Starting at “Start”: An Exploration of the Nondiegetic in Soccer Video Games

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This article is a critical qualitative textual analysis of a selection of soccer video games, focusing on the representational and functional aspects of machine actions outside the game (Galloway, 2006) as illustrated by the “Introductory Video” and “Start Menu.” I analyze the figurative and ludic implications of these components comparatively, illustrating their crucial role in configuring audience expectations and pleasures for the game genre as well as for game play. By doing so I hope to illuminate how the socio-ideological values of sport video games (and video games in general) are not only exhibited through the main content of the game but also through something as simple as the start screen. This research concludes by examining what these nongame spaces have to tell us about representations of soccer in new media, and how these mediations affect our understanding of the sport’s culture.

Though consistently present in most video games, it seems the very ubiquity of the start menu (and to a lesser extent, the introductory video sequence) has undermined any form of thoughtful examination, as something so common is consequently seen to be mundane; as Marshall McLuhan was said to remark, “I don’t know who discovered water, but I’m pretty sure it wasn’t a fish.”

While the majority of Games Studies scholars seek to understand the diegetic world of the video game, whether this be narrative conventions (Carr 2006;
Jenkins, 2004; Pearce, 2004), ludic aspects (Aarseth, 2003; Consalvo and Dutton, 2006; Kucklich, 2007), or representational characteristics (Flynn, 2008; Giddings, 2007; Jarvinen, 2002), there is far too little analysis or consideration of the nondiegetic space, seen instead as obstacle to entering the “real content,” as something to be navigated through instead of ruminated upon.

The nondiegetic arena of the digital game is something seen separately as marketing device, option list, ornament, or obstacle to the gaming experience. Yet features such as the introductory video and start menu are much more than simple decoration or crowd attraction. Indeed when video games first entered public consciousness through American mall video arcades and children’s restaurants (Kent, 2002), perhaps accusations of adornment and exhibition could be fairly levied, as the introductory videos and start menus of arcade games were (and still are) created firstly to attract curious punters. However, as video games migrated into domestic spaces the purpose of the introductory videos and start menus became less about selling the game (as the gamer must have already purchased the product), and more about creating aesthetic and ludic expectations, introducing themes and narrative, and allowing customization and configuration.

Parallel to the general inattention given by Games Studies scholars to nondiegetic spaces is the distinct lack of work by academics into the world of virtual sport (Leonard, 2006), even though, as Rowe (2004) notes, sport and new media are rapidly intertwining industries. While there has been some effort to understand the sport video game by certain scholars, all investigations of the text focus upon the diegetic space of the video game, the game as played, whether this be a discussion on the relationship between narrative and identification (Crawford, 2008), the varied systems of play used in sports video games (Kayali & Purgathofer, 2008), representation and the positioning of the user (Baerg, 2007), or the pleasures and social uses of these products within a community (Crawford, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Crawford and Rutter, 2007). None discuss nondiegetic devices such as the start menu, or the highly stylized introductory videos, which are by design the first features encountered by the gamer, and thus crucial in forming initial perceptions of precisely what soccer “is” in these new media products.

The object of this paper is to comprehend and evaluate the nondiegetic space of the soccer video game, as an entity that offers idealized subject positions (Grimes, 2003) for the player, by invoking certain features and competencies common in sport culture both representationally (each genre has a unique use and preference for icons, indexes and symbols of the sporting world) and ludically (by allowing specific actions), and also by providing certain technological and cultural affordances. Following from this, the paper questions whether the dominant culture of soccer is confronted by these texts, discussing whether the values and beliefs contained within are compliant with the broader sporting ideology espoused by the global media-sports complex (Maguire, 1999), or influenced by other cultural industries (Tinajero, 2008).

In doing so this research highlights the different sociocultural and ideological values of each subgenre, and the resulting relationship between sport, the video game industry, and the player, questioning how such media influence the audience’s experience and conception of the sport (Wenner, 1989).
Methodology

This research utilizes a multilevel critical qualitative textual analysis to provide an evaluation of the soccer video game, comparing and contrasting the representational and ergodic5 features of the three subgenres identified (televisual, management, extreme, detailed further below). This methodology closely adheres to Krzywinska’s definition of a textual analysis in relation to Games Studies:

Any game has a set of “textual” features and devices; a game is a formal construct that provides the environmental, stylistic, generic, structural, and semiotic context for play. Images, audio, formal structures, the balance of play, the capabilities of in-game objects and characters are all features that operate textually. The concerted action of a game’s textual strategies facilitate, at least in part, the generation of emotional, physical, and cognitive engagement, shaping the player’s experience of gameplay and making it meaningful.

