ACQUIRING LITERACY: *TECHNE*, VIDEO GAMES AND COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

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Recent work within composition studies calls for an expansion of the idea of composition itself, an increasing advocacy of approaches that allow and encourage students to greater exploration and more “play.” Such advocacy comes coupled with an acknowledgement of technology as an increasingly influential factor in the lives of students. But without a more thorough understanding of technology and how it is manifest in society, any technological incorporation is almost certain to fail.

As technology advances along with society, it is of great importance that we not only keep up but, in fact, reflect on process and progress, much as we encourage students to do in composition courses. This document represents an exercise in such reflection, recognizing past and present understandings of the relationship between technology and society. I thus survey past perspectives on the relationship between techne, phronesis, praxis and ethos with an eye toward how such associative states might evolve. Placing these ideas within the context of video games, I seek applicable explanation of how techne functions in a current, popular technology. In essence, it is an analysis of video games as a techno-pedagogical manifestation of techne. With techne as historical foundation and video games as current literacy practice, both serve to improve approaches to teaching composition.
For my parents, who continue to support my education and, for 25 years, resisted my requests for video games
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And though I dedicate this document to my parents, their unwavering love and continued support of my educational endeavors warrant a second mention. I also need to thank my brother, Michael A. Schirmer, for the many conversations and shared gaming experiences which helped in the formative processes of composing this document. My final thanks go to Marci Monroe, whose critical eye, sharp wit and continual encouragement provided the further challenge and impetus necessary for completion.
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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW AND JUSTIFICATION

Introduction

Recent work within composition studies calls for an expansion of the idea of composition, and there is an increasing advocacy toward teaching approaches that allow and encourage students to greater exploration and more “play.” There is also movement away from the argumentative essay and more in the direction of other kinds of composing, including PowerPoint presentations, e-portfolios, websites and digital video productions. Such advocacy comes coupled with an acknowledgement of technology as an increasing influence in the lives of students entering composition classrooms. Theirs is a post-wired reality, writes Geoffrey Sirc in “Virtual Urbanism,” a reality so integrated with various technologies, from eBay and YouTube to XboxLive and iTunes, that “pedagogical applications have taken a back-seat” (16). These technologies are new and exciting and many students devote ever more attention to them, finding some in particular to be more engaging and rewarding than sitting in a composition classroom, learning to write by traditional instructional methods.

The continued writings of Sirc, among others, concern an increasing call to engage students where they are and where they want to be. Such scholarship also often stresses how American higher education fails to even adequately participate in this endeavor. It is here that various questions concerning implementation arise, and paramount among these focuses on how to make pedagogy more of a competitor. Of course, the easy answer is to incorporate said technologies to further learning and literacy, and while many compositionists already teach in computer-assisted classrooms, more remains to be done regarding pedagogical applications. Integrating such technologies can be done better, for without a more thorough understanding of
technology and how it is manifest in society, any incorporation is almost certainly doomed to some kind of failure. Therefore, it is necessary to peruse the history of the root of technology, *techne*, in the hopes of not only discovering an understanding applicable for today’s post-wired reality but also achieving a more beneficial balance between pedagogy and technology, perhaps even eliminating the very notion of competition between the two.

However, *techne* is a rather ambiguous term, despite being commonly understood as synonymous with art, craft and/or skill. Still, *techne* does not work in isolation; it is often inseparable from other old Greek words, like *episteme*, *ethos*, *phronesis* and *kairos*. It is therefore important to examine the relationships between such terms. Doing so not only reveals an operative definition of *techne* as the acquisition of literacies, but such examination is also necessary for understanding how *techne* itself is manifest within a current, popular technology, such as that of video games. Out of such analysis, we are then able to question the very nature of composition pedagogy in relation to technology, applying both *techne* and video games to the very design of a composition course. Through such a two-tiered methodology, we come closer to a peaceful and reciprocal relationship between pedagogy and technology, one in which each acknowledges and acts on the influence of the other.

My curiosity lies in the possible, dual application of *techne* and video games to composition pedagogy. As the very idea of what constitutes composition expands beyond any traditional definition, I am all the more interested in the benefits *techne* and video games bring to the theory and practice of teaching and work toward eliminating the competition between pedagogy and technology as well as better integrating learning principles from other technologies. There is an increasing amount of attention paid to *techne* as well as video games, as I explain in more detail later about how scientific and technical communication scholars look
to *techne* as a way to revise and/or reinvigorate their own pedagogical approaches. I think it is time for compositionists, who work more and more with technology, to do the same. And even as compositionists grasp at the inherent possibilities presented by MOOs and IM, it is important to explore beyond text-based approaches, particularly if students are to compose multimodal pieces. Video games, which collectively comprise an ever more popular medium that not only refashions earlier media but also promotes a degree of interactivity greater than other technologies, are surely representative of a more immersive style of learning.

This project begins with more detailed justifications for both *techne* and video games. It continues by way of surveying past perspectives on the relationship between *techne*, *phronesis*, *episteme* and *ethos* with an eye toward what remains applicable and beneficial today. Following is the implementation of these ideas within the context of video games, the purpose being an applicable explanation of how *techne* and its various cohorts function in a current, popular technology. In essence, it will be an analysis of video games as a techno-pedagogical manifestation of *techne*. Building on these perspectives and observations, I conclude with some speculative explanation of how and what composition pedagogy might take from *techne* and video games in terms of design.

In this way, each chapter builds upon the previous ones in the service of the overall goal, which concerns critiquing and validating some current composition practices as well as forwarding a more reciprocal relationship between pedagogy and technology. *Techne* provides a historical foundation and video games provide a current literacy practice, both of which serve to improve approaches to teaching composition. Prior to more detail on each chapter, though, it is essential to first delve deeper into how and why this project is important, regarding specifically the dual focus on *techne* and video games as beneficial to composition pedagogy.
The Ambiguity and Applicability of *Techne*

In writing of technology’s influence, scholars return to the root of the word, *techne*, which is rather ambiguous in meaning. Most often defined as art, craft, skill and/or the active application of knowledge, it is the very ambiguity of *techne* that many scholars find intriguing and beneficial to their ends, even though the pervasiveness and scope of *techne* also remains a point of contention. *Techne* is both a tool utilized, working in tandem with knowledge/wisdom to produce an effect or event, and more than a tool, often exhibiting a kind of autonomy which some embrace and others fear. Divorced from or saturated with emotion, separate or inseparable from knowledge and science, ‘mere craft’ or exalted art, these various interpretations of *techne* illuminate an interesting effect of multiplicity as our lives become increasingly seamless with myriad technologies, an effect which, as Sirc observed, composition pedagogy still struggles to account for. It is becomes necessary to not only revisit technology’s roots but to also ultimately provide my own understanding; while the latter occurs in Chapter 2, the former of these begins below. In so doing, we shall find a wide variety of definitions as well as many ideas concerning past and present technological influences on the very nature of human experience.

Prominent among these is Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology,” in which he not only defines technology instrumentally (as a means to an end) but also anthropologically (as a human activity). There is very little separation between these definitions, though, as “to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity” (4). And this makes sense is because, as Heidegger reveals later, *techne* is the name for the activities and skills of the craftsman as well as for the arts of the mind and the fine arts (13). As such, it is also a mode of revealing, the active application of knowledge *in preparation for* as an example,
the building of a house or the composing of a text. To a greater extent, technology does this as well, coming into existence and perpetuating that existence in those places and spaces of revealing.

In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong also explains *techne* and technology as modes of revealing, for vital aspects of the latter’s perpetuation come in the forms of awareness and critique, as our very understanding of differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age. Writing from the very beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it, enabling the organization of the constituents of oratory into a scientific ‘art’ (9). This is a kind of reinforced reciprocity leading into the idea of multiplicity, and I quote Ong at length here as a further illustration:

> Writing and print and the computer are all ways of technologizing the word. Once the word is technologized, there is no effective way to criticize what technology has done with it without the aid of the highest technology available. Moreover, the new technology is not merely used to convey the critique: in fact, it brought the critique into existence. (79)

In essence, *techne* not only enables and inherently encourages further *techne* (and technology), but also its critical analysis. Reflection is as necessary an aspect as reciprocation here, and the multiple technologies available for engagement also enable greater awareness of *techne* itself. *Techne* is not only more available but also more open and visible. *Techne/ology* reciprocates and reflects back on itself, possessing an almost ethereal autonomy.

In *Writing Space*, Jay David Bolter has a particular word to describe this process: “remediation” (23). It is a kind of refashioning of writing technologies, in which “a newer medium takes the place of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of
writing in the older medium and reforming its cultural space” (23) with the implicit (though often now stated) purpose to improve upon an existing technology. However, as Bolter and Richard Grusin explain in their book-length work, *Remediation*, digital technologies now proliferate faster than cultural, legal and educational institutions can keep pace, which they consider to be a “double logic of remediation” (5), with our culture both multiplying and erasing all traces of mediation. This is a further development of the idea of repurposing, which involves the use of certain features of older communicative technologies in new ones. As observed by Nicholas Negroponte in *Being Digital*, the popularity of movies caused plays to be repurposed into film, and movies to be repurposed for television (63). In this way, remediation/repurposing is driven as much by socio-economic forces as anything else, and cyberspace is a prime example of this, given its continual expansion and its begetting of email, discussion boards, blogs and social networking sites, each of which possess an associative techne. As Bolter himself originally wrote, cyberspace is not “divorced from the natural and social world that we know; rather, it is an expression and extension of both” (98).

All of the aforementioned authors acknowledge that only through technological implementation by human beings is such reciprocation and remediation even possible. Technology has yet to accomplish such processes entirely on its own, although autonomous aspects are increasing, as R.L. Rutsky observes in *High Techne: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman*. Challenging the modernist notion of technology as mere instrument or tool, Rutsky writes of how there is “not only a shift in the conception of technology, and of the aesthetic, but also a shift in the very definition of humanity” (103). Through acknowledgements of the science fiction worlds of literature (William Gibson, Octavia Butler) and film (*Blade Runner, Metropolis*), Rutsky further illustrates an argument for
technology as an autonomous aspect within the continued development of humanity. Rutsky, ultimately revealing an understanding of techne as possessing both aesthetic and technical characteristics, stresses the importance of each in our contemporary techno-culture, one in which interaction is necessary not just for understanding but for continued survival.

Taking this idea further is Mark Hansen with *Embodying Technesis: Technology beyond Writing*, who also contends that technologies alter the very basis of human experience, changing not only perception but its very structure, making murky the waters of what constitutes identity or agency. This is due at least in part to what Hansen calls “the robust materiality of technology” (4), echoing Rutsky’s recognition of the importance of aesthetics in today’s technologically-oriented society. By defining technesis as “the putting-into-discourse of technology” (4), Hansen also channels Heidegger, who understood the very questioning of technology as a way of thinking through it and technology as a mode of revealing truth.

And while both Rutsky and Hansen have more to say about the relationship(s) between technology and culture rather than contested definitions of techne, I include them here because they demonstrate what continues to influence any understanding of techne and also the wider implication(s) for the teaching of writing, a technology (if not a techne) in itself. As we employ computer technologies to engage students in composition, a kind of technological multiplicity occurs. Because of this, the teaching of composition is influenced by those technologies it employs. With the increasing aesthetics of such technologies, thanks in large part to various aspects of cyberspace, becoming more aware of the influence of technology regarding society could be of great assistance in general education. Furthermore, technology is increasingly transparent in society, becoming so ubiquitous that it is rarely noticed anymore. With contemporary composition students living in a space of technological transparency, the kind of
instruction suggested in this document overall has the potential to make these tacit technologies more visible and open to further critical analysis.

This is something R.A. Hodgkin advocates in “Techne, Technology and Inventiveness,” critiquing the new ‘British’ Design Technology curriculum, which conceived of technology in an incredibly narrow way. Hodgkin suggests that the most beneficial forms of child’s play embody not only elements of science and analysis but also experimental making. In other words, the curriculum discussed falls short of an awareness concerning the pragmatic and aesthetic, the natural and experiential elements of learning. Hodgkin includes techne in this discussion to better illustrate how education should work, noting that inherent to techne is “the suggestion of learning within a tradition and under skilled practitioners who generate and transmit the tacit values, standards and skills of their craft” (208). With this understanding, Hodgkin provides a rough classification of the different kinds of artifacts and tools produced by human kinds of techne, thereby emphasizing “the great range of makings and doings towards which young humans ought to be shaping their capabilities” (213). Out of this classification, Hodgkin concludes by explaining how technology and science endure, “through successive layers of play, practice and exploration and with the whole process being speeded up and given precision by the catalyzing power of language and number” (216). In this way, Hodgkin explains an understanding of techne as the bringing-together of creativity and regulation in the service of production.

However, I am wary of this characterization of techne as being in the service of production, partly because of the capitalistic implication and partly because a necessary aspect to my pedagogy involves helping students become active, critical users, not just consumers and/or producers. Such a concern is increasingly shared by some of those in the scientific and technical
communication community, as evidenced by contributions to a special 2002 issue of _TCQ_ on _techne_, many of whom view it as more than ‘in preparation for’ as Heidegger did.

For example, in “Techne and Technical Communication,” Jay Gordon seeks a beneficial connection between ancient understandings of _techne_ and present problems in the teaching of technical writing. Gordon also acknowledges ancient disagreements, primarily between Plato and Aristotle, but understands _techne_ as a kind of control over chance, as the intimate understanding of ideal forms, arguing that “a genuine _techne_ embodies both theory and practice because the former supplies the ‘rationality’ that explains and justifies the latter” (156). I should note here, too, that Gordon views the Classical Greek discourse as especially useful as many of the issues addressed “continue to be important to technical communication teachers and students, albeit with certain reconfigurations” (161). It is my contention that the same might be said for composition.

Similar to Gordon, though, is James Dubinsky who, in “More Than a Knack: Techne & Teaching Technical Communication,” writes of _techne_ as a situational bridge over the gap between theory and practice, built through collaboration, questioning and dialogue. In particular, he draws similarity between the _techne_ of medicine and the _techne_ of teaching given the “reliance upon the contingent and indeterminate and the fact that both patients and students are human…that what works for one won’t necessarily work for all” (132). However, this particular alignment of medicine and teaching could be detrimental rather than beneficial. This is something of an update from the Greeks as Plato’s Socrates made a similar joining between the arts of medicine and rhetoric, but likening teaching writing to medicine makes me wary, if only because there are particularly pointed passages in Mike Rose’s _Lives on the Boundary_ which show how harmful the influence of medical language has been on American education. Even if
such a comparison works well in further illuminating Dubinsky’s argument, such a connection has the potential to be taken too far. Still, Dubinsky stresses that teaching is not simply a knack or mere craft but rather “an art that requires a flexible attentiveness to the situation and audience” (138).

In slight contrast, Ryan Moeller and Ken McAllister offer up various and sundry understandings that emphasize the truly complex nature of *techne*, using historical Greek and Roman anecdotes to better illustrate *techne* as a many-splendored thing. Through providing perspective on *techne* as conversation about an art, as ingenuity, cunning, trickery, chance and artisanship, Moeller and McAllister seek better ways to introduce technical communication to students, “letting them learn and play with the rudiments of technical communication before requiring them to act like experts and professionals” (187). Furthermore, such focus on *techne* encourages students to think in a way more expansive, “as technical communicators in a society rather than as employees who have a job to do” (188). The authors see within *techne* and its many definitions the possibility for active, critical thinking. To further this process, Moeller and McAllister stress movement beyond descriptions of technical communication as the practice of clear presentations of technical information and reclaim *techne* as “creative, ingenious, tricky, unpredictable, and utterly human” (204) for work as teachers and technical communicators.

Byron Hawk, in “Toward a Post-*Techne*—Or, Inventing Pedagogies for Professional Writing,” builds on the ideas offered by Gordon, Dubinsky and Moeller and McAllister as well as Rutsky’s revisionist notions by conceiving of *techne* as techniques for situating bodies in contexts, or ‘readiness-to-hand,’ which is “not about technology’s usefulness…but the immediate relation of one thing to another thing” (375). This also represents movement beyond the modernist notion of technology critiqued, in particular, by Rutsky. A post-*techne* pedagogy,
explains Hawk, “would need to be enacted in workplace contexts to both produce and reproduce techniques specifically for that…situation” (383). Kairotic in theory and practice, such pedagogy incorporates not only the techniques of the teachers situating the students but also the techniques of the students produced in specific contexts (384). Echoing an idea prefaced to some degree by Hansen, Hawk concludes by stressing the importance of teachers of rhetoric and writing inventing situations by embodying them.

These recent studies in scientific and technical communication all recognize that, because of technology’s influence as well as our influence upon technology, it is beneficial if not wholly necessary to explore techne. Compositionist Diane Penrod also stresses the importance of doing so. In Composition in Convergence, she reflects on how various technologies affect the assessment of student writing, focusing specifically on how computer technology disrupts conventional literacy practices like reading and writing while also encouraging the development of new models for thinking. With written discourse so shaped by computer technology, there comes a need, writes Penrod, to “return to Composition’s rhetorical roots to find a language and a methodology” (26) for evaluation. This means a reintroduction of terms like kairos, copia, expediency and techne, all of which represent different applications of how students manipulate language and text in response to their audiences. In particular, Penrod sees techne as a critical aspect because “it reflects the writers’ ability to handle typography, graphics, color, white or blank space, and even sound” (26) in addition to student competence regarding the written word. Similar to Gordon, Dubinsky, Moeller and McAllister and Hawk, Penrod actively redefines techne to serve a particular pedagogical end, i.e., evaluation, emphasizing the importance of aesthetic criticism.
In expressing my earlier concerns, though, I consequently call into question the very idea of pedagogy as *techne*, whether or not this is even right or necessary. Of course, the rightness may simply depend on how we define *techne*, which is why I provided here a wide variety of meanings. We might therefore inquire as to what kind of *techne* teaching should be. Again, the very ambiguity of the meaning of *techne* allows for wide applicability, just as the ambiguous nature of technological utilization allows for much the same. But we need to do something more with both, if only because technology and society, as explained by Heidegger, Rutsky and Hansen, are ever more in convergence. Furthermore, as Hodgkin noted, with present educational models failing to live up to technology’s expectations, there needs to be more exploration of *techne* and better understanding of just how to implement it, along with technology, in the classroom. With initial explorations by the likes of Gordon, Dubinsky, Moeller and McAllister and Hawk already underway, there is a greater allowance for even deeper scholarship in this particular area.

This is also worth considering because, as Penrod stressed, of the present technomultiplicity already present in the composition classroom. Perhaps coming to perceive composition pedagogy as a *techne*, thereby furthering multiplication, will provide a greater perspective and reveal all the more the importance of self-reflection in this techno-culture of ours. And such perception can only be aided by exploring the very nature of *techne* in relation to other old Greek words, like *phronesis, episteme, ethos* and even *kairos*. Understanding these terms is necessary for greater comprehension and broader application of *techne*. Inquiry into these relationships should also reveal some aspects synonymous with those basic questions often asked within composition scholarship concerning theory and pedagogy.
**The Expansion of Literacy and Video Games**

Basic questions of composition scholarship are often dependent upon the very concept of literacy, one that, thanks to technology, also continues to expand. The use of technology (and the conduct governing use) requires literacy, knowledge as multiple in range and scope as the various and sundry applications utilized. And it is conduct and use of technology that further shapes not only literacy but also technology itself, as noted by the reciprocal relationship already alluded to. Video games as a whole are rather representative of both applications utilized and contributors to changes in literacy and technology. Therefore, to better understand the place of video games in this regard, it is necessary to first explore how literacy changes due to technological influence.

While not explicitly acknowledging video games in his presentation of a rhetorical model of multimedia communication as well as an analysis of the multimedia composition process, Gary Heba, in “HyperRhetoric: Multimedia, Literacy, and the Future of Composition,” does provide an important perspective, leaning in the direction of a new understanding of literacy. As multimedia blurs the boundaries among cultural media which thereby allows us to sample, assemble and reassemble various fragments, multimedia literacy is “a kind of meta-literacy, produced by a meta-technology, which provides a new electronic meta-context for discourse” (21). This is in rather sharp contrast to the traditional orientation to communication held by composition teachers as this literacy, dubbed HyperRhetoric, is a form of communication that continually invents and reinvents itself through an ongoing negotiation among users, developers, electronic context, and its presentation in a multimedia environment. (22)
This communicative process is in a constant state of movement, meaning that “specific literacies come into play as needed and recede when others are required” (23). We might view this as similar to the technological multiplicity explained earlier; there is not so much a layering or hierarchy present in multimedia literacy as utilization on a need-to-know, contextualized basis. There is an immediacy to this literacy, which inherently calls for active engagement rather than passive absorption. Furthermore, as Heba provides a semiotic framework for additional understanding of HyperRhetoric, reminding us that there exists no single author of any multimedia publication, it is also possible to recall the reciprocity and reinforcement within techne.

In something of a complement to Heba’s focus on literacy, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin concentrate on multimedia itself, putting forth the argument in Remediation: Understanding New Media that new visual media achieve cultural significance by paying homage to, rivaling and refashioning earlier media. The authors explain how video games are an integral part of this communicative process, remediating not just the computer but also television and film by way of requiring intimate interface involvement, acknowledging the medium and redefining the standard, respectively. In this way, video games comprise an addition and/or expansion to multimedia literacy by way of refashioning those technologies, creating a deeper degree of interactivity and increasing negotiations among users, developers and contexts. Interestingly enough, it is because of this dual remediation of film and television, write Bolter and Grusin, that video games have come under attack (99). The very immediacy of experience, of greater interactivity, presented by video games for our visual culture becomes a threat to those who fear erotic and/or violent immediacy. In fact, we might view video games as closer to the act of composing for they allow “the player to intervene in the action and so to define a role
unlike the one offered by film, video, or photography” (101). Video games are almost archetypal 
of technological possibility, possessing the capacity for good or evil, depending on use.

Such role definition, though, is difficult without some knowledge of how to best operate within the medium, particularly as it fluctuates on its contextualized foundation. Offering another perspective, similar to Heba’s HyperRhetoric as well as nodding to the continual remediation of technology, is James A. Inman who introduces, in *Computers and Writing: The Cyborg Era*, a new term for contemporary meaning-making, cyborg literacy, defined as “the integration of a series of systems that compel simultaneous attention to individuals, technologies, and other elements in the contexts they share” (160). However, Inman himself admits it has no easy-to-follow guidelines, because cyborg literacy relies instead on individuals to choose which systems prove important and allows for the pursuit of “whatever is interesting whenever it is interesting” (164).

Since both literacy, as mentioned by Heba, and technology, as mentioned by Bolter and Grusin, are continual processes of negotiation, there is some measure of difficulty in creating principles for design and evaluation. However, Inman’s lack of any kind of workable heuristic is troubling and, within a compositional context, almost impossible in which to engage students. And while cyborg literacy builds on both HyperRhetoric and remediation by way of embracing the amalgamation of multiple systems of interaction, it does not go far enough in providing an applicable framework for teaching composition in this age of information technologies. Furthermore, this notion of literacy does not work or play well with video games, many of which operate under rather strict rules of engagement. Pursuing whatever is interesting whenever it is interesting is likely to get the player of military-oriented games, which have very specific goals and outcomes, killed.
Furthermore, just because processes of negotiation are ongoing does not mean heuristics are unworkable, as evidenced by Stuart A. Selber’s *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, which advocates and situates an expansion of the idea of literacy in this techno-culture of ours by providing a conceptual landscape of a computer multiliteracies program, emphasizing suggestion and compliment over restriction and competition. Similar to Heba’s HyperRhetoric yet different from Inman’s notion of cyborg literacy, Selber stresses that technology and its contexts are “dynamic, contingent, and negotiable by nature” (29) and supplies a three-fold heuristic for understanding literacy, and outlines parameters for each in subsequent chapters. First among these is functional literacy, which involves student understanding and management of computers; second is critical literacy and concerns student recognition and questioning of the politics of computers; and third is rhetorical literacy, which focuses on persuasive, deliberative and reflective action regarding interface design. Altogether, Selber’s approach to literacy is not only more grounded in rhetorical theory but also more concretely cognizant of how composition teachers desire to utilize technology in the classroom as a complement to student understanding. Such an approach, too, aligns the importance of interrogating the very uses of literacy and technology with the need for a practical pedagogical framework.

This is important work because, as Cynthia Selfe explains in *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*, a critique of present policy and practice as well as a call-to-action, “literacy instruction is now inextricably linked with technology” (5), echoing sentiments expressed earlier, most notably by Heba. Given this link, technology is as much part of teachers’ responsibility now as literacy and with the two merged into technological literacy we now have what refers to
social and cultural contexts for discourse and communication, as well as the social and linguistic products and practices of communication and the ways in which electronic communication environments have become essential parts of our cultural understanding of what it means to be literate (11).

