I had just learned, using different tools and more complex skills. I learned how models needed to be constructed, specifically how to connect different vertices in order to make an accurately rendered image. For example, in Figure 3.2, there are four highlighted points connected on the surface of the anvil. These four points, called vertices, creates a 'face,' which acts as the surface of the model. Four connected points, instead of eight or fourteen, creates a less complex shape and makes the final project more likely to be rendered accurately.

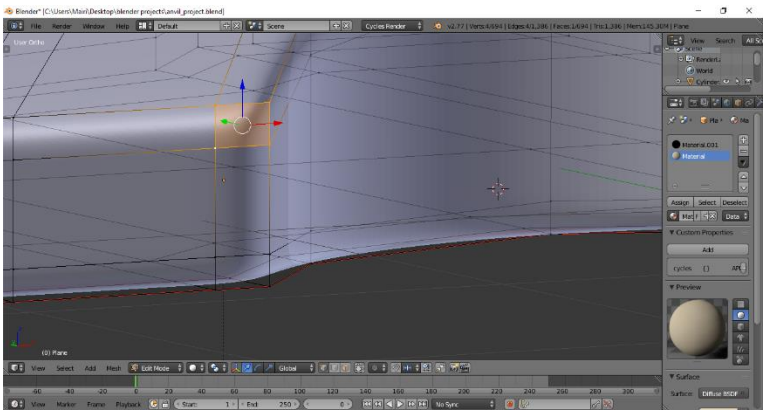

Figure 3.2: Close-Up of Four Vertices Selected

Below I have included two images (Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4) of the anvil in its later stages, once the modeling had been completed. These two images show the complexity required to make even a simple shape. Lines must be created to allow curves and edges to be expressed in

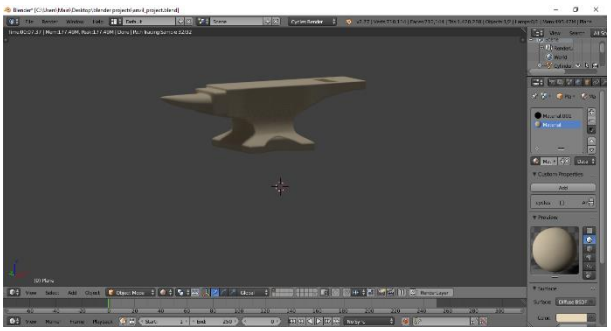

Figure 3.3: 3D Model of Anvil

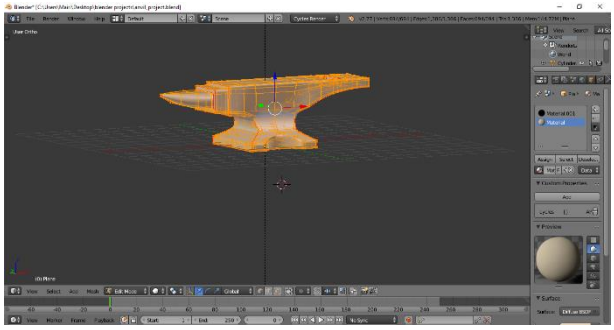

Figure 3.4: Highlighted 3D Model of Anvil

very specific ways. By increasing or decreasing the spaces between the lines, the edges of a shape can be made more or less curved, as smaller faces can be angled so as to create a curve. This process is one of many ways in which images are made, and creates a riding framework that must be followed in order to communicate the image effectively. However, there is a definite struggle in creating images in such a highly regulated manner.

While creating these images, I was forced to use a very strict set of rules in order to accomplish my desired goals. Each line had to be carefully constructed, meet with the appropriate end point, and have the appropriate constraints and curve type. When creating simpler images, the process was made easier by basic shapes, and fewer curves. I was rather unhappy with the way the anvil turned out, as I struggled with navigating the complex connections between points. The anvil was a combination of soft curves and sharp corners, which posed challenging to me.

In order to practice more organic shapes, and become more independent in my modelling, I decided to create a 3D model of my dog, Finnegan. I put a great deal of time into this project, and learned a great deal. Modelling an organic shape allowed me to expand on the 3D modelling

skills I had already developed, as well as play with different possible aesthetics for the game itself. I watched a YouTube tutorial by Grant Abbitt on creating low-poly animals, and used the basics of this tutorial to inform the creation of my 3D model of Finnegan. One of the major bonuses creating a 3D model of my dog was that I could get appropriate reference pictures of him firsthand (both a front and side images). Gathering sufficient reference material is a major difficulty when working with 3D modeling, as the translation of the image from 3D to 2D and back to 3D made it difficult to create images that stay true to their real counterparts. The movement between forms skews proportions, and the very essence of the object or creature can be lost amongst the complexity of translating something real into a 3D version of itself that exists in a 2D space.

Figure 3.5: 3D Model of a Border Collie

The finished product was the result of a great deal of sculpting on my part. I created a low-poly version of my dog (Figure 3.5), assigned different square faces different colours, and

Figure 3.6: Side View of a Border Collie

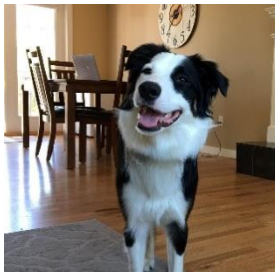

Figure 3.7: Front View of a Border Collie

Figure 3.8: Left-Side View of a Border Collie

created somewhat accurate body parts. Looking at this image allows the viewer to recognize that this is a dog – a sideways image may be even more evident as the tail is a clear indicator of dog-ness – but the image is also not fully representative of dog. The planes are flat, he has no eyes, and his ears are melded with his head. There is, however, something in how the shapes come together that allows a person's mind to make the connection between a dog and this choppy, computer-ruled shape. In attempting to create something that resembled my living, breathing companion, I was forced to use a different set of rules. The process of 3D modeling is then nestled deep within rule sets, making it vital that anyone hoping to be a part of this process learn the rules of this particular structure.

The concept of rule structures allows for the development of important parallels between videogames and Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play." Creating a 3D model forced me to understand the rules of coding and modeling in the "real world" as well as in the computer world. In order to create a model that was able to mimic Finnegan's appearance I needed a clear and complete understanding of how I saw him, what he looked like and how he moved. Derrida's explanation of structure relies on the reader's understanding of how rules systems come together to form language and culture, and in order for me to effectively mimic a "real" creature on my computer, I needed to thoroughly understand the rules that governed my dog. Games allow for more conscious interactions with rule systems, as they require the player to be consciously aware of how the rules that allow the game to function. In "real life," being conscious of rule systems is considerably less frequent. In fact, many of the rule systems in place require that people do not critically engage them, but instead let the structures exist without hassle. Derrida's idea of the center, or the core force that enables structures to exist, requires a level of acceptance in order to

maintain power. If people become aware of the superficial nature of the center, the entire system is thrown into question.

As I worked through the process of creating models to use within my game, my understanding of the software's rule systems grew. However, as I moved between 3D modelling and coding the game, my knowledge of the rules systems of each software increased and decreased with my focus. At this point, it has been over four months since I worked with Blender, and because of this I am now unfamiliar with the skills that I would need in order to create another 3D model. If I were to go back and try and create another low-poly model of Finnegan, I would need to review some of the tutorials, but the process would be less about learning and more about unearthing previous knowledge. The idea of faces and vertices have stayed with me, and I would have some understanding of how to use these elements, but I have forgotten the keyboard shortcuts that are needed to make the modelling process more seamless. Even the process of engaging with the software's rules allowed me to engage with the concept of structure. It is this examination of different rule systems that I will develop further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The process of planning my game was deeply rooted in learning skills relevant to the creation of a videogame. Not only did I have to learn how to use Blender, I also had to become familiar with the software in which the game itself was formed. In the first planning stages I sketched out the events I wanted the game to contain in an attempt to develop the possible mechanics of the finished game. As I worked on this outline, I reflected on games I had played over the course of my life. I enjoy third person adventure games, and games with appealing graphics. Through these reflections on the aspects of games I found effective, I was able to develop possible iterations of the graphics.

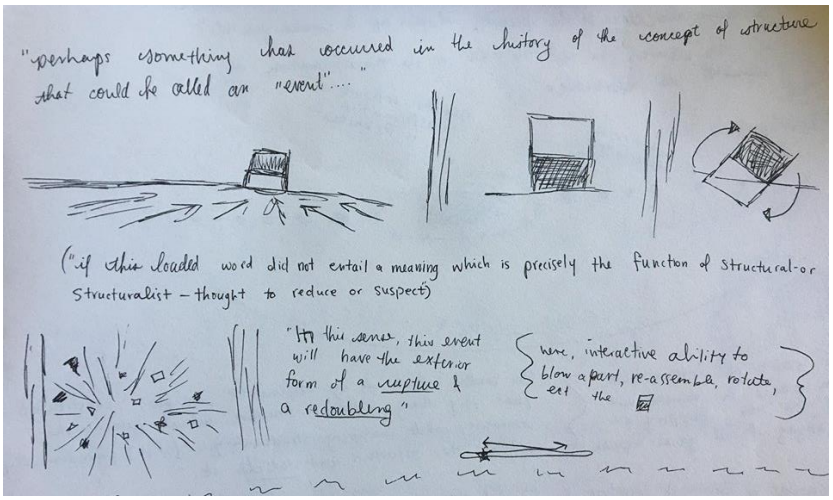

Figure 4.1: Sketches of a Black and White Box

My sketches were heavily influenced by the following: how each object would exist within my game, interact with the game space, and interact with other objects. Clearly stating the rules that governed each object allowed me to more fully understand what information I would need in order to design and research the necessary code for each object.

