THESIS

CALL OF CTHULHU AND VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE: INVOCATION,

SPATIALITY, AND RITUAL TRANSCENDENCE IN TWO TABLETOP ROLE-PLAYING

GAMES

Submitted by

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In Partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 2015

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ABSTRACT

CALL OF CTHULHU AND VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE: INVOCATION,
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In 1974 the world's first Tabletop Roleplaying Game (TRPG) was published, *Dungeons and Dragons*. Since that time hundreds of TRPGs have been published in multiple genres. In this thesis I explore the rhetoric of two of the most popular horror-themed TRPGs: *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. I focus on explaining how these games came to be, how they serve their players as equipment for living, how they rhetorically (re)construct real-world places and spaces, and finally, how they encourage transcendence and jamming through ritual play and participation. This thesis hopefully helps to show the complex multi-layered rhetoric taking place in a relatively ignored form of media. Additionally, I introduce the concept of textual invocation as a complimentary theoretical construct to that of textual poaching as an explanation for how players and designers engage in a give and take of authorship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

...I feel quite justified in believing that games and sports ought not be ranked among the major

phenomena of life.

H.P. Lovecraft to Robert E. Howard, October 3-5-7, 1932

While I adore his fictional works and their contribution to American literature, I could

not disagree more with Howard Phillip Lovecraft. I believe games and play are fundamentally

important aspects of the human experience. Games, such as the Olympics, can inspire a nation,

speak volumes about a culture, and, in the case of role-playing games, open new worlds for

exploration. Like many role-players, I remember the exact moment when I became "hooked' on

gaming. It was the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of high school and I was

playing my third or fourth session of *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). Within the game, our

adventuring party was travelling to a nearby city so that the paladin in the group could compete

in a sword-fighting tournament and win glory for his god. As dusk approached a thunderstorm

began and our party was forced into the woods seeking shelter. Eventually, we found a man-

made entrance carved into the rock wall of a cliff. On either side stood two large onyx statues

depicting a minor deity worshiped by vampires in the area. The entrance looked deserted so,

after much debate between members of our adventuring party, we entered the cave. As the last of

us passed the threshold, entering the long hallway before us, the statue groaned and crumbled to

the ground, blocking any avenue of retreat and leaving us shrouded in darkness. At the moment

when our Dungeon Master (DM) described the statues crashing down behind us, I as a player felt

a shiver of fear that literally shook me. I could feel anxiety building, and as I looked around on the other players faces, I could see they felt it too. My fellow players and I had all experienced a moment of very powerful immersion, and had a physical, bodily reaction to it. It mattered little that we were a group of teenage boys sitting around our friends' kitchen table at two in the morning. It mattered little that we were far from any caves or any danger (apart from running out of snacks and soda); we all experienced a moment of shared and constructed fear, brought about by nothing other than our friends' masterful storytelling and our own investment in the game of storytelling.

Ever since that morning I have found myself fascinated with tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). I have been playing and running them for years, trying to achieve those rare moments of full immersion, trying to help others find them, and generally enjoying the opportunity to exercise my imagination with good friends, while creating a memorable story. For the most part, my own experiences with playing and running TRPGs have focused on horror-themed games, thanks, most likely, in no small part to the previously mentioned story. Aside from the sheer joy of play, I have always had a bit of an academic interest in TRPGs. I have been fascinated by the notion that people can jointly tell a story to which none of them know the conclusion. I have been interested in how TRPGs have encouraged other players and myself to look at the world differently, and I have found myself fascinated with the levels of immersion achievable through the ritualized activity of play. In an attempt to answer these questions I will examine two horror-themed TRPGs which have been highly influential over the years, *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*.

First being published in 1981, the *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game is one of the longest running role-playing game lines in the industry. *Call of Cthulhu* was published a scant seven

years after the first printing of Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax's industry-founding *Dungeons and Dragons*.[1] While *Call of Cthulhu* has never achieved the popular media exposure or industry popularity of *Dungeons & Dragons*, it has nonetheless endured and thrived. *Call of Cthulhu* has won numerous industry awards over its thirty years and many editions.[2] Award highlights include: 1981 Game Designer's Guild Select Award, 1982 Origins Awards Best Role Playing Game, 1985 Games Day Award Best Role Playing Game, 1986 Games Day Award Best Contemporary Role Playing Game, 1994 Gamer's Choice Award Hall of Fame, 1995 Origins Award Hall of Fame, and in 2003 GamingReport.com readers voted it as the Number One Gothic/Horror RPG.[3] As plainly acknowledged in the sixth edition of *Call of Cthulhu*, "This game was first published in 1981. At that time, three major national awards were issued in the United States for excellence in game design. *Call of Cthulhu* won all three".[4]

Based on the collected works of celebrated American horror and science-fiction writer Howard Phillip Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* encourages players to play the roles of investigators looking into the supernatural horrors lurking in the shadows of its fictional version of the real world (Circa 1890's, 1920's and the modern day). Unlike many fantasy-themed TRPGs like *Dungeons & Dragons*, the focus of *Call of Cthulhu* is not fighting monsters but instead uncovering their secrets, retaining character's sanity, and preventing the return of ancient god-like beings called the great old ones.[5] As presented in the Introduction to the core book:

> If you have ever been enthralled by a ghost story or spellbound by a horror movie, you are in for a treat. Part the veil that separates frail humanity from the terror that lurks beyond space and time. Investigate forgotten ruins, haunted woods, and nameless menaces.[6]

This theme of investigation into the unknown and unnamable can be seen beyond the Call of Cthulhu game. The gaming themes first developed by Chaosium Inc. have spread to many other games, coinciding with a greater popular culture awareness of Lovecraft's works.

Chaosium Inc. has agreed to license the core concepts of their game system to other TRPG companies (as evidenced in Wizards of the Coast's 2001 *d20 Call of Cthulhu*, Green Ronin's 2008 *Shadows of Cthulhu*, Pelagrane Press's 2008 *Trail of Cthulhu*, and Pinnacle Entertainment's 2009 *Realms of Cthulhu*). Chaosium has used the popularity of *Call of Cthulhu* to engage in horizontal integration as well, with brief forays into the ancillary markets of collectable card games (*Mythos* and *Call of Cthulhu Living Card Game*), portable and non-portable videogames (*Call of Cthulhu: The Wasted Land*, *Call of Cthulhu*), Live Action Role-Playing Games (*Cthulhu Live*) and miniature figurines (produced through Grenadier Models). Furthermore, the Cthulhu mythos has seen a recent explosion of exposure in several other markets with the release of stuffed animals, re-printings of Lovecraft's original works, films such as Andrew Leman's *The Call of Cthulhu* (2005), board games such as the award-winning *Arkham Horror*, and a host of other merchandise. While it would be foolish to claim *Call of Cthulhu* as solely responsible for this resurgence in Lovecraftian horror, its success did provide an early showing of the sustainability of a Lovecraft niche market.

Call of Cthulhu, while the first horror-themed TRPG, has since been joined by other examples of the genre. In 1991 White Wolf Publishing came out with a horror role-playing game system called the Storyteller System. The flagship game for this system was *Vampire: the Masquerade*. In the twenty years since its inception *Vampire: the Masquerade* has inspired a veritable mountain of paratexts, including: 169 published supplements (with more in development despite the series having been "retired" in 2004), over thirty novels, a line of graphic novels, a television show on the Fox network, two audio CDs, two computer games, *Vampire: the Masquerade* branded clothing, three action figures, and even a professional wrestler.[7] In addition to all of these supplemental materials*, Vampire: the Masquerade* was

successful enough to serve as a launching point for several other similarly titled game lines by White Wolf Publishing, including: *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*, *Mage: the Ascension*, *Changeling: the Dreaming*, *Mummy: the Risen*, *Demon: the Fallen* and *Wraith: the Oblivion*. The success of *Vampire: the Masquerade* can further be seen through its reception of the 1991 Origins Award for best roleplaying rules.[8]

To say *Vampire: the Masquerade* had an impact on the role-playing game industry is an understatement. It was not, however, just the plethora of paratextuality which contributed to this cultural impact but also the game itself. *Vampire: the Masquerade* was a major deviation from the majority of roleplaying games on the market in 1991. Until its publication the majority of popular games were based on fantasy, super heroes, and popular franchises (*Ghostbusters*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Star Wars* to name a few). Furthermore, those games that did focus on horror, such as *Call of Cthulhu*, had players taking the role of humans fighting against the monsters in the shadows. *Vampire: the Masquerade* created a new genre of roleplaying game: personal horror, where identification was transferred from the player to the monster. In *Vampire: the Masquerade* players make characters who are the monsters rather than make heroes to fight the monsters. The storylines follow players' vampire characters as they struggle to retain their humanity in the face of their unnatural and undead condition. Much like *Call of Cthulhu*, combat is relatively rare. Instead of focusing on mystery solving, players play politics with each other and non-player characters (NPCs) to try and gain status in the vampiric feudal hierarchy of the modern gothic setting.[9] This style of gameplay differs significantly from the majority of roleplaying games created in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Vampire: the Masquerade* asked players to make much more meaningful decisions through their characters, confronting ethical problems such as vampiric feeding, the dangers of religious and sectarian extremism, and how

the rule of law should be developed. The focus of the game was predominantly on role-playing rather than combat and dice roll-play.[10]

As can be seen from this brief introduction, these two texts have been foundational for much of the TRPG industry in their treatment of horror. They have proven to be popular within their niche markets, and representative of larger popular culture resurgences in horror. It therefore makes sense to look deeper into these texts to ascertain their possible communicative implications, such as how they generate the experience of horror, in what ways they can help structure our understanding of the actual world, and how they replicate and change our understandings of real world places. Furthermore, the lack of much scholarly attention, specifically within the fields of communication and rhetorical studies, paid to TRPGs presents an invitation to engage with these texts in a way which has not been done before.

I will be asking several research questions to guide my analysis of these two texts. First I am interested in the exigency of both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. I seek to find some of the possible reasons for players to wish to engage with either of these game systems. My first research question is: What is the exigency for playing *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Second, I am interested to know how these two games function as symbolic equipment to help their players to confront their own lived realities. Broadly then my second research question can be phrased as: How do *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* function as equipment for living? Third, I am interested in the ways both of these games present and interact with real world places as centers for horror play. This third research question may be phrased as: How do *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* generate horror through the use of real world places, specifically cities? Finally, I am interested in understanding how the ritualistic nature of the play of TRPGs can engender identification and

immersion and can contribute to the experience of horror. In an effort to answer this question I will examine both of these games as representative case studies of the larger TRPG horror genre.

This analysis can be seen as filling the gap in critical scholarship of non-traditional media forms. In communication studies, media studies no longer focuses exclusively on television, radio, and film. The field has expanded to acknowledge the importance of immerging media forms, as well as older forms of media which were previously ignored. This analysis will also contribute to specific discourses currently ongoing in the communication discipline. This project will further contribute to the rich scholarly literature regarding Kenneth Burke's concept of equipment for living. Additionally, this analysis will be engaging in further analysis regarding ritualization of communication forms, identification, and the broader subject areas of horror and play.

Aspects of Games

Before beginning a discussion of the TRPG in earnest, it is important to discuss the different game-play aspects of the TRPG. In *Man, Play and Games* Roger Caillois developed a categorization system for describing the differing aspects of a variety of games and therefore classifying them. Caillois argued that there were four main rubrics which could be used to classify all games.[11] These four rubrics were the dominating features of *agôn*, *alea*, mimicry, and *illinix*. Caillois argued that every game is dominated by one of these four categories, although he did admit that there were certain combinations of categories which were also possible.

Caillois defines *agôn* as those categories of games where individuals are tested in their skill at a particular game.[12] Callois notes that games which are dominated by *agôn* often have rules systems for leveling a playing field between players, such as a handicap in golf or chess.

The reasoning for the inclusion of a handicap for a player of lower skill, according to Caillois is to artificially create rivalry between players, since the game loses meaning if the result of the test of skill is known beforehand. He notes, however that absolute equality between players is impossible as the entire goal of games dominated by *agôn* is "for each player to have his superiority in a given area recognized."[13] Obviously, games dominated by *agôn* can be played by more than one person on a team, testing individual's skills as well as their teamwork against those of a rival or rivals.

In opposition to *agôn* where the participants are ideally solely in control of the outcome of the game, *alea* includes all games where the participants have no control over the end result of the game. The Latin name for the game of dice, *alea*, describes those games which are tests of luck or destiny rather than skill.[14] In games dominated by *alea* the player is forced to become passive, waiting and relying on the forces of fate "… in short he relies on everything but himself."[15] Where *agôn* rewards practice and experience, *alea* negates these skills in favor of the lucky. Competition is still possible in *alea* however it does not typically have the same prominent position as it holds in *agôn*. Caillois acknowledges that these two categories, *agôn* and *alea*, are typically conflated together, such as in most card games, with the increased chance due to the influence of *alea* providing a more fair ground for *agôn* based competition.[16]

The third category of Caillois' rubric is mimicry. As Caillois explains, "all play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion, then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe."[17] Games dominated by the aspect of mimicry take this to a farther extent, allowing the player to submit themselves not to their skill or chance, but to a character. Mimicry can range from the childish games of playing at being an adult, to the heavily orchestrated theater performance. Importantly, Caillois notes that the

pleasure in mimicry is being another, not attempting to deceive others, after all, "the actor does not try to make believe that he is 'really' King Lear or Charles V."[18] Caillois argues that there is little melding of *alea* and mimicry, however, *agôn* dominated games do sometimes include a degree of mimicry, such as acting competitions, or sports fans dressing in team colors.[19]

The last category in Caillois' four-part rubric is *illinix*. Caillois describes games dominated by the aspect of *illinix* as "the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."[20] While Caillois primarily focused on games which resulted in a sense of dizziness through their play, this description implies that any game which focuses on disrupting sensory experience or order could be categorized as being dominated by *illinix*. Caillois further implies this with his inclusion of skiing and the banging of objects together as games structured around this aspect.[21]

As Caillois notes, "rules are inseparable from play as soon as the latter becomes institutionalized."[22] Because of this, in addition to the four categories of games, *agôn*, *alea*, mimicry, and *illinix*, Callois also included in his rubric two levels of rules definition for further categorization of games. The first level, *paidia,* is defined by Caillois as "…the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct…"[23] *Paidia* can best be thought of as play unrestricted by formal rules, where the spontaneity of the game is one of the main draws. As examples, Caillois cites kittens playing with a ball of yarn, children entertained by their rattles, and the joy of pulling fabric into threads.[24] It is important to note that *paidia*, according to Caillois, gives joy through the ability to affect the world around the players, even including the players themselves, in effect; *paidia* draws its pleasure from the discovery and enactment of agency. Ultimately, Caillois argues that *paidia* has a destructive influence, since the joy of *paidia*-based play comes

from the disruption of the status quo, occasionally resulting in players inflicting minor injuries on themselves (such as continually touching a sore tooth with their tongue) knowing that they are the cause of the pain and thus having the agency to stop it at will.[25] Caillois spends relatively little time discussing games produced through the interaction of *paidia* and the other aspects of games. As he notes, games of true *paidia* are almost universally unnamed, since the act of naming begins the processes of structuration which ultimately destroys *paidia*. With its joy coming from the discovery and enactment of agency, *paidia* stands in strong contrast to the other level of rules organization developed by Caillois, *ludus*.

Where *paidia* is freedom, *ludus* is (voluntary) submission. Caillois unfortunately does not provide an explicit definition of *ludus*, instead he simply describes how it serves as a source of joy as "the pleasure experienced in solving arbitrarily designed for the purpose for this purpose… so that reaching a solution has no other goal than personal satisfaction for its own sake."[26] *Ludus* is what happens when the games dominated by *paidia* are given formal structure and defined boundaries. An important distinction to be made is that *paidia* and *ludus* are two ends of a spectrum, rather than distinct categories. They are merely presented as extremes of the spectrum to enable the reader to understand the variety of levels of rules organization found in games. Where *paidia* may be the game of simply running through a field, *ludus* is an Olympic marathon complete with rules for equipment, qualification, and timing. The structuration of *paidia* into *ludus* through the creation of arbitrary rules results in the player giving up a degree of their agency. No longer are they bound only by their ingenuity and ability to cause change in the world, instead they must adhere to a set of guidelines or risk being branded a cheater. The player trades agency for the ability to replicate their experience as well as the satisfaction of directed utilization of knowledge, experience, skill, and intelligence.

Not surprisingly, Caillois spends significantly more time discussing the interactions of *ludus* and the four aspects of games than *paidia* and its interactions. Games of competition, dominated by the aspect of *agôn* typically have obvious interactions with *ludus*, where learning complex rules can serve as one of the skill tested. One only need think of the difficulty in explaining American football to someone unfamiliar with the sport to see the complex relationship at work between *agôn* and *ludus*. Caillois also argues for a strong connection between *alea* and *ludus*. This interaction can best be seen in the modern gambling industry, where players are still subject to the whims of fate, but nonetheless somewhat protected by the safety net of regulations placed on casinos. The interactions of mimicry and *ludus* are also quite obvious, with actors being required to stay on script as opposed to a more *paidia* focused improvisational theater. Interestingly, Caillois argues that there can be little to no direct relationship between *illinix* and *paidia*. For Caillois, the disruption inherent in *illinix* is closer to the freedom and lack of bounds found more in games dominated by *paidia*. Through the interactions of the four aspects of games, *agôn*, *alea*, mimicry, and *illinix* and the two poles of rules variations, it is possible to provide a more complex description of TRPG.

While Caillois originally suggested rather strict limitations on the interactions of the impact of games, the TRPG exhibits, in some ways, all aspects of the TRPG as well as both levels of rules. Players will often engage in *agôn* dominated competition between themselves or with the gamemaster. Indeed, competition is often one of the core aspects of play of most TRPGs, with players pitting their characters in combat against adversaries, testing their skill at solving puzzles and riddles, and trying to overcome the challenges presented to them by the gamemaster. Form most TRPGs there is some element of chance used to determine success or failure of complex actions. In both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* this aspect of

chance takes the form of dice. The use of dice in these and many other TRPGs to determine the results of actions within the game is a clear demonstration of the incorporation of *alea* into these TRPGs. Mimicry is an obvious component of the TRPG with its heavy emphasis on role-play and the complex interactions between player and character. Finally, *Ilinix* finds its way into TRPGs in that they are often played in places and times specifically set aside for this activity.

Play as ritualized communitas

Thomas S. Hendricks provides an excellent overview of much of the sociological and anthropological importance of the ritual nature of play in his 2006 *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression*. Hendricks begins his analysis of the importance of ritual to play by first acknowledging that all of the major theorists, who have written on the subject of play, from Marx to Huizinga to Weber, to Goffman, have all stressed the importance of its social nature.[27] Hendricks uses this as the basis for his argument that the ritual of play is ultimately a conformative activity. By describing ritual play as conformative, Hendricks is not arguing that it strips an individual of agency, but rather conformative activity is "an act of will and frequently demands the most far-reaching kinds of effort and reorientation by those involved."[28] For Hendricks, this type of activity is necessary for civil society to exist, because conformative acts are an acknowledgement of the values and worthiness of others, an act of social responsibility. Of course, not all ludic scholars see the conformative nature of ritual play in such light. As Hendricks mentions, Huizinga, who wrote in the wake of fascism in Europe, was very distrustful of the control of public ceremonies and rituals by totalitarian governments.[29] Hendricks counters this by articulating the difference between the conformative nature of ritual and the authoritarian, fraudulent, and often violent means the totalitarian

governments use to hijack them. Hendricks further defines the ritual of play as typically belonging to a specific type of conformative activity, *communitas*. Coming from the Latin for the spirit of community, *communitas* is a movement away from the individual. As Hendricks explains, "in *communitas* we give ourselves up and in the processes discover new dimensions of our being."[30] Ritual play, when structured as *communitas* allows an individual to, not only enjoy the act of participation, but also to defer to the structures of culture and reevaluate themselves in relation to them.

Defining the Tabletop Role-Playing Game

Before beginning an analysis of the tabletop roleplaying game, it is first important to define exactly which types of games this analysis will include. At first glance, the term "tabletop role-playing game" seems descriptive enough: games centering on role-play played on top of tables. There is however an extremely broad range of games fitting this description. Certainly the most well-known role-playing game, *Dungeons and Dragons* falls within the purview of this broad scope, unless of course it is played online in a play-by-post (PbP) forum, or through webcams. Additionally, this broad definition includes games such as *Monopoly*, which can certainly be played on a table, and involves players playing with the roles of venture capitalists. Clearly then, a more precise definition of the TRPG is needed to be able to begin discussions about the genre.