Therefore, given the continual technological advances we experience, it is important to pay attention to the wide variety of contexts, practices and environments, thereby enabling us to take better advantage of opportunities to introduce new and interesting ways of thinking about the very nature of literacy and pedagogy.

And yet, to some, attentiveness to such activities might seem irrelevant, annoying or even innocuous, much as this very project might seem. However, as Johndan Johnson-Eilola explains in *Datacloud*, an examination of information work from a variety of approaches and perspectives, we live in “a shifting and only slightly contingently structured space” (4), rearranging, filtering, breaking down and combining information of all makes and models. Because we live in a networked culture, which comprises communication networks, concepts, objects and subjects constructed by interconnected social and technical forces, examining those activities which appear trivial “can help us to better understand, learn from, shape, and extend these cultural shifts in productive ways” (9). The very multiplicity of literacies and technologies in which we now engage not only allow but perhaps even require that we interrogate communicative actions normally considered to be divorced from learning.

As explained earlier by Bolter and Grusin, video games necessarily comprise a variety of communicative activities and James Paul Gee, in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, argues that video games are rather intricate learning experiences, serving as interesting illustrations of how literacy works with technology right now. To further illustrate
this point, Gee outlines thirty-six learning principles built into good video games, including identity formation, choices in problem-solving, ability transfer, situated meaning and multimodality. Each of these principles has strong support in current research on human learning in cognitive science and thus, “the theory of learning in good video games fits better with the modern, high-tech, global world today’s children and teenagers live in than do the theories (and practices) of learning that they see in school” (7). Throughout the text, Gee remains steadfast in his thinking that there is much to be learned from video games as well as from those who play them, if only we take both seriously, while also encouraging more serious scholarship regarding video games.

Heeding this call are the contributors to *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*, a collection, edited by Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher, which examines the influence of this particular technology from a variety of perspectives. The majority of the pieces take the form of case studies in which scholars worked closely with their human subjects, many of whom were ultimately co-authors. Despite a four-part organization into “Gaming and Literacy,” “Gaming and Difference,” “Gaming and Gender” and “Gaming Across Time,” this collection exhibits some boundary-crossing ideas, the majority of which have to do with the intersections of identity, literacy and narrative and subsequent applications to composition pedagogy.

Of particular note is “Gaming, Identity, and Literacy,” by Daniel Keller with Paul Ardis, Vivienne Dunstan, Adam Thornton, Rachel Henry and Brett Witty, which focuses on the genre of interactive fiction (IF). Primarily text-based and computer-oriented, IF is a gaming environment through which players make a seemingly endless series of choices in forming a projective identity while progressing through a narrative. After profiling his co-authors, Keller makes a series of observations on what composition teachers might learn from their literacy
practices and values, including the pleasure students may feel in gaming environments because such spaces provide a “degree of choice they require to invest productively and enjoyably in a projective identity” (83), the formation of which is very important for developing writers. Keller also explains how games provide low-risk environments and continuous assessment and how teachers should engage in similar activities with low-stakes writing assignments and positive feedback (84), with the end result being, of course, better writers. And while Keller acknowledges the impossibility of replicating in the classroom the identical level of engagement students have with video games, by no means does this lessen the possibility of creating “learning experiences that come closer to students’ preferred ways of learning” (87).

Echoing but also reframing Keller’s observations, Joann Griffin’s “Relationship Gaming and Identity” places more emphasis upon the frame of narrative and its relation to the process of developing a self. Through studying the relationship of Josh and Stephanie and how video games play a part, Griffin highlights how we construct our narratives as well as our shared identities through social interaction with others (139). She also acknowledges video gaming as a significant aspect of many students’ lives, stressing the importance of encouraging student writers to observe, share and document their experiences with video games, what Griffin considers to be “important identity construction” (139). And while Griffin acknowledges the classed and gendered nature of video games, she also explains how their immediacy can be both challenging and rewarding “for asking questions about how one sees oneself in relationship to other identities and why” (141).

Like Keller and Griffin, though more closely related to my own research interests here, Debra Journe, in “Narrative, Action, and Learning,” is concerned with how video games might promote the kinds of literacies valued in the composition classroom. Essential to such discovery
is first the development of ways for scholars and teachers to “experience for ourselves what video games offer—either directly by playing these games or indirectly by listening to the reports of other players” (115). Journet’s contribution to *Gaming Lives in the Twenty First Century* is an exercise in the former, for she details her own experiences with *Myst*, a computer game which puts the player in the rather anonymous role of detective and problem-solver. This resembles Keller’s and Griffin’s earlier observations on the relations between identity, narrative and literacy.

   It is my aim to not only acknowledge the changing nature of literacy but also incorporate video games in the overall discussion, further heeding Gee’s call as well as Journet’s suggestion. And this is important work because, as Heba explained earlier, there is ongoing a process of negotiation inherent to present multimedia which exerts an influence not only on various and sundry technologies but also the ways in which we learn and use them. In turn, as noted by Bolter and Grusin, video games by their very nature reveal such processes in creation and subsequent interactivity. These are two aspects that both Inman and Selber attempt to better incorporate within their own separate understandings of what Selfe calls technological literacy; while the former presents a step in the right direction, only the latter is able to articulate a heuristic workable within the process of negotiation. As such, communication is not only necessary but vital, and Johnson-Eilola acknowledges this through an analysis of but one of its forms, thus opening the door for inquiry into other varieties. Gee’s work with video games, as well as that of *Gaming Lives*’ contributors, are of particular interest in that both acknowledge the allure of such technology in much the same way Sirc does in “Virtual Urbanism.”

   And although Gee’s work with video games so far remains rather general, it is also poignant in specific application. There are certain moments in which Gee alludes to how
particular video game learning principles could have applications to the teaching of science. These particular passages necessarily inspired my own interest regarding possible theoretical and practical uses for composition pedagogy. However, such an interest does not stand sturdy enough on its own. To better understand techne, it is necessary to show how it functions within a current technology. Furthermore, to better understand video games, it is necessary to explain them in relation to contextualized, historical inquiry of an old Greek word.

Chapter Overviews

As the above review of literature concerning techne and video games shows, technology exerts an incredible, increasing influence upon society and the way we learn and acquire literacy. Furthermore, if we understand techne as an aesthetic, affecting and autonomous art to be learned and practiced in context, video games surely represent yet another arena in which we might explore epistemology and apply at least some of its approaches to composition pedagogy. Technology is an integral part of teaching writing, and it is therefore important to go beyond acknowledgement and awareness by discussing and implementing approaches that encourage and complement new ways of making meaning. Technical communicators are already engaged in such discussions, as are a number of those in composition. The following chapters are a continuation of such work, to not only better understand ancient, initial ideas in relation to the present but also to revise current pedagogical approaches so they remain timely as well as engaging to the next generation of students.

Each subsequent chapter is in the service of this as well as my introductory query concerning a more beneficial balance between pedagogy and technology. This first chapter explains the importance of understanding techne and video games in relation to composition
pedagogy through a review of literature cognizant of reciprocal relationships among technology, society and literacy and acknowledging scholarship already exploring further implications of such associations. The second chapter, “Complicating Techne to Understand It” seeks to provide a unique perspective on the interaction between techne, phronesis, episteme, ethos and even kairos as a way of addressing my initial questions, though it will not be so much of an historical analysis as a selective survey of ancient Greek understandings of techne in the service of better understanding how to approach and implement technology in a composition course.

The focus of the second chapter rests almost exclusively upon selections of Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates as well as secondary observations of their work, much of which focuses not only on their understandings of techne itself but also its relation to phronesis, episteme, ethos and kairos. From such primary and secondary observations, I draw my own definition of techne as, quite simply, the acquisition of literacy. This is a view I do not so much suggest as deem wholly necessary because of the increasing seamlessness with which we conduct ourselves, utilizing a variety of technologies to achieve particular effects and events and further revealing the inseparability of technology and society. In this way, I argue that we have the capacity to come full circle and reinstitute a kind of Isocratic pedagogy in the composition classroom, one concerned with literacy as civic participation.

Such a concluding view leads into the third chapter, “Manifest Techne in Video Games” which provides further clarification of the relationship between techne, phronesis, episteme, ethos and even kairos through the current, popular technology of video games, ultimately seeking a more current understanding of these factors influential to composition pedagogy. And to better promote such understanding, I frame much of my discussion within the thirty-six learning principles James Paul Gee identifies within all good video games. By way of immersive
and interactive design, repeated actions in such games lead to better skills and more difficult challenges, and this leads us back to the idea of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, of learning that is constant and as satisfying as it is demanding. Through the incorporation of various, interactive game elements which encourage particular actions within the environment, such games are rather representative of how *techne*, among other ancient Greek concepts, is manifest in a current, popular technology. The primary intention of the third chapter is to explicate these representations even further through three particular video games.

First among these is *Okami* for the PlayStation2 (PS2) gaming console, in which the player is responsible for exploring a visually breathtaking landscape and utilizing an increasing collection of skills to recreate a once destroyed world. Innovative game play requires an adaptive and contextual learning style, one which involves the use of “painting” with the gaming controller as well as knowledge of which particular skill to utilize in a given situation. Second is *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, also for the PS2, which incorporates a variety of seemingly mundane, repetitive activities in the service of one of nine ultimate goals, all of which share similarity in saving a town from being ruined by resort developers. *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, for the Xbox as well as the PC, is the third video game upon which shall be a key focus, as its nonlinear game play and almost unlimited character creation are rather pivotal factors in relation to some of the learning principles outlined by Gee. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Gee makes allusions to how some of these same learning principles could be applied to the science classroom; it is my intention to make similar allusions in the fourth chapter, “Opportunities for Engagement in Composition”.

As such, it applies what we learned about *techne* and video games to composition theory, reassessing the design of composition sequences in relation to past and present scholarship in the
field. The intention here is to at once show how compositionists already adhere to both an understanding of *techne* as well as video game learning theories and also advocate how we should adhere to these elements in the future. Quite similar to composition courses and classrooms, video games are also constructed situations, although they more often offer users the freedom to move about as they desire, though always with a larger goal in sight, distant as it might be. Video games not only further reveal the relationship between *techne, phronesis,* *praxis* and *ethos,* but also have something to say about how to mediate through academia and techno-culture, two areas of increasing similarity. The fourth chapter offers some new designs for composition sequences that acknowledge both *techne* as the acquisition of literacy and Gee’s learning principles, ultimately concluding with a renewed call for the expansion of the “skill-set” of composition and to engage students where they are and where they want to be. Technology itself presents many opportunities through which to redefine literacy and learning, and while awareness of this is important, it is also only the first step, and the sequences in the fourth chapter are attempts beyond awareness and into greater action.

Through an overview of the previous chapters and some observations on limitations as well as implications for further study, the fifth and final chapter, “Moving Forward by Looking Back,” reiterates how understanding *techne* and video games are beneficial to teaching composition and provides some concluding commentary on what the field of composition should continue working toward. This involves working in acknowledgement of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy as well as of the gaming theories of learning explained by James Paul Gee. Taken together, more connections can be made and new course designs created to provide even greater possibilities for students to engage and experiment in myriad contexts.
Conclusion

As technology advances, and society along with it, it is of great importance that we not only keep up but, in fact, reflect on the process and the progress, much as teachers encourage students to do in composition courses. We need to be more attentive to technological influences, which are also often unmarked in the lives of the students entering composition classrooms, and redesign courses and sequences accordance with these influences. As such, there is much to learn from historical understandings of techne and its current manifestations in popular technologies, like video games. Such technologies reveal techne as flexible and diverse, each requiring rather different forms of interaction in relation to particular principles and the acquisition of means to desirable and fulfilling ends, achieved through tapping into the potential presented within.

And it is through various communicative technologies that we are better able to not only understand ourselves and the identities we create but to also comprehend and enact the changes we want to see in various contexts. Understanding techne as the acquisition of literacy and seeing the current, popular technology of video games as an example of this idea necessarily leads into rethinking composition, re-imagining approaches and sequences designed to promote active, critical thinking. And while technology appears to be of primary focus, it is only so in the service of learning. In essence, what can be gained from the following discussion of techne as manifest in video games is not only a burgeoning appreciation for how the concept operates today but also a greater curiosity for how it connects with current approaches to teaching.

Overall, this document is an exercise in reflection, recognizing past and present understandings of the relationship between technology and society and, more specifically, between techne, phronesis, episteme and ethos. Out of the exploration of such relationships,
there arise some new, alternate understandings of various aspects of composition, which are further illustrated by a focus upon the particular technology of video games as a manifestation of the aforementioned relationships. Doing all of this should help composition in doing a better job of keeping up with and integrating technology, bringing closer together and making more obvious the aesthetic and technical aspects of the various communicative technologies students use to make meaning. It should also help composition operate in greater acknowledgement of the increasing inseparability of technology and society, helping students understand the civic aspects of every action. And it should also encourage greater unification of ideas about what constitutes composition itself.
CHAPTER 2: COMPLICATING TECHNE TO UNDERSTAND IT

Introduction

In revisiting and reimagining the concept of techne for pedagogical purposes, to better fit theoretical constructs of teaching to the techno-culture many students now inhabit, it is possible to see techne as a kind of control over chance (Gordon 2002), as a situational bridge over the gap between theory and practice (Dubinsky 2002), as ingenuity, cunning, trickery, chance and artisanship (Moeller and McAllister 2002), as contextual techniques for situated bodies (Hawk 2004) and as reflection on aesthetic criticism (Penrod 2005). There is a collective acknowledgement of techne’s expansive ambiguity here, a characteristic embraced because it is the ambiguous nature of this ancient Greek concept that allows for such particular, pedagogical ends, ends which are all the more tied to technology in society.

Langdon Winner, in “Techne and Politeia: The Technical Constitution of Society,” recognizes the present inseparability of technology and society, first defining techne as a field of practice with its own distinctive knowledge and skills and politeia as “the proper order of human relationships within a city-state” (97). By way of an historical overview on the impact of sustained industrial development regarding Western political thought that Winner initially explains our present state, one in which “technical forms of life…give powerful and authoritative shape to human affairs” (98). Techne and politeia are now not so much drawn close together as they are impossible to separate, and, according to Winner, this means that “what appear to be merely instrumental choices are better seen as choices about the form of the society we continually build, choices about the kinds of people we want to be” (105). Every technological
act is a political one, possessing the capacity for change, as “our instruments are institutions in the making” (109).

In “Techne and the Origins of Modernity,” Stanley Rosen echoes many of Winner’s sentiments, focusing in particular upon the influence of Platonism in the development of the modern era. Emphasizing early that a healthy city does not exist by nature and instead must be produced by politics, “a theorectico-productive art that corrects nature or supplements it with artifacts for the protection of human beings” (73), Rosen acknowledges the inseparability of technology and society, and expands the very notion of what constitutes techne and technology. Rosen also concurs with Winner in how political and scientific aspects of technical production “modify and stimulate each other so as to lead to the development of a comprehensive philosophical program of revolution” (79), one impossible to designate as theoretical, practical or productive because it is all three. When it comes to sociopolitical and technological change, it is all happening, almost at once. Communicative online technologies like blogs and YouTube are primary evidence of this, both exacting an increasing influence upon politics in the U.S. as well as the distribution of information across the country with many major media outlets picking up on stories, factual or not, first found in such spaces.

This idea of philosophical, revolutionary change, explained in different words by Winner and Rosen, permeates not only some scholarship in composition and scientific and technical communication but also Carl Mitcham’s Thinking through Technology, a survey of the issues surrounding the philosophy of technology, concerned as much with the utilization of technology in society as with those responsible for its implementation. In conclusion to the fifth chapter, “Philosophical Questions about Techne,” Mitcham makes the following observation:
The making of artifacts—what things are made, how they are made and used—is not always the result of some straightforward accumulation of technical knowledge or power; it is conditioned not only by social needs and values, but also, and perhaps more significantly, by philosophical ideas. (134)

Mindful of this acknowledgement, this chapter proceeds with an engagement of such ideas and more than leans toward yet another redefinition of *techne*, of understanding it as the acquisition of literacy, a literacy that is multimodal in extent and execution. To understand *techne* as the acquisition of literacy is to see, within technology, an active, persistent engagement, a practical application, reflective and reciprocal, of ever-expanding knowledge. Exacting influence upon such practices are sociopolitical and technical factors which are, in turn, just as much a part of the acquisition of literacy itself.

This is not so much circular action as continual, with *techne* as the acquisition of literacy remaining in constant motion, not spinning its wheels (though it might appear as such), but instead moving right along (though not always at a comfortable pace for some). To better illuminate this understanding, the focus of this chapter rests upon a selective survey of works by Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates as well as scholarly secondary observations of their work. Much of this focuses not only on other understandings of *techne* but also its relation to other ancient Greek concepts, including *episteme, ethos, phronesis, praxis* and even *kairos*, all of which are vital in understanding *techne* as the acquisition of literacy.

In this reinterpretation of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, I do not so much suggest as deem it wholly necessary because of the seamlessness between technology and society observed by Winner and Rosen. The inseparability of technology and society leads to multimodality, and our utilization of various communicative technologies to achieve particular effects and events
has a collective impact beyond immediate usage, affecting us culturally and politically as well as personally. By keeping Winner and Rosen in mind as we progress with Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates, I believe we have the capacity to come full circle and reinstitute a kind of pedagogy in the composition classroom concerned with not only techne as the acquisition of literacy, but also literacy as civic participation.

Moving Ever Forward: Necessity, Not Reciprocity, in Plato’s Techne

One of the earliest understandings emerges in the work of Plato, who viewed techne as a flexible term encompassing a range of diverse arts, sciences and crafts. This understanding, though, is similar and yet divergent from the view of techne as possessing a perpetual progression, promoting and reciprocating changes of all kinds. It lacks reciprocity, even as, in many of the dialogues, Plato incorporates such diverse activities as basket-weaving and mathematics into his understanding of techne. Any and every thing governed by a set of principles or rules comprises a techne, as, in the Phaedrus, Socrates draws a similarity between the arts of medicine and rhetoric, explaining how, in each case, one must analyze a nature in order to “proceed in a scientific manner, not merely by practice and routine” (162). Such a statement implies an understanding of techne as more than mere art or craft, governed by an established set of parameters. For the most part, these principles and rules are not to be trifled with, much less amended, as the very construction of society depends upon them. For Plato, the only change comes with the creation of a new techne, which is summarily based upon an older, more established techne, and possibilities for revolution are limited to acts of remediation/repurposing.
In the *Republic*, Plato envisions *techne* as a model for politics, though not the other way around, for while new *techne* can surely come from old(er) *techne*, there is no account for other influences and interactions between the two. In this way, *techne* propagates rather than reciprocates, moving in a singular direction, with earlier *techne* serving as the basis for later *techne*. Further evidence of this view of *techne* as progressive yet unreflective lies in the *Phaedrus* with Socrates’ critique of writing, which is itself a *techne* because it “requires mastery of a determinate subject matter” (Roochnik 34), a necessary requirement for any kind of *techne*. But this condemnation of writing as out of context, without any voice and as evidence of a heuristic which weakens memory (165-166) is a clear and present paradox, as it is only through the act/*techne* of writing that Plato is able to have Socrates revile writing itself.

In simpler terms, Plato utilizes *techne* to condemn *techne*. This is an act of absurdity, yes, but *techne* leaves Plato no choice but to act in such a way. Not once does Plato realize or even acknowledge this rather contradictory activity in which he is engaged. As such, this is perhaps the earliest instance of the word being “technologized” (Ong 79), as it is only through an engagement with writing that Plato is even able to critique it. And while prohibited in part by the conscious decision to write in the form of a dialogue, Plato further reveals his understanding of *techne*, one which leaves no room for reflection, too concerned as he is with adhering to that which is governed by a set of principles. *Techne* as the acquisition of literacy for Plato is not a continual, sustained act; once acquired, a *techne* is kept, utilized and rarely questioned.

No longer active, *techne* becomes tacit, something else. As observed by Roochnik, with writing included as a kind of *techne*, the very term no longer means simply ‘craft,’ instead referring to ‘knowledge’ in “some as-yet-unspecified sense” (35), which Plato curiously acknowledges in his complicated treatment. *Techne* remains rather rigid, almost in spite of Plato
having it encompass a wide variety of arts, crafts and sciences, each possessing a rather
immovable set of principles. Such principles are needed for understanding *techne* as a kind of
productive knowledge, but also as the acting model for other kinds of knowledge, like wisdom.
Furthermore, as Mitcham explains, *techne* refers to “all human activities that can be talked or
reasoned about—all activities that are neither spontaneous nor the result of some unconscious
drive or intuitive perception” (118). And such an understanding of *techne* is necessary, too, for
Plato as his primary concern is truth, transcendent knowledge, a characteristic which sets him in
opposition to Aristotle and Isocrates, both of whom I discuss later.

The development of a clear set of principles and/or rules, though, is also necessary for
establishing ethical character proper for argumentation, as Plato has Socrates stress in the
*Phaedrus* the importance of *ethos*, that whoever “is to develop an art [*techne*] of rhetoric must
first make a methodical division and acquire a clear impression of each class, that in which
people must be in doubt and that in which they are not” (158). And while this could be
interpreted as a kind of reflection, it is much more a need for organization and structure of what
is present and available, rather than a critical eye upon an audience. And later, when Socrates
states that “the orator must understand everything he talks about and divide things up to discover
the truth” (167), what is revealed here concerns knowledge already present and utilized in the
service of something else. For Plato, the only apparent goodness of *techne* comes in utilizing it
toward the discovery of truth, and the development of *ethos* appears as essential to such action.

However, *techne* is not only an activity of a particular sort but also a kind of knowledge,
in close connection with *episteme*, for as Mitcham notes, in nonphilosophical usage, *episteme*
commonly means “acquaintance with,” “skill” or “disciplined experience” (118). Even
understood as systematic or scientific knowledge, *episteme* remains very near most any
definition of techne, with Plato’s Socrates using both terms interchangeably in the Charmides, which Roochnik acknowledges in “Socrates’ Use of the Techne-Analogy.” Such intermingling reveals another of Plato’s rather futile endeavors, i.e., the attempt to separate techne into two types, one consisting mainly of physical work that requires minimal language use and one more intimately bound by speech that requires little physical exertion. In part this is futile because, even as Socrates himself explains in the Gorgias, the same is true of all the arts, “each of them concerned with that kind of speech which deals with the subject matter of that particular art” (89). Each techne has not only a clear set of principles, but also a discursive method necessary for communicating said principles.

At least for Plato, necessity appears to be a defining characteristic in the relationships between techne and ethos and between techne and episteme. The structure of one allows and necessitates, if not encourages, the creation of the other; techne’s principles help ensure an appropriate ethos and episteme makes certain of discourse specific to techne. But while one almost begets another, there still remains a lack of reciprocity, at least in Plato’s way of thinking. This is little more than a one-way line of production, moving ever toward a particular end with little to no looking back of any kind. This is almost in spite of techne’s discourse, which functions almost purely as a means of relating important concepts, depositing the information needed for construction, and not much else.

In spite lacking reciprocal and reflective practices, much still remains applicable in relation to the idea of techne as the acquisition of literacy. Forward movement in the form of propagation is surely still relevant today as the Internet alone begat a plethora of potential literacy practices, from email and instant messaging to blogging and social networking, each built upon knowledge acquired by way of previous literacy practices, each increasing the
importance of ethos. Such diversity, for which Plato accounts in his understanding, is also evident in the acquisition of literacy and its multimodality. In this way, literacy has always been multimodal, concerning both the principled action and the communication concerned with it. This also carries over into the very parameters and principles for as these change, so does one’s knowledge and understanding, one’s episteme. Multimodal literacy encompasses, like techne, a many-layered set of principles as well as numerous discursive practices.

Tapping In: Contextual Applicability in Aristotle’s Techne

Even though Aristotle holds, like Plato, a view of techne as a “special kind of knowledge of the world that informs human activity” (Mitcham 120), the Platonic lack of reciprocity and reflection does not continue. Even more unlike Plato, Aristotle actually provides an operative definition in the Nichomachean Ethics, stating that techne is “identical with a state of capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning” (1140a10). This, of course, relates to the Platonic importance of principles and rules upon production, with techne possessing a “clear, perfect idea of a plan or design” (Kristjansson 463), but it also reveals the notion of potential, of something to be taught. As Jan E. Garrett explains, techne is “an actualization of our inborn capacity for knowing” (289-290). With Aristotle’s expansion regarding techne, lying therein is an idea of something to be tapped into, a literacy to be acquired and subsequently applied in a particular way toward a particular end.