Figure 4.1 depicts one of the first sketches I created when planning my game. Here, I am working to explore some of the themes I identified in Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play." The top half of the image contains three sections, each of which displays a different version of a black and white box. When I drew these pictures, I had the mechanics of the game in mind. The player would be able to interact with the box, pushing it backwards in the game space, and

rotating it on an axis. The rotation would allow the player to place either the black or white end of the box beneath the ground line. I designed this structure in an attempt to highlight the concept of binary division, and allow the player of the game to interrupt this division by manipulating the space surrounding the box. Through the manipulation of the shape, the clear hierarchy of black/white and up/down becomes muddled. In the bottom left of Figure 4.1 there is also an image of the box exploding. The original plan was for the player of the game to not only be able to manipulate the shape, but destroy it completely while maintaining complete control the entire time.

In these few sketches, I focused on using basic shapes to represent my ideas. The shapes were simple enough that I was comfortable I could recreate them using my chosen software, while still maintaining enough complexity that the game was worth creating. Because I have very little experience with coding, the prospect of creating a game often felt very overwhelming. However, my desire to create something which would require active participation far outweighed any doubts I had about the process. Rules and structures are closely intertwined, a concept that I have become very familiar with while working on this game. The process I am going through while creating the game nicely parallels the way the actions of the player are bound by the rules I create for the game. My own process of creation, specifically how I was required to operate within a strict set of rules when creating my game, parallels the way the player's actions are bound by rules.

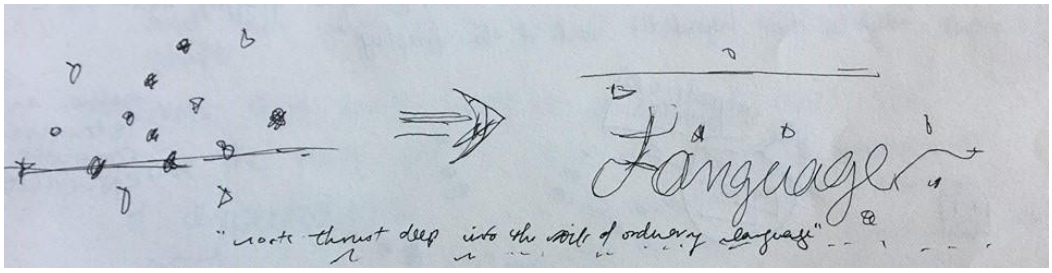

Figure 4.2: Sketches of Dots, and Some Writing

Throughout the planning process, I worked to connect concepts and ideas to the quotations within "Structure, Sign and Play." This connection consisted of writing down quotations I felt were important, then testing out short illustrations to see if any could help to develop the ideas the quotations presented. These illustrations were then assigned short descriptions, ones which would later help in the construction of the game by laying out some possible game mechanics. At first, creating these different sketches served more as an exercise in exploration than one of formal planning, as the sketches have little connection to one another. However, as I continued to create sketches and describe the game's possible mechanics, the possibilities that each of these sketches created became more well-rounded and distinct. I started to gain a clearer view of how the game itself could be materialized.

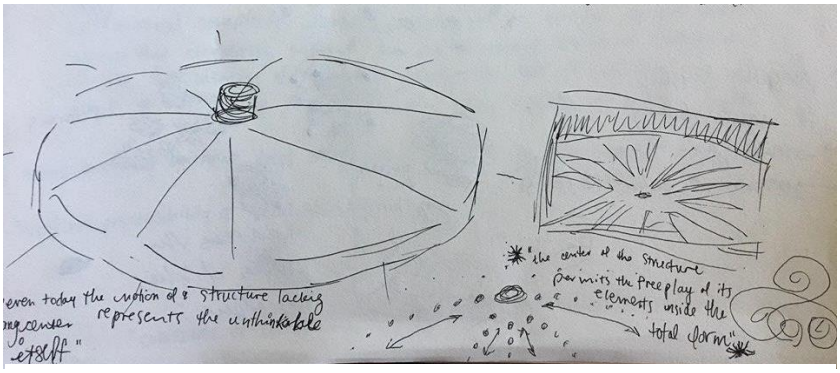

Figure 4.3: Sketch of a Circular Cake-Like Object

As I worked through abstract possibilities, towards a sense of how the finished game would look, I began to consider the opening of the game. Specifically, I wanted to know how I would introduce the player into a world of possible and probable reactions to their inputs. I decided I wanted to draw a clear parallel between Derrida's ideas and the physical structures that would be recognizable to those playing the game. At the same time as I decided that I wanted to take on this challenge, I was also faced with the question of how I would successfully create parallels

between the game as a series of images and ideas, and Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," without relying too heavily on text. After all, I chose Unity so as to move away from text and instead focus on images and mechanics. I wanted people to enjoy engaging with theory. This process of translating ideas, not only into another medium, but also into a medium I was unfamiliar with, posed quite the challenge. However, at this point in the creation of the game I did not want to limit myself to planning a game I was confident I would be able to code.

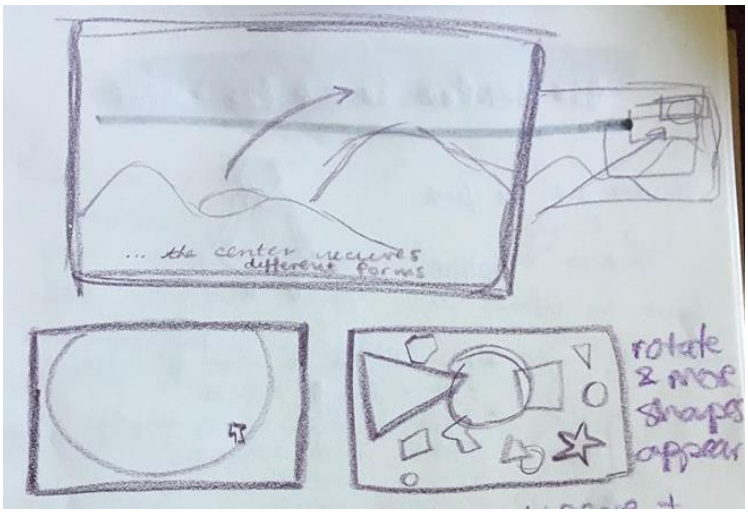

Figure 4.4: Sketch of the Sun Rising

After playing with possible game mechanics, I began to explore the opening of the game, and imagined how these potential starting places would reflect the concepts of structure and multiplicity. Figure 4.4 shows one of the ideas I mapped out near the start of the planning process. Through the images mapped out in these boxes, I attempted to engage with the possible manifestations of the phrase "the center receives different forms" (Derrida 1). In the images, which progress from the top box, to bottom left, to bottom right, the player would watch a short clip of the sun rising. Once the sun rises, the player would be able to click on the sun with their mouse and rotate it. Rotating the sun would trigger the emergence of a series of different shapes. In using the image of the sun, the center of our solar system, I am able to engage with the idea of center without the use of too much text. Instead, by using the familiarity people have with the sun and center, I am able to explore the ideas presented in "Structure, Sign and Play" in a more abstract manner.

Following the ideas presented in the first iteration of the opening scene, I decided the first portion of my game would be about finding different sets of structures within different images, such as a rotation of the sun allowing for the discovery of a constellation of shapes. The idea that "the center is not the center" (Derrida 1) would be addressed in this particular set of rules and interactions. The shifting of a seemingly static image in order to reveal a very complex and multifaceted internal space is an appropriate image response to the idea of destabilizing the center. The player would, quite literally, destabilize the center to allow for play.

Once I had planned the opening scene, the next step was to decide how it would progress. I could follow along in the same format I started with, in which the player interacts directly with the objects, or I could create another layer in which the player controls an avatar whose interactions with their surrounding digital world trigger action. In the interest of exploring different possibilities, I decided to introduce a controllable avatar. This decision was also based on my own enjoyment of games containing avatars, and perhaps pushed by the frustrating experience that I had in my youth with a puzzle game called *Myst.*

The introduction of an avatar would introduce a series of expectations into the game's mechanics. For example, the presence of an avatar puts forth an expectation that the game can be "won." Mechanics of collection are deeply rooted in game play, especially when a controllable character is introduced. Collection may manifest with the player needing to collect a certain number of objects in order to pass through to the next level, or attain a certain weapon to be able to defeat a certain monster. The idea of collection in one that mirrors some of our current societal weaknesses such as mass consumption, and the driving desire to have. These were not dynamics I wanted to encourage within my game, especially in the context of Derrida's "Structure, Sign

and Play." In order to combat that system of ideals, I decided that if I were to use collection mechanics I would have to come up with a way to interrupt the structure the game would present.