To understand design, the way it seeks to shape the player’s experience, and to evaluate the values of a game, it is important to conduct a detailed textual analysis. (Krzywinska, 2006)

Yet while Krzywinska was focusing upon the diegetic space of the video game, the “game world,” this article centers on the nondiegetic space of the video game, and instead analyzes the spaces existing outside, above, and on top of the game world, in this instance the Start Menu and Introductory Video.

The video game emulation of soccer has been chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, soccer is, in contrast to nation-centric sports such as American Football or Cricket, a sport with global popularity, understanding, and media coverage (Foer, 2004; Giulianotti, 1999; Sandvoss, 2003). In terms of video games, this is evidenced both by distribution and sales charts; whereas Madden NFL 08 (EA Tiburon, 2007) sells well in America alone (VGChartz, 2008) and does not even see release in Japan, soccer games such as the FIFA series (EA Sports) are distributed and sold in all regions (VGChartz), across all popular digital gaming platforms (PC, Xbox360, PS3, Wii, PSP, etc.). Thus, relative to other sports, soccer provides a fertile landscape for investigations into related issues of globalization (Giulianotti, 1999), licensing agreements (Boyle & Haynes, 2004), social usage (Crabbe et al., 2006), convergence, and transmedial practices (Jenkins, 2006).

Secondly, in maintaining three subgenres with distinct representational and ludic traits, the soccer video game allows for a broader comparative analysis than other sports, for example, American Football video games have televisual (Madden NFL 08) and extreme subgenres (NFL Tour [EA Tiburon, 2008]), yet have no management games.6 A comparative analysis of another genre provides neither the depth nor variety currently present in the catalog of soccer video games.

Following Yates and Littleton’s (2001) assertion that video games, like other media, maintain inherent preferred readings devised by the author, and Kline, Dyer-Witherford, and De Peuter’s claim that these preferred readings “contribute to the construction (and sometimes subversion) of an everyday ‘common sense,’ a repertoire of assumptions and premises about how things are in the world at large” (2003, p. 43), this methodology seeks to discover precisely what the assumptions
and premises of the preferred reading are, and what they mean for the player and associated culture.

In approaching the selected texts, this paper adopts Frasca’s (2003) concept of the simulation, defined as “to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system” (p. 3). As an approximation of the source system, developers of soccer video games, in association with the respective license holders (such as FIFA, national league sponsors, sports goods manufacturers and relevant governing bodies), selectively integrate certain features they deem of importance to the sport, while wholly discarding others. Such an approach has led to the birth of the aforementioned subgenres, which makes a comparative textual analysis productive. Following Frasca’s (pp. 9–10) further argument that a game’s ideology is exposed through both representation and the system’s rules and parameters, this study looks at the representational facets of the introductory videos and start menus (objects, avatars, background, music, text) and the configurative possibilities (what the player is allowed, and conversely forbidden from doing within the start menu).

The games selected are the most popular examples of each of the three subgenres listed. Firstly, the televisual genre is one that remediates (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) various aspects of television in creating the play experience (explained in further detail below). Analyzed from this genre are FIFA 08 (EA Canada, 2007), and Pro Evolution Soccer 2008 (Konami, 2007).

Secondly, the “extreme” genre is the newest subgenre of the soccer simulation, being a decidedly contemporary illustration of sport realized in the concrete jungle of the modern metropolis, and has much in common with other extreme genre games such as Tony Hawke’s Pro Skater (Neversoft, 1999). In this genre EA Sports BIG’s FIFA Street 2 (EA Canada, 2006) is investigated.

Lastly, I will provide an analysis of the management genre, here represented by Football Manager 2007 (Sports Interactive, 2006). The management simulation attempts to recreate for the gamer an interactive experience that parallels the experience of being manager of a football club, from tactical, transfer and career decisions to relationships with the club hierarchy (from the board of directors to players, staff and opposing managers). It is interesting to note that at no point in management games is the gamer allowed to take actual control of the players on the pitch, which is central to the gameplay of the other subgenres.

In conducting my analysis I have kept certain questions in mind, ones that I feel others should also reflect upon when looking at such subject matter. What themes are highlighted, and conversely, excluded? What form do the aesthetics take? Are they abstract, realist, surrealistic, exaggerated, cartoonistic, utopian, dystopian, and so on. Concerning the music and sound (or in some cases, the absence thereof), is it energetic, foreboding, orchestral or electronic? Is it licensed from a band or produced internally by the development team? Are there any major thematic elements established by the introductory video or menus? Also what options are provided to the player within the menu? What kind of rhetoric is used; is it playful, serious, informal, or professional?