Further evidence of this lies within Aristotle’s examples of various practitioners of techne, the most detailed involving medical doctors, navigators and performing artists (Kristjansson 463), whose excellence and expertise in art often produce results as tangible as those of potters and carpenters but, at the same time, respond to situations more dependent on
context. *Techne* is more than simple competence, consisting of both the “ability to carry out a procedure in practice in the form of a ‘coping skill’ and to give an account of the general laws and principles behind the procedure” (Saugstad 380). There is a process of acquisition at work here, and it involves more than knowing the underlying principles of production; understanding the rules governing the construction of a house or the plotting of a safe journey are just as important, if not more so.

This is because of the applicability of *techne* to unique situations. As Joseph Dunne explains in *Back to the Rough Ground: ‘Phronesis’ and ‘Techne’ in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, “a person who possesses the *techne* of medicine, for instance, is capable is bringing about not just health but also illness” (264). Just as *techne* is a capacity for creation, it is also a capacity for destruction, which is why understanding as well as knowledge of its principles and rules is important. In this sense, *techne* is a form of reflective knowledge, requiring not only productive ability but also deep deliberation on procedure. *Techne* is thus a continual practice, and, as such, can be forgotten as well as learned for “one’s skill is at one’s disposal, is one’s own to give or withhold” (Dunne 266). And, with such options available, it is necessary that *techne* be taught in a suitable manner, involving the student in a process with the teacher close at hand to acknowledge mistakes and suggest ways toward mastery (320). For Aristotle, “a teacher’s teaching and a pupil’s learning are the same event” (Dunne 339), requiring the presence of both for honest acquisition and understanding the principles and rules as well as actual production. This is because definitive of *techne* for Aristotle is “the artist’s prior conception of the thing to be made” (Glazebrook 105), with the end of *techne* being the thing made in conformity with the initial idea and the principles governing production.
One similarity between Plato and Aristotle concerning *techne*, though, concerns interchangeability with *episteme*, as Dunne admits the difficulty in finding significant differences between the two in the work of Aristotle, though this is more because “even within *episteme* itself there is a *techne* at work, i.e., logic, which governs reasoning and produces correct arguments” (253). This is in direct contrast to F.I.G. Rawlins’ understanding of the complementary relationship between *episteme* and *techne*, explaining the former as knowledge and the latter as “something not only conceived, but knowledge going into action…an outlet for creativeness” (389-390). But this relationship is not so much reciprocal as enabling; for Rawlins, *episteme* makes *techne* possible. To be sure, Rawlins’ is a more dichotomous and direct perspective, stressing at one point that “the mere construction of anything (material or non-material) will never engender *episteme*” (391), effectively eliminating any question of a possible reciprocal relationship between knowledge and action.

While Rawlins’ perspective is more Platonic than Aristotelian, Mitcham explains the connection between these concepts differently, referencing Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. *Techne* is *episteme*, writes Mitcham, because it involves “true consciousness of the world and hence can be taught; but it is to be distinguished from *episteme* insofar as it bears upon changing rather than unchanging things” (120-121). And yet Gordon, based upon a reading of Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, offers a further separation, with *episteme* as “knowledge of eternal, unchanging truths about the nature of a given subject” (156) and *techne* as one of two branches of knowledge and concerned with production, stressing that *episteme* and *techne* are “categorically different forms of knowledge” (158).

This other branch of knowledge is *phronesis*, knowledge enacted through personal experience, characterizing and expressing the kind of person that one is, “acquired and deployed
not in the making of any product separate from oneself but rather in one’s actions with one’s fellows” (Dunne 244). Because of this, while both it and techne can be understood as two modes of practical knowledge, phronesis involves a direct, ethical element. This is an important distinction for, as mentioned earlier, techne cannot be virtuous, but it becomes phronesis with the rise of reflection, with questions of moral and ethical concerns. This is because, as Kristjansson explains, we can, at least in principle, be good without techne, “without partaking in any of the activities associated with particular kinds of techne (without being a medical doctor, potter, navigator, etc.)” (469). But this principled component reveals another characteristic of phronesis, containing what Tone Saugstad describes as “the ability to combine a general knowledge with the particular knowledge of concrete situations” (381). There is a strong kairotic aspect to phronesis, too, more so than with techne. Phronesis is more specific, not so much knowledge of ethical ideas as “resourcefulness of mind…called into play in, and responds uniquely to, the situation in which these ideas are to be realized” (Dunne 272). If techne embodied is understood as what we do, phronesis embodied should be understood as who we are.

In both concepts, though, there is an active presence, which relates well with the idea of techne as the acquisition of literacy. That this ‘capacity to make’ can be taught and learned, acquired, in a manner that is not passive reveals a great deal of potential, with the proverbial door open to even further education. Again, the example of the Internet is apt here, for in much the same way as email begat instant messaging and other communicative technologies, learning the parameters of one allows, if not encourages, the learning of those coming after. The acquisition of multimodal literacy might be symbolized in a set of keys, not stagnant in its openness but revealing in particular ends.
Merging Components: Pedagogical Practices in Isocrates’ Techne

With the separation of different kinds of knowledge mentioned interchangeably by both Plato and Aristotle, Isocrates’ understanding of techne stands as an attempt to draw together those same concepts once separated by his precursors. As Terry Papillion suggests in “Isocrates’ Techne and Rhetorical Pedagogy,” Isocrates may have been “fighting a trend, led by Plato and later Aristotle, to break up his field into constituent parts” (154). Of greater importance to Isocrates was the unity of ideas rather than distinctions between approaches to discourse, which is evident in his usage of handbooks of whole speeches for subsequent, detailed model analysis (156). This reveals Isocrates’ strong self-identification as a teacher of public discourse, as opposed to that of a philosopher like Plato or Aristotle.

At least initially, though, the Isocratic idea of techne is not all that different from Platonic or Aristotelian understandings, as Papillion explains it as “art in the sense of a set of rules or theories…a written set of principles” (149). But this does not mean to imply rigidity, if only because rhetoric itself, though it can be taught, is fluid in response to changes in human existence. Part of Isocrates’ genius, according to Roochnik, is the ability to “turn this vacillation into a coherent and attractive prospect” (214). Part of the attraction, I think, comes from a techne that joins form with content, aesthetic with pragmatic, the merging of artistic and practical components by way of various technological influences upon human experience. While such influences were rather limited in his lifetime, Isocrates utilized what was available, both written and spoken examples, toward the development of “a strong sense of comparison to set out situations as examples for those around to learn and from which those around could create policy for the future” (Papillion 158). There is not only a reciprocal element to Isocratic techne but also
a strong civil aspect, which is not much of a surprise when considering the Sophistic tradition from which Isocrates came.

Necessary to his teaching is the togetherness of perceptive and paradigmatic approaches, exactly what Plato and Aristotle try to separate (159), even though, as Roochnik explains, “it is only the paradigmatic status of a living, breathing teacher that can communicate what needs to be known” (82). Atwill, too, writes of the awareness to the notion of acquiring a sense of the right way and moment, requiring “careful inculcation and the imitation of masters, which [Isocrates] describes as ‘habituation’” (58). Such method is necessary because techne does not happen by chance, nor is its usage in any way accidental, for “if one wants to take advantage of kairos, it must be conscious, not fortuitous” (Papillion 152). It should be noted, though, that Isocrates never directly claims a techne, despite having a tangible subject to teach. This is due in part to the incorrect approaches and content of other teachers’ work (Papillion 151), but also due to the subject matter itself, “indeterminate and susceptible to the vagaries of chance” (Roochnik 80). There is no ‘banking’ concept of education with Isocrates, only precept, practice and example (Papillion 151), all working together in the construction of good speakers.

As such, there is also an expansion of the relationship between ethos and techne with Isocrates, who explains that “the stronger a man’s desire to persuade his hearers, the more zealously will he strive to be honorable and to have the esteem of his fellow-citizens” (77). From the Antidosis, itself a revealing defense of his teaching practices, this statement makes known the addition of an Isocratic understanding of techne, one in which ethos factors greatly. Desire, for Isocrates, is as much a part of techne as pleasure, as the former informs not only the continued development of ability but also enables the latter to greater heights; ethos and techne work together toward the achievement of desire, i.e., pleasure. Furthermore, reciprocation is at
work in the art of rhetoric and, thus, *techne*, for the drive to persuade largely depends upon how
the audience receives the orator. One of the other functions of Isocratic *techne* is to allow the
orator to better endear oneself to a particular context, to *kairos*. And here lies a similarity
between Isocrates and Aristotle, for both call attention to the importance of *kairos*. While the
former explains his instruction as concerned with “the qualities of fitness for the occasion,
propriety of style, and originality of treatment” (“Against the Sophists” 13), the latter emphasizes
seizing the particular opportunity presented in arranging a speech (Atwill 58).

But this notion of desire is very much a part of Isocratic *techne* as it informs the
continued development of ability which, in turn, enables greater feats. Such understanding is
only further solidified in “Against the Sophists,” where, unconcerned with transcendent
knowledge (truth with a capital “T”), Isocrates focuses more upon the development and
application of social wisdom, a *techne* enhanced by and grounded in persistent, personal and
practical experience, one dominated by “fitness for the occasion” (73). It comes as no surprise
that Isocrates defines *techne* as ability “found in those who are well endowed by nature and have
been schooled by practical experience” (74). With such a definition, one might view Isocrates as
accounting for two kinds of *techne*, a natural ability, or ‘knack,’ and an experiential ability, or
‘craft.’ This is about as much of a separation as we can safely draw, though, because Isocrates’
subject matter is not fixed and stable, given that a good orator has some impact on events which
are, by their nature, unpredictable. This requires flexibility in responding to the particular of the
speaking moment, “and there are no hard and fast rules to explain how this is done” (Roochnik
75). Handbooks can only provide so much instruction before giving way to speech examples and
their particular contexts.
Such an acknowledgement of the limits of particular methods of teaching and learning relates well with the idea of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, an understanding that is most appropriate here, given Isocrates’ union of the concepts Plato and Aristotle attempted to separate. Limits are also rules, governing and informing methods of making, and necessary to any kind of composition. But there is fluidity here, too, for rules and principles are dependent upon and vulnerable to civic, kairotic probabilities. Incorporation thus becomes all the more necessary and important. The very term multimodal literacy implies a union of concepts in the service of learning, and Isocrates engaged in a similar, pedagogical amalgamation of methods. The awareness of audience, the element of desire and the development of ability are all concepts Isocrates understood as integral to each other, and they are just as integral to *techne* as the acquisition of literacy.

**Conclusion**

Comparable to that of rhetoric, the very concept of *techne* is oftentimes vague, due in part to association with a particular, practical art or craft. This is the most common understanding, though, that of a tool utilized, working in tandem with knowledge/wisdom to produce an effect or event. It is also more than a tool, exhibiting a kind of autonomy some embrace but others fear. Given such divergent responses, the extent and execution of *techne* remains a point of contention. Rare is the occasion for Plato, Aristotle or Isocrates, in particular, to call *techne* by name; instead, they often use the debate about rhetoric and its teaching as a way to explain their different views. Time and again, when presenting an argument on the nature of rhetoric, particularly in the dialogues of Plato, implicit in such argumentation is a particular understanding of *techne* as well as notions of *ethos, episteme* and *phronesis.*
Divorced from or saturated with emotion, separate or inseparable from knowledge and science, ‘mere craft’ or exalted art, varying interpretations illuminate not only what informs present understanding(s) of *techne* but also the persistent importance of other ancient Greek concepts. Interchangeability between some concepts, particularly between *techne* and *episteme* for Plato and Aristotle, does complicate matters, but it also allows for greater selectivity regarding means to ends. *Techne* and *episteme* are almost interchangeable for Plato because communication, spoken, written or related otherwise, is essential for the acquisition of any ability. And, for Aristotle, the overlap between *techne* and *episteme* occurs with the acknowledgement of the latter, too, possessing a kind of the former. Isocrates, though, does not engage in such exchange, given his stronger interest in the unity of such concepts and an opposition to drawing distinctions, which neither Plato nor Aristotle do all that well. This is because none of these terms, *techne*, *episteme*, *ethos* or *phronesis*, work in isolation; Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates rely on many of them in order to explain other concepts.

But what does all this have to do with *techne* as the acquisition of literacy? From Plato, we have the idea of *techne* as flexible and diverse, with each artful craft requiring some form of communication in concepts and construction. While little more than the depositing of information takes place, involving particular parameters and methods, there is still activity here, a kind of necessary action prior to production. This is but one way of acquiring the means to a particular end, and Aristotle takes this further with the idea of potential within, of something to be acquired and applied, but this something is more than the means. Rules govern and inform methods of making; absence of principles often means absence of production. Both are necessary aspects of literacy, its acquisition and action, which Isocrates understands in bringing principles and production together in his rhetorical pedagogy, itself a *techne*. 
In “More Than a Knack: Techne & Teaching Technical Communication,” James Dubinsky writes of *techne* as a situational bridge over the gap between theory and practice, built through collaboration, questioning and dialogue. In particular, he draws similarity between the *techne* of medicine and the *techne* of teaching given the “reliance upon the contingent and indeterminate and the fact that both patients and students are human…that what works for one won’t necessarily work for all” (132). While Plato’s Socrates made a similar joining between the arts of medicine and rhetoric, likening writing to medicine makes me wary, if only because there are particularly pointed passages in Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* which show how detrimental the influence of medical language has been on American education.

Even if such a comparison works well in further illuminating Dubinsky’s argument, such a connection has the potential to be taken too far. Still, teaching is not a knack or mere craft but rather “an art that requires a flexible attentiveness to the situation and audience” (138). This is surely something with which Isocrates would agree, given previous observations on the perceptive and paradigmatic aspects of his pedagogy of civil rhetoric. However, as Atwill and Lauer explain, though it possesses rules,

*Techne* does not represent unchanging laws or immutable truths, nor is it entirely tacit, the gift of genius or a mysterious set of inherited powers: it is explicit and teachable even as it calls into question what it makes explicit and what it teaches. Radically democratic, *techne* is the knowledge of those social practices that characterize the acts of insiders. Fated neither only to reproduce relations of power, nor only to reveal points of indeterminacy in those relations, *techne* enables cultural critique and becomes the means by which new social possibilities are invented. (37-38)
This idea correlates well with observations made by Winner and Rosen for, as mentioned in the introduction, every technological act is a political one possessing the capacity for change. This is *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, more Isocratic than Platonic or Aristotelian in extent and execution, though still retaining elements of each. And it is the enabling aspect of *techne* which further solidifies and strengthens the relationship between technology and civic action. Primary evidence of this particular feature lies within the 2007 CNN/YouTube presidential debates, which featured candidates addressing questions from users of the popular video-sharing website. Individuals utilizing this particular *techne*, exhibiting a ‘capacity to make’ and following through by working within defined parameters, had the opportunity to engage in a cultural critique witnessed by millions.

The myriad reactions to those debates are also evidence of how various communicative technologies are increasingly clarified and defined by sociopolitical forces. As another technology, video games provide further evidence, given the renewed debates about gameplay depictions of sex and violence. While such aspects will be addressed in the next chapter, of primary importance is a better understanding of how *techne* is further manifest today; and we need to explore it in relation to a current, popular technology, like that of video games. Doing so should also clarify the relationship between *techne, phronesis, ethos, episteme* and even *kairos* in contemporary time. Such a layered viewpoint is important for not only understanding video games as constituting literacy practices but also how we might apply its learning principles to composition pedagogy.
CHAPTER 3: MANIFEST *TECHNE* IN VIDEO GAMES

**Introduction**

Divergent ideas about *techne* and related Greek concepts can cause confusion regarding meaning, but such divergence also allows for greater understanding through acknowledgement of conceptual connections. In drawing together Plato’s idea of *techne* as flexible and diverse yet principled, Aristotle’s of a ‘capacity to make’ and Isocrates’ pedagogical amalgamation of parameters and potential production, we come to understand *techne* as the acquisition of literacy. In turn, this strengthens the relationship between technology and civic action, enabling cultural critique as well as inventing new social possibilities (Atwill and Lauer 1995), which are increasingly clarified and defined by sociopolitical forces. But these statements mix and match past and present understandings. Therefore, in order to better understand how *techne* is manifest today, it becomes necessary to explore it in relation to a current, popular technology. Doing so will not only provide further clarification of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy but also of the relationship between *techne, phronesis, ethos, episteme* and even *kairos* in contemporary time. In addition, these connections also illuminate how these factors, within video games, might influence changes to composition pedagogy.

Additional explanation of how particular video games are representative of *techne* and other ancient Greek concepts as manifest within a current, popular technology occurs in conjunction with a detailed revisiting of the 36 learning principles put forth by James Paul Gee in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, which are as follows:

1. Active, Critical Learning Principle
2. Design Principle
3. Semiotic Principle
4. Semiotic Domains Principle
5. Metalevel Thinking about Semiotic Domains Principle
6. “Psychosocial Moratorium” Principle
7. Committed Learning Principle
8. Identity Principle
9. Self-Knowledge Principle
10. Amplification of Input Principle
11. Achievement Principle
12. Practice Principle
13. Ongoing Learning Principle
14. “Regime of Competence” Principle
15. Probing Principle
16. Multiple Routes Principle
17. Situated Meanings Principle
18. Text Principle
19. Intertextual Principle
20. Multimodal Principle
21. “Material Intelligence” Principle
22. Intuitive Knowledge Principle
23. Subset Principle
24. Incremental Principle
25. Concentrated Sample Principle
26. Bottom-up Basic Skills Principle
27. Explicit Information On-Demand and Just-in-Time Principle
28. Discovery Principle
29. Transfer Principle
30. Cultural Models about the World Principle
Through these principles, in no particular order, Gee acknowledges the many educational aspects of the technology of video games and stresses the importance of amending current teaching practices to better complement what students want as well as what they need. Each game I describe later aligns quite well with Aristotelian, Platonic or Isocratic ideas, and Gee’s learning principles provide further foundation. Each game has a particular focus, whether upon potential, production or aspiration, and the persistent acquisition of literacy is necessary for continued fulfillment. I seek in this chapter to bring together outside observations on literacy and technology in the service of further illuminating connections between ancient Greek concepts as well as the idea of techne as the acquisition of literacy.

Again, understanding techne in this way involves seeing, within technology, an active, persistent engagement, a practical application, reflective and reciprocal, of ever-expanding knowledge. Exacting influence upon such practices, of course, are sociopolitical and technical factors which are actually just as much a part of the acquisition of literacy itself. It is our utilization of a variety of technologies to achieve particular effects and events that has a collective impact beyond immediate usage, affecting us culturally, personally and politically. Given the popularity of ‘next-gen’ gaming consoles like Microsoft’s Xbox 360 and Nintendo’s Wii as well as the sustained controversies concerning Rockstar Games’ Manhunt 2 and the Grand Theft Auto series, video games provide a mixture of technological and sociopolitical
aspects ripe for relation to *techne*, et al. As mentioned in the first chapter, recent scholarship on video games reveals how and what this technology helps us learn about literacy and identity. From James Paul Gee’s groundbreaking *What Video Games Have To Teach Us About Learning And Literacy* to Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher’s more recent *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*, there is ample support for the idea that there is much to be learned from video games, as well as from those who play them, if only we take them seriously.

However, acknowledging and engaging this idea within the current sociopolitical climate, which often unfairly and incorrectly blames video games for societal ills, tends to involve controversy. Not only is this further evidence of how certain sociopolitical forces exert influence upon technology, but this is also understandable, if only because video games are an easy target for those with little desire to discover the root causes of real-world violence, adolescent or otherwise. Gee was initially somewhat dismissive of the issue of violence in video games, but he addresses this concern in greater detail in the essay collection, *Good Video Games + Good Learning*. After debunking the few early studies allegedly proving a link between video game violence and the potential for real violence, Gee also makes mention of the decrease in violent crime since the introduction of particularly violent video games, like *Mortal Kombat*, *Doom* and *Quake*, before explaining how humans respond to media, that we are this way because our “evolutionary past had no screens and screens have not been around long enough for [us] to have evolved a different set of emotional response to virtual realities as [we] have to real ones” (14-15). The alleged connection between video game and real violence (as well as those who react in protest to the former) lies, at least partially, within a collective inability to separate the two.

Anti-gaming rhetoric, a symptom of this inability, underlies much of the early research into links between video games and violence and, as Kurt Squire observes in “Cultural Framing
of Computer/Video Games,” reveals more about fears of violence in American culture than actual knowledge of video games themselves. Such studies, according to Squire,

generally lack any real-world evidence linking game-playing to acts of violence;
they ignore broad trends that show inverse correlations between game-playing and violent behavior; finally, they make wild logical leaps in linking very constrained behaviors in laboratories to violent acts where people really get hurt.

And these accusations arise not only as criticism but also as a call for further study, for real research into the actual experience of playing video games as well as how such activities fit into people’s lives. It is quite unfortunate that anti-gaming language in the mainstream media continues to discourage such studies, which also prevents, as Gee explains further, far too many from asking not whether video games are good or bad for you, which is actually meaningless, but from asking “how the technology was used and in what context” (15). Just as both Plato and Aristotle, and countless others after them, observed that technology was neither inherently good or bad, Gee, Squire and other video game scholars advocate a similar viewpoint, ultimately preferring to focus on the positive aspects, the potential within the medium. Even in “Violent Video Games as Exemplary Teachers,” a forthcoming article from the Journal of Youth and Adolescence in which Douglas A. Gentile and J. Ronald Gentile provide a conceptual analysis of how players of violent video games are more likely to learn aggressive cognitions and behaviors, the concluding focus is upon what educators might “learn from the successful instructional and curriculum design features of video games” (3).

This idea of learning something from the likes of Grand Theft Auto IV, which allows for indiscriminate homicide, carjacking and the solicitation of prostitutes, appears lost on some social critics. Such individuals continue to blame video games for a variety of social ills, but this
is an attempt to take an effect and make it the cause. Furthermore, unwaveringly declaring video games evil, particularly on the basis of half a dozen examples, is misguided, if not wholly inaccurate, because the most consistently popular video games are those rated E for everyone or T for teen by the Electronic Software Ratings Board (ESRB). Evidence of this rests within David M. Ewalt’s “The Best-Selling Videogame Franchises,” a list dominated by *Super Mario Brothers* (185 million units worldwide) and *Pokemon* (106 million), games predominantly intended for children. These two alone dwarf *Grand Theft Auto* (50 million), which is the only series rated M for mature in the top ten.

But the very popularity of video games brings to light another criticism put forth by the mainstream media, one exemplified by *HealthDay*’s sensationalist headline, “Video Games Cut Into Teens’ Reading, Studying.” Drawn from the results of a survey appearing in the July 2007 edition of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, the *HealthDay* article explains that teenage video gamers “spent 30 percent less time reading and 40 percent less time doing homework.” The criticism present here is that video games are a distraction from the serious business of education, but, as John Timmer at *Ars Technica* explains, this is not exactly the case. In direct reference to the study itself, Timmer makes note of the fact that for each hour spent gaming during the week, the time boys spent reading did drop by 30 percent. “This would be problematic,” Timmer explains, “except for the fact that boys only spent an average of eight minutes reading on a typical weekday.” Furthermore, writes Timmer, “it’s entirely possible that gamers organize their time better.” So, similar to the early study on the alleged relationship between video games and violence in which people who play a violent video game will, afterwards, blast a competitor in a button pushing task with a noise blast .21 seconds longer than someone who played a nonviolent game (Anderson & Dill), the *HealthDay* article makes a big
deal over a relatively small issue, while also ignoring the more disturbing data that adolescents spend only eight minutes a day reading. I should also add that both the study and Timmer ignore the amount of reading often required while playing video games, particularly RPGs, which involve a great deal of exposition in the form of dialogue.

Perhaps research will one day discover, with irrefutable data, that there is indeed a detrimental connection between video games and violence, but that day has yet to arrive, in spite of how much some social critics desire it. Until that day arrives, and maybe even after, it is much more worthwhile to investigate this current popular technology, to realize how it connects with the concepts discussed in the previous chapter as well as how video games may influence every aspect of composition pedagogy, an idea explored in the next chapter. For the moment, though, of primary focus are three particular video games which reveal not only techne as the acquisition of literacy but also how the relationships between techne, phronesis, ethos, episteme and even kairos are manifest in a current, popular technology.