The solution I came up with to combat this particular mechanism was to switch the value of the collected objects at random points during the game itself. For example, the game would begin with the cubes holding the most value, and spheres holding the least value. Each cube picked up would add a point, and each sphere would subtract a point. A set time or interaction would switch the values: the cubes would revert to nothing, and the spheres would suddenly hold value. This approach to an avatar's interactions with the surrounding world also relates nicely to Derrida's ideas concerning deconstructionism. There is still a structure present, but the center of the structure, or the goal of the game, keeps substituting itself for something else – in this case spheres for cubes. By centralizing substitution, the game lacks a clear foundation, and forces the player not only to interact with what is happening in the moment, but also think about the possibilities of what the game could call for next.

Once I had sketched out and drafted enough ideas to combine into a game, I started to consider how I could translate the parts of the game that I had imagined into a digital format. The first step I took was to identify what kinds of mechanics the game would require, namely movement and interaction. I had to determine what kind of space the game would take place in, and how each component of that space would, or would not, allow for interactions between the avatar and its surroundings. I noted some of the interactions I hoped to include, such as a need for a pick-up script, as well as a movement script for the avatar. I also needed the objects within the game to be stationary, and allow the player to interact with them. Finally, I needed to be able to code the opening scene that I hoped the game would have, in which the cursor triggers movement from objects. As I identified each aspect necessary for the interactions within the

game, I assembled a list of the mechanics I would need to find and develop codes for. It was at this point that I had to test each of my ideas against the likelihood that I would be able to create them using my chosen software.

After I created a list of desired mechanics, I searched for resources that would allow me to code the game itself. Unity uses a "user-friendly" coding language called C#. However, my very limited knowledge of coding made even this relatively simple language seem overwhelmingly complex. Because of my limited coding knowledge, I returned once more to tutorial videos, this time from the Unity website. The first Unity video tutorial that I used, and the only one that I made it through completely, was one that walked the viewer through the steps to making the "Roll-A-Ball Game." This particular tutorial showed me the basics of making objects move within a scene, and showed how they interact with the game space and the other objects. Through this tutorial, I also learned how to add scripts to different objects, and what kind of information would be assigned to which script.

One of the major pieces of code that I learned from these tutorials was how to use interactions to trigger events. In "Structure, Sign and Play," Derrida speaks of an "event" or "rupture" (Derrida 1) that sets in motion a participant's ability to question a structure. In a similar way, I hoped to use events to stress the game's lack of a finite structure. Derrida's ideas of event and rupture can be connected to the mechanics of game creation in a way that opens up space for discussion. Within games, an event functions to allow or prevent the progression of the player. These events can be identified as collecting items, jumping on boxes, and triggering dialogue exchanges between the player and a NPCs. Each of these events is rooted deeply within a structure, which can be identified as the structure of the game, or the code. The code allows for

different events to take place, and contatins a list of possible events written by the game's creator.

The idea of an event, especially as Derrida refers to it, is extremely abstract. The event is identified as something that exists within the structure, a "loaded word" (1) that carries with it the "function of structural… thought" (1). This idea is convoluted, especially when compared with the way Derrida uses the concept of event as a breaking-away from the structure itself. When connected with the analogy of gameplay, and game creation, this idea of event can be explored through an analogy.

In coding, different inputs create different outputs, or events, which allow the player to progress in the course of the game. However, each of these events is pre-determined by the code, which supplies its own structure. The code/structure then dicates which events can be triggered at what time, and how these events will allow the player to progress within the game (yet another structure) itself. For example, some of the objects the player interacts with will be identified simply as decorations and will not help the player progress. Instead, these objects simply exist. The floor, for example, keeps the player from falling into a bottomless abyss, but beyond this basic function the ground does not serve any other purpose. The directions in which a player can move are limited, so the event of falling onto the floor allows the player to operate within a set gamespace. When playing games, there are always objects that cannot be interacted with at all, ot only at certain points. These objects do not have the capacity to trigger events, save for sometimes limiting character movement. These objects are assigned specific values within the structure, and the code dictates how each of these items operates.

In this way, the structure becomes the driving force in the completion of the game. The code allows for some items to be intereacted with, and others not to be. However, events trigger

actions only when set conditions are met, conditions which are specified in the game's code. The events that take place within the game fulfill the needs of the structure. Stepping back, the question becomes how Derrida's concepts of structure can be approached through the idea of a rupture. What aspects of a game-driven analogy can satisfy the idea of a "rupture"? Perhaps the player's ability to modify code allows for this parallel to be continued. If the player of the game is aware of how the structure is formed, and how the code is designed, they can then "rupture" the code itself, creating a different set of rules, and altering the structure. This would take place through mods, or even re-makes of games.

As well as the Roll-A-Ball tutorial, I watched a few playlists on YouTube user Brackey's channel. The first series of videos were in the playlist "How to Make A Game," and covered topics from player movement to camera movement. This process of coding a game was rather interesting, as it used different strategies than were presented in the "Roll A Ball" tutorial. The "How to Make a Game" tutorial series develops a game similar to *Temple* Run, in which an object is constantly moving forward, and the player uses their input to steer the avatar and avoid obstacles.

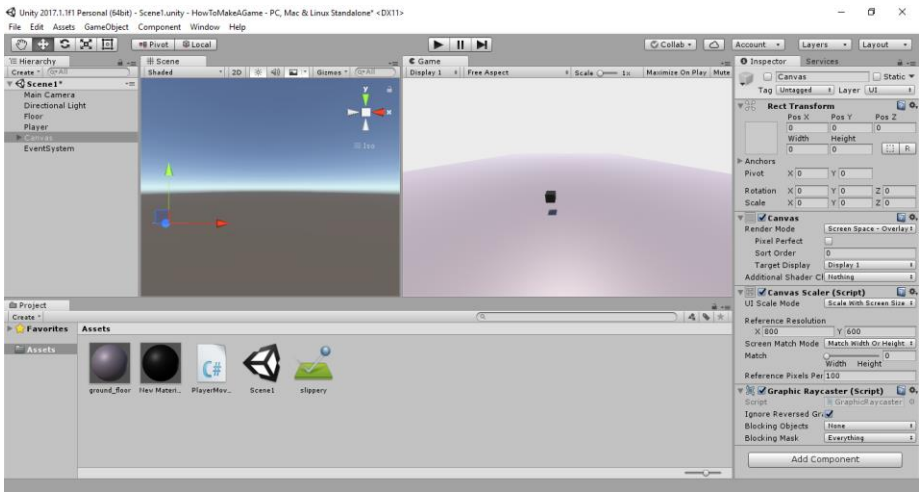

Figure 4.5: Unity Interface with a Black Square Hovering above Ground

This game tutorial starts by coding a set force that is applied to the player object. The coding in this game also included making the camera follow along behind the player object,

using code to set the following distance on a specific axis. This added layer of complexity allowed me to see the game as it unfolded, and witness how different kinds of coding allow for different kinds of player input. This game also prodived a different set of visuals, which helped me plan my own game. Ironically, one of the most important skills I learned from the creation of this game was how to set the colour of the sky. This small aspect of coding completely altered how I visualized and dveloped my game.

Overall, the tutorial offered tools and exposured me to different ways the tools I had already learned could be implemented. In one of his videos, Brackeys speaks of how coding allows game mechanics almost limitless possibilities. He notes this as a positive, but also recognizes how this overwhelming mass of possiblities could make coding seem impossible, even to more seasoned programmers. I found the idea of being overwhelmed by code quite relatable, as in my early stages I had little idea of where to start. I knew a few basic aspects of code, and understood the logic behind "if" statements, but the more complocated interactions were beyond me. My knowledge of "if" statements, which help the computer move through possible outcomes if a specific condition is met, allowed me to create a movement script. This movement script outlined how pressing different keys would satisfy set requirements and move the avatar. However, more complex interactions were still beyond me. Even when following along the with Brackey's videos, there were times I missed a tiny step, and the entire code ceased to work. For example, pressing a certain key is supposed to move the small black square. I assumed this movement, if given the same coding phrase, would result in a fixed speed in each direction. Instead, when I pressed the up, left and down arrows, the cube didn't move. When I pressed the right arrow, the cube rocketed off the edge of the ground plane. I do not know why

this happened, especially as I followed closely along with the tutorial, and I do not know how to go about fixing it.

Despite this difficulty, the coding process for player movement gave me some really good tools for creating my own game. For example, noting a "public float" in the script creates little input boxes in the Unity Inspector window (Figure 4.6), which allow for the numbers to be changes without going directly into the code. The creation of a public float allows for more fine-tuning of the game from outside of the script menu. There are similar lines for Sideways Force and Rb. The Rb slot is important, as it is what allows the cube to be assigned to this particular script. By dragging the Rigidbody square into the box to the right of Rb, I am able to connnect the movement script to the square. This method of connection is considerably more straightforward than having to constantly refer to which item is being called in this script.