By providing a comparative textual analysis of the introductory videos and start menus from a selection of soccer video games, this research will illuminate exactly what values, beliefs and ideologies are propagated as “normal” within soccer culture via the interactive entertainment industry, and also illustrate why
overlooking the nondiegetic, seen as common and mundane aspects of the digital game medium, is a mistake for anyone attempting to provide a full analysis of the product in question.

**FIFA 08**

**Introductory Video**

EA Sports’ *FIFA 08* is the latest release in a long line of extremely successful soccer video games, with this latest iteration selling over one million copies on its first week of release in Europe alone (Business Wire, 2008). As official product of soccer’s governing body, *FIFA 08* has the unique permission to incorporate official team and player likenesses not possessed by other soccer video game franchises. To this end it is not surprising that EA Sports capitalizes on this unique selling point through a plethora of iconography; detailed reconstruction of numerous stadiums, club and national team kits, and well-known player’s physical features, all propagating this sense of officialdom throughout the text, to establish itself as the only “authentic” soccer video game.

To render the teams, players and stadiums in increasingly spectacular detail obviously requires a powerful graphical engine, which is EA Sports’ other main selling point, visual spectacle. This spectacle is also achieved through the tier of remediation known as immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), as this subgenre takes on the qualities of its televisual counterpart to provide a visceral experience; commentary, broadcast angles, slow-motion replay, camera focus et cetera. Such attempts at remediation are key to understanding the experience offered by all genres of the soccer video game.

The introductory video for *FIFA 08* is created using the game engine, immediately impressing upon the viewer the product’s high production values. The sequence begins with the virtual camera panning across the ground of a full, large stadium, before fading to black and reemerging with a similar pan of the upper tier of England’s distinctive new Wembley stadium (Figure 1); visual spectacle and

*Figure 1* — Wembley Stadium as shown in the introductory video to *FIFA 08*. 
officialdom, the *FIFA* series’ two enduring traits, are thus established. Irish indie band *La Rocca’s* song “Sketches (20 Something Life)” gathers momentum during this sequence before the first gameplay footage is shown, and again, EA Sports invoke officialdom through the conspicuous licensing of established artists for the soundtrack (Konami, for example, create their own music for the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series, which has a tradition of being heavily criticized (Bolas, 2008)).

The ball is launched from a corner, before the editing segues to a Chelsea footballer playing the ball forward in slow motion, then fading into Barcelona’s Ronaldinho performing a similar volley. The screen fades to black again. Suddenly the song vocals erupt in an informal, sport-like cheer (“YEAH!”) as a player is shown charging toward the opposition with ball at feet, deftly executing tricks and feints. This is abruptly followed by the violent clash of two opposing players as they slide toward a loose ball. Immediately the “yin and yang” of British football are fulfilled; the British grit, and the foreign flair (Whannel, 1992).

This motif of contrast (skill versus work-rate) repeats through the next few seconds, until Robin Van Persie of Arsenal Football Club is shown to take a shot on goal. The screen immediately splits vertically into two sections as Van Persie is shown to miss the shot in both screens, the decisive nature of the miss being emphasized by the overt editing. The next shot, with a sepia-tone and circular lens overlay, shows Van Persie throwing his head into his hands, completing this accentuation, as Christopher Lasch laments (1991), that sport is increasingly dependent upon the scoreline rather than the performance.

Rapid successions of clips are then initiated, all showing attacking, flamboyant maneuvers. Again, the vertical split-screen is invoked for particularly close shots on goal. The montage continues to accelerate with evermore panache; audacious flicks and tricks are now illustrated to communicate clearly the sheer quantity of visual spectacle available in the product. The entire sequence revels in the five qualities of “utopian entertainment” noted by Richard Dyer (1978, pp. 4–5):

**ENERGY:** Capacity to act vigorously; human power, activity, potential.

**ABUNDANCE:** Conquest of scarcity; having enough to spare without sense of poverty of others; enjoyment of sensuous material reality.

**INTENSITY:** Experiencing of emotion directly, fully, unambiguously, “authentically,” without holding back.

**TRANSPARENCY:** A quality of relationships—between characters (e.g., true love), between performer and audience (sincerity).

**COMMUNITY:** Togetherness, sense of belonging, network of phatic relationships (i.e., those in which communication is for its own sake rather than for its message).