Defining the TRPG has proven to be a difficult task for those scholars who have done work in the subject area. The foremost academic author on the subject, Gary Alan Fine defines the TRPG as, "any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment."[31] Again,

Fine's definition is a bit too broad, ignoring some of the other primary aspects of the TRPG identified by later theorists. Daniel MacKay narrows the definition, by looking at the TRPG primarily as a form of performance art, describing it as, "an *episodic* and *participatory* story-creation *system* that includes a set of quantified *rules* that assist a group of *players* and a *gamemaster* in determining how their fictional *characters'* spontaneous interactions are resolved."[32] Jenifer Grouling Cover finds this definition "broad enough" and adopts it as her primary definition, although she tends to focus more heavily on the deliberation and rhetorical aspects of TRPGs than MacKay.[33] At the end of her analysis, Cover proposes an alternative definition, "The TRPG, can be defined as a type of game/game system that involves collaboration between a small group of players and a game master through face to face social activity with the purpose of creating a narrative experience."[34]

Alternatively, some authors take the approach of ignoring the definitional problem of the TRPG, and instead simply focus on describing its core mechanics. Hendricks describes the TRPG as consisting of, at the very least "a number of players (often between three and ten), a referee (often called the Gamemaser [GM]), a set of standard rules (*D20*, *Hero*, *Storyteller*), and a random element (normally dice, although some games, such as *Deadlands* and *Castle Falkenstein* use playing cards). The goal of such games is the construction of a narrative that is the result of the interactions of the GM, the players, the rules, and the random element."[35] Waskul takes a similar approach, describing the characteristics of the TRPG, rather than attempting to define it. His description focuses on the game's engrossment of players, collaboration, improvisation, and use of dice and complex rules systems.[36]

Because of the aforementioned shortfalls of the current definitions of the TRPG, I propose an alternative definition. This definition takes pieces of language from the definitions of

MacKay, Cover, and Fine. I propose a working definition of the TRPG as: Any collaborative and participatory story creation game/game system which enables a group of players and a referee(s) to interact with an imaginary environment. This definition avoids many of the problems of the previously mentioned definitions, such as the assumption of face-to-face communication, play as necessarily being episodic, and the assumption of a single referee/gamemaster. While I will operate within this definition for this project, I encourage readers to remember that this is a connotative definition. One of the most fulfilling aspects of the TRPG as a player is similarly one of the most frustrating as a scholar; that is, TRPGs are varied and can be played in as many ways as individuals can imagine. Ultimately, no matter how useful a definition, it will most likely always fall short of encompassing the full potential of this medium.

Frames of Narrativity

Since Fine first elaborated the TRPG community in his 1983 book, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*, academic inquiry into the subject has used a model of frames to describe the different levels of performative play occurring within the TRPG. One of Fine's central concerns is to understand the basis for cultural creations that occur both within the role-playing narrative as well as those which are created outside of the narrative. In order to deal with this dual system, Fine proposed the concept of *shared vision*. The basis for the concept of shared vision was first introduced by Erving Goffman, who suggested that cultures are created through shared understandings and knowledge making within the similarly constructed social frameworks of culture. Within this theory there are pseudo-frameworks, which Goffman simultaneously refers to as "keyings" and "stagings."[37] These pseudo-frameworks simulate actual frameworks by allowing members of a culture to engage with events independent of

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reality. For Goffman, fiction, deceit, and, most importantly for this study, games are all examples of keyings.

Fine isolates three different keyings, which he terms "frames," in order to discuss the multiple layers of engagement between players and referees in TRPGs: the "primary framework," the "game framework," and the "fantasy framework." The "primary framework" is most easily understood as the assortment of those frameworks used by players and referees to engage with one another.[38] The "game framework" is understood as the rules system of the game being played and how it constrains and dictates behavior.[39] Finally, the "fantasy framework" is the "frame in which the characters live, breath and act."[40] This triadic system is split even further by MacKay into five sections, breaking up the "game framework" of Fine and Hendricks into two parts. As MacKay explains, "the social frame [is] inhabited by the *person*, the game frame inhabited by the *player*, the narrative frame inhabited by the *raconteur*, the constative frame inhabited by the *addresser*, and the performative frame inhabited by the *character*".[41] The important distinction made here by MacKay and further accepted by Cover is that there is a distinction between the narrative of the game and the fantasy of the game; that is, TRPGs contain a fantasy narrative but are experienced by players and referees as a constituted textual universe. Despite this acknowledgement, Cover confirms Fine's triad as the most useful means of understanding the shared vision of players and referees, suggesting that scholars adopt the "narrative frame," "social frame," and "game frame" for understanding the levels of interaction amongst players and referees.[42]

For all three of these authors, the concept of a shared vision is central to the ability of players to negotiate with each other and with the referee. This negotiation is central because the TRPG often lacks a traditional media interface (e.g.: video monitor, film screen, etc.). Unlike

video games, computer games, board games, and card games, TRPGs do not often require a traditional media interface for players and referees to engage with, instead necessitating an adoption of a shared imaginative space and culture. In video and computer games the visual elements and programing of the game allow for individuals to share a fantasy, giving a collective understanding of what things look like and where they exist in relation to one another. Similarly, in board games the position of the pieces, their materiality, color, and the images of the board bring players together into a collective understanding and shared fantasy. This is not necessarily the case in the TRPG; as Hendricks notes "[TRPGs] have only a few static artifacts, including perhaps maps, representative pictures of character types, and miniatures. But these artifacts are not always present, nor are they necessary."[43] Instead the players and referees must engage in negotiation and deliberation to create the fantasy framework. For this project, I will be using the frames proposed by Cover, of "narrative frame," "social frame," and "game frame." Cover's recalibration of Fine's triadic model allows for an easy understanding of the primary levels of interaction engaged in by players. Furthermore, MacKay's five-frame system is less useful for a rhetorical and communicative analysis because it is focused on performance rather than communication.

Narativity and Authorship in the TRPG

  Both Cover and MacKay address the theoretical complications of narrative and authorship in the TRPG. For MacKay, TRPGs create a constituted narrative-like event in the moment of their performance, one that is ephemeral and fleeting.[44] MacKay argues that this is not technically narrative. Instead, players and gamemasters reformat in their own minds the

different frames of shared vision to construct a coherent narrative. Although Cover agrees that the play of TRPGs does not fit the strict definitions of narrative, Cover argues that the play of TRPGs creates a narrative experience through dialogue.[45] In essence, both MacKay and Cover agree that a narrative is constituted through the communicative performance of the TRPG, they simply differ on the moment of its constitution. For MacKay, the narrative is constructed idiosyncratically by the participants after the events of play. In contrast, Cover argues that the narrative is constructed individually in the moment of play, rather than after it.

With regard to the levels of authorship, Mackay sides primarily with the players and referee, in contrast to Cover, who provides a more nuanced understanding of authorship. MacKay argues that players and gamemasters use what he terms "fictive blocks," easily repeatable ideas and tropes from other forms of media to build their own imaginary entertainment environments.[46] For MacKay, the game designers and setting creators have very little input into the constituted narrative performance. In contrast, Cover argues for differing levels of authorship. Cover acknowledges the post-modern reconceptualization of audiences/readers, individuals doing the work of constructing their own texts from the fragments they are given by the primary authors.[47] From this, Cover explains that authorship is a consistently shifting target by the nature of the three aforementioned frames used to enact the TRPG. She argues that game designers and writers serve as primary authors so long as their rules and setting material remain unaltered. However when players and gamemasters begin to alter these textual fragments through play, they take up the role of primary author.[48] Furthermore, Cover argues that the appropriation of popular culture artifacts by players and gamemasters further complicates the levels of authorship, resulting in the need for a case-by-case analysis of

the topic. As complex as the unpacking of the issues of narrativity and authorship in the TRPG is, equally complex is the unpacking of the utility of the horror genre for its audiences.

Horror as Equipment for Living

A general scholarly consensus regarding horror in literature, videogames, and cinema is that is serves a purpose of articulating societies' fears in a helpful way for the audience.[49] Many academic studies of the genre have taken what can loosely be described as a Freudian approach to horror, arguing that the discourse of the media reflects the motives and fears the audience already experiences.[50] As film critic Robin Wood explains, this psychoanalytic approach to the study of media should not be confused with the romantic notion that the author/director is overtaken by the subconscious, rather it is voluntary submission to the influence of forces greater than the self.[51] For Wood, the psychological make-up of an individual and their cultural ideology are inexorably linked together, no matter whether one approaches from a Freudian or a Lacanian perspective. Wood argues that both of these psychoanalytic approaches see the end result of socialization as creating individuals subjugated entirely to their cultural norms. Since this socialization is never complete, the result is that:

> . . . every human being in our culture is a battleground on which is fought, at both the conscious and unconscious levels – always in a different form, always with a different outcome, variations infinite – the struggle between the forces of repression and the urge liberation, the struggle in microcosm that we see being waged in the outside world of politics, national, international, sexual.[52]

For Wood, cinema, and by implication other media forms (such as television, radio, and print), are an externalization of both the conscious and unconscious levels of this struggle. An example of this view of film being an externalization of this idiosyncratic battle is Wood's analysis of Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Wood argues that the majority of *Psycho* places the audience in a position

of identification, not with the protagonists, but with Norman Bates, the psychotic murderer. Wood suggests that this identification forces audiences to confront their own internal ideological battles: "we have been made to see the dark possibilities within all of us . . . we can now be set free, save for life. The last image . . . returns us to Marion, to ourselves, and to the idea of psychological liberty."[53] Another more contemporary example of this perspective comes from Barbara Creed. Creed sees Freudian psychoanalytic theory as a perfect counterpart to the analysis of horror cinema, since Freud's theories used cinematic terms, revolved around the gaze, focused on memory, and read much like the script of a horror film.[54] Creed argues that the character of Hannibal Lecter, from the *Silence of the Lambs* franchise is a lingering specter of the Freudian methodology and influence on film, while also an articulation of many of Freud's own fears.   Through perverse acts of consumption, Hannibal Lecter both figuratively and literally picks the brains of others, much as Freud was known to joke about doing. Creed sees Lecter as a figure who straddles several different temporal boundaries historic (from his name), modern (from his profession as a psychologist), and postmodern (from his use of olfactory humor).[55] This liminality represents the long standing associations between horror cinema and psychoanalytic theory.

In summation, author Stephen King poetically describes this critical lens as "the real danse macabre, I suspect: those remarkable moments when the creator of the horror story is able to unite the conscious and subconscious mind with one potent idea."[56] Here King describes the capacity of film to unite the subconscious fears already present within the audience, as part of society, and their conscious fears as members of the audience. Psychoanalytic approaches suggest that this unification of conscious and subconscious fears provides a cathartic release of tension.

In contrast to the Freudian psychoanalytic method of understanding horror, Barry Brummett proposed that critics and media scholars consider the adoption of a Burkian perspective rooted to the concept of equipment for living. As Brummet explains, the theoretical underpinnings of equipment for living stand opposed to traditional Freudian psychoanalytic methods of criticism because,

> …the public derives its motives from the discourse rather than the discourse from its motives. Discourse does not reflect motives which people already have; it is the source of motives, the crucible in which motivations are formed in the act of symbolizing or articulating them.[57]

Communicative interaction for Burke, enables audiences to have patterns of interaction for their everyday lives based on those presented in discourse or what Burke often terms rhetoric. Brummett explains that discourse functions this way on two levels: articulation and resolution. As mentioned before, the Burkian discourse creates the motives in the audience, it does not reflect them. Through this articulation of motive, discourse provides the audience with their fears, hopes, anxieties, etc.[58] This is not to say that individuals approach discourse *tabula rasa*, empty vessels to be filled by the media. Instead, discourse serves as an echo-chamber. In the case of horror, it generates fears and anxiety which need to be addressed and resolved with further discourse. For example, an individual may approach a film with a subconscious fear of wolves, but that fear was only created through previous discourse which failed at resolution. This is the second way in which communicative interaction serves an audience as equipment for their everyday lives. Discourse not only articulates the motives for audiences, it also functions as ways of resolving the tensions audiences have with those motives. By providing closure, whether positive or negative, to situations and motives confronted by audience members, those audience members are given methods for approaching their own lives.[59] Put blankly, with respect to the

horror genre, discourse generates fears while simultaneously providing ways of dealing with those very same fears.

While the approach to horror as equipment for living has been around since Brummett's foundational article in 1985, there has been little work on the horror genre within this particular framework. Brummett argues that horror films, specifically haunted house films, provide audiences with ways of dealing with disrupted temporal and spatial problems in their everyday lives, both through the apparatus of film itself and through the recurring and spatially liminal figures of ghosts.[60]

Likewise both Cooper and Nelson argue from a dramatistic perspective, although lacking the specific language, it is clear that their theoretical foundations are that horror discourse, or gothick (spelling changed to provide distinction from the time period of the same name) in Nelson's case, both create and fulfill a need. Cooper explains this perspective personally, when recalling an incident from his own childhood, after watching *A Nightmare on Elm Street* at a young age he was afraid to go to sleep. However he utilized the discourse of the same film to overcome his fear, and as he explains, "Thus *A Nightmare on Elm Street* helped a child overcome his greatest fears."[61] Here, Cooper provides an example of how the discourse of a film both helped to articulate a fear, in this case a fear of falling asleep for fear of being murdered by psycho-killer Freddy Kruger, and helped to simultaneously resolve that fear, in a positive manner, with the acknowledgement that Freddy Kruger is nothing more than a dream and therefore powerless. Cooper provides a detailed history of much of the backlash against horror, from its anti-scientific focus, overt sexuality, and violent tendencies. He argues that the gothic, or horror tradition, has had a major hand in the shaping of society, creating new discourses such as the pathological construction of homosexuality. For Cooper, horror is part of the communication

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which constructs our reality, rather than a reflection of it. Similarly, Nelson argues for understanding gothick fiction as providing a resolution to the discourse of an increasingly secular American popular culture. In this gothick discourse, Nelson sees the rise of deity-like vampires, immortal ghosts, and nuclear consumptive zombies as the sensible answer to man's search for some aspect of the divine.[62]

Moving into performance studies and thus closer to the TRPG, Simone do Vale has argued implicitly for the identification as a zombie to provide equipment for living for members of zombie walks (semi-spontaneous groups who dress in zombie costumes, often for fundraisers). Do Vale argues that participants in zombie walks gain a closeness with others not found in other similar spontaneous mass groupings such as flash mobs.[63] Additionally, do Vale argues that the zombie walks provide a cathartic resolution to the discourse in popular culture propagating fear of violence and disease while simultaneously encouraging mass consumption. The act of playing in the role of the Romero-esque zombie creates a discourse of the carnivalesque, both celebrating these manufactured fears and critiquing them simultaneously.[64] While these are not the only approaches to horror to take a dramatistic approach, they do provide a useful overview of some of its potential applications to the genre. Furthermore, they provide an example of what methodological procedures I undertake in my own analysis.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter Two of this thesis engages both the exigency for the play of, and how that play serves as equipment for living for both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Specifically, I explore each game's rules, setting information, and examples of play to make my

arguments about how they solicit play and provide utility. Chapter Three approaches how both of these texts deal with one of the most iconic cities in the United States, greater metropolitan New York by engaging with their sourcebooks for that city and how they create embodied space. For this chapter, I engage with the use of iconic locations within New York City by both of these games, as well as how they construct a culture of the city. Chapter Four approaches both of these games as a gestalt, looking into their use of ritual in game and their promotion of ritualistic play and how these practices develop character identification and immersion during play. This chapter pulls heavily from the sociological and anthropological literature on ritualized play and expands on their utility to communication studies. Finally, chapter Five concludes my thesis, tying together the varying strands presented in this work. I also suggest possible new directions for research to engage with TRPGs as both an aspect of media and as rhetorical discourse.

CHAPTER TWO:

EXIGENCY AND EQUIPMENT FOR LIVING IN TRPGS

A rhetorical text is not generated within a vacuum. Instead texts are constructed within a specific time and often in response to or continuation of specific pre-existing discourses. This view of a text as being generated by and operating within a set of preexisting discourses was popularized by rhetorical critic Lloyd Bitzer. In 1968, Bitzer proposed a question for other rhetoricians, "What is a rhetorical situation?"[65] Analogically, we are able to understand what is meant by an embarrassing, dangerous or frightening situation because we are able to clearly determine what factors and structures would lead to a situation being embarrassing, dangerous, or frightening. Similarly, in order to understand the rhetorical situation of a text, one factor a rhetorical critic should seek out is its exigency, those characteristics which inspire the rhetoric's creation. As Bitzer explained, "we need to understand that a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance."[66] In other words, rhetoric is a produced response, in part, to a specific context. By uncovering the exigence of a specific text, the critic can better understand what, how, and to whom it communicates.

Through his article on the rhetorical situation, Bitzer popularized the idea of tracing the context of a piece of rhetoric beyond mere background information. While Bitzer's technique of analysis calls for critics to engage a piece of rhetoric on several levels, it is clear that the exigence is the primary determinant of a piece of rhetoric.[67] This is because the need a piece of rhetoric responds to will dictate both the audience and the constraints, the two other aspects of Bitzer's rhetorical situation. As such I will be examining the context and problems which invited the creation of first *Call of Cthulhu* and then *Vampire: The Masquerade*. However, it is

important for me to begin broadly by examining the exigence of the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) in general before delving into specific texts, as understanding the form that a piece of discourse takes is relevant to understanding the specific instances of that rhetoric.

A Brief History of the TRPG

Several authors have done an excellent job of tracing the history of the development of the TRPG. In their view the TRPG can be seen as progression in form of several types of games. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the TRPG simultaneously exhibits aspects of a variety of types of games, from dice games of chance to improvisational theater. Many of these aspects come from truly ancient games, with twenty sided dice dating back as far as the Egyptian Ptolemaic period and the act of role-play likely being as old as humanity itself. However, despite these ancient origins, the most commonly cited direct ancestor of the TRPG is a now little known tactical war game named *Kriegspiel*.[68] *Kriegspiel* itself was the modification of a then thirty-year-old game, *War Chess*, which had been designed by the master of pages in the duchy of Brunswick.[69] Both *War Chess* and *Kriegspiel* are games predominantly constructed around *agôn*, where players' tactical knowledge is tested against each other by the movement of miniature pieces representing army units of the early 1800s. However, both also feature some degree of *alea*, where dice rolls are used to help determine the winner in combat, representing the degrees of chance in actual combat. Furthermore, *Kriegspiel* featured an impartial moderator who with the addition of dice rolls decided the fate of battles, clearly a precursor to the TRPG's gamemaster.

Kriegspiel proved both popular and useful, being adopted as a training method for Prussian military officers, and as MacKay notes, "British military attributed the tactical savvy of

Prussian soldiers to the game."[70] Due of the strong associations between the upper-class

bourgeoisie and the appointments of military officers in the 1800s, as well as the relatively high

material cost of production, and the heavy literacy requirement for understanding the rules, it is

not surprising that tactical war games became a popular pastime predominantly for the upper

classes.

War games continued as a bourgeoisie pastime throughout the Victorian period until

1915 with author H.G. Wells' adaptation of *Kriegspiel* called *Little Wars*.[71] The full title of

Wells' game-book: *Little Wars: a game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and*

fifty and for that more intelligent sort of girl who likes boys' games and books speaks volumes

about the potential audience Wells must have imagined. Due to the advancements in production

techniques as well as increased literacy it was now possible for members of the rising

middleclass, especially children, to have access to the resources necessary for war-games. In

Little Wars these resources now also included miniaturized versions of the tools of war,

including individual soldiers, rather than the generic tokens used in previous games. This shift to

the use of individuals being represented on the battlefield allowed war-gaming to develop its

next change in form in the eventual progression towards the TRPG. Interestingly, there has been

some reciprocation between TRPGs and *Little Wars* with *Dungeons and Dragons* author Gary

Gygax writing the introduction for the 2004 reprint of *Little Wars*. This connection with one of

the authors of the first TRPG helps further display the succession of games partially responsible

for calling the TRPG into existence.

The next major innovation in this line of succession came in 1968 when war-game

enthusiast Dave Wesely, a wargamer from Minneapolis-St. Paul Minnesota, began setting up

non-zero-sum scenarios in his war-games, having players control factions of a fictional city and

each having individual goals to accomplish over the course of play.[72] One of Wesely's early players, future *Dungeons and Dragons* co-author, Dave Arneson further modified his own war-game scenarios to have players controlling individual figurines instead of full armies and introduced high-fantasy into the games. As MacKay notes, "Arneson introduced Tolkienesque fantasy elements into his war game. Not only did players now have the control of an individual character which they could identify, but it became possible for that character to cast spells or wield magic swords against fantastic, mythical creatures such as dragons and hobgoblins."[73] Arneson eventually shared these shifts in his war-games with the designer of the war-game *Chainmail*, Gary Gygax. In January of 1974 Arneson and Gygax published the world's first TRPG, *Dungeons and Dragons*.