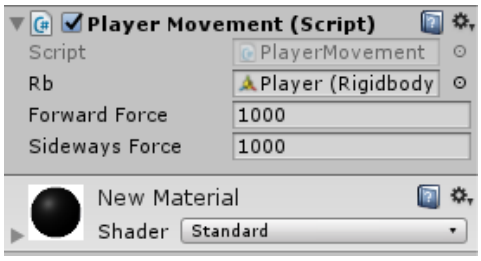

Figure 4.6: C# Script Box from Unity Inspector

Following Brackey's tutorial taught me how to attach scripts to objects within the game, as well as how to make the scripts more interactive within the Unity framework. Working through the tutorial helped me examine my game in terms of the mechanical elements, and consider how I would use the tools I was learning in creating my own game.

Learning how to code in Unity parallels quite nicely with the idea of structure, as code depends on a set and recognizable structure in order to function. Substitutions within the set structure allow for varied outcomes, but the changing of the elements within the structure causes the game to stop working. The output becomes skewed, or non-existant. Working with code reveals parallels between Derrida's theory and computer coding which I was not expecting when I started this project. The continued enagement with code and structure allowed me to explore

Derrida's ideas in a series of different, that each of which allowed me to develop a more complete and nuanced understanding of structure within contemporary society.

CHAPTER FIVE

As I began to understand the game's mechanics, specifically how these mechanics might be coded, the game started to come together. As is the case with many processes, what started to appear on the screen was rather different then the game that I had originally planned. As I imported assets into the game, I realized that it would be considerably easier for me to create distinct levels within the game, as this would limit the amount of coding present in each section. The creation of distinct levels also allowed me to build slowly on ideas, resultig in a game that walked the player through a series of clear concepts that built on one another. Once I had an idea of what the player would interact when, I imported assets into the first level, then wrote code for the objects within the scene.

When I assembled the first level it became clear that I would not be able to create the game I had designed with the level of knowledge I had. The plans for a third person exploration game quickly dissolved as I realized just how much coding I would need in order to make it work. The camera would need to follow the player, and I would need to have a series of objects with which the player's avatar could, or could not, interact. The planned opening, in which the sun was the focal point, dissolved when I was unable to find a good tutorial on using cursor input. Instead, I created a 3D model of a tree-like object with twisted and sharp branches, and placed it into the scene. I also changed the setting of the sky so instead of a multifacted blue it was a solid colour that matched the ground. These visual changes created a high-contrast game space with some opportunity for interaction, but did not require too much coding.

The first level of the game, which features the tree-like object called "messy-shape," provided the first area of coding frustration. First off, the object had identified for itself an off-center, center axis. This meant that when the object rotated, one of the branches moved

considerably further outwards than any of the other ones. I spent hours altering the code in an attempt to rectify this issue, and going through the game object options in the side menu. No matter what I tried, the object would still rotate on an offset axis. Eventually, I decided that I needed to move on from this particular dilemma, and approach this issue in a different way.

Once I had stopped trying to fix this problem, I realized that the having a skewed center, one I was unable to redefine, was rather fitting to the whole discussion. Derrida identifies an "organizing principle" (1), that allows for a structure to hold its shape. I was unable to change this center without completely eliminating it, and because this was the only object in the playing space thus far, eliminating Messy Shape would be like eliminating both center and structure. Messy Shape became a function within the game, one that organized everything around it, including my approach to the game itself. Because the object rotated so one side was further away from the center at all times, I decided to use this to drive the interactions within this particular level.

Once I had accepted this error, my next step was to work it into the game's playability. My first strategy was to create a space that, when the longer arm of the shape entered it, would trigger the appearance of some text. I watched a series of videos on creating these spaces, as well as gathered together a series of possible codes. Each approach relied on using a collider and noting which space was the trigger. In game terms, identifying an object as a trigger allows the computer to call on a certain event once a space has been interacted with. However, I could not get the sequence of events that I could envision in my mind to be transferred into the game's code. No matter what I did, Messy Shape did not trigger an event. I spent hours trying to get the code to work, but each process that I went through just seemed to show me even more clearly how little I really knew about the coding process. It was as if, when tested, each gap in my

knowledge split further, and the task started to feel increasingly impossible. I took a break from the coding and started to work on the writing portion of my thesis instead.

The break I took in the middle of the coding dilemma brought about two things: one of which was the solution, and the second of which was another problem. I found, much like when I worked with the 3D modelling, that whenever I took a break from coding my knowledge of the skills I needed started to fade. When I returned to the game, I had forgotten the basic structures of the code, and had to return to my notes in order to begin. In something as unforgiving as computer coding, knowing the structure and basic rules is necessary to creating functioning game mechanics. It was frustrating to return to something that had been causing me problems, only to encounter even more problems. Fortunately, it was this movement away from the code that also allowed me to come up with the solution to the event problem.

Because of how the text layer of the game is placed, the words fall in front of the object. This spatial organization of game components allowed me to approach the issue of appearing and disappearning text using alternative strategies, ones that did not rely on code. I made the text the same colour as the background of the game, which gave the illusion that the text was not present at the start of the game. The player can rotate the game object allowing for different pieces of the object to extend to different parts of the screen at different times, and reveal the words. The mechanics of this particular aspect of the game are rather straightforward, but the process allowed me to look at the different methods of approaching the creation of a game.

I have previously made reference to the structure of coding in relation to the structure discussed in Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" and I feel that this particular process of working through the limitations of my coding knowledge allows for a more in-depth discussion of the issues of structure and center.

Derrida identifies the center as the force that dictates and holds together the structure, despite the center's ability to take different forms. "The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere" (Derrida, 1). I wanted to explore which parts of the process of creating a game are assigned the role of center. In some ways, the game itself is an obvious choice for the center. It is not the code, but rather made up of the code. The game does not rely fully on my written fractions of code to operate (here I am discounting the portions of Unity that are running on code, and creating game aspects based on code). For example, my use of contrasting colours to make the text portions of the game visible bypasses the code I was trying to write. The code exists as a sort of "totality" (Derrida 1), and yet the game itself does not appear within the code, but rather exists in an "elsewhere" (Derrida 1). The game is dictated by code, but also dictates the code that creates it. The vision that I have for the game, and how it will come together, guides the assembly of information gathered to create the game.

Similarly, game creation software acts as a kind of center. Without it, the game would not exist, yet once the game is created and running the software fades into the background. The way I was able to bypass the coding by using contrasts in object and item colours because of the object creation option within Unity. Without Unity, and all the elements that allow for a limited knowledge of coding, I would not have been able to make anything. The game's creation was completely dependent on the software, and yet once the game becomes a finished product, something playable and tangible, the software fades from the forefront. I have played numerous games created in Unity, none of which I needed the Unity software to play. However, without Unity the game could not exist. Unity provides tools and rule structures that allow for the game to come into being, all the while dictating the forms in which information can be input.

By bypassing the coding, I was able to create a workable aspect of the game that still remained true to my vision. Having the player discover instructions based on input allowed me to work with the idea of uncovering and active participantion. I am interested in the ways in which many people approach puzzles, and how games have become a tool for working through problems in an enjoyable and interactive way.

Identifying software as structure is fitting because of its role in determining how the game is represented. The software makes possible "freeplay" (Derrida 1), while at the same time limiting this play. Here, play is referring to the substitution of elements within a set strucutre, much as a programmer is able to substitute the commands in a line of code to create different outcomes. There are opportunities for the game maker to create almost limitless possibilities for the game itself, which are made available by the programmer's knowledge of coding. The spaces for coding, as well as inputing different objects and creating different game objects, allows for a "substitution of… elements" (Derrida 1), and a complex chain of actions to take place within the game.

There is some freedom in the creation of the game that allows for me to approach this process through a series of different tactics. If the game itself operates as a sort of center, then the process of creating the game is the structure, as each element I introduce must be checked in its ability to communicate the game. In a similar vein, the game creation software, Unity, would likely be the most evident instance of the center, as it acts both as a means to create the game, as well as dictates the pieces and order in which the game can be carried out. Unity, as the center in this analogy, allows for some freeplay and restricts how this freeplay can come about. I was able to use the set-up of the game objects in order to get around the coding, but I still had to work within the structure that was made possible by the software (Unity).

Through examining different structures which come together and allow the game to be created, the acute presence of structure itself is felt. Computers and computer languages are created by, and dependant on, people. Computers rely heavily on rule systems, which becomes very clear when coding. The placement of each letter and point of punctuation must exist in perfect order, or else the computer is unable to interpret it. When I worked with HTML and CSS coding while creating games in Twine, I began to appreciate how important patterns and structures were to the creation of a game. I was interested in the process of coding variables in Twine, as I was doing workshops with a series of students at a local high school. As I prepared for these workshops I read about and practiced different codes. One of the major errors that came up was when continuity from one variable to another was lacking, causing the programing to fail. These errors could be as small as one missing or misplace letter. Errors that a person's mind could easily repair were catastrophic to the formation of the code, demonstrating the connections surrounding structure, game creation, and play.