The energy displayed by these virtual athletes is never less than vigorous, in part due to the player animations that have been designed to recreate the athletes’ movements in a technically perfect manner. The abundance is provided by the consistently full crowd, the pandemonium of sound, and the vibrant visuals, all of which remain paramount to the marketing of the televiual genre. The intensity is provided by the cybernetic system, allowing the gamer to take control of the team they are usually limited to watching on the same screen, the immediacy (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) provided by the control system is crucial to conceal the
technology and suspend the disbelief of the operator through intuitive, accessible, immediate control. Transparency is obvious for any sporting event (as zero-sum game, the motive is clearly to win), and community is provided by the phatic crowd noise and the team dynamic of soccer.

Tied to the presentation of this utopian entertainment, the abovementioned remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1999), in terms of reconstructing the televisual experience, is summoned through the continuous use of slow-motion and broadcast angles, before going further into the realm of simulation by providing viewing angles only possible through digital reconstruction; a bullet time perspective is invoked that allows the camera to roam freely through time-space.

Finally the ball is shown to reach its target through various shots on goal. Both a free kick and an elegant lob shot are intercut in slow motion to bring the introductory film to a close, as the ball bounces joyfully into the back of the net on both occasions; delayed until the last moment, it is the climax of the entire text, the jouissance (Barthes, 1975) of the football match.

The EA Sports emblem alongside the FIFA officially endorsed product logo then come to the fore, the FIFA 08 title taking centerpiece within an austere white design incorporating a shimmering silver lining; technology and brand approval (visual spectacle and officialdom again) connoted in one swift animation.

One should note that absent from the introductory video is any reference to the jurisdictional body of the game: curiously enough for a FIFA certified product (and even more so in the officially licensed FIFA Street series [EA Canada, 2005-present]), the video gives no mention to regulation or refereeing. In addition, and more predictable considering the game’s FIFA heritage, any examples of fouling, violence or cheating are absent. This highlights the utopianism of the FIFA series, and more widely, the entire televisual genre.

Also of note is the structure of the video. Beginning with panoramic views of the stadium, classic sporting themes are then evoked; hard tackles and individual skill, the grit versus flair paradigm. Then of course, the entire sequence is a build-up to the aforementioned jouissance of the football match, the goal, shown in extreme slow motion as it ripples across the back of the net, it’s almost sporting pornography, as Whannel notes (1993), it is surely no coincidence that young British men refer to sex as “scoring.”

**Start Menu**

In looking at the images included for FIFA 08’s start menu, one would immediately assume they portray two completely disparate aspects of the game, one the game being played, the other the start menu, yet they are both part of the same section; EA Sports have managed to cleverly meld diegetic and nondiegetic action. While, traditionally, games have the nondiegetic section first (configure your game, then play), EA Sports have created a blend which fulfils both representational and ludic goals: the graphical system is immediately demonstrated to flaunt visual spectacle, while ludically, the opportunity exists to experiment freely with the game mechanics in a practice, anesthetized environment: no crowds, no opposition, no rivalry or contestation, no pressure.

As can be viewed in Figure 2, the practice environment also includes a gigantic television screen mounted on the wall behind the goal. This screen acts to
reinforce elements of visual spectacle and offici­aldom, allowing the user to watch and take control of action replays upon scoring a goal, thereby remediating the experience through the dominant media form of sport consumption (Whannel, 1992).

In providing this practice screen the game is also self-reflexively acknowledging its status as computer game; though the sport it tries to emulate in an authentic manner is a team sport, the practice screen is single player, provided for the player to familiarize himself with the game system, and to also exhibit itself first and foremost as computer simulation, as showcase for the spectacle of the graphical engine.

Linked with this is the sense of placelessness or blankness attributed to contemporary sports stadiums (Sandvoss, 2003), as can be seen in both images, the setting perpetuates this loss of social, cultural or geographic importance in sport consumption, a dismissal of heritage and locality as unimportant, as Ronaldinho, wearing a Barcelona shirt, seems to be practicing within a locale that is identifi­ably not the Nou Camp (Barcelona’s home ground), instead being situated within a bland urban backdrop familiar to the average gamer. Thus tradition and place within sport culture is further undermined, as it is not the club, country, or even fans shown as crucial to this environment, but instead the player and the media take central importance, reflecting a common theme in modern football, as Sandvoss notes:

Figure 2 — The combined practice environment and start menu of FIFA 08.
Television has set the pace for the transformation of stadia into placeless environments which seek to emulate the televisual representation of football, not shape it. Consequently, to many fans football on television has replaced the actual game as the point of reference. . . . Thus football’s historical, social and cultural referents, upon which participation and citizenship are exercised in football fandom, are increasingly eliminated and standardized, universally applicable discourses—in other words simulated connotations. (2003, pp.173–174)