While Jenifer Grouling Cover agrees with Mackay and Fine's portrayal of the TRPG emerging from a succession of games starting with *Kriegspiel*, she argues for a second form of antecedent text which helped set the stage for the development of the TRPG, the interactive fiction of the gamebook, a type of fiction which offers a reader choices in developing the narrative. As Cover notes, "although all fiction requires some participation of readers as they form the story in their minds, interactive fiction is more actively produced or navigated by the audience."[74] Choose-your-own-adventure books are perhaps the most well-known form of interactive fiction, allowing readers to choose from a variety of options in the navigation of a narrative. The first interactive fiction, a precursor in form to the later choose-your-own-adventure gamebooks, "The Garden of Forking Paths", was written by Argentinian author and poet Jorge Luis Borges. Due to the innovative way that audiences were encouraged to move through his short story, Borges has been credited as developing the world's first hypertext short story, well before the development and widespread distribution of the personal computer.[75]

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Despite this early origin, the interactive fiction, including gamebooks, did not gain widespread popularity until the 1970s. In fact, Cover notes that their simultaneous rise in popularity with that of the TRPG, itself another form of interactive narrative, had a reciprocal relationship between the two media.[76] Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), the company founded by Gygax to publish *Dungeons and Dragons*, eventually came out with its own brand of choose-your-own adventure books in 1979, clearly showing the close relationship between these two text types in their development.

Additionally, the development of the TRPG can be seen as filling a genre gap in popular entertainment. In the early 1970s there were few films which tackled the high-fantasy genre.[77] The iconography of the sword and sandal epics of the 1960s, such as Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960), Joseph Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963) and Harry Hausen's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) were the closest approach to high fantasy in film.[78] Indeed these are the films which both Gygax and Arneson would have grown up with as young men. In the 1970s the relative freedom from the censorship of previous decades, combined with a continued decline in profits produced an environment where the high budget and lack of predictable success discouraged the production of high fantasy sword and sandal films. Instead, as popular culture historian Leroy Ashby notes, "literally dozens of bleak, despairing movies poured out of Hollywood, movies that mirrored and reinforced the anguish that shook Americans as they dealt with war, racial conflict, campus upheaval, growing cynicism, and an economic downturn."[79] There were a few instances of fantasy making appearances in cinema, Ralph Bashki's *J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings* (1978) was one of the few exceptions to the bleak socially conscious films of the time period. Interestingly, the source material for Bakshi's film, *The Lord of the Rings* was also one of the sources cited by Gygax and Arneson as an influence on the

development of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Just as cinema was dominated by bleak reflections of the national mood, television in the early 1970s was dominated by socially relevant situation comedies. Television shows such as *All in the Family* (1971-1979), *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983), *Maude* (1972-1978), and *Good Times* (1974-1979) were, much like the films of their time period clearly direct social commentary of the state of American society in the early 1970s. Closer to the end of the decade, as TRGGs gained in popularity, fantasy fared little better in television, as the socially conscious sitcoms of the early 1970s were replaced by feel-good sitcoms such as *Happy Days* (1974-1984), *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983), and *Mork and Mindy* (1978-1982).[80]

What can be seen from this brief look into popular culture of the time is a lack of representations of one of the most classic narrative archetypes, fantasy. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of the genre of high fantasy which had developed a following with novel series such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Pydain Chronicles* can be seen as contributing to the discourse calling the TRPG into formation. To view, as several authors have, the development of *Dungeons and Dragons* as solely the natural evolution of wargamming is a mistake. Instead it can also be seen as a response to a popular culture which for the most part had ignored a genre, high fantasy. This left those who wished to engage with this genre with the lone choice of developing narratives themselves. This response to popular culture of the time also helps explain the relative lack of diversity in genres of TRPGS for much of its early history. As Gary Alan Fine noted in 1983, "The aesthetic and financial success of *Dungeons & Dragons* sent other game designers to their typewriters in desperate pursuit, and today dozens of role-playing games are sold."[81] *Dungeons and Dragons* (1974), *Tunnels and Trolls* (1975), *Empire of the Petal Throne* (1975) *Knights of the Round Table* (1976) all show the generic restrictions of the

TRPG in its early days. Despite the desire Fine notes for authors to create their own TRPGs, authors remained entrenched within the genre of high fantasy. This leads to the question: What then served as the exigence for the development of the first horror-themed TRPG, *Call of Cthulhu*?

Invoking the Cthulhu Mythos

Published in 1981, *Call of Cthulhu* was developed just as the TRPG was starting to rise in popularity. Much like its genre-founding predecessor *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Call of Cthulhu* can be seen as originating in several discourses. Specifically, *Call of Cthulhu* can be seen as being called into existence through a discourse which started in the 1920s, started by H. P. Lovecraft and one of its own time period with the rise of horror as a popular genre in the late 1970s and early 1980s in film and television. The intersection of these two discourses sparked the creation of the first horror themed TRPG, *Call of Cthulhu*.

In order to discuss the exigence of *Call of Cthulhu* it is necessary to begin with the author who made the text possible, Howard Phillip Lovecraft. Born August 20, 1890, H.P. Lovecraft eventually became one of the most influential horror authors of the twentieth century. Lovecraft is often credited with being the inventor of the sub-genre of "cosmic horror."[82] Cosmic horror as Lovecraft created it, focused not on the evils of man or the supernatural (although these themes are far from absent in much of his work) but ultimately on the insignificance of humanity, as Mythos scholar Richard L. Tierney explains, "the 'shocker; in [Lovecraft's] best tales is usually the line in which the narrator is forced to recognize that there are vast and powerful forces and entities basically indifferent to humanity because of their overwhelming superiority to man."[83] Thus, Lovecraft's horror operated much like the Total Perspective Vortex, a torture device,

imagined by Douglas Adams in *Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980). The device functioned by giving the tortured victim, "just one momentary glimpse of the entire unimaginable infinity of creation, and somewhere in it a tiny little mark, a microscopic dot on a microscopic dot, which says, 'You are here.'"[84] Horror was thus generated through a realization of the universal indifference towards an individual and the futility of human action and agency. Lovecraft's short stories typically included the themes of the insignificance of humanity, inherited guilt, bodily transformations, madness, the mundane in juxtaposition with the unthinkable, and the amorality of the universe. While he was little known in his own time, much like renowned horror author and inspiration to Lovecraft, Edgar Alan Poe, Lovecraft gained in fame after his untimely death in 1937. One of the factors which contributed most to Lovecraft's writings longevity was the development of the Cthulhu Mythos.

Ironically, the shared diegetic universe Lovecraft may today be most well-known for, the Cthulhu Mythos, was both coined and primarily constructed after his death by Lovecraft's friend and occasional publisher August Derleth. The Cthulhu Mythos is a diegetic universe shared across several authors which Lovecraft laid the foundations for and was actualized by Derleth shortly after Lovecraft's death.[85] While Lovecraft scholars debate the exact component parts of the Mythos (as well as the name Cthulhu Mythos itself), the Cthulhu Mythos is generally understood to be a pantheon of gods (sometimes deity-like aliens) and series of fictional locales and individuals which Lovecraft and other writers used to place their stories in the same diegetic universe without direct collaboration.[86] Loosely speaking, the mythos centers on a pantheon of ancient entities (including but not limited to Cthulhu, Yogg Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, and Shub-Niggurath) who lie dead but dreaming around the globe. Collectively called "The Great Old Ones", these deity-esque entities are prophesized within the world of the Cthulhu mythos to one

day awaken and destroy humanity. As Lovecraft explained in *The Call of Cthulhu* (not to be confused with the TRPG, *Call of Cthulhu*), "The Great Old Ones… lived ages before there were any men, and… came to the young world out of the sky. Those Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult which had never died… There were arts which could revive Them (sic) when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity… and all the earth would be flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom."[87] Spatially, the mythos primarily centers on the Massachusetts coastline in fictional towns of Arkham, Dunwich, Kingsport and a few others. While some debate the connection between the locales and their importance to Lovecraft's work, they did feature heavily in much of his writing, adding to it a sense of place for the generation of horror.[88]

As Lovecraft primarily wrote for serial magazines and pulps, having a shared diegetic universe which made his horrific Old Ones seem to be ubiquitous across several authors' works helped engender the sense of realism and cosmic dread Lovecraft attempted to create for his readers. Several authors, including August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch and Henry Kutterner, did indeed utilize this diegetic universe to varying degrees and contributed to the development of the Cthulhu Mythos during Lovecraft's lifetime. In addition to this, Lovecraft himself ghost-wrote several stories which made allusions to the Cthulhu Mythos, making it appear to readers of the time, including his collaborators, that there were even more authors utilizing the Cthulhu mythos. Lovecraft also actively encouraged others to utilize the mythos for the backgrounds of their own stories, as he explained in a letter to August Derleth upon hearing that Derleth's story was rejected for its use of his Great Old Ones, "And what pointless censure of the introduction of Cthulhu and Yog-Sothoth – as if their use

constituted any 'infringement' on my stuff! Hades! The more these synthetic daemons are mutually written up by different authors, the better they become as general background-material. I like to have others use my Azathoths and Nyarlathoteps…"[89] After Lovecraft's death August Derleth seems to have taken this consolatory advice to heart, starting Arkham House Publishing and becoming one of the license holders to Lovecraft's works. Additionally, he continued Lovecraft's tradition of collaboration in fiction by publishing new stories written in the Cthulhu mythos.

Since the early 1930s authors and aspiring authors have been encouraged both directly and indirectly to use the Cthulhu mythos to write their own stories. The actions of these authors, many of whom, such as August Derleth, were great fans of Lovecraft's work resembles the common fan activity of textual poaching. First introduced by Henry Jenkins in 1988 as a way of reimagining the fan as an active participant in media consumption, rather than an infantilized adult, textual poaching is characterized as "a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprint, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience."[90] Influenced heavily by Michel De Certeau, the concept of readers as textual poachers borrows language from the world of games, describing the poaching act as "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text."[91] The game of textual poaching reconstitutes fans, and all other textual readers, as active agents, taking apart texts and reassembling them in new idiosyncratic ways which the original producers could have never intended. By engaging in poaching, the reader takes control of the textual production process (albeit on an individual level), redistributing the power and roles of media producer and consumer.

While it may be tempting to imagine all those authors who have utilized the Cthulhu Mythos as poachers, there is a significant difference between the activity of poaching and the writing in the Cthulhu Mythos. For De Certeau, one of the most important features of the act of poaching was that it was outside of the bounds of the system in which it participated, an act not legitimized by the authority of the text itself. As he explains, "his place is not *here* or *there*, one or the other, but neither the one nor the other, simultaneously inside and outside, dissolving both by mixing them together, associating texts like funerary statues that he awakens and hosts, but never owns. In that way, he also escapes from the law of each text in particular, and from that of the social milieu."[92] Just as in actual poaching, the metaphorical act of textual poaching is unsanctioned; the producer of the text has no control over how it is used once the poacher has obtained it. Furthermore, poaching is an idiosyncratic practice; it expands the resources of the text, but only for the poacher, providing nothing to the producer or to the original text.[93] Clearly, this relationship between poacher and producer is different from the relationship between Lovecraft and the other authors of the Cthulhu Mythos. Where the poacher operates unsanctioned, the writers of the Cthulhu Mythos (at least during Lovecraft's life) were actively encouraged, where the poacher takes from the text to make for themselves, the writing of the Cthulhu Mythos, because of its sanctioned manner, expanded it, giving it more power, which in turn helped to spark the TRPG's first movement into the horror genre.

Due to these key differences in legitimacy and level of contribution the authors who utilized the Cthulhu Mythos were not textual poachers, but instead *textual invokers*. Where the poachers take, unsanctioned for themselves, the individual who engages in invocation is given freely the text and allowed to make for themselves as well as simultaneously increase the source's cultural imprint. The supplicant who invokes a deity is given the prayers freely by his or

her religious authority, allowed to make them his or her own. In this way supplicants are understood to enact belief and therefore increase their chosen deities' power. Just as The Great Old Ones in the Cthulhu Mythos gained power through the invoking of rituals performed in their name, which they themselves gave to their human cultists, so too does the Cthulhu Mythos gain in power through its utilization. The textual invoker is an individual who, given authority to use the resources of a text by the legitimate authority, both makes for themselves and increases the cultural imprint of the original works, providing for the source as well as their own self. It differs from poaching as an activity in that the individual engaged in textual invocation is sanctioned by the authority of the original text and thereby increases its saliency.[94]

Through the works of the textual invokers, Cthulhu and other members of The Great Old Ones appear more ubiquitous across fiction, gaining saliency in the minds of readers. The invocation of the Cthulhu Mythos enacted the themes of the mythos, creating the underlying sense of dread mysteries lurking just under the surface of mundane reality. The power of this textual invoking to enhance and expand the Cthulhu Mythos can most clearly be seen in the adoption of the Cthulhu Mythos by real world occultists. For example, the Necronomicon, a fictional text which plays a role in several stories set using the Cthulhu Mythos, has been created several times and sold openly for use in occult rituals. Where other authors may have fought to control their intellectual property, Lovecraft encouraged its use. This is because the textual invoking of the Cthulhu Mythos worked to enact it in reality, thus ensuring it gained salience in reader's minds.

Furthermore the format of the medium of the TRPG is one which itself creates an environment for invocation. TRPGs present their players with specific diegetic worlds and sets of rules so that players may use an alter them to create their own story. Players are clearly given

authority to control their own games (for the fee of the game books of course) and nearly all TRPGs encourage players to pick and choose what they like best of the game and modify what needs to be changed, an assumption typically known as Rule 0. The modifications of the diegetic world and the rule-changes developed through the play of TRPGs add to the original text by being reproduced in fan communities and occasionally making their way into the newer, updated printings of the games. The environment of textual invocation created by Lovecraft helped provide a discourse which, even years after his death, paved the way for *Call of Cthulhu* to become the first TRPG, a medium which engaged in the same practice of invocation as the Mythos authors, to be sanctioned to utilize a pre-existing literary source for its setting.

The encouragement by Lovecraft and others to make the Cthulhu mythos their own can clearly be seen as one of the driving factors which lead to *Call of Cthulhu* being published. As a form of interactive fiction, *Call of Cthulhu* opens up to players the ability to interact with the Cthulhu mythos both by creating fiction (albeit oral rather than literary) but also by inhabiting it through the characters that they play. By providing players the opportunity to interact with the Cthulhu mythos in new ways *Call of Cthulhu* can be seen as a logical extension of the discourse of textual invoking and collaboration started nearly fifty years before the games inception. This however is not the only discourse to be involved in the exigence of *Call of Cthulhu*. An equally important discourse was developing in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Chaotic Calls for Cthulhu

While the first generation of TRPGs may be seen as being called into existence by a discursive gap in the representation of fantasy as a genre in entertainment, *Call of Cthulhu* can be seen as a continuation of the development of the popular discourse of horror in the late 1970s

and early 1980s. Although the film and television industries of the 1970s with their dark gritty reflections of reality and their socially relevant sitcoms, the end of the decade, in contrast, was a search for happy endings.[95] Television became dominated by feel good sitcoms such as *Happy Days* (1974-1984) and the screwball "jiggle" television of *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) and *Dukes of Hazard* (1979-1985). In this atmosphere of joyful nostalgia, comedy, and sex appeal, horror rose quickly as a counterdiscourse to the optimistic worldview offered in much of the media.

The television show *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971) brought horror to a more mainstream audience, with its merging of the soap opera and horror genres. This trend continued on in the decade within popular culture. As popular culture historian Leroy Ashby explained, during the end of the 1970s "horror was, indeed, on the upswing."[96] This upswing of horror was for the most part actualized through the discourses of popular literature and film. Bob Batchelor and Scott Stoddart, popular culture historians, cite famed horror author Stephen King as the most successful author of the entire decade of the 1980s.[97] It is indeed difficult to argue with King's success. By 1985, 50 million copies of his books were in print, by 1989, over 100 million copies were in print.[98] Much like Lovecraft, King and other authors of the early 1980s eschewed the traditional trappings of the horror genre, haunted houses, crumbling cemeteries, and musty tombs, in favor of presenting reality in conflict with the unthinkable. His novels such as *It* (1986), placed average people in the role of investigating and confronting the horrors which lurked just beyond the threshold of our reality. This presentation of the mundane juxtaposed with horror was taken up by other authors as well, Italian semiotician Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* which debuted in English in 1983 similarly presented a mundane character in conflict with

and investigating the darker aspects of reality. Similarly, film took up this conflict between the horrors lurking on the threshold of realty and the mundane existence of its viewers.

Horror films of the 1970s and early 1980s as Ashby explains, "suggested not all was well across the land."[99] Films such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976), *Alien* (1979) and others dealt with themes such as inherited guilt and the failures of rationality, much Like Lovecraft's writings. Perhaps the most obvious examples of this turn in horror films are John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) and Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) franchises. Not only did both films prove that franchises were viable at the time period, but much like the writings of Lovecraft, King, and Eco they brought horror out of the traditional spaces it had previously occupied. Both *Halloween* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* brought horror to the places their audiences lived, the suburbs. Additionally, these film franchises tended to position their protagonists in a Lovcraftian way, as investigators who are forced to confront the evils of the world. Much like Lovecraft's works, *Nightmare on Elm Street* also focused heavily on the power and significance of dreams and the slow decent into madness. Through this counter discourse of horror, authors and directors were able to create a critique of the prevailing theme of unbridled optimism present at the turn of the decade. In nearly every case of these horror discourses, systems were shown as breaking down. In *The Exorcist* and *The Name of the Rose*, the church was shown as ineffectual at dealing with corruption (both physical and spiritual), thus breaking down its power. In *Halloween* and many of King's works, madness dissolved characters into entropy. Even in *Nightmare on Elm Street*, the barriers between dreams and reality broke down, resulting in bloody chaos at the fingertips of Freddy Kruger. In each of these horror discourses, a fear of entropy was highly present. While by 1984 it was morning in Ronald Regan's America,

for horror audiences a dark night was settling across the suburbs breaking down established order in its wake and inadvertently creating a discursive space for the creation of *Call of Cthulhu.*

The two prevailing discourses of horror, the textual invoking of Lovecraft's day and the self-reflexive horror of the late 1970s and early 1980s created an environment which articulated specific fears and desires about society. Out of this environment, *Call of Cthulhu* was developed, providing audiences with ways of making sense of the fears and desires created both by it and through the discourses which generated it. In this way *Call of Cthulhu* can be seen as functioning as Burkean equipment for living for its audience, helping them to confront their real life problems. In this view, *Call of Cthulhu* and its play are functioning as literature, or as Burke would suggest discourse systems, which provide an audience with tools to confront their problems, including other discourse systems.[100] This naturally leads to the question of what are the real problems which *Call of Cthulhu* responds to?

What to do with Cthulhu?

As explained in the introduction of *Call of Cthulhu's* rulebook, "The purpose to horror roleplaying is to have a good time. Right down to the pounding hearts and sweating brows, it's part of human nature to find pleasure in being scared, as long as being scared is not for real."[101] As a game which primarily (however not exclusively) deals with the genre of horror it makes sense to look first at what sorts of fears are addressed through *Call of Cthulhu* and the way in which it invites audiences to play with those fears.

Much like the horror discourses from which it was generated, *Call of Cthulhu* has a strong emphasis on the collapse of the structures of the world into entropy. When The Great Old Ones awaken they will destroy the earth, they simply must wait for the stars to align. Their presence breaks down fundamental physical laws of time and space, such as the dreaded

Dimensional Shamblers, entities "capable of walking between the planes and worlds of the universe…" or the Outer God Daolath, whose mere presence transports matter (including its cultists) to other parts of the universe.[102] Players generate characters through random dice rolls, which represent the attributes of characters and their strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, the game system requires players to roll dice to determine success or failure of the use of skills and to determine their vary sanity, *alea*, random chance holds sway. Nowhere is this structural disintegration more present however, than in the game's theme of madness. The core rulebook devotes several sub-chapters to mental illness, many monstrous antagonists cause madness just by their vary appearance, and the rules require players to track their character's sanity score over the course of the game. Sanity and by inversion, madness, are such important elements of the game that on the official character sheet, the area for tracking a character's sanity is as large as the section for providing the character's name and demographic information, which itself includes a place to fill in any mental illness a character suffers from. Character's expected descent into madness constitutes then one of the most obvious ways in which *Call of Cthulhu* articulates a fear of entropy.