My creativity allowed me to challenge the restrictions of the structures demonstrating that although each structure had purpose in the construction of the game, some elements could be altered and worked around. The ability to think critically about the structure itself allowed me to work beyond the rules that at first seemed to bind me and instead create something I was happy with. The awareness of structure, which I was only able to reach after I had taken breaks from creating the game, led me to be able to work around the challenges it posed. I had to be familiar both with my limitations, as well as the rules, in order to create something functional. I needed to substitute elements of the structure for one another in order to reach my goals.

The creative thought process enabled me to work through seemingly different areas of expertise and find meaningful connections between the two. The parallels between pieces of

Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," and coding reveal a place where there is opportunity for further study. The connections between these areas allows for a bridging of different disciplines, both the technological and the philosophical, and demonstrates how theory can be used to address a diverse set of issues and constructs. The ability to look critically at 'real-world' experiences allows for engagement from a variety of people. By creating parallels between disciplines, a space is created in which a pushback can arise against the strictly regimented divisions between arts and sciences.

Software such as Unity gives a diverse group of people the skills and tools to engage critically with the process of creating videogames. Games exist as systems of rules, and allowing for a more diverse group of people to define and interrogate these rules allows for a more inclusive set of rules to be created. Shifting structures create new ideas and approaches. The liberation of this knowledge allows for a more in-depth approach to the game itself, and a more critical engagement with the game creation process. Codes themselves can be created, so allowing for an engagement with the idea of coding alongside a knowledge of Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" allows for a critical look at the technological structures we depend so heavily on today.

CHAPTER SIX

I have previously focused on discussing the more general idea of games in relation to Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play," as well as the possible iterations of my game. At this point, I would like to discuss how the game I created functions, and how the levels provide a space in which to engage Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play." The completed prototype consists of three levels, each consisting of text and shapes. The first level has the least amount of text, and focuses on getting the player familiarized with the game's controls. The second level has more text, and builds on the rules learned in the first level. The third and final level has considerably less text than the second, but shifts the layout of the game space. Each of these levels speaks to Derrida's theories in some way, but focus on asking the reader to examine how much they know going into this game, and how much they learn through the process of playing.

The first level opens with Messy Shape superimposed on a lavender background. Below the shape there is a white ground plane on which Messy Shape casts a shadow (Figure 6.1). The player of the game has not been presented with any instructions, and upon beginning the game they will simply be presented with these three colours and a shape. In many games, the first portion of play is interspersed with instructions. The player learns, piece by piece, what will be required of them in order to play the game. For example, in *Overcooked*, a multiplayer kitchen simulator, in each level that you must make something new the instructions are provided at the start, and you must signal that you understand them before continuing. The lack of instructions in my game is conscious, as it requires the people playing the game to examine their own knowledge of videogames and act based on that. In asking people to reflect on their own experience and act based on their pre-existing knowledge I created the first point at which to

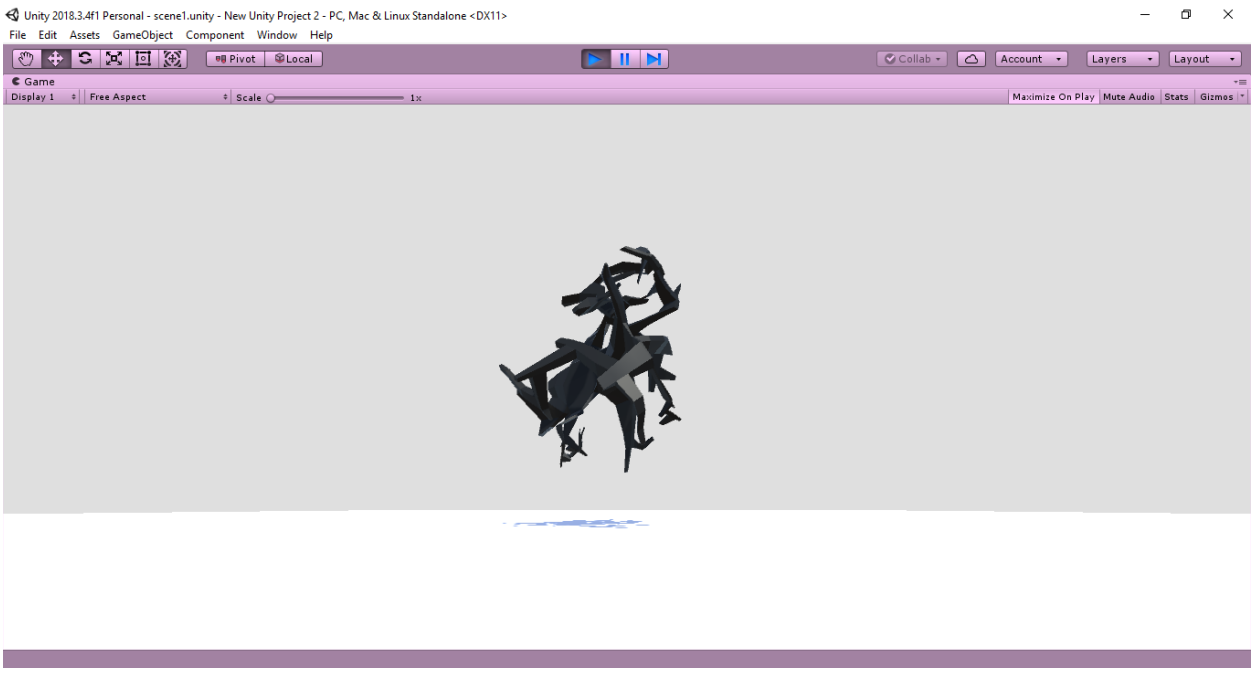

Figure 6.1: Messy Shape Hovering above the Ground

examine structure. Rule systems are deeply ingrained into a person's mind, and the first part of the game is used as a point from which to ask people how conscious they are of their own rule systems.

The lack of instruction also adds in an element of failure. As the players test their knowledge of videogame structures against this particular game, they are faced with the risk of making the wrong choice. When there is nothing telling the player what to do, they are forced to make attempts to figure out the controls. Although the actual controls are not too obscure, there is a moment in which the person playing is faced only with the option to try. The controls I chose are the up/down/left/right keys, as these are the keys I was most familiar with using when playing games. Another option, the one I was less familiar with, is the a/w/s/d keys. I chose not to use this key combination to control movement as it does not feel as natural to me. I have not experienced this structure as frequently, and as a result it does not make as much sense to me. From my experience, the arrow keys are more logical, as they point in physical directions. The

letter keys are laid out in the same pattern, but the symbols that appear on them do not adhere to my understanding of space. The structure is the same, but the parts are substituted in a way that I am not as readily able to follow. Despite my bias, these two sets of keys are frequently used for movement. I think many games choose the a/w/s/d keys over the arrow keys to control character movement, especially in more complicated games. In these cases, efficiency takes over the structure, and becomes the guiding logic.

After the player figures out how to interact with the world, they must also figure out how to make sense of their engagement. Pressing the left and right arrow keys results in Messy Shape rotating to the left and right respectively. The object's movement reveals two sets of text, each existing on opposite sides of Messy Shape. If the object is rotated to the right first, it reveals the word "press" (Figure 6.2) and if it is rotated to the left first, it reveals the letter "D" (Figure 6.3). As the letters are the same colour as the background, the contrast created by the shape that enables the person manipulating the object to be able to see the letters. At first I tried placing the entire phrase in one space, so that once the player had figured out the mechanics they could see the instructions rather quickly. However, upon testing this set of rules, I felt they made the first part of the game too easy. The person playing barely had to do anything before they can

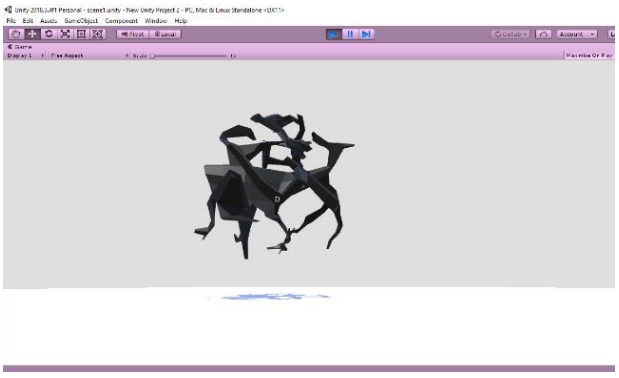

Figure 6.2: Messy Shape

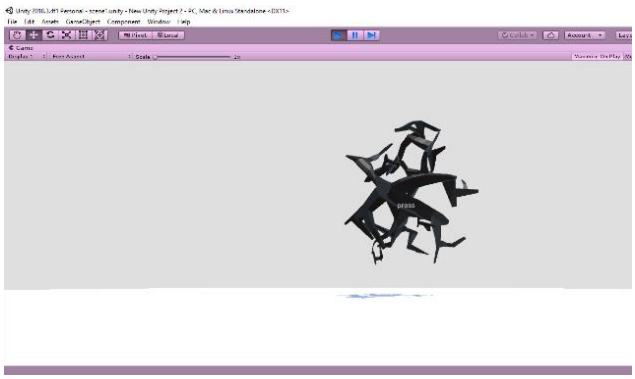

Figure 6.3: Messy Shape

progress. I wanted to add a layer of complexity that would keep the player engaged slightly

longer. The solution I came up with was to split the text into two sections. The letter on one side, and the verb on the other. The division creates a gap in which the interpretation is slightly less clear. The word “press” is not specific enough to be instructions, as keys have been pressed up until this point. The letter “D” is also not enough of an instruction, although alone it may be able to signal more than “press.” The game begins to require not just a knowledge of games, but also of language structures. Independently, these two sets of symbols are not enough to make sense out of the space. Once combined, they allow for both understanding and progression.