The first of these is Okami (rated T), for the PlayStation2 (PS2) gaming console, which entails the exploration and restoration of mythical Japan through the use of an increasing collection of particular skills. Also for the PS2 is Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland (rated E), which incorporates a variety of seemingly mundane, repetitive activities in the service of saving a small town from ruination by resort developers. The third game is Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind (rated M), for the Xbox as well as the PC, and presents an almost unlimited amount of options with its character creation and nonlinear game play, though it also maintains a series of quests regarding the prevention a god from overtaking an island nation.

Each game is also representative of a particular genre, defined as much by presentation of the game environment as possibilities for interaction. Okami lies firmly within the action
adventure genre, incorporating reflex-based actions for the purposes of combat as well as exploration and the gathering of items within the gameworld. In contrast, *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland* is a variant of the simulation genre, combining elements of skill, chance and strategy to conjure certain aspects of reality; in the case of this game, the main simulated aspect is farming. And *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* is an action role-playing game (RPG), featuring a predominant focus on character creation and development via combat and interaction with non-player characters (NPCs), but it does bear some similarities to *Okami* and *Harvest Moon*.

By way of immersive and interactive design, repeated actions in each of these games inevitably lead to better skills as well as more difficult challenges, and this leads us back to the idea of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, of learning that is constant and as satisfying as it is demanding. Through the incorporation of various, interactive game elements which encourage particular actions within the environment, *Okami*, *Harvest Moon* and *Morrowind* are rather representative of how *techne*, among other ancient Greek concepts, is manifest in a current, popular technology. And the primary intention of this chapter is to explicate these representations even further.

**The Power to Create and Destroy: Okami**

In terms of design, it is in the very nature of video games to align with the Aristotelian idea of *techne* as a ‘state of capacity to make,’ for, in every genre and every gaming system from the Atari and early PC to the PlayStation 3 and current, high-end PC, there is potential for something to be acquired and subsequently applied to a specific end. Contextual applicability is of the utmost importance in video games, and *Okami*, developed by the now defunct Clover Studio, distributed by Capcom and originally released in 2006, is a shining example of this idea.
This PS2 game also provides much toward the notion of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, doing so by way of unique player interaction through and with the controller as well as the gameworld. *Okami* also contributes to the construction of a unique literacy with its ‘painting’-oriented gameplay. However, it is first necessary to establish an understanding of *Okami* itself; without it, much of what follows would not make sense.

*Okami*, which literally translates as “great god” but also is a pun for “wolf,” is an action-adventure game centered on reflex-based actions for combat, exploration and item-gathering within the gameworld. Combat comes in the form of a variety of villains of varying difficulties, all of whom are underlings to the eight-headed dragon Orochi, who “swallowed the world of the plants, animals and people – until finally he engulfed even the sun itself in total darkness” (*Okami* 5). Exploration does not always lead to combat, however, for interaction with non-player characters (NPCs) is essential for fulfilling in-game missions, including restoring the lost faith of people and animals and bringing peace to the land. The gathering of items is a necessary aspect to this game, too, as particular items make the fulfillment of certain missions possible.

![Figure 1. Amaterasu, goddess of the sun. Screenshot.](http://ps2.ign.com/dor/objects/678618/okami/images/okami-20060510020742697.html)
All of this occurs while playing as the game avatar Amaterasu (Figure 3.1), an ancient deity who takes the physical form of a white wolf and possesses the power to bring life and light back to the land. In the form of the Celestial Brush, this power allows the player, through Amaterasu, to “paint” aspects of the game environment. Holding down the R1 button of the PS2 controller transforms the gameworld into a canvas, allowing the player to press the Square button and move the left analog stick to paint with the Brush. After painting is complete, releasing the R1 button sets “the effects of the drawing in motion in the real world” (9). For example, drawing a circle on a once-dead tree causes it to bloom (Figures 3.2-3.5).

Figure 2. Amaterasu sits next to a dead tree in the game environment. Screenshot. http://www.ultimagame.com/ps2/okami/imagen_f120428_x.html.
Figure 3. With the game environment transformed into a canvas, painting becomes possible. Screenshot. http://www.ultimagame.com/ps2/okami/imagen_f120429_x.html.

Such interaction sets *Okami* apart from other action adventure games, for while it holds similarities regarding combat and exploration, few (if any) other games allow and encourage play within a gameworld in this way. This innovative gameplay requires an adaptive and contextual learning style, one which involves “painting” as well as knowledge of which particular skill to utilize in a given situation.

This is Aristotelian in nature because of the importance of reciprocity and reflection in relation to specific actions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *techne* contains capacity for destruction as well as creation and, with both as possibilities in *Okami*, knowledge of principles and rules are important for effecting certain events and acquiring other contextual abilities. In relation to *Okami*, perhaps strongest of *techne*’s related concepts is *phronesis*, knowledge enacted through personal experience, characterizing and expressing a particular identity. As later examples attest, *techne* is a form of reflective knowledge, requiring both productive ability and deep deliberation on procedure, making for a continual practice that can be forgotten as well as learned through a variety of interactive moments.
But such interaction would fail if every aspect of the game environment did not provide encouragement toward active and critical engagement. Very few (if any) video games outright ‘reward’ passivity, but an example exists in *Metal Gear Solid III: Snake Eater*. One of the major combat situations concerns an ancient military sniper kept alive only by the thought of going up against Snake, the in-game character controlled by the player. However, as I myself discovered, if the player creates a save file at the beginning of the combat situation and then goes at least seven days without playing, a short sequence will summarily explain that the sniper finally died while waiting for Snake to engage. And while some players might be relieved at being able to progress in the game without the risk of that major combat situation, I felt some slight remorse at having neglected the desire of the elder sniper and bringing some dishonor upon Snake. In a way, this was a punishment for not engaging actively and critically with the game.

Still, this characteristic is revealing of the first of Gee’s learning principles listed, that all aspects of the learning environment, “including the ways in which the semiotic domain is designed and present” (49), are set up to encourage active and critical, not passive, learning. This principle lies firmly within *Okami* as well, presenting a great wealth of potential through exploration of and interaction with the gameworld, particularly in the form of “painting” the landscape. And such exploration and interaction comes in the form of a mixture of words and images, with text boxes appearing in the form of character dialogue and plot explication, with the player moving Amaterasu through the environment and interacting with NPCs.

This leads to Gee’s second and third principles listed earlier, the first of which concerns an appreciation of design and design principles as core to the learning experience and the second of which involves an appreciation of “interrelations within and across multiple sign systems (images, words, actions, symbols, artifacts, etc.) as a complex system” (49). In *Okami*, this takes
shape, perhaps rather obviously, in the form of “painting,” which requires learning to situate different meanings for elements within different situations. Drawing a circle just anywhere on the landscape will not do, and while a circle on a once-dead tree brings it to life, a circle in the sky causes the sun to shine and a circle drawn in a pond or ocean creates a lily pad. Each action is contextual, and, without an appreciation of the design and principles of the game as well as the interrelations within, “painting,” along with every other form of environmental interaction, is almost impossible. In other words, it becomes quite difficult to play the game.

And playing the game, according to the fourth of Gee’s learning principles listed, involves the mastery of what he calls a semiotic domain, “any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities” (18), including oral and written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs and artifacts. Video games generally function as a family of related domains, given the different genres, such as first-person shooter games, fantasy role-playing games, real-time strategy games and simulation games. The practices recruiting modalities in any one of these video-game genres are myriad, with Okami as no exception, for the accompanying manual details every kind of basic action in the game. In addition to the “painting” practice described earlier, game controls (practices) for Okami include:

**Standard Controls**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start</td>
<td>Open the Fan menu</td>
<td>Quit out of menus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select</td>
<td>Open the Options menu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left stick</td>
<td>Move Amaterasu</td>
<td>Move in menus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right stick</td>
<td>Move camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
R3 button  Center camera behind Amaterasu
D-pad      Move in menus
L1 button  Far and close views
L2 button  Hold to view map
R1 button  Use Celestial Brush
R2 button  Fleetfoot
Triangle   Dig holes or bite objects
Square    Attack/tackle
Circle    Investigate/talk/bark
X         Jump

Battle Controls

Command  | Primary                             | Secondary
---------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
Start    | Open the Fan menu                  | Quit out of menus|
Select   | Open the Options menu              | -               |
Left stick| Move Amaterasu                     | Move in menus   |
Right stick| Move camera                        | -               |
R3 button| Center camera behind Amaterasu     | -               |
D-pad    | Move in menus                      | -               |
L1 button| Far and close views                | -               |
L2 button| Hold to view map                   | -               |
R1 button| Use Celestial Brush                | -               |
R2 button| Fleetfoot                           | -               |
Triangle | Secondary attack                   | Back out of menus|
Square   | Attack                              | -               |
And, of course, there is the larger, overarching practice of coming to know how to manipulate the PS2 controller so all of the above actions are even possible.

I should note here that these are basic actions. There are others, mainly particular combinations, to be discovered and developed while progressing through the game, actions that are, in a way, rewards for seeing the game as “a complex system of interrelated parts meant to engage and even manipulate the player in certain ways” (Gee 42). Having such a perspective involves metalevel thinking, and active and critical engagement, about the relationships of the semiotic domain being learned to other semiotic domains; such thinking is part of Gee’s fifth learning principle. So, thinking about Okami as a system and a designed space, not just playing the game moment by moment, allows for not only a more enjoyable gaming experience but also increases the possibility of transferable skills to other moments in-game and other games overall.

One of the actions, or “mystical celestial brush powers” (16), is Catwalk, which involves drawing a line from one of the Kabegami statues and then climbing up the line to previously inaccessible areas. Kabegami statues appear throughout, but the Catwalk brush power cannot be acquired until more than halfway through the game. With this one example, Okami, as a semiotic domain, specifically manipulates the player to act, interact and value in certain ways, to be aware of Kabegami statues and remember to return to them later.

The acquisition of Catwalk, along with all other brush powers, is indicative of an Aristotelian relation between techne and phronesis but also kairos. It is only through particular moments made available by previous ability acquisition that progression is possible. This reveals the linear narrative of Okami as well as the leveled structure of the brush powers themselves. While earlier powers involve little more than drawing a line or a circle, later
powers, like Catwalk, are even more dependent upon context. They also involve a greater complexity of interactivity, incorporating not only brush strokes but the more basic actions of running and timed jumping. Learning the parameters of an ability and its subsequent, contextual application allows, if not encourages, the learning and contextual application of other, later abilities. Identity is wrapped up in this, too, as each freed god granting a brush power greets Amaterasu as “origin of all that is good and mother to us all.” Harkening back to the previous chapter, if we understand embodied techne as what Amaterasu does, embodied phronesis is understood as who Amaterasu is.

Through particular actions, interactions and values in video games, the player learns about and takes on new identities, becoming, for a time and place, certain types of people (Gee 44). Although, in the case of Okami, the new identity is that of a sun god in the physical form of a white wolf, I felt some commitment to this virtual identity and to the virtual world with which Amaterasu interacts. This was because of my own willingness to see myself in terms of a new identity, to see myself as “the kind of person who can learn, use, and value the new semiotic domain” (59). I was willing in this endeavor because I found both the virtual identity of Amaterasu and the virtual world of Nippon appealing and compelling. By playing Okami, I enacted the seventh of Gee’s learning principle, which is about committed learning and concerns participation in an extended engagement, “lots of effort and practice” (67), as the extension of a real-world identity in relation to a committed virtual identity and a compelling virtual world. As I explain in the next chapter, composition should function in a similar manner, with teachers helping students commit to and develop various and unique writing identities in relation to particular contexts.
Connected to this, too, is Gee’s “amplification of input” principle, which deals with the feeling of achievement in the sense that relatively simple effort creates a great deal of effect. This relates, at least in part, to the above list of possible actions in *Okami*. By pressing the right buttons and utilizing the analog sticks in the proper manner, the gameworld comes to life and various interactive opportunities arise, ranging from dialogue with NPCs to fishing sidequests. Within the “painting” interaction alone, this “amplification of input” principle is evident, as I am able to impact the gameworld through the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brush Power</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rejuvenation</td>
<td>Fill in gaps with ink</td>
<td>Makes bridges/paths visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Slash</td>
<td>Paint line across object/enemy</td>
<td>Cuts object/enemy in half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise</td>
<td>Paint circle in the sky</td>
<td>Brings back the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensprout-Bloom</td>
<td>Paint circle on withered plant</td>
<td>Restores plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensprout-Water Lily</td>
<td>Paint circle in water</td>
<td>Creates lily pad transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensprout-Vine</td>
<td>Paint line to flower bud</td>
<td>Transports Am. to flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry Bomb</td>
<td>Paint circle with vertical line</td>
<td>Creates bomb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterspout</td>
<td>Paint line upward from source</td>
<td>Creates column to stand on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain</td>
<td>Paint circle on Mermaid Spring</td>
<td>Allows travel at no cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deluge</td>
<td>Paint two vertical lines downward</td>
<td>Creates downpour of rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crescent</td>
<td>Paint half circle in the sky</td>
<td>Turns day into night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galestorm</td>
<td>Paint loop from left to right</td>
<td>Causes wind to blow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whirlwind</td>
<td>Paint three horizontal slashes</td>
<td>Summons whirlwind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferno</td>
<td>Paint line from source to target</td>
<td>Burns/hurts/melts target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireburst</td>
<td>Paint infinity symbol</td>
<td>Summons fireball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veil of Mist</td>
<td>Paint two horizontal lines</td>
<td>Slows down enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistwarp</td>
<td>Paint X on Origin Mirrors</td>
<td>Allows warp to Origin Mirror</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catwalk: Paint line up from Kabegami, Grants access to new areas
Thunderstorm: Paint line from storm to target, Electrifies target
Thunderbolt: Paint lightning bolt, Electrocutes target
Blizzard: Paint line from source to target, Freezes/immobilizes target

Each action has a significant impact upon the gameworld and proves vital for defeating a wide variety of enemies and acquiring important items, and both activities progress the plot and subsequently open up new areas of exploration. Furthermore, each action is grounded in embodied experience, making for little to no general or decontextualized meanings in *Okami*, and reveals evidence both of Gee’s situated meaning principle of learning as well as the multimodal principle of learning. Meaning and knowledge in good video games like *Okami* are built up through an ever-present mixture of images, texts, symbols, interactions, design and sound, all of which make up the world of experience and interaction within the game itself. And again, expanding and increasing the compositional mixture are deserving of greater attention in designing course sequences.

Not only are multiple modalities linked with thinking and learning, but, as Gee explains, the latter are ‘stored’ in material objects and the environment (111). Certain in-game actions, depending on items in the player’s possession, are taken care of, freeing up devotion to other matters. This has the tendency to eliminate tediousness in good video games and allows players to better learn how to ‘read’ the environment and figure out how to proceed. For example, the first major combat situation in *Okami*, one requiring unique use of a certain brush power, is with the Spider Queen (Figure 3.6), a rather intimidating foe in terms of size if nothing else. Quick movements are necessary to avoid the Spider Queen’s various attacks, but this is all the game asks of the player (at least initially), allowing some ‘reading’ to occur.
However, in my first encounter with the Spider Queen, I focused solely upon dodging attacks, rather than attempting to figure out how to defeat her. It took me a little while to make the connection, both figuratively and literally, between the hooks sticking out of her rear and the many open flower buds surrounding the battle area. This was an instance in which I forgot what I had acquired. Once I understood it was necessary to directly apply some recently acquired contextual knowledge, i.e., paint at least two lines from the hooks to the buds and thereby force the Spider Queen to reveal a weakness (Figure 3.7), I was able to rush in and use other brush powers to cause major damage and ultimately win the fight. And, in the context of the game, doing so provided satisfaction not only in terms of winning but also in terms of furthering the narrative, opening up possibilities for still more exploration and satisfaction.
Now, if I had initially paid closer attention to what *Okami* offered prior to the Spider Queen altercation, thereby building up my intuition regarding the Greensprout-Vine brush power, that major combat situation could have proved easier. Furthermore, on a second time playing through, I discovered it was possible to manipulate the angle of the canvas with the right analog stick, which made it even easier to paint lines from the open flower buds to the Spider Queen’s rear hooks. The knowledge behind such action is intuitive or tacit, built up in repeated practice and experience with not only the current game but in relation to all others played as well. In this way, as Gee regards the intuitive knowledge principle of learning, “not just verbal and conscious knowledge is rewarded” (111). While previous practice and experience is not essential for playing and learning, it certainly helps.

And learning in *Okami*, from the very start, initially takes place in a simplified subset of the larger semiotic domain, adhering to Gee’s subset principle of learning. After a lengthy (and rather beautiful) introduction to the overall narrative, the first mission involves a large peach hanging from a branch of the sacred Konohana tree in Kamiki Village. As we learn from Amaterasu’s bug-like companion, Issun, only a special power can cut down the peach and restore
Kamiki Village to its former glory. In order to acquire this power, the player-Amaterasu must explore the River of the Heavens, part of the simplified subset specifically designed to introduce the player to the many actions listed earlier. Also introduced here are the various screens within the fan menu (activated by pressing the Start button), including Divine Attributes, which contains the Tools and Equipment sub-screens, Celestial Brush strokes, Archives and the Map.

But what is interesting here is the language used to communicate actions, with Issun making declarations like, “Press the R1 button to hold the brush, then the [Square] button to draw!” Such language not only melds the player’s real-world identity as a player and the virtual identity as Amaterasu, but it also, as Gee observes, ‘confuses’ the virtual world (e.g., “paint”) and the real world of the player using the game system (e.g., “press the paint button”). This is part of the subset principle in that learning does not begin “separate from the domain in which the learning is going to operate” (Gee 122). As in the opening Okami mission, there is no sort of time pressure or difficult combat situations and, instead, offers a concentrated sample of the most basic and important actions (movement, combat, “painting”), items and interactions, all of which make up the bulk of the game experience.

And what follows from these opening subsets is in accordance with the incremental principle of learning, in which there’s a particular order of earlier stages leading to generalizations fruitful for later cases. This is evident in Okami with the main quest as well as side quests, those tasks providing slight deviation from the main, linear course of game events. For example, after acquiring the Greensprout-Bloom brush power, it becomes possible to use it on all the cursed trees in Kamiki Village, which in turn causes Mr. Orange, the village elder, to initiate the Konohana Shuffle. Such initiation requires rather quick reflexes in order to use Greensprout-Bloom on a series of flower bulbs and ultimately release the full bloom of the
Konohana tree, which opens an opportunity to acquire the Water Lily brush power. In this way, each action within the gameworld leads to possibilities for other unique actions, all of which work together in terms of not only forwarding the main narrative, but improving the player’s chances of advancing in skill.

This also relates to the bottom-up basic skills principle of learning. What counts as a basic skill, explains Gee, is discovered “bottom up by engaging in more and more of the game/domain” (137). The opening subsets of Okami, comprised of simple, introductory actions like running and jumping and the incremental tasks of beginning “painting” usage with Rejuvenation, Power Slash, Sunrise and Greensprout-Bloom, are firmly within the context of the game; their continued use is not only encouraged but required for narrative and skill progression. These also operate in accordance with Gee’s explicit information on-demand and just-in-time principle of learning, for knowledge of each skill, be it oriented to movement, “painting” or another kind of interaction within the gameworld, is apparent when needed “or just at the point where the information can be best understood and used in practice” (138). Evidence of this lies in the earlier description of the Greensprout-Vine brush power in relation to defeating the Spider Queen, but it is even more evident in relation to acquiring the Galestorm brush power. Learning this is necessary for not only blowing away the source of the evil contaminating Kusa Village (by painting three loops in the direction opposite the evil wind) but also for attacking and defeating Crimson Helm, another enemy engaging Amaterasu in a major combat situation. Also, scattered throughout the game are much simpler missions attached to the Galestorm brush power, namely treasure chests on fire requiring wind to blow away the flames and acquire the item within. These quick tasks, wherever the player may find them, provide additional brush power practice as well as tangible, in-game rewards.
But the major combat situations in *Okami* also provide scaffolding for the player to apply earlier learning to later problems, revealing evidence of Gee’s transfer principle of learning. No single combat situation presents greater evidence than the final battle with Yami, ruler of darkness, which requires the use of most every brush power acquired over the course of the game. At the beginning of the battle, Amaterasu is powerless, stripped of brush powers and other offensive items, able only to dodge attacks and land blows of significantly less power. However, after enough hits, Amaterasu regains Rejuvenation and then Power Slash, the first two powers acquired in the game, which together enable the use of offensive items and, eventually, Greensprout-Bloom, used to reveal Yami’s true form and greater vulnerability. What follows at this point is a varying, contextual combination of brush powers and conventional attacks, including Waterspout (to retard Yami’s flames), Power Slash (to deflect Yami’s slot machine attacks), Thunderstorm (to electrify Yami) and ultimately Sunrise (to weaken Yami). And, as each brush power is re-acquired, Yami becomes a greater challenge, attacking with greater frequency, variety and strength, before taking the form of a massive hand that nearly covers the combat area. But with each new form Yami takes, new signs and symbols and contexts arise for player recognition, like storm clouds rolling in to provide the opportunity to use Thunderstorm. As in earlier major combat situations, this final battle calls for the player to be aware not only of an adversary but also the surrounding environment, which contains clues on how to proceed. Everything learned earlier in the game, from movement and combat to the brush powers themselves, comes to the fore against Yami in similar, yet unique ways. In these ways, *Okami* calls for the player to fulfill potential, to realize that state of capacity to make.

This involves more than knowing the underlying principles of production, i.e., which brush power creates a bomb or turns day into night. Understanding the rules governing
contextual application are just as important, if not more so. In one sense, the entire game is a process of literacy acquisition, or practice, for the final major combat situation, with this ‘capacity to make’ taught and learned in an active, critical manner. And techne as the acquisition of literacy involves a special kind of knowledge, informing particular activity and incorporating reciprocity and reflection as elements necessary for action. Within Aristotelian techne is the idea of something to be tapped into, a literacy to be acquired and applied for particular purposes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, evidence of this lies within Aristotle’s examples of various practitioners of techne (doctors, navigators and performance artists), whose excellence and expertise produce tangible results that also respond to context-dependent situations. Evidence is also within Okami, a video game presenting rather unique forms of immersion and interaction within a particular environment, one immediately responsive to contextual application.

The Cure for the Common Day: Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland

Although not as explicitly stated, or arguably tangible, within the action-adventure-oriented Okami, other games present a more Platonic understanding of techne and related concepts. As mentioned earlier, the simulation genre combines elements of skill, chance and strategy to represent real-world actions of one form or another. These range from the more complex mayoral management in the SimCity series to the somewhat simplistic activity of farming in the Harvest Moon series, the latter of which is the primary focus in this section. What is more explicit and tangible about the simulation genre, though, concerns the representation of reality-based interaction within the gameworld. As mundane and repetitive as such activities appear to be, they have meanings set and understood outside the game. All actions are, of
course, not as complex as in the world outside, but they still require a good deal of learning, tacitly encouraged, if not necessary, for playing and enjoying the game.

*Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, the first in the series for the PS2, incorporates a good variety of these mundane, repetitive activities in service of an ultimate goal, though, like other simulation games, this achievement can occur a number of ways. Perhaps more so than in the action-adventure genre, which is aligned more with the Aristotelian idea of potential, simulations have a greater concern with production, the Platonic application of particular means toward particular ends, which makes them more appealing for educational purposes. Learning may come easier within a simulation designed and set with clear parameters for progress and punishment, but this does not mean fun is no longer present, as evidenced by the continuing popularity of *The Sims*, a strategic life-simulation series involving the daily activities of player-created virtual persons, and *Civilization*, a strategic turn-based series involving the building of an empire. Both series offer player control on a scale grander than that of the *Harvest Moon* series, but all are simulations, making this genre one of the more inclusive and wide-reaching within the realm of video games.

As such, the simulation genre, and *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland* in particular, is also rather revealing of how *techne*, along with other ancient Greek concepts, is currently manifest. Again, in contrast to more Aristotelian notions of *techne*, et al, this game is more closely aligned with Platonic ideas of *techne* as propagating rather than reciprocating, moving in a singular direction, with earlier forms serving as the basis for later engagement. Because of this, there is less reflection on action and more concern with adherence to a set of principles, more focus upon what lies ahead and how to achieve desired ends. In *Harvest Moon*, just as in Plato’s dialogues, *techne* is a kept, utilized and rarely questioned concept. And through the
continuation of the overview of Gee’s learning principles begun in the previous section, this particular simulation provides greater clarification of the idea of techne as the acquisition of literacy. But, again, before such explanation occurs, it is necessary to have a greater understanding of the game itself, including the degree of interaction as well as narrative aspects. Coming to know these features should not only provide a context for connections to be made but also some inferred ideas regarding the more tangible aspects of this particular simulation.