Call of Cthulhu resolves this discourse through the creation of a very structured universe. Several pages are devoted to a comprehensive timeline detailing the rise of The Great Old Ones and the important events (both terrestrial and alien) from 1.8 billion years before present to 2,500 B.C.E. An entire chapter details the deities and monsters of the diegetic universe of the game, complete with descriptions, images, classifications of types of deities, attributes, goals and tactics, and the all-important number of hit points.[103] Skills and abilities are categorized into specific systems, from knowledge of accounting to aptitude with sub-machine guns. When dice must be rolled, it is specific varieties, producing a set variance. Sanity is a descent into bedlam

for characters; however it is one which can be, and if following the rules, must be actively managed. Furthermore, the rules provide ways of slowing, stopping, and counteracting this descent into entropic madness, by allowing players to purchase more sanity over the course of play by trading in their experience points.[104] In every way, the rules of the game function to provide players with a highly systematized world, which they can then, knowing the system, manipulate to their own advantage.

This presentation of a highly systemized diegetic game world functions to resolve the discourse of discord present in *Call of Cthulhu* and other texts which helped create the environment out of which it arose. Symbolically, the complex system of structured rules and categorized information functions as equipment for living for players by presenting them with ways of controlling the world with which they chose to engage. Furthermore, this symbolic control is reinforced through the medium of *Call of Cthulhu* itself, the TRPG. During the course of the game's play, players control their characters' actions, directing the course of the narrative throughout the game, creating a double level of control, both of the narrative as well as the rules system. Through the articulation of this discourse of control, *Call of Cthulhu* functions as a medicine for the fear of structural breakdown and entropy, providing audiences, the players, with a set of symbolic tools for dealing with these fears. This is not to imply that individuals explicitly play *Call of Cthulhu* because they fear a breakdown of established social institutions, but rather that by allowing players symbolic control of a highly structured diegetic universe, *Call of Cthulhu* provides a symbolic resolution and means of managing those discursive fears.

It is important to note that this articulation of a discourse of control is not the only way in which *Call of Cthulhu* likely serves as symbolic equipment for living. It is however the most obvious and because of the systemic nature, likely one of the most reproduced across individual

game sessions and player groups. Due to the high variability and customization of games to fit individual and group needs, it is difficult to extract the other possible ways in which *Call of Cthulhu* could produce and alleviate its player's fears and desires. A game campaign (series of interconnected stories) set in the 1920s dealing heavily with the criminal trade of bootleg liquor and only occasionally drawing into the supernatural is likely to serve a very different function than a campaign set in the present day featuring military characters investigating ancient cultic ruins around the globe. Nevertheless, both games are likely to use the game system of *Call of Cthulhu* as well as engage with its highly categorized and structured presentation of the world and its occult horrors, and in this way provide their players with a symbolic way of managing their discursively constructed fears. Despite its utility, *Call of Cthulhu* does not speak to every type of fear. This absence allowed room for the creation of one of the most revolutionary TRPGS, *Vampire: The Masquerade*.

The Vampire's Resurrection

With its first printing in 1991, *Vampire: the Masquerade* took the TRPG community by storm, winning the Origin's award for best new role-playing game for that year and selling so well that it warranted a second edition to be published just a year later in 1992. Whereas *Call of Cthulhu* was partially a product of the counter discourse to the optimistic tone developed in the transition to the early 1980s, *Vampire: the Masquerade* is equally a product of the horror and political discourses of the late 1980s and early 1990s. By this time, franchises such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* had lost their shock and monstrous characters like Freddy Kruger had become something to lampoon in popular culture.[105] In this environment a new type of horror began to rise from its coffin in the media landscape: one of vampires and blood.

During the mid-1980s and continuing, more people read about vampires than ever before, and as cultural historian David J. Skal importantly notes, "for the first time, they were identifying with them positively."[106] A short review of horror literature of the time period clearly shows the vampire was a creature on the mind of many Americans, with novels such as Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and *The Queen of the Dammed* (1988), Chelsea Quinn Yarbo's *A Flame of Byzantium* (1988), S. P. Somtow's *Vampire Junction* (1984), Ray Garton's *Live Girls* (1987), Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* (1992), Joh Steakley's *Vampires* (1990), Nancy Baker's *Blood and Chrysanthemums* (1994), and Barbara Hambly's *Those who Hunt the Night* (1988) gracing bookshelves across the country. Of course vampires were not solely relegated to the pages of popular literature, they also had a strong presence on the silver screen. Joel Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* (1987), Fred Dekker's *The Monster Squad* (1987), Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark* (1987), Fran Rubel Kuzui's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992), and perhaps the most well-known of the era, Neil Jordan's *Interview with a Vampire* (1991), all appeared on the silver screen, expanding the cultural preoccupation with vampires. Additionally, the 1931 *Dracula* was re-released in theaters in 1991 as part of a joint promotional venture with Miller Beer. Even film characters who were not vampires were still portrayed as having eerily similar attributes. For example Jonathan Demme's Academy Award sweeping *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) starred the cannibal character Hannibal Lecter, who like Dracula and other vampires, had a strong taste for human blood. Vampires also appeared on television, with *Count Duckula* running from 1988 to 1993 and vampires appearing in several episodes of *Tales from the Crypt* (1989-1996).

Many of these representations worked to reframe vampires in a more sympathetic, powerful, and modern light. Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* presented vampires not as a cloaked

eastern European aristocracy but as attractive, young, Californian bikers and surfers. These lost boys, with their leather jackets, underground palace, and beautiful female hanger-on clearly present a different picture from the traditional image of the vampire embodied by Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931), equal parts 1950s juvenile delinquent, punk rocker and goth. The lost boys fear nothing, are able to go where they please, and do whatever they want. The Vampires of *The Lost Boys* are only restricted in their agency by their condition of being vampires and only once by an older more authoritative vampire father figure. Similarly, Somtow's *Vampire Junction* intertwined the undead and the underground rock music scene which would eventually help create the "goth" music genre. Inspired by both the music videos of MTV and the gore of splatterpunk films of the 1980s, Somtow's novel featured quickly changing scenes of musical performances and a high quantity of gore. Somtow's protagonist, a 2,000 year old vampire posing as a 12 year old rock musician is a relatively unrestricted agent, clearly powerful in whatever domains he chooses. Perhaps one of the most important transformations of the vampire came from novelist Anne Rice and the films based on her series. As Skal explains, "Rice spins a seductive, evocative myth of gender transcendence among the living dead, consciously seeking a gay resonance."[107] Rice's characters of Louis, Lestat and Armand seek out male companionship throughout their unlife, coming to terms with both their unholy thirst for human blood and their transgressive sexual desires. Surrounding vampires with discourses of underground rock music, youthful rebellion, and most importantly overt, often queer, sexual liberation, all themes which show up rather clearly in *Vampire: the Masquerade* mediated representations of the vampire worked to create a distinctly new, distinctly human, breed of monster.

Finally, it is important to note that at this time the vampire also entered into political discourse, especially in the resurgent political right, as a means of demonization. Horror

metaphors have long found a home in political discourse, with budgets, taxes, and entitlement programs needing to be "slashed", "cut", and "drained" in order to preserve our way of life. With the economic downturn of the early 1990s, these horror metaphors worked their way in to businesses as well, with jobs being "cut" and "slashed" due to the recession. While not specifically part of the vampire in popular culture, the use of these metaphors and the economic conditions which created a space for them is a discourse the vampire responds to, although not the only one.

Homophobic discourses utilized the vampire metaphorically to condemn members of the GLBT community. The metaphor functioned by comparing the inability of gay and lesbian couples to produce offspring and therefore the need to corrupt others into their lifestyle to the inability of vampire to procreate and need to kill to make more vampires. Explained by Anita Bryant, a strong advocate against gay rights through the 1970s and 1990s, in a 1977 *TIME Magazine* article, "the male homosexual eats another man's sperm. Sperm is the most concentrated form of blood. The homosexual is eating life."[108] Interestingly, the use of this metaphor functioned on another level, connecting the then perceived homosexual disease of AIDS with the blood swapping and feeding rituals of the undead. Explaining this connection between the AIDS epidemic and the connection to the vampire, thanatologist Robert Kasenbaum claims, AIDS "has a way of speaking directly to powerful fantasies that usually remain under firm control and constraint."[109] He further explained with regard to these AIDS induced fantasies, "The vampire image may, may now have taken the all too palpable form of an unholy, sex-related, blood stealing catastrophe."[110] In this way, the new representations of vampires in popular culture were tied together by their presentation of anxieties about sexuality, rebellion, and blood borne diseases.

The Living Dead as Equipment for Living

Called into existence by these discourses which served to popularize, humanize, and demonize the vampire, *Vampire: the Masquerade* works to resolve these underlying anxieties by serving as symbolic equipment for living for its players. Responding to the changing figure of the vampire in popular culture, *Vampire: the Masquerade* provided players with a symbolic way of dealing with and transcending their discursively constructed fears, especially those fears of AIDS and diminishing personal agency. This is not to say that individuals played *Vampire: the Masquerade* because of specific fears regarding AIDS and a lack of agency, but for these with those fears, the game provides ample equipment for the resolution of those fears.

As a game where players play vampires, *Vampire: the Masquerade* obviously deals heavily with the subject of blood. The importance of blood in the game can be seen in the myriad ways in which it is used in the development of the setting of the game. Vampire characters must drink blood to survive, as explained in the 20th anniversary edition of *Vampire: the Masquerade*, "to sustain its artificial immortality, the vampire must periodically consume blood, preferably human blood. Some penitent vampires eke out an existence from animal blood, and some ancient vampires must hunt and kill others of their kind to nourish themselves, but most vampires consume the blood of humanity. *Our* blood."[111] Additionally, blood takes a new moniker within the gothic culture of the vampires of the World of Darkness game setting in *Vampire: the Masquerade*, vampires refer to blood as "*vitae*", drawing explicitly on the Latin word for life. Blood also functions to help a vampire reproduce, or in the sobriquet of *Vampire: the Masquerade*, embrace a childe. As explained in the core rulebook, blood is vitally important to the task of continuing a vampires literal bloodline, "the embrace is similar to normal vampiric feeding as the vampire drains her chosen prey of blood. However, on complete exsanguination,

the vampire returns a bit of her own immortal blood to the drained mortal. Only a tiny bit – a drop or two – is necessary to turn the mortal into a new vampire."[112] The blood a mortal receives from a vampire not only allows them to transcend death, but also determines the abilities and curses as a vampire.

In *Vampire: the Masquerade*, vampires are divided by clans, each with unique powers and weaknesses. A clan is bound only by one thing, their inherited blood from their quasi-mythical clan founder. For example within the narrative frame of the game, the vampire clan Ventrue was founded by an eponymous vampire who had specific feeding restriction (he was only able to feed from specific mortals due to a curse from the biblical Caine) and had specific vampiric powers, including the ability to dominate the minds of others. Every vampire created in his line has some degree of feeding restrictions and the option to learn the ability to dominate, something only a vampire of Ventru's blood may learn. Mechanically, within the game frame, this is represented by players choosing a clan for their character and clans having in game restrictions on which powers may be purchased by the player.

Interestingly, in *Vampire: the Masquerade*, blood does not just determine the powers of a vampire, but also fuels them. Most supernatural vampire abilities require the expenditure of a "point" of blood, a nebulas unit estimated at roughly a liter. Furthermore, Vampires may amplify normal attributes supernaturally, by forcing blood into their muscles for added strength, or into their skin for added stamina and durability. Lastly, blood holds an ultimate power over vampires through the properties of the blood bond. By feeding another (mortal, vampire, animal) their blood three times, a vampire can induce a state where the other is hopelessly in love with the blood donor. This blood bond strips an individual in the narrative frame of the game of their

agency, making them a thrall to the vampire who controls the blood they have become addicted to.

It is obvious that blood and power are inexorably linked in *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Blood creates, dictates, and in some cases controls the un-lives of the characters in the game. Ironically, with all of their blood based powers and control, vampires within the narrative and game frames are still somewhat vulnerable to blood borne diseases such as AIDS. As explained in the core rulebook, "any illness that can be transmitted by the blood is a potential problem for vampires, because they can carry the illness and transmit it from victim to victim. Indeed, several [vampires] have become active carriers for HIV."[113] The section goes on to explain that some vampires have been put to a final death for endangering the mortal herd by spreading such virulent infections, while also acknowledging that it can be cured in a vampire host (albeit in a painful magical ritual). While AIDS is only mentioned occasionally throughout the core rules of the game, it is presented as a looming specter which continually threatens the night-to-night existence of vampire characters, just as it threatens the real existence of thousands of Americans every day.

By appropriating blood as both a symbol of power and as a way of dealing with the threat of AIDS, *Vampire: the Masquerade* offers players with material to symbolically resolve their discursively constructed fears. The vampire symbolically represents the death caused by loss of work and power during the recession of the early 1990s as well as the death brought on by the epidemic of AIDS. However, by having supernatural power (as well as political, since vampires in the narrative frame run a worldwide global conspiracy) and the ability to cure AIDS, vampires transcend these fears. As Skal explains, this utilization of the vampire was produced in a specific time, "in the early sixties, children turned instinctively to the resurrection figures of Dracula and

Frankenstein as protective amulets during the death-looming days of the Cold War. In the age of AIDS , the vampire myth offers a similar strategy to adults (both gay and straight) for processing the widespread, inescapable reality of death at an early age . . . vampirism, in other words, was equated literally with power, resurrection, and beneficial energy, an admixture of Halloween and Easter."[114] By allowing players to literally take on the roles of these powerful transcendent figures of death, *Vampire: the Masquerade* provided players with a symbolic coping mechanism for these fears. The medium of the TRPG is also important to consider with this symbolic function of the game. The act of playing a character requires an individual to transcend their own bodily lived experiences and empathize with those of another. This transcendence from player to character mirrors the transcendent nature of the narrative vampires' ability to transcend the loss of agency caused by death. By invoking the persona and image of the vampire, specifically, the vampires constructed out of the pastiche of the late 1980s and early 1990s in *Vampire: the Masquerade*, players were developing systems of symbolic thought to resolve the fears of agency loss and early death which were so prominent in the media discourses of its time.

CHAPTER THREE:

TAKING PLACE AND MAKING SPACE

I have explored the streets and warehouse districts of Rio de Janeiro, nearly burning the city to the ground in the process. I have traveled the dusty back alleys of ancient Memphis, looking for those who would do harm to the Followers of Set. I have even stopped a pack of cybernetic werewolves from destroying Zurich, with a little aid from a ghost-pirate armada. Although these events did not occur in actuality, each transpired within the complex structure of the narrative and social frameworks of individual sessions of *Vampire: the Masquerade*, campaigns of which I played from 2006 to 2008.[115] Despite the fact that these events lacked a phenomenological basis in the physical world, I nonetheless carry them with me as distinct memories that inform my interaction with lived reality. While I will never burn down Rio de Janeiro or man a ghost-pirate-ship in Zurich, it is possible that I will visit these real-world locations. It is sensible to suggest that, should I ever travel to one of these cities in the future, my experiences with the spaces of each locale will be informed, at least partially, by my earlier experiences with its in-game counterpart. Should I then ever decide to revisit these locations within a tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) narrative, it is also likely that my experiences with the diegetic version of the cities will be re-informed by my actual experiences. In such a way, there is a discursive relationship between these two spaces, allowing both the fiction and reality to co-construct one another. This discursive relationship is ultimately fluid, with the symbolic constructions of spaces changing the reception of their material reality, and the material reality in turn informing the previously mentioned symbolic constructions of space.

In this chapter, I will explore this discursive relationship between the fictive and real versions of space in both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Both games present

diegetic universes that are dark reflections of our own world. While undoubtedly it would be interesting and perhaps illuminating to explore how each game recreates the entire planet, such an undertaking could not be achieved successfully within a single chapter. Instead, I will narrow my focus to the question of how each of these games, through their sourcebooks, creates a diegetic version of New York City. What this approach may lack in breadth, it will hopefully make up for in depth. Ideally, using the city of New York as a case study to explain how the games structure and create diegetic versions of real-world spaces and places and how this may inform interaction with said spaces and places will offer the reader a deeper understanding of the discursive relationship between reality and the TRPG. Throughout this chapter I will use the term "ludic New York" to refer to the simulacra of the city created through the discourse of TRPGs, be it in the course of play or published in TRPG books. In contrast I will use the term "real New York" to refer to the city located at 40° 45' 21" north latitude 73° 59' 11" west longitude latitude and longitude and home to, at this time approximately 8.245 million individuals. The use of these terms is not meant to imply that the ludic New York City is un-real nor that the real New York is never ludic, but instead to provide a useful way of creating a distinction between the two cities. As a city which is constantly being written and re-written in national and international media, New York City provides a unique combination of flexibility and constraint for both game designers and players when writing the city in TRPGs. As New York City itself has become a symbol worldwide, with many varied meanings it seems and obvious choice of locale when analyzing the construction of space and place in TRPGs. Additionally, the choice of New York City as a case study is strategic. Both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* produced sourcebooks for the city within four years of one another, developing out of relatively similar historical milieus, which as shown in the previous chapter

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can influence the creation of a text. Nevertheless, New York is a potent symbol to allow for a multitude of potential representations of the city. Speaking to this, the *Vampire: the Masquerade* sourcebook for New York, *New York By Night* explains:

> It's impossible to hear the words 'New York City' and not have a connotation immediately come to mind. What's more, it's almost impossible to have two people's connotations coincide – to one, New York is a den of filth, to another it's a cradle of culture. Yet a third, it's a financial wonderland while a forth it's a hive of tenements and poverty. It's Gotham, the Big Apple, the gateway to America and the city that never sleeps. It's an icon of hope and failure, a city in which it costs 2,000 dollars to rent an apartment, and yet 4,000,000 of the city's residents don't make that much in a month. It's Giuliani reform and Koch hell. It's the Son of Sam and the subway series. It's all of that, and then some, and none at all.[116]

This mutable identity of the metropolis allows for examining the various similarities and differences in the ways both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* construct their fictive versions of the city.

New York City: Spaces and Places

An iconic passage of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* begins with Certeau poetically describing a descent from the World Trade Center, moving from the godlike view of the city back to the street level, "the dark space where crowds move back and forth."[117] For Certeau, these two vantage points offer radically different perspectives for understanding and creating New York City, both of which can be found in the TRPG experience offered by *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. The first, an Icarian view, positioned in the idolized space of the renaissance painter, shows New York as "a 'theoretical' (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices."[118] In contrast, the view of the street, the view of the crowds who dwell down below the towers of the city is limited in scope but more engaged, "The practitioners of the city …

follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read."[119] This differentiation of perspectives serves two functions. First, it demonstrates the conceptual difference between two vitally important terms for Certeau. The first, *place*, is a location of the proper, analogous to strategic activity, represented by the simulacrum view of the city from the World Trade Center. The second, *space*, a tactical appropriation of place embodied in the movements of the bustling crowds of New York. Additionally, this binary initiates Certeau's argument that walking through a place, creating a space, is an activity analogous to speech and communication in general. Just as speakers carve out of the structures of language and culture a space for themselves, walkers in a city utilize the strategic place in tactical ways, producing their own ephemeral and fleeting texts of the city. An analog of this activity can also be found in the play of TRPGs whose scenarios are set within cities.

While Certeau's walkers write the city with their footfalls on the sidewalks and alleyways, TRPG designers write the city with keystrokes and image placements in page layout programs. Similarly, TRPG players and game masters write their own versions of the city through the choices they make in the course of play, giving narrative life to some areas and ignoring others. In each case a strategy or place invites the creation of a tactical response, and in turn the creation of a new strategy, which in turn invites the creation of another tactical response. The ebbs and flows of individual's foot traffic in New York City create a structured pattern, which is noted and either simulated or re-imagined by the game designers, who then offer game structures to players to negotiate. The simulacra experience of New York offers game designers and to some extent TRPG players an opportunity for space-making. The city, as Certeau explains, "like a proper name, thus provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties."[120] The physical

spatial order of the city reduces the possible ways of interacting with and in it (walls, fences, open areas, etc.). It is worth noting there that this space (and place as well) is always created in retrospect. The textual city that walkers and game designers write is always in some degree of flux, an unstable entity constantly being re-written. As Brian Massumi explains in *Parables for the Virtual*, this reshaping is a common and necessary practice. As he states, "when we think of space as 'extensive,' as being measurable, divisible, and composed of points plotting possible positions that objects may occupy, we are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movements."[121] The writing of the city, which requires the mental stopping of time, happens in the liminal moment of the present, the ephemeral set of relations between the co-constructing past and future. That both walkers and game designers must mentally stop the world to write it helps to highlight the artificial relationship both have with the construct of the spaces of New York. Just as walkers in retrospect enunciate these spaces by walking through some and ignoring others, the game designer, *ex post facto*, enunciates and displaces others through their literal enunciation in the sourcebook.