One of the driving forces in games is a knowledge that progression has taken place. People playing games want to know that they have achieved something, or are working towards something. In my game, progression is measured by the player’s ability to move onto the next level. There is not a set of numbers that alerts the reader to the fact they have collected something, and there is no score marker. This is mainly because my coding skills are limited, and once I figured out how to create something successfully, I decided it would be better to simply create different levels with similar structures and different restraints. In this way, my game was not built solely with my knowledge, but also with my lack of knowledge. Limitations are a large part of the game, both thematically and practically. Unity, the software that I used to create the game, gave me a structure that I could work within, while at the same time limiting what I was able to do with the knowledge I had.

When the person playing my game presses the D key, they are moved into the second level of the game. In this level, I began to build on the skills I had scrapped together when creating the first level. I added in gravity, so Messy Shape didn’t simply hover, but instead plummeted to the

ground and bounced a few times once hitting it (Figure 6.4). Through this process, I learned the different restrictions and properties that could be assigned to objects, and was able to play with how each of these objects interacted with one another. There is more text in this level, and as Messy Shape falls from the sky it reveals text through the contrast is creates. This streak of

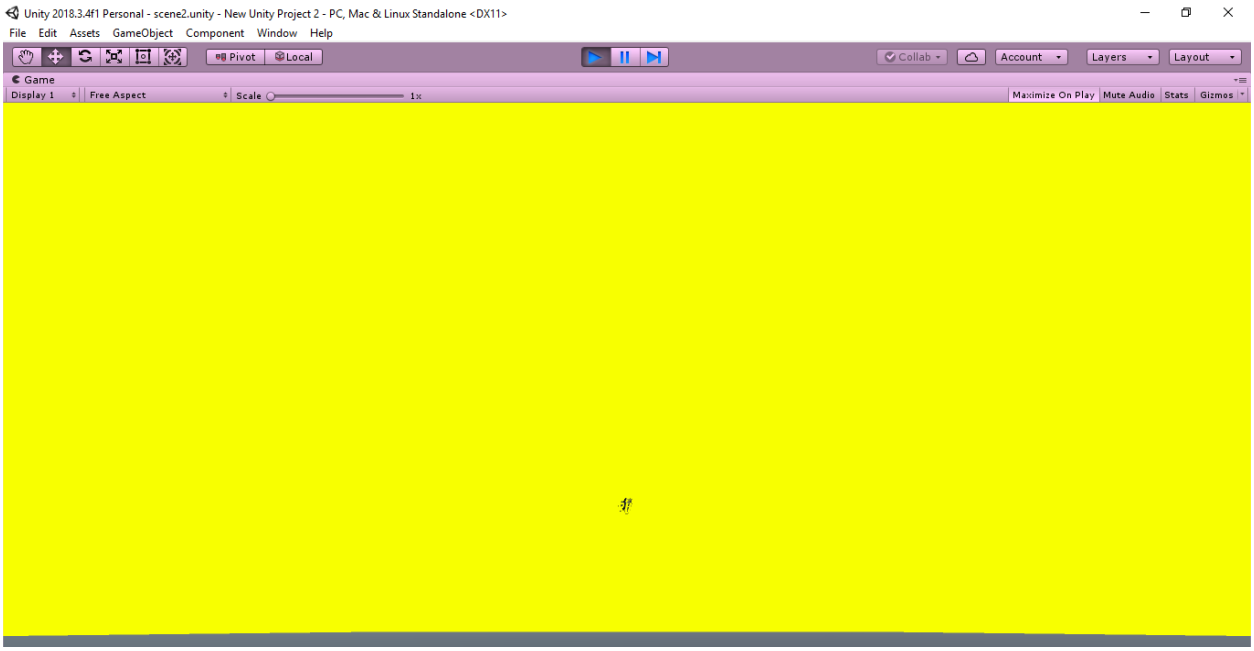

Figure 6.4: A Tiny Messy Shape Falling from the Sky

contrast hints at what the player will need to do, without actually telling the player how to accomplish it. Once Messy Shape lands, the player must figure out what kind of movement is required to read the text. In the previous level, the arrow keys allowed for rotation, which was enough to reveal the text. In this level, the shape lands so far back that it is unable to make any of the words legible from where it stands.

Messy Shape lands on the black ground, and bounces a few times before coming to a stop. Because the shape starts so far back, and because the movement code that I ended up with takes into account velocity, the person playing the game has to hold the key for a few moments before any kind of movement is perceptible. The shape is able to move freely around a 3D plane, but is bound at the edges by invisible barriers. The camera is placed so that the shape can disappear

when it is close to the player, but can be brought back into view. Rotating the object is also still possible, although this is not a necessary part of the game. Figuring out the rotation is also not something that comes easily, as the keys assigned the rotation functions are the R and L keys for right and left rotations respectively. There is no information given about the rotation, and I kept it mainly as a residual possibility from the first level. I was proud of being able to figure out the rotation, and so I left it in. The rotation may help in the reading of the text, although it is not completely necessary.

Text makes up a larger portion of this level than the previous one, as in this level I chose to include a quote directly from "Structure, Sign and Play." The first level of the game focuses more on figuring out the mechanics of the game, so I wanted to create a more explicit link

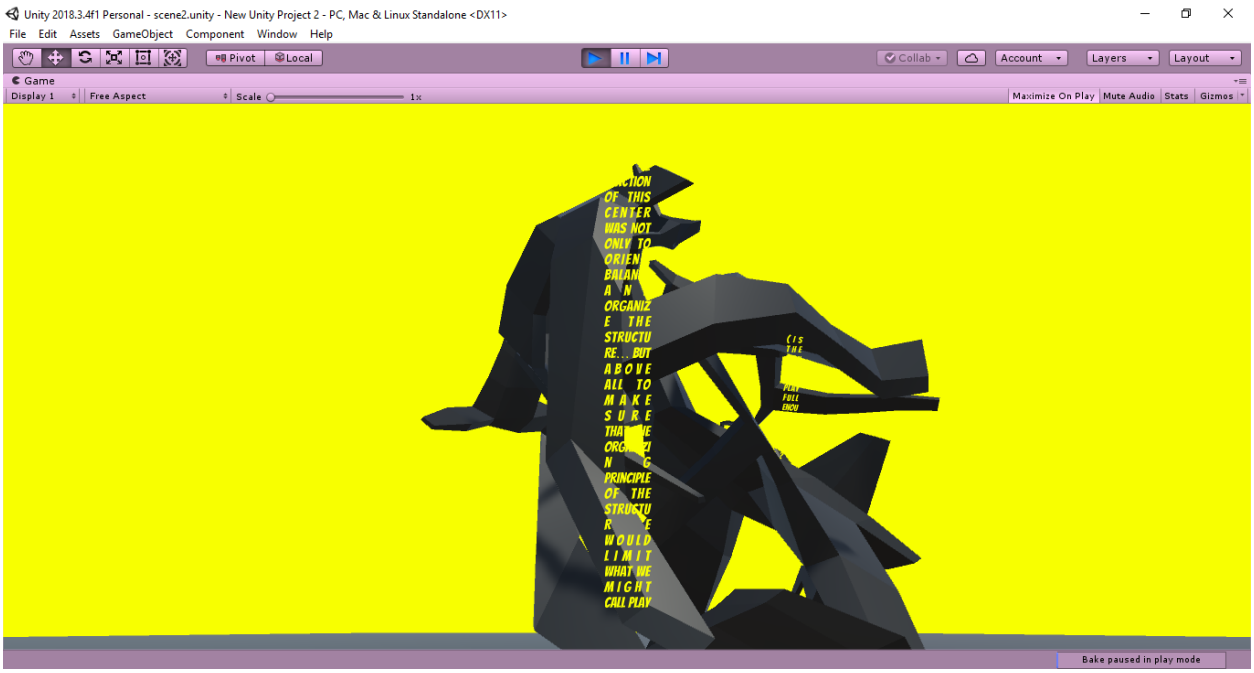

Figure 6.5: Close-Up of Messy Shape with Text Revealed

between the game and the text in the second level. In retrospect, this level looks rather clunky, although at the time I was very excited to have figured out how to include different font styles within the game. One thing I think is important to note when examining the text aspects of the

game is that when I would navigate the text within the game space, it would never appear in the same place when I entered the play mode. I constantly had to move back and forth between the play mode and the edit mode. That process was extremely frustrating, and I am unsure how the differences between the edit, mini play and full screen modes will impact the game if played on different computers. The image of my game's structure presents differently in each of these different modes, a fact that concerns me when I think about the possibility of making this game available for others to play.