For starters, exploration is of paramount importance in *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland* and combat is nonexistent. This is evident from the introduction of the game manual, which introduces the player to the following scenario:

When your Grandpa passed on, you were asked to go to his farm and make sure everything was in order. It wasn’t until you visited the old place that you realized that the farm and local village was in danger of becoming a resort. Can you find a way to save it before it’s paved into a parking lot? (4)

With a focus on the prevention of destruction rather than its promotion, this guiding question entreats the player to explore the gameworld for possibilities, which become apparent through interaction with various NPCs, including owners of local businesses, fellow farmers and other village inhabitants. However, the player needs to first earn the trust of these characters before important facts about ways to save the village can be revealed. To do so, the player must prove successful at farming, i.e., make a living on Grandpa’s former farm, which may or may not include foraging, growing crops, raising animals part-time working, fishing, cooking and selling produce and other goods.

Playing *Harvest Moon* encompasses a range of diverse activities and is very much in line with Plato’s views on techne as a flexible concept. Furthermore, principles and rules govern
each productive activity, and these are parameters to be respected and not trifled with, as the very construction of the game itself depends upon them. And, as in Plato’s *techne*, change comes with the opening of a new *techne*, summarily based upon an older, more established *techne*. This reveals *techne* overall as a kind of productive knowledge. Still, almost in spite of encompassing a variety of different actions, *techne* remains in both Plato’s view and *Harvest Moon* rather rigid, persistently guided by the inquiry in the game manual.

As the player has until the end of winter to save the homeland, the guiding question above also provides a sense of urgency, of purposeful exploration and interaction, rather than wandering about the gameworld without reason or meaning. Still, with encouragement of exploration, there is also encouragement of risk, as all good video games, simulations in particular, present the player with what Gee describes, crediting psychologist Erik Erickson, as a psychosocial moratorium, “a learning space in which the learner can take risks where real-world expectations are lowered” (62). For instance, when it comes to planting seeds (Figure 3.8) for future harvest (Figure 3.9), there’s a suggestion (rather than a stated rule) of waiting until after the early rainy season, because it is possible for heavy rains to wash away what was recently planted.
But the option to plant early remains and, if taken and executed properly by paying attention to weather forecasts and timing planting sessions right, the player will be able to harvest and subsequently profit earlier. However, it should be noted that doing so, too, inhibits social interaction elsewhere, for part-time work also presents an opportunity for earning the trust of Bob, owner of nearby Brownie Farm and operator of the Farmer’s Shop. Planting early can
initially limit the amount of productive knowledge the player has to work with, though it does allow for the player to establish a greater understanding of the effects of in-game weather. With options available and expectations lowered, the player is able to take greater risks, revealing in *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland* possession of this particular learning principle.

While risks are involved from the very beginning, there are also intrinsic rewards, "customized to each learner’s level, effort, and growing mastery and signaling the learner’s ongoing achievements" (67). If the player does plant seeds in the proper manner, by first hoeing the ground, seeding, watering and remembering to water every day thereafter, greeting one morning will be a bright red tomato, ready for harvest. Other in-game aspects align to this achievement principle, rewarding particular actions and patience. As a further example, allow me to explain one of my first desires related to the game: I wanted a dog (Figure 3.10). Within the first week, while tending crops, I noticed a stray dog running about Grandpa’s (renamed Laredo) farm. Whenever I approached, this hound dog with a red scarf around its neck was quick to scamper away, just beyond my outstretched arms. This happened every morning for about a week before, in some frustration, I referenced the game manual and learned that if I left food in the dog dish just outside the farmhouse, I would eventually befriend a playful puppy. So, for the next two weeks, in addition to tending crops and before heading over to Brownie Farm, I made sure that putting food in the dog dish was part of my routine. And yes, the first time I was able to hold the dog in my arms was quite satisfying, knowing that my patience and devotion had intrinsic value in the gameworld.
Of course, the initial reward was having a non-human companion to play with in those few non-working moments, but the sustained reward involved the development of a kind of schedule, of making each moment that much more meaningful and purposeful. It also prepared me for raising chickens (Figure 3.11), cows (Figure 3.12) and a horse (Figure 3.13), all of which needed to be fed daily, brought inside or left outside depending on the weather and checked on for health and general happiness in the form of talking to them and/or brushing them every day. Befriending that hound dog, which I named Casey, gave me ample practice and preparation for later taking care of my chickens, Anna, Becca, Gemma and Hannah, my cows, Bessie and Daisy, and my horse, Bolt. These actions, planting and harvesting crops and caring for a variety of barnyard animals, also caused me to rethink my time management skills, to be more precise in particular activities, to be even more aware of the passage of time as well as the weather.

Figure 12. Tending to a cow. Screenshot. http://ps2.ign.com/dor/objects/16273/harvest-moon-save-the-homeland/images/HMSTHScreen01.html
Such engagement caused me to develop a clear set of principles and/or rules for my own unique gameplay, to establish a particular approach and *ethos* for completing important tasks, which was as much about scientific progress as practice and routine. I needed to understand everything I did and, as Plato has Socrates explain in the *Phaedrus*, to divide things up to discover the truth. While this could be seen as a kind of reflective action, what informed me much more was a need for organization and structure of what was present and available and utilizing that toward the discovery of truth, i.e., saving the homeland. In partitioning my time between planting, watering and harvesting crops, caring for my various livestock and interacting with NPCs collectively, I opened up possibilities for successfully completing the narrative. Contained within these actions, too, are two more of Gee’s learning principles, one concerning practice and the other ongoing learning. This was also an exercise in the former for I had plenty of practice in an exciting context, in a virtual world compelling on my own terms and where I experienced ongoing success (71). Early success involved attaining Casey, my chickens and cows and Bolt, but continuing success came in the form of indicators of how well I got along
with my dog and horse and the moods of my chickens and cows. Regarding Casey and Bolt, the higher the number of hearts, the stronger the relationship and the greater the chance of narrative openings, as evidenced by the following:

**Casey (dog)**
1 Heart—He is starting to like me.
2 Hearts—He comes to me when I whistle.
3 Hearts—He's starting to run faster now.
4 Hearts—He is getting smarter and he listens to what I say.
5 Hearts—A man's best friend. He is my buddy.

**Bolt (horse)**
1 Heart—We are getting along better.
2 Hearts—He can run now.
3 Hearts—He is running faster now.
4 Hearts—Top speed. He runs like the wind.
5 Hearts—He is confident he won't lose to anyone.

Regarding my chickens and cows, the happier and healthier they are, the greater the chance of heightened production, in the form of golden eggs and golden milk (and higher profit margins). Achieving these successes required spending much of my in-game time on task (read: practice), but it also meant having to undo earlier routines. While tending crops alone was relatively simple, my farming activities became more and more complex and demanding of my time, requiring me to adapt to the new responsibilities and summarily enact Gee’s ongoing learning principle, which concerns “cycles of new learning, automatization, undoing automatization, and new reorganized automatization” (71). I had to prioritize and reprioritize, putting off watering my tomatoes and corn until after Casey, my chickens and cows and Bolt were all fed and outside, unless, of course, it happened to be raining that day.
Furthermore, the options of planting crops on four large tracts of land and caring for a variety of demanding animals presented ample opportunities to operate within, but at the outer edge of my resources, which is rather revealing of Gee’s “regime of competence” principle of learning. As I continued to experience success by doing the same things, e.g., harvesting crops and caring for Casey, my chickens and cows and Bolt, my behaviors became more and more routinized (70), although later narrative signals to be explained later also caused me to rethink this routinization. For the moment, though, it is important to note that a significant portion of *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland* incorporates the achievement, practice, ongoing learning and “regime of competence” principles of learning in a very satisfactory manner.

Part of what also makes this gaming experience worthwhile is indicative of Gee’s probing principle of learning, involving a cycle of “probing the world…reflecting in and on this action and, on this basis, forming a hypothesis; reprobing the world to test this hypothesis; and then accepting or rethinking the hypothesis” (107). While this aspect is evident in the above examples, it is even more pronounced in relation to narrative signals, specific in-game actions forwarding the plot. Tending crops and farm animals is rewarding in itself, but these actions are intended to provide support for further interaction with townsfolk, interaction necessary for finding a way to save the homeland. There are a total of nine different ways to save the farm and village, and each ending hinges on fulfilling certain criteria to trigger events, ranging from getting to know specific characters very well to collecting specific objects. Sometimes these events do not happen at once, occurring instead over a period of game time, days, sometimes weeks, later. Also, many of the characters in *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland* can be involved in more than one ending, as Gwen, granddaughter of the carpenter Woody, is part of both the Endangered Weasel and Horse Race possible endings.
I triggered the latter of these by working part-time at Brownie Farm and earning enough of Bob’s trust to receive Bolt, which I then made sure to brush and feed and, once allowed, ride every day. Once able to ride Bolt, Bob showed up at Laredo Farm to compliment me on my riding ability and express confidence in my training Bolt to run. At this point, Gwen showed up and made a few snide comments about how anybody can ride and that no one will beat her horse. Once Bolt was at the level of five hearts, Bob once again showed up at the farm with compliments and a declaration to begin training Bolt for the horse race, which, if won, would provide enough money to save the town. Training involved running Bolt in a Time Attack, i.e., going around the race track at Brownie Farm three times and beating Gwen’s time of 52 seconds. However, I was consistently unable to do this; either I did not keep close enough to the right fence or I did not maintain sharp corners or I simply was not accustomed to using the left analog stick, designated for movement, in a more competitive manner.

Probing and reprobing this possible Horse Race ending led me to a dead end. In an attempt to find another way around, I initiated more contact with Gwen, thereby triggering the Endangered Weasel ending, which I was able to complete with relative ease. However, completing this particular ending did not mean the end of the game, not with eight other endings to achieve. The only difference in beginning anew is that all the townsfolk once again treat me like a stranger, causing me to re-establish previous relationships and form new ones as related to which alternate ending I intend to pursue.

The gameplay aspects described in the above paragraphs, though, incorporate not only the probing principle of learning but also Gee’s multiple routes and discovery principles. With nine possible endings, each tied to specific abilities learned within the gameworld, there are multiple ways to make progress, which allows players to “make choices, rely on their own
strengths and styles of learning and problem solving, while also exploring alternative styles” (108). The various technai in Harvest Moon possess not only clear sets of principles but also methods necessary for interaction, revealing that Platonic interchangeability between techne and episteme, between action and knowledge. My first choice was to run the Horse Race, but when faced with a presently unachievable goal, I was able to explore other possibilities and play to more evident strengths, to engage in epistemic methods already in my possession. And this was not something overtly explained to me in either the manual or the game itself. Instead, I had “ample opportunity to experiment and make discoveries” (138), essential action for playing and enjoying the game as well as completing it.

But this movement of mine between the game and its accompanying manual is also evidence of Gee’s text principle of learning, wherein texts are not understood only in terms of the definition of the words in the text and their text-internal relationships to each other but are understood in terms of embodied experiences (108). The manual provides initial information about each of the nine possible endings, including ways to get started, i.e., with whom to establish friendships and other actions to take. Such information makes sense only in the context of the game, for without knowledge of how to earn Gina’s and Dia’s trust by giving them their favorite items as presents (explained on page 9 of the manual), the Goddess Dress ending is not a possibility. In fact, if there is some reader confusion about what is described in this section, at least part of it comes from this lack of embodied experience in relation to Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland.

The ways in which this game concerns both principled action and the communication concerned with it is further evidence of how one’s knowledge and understanding, one’s episteme, change and adapt in relation to particular parameters and principles. Because of the
persistent forward movement of simulation games, in spite of an apparent lack of reciprocity and reflective practice, necessity remains a defining characteristic in the relationships between techne and ethos and between techne and episteme. The many actions presented necessarily lead to the establishment of particular approaches to achieving desired ends, and continued acquaintance with such endeavors make for further actions. While little more than a one-way line of production, moving ever toward the particular end of saving the homeland, techne functions as a means of relating important concepts, of depositing knowledge on-demand for tending crops, etc.

And, if there is some experience with the Harvest Moon series, other simulations or even other video games in other genres, the potential for confusion is limited, if only because of Gee’s intertextual principle of learning. This concerns an understanding of texts as a family, or genre, of related texts and comprehending any one such text in relation to others in the family, “but only after having achieved embodied understandings of some texts” (108). The more grounded, personified familiarity one has with particular texts, the greater the capacity for recognition of such texts, be they video games and/or related materials like instruction manuals and strategy guides. Because of my experience and success in playing Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland, I look forward to playing others in the series, or “cashing out” (108) as Gee calls it when understanding one such text intertextually in relationship to other related texts connected to video games.

Actions Define Character: Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

While Okami and Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland are more revealing of Aristotelian and Platonic ideas of techne and related concepts, Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind aligns itself more with an Isocratic understanding through a rather unified presentation of abilities in relation to an
expansive, immersive and responsive gaming environment. Perhaps more so than in the two games described earlier, *Morrowind*, with its predominant focus on character creation and development via combat and NPC interaction, represents a union of concepts in the service of learning. The development of abilities as well as audience awareness and desire are all integral aspects to this game, necessary for enjoyment and success, all lending to the idea of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, particularly through embodied experiences. As we shall see in relation to still more of Gee’s learning principles, *Morrowind* is further evidence of how not only practices of literacy are present in video games but also how *techne* and related notions lie within this current, popular technology.

*Morrowind* represents, like Isocrates’ understanding of *techne*, an attempt to bring together concepts separated by Plato and Aristotle, and in *Okami* and *Harvest Moon*. While the two previous games focus more upon potential and production respectively, *Morrowind* is more all-encompassing, inviting the player to approach the gaming experience with a more active, critical mind and to allow for and encourage the development of a range of abilities dependent on what the player wants to achieve. This game forces the player to see and how to take advantage of the connections between particular skills and abilities, almost to the point of exploitation. Like Isocrates’ understanding of *techne* (via rhetoric) as fluid and responsive to changes in human existence, *Morrowind*’s design and implementation joins form with content, aesthetic with pragmatic, to a degree greater than seen in *Okami* and *Harvest Moon*. There is much less rigidity, for though rules remain, the freedom to move and negotiate is much greater here. As I describe later, there are also elements reciprocal and civil to *Morrowind*, both in-game and outside of it, asking the player to make expert use of what is available in the development of a virtual identity, a request easily found in popular massively multiplayer online role-playing
games (MMORPGs) like World of Warcraft and Second Life. But what remains interesting about Morrowind is that it is not an MMORPG, that the game designers created this world for largely individual experiences that are personal and unique to any particular player.

One of the major differences between Okami and Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland and the game of primary focus in this section concerns Morrowind’s options for character creation. While the two games described earlier present the player with already well-defined identities reinforced throughout the duration of playing, Morrowind presents a character-identity equivalent to a blank slate, offering a wide variety of abilities and skills from which to choose. Depending on the player’s choices, the character develops and further hones those abilities and skills better than others, building concentrations in certain areas. As James Paul Gee describes in Why Video Games Are Good For Your Soul, “the virtual character becomes an authentic professional built from the ground up by the player” (92), making the gameplay more of a unique experience, particularly in comparison to Okami and Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland (though these games are unique in other ways). And I think Gee focuses upon Morrowind because of how well it complements the eighth principle of learning in What Video Games Have To Teach Us About Learning and Literacy, involving both the employment of and play with identities and presenting real choices in development as well as ample opportunity to meditate on the relationship between new identities and old ones. As such, there is a “tripartite play” (67) of identities involving relation and reflection on multiple real-world identities, a virtual identity, and a projective identity, the last of which is “the interface between one’s real-world identities and the virtual identity” (66), between the real James Schirmer, teacher/gamer, and the virtual Max Amox, Redguard Sentinel.
This freedom of choice, though, is also evident in *Morrowind*’s nonlinear gameplay, which is not only a marked difference from *Okami* and *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, but also within the RPG genre itself. Many such games, like the *Final Fantasy* series, present opportunities for ability and skill (though not character) customization, but have strong, plot-driven aspects, even in regards to side quests, those activities unrelated to the main task at hand. And *Morrowind* has a large, detailed series of actions related to a dominant quest, but the player possesses the ability to complete it first or delay it indefinitely. From the moment the player-character establishes an initial set of in-game abilities and skills in the town of Seyda Neen, s/he is able to do what s/he wants when s/he wants. Of course, at the outset, abilities and skills are in dire need of development, so some options are limited, but more open up as the player-character progresses. This can also be rather overwhelming, the idea of complete control over everything within a gameworld, but after settling into it, the almost endless possibilities for engagement are enticing.

Part of what makes this process overwhelming concerns the necessary, increased awareness to the notion of acquiring the right way and moment. Such a method is necessary because *techne*, as understood by Isocrates, does not happen by chance, nor is its use in any way accidental. *Morrowind* requires fully conscious decisions, incorporating a range from the relatively simple actions of exploring a new town and its inhabitants to the more complex undertakings of defeating the evil infecting the land. Every choice in *Morrowind* is kairotic, shaping not only the player-character but the surrounding environment as well. Initial choices shape later possibilities; choose the right race and NPCs will be more willing to communicate, but pick the wrong class and some quests will be much more difficult. I have personally restarted a game more than once due to dissatisfaction over some of my own choices, if only
because I ultimately felt particular skills and/or abilities did not come to work together in the construction of an identity I desired.

Because of both options for character creation and choices regarding actual gameplay, *Morrowind* presents an opportunity for the player to take clear ownership of a virtual identity, one defined by their own values, desires, choices, goals and actions (Gee 65). *Okami* and *Harvest Moon* certainly caused me to feel connections with the characters of Amaterasu and the boy tending his grandfather’s farm, but not to quite the same degree as in *Morrowind*, where I was able to pick and choose to a much greater degree which abilities and skills I wanted to develop and which quests and other tasks I wanted to take on. As I came to know more about the gameworld by exploring towns and interacting with NPCs, I also came to know more about Max Amox and the current and potential capacities that together we possessed. As such, *Morrowind* showcases Gee’s learning principle of self-knowledge, which concerns how the construction of a virtual world promotes self-reflective learning.

Related to this principle, too, is the idea of a concentrated sample, during which the early parts of a game provide “an ample number of the most fundamental or basic artifacts and tools the player needs to learn to use and actions the player needs to learn” (135). In the context of *Morrowind*, the first town Max Amox travels to, Seyda Neen, functions as a concentrated sample, presenting not only opportunities for conversations and combat but also for learning to manage various game menus (Figure 3.14). To be honest, it took me some time to fully understand the item subset screens (Weapons, Armor, etc.) and I still have trouble with directions and using the map correctly. Perhaps I needed more of Gee’s signs and actions to occur in Seyda Neen before I-Max Amox set out on the lonely road to Balmora, the first of the towns primarily associated with the main quest.
The management of these in-game menus also further reveals a unification of ideas akin to Isocratic notions of *techne* and interrelated concepts, particularly with regard to *ethos*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, desire is very much a part of Isocratic *techne*, informing the continued development of ability and enabling greater pleasure in the overall experience. Desire is also a fundamental part of playing *Morrowind*, involving acts of reciprocation in the drive to better endear oneself to the particular context of the gameworld, to the kairotic moment. Persistent fulfillment of this desire comes in a variety of moments, from successfully persuading a vendor to a lower price on a coveted item to landing the killing blow upon a challenging enemy. The better endeared the player is to a particular moment, the greater the satisfaction in its execution. As such, *ethos* is rather synonymous with identity in the context of *Morrowind*, and, regarding this, *techne* works in developmental tandem.

But in choosing to take on and develop this virtual identity, I also engaged in conscious reflection about cultural models, what Gee describes as the “tacit, taken-for-granted theories we (usually unconsciously) infer and then act on in the normal course of events when we want to be like others in our social groups” (146). There are a great variety of moments in *Morrowind*...
presenting opportunities to initiate a combat situation or find an alternate solution to a confrontation. In these situations, I had to think about the kind of identity developed so far and if a particular action would complement or go against what Max Amox stood for and his-my-our ethos. Furthermore, the nonlinear nature of the game itself caused some reflection on the value of exploration and active delaying of the main quest, for I had a much more enjoyable experience with climbing the ranks of the Fighter’s Guild, from Associate to Guildmaster, than saving the land of Vvardenfell from the evil demon lord, Dagoth Ur. Similarly, I could not help but wonder why I found Morrowind much more of a satisfying game experience over other RPGs, like those in the Final Fantasy series, ultimately leading to a realization of the kind described earlier about the allure of the freedom of choice.

Part of this freedom, too, comes in relation to Gee’s distributed principle of learning, which concerns how meaning and knowledge are spread across objects, tools, symbols, technologies and the environment as well as the learner (197). There is a correlation here to the “material intelligence” principle mentioned earlier, which involves the storage of knowledge in material objects, but what is important in this current principle of learning is the network, the interconnectedness of people and their texts, tools and technologies. Regarding Morrowind in particular, there are entirely self-sufficient online communities continually engaged in the distribution of knowledge, ranging from optimum character creation to particular strategies for particular side quests. A good number of those can be found at gamefaqs.com, one of many websites dedicated to this principle. Such sites feature an extensive list of walkthroughs, specific guides for achieving specific ends within Morrowind, and I have to admit I referenced a few of these, particularly when lost in the wastes of northern Vvardenfell. As Gee describes in relation to the distributed principle of learning,
If you were to assess just my skills playing video games alone in my own home, you would underestimate me. You need to assess me as a node in a network and see how I function as such a node. The knowledge I gain playing games…is but a part of my functioning as such a node, and it is knowledge that can spread into the network as well. In turn, knowledge flows to me, making me better than your original estimate would have assumed. (189)

In other words, video game functionality concerns not just navigation of a gameworld but also navigation of interrelated texts, involving the accompanying game manual and any number of supplemental materials authored by fellow players.

This flow of knowledge also relates closely to the dispersed principle of learning, given the sharing of information with others outside of the realm of Morrowind the game. In many instances, these players constitute what Gee calls an affinity group, a group “bonded primarily through shared endeavors, goals, and practices and not shared race, gender, nation, ethnicity or culture” (197). The commitment here concerns immersive practice, since it is the practice itself that grants identity (193), an aspect acknowledged in the following introduction to “Character Creation Made Simple”:

You looked at your included game guide, made a few choices about race, skills and class, and walked out naked and clueless into the enormous and mostly unfriendly world. You made a few choices, probably died or got arrested, and soon enough you noticed that you weren't happy with what you had made for yourself…Now you have to start over, because you want your character - whom you'll be spending possibly hundreds of hours with - to be perfect.

And that's why I'm here. (dao_jones)
Practice grants identity both in and outside of *Morrowind*, obviously, as players often come to maintain writerly identities on sites like gamefaqs.com in addition to the character(s) developed in the game space.

This also leads to Gee’s last learning principle, regarding how the learner is “able to customize the learning experience and domain/game from the beginning and throughout the experience” (197). Such customization is obvious in terms of character creation and nonlinear gameplay, of course, but also in relation to the distribution and dispersal of contextual, networked knowledge. What is also interesting about this principle concerns how the designers of *Morrowind* provide a constant reminder of this customization in the form of a journal, readily accessible for purposes of quest direction as well as just to see where the player has been and how far s/he has progressed. A secondary influence should be noted here, too, involving the inherent possibility of customizing the gaming experience for others, if they happen to read through a guide about creating a character best suited to the many challenges in *Morrowind* (Dark Elf/Imperial Adventurer, to some).

This particular role-playing game, in contrast to the action-adventure game *Okami* and the farming simulation *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, draws together a variety of actions inside and outside of the gameworld in a kind of union. Evidence of this lies primarily in the depth of character creation and nonlinear gameplay, with many aspects layered and dependent upon each other for developmental success. Evidence of this also lies in the networked relationships containing contextual knowledge of the game, including limits and areas of exploitation (or glitches). As such, *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* stands as a more than solid example of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, enhanced and grounded in persistent, personal and practical experience. With rules and principles dependent upon kairotic probabilities,
ability/skill incorporation becomes all the more necessary and important. *Morrowind* itself contains a kind of multimodal literacy, implying a union of concepts in the service of learning, and Isocrates surely engaged in a similar, pedagogical amalgamation of methods.