This enunciatory skipping from space to space by game designers is an activity analogous to the rhetorical device of asyndeton, the suppression or skipping of linking words within or between sentences. When creating their simulation of New York, designers necessarily engage in spatial asyndeton, skipping from borough to borough in both *New York By Night* and *Secrets of New York* (two compendiums of setting information, published in 2001 and 2005, respectively), with nothing but page breaks between them. This spatial asyndeton collapses the spaces between the city's five boroughs while eliminating the places within them. As Certeau might say, game designers practice "the ellipsis of conjunctive *loci*."[122] This asyndeton is necessary because the city sourcebooks are simulations of the city. In order to simulate the city without asyndeton, the

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sourcebooks would need to be the size and shape of the city of New York, no longer representing the city but cloning it. Similarly, this invites players of the game to engage in asyndeton in the course of play, eliminating the steps and travels of characters, skipping from location to location with only brief explanations of how the characters move from space to space.[123] The city sourcebooks of *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night*, and by invitation, play of both games, collapse New York city into itself, reducing spatial limitations and leaving only select portions of the text of the city for players to interact with.

In addition to asyndeton, walkers, designers, and players also engage in synecdoche. Synecdoche, the substitution of a whole with its part, works in conjunction with asyndeton. For example, asyndeton will reduce Liberty Island to nothing but the Statue of Liberty and synecdoche will expand the statue to be taken as all of New York. Both *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* display parts as representative of the whole throughout their coverage of New York. In *Secrets of New York,* for example the inhuman living conditions of the city's slums in the 1920s is reduced to a chart which offers percentile chances for violence to happen when characters visit the tenement districts. Each visit offers a chance of: nothing happening (79%), "hoodlums" attacking the characters (4%), a gang attacking the characters (4%), a mugging (3%), characters being exposed to a contagious disease (2%), and a fire (4%).[124] In this case, the events of the tenements have come to stand in for the entirety of tenement life, expanding the results of the economic repression of the 1920s working class to represent the entirety of the totality of living in a tenement. Interestingly, this synecdoche of violence/danger as tenement life spatially binds tenements as a place outside of the city proper, one which should not be visited. At best, players can hope for nothing of note to happen when visiting the tenements. At worst,

their characters and all of the working-class residents could die in a conflagration caused, in the game frame, by the player's decision to have their characters visit the tenements.

By engaging in synecdoche, game designers are paradoxically both expanding and contracting the text of New York. The part which replaces the whole, such as the violence/danger of tenements replacing the quotidian reality of life in such venues, is expanded to encompass the entirety of whole. As Certeau explains, "synecdoche expands a spatial element in order to make it play a role of a 'more' (a totality) and takes its place."[125] At the same time, the totality of tenement life is shrunk down (perhaps unfairly) into one of its more unfortunate aspects, in this case the danger that this particular locale poses to outsiders. This simultaneous shrinking and swelling allows game designers and players to focus on those aspects of the ciy-as-text that they find the most compelling. In conjunction with the asyndeton of the city space, New York is "transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands."[126] As simulacra of the "authentic" New York, the city sourcebooks and the play they invite require these rhetorical maneuvers as it would be impossible to reproduce New York in its entirety in the medium of the sourcebooks and the performed experience of game play.

Leisure, Simulacrum, Tourism, and Myth

If one accepts the conventional (or colloquial) wisdom that game designers, through their writing process, interact with the "real" New York, then the city sourcebooks they produce are simulations of the real, just as a photograph is a simulation of the object it attempts to capture. These sourcebooks for the city then invite players to create their own second-order simulation, a simulacrum of the city, through the sourcebooks' invocation via play. This, however, is not the

only perspective which can be taken on the semiotic relationship between the city, its sourcebooks, and the reconstruction through play.

Some theorists have argued that the game designers, or anyone else, cannot interact with the "authentic" New York, but instead interact with signifiers of the city.[127] As Certeau notes the view of New York, from the Icarian vantage point of the World Trade Center constructs the city as a visual simulacrum.[128] Perhaps more clearly, Dean MacCannell in *The Tourist: A New Theory for the Leisure Class* notes, "Sightseers do not, in any empirical sense, *see* San Francisco."[129] Instead, MacCannell argues, sightseers (and game designers as well) interact with a complex assemblage of symbolic markers, such as Fisherman's Wharf, the Golden Gate Bridge, Chinatown, and cable cars, all of which represent parts of San Francisco.[130] Together, this assemblage of interdependent parts creates the symbolic San Francisco for a sightseer, an activity similar to Certeua's walker's use of synecdoche.

Cities, in this perspective, are experienced not as "authentic" objects, but already as signifiers. Individuals experience the city already as a simulation; TRPG sourcebooks then are a simulacrum which invites the creation of its own simulacrum. Regardless of whether the city can be experienced authentically or is already a collection of simulacra, the result is that TRPG city sourcebooks such as *Call of Cthulhu: Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* structure an invitation to players to create their own simulacra of New York. Interestingly, of the archetypes of symbolic form, these simulacra can be seen to function in a manner strikingly similar to the activity of tourism.

MacCannell argues that tourism and sightseeing are functionally activities that engage with locations as simulacra. As previously mentioned, MacCannell argues that sightseers are unable to experience a city or tourist sight as an authentic totality; instead, they must interact

with the culturally created assemblages of the city, produced through asyndeton and synecdoche's simultaneous shrinking, growing, and dividing of the city. MacCannell goes on to argue that these interdependent parts of the city function as signs. Importantly, MacCannell notes that what these signs' sightseers seek out are usually themselves mediated by what he terms markers, "information about a sight, including that found in travel books, museum guides, stories told by person who have visited it, art history texts and lectures, 'dissertations' and so forth."[131] This leads to the classification between on-sight and off-sight markers (a distinction of physical proximity of the marker to the sight), and importantly the acceptance that many sign sights are also markers for themselves, such as the Rosetta Stone, totem poles, and the "Cleopatra's Needle" obelisks in New York, London, and Paris.[132]

As players in a TRPG explore and co-create the narratively produced cityscape their characters inhabit, they are engaging with a series of signs which are also markers. Players who have their characters visit the Statue of Liberty are both interacting with a simulacrum of the space and interacting with (as well as co-producing) a marker that contains information about the sight. In much the same way, TRPG city sourcebooks obviously both represent the different interdependent signifiers of the city, but also provide information about those signifiers. For example, in *New York By Night*, the presentation of the Garbbaldi-Meucci Museum both represents the museum and functions as a marker, providing information about it. Linguistically, the book creates a simulacrum of the museum as the printed words on the page and their placement in the section devoted to Staten Island have no resemblance to that which they signify, a two-story wooden building. In addition, this simulacrum marks the real museum, presenting information, such as "this museum has been converted from the house of Antonio Meucci (who originally invented the telephone, prior to Alexander Graham Bell) into a museum" that informs

visits both real and ludic to the space.[133] Interestingly, this marker information is not just limited to marking the "real" Gabbaldi-Meucci Museum, as *New York By Night* also includes information pertaining to the diegetic universe of *Vampire: the Masquerade*, explaining for example that the vampiric sect known as the "anarchs" have taken control of the building. Mixing both real world marking and ludic marking *New York By Night* explains, "the museum is a popular place for the more intellectual anarchs to discuss their philosophies and for the iconoclastic anarchs to plan their next reign of terror. The museum is open only until five from Tuesday through Sunday, so by the time it's dark, the anarchs usually have the run of the place, through a covert agreement made with the curator."[134]

The mixing of real world-marking (the information regarding the museums founding and its hours of operation) with the ludic world-marking (that the museum is a secret haven for violent vampiric anarchists) displays the complex way in which the city sourcebooks function concurrently as both off-sight and on-sight markers. By providing information reflecting the real Gabbaldi-Meucci museum, such as its location on Staten Island, the inventions of the former property owner, and the hours of operation, *New York By Night* informs readers and potential tourists (both phenomenological and ludic) about the space. This presentation is similar to more conventional off-sight markers, such as travel brochures and the museum website. At the same time, by marking the diegetic universe of the game, *New York By Night* informs the game frame diegetic place, Gabbaldi-Meucci museum, in much the same way that a tourist may be informed on sight by a tour guide or an individual speaking about the rumors they have heard about the location. Since *New York By Night* presents this information as coming from an individual vampire writing about the city (Callebros, a member of clan Nosferatu) the information is provided within the narrative universe of *Vampire: the Masquerade* and is effectively then on-

sight. By providing both on and off-sight marking, *New York By Night* bridges the gap between the phenomenological sights and their simulacral representations.

Providing players with self-marking sights, *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* encourage players to go on ludic tours of the city of New York. Both MacCannell and Certeau have written about the function of travel as going beyond leisure. MacCannell argues that travel, in its modern incarnations, is *alienated leisure*. As much of modern tourism involves tourists engaging with the workplaces of others, visiting breweries, courtrooms, stock exchanges, etc., this leisure is alienating "because such visits represent a perversion of the aim of leisure: they are a return to the work place."[135] Furthermore, this alienation speaks to larger issues of modern life. MacCannell suggests that because individuals are alienated by the progress of inauthenticity in modern life, they seek authenticity and meaning in the work, culture, and times of the other, in other words, "reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles."[136] The forms of play invited by city sourcebooks like *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* clearly speak in some ways to this desire for authenticity and alienated leisure. By their very nature, TRPGs allow players to seek out the authentic in ways mundane travel cannot. As a fictional game, players are not bound by the same rules that non-ludic tourists are, being able to travel to both "real" and fictive loci. Their searches for the authentic can have them encounter cultures which have not existed for years or have never existed at all (such as the anarchist vampires running the fictive Gabbaldi-Meucci museum in *Vampire: the Masquerade*). Even the act of making a character to play in a TRPG is a call to the authentic, as once a player has created a character; he or she is the only person who can faithfully play (or "perform") that character in accordance socially contract of the game.[137] At the same time, playing a TRPG is a form of alienated leisure. As all of the action of a game takes

place in discourse and the imaginations of players, players are physically alienated from the

activity. Furthermore, as has already been addressed, TRPGs encourage players to create

simulacra of the "real" (that which is ostensibly "authentic," but which is no less a compendium

of similuations). Despite the media hype of the late 1980s and early 1990s that suggested

otherwise, it is unlikely that a player will confuse the simulacra created in the course of play of a

TRPG with its phenomenological counterpart. Again, this maps onto tourist and sightseeing

activities.

As Umberto Eco, Jean Baudrillard and MacCannell have suggested, tourists seek out

simulacra for specific purposes. Both Eco and Baudrillard examine Disneyland as one such

location, one that they refer to as a simulacrum of the simulation that is the United States. Both

theorists argue that Disneyland serves as an exemplar of *hyperreality*. Eco suggests that tourists

enjoy Disneyland because it offers visitors the idea that human ingenuity and technology can

"give us more reality than nature can."[138] The simulacra creation of Disneyland, for Eco, can be

thought of as a celebration of the human ability to stop time and recreate it retrospectively in

better ways, functioning as a monument to anthropocentrism. In opposition to this, Baudrillard

argues that Disneyland has appeal not because it can offer more realism than reality, but because

it contrasts so distinctly with reality. Disneyland exists as a simulacrum according to Baudrillard,

to prove to visitors that the "real" must be elsewhere: "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in

order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that

surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of

simulation."[139] This view of simulacra tourist attractions as existing to enhance the authenticity

of reality is mirrored in MacCannell's analysis of "tacky" or "pseudo" attractions. Describing a

Bible-themed amusement park which comes complete with a larger-than-life fiberglass Christ,

MacCannell notes that "this type of attraction in fact functions to enhance the supposed authenticity of places such as the Statue of Liberty or the Liberty Bell. Modern society institutionalizes these authentic attractions and modern life takes on qualities of reality thereby."[140] For MacCannell, tourism is necessarily an act of differentiation, and the recognition of tourist sights that acknowledge their artificiality creates an idea of the authentic, thus enhancing the social worth of the authentic attraction. In this view, when players utilize either *Secrets of New York* or *New York By Night*, by engaging with a ludic city of New York, they enhance the supposed authenticity of the "real-world" New York. As MacCannell explains, this happens because "the act of communion between tourist and attraction is less important than the *image* or the *idea* of society that the collective act generates."[141] Essentially, the ludic creation of space allows for the development of a hierarchy of authenticity, with the ludic New York serving to prove the authenticity of the phenomenological version of the city.

MacCannell argues that, "*sightseeing is a ritual performed to the differentiations of society*. Sightseeing is a kind of collective striving for transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience."[142] Sightseers, who engage in alienated leisure, enunciating by their presence the workplace of others, seek to give meaning to the act of labor by incorporating the labor of others into their own experience. Similarly, the visiting of attractions which acknowledge their own artificiality, either implicitly (such as Disneyland or the Bible-theme-park) or explicitly (such as the ludic sights visited by *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* players) allow for the creation of a hierarchy of sights and thus enhance the authenticity of institutionalized sights which hide their simulacra nature (such as the Liberty Bell and the Statue of Liberty).

Certeau offers another possible explanation for the activity of tourism in general. For the French theorist, walking, and to differing extents all forms of travel, are substitutes "for the legends that used to open up space to something different."[143] Implicitly describing the retrospective creation of space through the mental stopping of time described by Massumi, Certeau argues that travel produces *myth*.[144] Myth here is described as "a fragmented discourse which is articulated on the heterogeneous practices of a society and which also articulates them symbolically."[145] The writing of myth here serves the function of not only creating space from place but also offering a way to *change* the place. As Certeau explains, "the 'meaning' ('*sens*') of scriptural play, the production of a system, a space of formalization, refers to the reality from which it has been distinguished *in order to change it*."[146] From this position, Eco and Baudrillard's hyperreal Disneyland and MacCannell's tacky Bible-theme-park function not just as signifiers about reality, but as tactics for changing it. A giant fiberglass Christ no longer just enhances the authenticity of the Statue of Liberty, it also critiques it, reshaping the possible forms it could take. The simulacra constructions of New York by *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* then both enhance and critique the structural place of New York. They offer alternative ways of retroactively reconstructing the city, of ways for the city to "be." Since these are simulacra, they make the real New York more authentic. Yet, at the same time, they offer choices to the current structure of New York. In this way, ludic travel in a TRPG is a substitute for real world travel, which in turn is a substitute for mythmaking.

As texts that offer alternatives for the reconstruction of the world, *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* function in a manner similar to how MacCannell sees natural history museums functioning. Implicitly describing the now-ubiquitous Milwaukee Style, an exhibition mode invented by taxidermist Carl Akeley in 1890, MacCannell argues that natural history

museums are dominated by a structure of re-presentation.[147] This re-presentation, "an arrangement of objects in a reconstruction of a total situation," both simulates and provides a (often implicit) critique of what reality could be.[148] As ludic tourist sights analogous to natural history museums, *Secrets of New York* and *New York By Night* offer their tourists scenarios for engaging with their construction of New York. These scenarios inform the alternative realities offered by both texts, just as visiting the scenarios that natural history museums offer informs the argument about reality they construct. In the last two sections of this chapter I will turn to the ways in which both sourcebooks invite players to engage with them and the alternatives to the real world New York City that they offer.

Call of Cthulhu: Secrets of New York

One of the more utilitarian aspects of TRPG city sourcebooks is that many include pre-made scenarios for gamemasters to use with their players, essentially offering an example of how that material might be used. *Secrets of New York* provides two such scenarios, "The Half Moon" and "Transgression." Both "The Half Moon" and "Transgression" feature a series of locations, non-player characters (NPCs), clue handouts, and events to lead players through a somewhat scripted adventure. In "The Half Moon," players investigate the disappearance of a reporter and in the process uncover an ancient cult, stop a monster, save a Harlem street-cleaner, and stop an immortal billionaire. In "Transgression," players attempt to stop a mad physicist from opening a portal to an alien world and potentially putting the entire planet at risk. Each scenario has locations and characters meant to be specific to New York City as presented by *Secrets of New York*, implying the stories could not be set in another location. Interestingly, both of these

adventure scenarios depict New York as a place where individuals must, for the sake of the world and their sanity, perform two actions: *travel* and *question authority*.

Both "The Half Moon" and "Transgression" are dominated by travel. The opening passage of "The Half Moon" starts the players' characters, already in transit, on "a slow elevator ride to the eleventh floor of the New York *Weekly Messenger* brings investigators to the editorial office."[149] From this point, the players are given a series of locations across the city for them to investigate, including the missing reporter's apartment in Brooklyn Heights, an antiquarian's office in the Whitehall District, a tenement and a dance club both in Harlem, and the New York Public Library and Hall of Records in downtown Manhattan.[150] From there players gain more clues leading them to a mansion in Brooklyn and an underground secret laboratory in Yorkville. Even the NPCs are well-traveled, with the villain having emigrated from Amsterdam in 1609 and the helpful conjure-man Dr. Byron Fisher having studied at Oxford before returning to the United States and starting his business in Harlem.[151] The freedom of quick and easy travel and, more importantly, the knowledge that one can gain from travel are implicitly highlighted throughout the adventure, with New York being a place which allows for this beneficial travel.

The scenario entitled "Transgression" is equally dominated by the concept of travel, albeit in a very different way. The scenario's plot calls on the characters to stop a physicist from constructing and testing a device which opens portals to other planets and possibly dimensions. Early in the scenario, the device is described by its inventor as "revolutionizing transportation the way the telegraph revolutionized communication."[152] In contrast to "The Half Moon," where travel is presented as the saving grace of the kidnapped street cleaner, travel in "Transgression" is offered as a danger to the players and the city. Not only is the hellgate likely to either open planet Earth to an alien invasion or burn down a large section of the Gashouse district of lower

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Manhattan (a matter left up to the gamemaster to decide), but the Gashouse district is itself presented as a location where players and gamemasters are encouraged to present as sharply contrasting with other parts of the city.[153]

What is evident in both of these scenarios is that New York is constructed as a place of motion. "The Half Moon" and "Transgression" urge the player's characters within the game and narrative frame to move about the city. In the processes, players rhetorically engage with asyndeton and synecdoche, shrinking and expanding their retroactively constructed ludic New York to allow for the carving out of spaces for themselves. Just as the players go on a ludic sightseeing trip through the city, their characters must go on a frantic journey from one end the metropolis to the other. This simultaneous activity of leisure on the part of the players and work on the part of their characters effectively demonstrates MacCannell's concept of alienated leisure. While player's relax and enjoy both a game and a virtual trip through New York, they are simultaneously "returning to work" by describing and imagining the investigations and problem solving of their characters. This alienated leisure allows the players to virtually perform actions which they would otherwise be unable to do, including challenging authority.

In "The Half Moon" and "Transgression," characters are invited to come into conflict with authority figures. Through their performed characters, players attempt to thwart the plans of millionaire and socialite Ambrose Mogens over the course of the plot of "The Half Moon." In "Transgression," players must confront not only a tenured professor but also an electrical plant manager in order to prevent a catastrophe. In both of these cases, *Secrets of New York* constructs the city as a place where subversion of authority is not only able to be effective, but also necessary. New York is rhetorically expanded through the sourcebook to become a place of hope and rebellion. Players are encouraged to not only restructure and thereby subvert the physical

systems of New York to suit their purposes, but also to undermine the social hierarchies of the city, in order to protect it. Through these discourses of constant travel and subversion, New York is constructed as a place of positive flux. This is fitting considering the previous chapter's assessment that *Call of Cthulhu* speaks generally to individual fears of chaos and entropy. In contrast to this, *Vampire: the Masquerade*'s sourcebook, *New York By Night* offers a very different New York.

New York By Night

While *Secrets of New York* presents players and gamemasters with fully fleshed-out adventures as an example of how to use the material in the book, *New York By Night* takes a less direct route, offering instead a series of unresolved plot points that can be incorporated into a game. These plot points offer a number of potential ways for players to interact with the ludic New York. Unlike the adventures presented in *Secrets of New York*, these plot points are less directed, offering only suggestions of how to portray NPCs and their goals instead of a linear adventure, suggesting that more work needs to be completed by the gamemaster in advance of play. *New York By Night* presents three major plot lines, divided into a series of subsections of a chapter, for players to utilize when constructing their game in New York. First, "Prince of the City" details the prominent NPCs of the city and their goals for achieving the cities highest vampiric office, the princedom.[154] Second, "The Horror Below" offers players and gamemasters information on the ancient antediluvian vampire, Tzimisce, who has achieved apotheosis with the ground on which New York was built.[155] Third, "The Hint is On" allows players to do battle with vampire-hunting humans, inverting the role of the vampire characters from urban hunters to

urban prey.[156] Across all three of these plot points, there is very little mention of New York as a city itself.