There are two blocks of text in the second level, the first of which is a quote from Derrida, and the second is a line of text I wrote in an attempt to connect "play" with the game in more concrete terms. The quote that I chose for this level comes from the first page of "Structure, Sign and Play" and reads as follows:

> The function of the center was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure… but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call play" (1)

This particular quote is a driving force in the design of this level, as Messy Shape stands in once more for the idea of center. Without being able to maneuver the shape, it is impossible to make any sort of meaning out of the space or the ideas within it. Something has to "orient" (Derrida 1) the player in the ideas being presented, otherwise the space has little meaning. Similarly, if the space is static, there is little to be done in order to engage with the game's world. The movement of Messy Shape within the game space can then be identified as "play" (Derrida 1). There is only so much of the text that can be seen at one time, meaning that Messy Shape places restrictions on the interactions that the player has with the game.

The other set of text, the one that I wrote, asks the person playing the game if the bounce of Messy Shape is playful enough, and is followed by a Y/N? option. Without the previous level, it is somewhat unclear as to how the person playing the game is supposed to interact with this screen. If the person uses the rules that have been established in the first level, at some point they should be able to recognize that there are only two single letters on the screen, and these are the Y and the N. Again, nowhere is it stated that these are the buttons to press in order to further the player's interactions with this level, and yet the person should be able to use the information that they have previously learned and apply it to this level. The rules of previous interactions, and the limitations of the space and possible inputs, should allow the player to figure out the interaction that will allow them to progress. If they press the Y, which is symbolically standing in for yes, they will complete the second level and find themselves in the third. If they press the N, symbolically standing in for no, they will be reset to the start of the second level, and have to watch Messy Shape plummet from the sky once more.

The major question surrounding the mechanic of pressing Y or N is whether or not one level is enough to establish that pressing certain keys will result in the continuation of the game. Of course, computer games by nature require some combination of keyboard and mouse interaction, so the possibility of pressing a key to progress a level is not completely obscure. At the same time, the rules surrounding progression are usually much more rigid than simply figuring out what button is the right one to press. The question arises as to how many times one has to repeat a process before the rules of the process become almost second nature. The rule systems are learned, and making people aware of that fact is one of the driving forces behind Derrida's work. The systems are not natural, but rather synthetic constructions that people learn to follow so well that they take them as the truth.

Once the person playing my game has pressed the Y key and been moved onto the third and final level of the game, they reach a screen where Messy Shape is no longer visible. Messy Shape, who has previously been found at the center of the screen, either hovering above the ground or falling from the sky, is no longer present. The center has shifted, or rather disappeared, and the person playing the game is no longer able to control what they understand to drive the game. Messy Shape is a catalyst for the rules, and up until this point has been the only way for the player to interact with the instruction, or make sense out of the space. Arguably, Messy Shape is unnecessary if the person playing the game simply went through every key and tried pressing them. Eventually they would hit the key that takes them to the next level, and not need to read the rules.

The third level opens with a blue circle on a white background. Within the circle are a series of small black orbs, which move towards the center of the blue circle as soon as the game begins. As the black orbs move, they run beneath a layer of text, hinting at the fact that there is a phrase written on the circle. At this point in the creation of the game I was interested in exploring what else I could create with the skillset I had developed. I wanted to try different visuals, so I chose to use the circle, an image that stands out the most to me when I read “Structure, Sign and Play.” When I reached this point in the game creation process, I had amassed a set of resources that I could turn to if I needed to clarification on different types of code, as well as developed a considerably more sound understanding of Unity itself. The part of this level that I am most proud of is the movement of the orbs. Upon the start of the level, all of the little black orbs are drawn into the center of the blue circle. Once the orbs have all reached the center, a white rectangle drops from above the camera view and onto the circle. This becomes this level’s controllable object.

The center is a driving force in this level, visually pulling the other elements into itself. There is no controlling the movement of the orbs, and so the player is forced to wait until the center has consumed the orbs before anything else can be done. The player has witnessed the

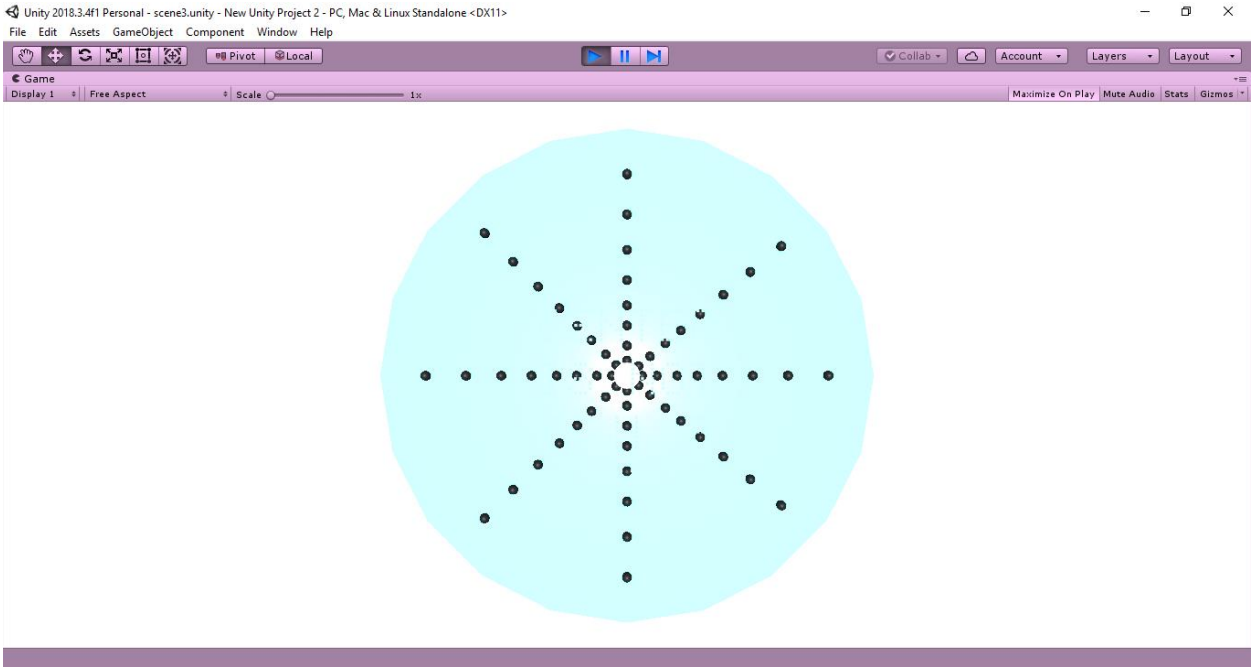

Figure 6.6: A Blue Circle with Lines of Black Dots Coming Out of the Center

power of the center, and been powerless to change what is happening. When the white bar drops, the black orbs do not re-appear, forcing the player to navigate the space with the newfound knowledge of the center's power. I tried a few times to code the orbs so that after they reach the center of the circle they re-appear where they started, forming a continuous loop. Unfortunately, I was unable to figure out the code to do so. The constant inward pull would be visually interesting, but I do think it would weaken some of the theoretical aspect of the game. Derrida refers to the "fixed" (Derrida 2) number of objects within a field, and I think making a seemingly infinite number of orbs appear out of nowhere and progress towards the center would weaken the connection between "Structure, Sign and Play" and the game.

The quotation I chose for the last level of the game is a rather confusing one, especially when embedded in the text. In a short line where Derrida says “the center is not the center” (Derrida 1), he effectively throws the idea of center into chaos. Once the words have been read, the rectangle can still be moved around, but there is nothing else to see. The explicit statement that the “center is not the center” (Derrida 1), coupled with the placement of the words in the center of the circle, suggests that something else is present in the game space. I realized the final level lacked closure, and required something to offset the images of the orbs against the quotation. If the “center is not the center” (Derrida 1), there needed to be something happening that made the quotation seem believable, something that was not at the center of the screen. To answer this dilemma, I made Messy Shape white in colour, so as to blend in with the white background, and placed it in the upper right hand quadrant of the screen. The thing that had been the center for the entirety of the game was no longer the center. It could not be moved, or interacted with. Instead, it was simply there to be discovered.

As the game is only a prototype, I would like to note one major change that I would like to make happen, but was unable to figure out. In the final level of the game, I would like, once the white rectangle reaches Messy Shape, for a bunch of tiny black orbs to expel themselves from the space where Messy Shape sits, and spin wildly around the whole screen. I can see it very clearly in my head, but I have no idea how to code it into being. The orbs would move in patterns, spinning chaotically in circles and waves and crashing into each other and be thrown off course. It would be both beautiful and meaningful, as the centers would both consume and create these orbs, which would them be able to more clearly stand in for meaning. If you have not yet played the game, or are planning to play it again, I have a request for you. When you reach Messy Shape with the white rectangle, imagine a seemingly endless supply of tiny black orbs

spinning wildly around the screen, being pulled in different directions. Once the screen seems crazed with potential, imagine these orbs being drawn to the center of the blue circle, where they seem to disappear, only to re-appear once more from Messy Shape.