**Conclusion**

The current popular technology of video games, in particular the action-adventure, simulation and role-playing genres, contains sufficient evidence of not only *techne*, but also the related concepts of *episteme*, *phronesis* and even *kairos*. The direct application of acquired knowledge, through acts of “painting,” tending chickens and cows and/or developing a unique identity, is essential to the embodied experience of video games. Each in their own way, *Okami*, with its potential regarding Aristotelian ‘capacity to make,’ *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, with its emphasis on tangible, Platonic production and *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, with its Isocratic, unified presentation of ideas, mixing together potential production and the fulfillment of desire, exemplify *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, revealing it as the fluid, embodied experience that learning is in a current, popular technology. These games also reveal *techne* as flexible and diverse, each requiring rather different forms of interaction in relation to particular principles and the acquisition of means to desirable and fulfilling ends, achieved through tapping into the potential presented within.

The interchangeability and/or overlapping of *techne* and *episteme* for both Plato and Aristotle is evident in the communicative aspects of gameplay, be it reading dialogue or ‘reading’ the environment for clues as how to proceed. And such reading requires kairotic flexibility on the part of the player, who needs to draw from a diverse array of literacies in order to achieve particular ends. In some instances, there is more than one method of acquiring the
means, which broadens possibilities for the development of identity. Knowledge in these games is not only deposited initially, but distributed and dispersed through and beyond the gameworld, making insiders of all who engage in the network of relationships, the affinity groups, associated. Principles, both of learning and otherwise, govern and inform methods of acquisition and meaning-making, all of which are necessary aspects of literacy itself, of its acquisition and action. Aristotelian, Platonic and Isocratic notions of *techne* and other Greek concepts are surely evident in the current popular technology of video games and, in particular, those described above.

Furthermore, most every moment in any video game is kairotic, requiring of the player a responsive action appropriate to the unique situation presented. In *Okami*, the majority of these moments arise in major combat situations, requiring timely use of the Celestial Brush powers. In *Harvest Moon*, such moments are evident in the planting, watering and harvesting of crops as well as the tending for livestock, requiring a more leveled undertaking of appropriate action. In *Morrowind*, kairotic potential is all around, from NPC encounters and combat situations to choices made in leveling up the player-character, requiring appropriate action now to influence appropriate action later. This all necessarily falls under the umbrella of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, for the kairotic element is what makes learning an ever-present moment. Each new encounter shapes one’s literacy practices, causing reflection and/or revision in light of new knowledge and experiences.

There is at least one potential criticism of looking at these games, though, concerning an archaic nature for all were original releases on systems now past. With the Xbox gaming console is largely irrelevant due to the emergence of the next-gen Xbox 360, the PS2, while still popular, grows less so with the PlayStation 3 gaining more and more ground. But the ideas and
concepts presented in these games are still evident, with *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* being one of the first popular games released for the 360, the *Harvest Moon* series moving to the Nintendo DS, a portable, hand-held system, and *Okami* in the porting process for the Nintendo Wii, a console exhibiting some rather revolutionary control schemes that look to be a near perfect complement to “painting.” Though the examples provided in this chapter are between two and five years old at the time of this writing, their characteristic design and implementation remain important aspects in the development of future video games. In fact, these more recent additions to the video game canon, like *Oblivion* and *Harvest Moon: Rune Factory*, which augment many of the features mentioned earlier, only provide further evidence of Gee’s principles of learning and of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy. And, if the video game industry continues to produce games of such quality and caliber, I imagine these connections will become stronger and more pronounced in the future.

Playing such games involves a great deal of learning, for, as Steven Johnson notes in *Everything Bad Is Good For You*, “the cognitive challenges of videogaming are much more usefully compared to [word problems]” (57-58). This is because, as Jesper Juul explains in *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, word problems/puzzles and video games share the mode of reasoning required in order to play, i.e., thinking ‘outside the box’ (93). Squire and Jenkins take this idea further in “Harnessing the Power of Games in Education,” explaining that games are more than problems or puzzles; they are environments in which students develop a much firmer sense of how specific social processes and practices are interwoven, and how different bodies of knowledge relate to each other. In that sense, they resemble classic word problems, where students are
invited to separate out the data they need from a much more complex field of information and then apply it toward specific tasks. (15)

What Johnson, Juul and Squire and Jenkins all acknowledge and accentuate is that video games constitute a learning experience, often multiple learning experiences, designed and implemented so that the player is able to acquire the skills necessary for overcoming specific challenges.

Although the design and implementation is still often quite different, the goals and outcomes associated with a composition course also involve the acquisition of skills (read: literacy) for completion. What can be gained from this discussion of techne as manifest in video games is not only a burgeoning appreciation for how the concept operates today but also a greater curiosity for how it connects with current approaches to teaching. As Kurt Squire explains in “Video Games in Education,” one of the most important, potential benefits of studying games “may not be as much in generating theoretical understanding of human experience in technology or guidelines for instructional design, but rather, in inspiring us to create new designs.” It is with this in mind that we move forward with speculative application of these concepts, of techne as the acquisition of literacy, in relation to composition pedagogy.
CHAPTER 4: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN COMPOSITION

Introduction

Ambiguity regarding *techne* and related ancient Greek concepts can cause confusion of meaning but also allow, through acknowledgement of conceptual connections, for greater understanding. Doing so thereby leaves an opening for redefinition in light of new developments, to better comprehend how *techne* is manifest today. Through joining Platonic notions of *techne* as flexible and diverse yet principled, an Aristotelian ‘capacity to make’ and the Isocratic amalgamation of parameters and production, we come to the unique understanding of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, of seeing, within technology, a reflective and reciprocal practice of ever-expanding knowledge.

In taking these characteristics from ancient understandings of *techne*, such comprehension is easier to grasp in relation to the current, popular technology of video games, which reveal not only some clarification of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy but also of the relationship(s) with other concepts overall. It is the direct application of acquired knowledge within the action adventure, simulation and RPG genres of video games, each of which requires rather different forms of interaction in relation to principles and production, that largely reveals *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, as the fluid, embodied experience that learning itself is in a current, popular technology. Epistemic understanding and kairotic flexibility are necessary for playing video games, requiring the player to draw from a diverse array of literacies in order to make progress and take appropriate action in response to unique situations within the gameworld. *Techne* as acquisition of literacy is thus a series of layered, ubiquitous moments,
with each new encounter giving further shape to present future practice in relation to ethos and identity, causing reflection and/or revision in light of new knowledge.

As also mentioned in earlier chapters, such an enterprise is, for many, more interesting and satisfying than what is still the conventional learning space, the classroom. The reasons for this are myriad, ranging from the creation and development of a valued identity to the distribution of on-demand knowledge, all of which occurs because of the overall design of a good video game. Video games offer, as Kurt Squire observes, designed experiences, “in which participants learn through a grammar of doing and being” (19). In providing a set of experiences with an assumption of learners as active constructors of meaning with unique drives, goals and motivations, most good video games afford multiple trajectories of participation and meaning making, with content delivered just-in-time and on demand to solve problems (24-25). Most good video games are more endogenous than exogenous, two terms coming from Reiber’s 1996 Education and Technology Research & Development article about play which Squire explains further. While an exogenous game is one in which context is extrinsic to gameplay, an endogenous game is one in which context and gameplay are inextricably linked. In an exogenous game, the learner appears as an empty receptacle with knowledge comprised of discrete facts and the act of learning involving memorization with instruction similar to transmission. In rather stark contrast, an endogenous game paints the learner as an active and social organism with knowledge as a tool set for problem-solving and learning involves discovery and experimentation with instruction as a social negotiation process (24).

If the first-year composition course itself was a game, I think it would still (unfortunately) be decidedly more exogenous than endogenous in nature. Placement tests and other assessment procedures acknowledge skills for proper pacing rather than seeing pre-
knowledge as something to be leveraged and played upon. Identity and context are wrapped together in terms of superficial motivation rather than something to be managed over time and making for the actual content of the learning experience. As such, concepts like audience awareness remain intangible for those who persist in seeing themselves as students in a composition class rather than actual, active composers. However, change is always possible, and it might not be as difficult as it first seems, if only because many of the learning principles scaffolding good video games are also evident at course and curriculum levels.

Further acknowledgment of this idea lies in “Applying Gaming and Simulation Techniques to the Design of Online Instruction,” by Rude-Parkins, et al, which documents the development of an online course for Army captains and presents some broader applications to the design of online instruction, including provisions for multiple ways for learners to react and make selections and further instructional predictability regarding movement from simple to complex problem-solving, possibly in the form of adaptive testing. In “Avatar Pedagogy,” Joel Foreman also anticipates a greater convergence of gaming technology and education, envisioning virtual universities populated by “professors whose ideas about education have been shaped by their multiplayer online gaming experiences.” And I think there is this increasing academic focus upon massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), like World of Warcraft, because, as Squire summarizes, participation in such games “constitutes participation in social practices with real consequences for its members” (23), which is an indirect allusion to Gee’s idea of affinity groups.

And while there are connections between the construction and design of MMORPGs and that of e-learning courses, I chose Okami, Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland and Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind for discussion in the previous chapter because all were offline games and closer
to the construction and design of a computer-mediated composition course. Just as every player of *Okami* charts a unique trajectory through the gameworld (almost in spite of the linear nature of the game), every student in a composition course does much the same, and this is based as much upon previously acquired literacies as the actual design of the game/course. So, while MMORPGs may be representative of what future courses will look like more and more, it remains important to understand what current connections there are between offline courses and video games.

In relation to *techne* and related concepts, though, video games are further evidence of the idea that not everything need be “orderly, visible, easy to understand. And utterly uninteresting” (Sirc 15). As Squire and Levi Giovanetto, in “Self-Organizing Communities for Knowledge Production,” conclude their observations on Apolyton University, an online university created by players of the simulation *Civilization III*, the question we need to be asking is “less ‘how can we get these technologies in schools’ and more how can we retool schools for the digital age” (11). While maintaining an exclusive focus on the teaching of first-year composition, the majority of what follows is an exercise in addressing this concern. It involves a discussion of what composition teachers and curriculum designers already do in relation to *techne* and video games as well as some observations on what yet still needs to be done. Overall, I support not only an increased focus on the development of *ethos* and identity, as Bartholomae observes in “Inventing the University,” but also increased focus on multiple (kinds of) compositions, as Sirc stresses in *English Composition as a Happening*, along with an increased focus on literacy more broadly conceived, as Selber’s *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* attests. Through connecting these works (and others) to Platonic, Aristotelian and Isocratic understandings of *techne* in relation to the current, popular technology of video games, this
chapter seeks to provide tangible suggestions in addition to theoretical concepts of how composition pedagogy might be all the more acknowledging of technology’s continuing influence.

Fulkerson’s Axiologies and the Acquisition of Literacy

In the dual interest of brevity and ease, though, I want to turn first to Richard Fulkerson’s “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” an argument/summary on the current, complicated nature of composition, which he sees as less unified, more splintered and ripe for the new theory wars. This is because of three alternative axiologies (theories of value), critical/cultural studies (CCS), expressivism and procedural rhetoric, all vying for greater command over composition. Fulkerson makes this presentation within the context of four questions related to axiology, process, pedagogy and epistemology, emphasizing the importance and influence of each upon the creation of a composition course. What is interesting, too, is the inherent encouragement Fulkerson provides regarding a deeper consideration of our own positions and approaches to teaching composition. In particular, it is in response to Fulkerson that I first began developing the possibility of a meta-composition course, a writing-about-writing course which aids and encourages students to more fully realize genre-based composition as argumentation for an academic discourse community. It is my intent here, though, to first show more broadly how each theory is revealing of techne as the acquisition of literacy, particularly in relation to how it is manifest in the current, popular technology of video games. Doing so should illuminate, in a more general sense, what a wide variety of composition teachers already acknowledge and do in the interest of techne as the acquisition of literacy.
Despite composition becoming a “less unified and more contentious discipline” (654), understanding *techne* as the acquisition of literacy and seeing it manifest in the current, popular technology of video games has implications for Fulkerson’s three alternative axiologies, which he defines by way of questions regarding what makes writing ‘good,’ how texts come into existence, the pedagogy of procedural knowledge and the epistemology underlying answers to the first three (657-658). While Fulkerson ultimately views CCS, the first of three axiologies, as inappropriate for the likelihood of indoctrination in addition to lacking the actual teaching of writing, what this theory of value does acknowledge in relation to *techne* as the acquisition of literacy concerns the interpretation of social artifacts, along with writing as “an extended, recursive, complex process” (661), and the empowerment accompanying this process.

Good video games, as mentioned earlier, are designed experiences, allowing the player to take on and play with a new identity that s/he comes to value, and this can be an empowering process, not only in terms of the gameworld as new abilities and skills are acquired but also in the affinity groups built around such games. Increasingly, becoming an expert within a video game means professing expertise elsewhere in spheres of influence related to said game, in online discussion boards and websites devoted to the intricacies of its play. And while insights regarding quests for the Fighter’s Guild in *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* are not exactly on the same level as insights regarding the “injustices of American and transnational capitalism, politics, and complicit mass media” (661), the acquisition of literacy in both is quite similar, involving not only Aristotelian potential but also Isocratic civil action, both of which are contextually dependent.

Somewhat similar to this is the second theory of value, expressivism, which Fulkerson views as understanding writing as “a means of fostering personal development” (667) and is
quick to emphasize that there is no single ‘expressive’ way to teach composition, just as there is
no single CCS way. While more dependent upon those teaching composition, this aspect is also
evident in good video games, particularly with *Harvest Moon* and *Morrowind*, each offering
multiple avenues of approaches to in-game tasks, again allowing the player to chart not only a
unique path through the gameworld but to also experiment with other approaches in a non-
threatening atmosphere. Good video games increase the player’s maturity and self-awareness,
much like the axiology of expressivism. It should be noted, too, that, in relation to *techne* as the
acquisition of literacy, there is more of a phronetic connection, given that *phronesis* is
knowledge enacted through personal experience, through expressive actions with others.

Still more similarities exist between *techne* and video games and what Fulkerson deems
as procedural rhetoric, beginning with the theory of the writing process, which understands
composition as “an extended set of (teachable) activities in which a wide variety of invention
procedures may be valuable” (671). And the same goes for drafting and revision activities,
which reveals again that connection to Gee’s learning principle of multiple routes. But the
differences within procedural rhetoric itself come, as Fulkerson writes, in the form of
disagreement on argumentative topics, “how explicitly to ‘teach’ argument, over how to assess it,
and over the role of ‘logic,’ either formal or informal” (674). Similar differences and subsequent
discussions are ongoing in relation to video games, from early stages of development to long
after a release on discussion boards. There is an ongoing process of negotiation, and the players
are as much a part of that as the developers, which leads me to think there should be more of a
similar process when it comes to teaching composition. Writing-across-the-curriculum and other
initiatives are a step in the right direction in this regard, for, as Fulkerson observes in relation to
the academic discourse aspect of procedural rhetoric, the goal is “to allow students to read, write,
and reason as they will be expected to do in other college courses, and thus to absorb the sorts of rhetorical moves that will help them survive in college” (678). Replace a few key words in that statement, like ‘students’ with ‘players’ and ‘college’ with any given video game, and the similarities should be further evident.

However, Fulkerson also mentions how easy it is to create a course that baffles students: “We may teach one thing, assign another, and actually expect yet a third” (680). This is also a characteristic acknowledged by Mike Palmquist, et al, in Transitions: Teaching Writing in Computer-Supported and Traditional Classrooms, stressing that if students do not see relationships between assigned tasks in a class session and the eventual essays turned in for grading, students “will not work with good will in any class, whether it’s computer-supported or not” (157). Because of a lack of transparency on the part of the teacher, composition can often be a video game poorly designed and implemented. In order to eliminate confusion and contradictions, teaching composition needs to become all the more transparent and accessible, not only in the sense of writing-across-the-curriculum initiatives but also in the sense of greater communication with students beyond the posting of syllabi and assignments to a course website. This transparency needs to come in the form of some deconstruction of student and teacher expectations regarding composition as well as technology. Still, with composition a less unified field, understanding techne as the acquisition of literacy, and acknowledging and implementing tangible formations of the ideas presented here, could very well create a more cohesive discipline.

A necessary part of this greater cohesiveness concerns greater student involvement regarding Fulkerson’s analytical scheme of axiology, process, pedagogy and epistemology. Students deserve a greater say in the construction of a composition course, much like what
players increasingly have in video games. Part of what makes any gaming experience ‘good’ involves an ongoing process of reflective negotiation between the game and the player. From the very beginning, each game mentioned in the previous chapter presents necessary and potential achievements, and it is largely up to the player to decide which to go for. This is perhaps most evident in *Morrowind*, wherein every action has significance not only in the construction of a virtual identity but also the learned abilities necessary for quest completion. What makes it ‘good’ is dependent upon context, and having students be more attentive to context as well as the identities created within should make for a better learning experience overall.

Regarding the process question, i.e., how written texts come into existence, it is helpful to think of the player of a particular game being able to chart a unique trajectory through the gameworld, based primarily upon achievements chosen and abilities gained, with the designer having already placed new and interesting options at predetermined points along the way. This is perhaps most evident in *Okami*, wherein every “painting” ability acquired and learned subsequently opens up possibilities for further acquisition and learning. The view of process in relation to gaming literacies is one of encouraging self-perpetuation, the development of different skill-sets to be used in tandem, and this is largely taught by way of immersion and subsequent interaction with semiotic domains, because what good video games effectively teach is procedural knowledge. The question of epistemology, too, is as much for students as it is for composition teachers here, with answers depending as much upon intuitive or tacit knowledge as what can be negotiated in any given moment.

How we answer each of the questions within Fulkerson’s analytical scheme in relation to gaming literacies is dependent not only upon particular games but also upon particular players, given the increasing uniqueness of the gaming experience itself. As such, the first-year
composition course should work in the direction of more opportunities for students to answer 
these questions themselves, by providing assignment sequences that encourage such reflection 
and reciprocity and bearing more than a superficial similarity to the relationship between 
technology and society.

**Composition Sequences**

*Opening Observations and Suggestions*

Despite the assumption that words give a sense of permanence, nowhere is this more 
untrue than within a composition course. In viewing the writing of ideas as a process, vital to 
that process is the possibility of change. While possibly unmarked to the reader’s eye, students 
need to be more aware of the possibility of change, coming to understand a truer sense of 
composition based in creativity and originality as much as in argument and presentation. Of 
course, this idea might conflict not only with student perceptions of writing but also with 
discipline-specific perceptions of writing. The following sequences are an attempted 
reconciliation of such differences, to strike some kind of balance, first through an active 
deconstruction of various and sundry expectations and then by way of what Sirc in *English 
Composition as a Happening* describes as “assemblage, with a structure based on association and 
implication; piling stuff on to create a spellbinding, mesmerizing surface” (284). This happens, 
too, in acknowledgement of Carl Whithaus’ observations on how ways of knowing and writing 
are bound up as much an individual’s knowledge of relations among past and present literacy 
activities (read: *episteme*) as in formal and technological innovations, which he considers a 
“piling up” of verbal and textual rhetorical practices (117).
What both Sirc and Whithaus recognize, albeit in different ways, is an understanding of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, aware as they are of the present (and increasing) many-layered-ness of technological practices, something Gee also acknowledges through his multimodal principle of learning, in which meaning and knowledge are built through more than just words. As mentioned in previous chapters, *techne* possesses aesthetic and technical aspects which are of great importance in our contemporary techno-culture, and the first-year composition course should be in greater acknowledgement of this, if only because of the increasing inseparability of technology and society. How identities take form in light of this are also important to address and expressive and feminist pedagogical approaches work well in assisting such articulation with students, for, as Susan Jarratt writes, “both feminist and expressive compositionists are strongly committed to admitting the presence of the whole person into the educational scene” (122). Each values the expression of ideas in varied forms and contexts, public and private, academic and informal. Furthermore, expressive and feminist pedagogies necessarily problematize academic discourse, thereby encouraging students to think critically about commonly accepted definitions and practices. However, not all academic disciplines actively encourage this, which is something to also emphasize to student, the freedom with which they might approach writing, to feel things out in ways more open than what might be allowed or advocated within their major/intended profession. Such a composition course becomes all the more videogame-like, adhering to a wide variety of Gee’s learning principles, including the subset, concentrated sample and discovery principles.

Through these pedagogical approaches, too, there is work in the direction of the creation and development of community, for composition should be not only about the construction of and experimentation with identity but also the sustained development of what Gee calls an
affinity group. In the context of a composition course, this largely means being accessible as well as honest with students. Composition teachers need to be learners as well, fully present to learn from and with students about their needs and how they might best be addressed. To be fully present is to be accountable and responsible, to be open and flexible, and students should be encouraged to do the same. As long as we keep aware of ourselves, of how we act and conduct ourselves in the classroom, change is always possible. This is even more the case in the following sequences as they require learning right along with students about particular discursive practices.

This is necessarily an act of collaboration which overlaps with expressive and feminist pedagogies; it forms the content of a composition course as much as the context of students’ writing. And, like Sirc, Whithaus and others, I view technology as a primary change agent within composition, both in the development of the composing self as well as the creation of an affinity group. With the capacity for greater consistency, accountability and connectedness among and between students and teachers, online technologies offer myriad methods of communication and interaction in the form of email, mailing lists, discussion boards, blogs and websites. Therefore, such forms enhance the potential for collaborative acts like small-group discussion, peer response and even collaborative writing, all of which, as Rebecca Moore Howard writes, asks “students to listen to each other” (58). Various online technologies further promote the idea of an affinity group, and this aspect alone is of vital importance to the sequences described later.

Prior to more details about the sequences themselves, though, I should also mention that I drew initial inspiration from Michael Carter’s “What Is Advanced about Advanced Composition?: A Theory of Expertise in Writing” and originally designed these for an advanced
composition course. While the theory of expertise deserves deeper discovery elsewhere as a further techne, I have since come to view the notion of quality as too important to be saved for later. The first-year composition course is the first, real introduction for many students to college-level writing and, as such, discussions of quality should become a more necessary aspect. By first building on present knowledge and then expanding outward, the first-year composition course should give students myriad opportunities to work in greater detail with pieces of writing influential to their desired major(s) and/or intended profession(s). The first-year composition course should also call for students to think critically and reflect on their desires and intentions and the discourse employed in such contexts and also engage in such discourse themselves. And this should happen through a variety of academically and culturally oriented assignments, challenging students to identify, analyze and synthesize their own unique understandings of quality and what makes ‘good writing’ in regards to a variety of discourse communities (as well as the affinity group established by the class). And, given how students often get bored very, very fast if presented with assignments too close in similarity, offering a wider variety of assignments should not only help in maintaining student interest over the course of the semester, but also adhere to Sirc’s and Whithaus’ notions of ‘piling’ explained earlier.

Critical self-reflection in the midst of composing varieties occurs in good video games, too, revealing techne as flexible and diverse and requiring different forms of interaction in relation to particular principles. Designing a composition course around these ideas necessarily makes for a more videogame-like environment, encouraging (rather than allowing) students to experiment and play with what they know and what they want to know, helping to them to tap into that Aristotelian ‘capacity to make,’ produce tangible results in a variety of ways and ultimately fulfill their own desires through a unified presentation of ideas. Possibly unique to
these following sequences, though, is the greater dependence on student impressions of what makes ‘good writing’ in addition to the ideas of the instructor, discipline, etc. Therein lies the potential for an incorporation of university-wide outcomes and student-oriented objectives, of instructor- and discipline-influenced specifics, concerning various kinds of compositions and understanding, as stated in the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, “the relationships among language, knowledge, and power” (358).

In the absence of other expectations, I offer here my own, including better incorporation and value of personal experience in composition, identification and analysis of features of discipline-specific discourse(s), research and synthesis of major/current documents within discipline-specific discourse(s), collaborative development of extra-textual compositions and the appreciation of discursive practices in a variety of disciplines. And while more readily apparent in one sequence over another, all expectations are present and accounted for, and the first sequence will make these known in relation to both student and university learning outcomes. Of premiere importance, though, is the acquisition of a broader perspective of major/intended professions regarding discourse and how to engage in it, i.e., literacy.

All of this occurs through a wider variety of student compositions, including reading responses and research-oriented reflections featured on blogs created and maintained by students throughout the semester as well as interview transcriptions, annotated bibliographies and PowerPoint presentations. In other words, students engage in freewriting, “small-group dialogic collaborative response” (Burnham 19), self-critique, cultural analysis and genre-specific forms of composition. All of these shall serve to not only help students develop an ethos through the employment of various communicative technologies but also represent engagement with ‘extra-textual stuff,’ compositions outside the more traditional realm of writing, the ‘piling on’
mentioned earlier. And since, as Bartholomae writes, it is the written product, “and not the plan for writing, that locates the writer on the page, that locates him in a text and a style and the codes or conventions that make both of them readable” (80-81), the establishment of character, of appropriate ethos, comes through the acquisition of literacy and its subsequent implementation on the page, the screen, etc. There is a Platonic production here as well as a kind of necessity, with techne’s principles helping ensure an appropriate ethos, with episteme, held or guessed at, making certain of the specific discourse.