Instead, *New York By Night* focuses on the characters of its fictional version of the city. Many of these characters are well developed from White Wolf Publishing's long line of paratextual material, especially its series of novels (discussed earlier in this thesis). The characters of Callebros, Theo Bell, Tzimisce, Jan Pieterzoon and others are (in)famous across White Wolf's meta-plot of the *Vampire: the Masquerade* property. Characters are encouraged to interact with these diegetic celebrities as they and the NPCs work to consolidate their power. That this power struggle occurs against the backdrop of New York is relatively incidental, of less importance than the use of the titular locale in *Secrets of New York*. Interestingly, with the exception of Tzimisce, the NPCs presented in *New York By Night* are of lower power than those presented in other city sourcebooks for the property. As *New York By Night* explains, "the reasons for this are numerous. First, the setting assumes that established vampires don't want to leave their bases of power to gamble on success somewhere else. Second, this book is written to allow characters the chance to hold titles among the Camarilla luminaries…. Third, New York is a big city, iconic among vampires and mortals worldwide."[157] This decision to make New York a place of relatively low-powered vampires in a setting of century-spanning plots and international intrigue constructs New York in a rather limited and specific way. In contrast to *Secrets of New York* which constructs the city as a place where entrenched authority *needs* to be subverted, *New York By Night* constructs the city as a place where power can be developed for the first time. The longest of the three aforementioned plot-points, "Prince of the City," assumes that players' characters will be "part of the action" in the contest for the cities' highest vampiric office.[158] Possible resolutions for the other two scenarios suggest having players' characters gain control

of other vampires via uncovering knowledge about Tzimisce or by directing vampire-hunters towards their rivals. New York, as the backdrop for these activities is naturalized as a place where power is created, kings (or princes) are made, and rivals are defeated. *New York By Night* presents the city in much the same way that a problem gambler might think of Las Vegas, a place of endless possibilities if only one is willing to invest enough.

As a city under constant writing and re-writing New York City is many different things to many different people. Through the course of play in TRPGs, players construct a discursive ludic New York City which is a simulacrum of the real New York. The processes of creating this new version of the city is an activity both free and constrained, with both versions delimiting each other. As I have shown, this writing of the city is very similar to the often ritualized activity of tourism. Just as tourists flock to the same attractions over and over, TRPG players write and re-write the cities their characters inhabit over and over. This next chapter will explore the ritualistic elements of TRPGs and what purpose TRPGs serve as rituals themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR:

TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH RITUAL PLAY

As explained in the previous chapter, Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TRPGs) can be understood as a form of alienated leisure analogous to tourism. In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell notes the strong relationship between tourism and ritual. MacCannell, in fact, argues that "sightseeing is a ritual performed to the differentiations of society."[159] Drawing from Goffman, MacCannell expands on this concept of the tourist as a ritual participant, noting the long strings of ceremonial and obligatory rites a tourist must engage in when sightseeing. When in Paris, a tourist *must* visit the Eiffel Tower; no trip to New York is complete without seeing the Statue of Liberty. This ritual observance is only able to be broken when one refuses to take part in the act of travel. As MacCannell notes, "No one is exempt from the obligation to go sightseeing except the local person."[160] Only by removing oneself from the liminal space of the ritual, in this case traveling (where one is always between places) can the tourist escape their ritual obligations. Indeed, ritual has had a strong connection to tourism since the development of tourism. After the crusades, pilgrims ritually traveled to the holy land, with specific churches to stop at. Some archeologists have suggested that Stonehenge might have served a similar function for the Neolithic inhabitants of Britain. In the modern world this ritual coming and going of people may not always be trapped in religion, but it still occurs. With regard to TRPGs the most obvious occurrence of this ritual flow of people from one area to another is in Indianapolis each August with Gen-Con.

Every year, near the end of summer, the capital of Indiana is swarmed with tens of thousands of gaming fans, developers, publishers, and enthusiasts. For five days the Indianapolis

convention center and surrounding area is inundated with the gamer sub-culture. Walking

through the area, one is likely to see everything from Space Marines to Vampires, 1920s

Lovecraftian investigators to Drow (a type of elf that lives underground) warriors. Gen-Con,

short for the Geneva Convention, markets itself as "the best five days in gaming." While there

may be some question as to whether Gen-Con is the *best* five days in gaming, it is certainly one

of the *biggest* five days in gaming. At Gen-Con, new products are launched, world tournaments

are held, and the prestigious Ennies are given out (a set of awards for the TRPG products which

are voted the best of the year). While it might lack the global media exposure of conventions like

Comic-Con, Gen-Con is an important cultural event for an often ignored American subculture.

I have been fortunate enough to attend Gen-Con twice, in 2010 and 2011. Both times I

attended the convention, not only was I wowed by the number of people, their elaborate

costumes, and the many opportunities to interact with leading game designers, but I was

primarily struck by how similar people at the convention were to myself and my own gaming

cohort. In picking up a single session game of White Wolf's *Changeling: the Lost* or Wizard of

the Coast's *Dungeons and Dragons* I encountered patterns of behavior that were exceedingly

familiar to me. Furthermore, I had brief moments where the improvisational play developed at its

own pace in a way outsiders would most likely have assumed was planned. Yet, I had never

played with any of these people before, many of whom came from different regions of the nation

and, in one case, from across the Pacific Ocean. This experience of seeing the same activities

played out in front of me from group to group, of meeting strangers and having a game flow, has

led me to wonder what it is in TRPGs that drives this repeated, meaningful behavior. In this

chapter I will explore this issue, arguing that both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*

provide their players with the necessary implements to allow for the development of rituals for

building *communitas* and pursuing *jamming*.

Rituals and Role-Playing Games

For more than a century scholars have debated what constitutes a "ritual" and what if any

importance rituals serve in society. As Catherine Bell notes in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*,

ritual as a formal term first emerged "in the nineteenth century to identify what was believed to

be a universal category of human experience."[161] The term "ritual" has been adopted from these

early beginnings by a wide range of scholars (including anthropologists, religious scholars,

sociologists, and mythologists) for differing purposes. As Bell notes what makes the term so

useful for such a wide range of scholars in the humanities is that ritual has been both a method of

analysis as well as a an object of study for these varying groups.[162] Despite the many varied

academic uses of ritual, Bell explains that there is a surprising amount of consistency across

disciplines about its important facets, the vast majority agreeing that a ritual is, at a bare

minimum, "a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces

come together."[163] This consistency, according to Bell, can be explained because, despite the

wide range of theoretical approaches, scholars have essentially two ways of approaching ritual:

as thought and as action.[164]

In his article for The Forge (a website devoted to academic approaches to TRPGs) titled

Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games, Christopher I. Lehrich calls these two approaches

"ritual as performance" and "ritual as a practice." As I will be referring to Lehrich's article (the

formative text in the discussion of TRPGs as rituals), I will use his terminology for clarity.

Lehrich argues that from both perspectives, performance and play, TRPGs are not analogous to

rituals but instead *are* rituals. As Lehrich explains, this approach means that "classical and recent tools of ritual analysis apply fully to [T]RPGs, for *analytical* purposes, for making sense of [T]RPGs as something other than an entirely isolated hobby, indeed for seeing [T]RPGs as a human cultural product not particularly distinctive to modern society."[165]

The first perspective discussed by Lehrich is ritual as a performance, which comes from the popularization of a variety of scholars, including: Victor Turner, Kenneth Burke, Erving Goffman, J. L. Austin and John Searle.[166] As Bell explains, "In its own way, performance theory signals a strong dissatisfaction with the traditional categories brought to the study of ritual."[167] The performance approach to ritual relies on two fundamental arguments. As explained by Milton B. Singer in *Traditional India*, these two arguments are that most people "think of their culture as encapsulated within discrete performances, which they can exhibit to outsiders as well as themselves," and that these performances are "the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure."[168] Speaking of the ritual importance of cockfighting for the Balinese, Clifford Geertz explains that rituals function interpretively as stories communities can tell themselves about themselves and as performance, showing community membership through participation in ritual activities.[169] From this perspective then, these performances can be seen as instances of culture and serve the function of organizing and transmitting culture (to self or others).

Lehrich argues that this perspective equates to the concept of virtual experience and immersion in TRPGs. This is because the performance branch of ritual studies argues that the participants must engage the ritual wholly, allowing themselves to be subsumed by the activity. For example, Lehrich uses the example of the Catholic Eucharist to explain the importance of full, bodily, participation in rituals. He explains, the "liturgical tradition emphasizes that the communicant should be fully involved in the process, such that when the miraculous

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transformation of the substance of the wafer and wine (Transubstantiation) occurs, and when in fact the communicant receives these into the mouth, it is not only one's body that receives the body and blood of Christ, but the totality of body, mind, and soul."[170] Implicitly, this connection between a surrender of a ritual participant and the act of playing has also been made by Brian Massumi in *Parables for the Virtual*.

Speaking of soccer and more generally of games, Massumi notes the importance of understanding the complex relationship between the player and the pieces of play. Massumi explains that for example, in soccer, "*the player is the object of the ball*. True, the player kicks the ball. But the ball must be considered in some way an autonomous actor because the global game-effects its displacements produce can be produced by no other game element."[171] In this relationship the ball is partially a subject and the player is partially an object. In Lehrich's example of the Catholic Eucharist, the wafer and wine serve a similar role, having ritual effects not reproducible by other objects on the subject-body of the communicant.

In TRPGs such as *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*, this role is taken by the dice, the rules books, and most importantly the discourse created between the player and the storyteller. Much like the soccer ball or the wafer and wine, these "objects" organize the players around themselves, having effects on them which cannot be replicated by other ritual materials. Thus from the ritual as performance perspective it is possible to argue that TRPGs are rituals. The emphasis on a total bodily surrender to a performance which serves the function of passing on information to the self or others is the same as the surrender in playing soccer (a point which will become important later in this chapter), or the immersion and virtual experience of the TRPG. However, this is just one of the two major perspectives on ritual addressed by Lehrich. TRPGs can also be seen as ritual from the alternative position of rituals as practice.

Where performance theory argues for understanding rituals as a total bodily experience meant to transmit information, practice theory instead focuses on how rituals are differentiated from the other activities with which people engage. In order to come to this focus, Bell, rather than providing yet another definition of ritual, instead defines *ritualization*, saying that it is "the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions."[172] From this perspective, rituals are important not because of their communicative ability, but because they function as ways for societies to make juxtapositions and contrasts. As Bell explains, "ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane,' and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors."[173] Drawing heavily from structuralism theory, practice theory is concerned with how cultures choose to develop their rituals. As Lehrich explains, ritual as practice approaches, primarily ask the question, "how people choose, from a limited range of culturally available options, which techniques to apply at a given moment."[174]

An important aspect of the ritual as practice model is that it sees ritual as a paradox, in that it is both a liberating and constraining activity. In the practice model, individuals take on the roles of what Claude Levi-Strauss termed *bricoleurs*, arranging and rearranging signs in order to form meanings in the process of rituals. Since individuals have the entirety of their cultural sign system to choose from in the process of constructing and practicing rituals, there is an element of liberation, allowing individuals free choice amongst many options. At the same time, each choice of sign reinforces the totality of the sign system itself. As Lehrich explains, "Every strategic use of signs is at once a free, liberated exercise of power by a situated person, and at the same time a contribution to keeping the system stable and intact without significant change."[175] In an

extended metaphor of a hobbyist constructing a Rube Goldberg machine from odds and ends, Lehrich notes that each use of the signs in the ritual (metaphorically the odds and ends building the contraption) changes the signs. With each use they are modified to include their new history. What Lehrich fails to note, however, is that the larger cultural system is also modified by the use of the signs, if even in the slightest way. This is because the larger cultural system from which the signs are drawn is also constructed of the signs used by the ritual participant. Failing to acknowledge this incremental change, Lehrich argues that the use of signs in rituals is ultimately a distraction because it cannot affect "real change" and instead simply reinforces the efficacy of the system from which the signs are drawn.

Lehrich argues that, from this perspective, TRPGs can be seen as rituals specifically when one approaches them as collaborative stories. As Lehrich explains, the practice theory's concern for the use of signs fits well with TRPGs as collaborative storytelling because researchers can focus on "how the whole group in combination produces signs and texts that they themselves read."[176] Furthermore, Lehrich adds, "the structural model of signification fits well here, as the primary issue is to understand ritual or mythic activity as a mode of discourse production."[177] Players of either *Call of Cthulhu* or *Vampire: the Masquerade* are free to play the games however they want. However, there is a system of signs which are developed by the community of players and the game itself which constrain the way the gameplay is actualized. The social contracts among players (agreeing what is or is not acceptable in the course of gameplay), genre expectations, the game system, and the relationship amongst players all structure and constrain the play.

Implicitly describing this method of production, Daniel Mackay in *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art*, argues that, "contextualized and conditioned by the films,

books, and their product-art-forms in which role-players immerse themselves, the role-playing game adopts their patterns and 'plays' them out in a Barthesian structuralist activity within the cultural sphere, 'divorced from their original motivations.'"[178] Players draw not just from the game sphere to develop these structures but also from their cultural sphere as well. Players often utilize common tropes or, as MacKay terms them, "fictive blocks" to develop their characters and choose their in-game actions. It is not unusual for artwork from outside of the game, such as stills or clips from unrelated films, to help players imagine the setting. In each case there is a pattern of decontextualization, storing of the trope or "fictive block" for future use, and a recontextualization through the performance of play, which as MacKay notes "is similar to Arnold Van Gennep's (1908) identification of a three-phase sequence of separation, liminality, and reincorporation that occurs within rights of passage throughout the world."[179] As Lehrich expounds, TRPG:

> play enacts theory, in the sense that standing behind and prior to play is a series of theoretical constructs: system design, GM notes, pre-play agreements and social contract, genre expectations, and other theoretical tools. From this perspective, [T]RPG play acts out this prior structure; this is equivalent to the old reading of ritual as acting out a liturgical text.[180]

At the same time, there is freedom for players to move within this prior structure, in the process changing it. This paradox of constraint and freedom, allowing individuals to work within a system while at the same time modifying the system's component parts (and the system itself) is the same as what can be said of rituals: "Within apparent constraint there is scope for contestation, not only of the various issues and questions related to particular ritual's situation within the social context, but also of the ritual itself with all its symbols."[181]

Apart from Lehrich, one other theorist has addressed the close connection between rituals and TRPGs. In *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art*, MacKay argues for

understanding TRPGs' ritual importance in ways that mirror Lehrich's binary of performance and practice. As noted previously, MacKay argues that TRPG play is a structuralist activity which requires players to decontextualize, store, and recontextualize cultural structures (MacKay's "fictive blocks") in a pattern similar to separation, liminality, and reincorporation featured in rites of passage and rituals. However, MacKay also makes the argument that TRPGs are performances as well as (implicitly) a form of practice. Arguing on a meta-level, MacKay suggests that all TRPGs are performances which convey the same information to the audience (the player performers): dissatisfaction with capitalist society.

MacKay comes to this claim by acknowledging that it is only through modern capitalist culture that individual players are able to experience enough fictive blocks to be able to structure the ritual of TRPG play in such a way as to appear to have freedom. Without the mass entertainment industries and the introduction (or absorption/domination) of foreign cultural structures from globalization, players' options as *bricoleurs* would be significantly smaller. However, MacKay notes that there is a problem with would-be-player interaction with these fictive blocks; the assembled decontextualized fragments are experienced as imaginary, or at least only exist within the mind, and thus cannot help the individual become reincorporated into society.[182] This prevents the final stage of the three part ritual pattern previously discussed. MacKay argues that through the play of TRPGs, individuals are able to finally complete this third portion of the ritual pattern, reincorporating themselves though a performance back into society. At the same time, this activity is, according to MacKay, resistive to capitalism because players:

> separate themselves from the desire to buy and possess . . . instilled in all those who have been raised in a society whose mythology is science and capitalism. The role-playing game process is a redirection, a reapplication of the energy to possess the creation of an aesthetic object, a performance, that the players embody.[183]

As a performance whose audience is the performer/players themselves, the product created is intangible and a non-commodity This ritual act of the completion of the reintegration of the individual completes the rite of passage, if only temporarily, transforming consumers into producers.[184]

Unfortunately, MacKay's argument is overly optimistic. While it is true that the act of performing the play of TRPGs does indeed transform the individual from a consumer to a producer, it does so within the bounds of the greater capitalist structure. Where Lehrich fails to note that the structuralist activity of rituals modifies the system they are constructed and contained in, MacKay fails to note that the ritual process of the TRPG reifies the structures of capitalism that it resists. It is only by first consuming mass and popular culture that an individual is able to begin the ritual process which is completed in the play of TRPGs. This is not meant to disparage either author's theoretical approaches, but to demonstrate how they helpfully inform each other.

Thus from two different approaches, and two different theorists, TRPGs can be seen as rituals. From the perspective of performance theory, TRPGs function as performances for the players themselves, transmitting information about their culture back to themselves. The immersion and virtual experience of TRPG play correspond to ritual's full-body participation. In both cases there is an inversion of the typical subject-object relationship with the ritual participants or players become the objects of the subject ritual materials or game discourse. This performance functionally allows players to finish the three stages of ritual described by MacKay, temporarily transforming them from consumers to producers. From the perspective of practice theory, TRPGs are rituals because of the way in which they manipulate signs. Players and Gamemasters do the same work as ritual participants, creating *bricolage* out of the various

potential signs found in their societal matrix. Through this manipulation of signs, ritual

participants and TRPG players modify both the signs they use as well as the greater structure

from which they are drawn. At the same time it must not be forgotten that this use of sign

systems also reifies the structure from which the signs are dawn at the same time that it changes

it. In this perspective the ritual participants and the players are both liberated and constrained,

free to choose whichever signs they want but only within their cultural structure, always reifying

the structure and reshaping it with each use.

It is important to note here that while these two perspectives, performance and practice,

have been presented as a binary, this does not meant they are mutually exclusive. As Mackay

demonstrates, it is entirely possible to conceive of ritual as both a structuralist practice activity

and at the same time a communicative performance. The positions are not mutually exclusive. It

is likely that rituals are a performance and a practice, as well as many other things yet theorized.

Neither claim invalidates the other. A gestalt approach may be able to pose more interesting

insights than either could alone. Having explained how TRPGs are rituals from both the

performance and practice perspectives, I will now address the functions they serve. I will argue

that TRPGs in general serve two purposes, building *communitas* and creating conditions for

individuals to experience what Eric M. Eisenberg refers to as "jamming."

Communitas, Ritual, and Play

There have been many different approaches to studying the relationship between culture

and games. For example, Johan Huizinga and Rogert Caillois have focused on detailing what

made a game, the different aspects and features of games, and how they related to the

overarching cultural values of their societies. More contemporary ethnographic approaches have

focused on the identity work which is done by playing games. Alyce Taylor Cheska, in *Revival, Survival, and Revisal: Ethnic Identity Through "Traditional Games,"* discusses the resurgence of Canadian Inuit games to "preserve some of their fast-disappearing cultural uniqueness."[185] Others have examined how games and play have helped people cope with adversity. George Eisen's *Coping in Adversity: Children's Play in the Holocaust* provides a chilling examination of the importance of playing games for both children and adults living in the ghettos during the Second World War.[186] Others have looked at how members of different age categories in specific cultures play, and what games they choose to play.[187]

In each of these approaches it is clear that there is a strong connection between community and the games being played in it. Whether it is Canadian Inuit peoples engaging in stick gambling or children of the German Ghettos playing chess, games are social and cultural phenomena. Games, as vehicles for play, function as ways of developing and strengthening communities and their cultures. Each of these cases fall under what Brian Sutton-Smith terms "rhetorics of identity."[188] Sutton-Smith argues that there are a number of common ways individuals discuss the concept of play, one of which is through the rhetoric of identity. A rhetoric of identity takes the position that, "typically, communities demonstrate both their power and their identity through sporting success or festival occasions."[189] Thus scholars taking this theoretical approach to the subject focus on how play and games help a community achieve bonding, independence, cooperation, and *communitas*.[190]

Of particular note here is the concept of *communitas*. Derived from the Latin word for the spirit of community, *communitas* is, a shared sense of intimacy and joy developed among individuals experiencing liminality together. As Thomas S. Hendricks notes in *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression*, *communitas* is both

conformative and consummatory as a mode of expression and, "like ritual, *communitas* commonly features social or symbolic immersion."[191] As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, the statement that *communitas* is conformative does not mean that it strips individuals of their agency. Rather, individuals experiencing *communitas* transform themselves to fit the schemes of the collective.[192] Additionally, as a consummnatory activity, engagement in *communitas* is not done solely for practical reasons but also for the "satisfaction inherent in participation itself."[193]

Hendricks has noted that in modern Western societies, participation in communitas, usually through rituals, has been treated with some degree of disdain. For many modern Westerners, the surrender inherent in *communitas* "produces images of communism, fascism, cults, and tribalism."[194] This argument mirrors those made by Tom E. Driver in *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*, a book that explores societal "ritual boredom" and "ritual misapprehension."[195] Despite this boredom and misapprehension with rituals, Driver asserts that human beings have an innate need for their transformative effects. One of the reasons Driver asserts the need for ritual is that is a producer of *communitas*.