In her book *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters,* Anna Anthropy states that "through playing the game, the player develops a sense of the limits and subtleties of these hidden rules" (53). Similarly, people develop an understanding of the rule sets that guide their lives. It is through experience, and the continued exposure to certain sets of ideas that communities and cultures are defined. According to Derrida, the absolute nature of the rule sets, not the role of structure, is questioned. He does not defy the fact that rules are important to people's ability to understand, rather challenges the idea that there is an ultimate truth. By presenting games as an opportunity for people to identify external rules as artificial and created, a space opens in which cultural rules can be examined. People who play games have some understanding of the structures that allow the play to take place. The limitations of the player, the rules that guide and control movement – each of these elements combines to create something that mirrors people's experience. Games are a way to examine the word through a lens that places us far enough away from our own rules so as to remain somewhat comfortable. Games provides a starting point from where discussions can begin.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of this thesis is the question of how different methods of presentation can affect engagement with, and reception of, ideas. An exploration of this question led me to present complex theories using a videogame, a format that allowed for a different kind of engagement than would be possible with an academic essay. The videogame enabled me to engage with Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" from a series of different perspectives, which in turn allowed me to explore the ideas presented in even more depth. This approach was not only helpful to me in my own understanding of the text, but allowed me to find different ways in which to present the text to others.

The introduction started this thesis off with a series of discussions surrounding the role of capitalism and neoliberalism within contemporary society, and used the ideas of Louis Althusser, Slavoj Žižek and Wendy Brown to frame the discussion. One of the major concerns that was raised focused on the shifting role of academia within contemporary political and economic climates, specifically how universities have shifted their focus to providing people with skills relevant to workforce participation. Critical theory has become something that many people do not have the time to engage with in depth, and because of this, ideas are not being as readily explored and questioned. How knowledge is accessed is shifting, making this thesis a way in which to explore the possible methods of communication that can complement these changes and prevent questioning from being swept aside.

Play serves as the guiding force in the creation of a new approach to theory. Failure is a vital part of learning, and yet many people resist the idea of failing. I wanted to use the idea of play to explore how people engage with ideas when they are faced with a structure that allows them to fail without experiencing the stigma that so often comes with it. Instead of framing the

exploration of "Structure, Sign and Play" through only the scholarly essay, I chose to present the ideas through a series of visual and interactive experiences. The game allows people to engage in an entirely different way than they would in an academic or solely text-based format. I wanted to make something that was not only accessible, but also enjoyable for people to interact with. The idea of play seemed to mesh nicely with the idea of a game, and a course on prototyping videogames gave me just enough skills to be able to create my own prototype.

Using Derrida's work to frame my exploration into different elements of game design allowed me both to increase my understanding of theory, and my understanding of game creation. Above all, this process allowed me to understand the importance of creating tangible ways that theory can be applied and examined. I was able to explore a series of ideas and connections between Derrida's work and my own that enabled me to gain a considerably greater understanding of "Structure, Sign and Play" than I would have if not for engaging with the design process. Taking an abstract idea and focusing it on something concrete allows for a more complete understanding of an idea to develop, and makes it easier to explain ideas to others. Theory should be engaged with, argued and explored, not simply created and left. Taking theory off of the page and exploring aspects of it through visuals and interactive structures which people are able to engage with directly makes the entrance into these ideas more enjoyable, increasing the likelihood that people will continue to engage these ideas and seek out others.

I created my game with the intent of making theory accessible who would otherwise lack the time and resources to engage with it. The game was meant to lessen complicated jargon, and instead present identifiable mechanics that reflect some of the major ideas presented in "Structure, Sign and Play." The idea of the center is reinforced through the images of Messy Shape, as well as through the smaller pieces of text included in the finished game. I did not

lessen the complexity of the ideas, but rather presented them in shorter and more manageable increments. The forms, shapes and pieces of text allow for the person engaging with my game to take their time with the ideas. When faced with a large block of text and very little time to read it, many people tend to skim through, tripping over the words and forming an unstable understanding of the text. Creating a game that works with the text in pieces was meant to allow for the player to gain a more developed understanding of the ideas as they are presented.

Avoiding the feeling of having failed is enough of a driving force in contemporary society that it is worth returning to this idea for a moment. Most people who do not read theoretical work after theoretical work are not going to be able to pick up "Structure, Sign and Play" and read it with ease. The format and the language is completely foreign – and not just when an Anglophone tries to read the French version. Theory itself is structured in a meandering and musing kind of way, completely different from the academic essay. In presenting a short game consisting of only three levels, I slowed the pace of the ideas' expression. Beyond this, my game allows the person playing to experience failure in a safe and familiar setting. Resistance to failure, especially in academic contexts, is common, and by allowing people to explore these ideas without being afraid that mistakes will reflect poorly upon them, they are freed to explore in more depth. Whether we mean to or not, failure divides people into those who can have, and those who cannot. Perhaps this division has its place in some fields, but it does not have a place in a field that is so heavily dependent on the interrogation of ideas surrounding culture and society. Creating a form that allows people the freedom to engage, also allows for the discussions to be broadened, and ideas to be built upon and explored. At the same time, the distribution of the game, and its ability to communicate with an audience pose real and unexplored potential barriers.

The process of researching this game alongside Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" allowed me to gain an even better grasp on the text than I had previously, as I could explore the different methods of learning and thinking about a text. Above all, it allowed me to pursue the idea that cultural theory could be made more readily accessible to people. I was able to do so by entering into the field of coding, which I knew very little about, and creating something tangible. I developed a space in which Derrida's work could make some really interesting insights, and found a way that people engaging with technology could also engage with critical theory.

This idea of having people who work with technology engage with works of cultural theory was not one I had originally anticipated coming out of this project. Furthermore, this knowledge challenges some of the assumptions I made going into the creation of a game that would "make theory accessible." When I started out, the idea of accessibility was strongly rooted in making something that could be accessed and engaged with by people who were unable to, or simply didn't want to, engage with theoretical texts. Through my work, the parallels that have come up between technology and structure have become a major part of my argument. This discovery allows for another layer of access to be explored: as coding rises in prevalence, and people engage with such rigid sets of rules, access to theories that can push them to question these structures could provide them with another layer of understanding.

Through joining games and theory I was able to explore "Structure, Sign and Play" in even more depth than I had previously. This process also revealed intersections in disciplines where ideas can connect more fully than were they to remain in separate fields. I created something tangible, thus reaching the goal that I set out for myself. Beyond reaching that goal, I also created a whole new space in which I could explore and communicate complex ideas. The game itself is a functional prototype, and is able to demonstrate how some of my ideas and hypothesis could be

realized. The game shows that it is possible to create something that is not only able to expose people to theory in different ways, but also demonstrates that this method of exposure does not have to be simply prescriptive. A game can lead the person playing it, showing them mechanics and structures without telling them directly what they need to think about a given idea or concept.

The final aspect of this thesis I think is worth restating is the idea of creating a dialogue. No matter how may ideas someone has, if they are unable to develop them or discuss them with others, these ideas cannot impact the surrounding world. I am not simply considering the beneficial ideas either, as without engagement and exploration from a diverse population, less beneficial or harmful ideas can fester. Through the writing process, I have been in an extensive dialogue with "Structure, Sign and Play," and the ideas that it sets forth. It was the process of creating something that others could engage with that was at the core of this thesis, and creating the game was my way to take ideas and broaden the reach even further. The audience for my thesis and game are different, and by dividing my work into these two different formats, I was able to create presentations of ideas that can reach more people, and bring them into this vast dialogue of ideas.

Throughout my research, and the process of creating and developing a game based on "Structure, Sign and Play," I have come to understand that no matter what I create in an attempt to make theory accessible, it is the act of discussion that is the most important. My game can act as an introduction, or a first step in asking people to engage with theory. However, my game does not represent all of Derrida's work, and not even close to all of "Structure, Sign and Play." Games do have limitations, and moving between forms results in some degree of loss. Further explorations on this topic could include an examination of how different groups of people

respond to theoretical works and ideas within games. A more in-depth exploration of people's responses to the game would allow for a clearer idea as to how much discussion would need to take place in order to make sense of the game.

Beyond my own game, I would like to see what other people create. Near the beginning of this thesis I referenced Kari Kraus' ideas concerning speculative design, in which a designer identifies parts of an existing object, then creates something completely new out of one of these parts. An important piece of this process comes from the designer's eye, or what they identify as a potential for something new. My game reflects which of Derrida's ideas I found to be important, but were someone else to program a game on the same topic they would likely chose a different approach or a different portion of the text. The next step in this exploration is not to simply explore how *my* game would be received, but how others would interpret and create games dealing with the same text. Broadening the discussion, and adding new voices from all sides, will allow for the ideas presented in this thesis to be tested, explored, and challenged, bringing about the discussion that this project worked to spark.

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