However, I should clarify here that I do not necessarily advocate the abolition of the argumentative researched essay. Because it still holds a great deal of weight and worth in many disciplinary circles, and given that a good number of students enter a composition course with the expectation of creating at least one such document, I think it almost essential to have, at least for the time being. And rather than having a course structure with such an assignment as the capstone, perhaps it should instead function as the introduction and be actively utilized in deconstructing initial expectations. Some deconstruction is necessary in keeping aligned with a more videogame-like design, for there is an early process of negotiation in every video game during which the player comes to understand and accept parameters. Similar processes of negotiation need to be part of the composition course, too, and an argumentative researched essay assignment could very well be conducive to that.

Sequence #1: Initial Conceptions

This is, in fact, one of the intentions behind the first sequence, Initial Conceptions (IC), involving the development of greater understanding of what makes ‘good writing’ within the broader academic context. This is because the acquisition of literacy involves a process of
invention similar to that described in Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University.” Early in the
piece, there is some reflection on a first-year student’s placement essay, and Bartholomae
observes that the student is “trying on the discourse even though he doesn’t have the knowledge
that would make the discourse more than a routine… even though he knows he doesn’t have the
knowledge that would make the discourse more than a routine” (75). And I include this
observation because it might as well be of my first hours of playing any of the video games
mentioned in the previous chapter. In each is a period of investigation involving the game’s
discourse, and having a depth comparable to any real-world environment. But where these video
games go beyond what happens in the composition classroom concerns the aspect of undoing
routinized mastery. *Harvest Moon*, for example, presents more continual challenges to players at
higher and higher levels than does composition in its current form. Such a game, too, is more
revealing of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy than composition for similar reasons, concerning
how one’s knowledge and understanding change and adapt in relation to particular parameters
and principles.

Composition thus needs to present students with ample opportunity to operate within, but
at the outer edge of their knowledge base, so challenges remain but are not undoable. Rather
than presenting students with four or five major composition assignments over the course of a
semester, with so many similarities as to appear identical, having a wide range of compositions
available and based at least in part upon students’ prior knowledge should not only encourage
students to operate within their “regime of competence” but also, in relation to Gee’s sixteenth
learning principle, “allow them to make choices, rely on their own strengths and styles of
learning and problem solving while also exploring alternative styles” (209). Unlike *Harvest*
Moon, though, composition does tend to be more than a one-way line of production, and IC and the other sequences detailed here provide numerous instances of reflection and reciprocity.

Furthermore, there is an early process of negotiation in every video game during which the player comes to understand and accept its parameters. While more lenient within certain games and/or genres, the player begins playing with some initial understanding of what will be expected and it is up the designers of the game to not only fulfill and go beyond those expectations, but also make it enjoyable. Far too often, there are expectations on the part of teachers and students that there will be little to no negotiation of achievement requirements, much less the weekly/monthly schedule of tasks. What needs to happen overall is some deconstruction of expectations regarding composition as well as what information and knowledge students bring to any given course, anything informing their potential understanding of what a college-level composition course is, or should be, all about. And this needs to go beyond discussions in scholarship and into the actual composition classrooms, becoming part of the overall process of engagement and exchange of ideas with students.

It is therefore due to the nature of IC dependency on student involvement that it is a sequence overall more pivotal than the others. This initial two-to-three-week period has the potential to make or break everything else, involving not only critical readings of instructor-introduced texts but also self-reflective pieces by students in which they offer some initial conceptions of quality in regards to composition. Engaging in both activities, along with in-depth classroom discussions, should help in clarifying parameters necessary to achieving course aims, including negotiations on student-valued aspects like grades.
**Week 1: Initial Conceptions**

- **Monday**
  - Students will get acclimated to various course elements, including creating their own blogs and work groups and learning the level of responsibility expected of them. Homework will be a blog entry on initial conceptions of “quality” and “academic writing.”

- **Wednesday**
  - Students will share initial conceptions in small group and whole class discussions, deciding upon comprehensive definitions of each. Homework will be a blog entry, comparing/reflecting on initial conception(s) and comprehensive definitions.

- **Friday**
  - Students will freewrite and subsequently discuss initial possibilities for how to apply comprehensive definitions to this course. Homework will be selections from Michael Carter’s “What Is Advanced about Advanced Composition?: A Theory of Expertise in Writing,” Richard Fulkerson’s “Composition at the Turn of the Century” and Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and a blog entry synthesizing the readings.
Week 2: Initial Conceptions

- Monday
  - Students will discuss the readings and how Carter, Fulkerson and Pirsig fit into the initial possibilities discussed last class. Homework will be a blog entry building on class discussion as students focus on Carter, Fulkerson or Pirsig and how such ideas might work in the course structure.

- Wednesday
  - Students will incorporate ideas from Carter, Fulkerson and Pirsig, along with comprehensive definitions, and begin giving more structure to the course, shaping it how they want it to work for them. Homework will be a blog entry detailing students’ class contributions and further thoughts on the growing class structure.

- Friday
  - Students will continue idea incorporation toward course structure, making sure to involve aspects like attendance, grades and class participation. Homework will be a collaborative piece of writing in which students compose and propose a particular structure to the course.

Week 3: Initial Conceptions

- Monday
  - Students will share collaborative pieces of writing on particular course structure proposals and work toward achieving consensus
on overall course structure. Homework will be a blog entry reflecting on the collaborative piece of writing, its process, worth and potential impact on the class.

• Wednesday
  ▪ Students will continue to work toward achieving consensus on an initial structure for the course overall. Homework will be a blog entry on the finalized course structure and how it complements and/or inhibits their own learning.

• Friday
  ▪ Students will discuss identity in relation to the initial course structure and how/where they see themselves fitting into the environment and the parameters set there. Homework will be necessary preparations for the next sequence, including a blog entry about media representations of an intended major/profession.

The negotiations taking place and precedence in this first sequence mirror much of what happens in the early stages of the video games described in the previous chapter, particularly with regards to *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, which challenges the player in similar ways from the very beginning and throughout the gaming experience. Both require consistent, critical reflection upon one’s own expectations and the beginning of construction and maintenance of an identity in accordance with those expectations. Part of what makes the experience of playing *Morrowind* so satisfying is identity construction and maintenance, and IC aims to make for the start of similarly fulfilling happenings.
These sequences also work in acknowledgement of the concept of *phronesis*, knowledge enacted through personal experience, characterizing and expressing a particular identity. The development of this identity requires *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, *techne* as a form of reflective knowledge, requiring both productive ability and deep deliberation on procedure, making for a continual practice that can be forgotten as well as learned through a variety of interactive moments, e.g., blogs, PowerPoint presentations and/or websites in the two following sequences, which are equivalent to the many menus managed in *Morrowind*.

*Sequence #2: Major Media Representations*

The second sequence, Major Media Representations (MMR), takes the ideas developed in the first sequence further, turning to cultural analysis for the purposes of greater comprehension regarding the ways in which a particular profession is viewed through various forms of media. Over a three-week period, students attend to the gender, power and authority in their intended majors/professions, particularly their expectations and perspectives on how such issues influence future endeavors. A constructive way to get at this involves inviting students to think about how the media represents their intended majors/professions, and MMR is a sequence that “invites reflection on [gendered ways]—brings them out of invisibility so that their sources and effects in the context of a sexist culture can be examined” (Jarratt 120). It is also the first sequence to better familiarize students with their intended majors/professions. In my own teaching experiences, it appears that many students have some pretty good ideas of their intended majors/professions; if not, many still have a few possibilities in mind. Whatever the case may be, MMR asks students to think about, reflect on and compose a piece of substantial length on the representations of their intended majors/professions. Of major focus will be attention paid to
the gendered ways their intended majors/professions are presented in various forms of media, though students should also take some time to reflect on questions of age, class and ethnicity, too.

Such a focus is important because movies, television shows and other forms of media (including video games) can be very influential in representing particular professions and/or inspiring others to pursue careers in said fields. For example, we have Robin Williams as the creative, exciting (male) teacher in *Dead Poet’s Society* and Barbra Streisand as the unattractive, sex-starved (female) teacher in *The Mirror Has Two Faces*. Furthermore, we have Arnold Schwarzenegger, the tough narcotics cop going undercover as the angry, bumbling elementary teacher in *Kindergarten Cop*. So, the primary guiding question for students concerns what sort of precedent the media sets regarding male and female positions in a particular profession. To better address this question, students will watch at least three movies or television shows related to their intended majors/professions. The relationship can be direct (*Glengarry Glen Ross* for real estate, *Black Hawk Down* for military, *E.R.* for medicine), peripheral (*Kindergarten Cop* for education, *The Shining* for creative writing, *High Fidelity* for small business) or even absurd (*Harvey Birdman* for law). Students should keep their selections timely for of major concern are current representations of your major/intended profession. Furthermore, questions about male/female, upper/middle/working class and other forms of predominance as well as student comparisons of identity representations and subsequent glamorized, romanticized, satirized and/or criticized notions should provide some guidance in the composing process.
Week 4: Major Media Representations

- Monday
  - Students gain an introduction to the first popular culture-oriented assignment of the semester and begin viewing a film offering representation(s) of an English teacher. Homework will be a dual blog entry about initial possibilities for student viewing and initial impressions of film viewed in class.

- Wednesday
  - Students will continue viewing of a film offering representation(s) of a writing instructor, English teacher, etc. Homework will be a dual blog entry about finalizing a list of films for individual student viewing and continued impressions of film viewed in class.

- Friday
  - Students will share intended viewing lists and endure instructor lecture about film viewed in class last week. Students will see lecture as a model for their own work on media representations of their intended majors/professions. Homework will be a blog entry detailing notes/observations of first film viewed.

Week 5: Major Media Representations

- Monday
  - Students will share intended viewing lists and endure instructor lecture about film viewed in class last week. Students will see lecture as a model for their own work on media representations of
their major/intended profession. Homework will be a blog entry detailing notes/observations of first film viewed.

- **Wednesday**
  - Students will continue viewing films and blogging notes/observations.

- **Friday**
  - Students will continue viewing films and blogging notes/observations.

**Week 6: Major Media Representations**

- **Monday**
  - Students will share rough drafts of media representations of major/intended profession and engage in peer review. Students will also sign up for conferences to discuss drafts with instructor.

- **Wednesday**
  - Students will hold conferences with instructor to discuss drafts and revision. Students will also blog reflectively about the revision process.

- **Friday**
  - Students will submit final drafts of media representations of major/intended profession and begin individual annotated bibliography work oriented toward preparation for discipline-specific discursive practices piece of writing.
It is the parameters and rules decided and set during IC that allows for everything in MMR to occur. If IC is the more Aristotelian sequence in that it taps into students’ potential for comprehending notions of quality and subsequently aiding in the construction of an environment conducive to their own expectations, MMR is more Platonic with its greater focus on the production of various texts, with earlier forms serving as the basis for later engagement, in this case, the third sequence. This is quite similar to *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, too, given the exploratory aspects of the sequence as guided by specific inquiry, requiring greater interaction with and reflection upon a second semiotic domain, that of popular culture. As such, this sequence contains a greater complexity, which is in accordance with Gee’s incremental principle of learning; it also encourages students to think reflectively about their own cultural models regarding the world (211).

*Sequence #3: Pop-Up Scholarship*

The third sequence, Pop-Up Scholarship (PS), again takes these ideas further, drawing inspiration from the final section of Rebecca Moore Howard’s “Collaborative Pedagogy,” which explains writer/text collaboration as when “a writer overtly collaborates with a written text” (66). She uses the term *(re)formative collaboration* to further describe such pedagogy as the facilitation of exercises in which students have more freedom to play with language without regard for singular ownership. This relates most clearly to Gee’s design and semiotic domain principles of learning, which involve coming to appreciate the design of and participate in a particular discourse community, but it also has a connection to the ‘psychosocial moratorium’ principle wherein learners are able to take risks “in a space where real-world consequences are lowered” (207). The acquisition of literacy does involve the taking of risks, and a first-year
composition course should be mindful of this, too, in the sense that students should have the ability to engage in a dialogue with a particular text, not only making note of discursive features but also amending/changing the text itself. PS is a further continuation of IC, of that initial process of negotiation, though more in relation to a more discipline-specific context. This sequence also emphasizes Bakhtin’s work on dialogism and that “all discourse is a response” (Ewald 88) as well as the creativity of the reader in the act of making meaning, encouraging an abandonment of “the notion that the text is the sole, even primary, repository of meaning in written discourse” (88).

Further inspiration, as evidenced by the working title, comes from VH1’s *Pop Up Video*, a show which presented music videos from different genres and offered pop up windows with a range of information about the band/artist featured and lyrical interpretations to sociopolitical commentary and little-known facts. VH1’s *Pop Up Video* was a kind of writer/text collaboration as it not only involved more than one kind of text but also more than one kind of author; furthermore, the show itself was rather light-hearted and all about linguistic play. This sequence in particular makes use of the ‘Insert Comment’ and ‘Track Changes’ features of Microsoft Word and how they might encourage similar play. By engaging in this sequence, students will have the opportunity to work in greater detail with a major piece of writing in their field of study, showcase awareness of discursive practices within said field, present knowledge to an audience of colleagues and reflect on these discursive practices, drawing some comparisons between multiple fields.

In order to do so, students should have, by this point, working knowledge of discursive practices in their major fields of study. To better demonstrate this not only to the instructor but also to colleagues, students choose two influential articles (one dated, one current) from
publications oriented to their major fields of study. Following .pdf to .doc conversion (or a simple cut and paste action), students go through both documents after selecting the ‘Track Changes’ feature in Microsoft Word. Students should make observations on format/style, ask questions oriented to the text and field of study, delete unnecessary sentences, insert new sentences and be sure to give justification for all changes. All changes and inserted comments then serve as the basis for the development of a PowerPoint on the particular discursive practices within a major field of study. How students present such information is theirs to decide, and possibilities include a guided tour of the documents themselves or a more conventional collection of bulleted points. Students should have some conclusions about the nature of these discursive practices, if they have any problems, if they think all disciplines should adopt them (and why). The final part of the sequence then involves a reflective composition on not only the discursive practices within a major field of study but also the discursive practices of others. Students should ask themselves about similarities and/or differences and what this might reveal about the very nature of academic discourse. Students should think as well about whether or not they look forward to writing in such a style/format and how this will change the way they currently compose.

**Week 10: Pop-Up Scholarship**

- **Monday**
  - Students will bring at least four examples of discipline-specific writing culled from annotated bibliography work to class for small group analysis. Homework will be two selections (one past and one current) from the field of composition and a subsequent a blog entry synthesizing assigned readings.
- **Wednesday**
  - Students will endure a second modeling session in which instructor gives a presentation on discursive practices of the field of composition, specifically referencing assigned readings. Students will discuss in small groups choices for the assignment. Homework will be a blog entry detailing choices and why.

- **Friday**
  - Students will “track change” one of the chosen articles chosen. Homework will be blog entry reflecting on the process.

**Week 11: Pop-Up Scholarship**

- **Monday**
  - Students will continue “track changing” chosen articles. Homework will be blog entry of uploaded “track changed” documents.

- **Wednesday**
  - Students will take some time to reflect on “track changed” documents, giving each other some previews of the presentations to come.

- **Friday**
  - Students will begin presenting on particular discursive practices within major/intended profession.
Week 12: Pop-Up Scholarship

- Monday
  - Students will finish presenting on particular discursive practices within major/intended profession. Homework will be a blog entry about what students learned in both listening and presenting.

- Wednesday
  - Students will engage in small group/whole class discussion centered around what they learned in both listening and presenting.

- Friday
  - Students will share their reflective pieces of writing in small group/whole class discussion prior to instructor submission. Following this will be discussion of student preparedness for final writing sequence.

This third sequence further reveals how layered learning experiences are, for not only will students negotiate the physical space of the classroom and the virtual spaces of various communicative technologies, but they will also begin important exploration into different semiotic domains, those of their intended majors/professions. Such exploration occurs within a setting where expectations and risks are lowered, of course, which is in accordance with Gee’s ‘psychosocial moratorium’ principle of learning. And there are also possibilities for metalevel thinking about semiotic domains, “active and critical thinking about the relationships of the semiotic domain being learned to other semiotic domains” (Gee 208), in the sense of mediating multiple spaces through multiple modes of inquiry, seeing how the notions of quality initially
agreed upon in the sequence compare to similar notions within a student’s intended major/profession.

This relates well to *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, too, given the drawing together of diverse compositional practices in the service of greater knowledge. By acknowledging Gee’s thirty-sixth learning principle, that of the insider, this sequence promotes greater development of *phronesis*. Students, having been able to customize the learning experience from the beginning and throughout, become insiders and even teachers, particularly when it comes to sharing knowledge about a discipline-specific discourse with others. And each sequence described here also increases the kairotic potential of learning, making it an ever-more-present moment and requiring appropriate action now to influence appropriate action later, just as in *Okami*’s timely use of the Celestial Brush powers, *Harvest Moon*’s increasingly leveled tending of crops and livestock and *Morrowind*’s myriad choices in leveling up the player-character. Like in these video games, each new sequence further shapes students’ literacy practices, causing reflection and/or revision in light of new knowledge and experiences.

*Closing Observations and Suggestions*

Through these sequences, the first-year composition course comes to function as a primary example of Gee’s concentrated sample and subset principles of learning, providing students with greater instances to practice fundamental aspects in early stages and simplified, discipline-specific contexts in which to do so. This also allows students to “imagine for themselves the privilege of being ‘insiders’—that is, the privilege of both being inside an established and powerful discourse and of being granted a special right to speak” (Bartholomae 81). In a recent *CCC* article, “A Kind Word for Bullshit: The Problem of Academic Writing,”
Philip Eubanks and John D. Schaeffer call this a kind of bullshit, though not necessarily with a negative connotation, explaining that it may be both unavoidable and beneficial. This is because good writing is “inseparable from the context in which it arises—and thus from the manipulations of self that contexts foist upon us all” (385). In other words, there is bound to be some bullshit along any of the paths to good, quality composition.

But with the understanding of techne as the acquisition of literacy, the act of composition need no longer be this kind of imaginative act, or academic bullshit, for the design of a more videogame-like composition course, endogenous in nature, acknowledges and plays upon prior student knowledge. Again, a major difference between playing a video game and ‘inventing the university’ concerns how the former is, in some ways, more tangible, with parameters and principles introduced and reinforced from the very beginning, while the latter tends toward abstraction due to differences in understanding quality and expertise in writing. Such differences are as much among students as between them and teachers. Encouraging students early on to write from their own unique expectations, be they high or low, functions as the beginning of an ongoing process of negotiation concerning quality and expertise, how to define and recognize such aspects in each other’s compositions as well as their own.

Helping students in this endeavor involves a more direct, yet tricky engagement, for, as Robert Pirsig writes in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, we know what quality is, even though it cannot be defined (208). This is also acknowledged by Michael Carter, in “What Is Advanced About Advanced Composition?: A Theory of Expertise in Writing,” who goes on to draw a connection between expertise and the production of knowledge within a specific field, “which allows the expert to act much more effectively and efficiently than those who do not possess that knowledge” (74). As Pirsig’s Phaedrus engages his students in discussions of
quality, many become frustrated and/or upset at their collective inability to provide a working definition. Through a process of Phaedrus modeling quality, though, they come to understand it with greater clarity, “how the aspect of Quality called unity, the hanging-togetherness of a story, could be improved with a technique called an outline” (209). But this still left the question of how to actually do it, which, as Pirsig explains,

[Phaedrus] could reply, ‘It doesn’t make a bit of difference how you do it! Just so it’s good.’ The reluctant student might ask in class, ‘But how do we know what’s good?’ but almost before the question was out of his mouth he would realize the answer had already been supplied. Some other student would usually tell him, ‘You just see it.’ If he said, ‘No, I don’t,’ he’d be told, ‘Yes, you do. He proved it.’ The student was finally and completely trapped into making quality judgments for himself. And it was exactly this and nothing else that taught him to write.

(209-210)

Students need to learn to make quality judgments for themselves; if they come to value the identities being developed, the characters being established, within the various contexts they have chosen, making such judgments becomes easier. This is not to say that overarching judgments, like those of the university curriculum, no longer have a place; on the contrary, part of this process necessarily involves seeing how students’ own quality judgments align with those of others in the classroom and beyond. Just as many first-year composition teachers figure out how to make what they want to have students do in a particular course in relation to larger, agreed-upon outcomes that are decided by groups or another higher authority, students deserve opportunities to do the same, with composition teachers, of course, acting as guides. By helping students become more aware of the identities they want to construct and maintain in various
academic contexts, we not only promote what Eubanks and Schaeffer call a productive sort of bullshit “that ultimately produces better thought and better selves” (387), but we also encourage a greater value for students upon their compositions as related to the identities enacted.

As these sequences attest, a good composition course should be more like a good video game, providing encouragement for learning as well as freedom of movement and identity exploration. The above sequences also represent a kind of pedagogical experimentation, for just as students continue to develop their writing, instructors should continue to develop their teaching. These are attempts to draw Fulkerson’s three axiologies together by asking students to not only reflect on discursive practices but to also work together in problematizing and questioning those same practices. Working with and through these assignments should provide feedback sufficient for amendments to future course designs, which is something to make known more fully to students, not only the experimental nature of the course itself but the absolute vitality of their contributions.

There are, of course, inherent risks taken in designing a course so dependent on student involvement, a level of involvement I expect many students (and teachers) will be uncomfortable with. It is the responsibility of all involved to provide support and encouragement toward the collaborative measures embedded in these sequences. Not explicitly included here, though, are a sample set of university outcomes, but such inclusion could provide a way to fulfill requirements within certain pedagogical and technological contexts. Again, this is part of the transparency I believe is necessary for first-year composition; students should be as aware of overarching learning outcomes as the teacher is, and such inclusion could also provide another opportunity for learning together.
Much of the above sequences overall, I think, involve this collaborative aspect of learning together, given that there are at least two modeling sessions designed to help students understand possible approaches. One possibility for further student comprehension involves the construction of a teaching blog in which the instructor works through the actual assignment sequences just as students do. While this might make for a kind of double duty on the part of the instructor, doing so could very well help in understanding the difficulties some students might have. Of course, by encouraging students to take greater responsibility in structuring certain aspects of the course overall, perhaps some of the usual teaching load will be lifted. As such, these sequences ask just as much of the teacher as it does students, thereby forcing all involved to really get together in making it work. Of course, what is meant by “work” will be just one of those aspects to be decided by students.

Another composition possibility concerns an FAQ or walkthrough, a document quite common to websites devoted to video games. In such a document, the composer provides not only general information about a particular title, sometimes including its history, but also, and primarily, strategies for achieving specific ends. The amount of detail provided in a walkthrough can be extensive, wholly dependent upon the depth of the video game itself. For example, the walkthrough for *Morrowind* I referenced only when unsure of how to proceed, i.e., stuck, is close to 300 pages in length, complete with various subsections for main and miscellaneous side quests. Having students compose similar documents but in relation to a first-year composition course could provide to be a rather enlightening exercise, revealing not only their own strategies for completion (read: principles for production) but also unique views on the purposes of the course itself. Such an assignment is something Gee also suggests, but within the context of a science classroom, where learners write extensive walkthroughs “according to strict norms and
debated when and how to use them, debates that became part and parcel of the learners’ growing appreciative systems about what it means to ‘do science (well)’” (101). These student-composed walkthroughs of a first-year composition course could continue the ongoing processes of negotiation already present, providing students with yet another opportunity to develop a different kind of ethos in relation to techne and phronesis, and perhaps a helpful document future students could reference if/when stuck.