Driver, drawing heavily from Victor Turner, argues that rituals are creators of *communitas* because of their liminality. As previously noted, rituals exist outside of the bounds of the everyday. According to practice theorists, this liminality of rituals allows them to serve as ways of differentiating different aspects of culture (sacred/profane, etc.). Furthermore, the process of going through a ritual forces an individual into a liminal state, caught between their initial and their transformed stages. As rituals, TRPGs like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* take place in liminal environments. Players typically play in the privacy, at a set time each day/week/month, at a specific location. As games they fall within the liminal zone of

what Johan Huizinga termed "the magic circle," paradoxically existing both in and not in the mundane world. Furthermore, players place themselves in liminal roles through the course of play, being both the player and the character. This liminal focus is also reflected in content of both games covered in this thesis. In *Call of Cthulhu* the players play characters who exist between the "real world" and the supernatural, having to negotiate between these two perspectives. In *Vampire: The Masquerade* the characters played by the players are vampires, caught in a liminal state between life and death. Interestingly, in *Vampire: The Masquerade* one of the plot-hooks offered to players are rumors of a resolution to their character's liminal state, the transcendence from vampire to demi-god through the act of Golconda.

On nearly every level, TRPGs encourage liminality. As Driver explains, *communitas* "emerges liminally, in times and spaces generated ritually."[196] By playing together, players of TRPGs experience liminality in multiple frames. Within the narrative frame, their characters exist either stuck between the mundane and the supernatural or as undead figures caught between life and death. In the game frame, players are in the liminal position of both being and not being their characters, being and not being in a setting (such as New York City), and being and not being authors of the "text" of the games narrative. Within the social/cultural frame, TRPG play takes place in spaces and times separated from the everyday. This liminality creates a shared sense of unity among the players as they are caught between a variety of positions. This shared sense of unity, existing, if only, for the duration of play can quickly bind a group together in their ritual participation in the play of TRPGs. However, *communitas* is not the only state experienced by TRPG players.

Jamming, Transcendence, and Disclosure

In the first chapter of this thesis, I opened with a story from my past, of how I and my fellow players came to experience horror during the course of a game of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Despite being in no "real" danger, aside from possibly waking my Dungeon Master's parents or running out of Mountain Dew, we had managed to transcend our surroundings and feel the emotions of our characters. In the summer of 2010 I was witness to a very similar experience from a slightly different perspective. While serving as the storyteller for a single-game session of White Wolf Publishing's *Innocents*, a game about role-playing children in a dark gothic reflection of our own world, the players decided to have their characters go to the local park and play a pick-up game of baseball. During the course of this brief diversion, the players seemed to have all "clicked", displaying the same care-free joy that their characters were described as having. The players, who by this time were comfortable with the game mechanics, smoothly transitioned from rolling dice to describing the in-narrative effect without any interruption from myself. Later on, they held a nearly thirty minute long conversation, done entirely in-character, concerning their future plans. I believe that the spontaneous, shared experiences I have experienced, witnessed, and described here are an important result of the ritual nature of TRPG play. Specifically, these moments are characteristic of jamming, a behavioral condition which, in the case of TRPGs, allows for both transcendence and disclosure, as well as being a consummnatory activity in itself.

In his article "Jamming: Transcendence Through Organizing", Eric M. Eisenberg appropriates the term "jamming" from discourses of music and sports. Eisenberg explains that jamming is "characterized by fluid behavioral condition unhindered by expectations for self-revelation."[197] While Eisenber's definition focuses on how jamming is non-disclosive, I contend

that TRPG play allows for both jamming and disclosure because players are able to disclose indirectly. As MacKay notes, "The roles that the players adopt allow them to delve into their emotional depths, their affective selves, and to express their feelings and ideas, but they do so through the creative distance the role provides."[198] By taking up the role of an occult-savvy professor at Miskatonick University or a rabble-rousing Brujha vampire, players are able to create a gap between player and character. At the same time, every character will be based, at least in part, on the player's experiences and knowledge. By playing a character individuals are able to disclose indirectly, preventing the interruptions that can hinder jamming.

In his article, Eisenberg identifies four essential characteristics of jamming. First, jamming is a transcendent activity. According to Eisenberg, this transcendence is one of the reasons for the appeal of jamming, as it "enables individuals temporarily to feel part of a larger community, but without the obligation to reveal much personal information."[199] Interestingly, Eisenberg compares the transcendent aspect of jamming to both ritual, specifically Myerhoff's study of peyote rituals, and Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*.[200] Furthermore, Eisenberg notes that games are a powerful example of how jamming can be transcendent. This mirrors some of the arguments made by Massumi. Speaking of soccer, Massumi echoes much of Eisenberg's discussion of jamming as transcendent, stating that "the players, in the heat of the game, are drawn out of themselves. Any player who is conscious of himself as he kicks, misses. The player's reflective sense of themselves as subjects is a source of interference that must be minimized for the play to continue."[201] With regard to TRPGs, this transcendence is perhaps more obvious than in games such as soccer. Players must take on the persona of another during the course of play, they interact with imaginary object, people, and places, transcending their physical environments. The masked disclosure performed in the ritual play of TRPGs requires

individuals to move beyond themselves, becoming another. Additionally, as Massumi notes, "the rules of the game and their application are transcendent to the play."[202] This is because the rules of play are a codification to the action of the game. Rules require a reflection on play, a stopping of it for review. With regard to soccer, as well as TRPGs, "the intervention of the referee is an interruption that opens the way for an application of the rules."[203] However, rules are not entirely detrimental to the flow of play and the achievement of jamming. The codification of rules preserves the potentiality of the game for future use, allowing for variation in the game. With regard to the jamming I witnessed as a storyteller for the *Innocents* game I ran in 2010, the comfort of the players with the rules system allowed for players to continue jamming without the interruption of myself in the role of the referee/storyteller. Both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* have rules systems which encourage this sort of uninterrupted play. In *Call of Cthulhu*, skills and their level of difficulty are listed directly on the player's character sheet; already individualized, the player requires no input from the gamemaster to determine if they have succeeded or not. In *Vampire: The Masquerade*, game-mechanics all follow a set formula, use the same type of dice (ten-sided), and have a pre-set standard difficulty (unless modified by the gamemaster). In each case, the rules of the games invite players to continue their play uninterrupted, prolonging the transcendent state of ritualized jamming.

The second aspect of jamming noted by Eisenberg is that it is an activity which embraces diversity. Eisenberg explains that "seamless performance conveys a joyful, encapsulated feeling of total involvement . . . Later, these same people may meet and have little to say to each other beyond a passionate retelling of the experience."[204] As an example, Eisenberg discusses a game of pick-up basketball he played with a group of strangers, where the players seemed to flow and work well together, not despite, but because of their differences. The same can be said of TRPG

play. As a structuralist ritual activity, the more cultural pieces available for the making of the ritual, the richer and deeper the experience is bound to be. By drawing players from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, the potential discourse and narrative created in the play of TRPGs is expanded, providing a greater possibility of interactions among participants.

The third aspect of jamming Eisenberg identifies is that "jamming experiences are both unusual and relatively rare."[205] In the realms of sports and music from which the term jamming is drawn, game and musical sessions can often be much more work than play, with jamming experiences being the exception rather than the rule. Much of the same can be said of TRPG play. The role of gamemaster often requires considerable work, preparing adventures, scenerios, and encounters before the actual play begins. From the perspective of players, work must be put in between game sessions to update and maintain character sheets. Additionally, players must often work in game sessions to maintain relationships in both the cultural and narrative frames. The intrusion of egos, tangential cultural frame material, overt disclosure, or simple bad luck, can quickly end the most intense and immersive moments of jamming. As Eisenberg explains, jamming requires many of the same fundamentals of rituals, "clear rules, structures, and expectations…"[206] Additionally, the requirements of the individual mirror those of the ritual participant from the performance perspective, "one must surrender to the experience, engage faithfully and respectfully in the interaction, and not use the exchange to unload on, show off, or control other."[207] Cooperation amongst participants is fundamental here. In TRPGs, players collaborate to tell a story, each game and narrative frame action contributing to the development of the narrative performance.

Importantly, Eisenberg argues that jamming cannot be institutionalized, because the spontaneous ebb and flow needed for jamming cannot become routine without losing that

spontaneity. Despite their ritual nature TRPGs cannot create a habitual system for jamming, however, they do engender it more than some other forms of activity. Like jazz sessions or pick-up games of basketball, the action of TRPGs is spontaneous yet housed within specific structures. However, unlike jazz sessions or basketball games, TRPG play results in a narrative. The narrative elements of TRPGs like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* allow consecutive sessions to build off of each other in ways that sports and music cannot. The narrative provides further structure to the gameplay, making it easier for players to slip into those rare moments of jamming. Additionally, the liminality of the TRPG helps to preserve the spontaneity. TRPGs are, as has been previously addressed, often played in specific places at specific times. This separation helps to engender a sense of "specialness" about TRPG play which invites players to approach play with the mindset necessary for jamming.

Finally, the fourth aspect of jamming Eisenberg identifies is that it is a risky activity. Psychologically, players risk embarrassment if their play-skills are found inferior to those of the other players. Additionally, the masked disclosure in TRPGs can risk exposing unresolved emotional issues triggered by the intensity of the jamming experience. Finally, Eisenberg notes that as with most other highly intense experiences, such as love, religion, and psychedelic drugs, there is a risk of addiction to the jamming experience, of "becoming so hooked on transcendence that it is hard to live otherwise."[208] Indeed, this last risk of jamming echoes much of the discourse of fear surrounding the emergence of *Dungeons & Dragons* as a cultural phenomenon in the 1980s. This fear is perhaps most amusingly articulated in the made-for-TV movie *Mazes and Monsters* (1982), where Tom Hanks' character develops a dissociative break with reality due to becoming addicted to the Live Action Role lay of a *Dungeons & Dragons* like game. While *Mazes and Monsters* may come off as dated and humorous to experienced players of TRPGs, it

does articulate a real fear that the powerful experience of jamming produced through the ritual play of games like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* can lead individuals down the path of addiction.

The play of TRPGs has the potential to be a very powerful, transcendent, communal experience. Individuals are invited by the games to discretely disclose, experience liminality together, and ritually seek rare moments of jamming. As rituals, TRPGs can be seen as both a performance and a practice. An immersive bodily experience, TRPG play is performed for the players themselves, while simultaneously being a structuralist exercise in *bricolage*. The ritual nature of TRPGs invites players to experience both *communitas* and jamming together, in ways which are similar to, yet distinct from other forms of cultural activity. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will review the information and arguments I have presented thus far concerning *Call of Cthulhu*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, and TRPGs in general. Additionally, I will suggest some areas for further research into this largely unexplored area of discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSONS

A central concern throughout this project has been to display the many different ways in which tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) are communicative. With so little academic scholarship devoted to studying TRPGs and most of that scholarship outside of the communication discipline, it is easy to look at the concept of a TRPG and ask the question, "where's the communication?" The preceding chapters have hopefully demonstrated that TRPGs are a social and cultural phenomenon, they are performative, and they are communicative. With each analytical chapter of this thesis (chapters: 2, 3, and 4), I have attempted to make evident the different levels of communication found in both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Additionally, much of my research fits in well with communication scholars who have studied other types of games. While TRPGs are a different type of game than videogames or sports, both of which have received considerable attention from the communication field, there is a degree of overlap between to be found in their communication. Ideally, this project helps to add to those dialogues in the field of communication and further broaden their topic areas. Furthermore, I have tried to answer some of the questions that have plagued me, as a player of TRPGs, and demonstrate the communicative complexities of this hobby. In order to accomplish this, each chapter has been organized as an answer to a research question or set of questions. Additionally, each of these answers can be seen as taking place in multiple dialogues, those of the authors cited whose theory I have used for my analysis. Additionally, each of these chapters can be seen as helping to begin a new dialogue focused on the communication and rhetoric of TRPGs.

Questions of Exigency and Equipment

Chapter 2 of this thesis attempts to answer the questions of what are the exigencies of the form of the TRPG as a game, and what are the exigencies of both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Additionally, as it ties in with exigency, this chapter also addressed how both of these games serve as equipment for living, providing their players with motives and resolutions to discursively constructed fears.

As demonstrated, the ludic form of the TRPG comes through a long succession of games, from the German officer training games of *War Chess* and *Kriegspiel* to the first TRPG *Dungeons and Dragons*. Additionally, the development of other forms of interactive fiction, specifically the choose-your-own-adventure gamebooks further influenced the form of the TRPG as a medium. Both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* have an exigency which is influenced by both literature and popular culture, with both being called into being by an absence of their specific genre styles.

In *Call of Cthulhu* this literary connection is perhaps more obvious, with the game designers specifically encouraging the connection between their products and the works of H.P. Lovecraft and other Cthulhu Mythos writers. Lovecraft's own encouragement that others use his diegetic universe of the Cthulhu Mythos helps to inform how his and others' material has been appropriated for use in TRPGs. By creating a shared-use diegetic universe, Lovecraft created an environment which encouraged what I have termed textual invoking, an environment which was further encouraged by August Derleth as the holder of much of Lovecraft's literary estate. Much like Henry Jenkins' textual poaching, textual invoking involves the appropriation of material to be re-used. Where it differs is that a textual poacher is acting without the consent of the author, often utilizing material in ways the author could not have foreseen. The invoker acts with the consent, in the case of the Cthulhu Mythos encouragement even, of the author, utilizing the

source material in ways which, as an authorized user, further enhance the cultural imprint of the material. It is worth noting here that textual invocation and textual poaching do not exist in an opposed dyadic relationship, instead in most cases there is likely some degree of mixing of the two. In fact, this theoretical mode of appropriation serves as an excellent model for how players of TRPGs are invited to interact with the games themselves. By selling game systems, publishers such as Chaosium and White Wolf are authorizing buyers to use their source material to create their own stories, enhancing the cultural resonance of that material for the playgroup involved in the story creation. While the environment of textual invoking encouraged by Lovecraft was a driving force to the creation of *Call of Cthulhu* it was only part of the equation.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the discourse of the 1970s and early 1980s created an environment which further called for the creation of a cosmic horror TRPG. The popularity of horror authors such as Stephen King and Umberto Eco as well as the popularity of films such as *Halloween* (1978) and *Alien* (1979) set the stage for the emergence of the first horror themed TRPG, *Call of Cthulhu*. This environment of popular culture along with the tradition of textual invoking paved the way for *Call of Cthulhu*'s publication in 1981. The discourse of horror in popular culture was decidedly one of the breakdowns of society and traditional institutions. As equipment for living, *Call of Cthulhu* both furthered this discourse and provided it's players with ways of resolving the tensions and fears it created. By presenting a world constantly on the brink of disaster, whether from the invasion of aliens or the awakening of ancient deities, *Call of Cthulhu* furthers the discourse of entropy and chaos so present in the horror of the 1970s and 1980s. As a TRPG, the game resolves these issues through the presentation of a strictly ordered, systematized world, where chance is actually very clearly managed. While *Call of Cthulhu* may have been the first horror-themed game, it was not the last

and in the early 1990s, *Vampire: the Masquerade* was called into being by a different set of circumstances and served as a very different set of equipment for living.

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the 1990s saw the revitalization of the vampire myth, with the change that now vampires were less frightening and more identifiable. Authors such as Anne Rice and Nancy Barker wrote of sympathetic vampire characters. On the silver screen Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* (1987) updated the image of the vampire, making them younger and more contemporary in appearance. At the same time homophobic political discourse appropriated the vampire myth as a way of demonizing homosexuals.

As a response to these discourses using the vampire, *Vampire: the Masquerade* may have provided players with ways of managing their discursively constructed fears. By placing a heavy importance on blood and then allowing players to literally manage their character's blood, *Vampire: the Masquerade* invites players of the1990s to symbolically manage their fears of AIDS. Furthermore, the figure of the vampire is a transcendent one, a being who has moved beyond both life and death. Vampires are figures beyond the most agency limiting condition of all, death. By playing powerful creatures of the night, players of *Vampire: the Masquerade* may have been developing systems of symbolic thought to resolve their fears over the loss of their agency.

Questions of Space and Place

The third chapter of this thesis revolved around questions of how TRPGs invite players to create discursive spaces and places through the act of play. I argue that TRPGs like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* function as alienated leisure, with the fictional worlds of the TRPGs and the real world influencing each other. Through the case study of New York City,

I have shown how the spaces created through the play of TRPGs are simulacrums of the real. The exploration and interaction with these cities is an activity analogous to the writing of cities done by Certeau's walkers, with players and game designers engaging in both synecdoche and asyndeton. The play of games like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* requires players to skip-over some areas, while enlarging others. While players ennucitorily engage with these areas, they are performing activity similar to sightseeing. Since the city sourcebooks for both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* mix real-world and ludic-world information they function as both on and off-sight markers. Finally, both *Call of Cthulhu*'s *Secrets of New York* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*'s *New York By Night* function analogously to Natural History Museums, re-presenting a specific construction of a space. In *Secrets of New York* this re-presentation takes the form of a city of motion, encouraging players to go on ludic sightseeing tours of the city, exploring every part of the Big Apple. Additionally, the sourcebook also presents New York City as a space of rebellion, encouraging players to question and undermine authority figures. New York City is presented as a city in constant flux, but one which can change for the better, a fitting characterization considering *Call of Cthulhu*'s focus on player management of entropy and chaos. In *New York By Night* the city is instead presented as a place where power can be gained. New York City is presented as perhaps the quintessential space for the American (vampire) dream to come true. Players who are clever and work hard are assumed to be rewarded with power and responsibility in the city. In this manner, *New York By Night* upholds the secondary function of *Vampire: the Masquerade* when viewed as equipment for living, offering players a chance to manage their anxieties about a loss of agency, by providing them with a city where any goal is possible, given enough determination and effort.

Questions of Ritual, Transcendence, and Jamming

The fourth chapter of this thesis primarily dealt with *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* as examples of TRPGs and how they create a ritual structure for the purpose of building *communitas* and creating jamming experiences. From performance theory perspective, TRPGs ritually organize and transmit culture. From the perspective of practice theory, TRPGs are a structuralist activity, just as rituals, placing individuals in the roles of bricoleurs, arranging and re-arranging signs as cultural units. This arrangement and re-arrangement of signs functions to create binaries, setting of the profane from the divine or in the case of the TRPG, the ludic from the real. Both ritual perspectives argue that participation in ritual activities, such as playing *Call of Cthulhu* or *Vampire: the Masquerade*, places the participants in a liminal state between the ritual world and the world outside of the ritual. In the case of the TRPG, players both are and are not their characters. They are both in and not in ludic places. They perform both work and leisure simultaneously. This experience of shared liminality helps foster the group experience of *communitas*, creating a community which is both conformative and liberating. Finally, as ritual activities, TRPGs foster conditions for jamming. The improvisational nature of TRPGs, combined with their inherent masking of disclosure produce conditions ideal for transcendent activity of jamming.

Areas for Further Research

While at this point it feels that this thesis has been an exhaustive exploration of the communication in TRPGs, this is certainly not the case. There is still much work to be done looking in to how communication is performed by and in TRPGs. This thesis has dealt with two of the many horror-themed TRPGs currently being published. There are many other horror

themed games which may communicate their horror in different ways. Additionally, genre analysis could be useful looking at other TRPGs, helping to understand the medium specificities of the performance of science fiction or westerns as ludic creations. Furthermore there are many games which are already part of established properties. Over the decades there have been several iterations and versions of licensed games taking place in the *Star Wars* universe. Other franchises such as *Ghostbusters*, *Smallville*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and the *Marvel* and *DC* comics universes have all produced successful TRPGs. A genre study might look into how these franchises translate their properties from film, television, and comics into TRPGs and how those TRPGs encourage players to interact with these pre-established diegetic universes.