In all, the above assignment sequences afford students “a place to begin” (Bartholomae 93). By engaging students in sustained discussions of quality and ‘piling on’ a wide variety of compositions, there should be a greater chance for more development and ownership of identities unique to particular contexts. The establishment of an appropriate and valued ethos, necessitated by techne, is intimately tied to the principles of production, and the design of every first-year composition course should be mindful of this. As Michael Begg, David Dewhurt and Hamis Macleod observe in “Game-Informed Learning: Applying Computer Game Processes to Higher Education,” it is through personal experience and critical reflection about their expectations that learners come to know themselves and what they are becoming. They mention this in light of a sequence of statements about the very nature of playing a video game, involving the adoption of a character role, picking up necessary vocabulary, adapting to the environment through interaction and realigning expectations and judgments through exploration, and note that it is a model paradigm of the active, constructive learner. In “What Would a State of the Art Instructional Video Game Look Like?” James Gee acknowledges this, too, explaining that any domain of knowledge, academic or not, “is first and foremost a set of activities and experiences…special ways of acting and interacting in ways that produce and use the domain’s knowledge.” A good video game necessarily constitutes a domain of knowledge and promotes
what Gee calls “distributed authentic professionalism” (and what Carter called “expertise”), which involves having special knowledge and distinct values tied to specific skills gained through experience and commitment to an identity. Composition can and should function as an important introductory step in the development of authentic professionalism, becoming more of a real-world simulation, one designed to immerse students in specific activities, values and ways of seeing related to both university learning outcomes and student goals.

Conclusion

At opportune moments in this document, I have been quick to clarify that what I advocate here does not necessarily involve bringing video games into the composition classroom. There are plentiful educational and/or entertaining video games available for implementation; certain titles, like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, could prove to be provocative texts for students to consider, and other titles, like the forthcoming Spore from SimCity designer Will Wright, have the potential to illuminate even larger concepts. But what would be largely ignored in such implementation is the greater challenge, acknowledged by Kurt Squire, to change the culture of education to be “organized around learning instead of the current form of social control,” the larger opportunity, explained by Geoffrey Sirc, to reflect with purpose on the desirable and essential technologies and strategies for students to perform and practice (126). These continued clarifications come in acknowledgement of discussions about previous “silver bullets,” namely in the form of computers, and how much has yet to change, with greater preferences still expressed for utilizing various communicative technologies in the service of increasingly outdated modes of teaching and learning.
And yet, at the same time, I hold firm in the understanding that, as composition and technology rise and converge, there is an even greater opportunity to bring about the kinds of changes discussed by Sirc and Squire. While I am not one to adopt the adage of ‘resistance is futile,’ I do think it will be markedly more difficult to remain using technology in the service of production only. Doing so runs an increasing risk of Platonic, one-way movement, emphasizing an inability to see the reciprocal and reflexive aspects of composition on technology and vice versa. The many online discourses utilized by many students are already seeping into their argumentative essays, as more than once I have come across a draft peppered with emoticons and/or ‘lols.’ These are the kinds of new, teachable moments available to composition teachers, but such moments are lost if there is no forward movement on the part of the teacher in terms of understanding technology’s persistent influence.

What happens in these moments is related to the continuing development of electronic writing spaces, specifically the Internet, which allows for not only a greater dissemination of information but a greater ease in modifying that same information. Furthermore, spaces within the Internet are quite varied, including e-mail, instant messaging, MOOs and social networking programs. Such variations make blanket definitions all the more difficult and, because many of these spaces are free, there is arguably a greater freedom of movement among and between them (should one have access to the Internet itself). This very freedom promotes a transformation of consumers into users, individuals utilizing the technologies made accessible and available for work as well as play.

Because of such movement, though, what constitutes work and what constitutes play is also changing; the boundary between work and play dissolves as users learn how to operate within a particular space. It should be noted, though, that it is an increasing rarity for users to
only occupy one kind of electronic writing space but to, instead, as mentioned earlier, move in and among and between spaces of many kinds. In *Datacloud*, Johndan Johnson-Eilola explores this further, showing how users do not merely use information, but inhabit it, and, despite working within various information spaces, these are all connected by technology, producing a “the datacloud—a shifting and only slightly contingently structured space” (4). Good video games like *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* are further examples of such a space, blurring notions of work and play by requiring a great deal of devotion to the construction of a unique identity and the accumulation of knowledge immediately associated with it. From this, we might better view ourselves as users, rather than as consumers, of both information and technology. What grows all the more important concerns the ability to not only be aware of these information spaces, but how to move in and among and between them. Even through ‘piling on’ activities could be helpful, they also threaten to bury us.

By separating literacy itself into three sections, Stuart Selber, in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, offers a thorough explanation of how to teach such ability and awareness. While functional literacy may be understood as playing a video game, critical literacy involves scrutiny and understanding the game in different contexts and rhetorical literacy concerns some level of production, either in the form of supplemental materials like strategy guides or actual modifications to the game itself. Gee’s learning principles about the nature of semiotic domains and subsequent affinity groups, about how the players of particular games become insiders by not only consuming but also teaching and producing, relate strongly to Selber’s multiliteracies. And both Gee and Selber dovetail nicely in the sequences described earlier, for while blogging is a type of functional literacy and MMR aligns with critical literacy, PS centers on rhetorical literacy and continuing the production of technology through reflective practice. It is through
various communicative technologies that we are better able to not only understand ourselves and
the identities we create but to also comprehend and enact the changes we want to see in various
contexts. And video games, by their very nature, implicitly and increasingly encourage the
development of various skill-sets to be utilized in tandem for the possibility of change. This self-
perpetuation can and should be more evident within composition, too, possibly in the form of
“chunking” particular assignment sequences so that one more aesthetic piece leads into the
development of one more technical, or vice versa.

Good video games, through an acknowledgement of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy,
provide some answers on how to teach such ability and awareness. Other answers lie within
previous scholarship by Donald Bartholomae and Geoffrey Sirc, authors concerned with
mediating the academic space through the development of identities both understood and valued.
Within this document is the advocating of not only a wider definition of composition itself, of
what students and teachers actually do and accomplish in and outside of the classroom, but an
understanding of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, of learning as an ever-present engagement,
due in large part to the various technologies influencing society in many facets. In *Computers
and Writing*, James A. Inman presents cyborg pedagogy, which might be viewed as an
amalgamation of technology and critical pedagogy and actively supports the use of multimedia
technologies to achieve learning goals and outcomes, thereby empowering minorities to
“imagine a place for themselves in worlds rich with technology” (224). Such empowerment is
also advocated by Cynthia Selfe in *Writing New Media*, framing it in the context of literacy and
suggesting that teachers pay attention to

the whole range of literacies that students bring to the classroom: literacies
presented in the home, the community, the church, and online; literacies
dependent on oral, visual, and aural performance; literacies based on multiple languages, cultures, and contexts. (57)

Of course, paying such attention to the multiple literacies of students relates to the varied information spaces explained by Johnson-Eilola as well as the categories described and advocated by Selber. We might view the “work” of students and teachers as exemplifying movement in and among and between various spaces, for not only are we surrounded, penetrated and bound together by information via technology, but by the physical locations holding (or withholding) such information. Acknowledging and reflecting on these spaces, as well as the context-dependent identities created within them, should allow us to tap into that Aristotelian potential along with Platonic principles of production and make for an Isocratic merging of all that is technologically available in the service of tangible, kairotic action.
CHAPTER 5: MOVING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK

Introduction

Understanding *techne* as the acquisition of literacy and seeing the current, popular technology of video games as an example of this idea necessarily leads into rethinking composition, re-imagining approaches and sequences designed to promote active, critical thinking. Just as Isocrates utilized what was available at the time, combining lectures and handbooks in the service of students’ civic and rhetorical development, composition teachers have all the greater opportunities to combine various communicative technologies for pedagogical ends. And such ends should have greater connection to Gee’s principles as related to good video games, focusing in particular upon the construction of unique identities that students come to value for most all good learning occurs through their development and maintenance. I should stress here, too, that while technology appears to be of primary focus, it is only so in the service of learning. As the work of Gee, Selber and Sirc surely attest, technology itself presents many opportunities through which to redefine literacy and learning. And while awareness of such opportunities is important, it is also only the first step, and the sequences described in the previous chapter are attempts beyond awareness and into greater action.

In the absence of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy and without acknowledgement of the learning potential and principles of good video games, such action would be significantly inhibited. We need to be more attentive to technological influences, which are also often unmarked in the lives of the students entering composition classrooms, and redesign courses and sequences accordance with these influences. Through an overview of the previous chapters and some observations on their limitations as well as implications for further study, this chapter aims
to not only reiterate how understanding *techne* and video games are beneficial to teaching composition, but also provide some concluding commentary on what the field of composition should continue working toward.

**An Overview**

Through the previous four chapters of this document, I endeavored to present an analysis of video games as techno-pedagogical manifestation of *techne*, along with some explanation of how and what composition pedagogy might take from both in terms of future designs and implementation. This all occurred in acknowledgement of the call for expansions of the idea of composition, of movement toward other, more varied kinds of composing. Similar to such advocacy, this document acknowledged technology as an increasing influential factor in the lives of composition students, and subsequently provided a more thorough understanding of technology and how it is manifest in society.

In a dual review of previous definitions of *techne*, the root of technology, due to its continuing ambiguity and the expansion of literacy due to various communicative technologies, the first chapter provided some initial explanation of the incredible and increasing influence technology exerts upon society and, more specifically, the ways we learn and acquire literacy. As Selfe and Johnson-Eilola observe, the technological advances we experience and the multiplicity of literacies and technologies in which we now engage require greater attention to a wider variety of contexts, practices and environments, presenting various and sundry opportunities to interrogate communicative actions otherwise considered to be divorced from learning and introduce new and provocative ways of thinking about literacy and pedagogy. And if *techne* indeed is, as Heidegger, Rutsky and some technical communication scholars observe,
an aesthetic, affecting and autonomous art to be learned and practiced in context, the current popular technology of video games represents an additional area of exploration regarding epistemology and subsequent application to composition pedagogy. Technology is an integral part of teaching composition, which makes it all the more important to go beyond acknowledgement and awareness by discussing and implementing approaches that encourage and complement new ways of making meaning.

Prior to such discussion and implementation, though, it was first necessary to provide a more foundational understanding of techne itself, which was more the point of the second chapter. A selective survey of ancient Greek understandings, it rested upon the likes of Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates as well as secondary scholarly observations of their work in the service of ultimately illuminating techne as the acquisition of literacy, a literacy that is multimodal in extent and execution, a necessary view due to the increasing utilization of various communicative technologies to achieve particular effects and events. Techne as the acquisition of literacy possesses a perpetual progression which Plato neglects to acknowledge, evident in the irony of his utilization of writing to critique and demean writing. From him, though, is the idea of techne as flexible and diverse, with each art, craft or science requiring a form of communication in relating concepts and construction. Despite being little more than the depositing of information, activity is still present, necessary and prior to actual production.

As but one way of acquiring means to an end, Aristotle takes this further with the idea of potential, of something to be acquired and subsequently applied, and yet more than the means. This is because rules are important, governing and informing methods of making; the absence of principles leads to the absence of production. As such, both are important aspects of literacy, of its acquisition and action, and Isocrates understands this by joining principles, production and
potential in his rhetorical pedagogy, which is also a *techne*. In this way, every technological act possesses the capacity for change. *Techne* as the acquisition of literacy is more Isocratic in extent and execution, solidifying and strengthening the relationship between technology and society. Through various communicative technologies, we are better able to not only understand the identities we create but also comprehend and enact the changes we want to see in society.

As explained further in the third chapter in relation to the current, popular technology of video games, *techne*, and its complementary concepts, work through implicit encouragement of developing various sets of context-dependent skills. Through detailed analyses of an action-adventure, a simulation and a role-playing video game in relation to Gee’s thirty-six principles of learning, this chapter provided greater understanding of how *techne* functions within a current technology, remaining flexible and diverse in games requiring different forms of interaction in relation to particular principles and the acquisition of means to desirable and fulfilling ends. With each new encounter in-game further shaping literacy practices and causing reflection and/or revision in light of new knowledge, learning becomes an ever-present possibility and reveals the acquisition of literacy as a fluid, contextual form of action. And the direct application of acquired knowledge is essential to the embodied experience of video games like *Okami*, with its ever-present Aristotelian ‘capacity to make’ potential, *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*, with its focus on tangible, Platonic production, and *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, with its Isocratic, unified ideas of principled production and fulfilled desire. Knowledge, too, in these games is not only deposited initially, but distributed and dispersed through and beyond the gameworld, making insiders of all who engage in the network of relationships, the affinity groups, associated. Principles, both of learning and otherwise, govern and inform methods of acquisition and meaning-making, all of which are necessary aspects of literacy itself, of its acquisition and
Aristotelian, Platonic and Isocratic notions of *techne* and other Greek concepts are surely evident in the current, popular technology of video games.

In acknowledgement of Gee’s numerous allusions to how such learning principles could be applied to more conventional learning environments, the fourth chapter represented an attempt to draw together observations from the previous two chapters, applying what we learned about *techne* and video games to composition pedagogy, necessarily reassessing certain conceptions in composition while also showing how we already adhere to an understanding of *techne* as well as video game learning theories and ultimately advocating further adherence to these elements in future course designs. One particular similarity concerns how both composition courses/classrooms and video games are constructed situations, although the latter offers a greater freedom for players to move about however desired, though almost always with a larger goal in mind. And the three sequences described in the fourth chapter places responsibilities for design and freedom equally upon students and teachers, and occurs in the interest of promoting not only some deconstruction and transparency of goals and learning outcomes but also more awareness and value of the identities developed in different contexts. This also makes composition more like a good video game, encouraging freedom of movement and identity exploration as forms of learning. Furthermore, composition should become more of a real-world simulation designed to immerse students in specific activities, values and ways of seeing related to a variety of goals and learning outcomes.

This document advocates not only a wider definition of composition, of what students and teachers actually do and accomplish in and outside of the classroom, but an understanding of learning as an ever-present engagement due to the various technologies exacting influence upon all of us. Reflective acknowledgement of these spaces as well as the identities created within
them allows us to tap into Aristotelian potential in conjunction with Platonic principles, making for an Isocratic merging of what is available through technologies in the service of tangible, social change. And again, with technology advancing society, it remains of great importance to not only keep up with but also reflect on process and progress, much as teachers encourage students to do in composition courses. This document overall has been an exercise in such reflection, out of which arose not only an understanding of techne as the acquisition of literacy but also how the teaching of composition might acknowledge and change in accordance with such influences.

Limitations, Implications and Suggestions

Still, the persistent merging of aesthetic and technical qualities only furthers techne’s present ambiguity, which leaves open other possibilities for redefinition in relation to particular fields of inquiry, and this document is a testament to this reality. As such, it is almost exclusively theoretical, offering not only a rather new understanding on ancient terms still applicable today but also suggesting some possibilities for greater acknowledgement of other literacy practices in the composition classroom. This document is a continuation of the work begun by James Paul Gee and Geoffrey Sirc regarding what constitutes literacy and composition and how expanding both can (and should) influence how we teach. Technology is a necessary aspect in the expansion of these concepts, given its influential and reciprocal relationship with society. But also necessary, at least in terms of integration, is the more thorough understanding of technology as manifest in society described in the third chapter; without such understanding, technological integration shall surely remain more Platonic than Isocratic, more concerned with principled production than civic change.
As stated early in the first chapter, the medium of video games refashions the earlier media of literature and film and ultimately promotes a degree of interactivity potentially greater than other communicative technologies, like blogs and social networks, which, in comparison, can appear as rather static environments for learning. While both necessarily constitute forms of *techne*, video games encompass more literacy practices, akin to Selber’s multiliteracies. Furthermore, if we want to encourage students to compose more than argumentative essays, it is possible that learning theories within video games might promote this to a greater degree. As of this writing, I am unsure of a better way to encourage students toward the development of other compositions through a focus on video games, a technology incorporating text, audio, video and player all together in real time. Of course, these observations could provide the foundation for further research into the technai of blogging and social networking. Perhaps there is more to both than I am willing to see right now.

Because of its more speculative nature overall, this present document should also be considered the first in a series. With the theoretical framework provided here, the next obvious step is to put it into practice, either by way of the composition sequences described in the fourth chapter or some other means. Guided by a triangulated methodology of autoethnography, data collection/analysis and interviews, the intent of such research would involve offering further observations on what it means to teach with an understanding of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy as well as what to be more mindful of in designing future sequences that are in acknowledgement of the learning theories in video games. Given my inherent biases, it would surely be possible for me to see only what I want to see, to find what I want to find; this, of course, makes triangulation, the intersection of multiple methods of inquiry, all the more important. This need to see how sequences like Initial Conceptions, Major Media
Representations and Pop-Up Scholarship work in a classroom (computer-mediated or not) would come through this combination of objective and subjective studies, and the overall aim would be more practical than theoretical, providing solid documentation in the form of students’ compositions to determine overall successes and failures, perhaps how even supposed failures are not necessarily so.

Beyond the inclusion of students, other participants could include the composition program’s administrator as well as veteran and new composition instructors, all of whom have, to a greater or lesser degree, unique approaches to the design of composition courses as related to learning outcomes, university-wide and otherwise. But to make the most of the participants’ time, it would be essential to also focus upon university and program documents in order to gain a greater understanding of how various communicative technologies fit and support both overall. And the outcomes of such a study, whatever they might be, would surely affect me as much as (if not more than) the other participants, possibly expanding and/or redefining my own pedagogical perspectives. Perhaps yet another redefinition of techne would be in order. Maintaining a unique presence in such a study through autoethnography would be essential.

Furthermore, by sustaining a distinctive presence within the study, providing self-reflective bits and pieces of my own teaching and learning experiences as related to the composition sequences, I not only contextualize the study itself but also bring to the forefront my own biases and preconceived notions. Using myself as an example of limited usage should also present more of an overall framework to such research. And, with the second method employed being textual analysis, there would be particular focus upon students’ compositions, with attention paid to reinforced and/or repeated phrases as related to their own expectations, goals and ideals, particularly those regarding overall pedagogical aims. Such analysis is important,
though, not only for reasons of accurate reflection of the sequences and the students, but also for possible influences upon subsequent interviews, which would be comprised of specific as well as general questions about reactions to the composition sequences themselves. Taken together, this should further establish a foundation from which to build my observations and results of the study overall, part of which may come literature cited in this document, specifically concerning the need for reflecting on how writing instructors utilize software/technology and what this might reveal about pedagogical as well as programmatic aims and goals and needs.

What I should also note about this tentative research design is how well research and teaching aspects would complement each other. For example, coming to know students’ expectations for a given composition course would be doubly fruitful, first for the development of the course itself and second for the development of the research document. I would be just as indebted to students for the continued success of the sequences as the outcomes of my further research. Doing so would surely keep me in alignment with the understanding that research and teaching, much like society and technology, have a reciprocal relationship that can (and should be) mutually beneficial.

Despite the theoretical nature of this document, though, I want to offer a few words regarding the possible impact on the education and training of new composition teachers. While the reading of seminal and influential texts like Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are unquestioningly important endeavors, more recent scholarship, such as Selber’s *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* and selections from Selfe and Hawisher’s *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century*, deserves inclusion. The latter of which, as mentioned in the first chapter, takes inspiration from and expands on Gee’s learning principles, examining the influence of video games through ethnographies of different players.
and their experiences. In particular, Joann Griffin’s “Relationship Gaming and Identity” and Debra Journet’s “Narrative, Action, and Learning,” with their focuses on narrative and its relation to the process of identity development, could be of particular help. Both emphasize the importance of observing, sharing and documenting personal experiences with video games, what Griffin considers to be “important identity construction” (139). This is surely something future composition teachers should also be encouraged to do. Such documentation might come in the form of a technological autobiography, similar to what I constructed in a graduate-level course and opened that initial door into thinking about other ways in which various communicative technologies influenced my own literacy practices.

Journet, too, sees great importance in scholars and teachers experiencing for themselves what video games have to offer, “either directly by playing these games or indirectly by listening to the reports of other players” (115). This can, and should, extend into the realm of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition, for, as Cynthia Selfe writes,

> If our profession is to succeed in preparing teachers to be effective educators in the virtual environments of the next decade, we will need to help them learn to use technology and to function actively as technology critics and reformers in the context of our educational systems. To these ends, we have to teach educators to function as lifetime learners within technological environments and to understand technology and technological change in terms of social, political, and educational implications. (25)

For current and future composition teachers, though, playing video games like those mentioned in the third chapter is not a requirement, at least not yet. That day is fast approaching, however, as the ethnographies in *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* show how such literacy
practices are already present and accounted for. These ethnographies, along with Gee’s own recent updates to *What Video Games Have To Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, specifically acknowledging the influence of online gaming experiences like *World of Warcraft*, should suffice for many interested in such research and beyond, though not for too much longer.

And while, as Griffin notes, video games have both classed and gendered natures, the learning principles underlying good video games do appear to be more universal. Representations of class and gender in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, for example, border on racism and misogyny, but the fundamental designs for interaction are quite similar to those in *Okami*, which has a feminine (though canine) protagonist, and *Morrowind*, which allows for the creation of any kind of character the player might desire. Of course, further research on video games as well as on the successes and failures of composition sequences like those described in the fourth chapter might be otherwise revealing of class and gender issues. Such concerns should be duly acknowledged and addressed in any following documentation as well as any composition sequences in ways that are appropriate for furthering student learning. As mentioned in the third chapter, confronting representations of class and gender in video games could prove to be another fruitful endeavor for students to work through, quite similar, in fact, to the MMR sequence described in the fourth chapter.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, composition still needs to do a better job of keeping up with technology, with the literacy practices students bring into the classroom. Composition sequences, like those offered in the previous chapter, should be in greater acknowledgement of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy, exuding as much concern and interest in Platonic notions of production as
an Aristotelian ‘capacity to make’ with relevance to students’ own potential for learning through experience. Composition sequences should bring closer together and make more obvious the aesthetic and technical aspects of the various communicative technologies students use to make meaning. Composition courses should be based as much in fulfilling the desires of students as those of teachers and administrators, acknowledging the rules governing and informing methods of making. Composition overall should operate in acknowledgement of the increasing inseparability of technology and society, helping students understand all the more that every action is a civic one. And doing so should allow for a greater unification and presentation of ideas about what constitutes composition itself.

Composition should also be in greater accordance with Gee’s thirty-six learning principles, and with courses and sequences created to encourage active and critical learning about principles of and appreciation for “interrelations within and across multiple sign systems” (49). Composition sequences should also be more explicit and transparent in terms of beginning the mastery of more than one semiotic domain and also promote metalevel thinking about them. Composition classrooms should function as spaces in which real-world consequences are lowered, representing an extended engagement opportunity for students to develop and play with identities to which they feel some commitment. And such composition spaces should be constructed so that students also learn “about themselves and their current and potential capacities…with intrinsic rewards from the very beginning, customized to each learner’s level, effort, and growing mastery and signaling the learner’s ongoing achievements” (67). In this way, composition sequences should promote ongoing learning in the midst of lots and lots of practice, involving cycles of “new learning, automatization, undoing automatization, and new re-
organized automatization” (71), all at the outer edge of students’ ‘regime of competence’ so work is challenging but not impossible.

This necessarily involves a cycle of probing the world, of forming, testing and accepting or rethinking various hypotheses, and composition sequences should provide multiple ways to make progress, allowing students to rely on present strengths while also exploring new alternatives in the movement between texts and embodied experiences, wherein lies the meaning of signs (108). As such, composition sequences should be intertextual and multimodal, building up students’ intuitive or tacit knowledge through repeated practice that takes place in a simplified subset and/or concentrated sample of the real domain, before moving up in incremental stages. Composition skills should be “discovered bottom up” (137) by engaging in more and more of the domain or domains like it, with information provided when needed or when it can be best understood and used in practice, so many opportunities remain for students to experiment and make their own discoveries, even in transferring earlier learning to later problems.

Composition sequences should also have designs that promote conscious and reflective thought about students’ cultural models about the world, learning and semiotic domains, “without denigration of their identities, abilities, or social affiliations” (166) and in juxtaposition with new models, with knowledge both distributed across and dispersed within a group “bonded primarily through shared endeavors, goals, and practices and not shared race, gender, nation, ethnicity, or culture” (197). Composition should, by and large, promote further the idea of students as not only insiders, but teachers and producers, too, who are able to customize the learning experience from the beginning and throughout.

In many ways overall, composition already works in acknowledgement of these ideals and principles overall, but there needs to be still more connections made, new designs created,
and this can be achieved through an understanding of *techne* as the acquisition of literacy and through the increased use of various communicative technologies, many of which provide countless possibilities for students to engage notions of identity and quality in myriad contexts. In this sociopolitical, techno-cultural age, such engagement and experimentation, such movement and play, is what composition should be all about.


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FIGURES

Figure 1. Okami. Screenshot.


Figure 6. Okami. Screenshot.


Figure 7. Okami. Screenshot.


Figure 8. Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland. Screenshot.


Figure 9. Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland. Screenshot.


Figure 10. Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland. Screenshot.


Figure 11. Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland. Screenshot.

Figure 12. *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*. Screenshot.


Figure 13. *Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland*. Screenshot.


Figure 14. *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*. Screenshot.