Another area of potential research is with issues of identity and representation in TRPGs. A quick look at the art of most TRPG books will show a world that is inhabited primarily by white men. When women are present, they are often scantily clad, appearing more as sex-objects than individuals. People of color are sadly, noticeably absent. Some game systems have started to move towards more progressive art and setting information, but there is still much room for industry improvement in this area. Along these lines there are also games such as White Wolf publishing's *Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom* which offers players a chance to portray characters in sub-Saharan Africa. As the majority of TRPG players are white, middleclass Westerners, this offers up a complex circumstance. Do TRPGs offer players the chance to empathetically take on the roles of people less privileged, or do the de-privileged simply become roles to be adopted for fun, or both? Further scholarly attention could help to detangle these complex issues as well as help the TRPG industry move towards more ethical, humane representation.

Additionally, further research needs to be done on how individuals actually use TRPGs and what the communication they use actually looks like. Much of the research that has been

done on actual players of TRPGs has been pathological, looking to understand if players are more likely to be involved in the occult, have problems differentiating reality from fiction, or are more prone to violence. Ironically, this pathological approach seems to have helped prove for its own demise, consistently showing no strong difference between TRPG players and control groups. Research looking into how players actually use the products of TRPGs and how they communicate during play would help inform the conclusions presented in this thesis. Where I have looked at how the games themselves are structured to invite specific kinds of interaction, further research could seek to understand how TRPG players respond to those invitations.

Finally, games beyond TRPGs deserve more attention from communication scholars. As this thesis has hopefully shown, games and their play are important parts of communities and have a strong cultural significance. Furthermore, games can be seen as cultural artifacts, discursively developed and presenting communicative message in a manner similar to more studied mediums such as film and television. Due to the nature of games, player involvement is more pronounced than that of audience involvement in film and television, meaning that there is potentially a richer area for studying the human interaction performed in games.

Final Remarks

Throughout this process, I have attempted to demonstrate the importance of exploring TRPGs from a communicative perspective. Additionally, I have aimed to walk the fine line between letting my own passion for the hobby and the more traditional "objective" scholarly take control of this project. Hopefully my passion for the subject has not clouded me to the complexities of TRPG play. As a final thought I turn to the quotation from H. P. Lovecraft which I used to begin this thesis, "...I feel quite justified in believing that games and sports ought not be

ranked among the major phenomena of life." In my own experience, I know games have played

an important role in not only my leisure time, but also in the shaping of how I see the world.

Through my analysis of *Call of Cthulhu* and *Vampire: the Masquerade* I have hopefully shown

to the reader, that Lovecraft was mistaken when addressing the importance of games.

NOTES

[1] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001), 15-18.

[2] The naming conventions of TRPGs make editions of the games a particularly confusing issue. For example while there have been many more than 6 versions of *Call of Cthulhu* the current edition is marketed as the sixth edition by Chaosium Inc. because many of the prior printings were not significantly different enough to earn a full edition to themselves.

[3] Chaosium Inc, "Chaosium Awards." Accessed September 15, 2012. http://catalog.chaosium.com/pages.php?pID=8&CDpath=1. The Chaosium webpage lists several more awards for the *Call of Cthulhu* game line not included here for the sake of brevity.

[4] Sandy peterson et al., *Call of Cthulhu* (Hayward California: Chaosim ,Inc., 2005), 6.

[5] I do not mean to insinuate here that there is only one way of playing fantasy games such as *D&D*. One of the unique and most rewarding aspects of the TRPG genre of games is the near unlimited diversity of play with nearly any game. Instead, I am merely asserting that the presentation and rules of most fantasy games encourage combat more than those of *Call of Cthulhu*.

[6] Petersen, Sandy et al., *Call of Cthulhu* (Hayward California: Chaosim ,Inc., 2005), 6.

[7] Professional wrestler David Heath played the character of Gangrel in the World Wrestling Federation (later World Wrestling Entertainment) from 1998 till 2001. The name Gangrel was taken directly from one of the names of the vampire clans in *Vampire: the Masquerade* and was eventually licensed by White Wolf Publishing after they threatened a legal battle with the then World Wrestling Federation.

[8] Origins Game Fair. "List of Winners." Accessed September 15, 2012.

[9] The play of *Vampire: the Masquerade* is encouraged to focus on the exchanging of favors between players, each trying to accomplish their own objectives while simultaneously trying to stymie their rivals.

[10] A common expression amongst individuals in the TRPG community, "roll-play" is meant to differentiate a style of play that focuses less on the story of the game and adoption of character roles and more on rolling the most dice and being the most effective character in the game.

[11] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barrash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 12-36.

[12] Ibid, 14.

[13] Ibid, 15.

[14] Ibid, 17.

[15] Ibid, 18.

[16] Ibid, 18.

[17] Ibid, 19.

[18] Ibid, 21.

[19] Ibid, 21-22.

[20] Ibid, 23.

[21] Ibid, 24.

[22] Ibid, 27.

[23] Ibid, 27-28.

[24] Ibid, 28.

[25] Ibid, 28.

[26] Ibid, 29.

[27] Thomas S. Hendricks, *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2006), 196.

[28] Ibid, 195.

[29] Ibid, 198.

[30] Ibid, 198.

[31] Gary Alan Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 6.

[32] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001), 4-5. All emphasis are MacKay's.

[33] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 10-11.

[34] Ibid, 168.

[35] Sean Q. Hendricks, "Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming," in *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*, edited by J. Patrick Williams et al. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2006), 39. All Parentheticals are Hendricks'.

[36] Dennis D. Wskul, "The Role-Playing Game and the Game of Role-Playing: The Ludic Self and Everyday Life," in *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*, edited by J. Patrick Williams et al. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2006), 19-21.

[37] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 43-44.

[38] Gary Alan Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 186.

[39]Ibid, 186.

[40] Sean Q. Hendricks, "Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming," in *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*, edited by J. Patrick Williams et al. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2006), 43.

[41] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001), 56.

[42] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 88-89.

[43] Sean Q. Hendricks, "Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming," in *Gaming as Culture: Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*, edited by J. Patrick Williams et al. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2006), 41.

[44] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001),121-134.

[45] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 75.

[46] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001), 77-85.

[47] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 124.

[48] Ibid, 124-147.

[49] The following is not an exhaustive list of scholarship which has made this argument, rather it is representative of influential and modern arguments concerning the utility of horror: Barry Brummet, "Electric Literature as Equipment for Living: Haunted House Films," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (1985): 247-249; Steven Allen, "Bringing the Dead to Life: Animation and the Horrific." *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 61 (2010): 87-107; Simone, do Vale, "Trash Mob: Zombie Walks and the Positivity of Monsters in Western Popular Culture." *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 70 (2010): 191-202; Beth A. Kattelman, "Carnographic Culture: America and the Rise of the Torture Porn Film," *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 70 (2010): 3-15; Thomas Reiglar, "We're All Dirty Harry Now: Violent Movies for Violent Times," *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 70 (2010): 17-41; Kinitra Brooks, "Finding the Humanity in Horror: Black Women's Sexual Identity in Fighting the Supernatural," *Poroi* 7 issue 2 (2011): 1-14; Heather L. Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Modern Popular Culture* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2008); David J. Skal, *The Monster Show* (New York: New York: Faber and Faber Inc, 2001); Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: New York: Everhoust Publishers, 1981); Lorena Russell, "Ideological Formations of the Nuclear Family in *The Hills Have Eyes*," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, edited by Thomas Fahy (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010) :102-120; John Lultz, "Zombies of the World, Unite: Class Struggle and alienation in *Land of the Dead*," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, edited by Thomas Fahy (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 212-136; John Lutz, "From Domestic Nightmares to the Nightmare of History: Uncnny Eruptions of Violence in King's and Kubrick's Versions of *The Shining*," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, edited by Thomas Fahy (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010) 161-178; Andrew L. Cooper, *Gothic Realities: The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture*

(Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010); Glen St. John Barclay, *Anatomy of Horror: The Masters of Occult Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978); Matt Hills. *The Pleasures of Horror* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Kendall R. Phillips. *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005); Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[50] Steven Allen, "Bringing the Dead to Life: Animation and the Horrific." *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 61 (2010): 87-107; Thomas Reiglar, "We're All Dirty Harry Now: Violent Movies for Violent Times," *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 70 (2010): 17-41; Heather L. Duda, *The Monster Hunter in Modern Popular Culture* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2008); David J. Skal, *The Monster Show* (New York: New York: Faber and Faber Inc, 2001); Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: New York: Everhoust Publishers, 1981); Lorena Russell, "Ideological Formations of the Nuclear Family in *The Hills Have Eyes*," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, edited by Thomas Fahy (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010) 102-120;); Kendall R. Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005).

[51] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revised* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.

[52] Ibid, 23.

[53] Ibid, 150.

[54] Barbara Creed, "Freud's Worst Nightmare: Dining With Hannibal Lecter ," in *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188-199.

[55] Ibid, 201.

[56] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: New York: Everhoust Publishers, 1981).

[57] Barry Brummet, "Electric Literature as Equipment for Living: Haunted House Films," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (1985): 249.

[58] Ibid, 248.

[59] Ibid, 248.

[60] Ibid, 247-249.

[61] AndrewL. Cooper, *Gothic Realities: The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010).

[62] Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[63] Simone, do Vale, "Trash Mob: Zombie Walks and the Positivity of Monsters in Western Popular Culture." *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries* 70 (2010): 198.

[64] Ibid, 191-202.

[65] Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," In *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, edited by Carl R. Burgchardt, (Pennsylvania: Starta Publishing, Inc, 2005), 58.

[66] Ibid, 60.

[67] Ibid, 62.

[68] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 8; Gary Allen Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 8; Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001),13.

[69] Gary Allen Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 8; Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001), 13.

[70] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Preforming Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2001), 13.

[71] Ibid, 13.

[72] Ibid, 14.

[73] Ibid, 15.

[74] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 22.

[75] Noah Wardrip-Fruin, and Nick Montfort, *NewMediaReader* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 29.

[76] Jenifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 24.

[77] High fantasy is a sub-genre of the fantasy genre. It is distinguished by typically either taking place in an entirely fictional universe, or a fictional universe existing within our own world (such as the wizarding world of the Harry Potter series), having a main hero who often must confront villains in physical combat, a focus on the dichotomy of good and evil, and a presence of magic. High fantasy is often also known as epic fantasy because of its grand narrative scope.

[78] Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement For All: History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 384-385.

[79] Ibid, 401.

[80] The only medium where high fantasy seemed to still be produced were comics. In 1970, Marvel Comics introduced the *Conan the Barbarian* series which was popular enough to launch a more adult oriented series *Savage Sword of Conan*.

[81] Gary Allen Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 15.

[82] Simon MacCulloch, "Lovecraft Waits Dreaming," in Dissecting Cthulhu: Essays on the Cthulhu Mythos ed. S. T. Joshi (Lakeland, Florida: Miskatonic River Press, 2011), 38.

[83] Richard L. Tierney, "The Derleth Mythos," in *Dissecting Cthulhu: Essays on the Cthulhu Mythos* ed. S. T. Joshi (Lakeland, Florida: Miskatonic River Press, 2011), 11.

[84] Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (New York, New York: Ballentine Books, 1981), 70.

[85] It is generally accepted that Lovecraft did not ever use the phrase "Cthulhu Mythos" to describe his plot device, however he did suggest some playful terms for it including Cthuluism and Yog-Sothery as potential names.

[86] Richard L. Tierney, "The Derleth Mythos," in *Dissecting Cthulhu: Essays on the Cthulhu Mythos* ed. S. T. Joshi (Lakeland, Florida: Miskatonic River Press, 2011); David E. Schultz, "Who Needs the 'Cthulhu Mythos'?," in *Dissecting Cthulhu: Essays on the Cthulhu Mythos* ed. S. T. Joshi (Lakeland, Florida: Miskatonic River Press, 2011); S. T. Joshi, "The Cthulhu Mythos: Lovecraft vs. Derleth," in *Dissecting Cthulhu: Essays on the Cthulhu Mythos* ed. S. T. Joshi (Lakeland, Florida: Miskatonic River Press, 2011).

[87] H. P. Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu*, DragonBytes.com, "The Works of H. P. Lovecraft," http://www.dagonbytes.com/thelibrary/lovecraft/thecallofcthulhu.htm, last accessed, June, 14, 2013.

[88] S. T. Joshi, Dissecting Cthulhu: Essays on the Cthulhu Mythos ed. S. T. Joshi (Lakeland, Florida: Miskatonic River Press, 2011), 7.

[89] Howard Phillip Lovecraft, Letter to August Derleth, August 3, 1931.

[90] Henry Jenkins, "*Star Trek* Return, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5 (1988): 88.

[91] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, Ltd.), 175.

[92] Ibid, 174.

[93] I fully understand that the use of the word "text" in this fashion privileges a view of an original text which exists independent of the discourses paratextually surrounding it. While I agree that the distinction between text and context, which includes the illegitimate works of textual poachers, is one developed socially by the critic rather than one existing in the phenomenological world, it is useful to remember that there exists a primary work which poachers poach from.

[94] No part of this explanation is meant to imply that textual invokers do not also poach texts at the same time as invoking them. As the very act of reading is an act of poaching, the textual invoker utilizes the activity of poaching as a tool to expand the original text.

[95] Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement For All: History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 432.

[96] Ibid, 439.

[97] Bob Batchelor and Stephan Stoddart, *American Popular Culture Through History: The 1980s* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 103.

[98] Ibid, 103.

[99] Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement For All: History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 439.

[100] Barry Brummett, "Electric Literature as Equipment for Living: Haunted House Films," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2 (1985): 247.

[101] Petersen, Sandy et al., *Call of Cthulhu* (Hayward California: Chaosim ,Inc., 2005), 25.

[102] Ibid, 156, 187-188.

[103] Hit points are an abstraction of relative physical health, with the higher the number the healthier and therefore more likely to survive combat a character or monster is. The inclusion of hit points for deities such as Cthulhu (160 to be exact) implies that a player will be able to theoretically kill said deities.

[104] Experience points are a systemic reward for players, representing their character's growth through the experiences they have in the game frame narrative. Players are able to exchange these experience points for increasing their skills, sanity, or other game characteristics, allowing them further control over the world system of the game and providing a relatively optimistic stance on the horrors of the universe functioning as potential for personal growth.

[105] Kendall R. Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005), 145.

[106] David J. Skal, *The Monster Show* (New York: New York: Faber and Faber Inc, 2001), 344.

[107] Ibid, 346.

[108] Anita Bryant, *Time*, June 13, 1977: 20.

[109] Robert Kastenbaum, "Safe Death in the Postmodern World," in *A Safer Death: Multidisciplinary Aspects of Terminal Care* eds. Anne Gilmore and Stan Gilmore (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1988), 12.

[110] Ibid, 284.

[111] Justin Achilli, et. al., *Vampire: the Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition* (Canada: CCP, 2011), 8.

[112] Ibid, 9.

[113] Ibid, 295.

[114] David J. Skal, *The Monster Show* (New York: New York: Faber and Faber Inc, 2001), 347.

[115] From the winter of 2006 until the spring of 2008 I played in a long-running game of *Vampire: the Masquerade*. The story stretched from pre-Roman times until the modern day, with each participant playing multiple characters by the end of the campaign.

[116] Justin Achilli, *New York By Night* (Clarkston, Georgia: White Wolf Publishing Inc., 2001), 7.

[117] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

[118] Ibid, 93.

[119] Ibid, 93.

[120] Ibid, 94.

[121] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 6.

[122] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984), 101.

[123] An example of how this asyndeton could be as simple as a player declaring, "My character runs from the subway station up onto the street and south towards the tremere clan chantry." In this case it would be possible to have the player describe each step and the space covered by

them, but it would be both cumbersome and break the spatial structuring presented to players in the city sourcebooks.

[124] William Jones et. al., *Call of Cthulhu: Secrets of New York* (Hayward, California: Chaosium Inc., 2005), 24.

[125] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984), 101.

[126] Ibid, 101.

[127] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984), 92; Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 111.

[128] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

[129] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 111.

[130] Ibid, 111-112.

[131] Ibid,110.

[132] Ibid, 11.

[133] Justin Achilli, *New York By Night* (Clarkston, Georgia: White Wolf Publishing Inc., 2001), 56.

[134] Ibid, 56.

[135] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 57.

[136] Ibid, 3.

[137] I have personally experienced this in my own gaming groups. The most recent example of this, at the time of the writing of this chapter, occurred in a game of *Legend of the Five Rings*. In the game I played a samurai named Bayushi Satoshi, however I was forced to move before the campaign had come to a conclusion. Within the narrative of the game, Bayushi Satoshi stayed with the rest of the player's characters well after I had left, until there was a narrative reason for the character to leave. In my absence, the storyteller played Bayushi Satoshi, however the other players continually commented to me that the storyteller could not play the character "right" because he was not me. This speaks to the argument of authorship made by Jenifer Grouling Cover in *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*.

[138] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* trans. William Weaver (San Diego, California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 44.

[139] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 166.

[140] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 14.

[141] Ibid, 14-15.

[142] Ibid, 13.

[143] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984), 106-107.

[144] Ibid, 107.

[145] Ibid, 133-134.

[146] Ibid, 135.

[147] While it is true that dioramas certainly existed before Carl Akeley, Akeley was the first taxidermist to focus on placing mounts in life-like poses and faux-naturalistic settings. Akeley's "Muskrat diorama", still on display at the Milwaukee Public Museum was the first introduction of the diorama to museums, which had previously focused on understanding natural subjects as decontextualized, what MacCannell terms "collections".

[148] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 78.

[149] William Jones et. al., *Call of Cthulhu: Secrets of New York* (Hayward, California: Chaosium Inc., 2005), 134.

[150] Ibid, 136-145.

[151] Ibid, 143.

[152] Ibid, 160.

[153] Ibid, 159.

[154] Justin Achilli, *New York By Night* (Clarkston, Georgia: White Wolf Publishing Inc., 2001), 113-119.

[155] Ibid, 119-123.

[156] Ibid, 123-124.

[157] Ibid 127.

[158] Ibid, 114.

[159] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1976), 13.

[160] Ibid, 43.

[161] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14.

[162] Ibid, 14.

[163] Ibid, 16.

[164] Ibid, 16.

[165] Christopher I. Lenrich, "Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games", *The Forge*, last accessed March, 22, 2013.

[166] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), 38.

[167] Ibid, 38.

[168] Milton B. Singer, *Traditional India* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1959), xii.

[169] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).

[170] Christopher I. Lenrich, "Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games", *The Forge*, last accessed March, 22, 2013.

[171] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 73.

[172] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.

[173] Ibid, 74.

[174] Christopher I. Lenrich, "Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games", *The Forge*, last accessed March, 22, 2013.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, 2001), 77.

[179] Ibid, 77.

[180] Christopher I. Lenrich, "Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games", The Forge, last accessed March, 22, 2013.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, 2001), 111.

[183] Ibid, 112.

[184] Through the use of the term "consumers" I do not wish to imply that there is a hard dichotomy between the acts of consumption and production. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 of this thesis, this is a false dichotomy as the act of consumption of a media text requires individuals to produce meaning for themselves. Instead, the use of the word consumers here is meant to evoke a more economic sense of the word than it may otherwise connote.

[185] Alyce Taylor Cheska, "Revival, Survival, and Revisal: Ethnic Identity Through 'Traditional Games'" in *Meaningful Play, Playful Meaning* ed. Gary Alan Fine (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers Inc., 1987), 149.

[186] George Eisen, "Coping in Adversity: Children's Play in the Holocaust" in *Meaningful Play, Playful Meaning* ed. Gary Alan Fine (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers Inc., 1987), 129-144.

[187] John R. Kelly, "How They Play in Peoria: Models of Adult Leisure" in *Meaningful Play, Playful Meaning* ed. Gary Alan Fine (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers Inc., 1987); Nancy R. King, "Researching Play in Schools" in *Meaningful Play, Playful Meaning* ed. Gary Alan Fine (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers Inc., 1987).

[188] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 91-110.

[189] Ibid, 91.

[190] Ibid, 91.

[191] Thomas S. Hendricks, *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression* (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 2006), 197.

[192] Ibid, 195.

[193] Ibid, 198.

[194] Ibid, 198.

[195] Tom E. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities* (San Francisco, California: Harper SanFrancisco, 1991), 7.

[196] Ibid, 163.

[197] Eric M Eisenberg, "Jamming: Transcendence Through Organizing" *Communication Research* 17:2, April 1990: 146.

[198] Daniel MacKay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, 2001), 112.

[199] Ibid, 146.

[200] Ibid, 147.

[201] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 74.

[202] Ibid, 78.

[203] Ibid, 78.

[204] Eric M Eisenberg, "Jamming: Transcendence Through Organizing" *Communication Research* 17:2, April 1990: 150.

[205] Ibid: 150.

[206] Ibid: 150.

[207] Ibid: 150.

[208] Ibid: 152.