In line with this, not only is the setting not the Nou Camp, it is not identifiable at all. The perfectly realized urban setting is so highly defined and so perfectly realized that it becomes a dilution of reality, as Baudrillard (1997) explains,

“Virtual reality” is at the antipodes of the real world. As for “high definition,” it is synonymous with the highest dilution of reality. The highest definition of the medium corresponds to the lowest definition of the message. The highest definition of information corresponds to the lowest definition of the event. (p. 26, emphasis in original)

Looking at the next image (Figure 3), the menu itself provides further information about the importance of officialdom, as well as the correlated notion of brand within the sport simulation. EA Sports’ logo is clearly definable, anchored

**Figure 3** — The *FIFA 08* Start Menu.
in the bottom left of the image, while upon the ticker-tape bar that scrolls along the bottom, *EA Sports* is visible once again with the FIFA logo occupying the right side of the image.

Tellingly, the first option presented to the gamer, “Kick-Off” reiterates the directive of the televisual genre, which is to eliminate the barrier of the computer interface to provide the gamer with an expeditious, intuitive experience; one button tap and the operator begins a match.

The combinatory effect of the introductory video and start menu in *FIFA 08* is to provide the player with a specific comprehension of soccer culture as professional spectacle, as corporately driven and commercially branded, and above all, as discussed by Boyle and O’Connor (1991), to consume and derive pleasure from football as a mediated experience similar to other dramatic televisual content.

**Pro Evolution Soccer 2008**

*Introductory Video*

Konami’s *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* (hereafter referred to as *PES2008*) is a direct competitor to EA’s *FIFA* franchise, and prides itself on providing a more intense, detailed simulation of football that thrives on the *joga bonito* (literally: play pretty) style of football, emphasized by South American teams such as Brazil and European teams such as Portugal; as the back cover of *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* remarks, “Express Yourself! . . . Pro Evolution Soccer 6 enables you to play the Beautiful Game” (Konami, 2006).

The introductory video uses CGI (computer-generated imagery) rather than utilizing the game’s graphical engine as *FIFA 08* does. In doing so Konami have opted to instead use analogy and metaphor to communicate their game’s ludic and aesthetic qualities. It should be noted that the palate for the CGI sequence is restricted to a spectrum of dull grays, only enlivened by sporadic bursts of color unleashed through possession of the football. The avatars themselves are colored with a fluid, mercurial gray, immediately connoting technology (see Figure 4).

The FMV (Full-Motion Video) begins with the gamic first-person perspective (Galloway, 2006) of walking down the stadium’s player tunnel, symbol for the beginning of the sporting event, the threshold between private and public, stillness and movement, containment and explosion, the “calm before the storm.” Solitary footsteps are heard (as opposed to the usual clatter of multiple feet), at once metatextually referencing the operator (as a single-player controlling an entire team) while highlighting the contrast between the calmness of the tunnel and the pandemonium of the football pitch; accordingly the music, provided by British group *The Kaiser Chiefs*, begins to play at a low volume. Only when the previously anonymous avatar touches a football with his foot (Figure 5) does the ponderous sound of the footsteps suddenly stop, replaced by the now booming music, as if the player has suddenly come alive, his feet lightened by the touch of the ball as effervescent bubbles of color begin to erupt from his head; he is quite literally in the other world of Huizinga’s “magic circle” of play (Huizinga, 1938), a bounded universe maintaining its own laws and local norms (Smith, 2007). Again, visual spectacle and officialdom remains crucial to the video’s impact.
Figure 4 — The introductory video for Pro Evolution Soccer 2008.
Missing from the video are any references to the team aspect of football; indeed if it was someone unfamiliar with the sport they would surmise that it consisted of matches between single opponents. The entire sequence is comprised of single avatars battling against one another for control of the ball; again, the singularity of the gamer is acknowledged. Much like *FIFA 08*, any illustration of authority or hierarchical control is discarded, replaced by the spontaneity and ad hoc appropriation of an urban environment by the avatar/s.

The character is then shown performing various tricks with the football as the footage moves in and out of slow motion. Bubbles of vivid orange and red colors continue to float away from his scalp, contrasting with the monochrome-sketch style of the setting, suggesting the fan proverb, “football is life.”

The video then switches to two players opposite one another, representing attacker versus defender. Exaggerating the typical movements enacted by attacker and defender in a one-on-one situation, they are shown to be performing a symbiotic dance regulated by a rhythm and movement known to them alone. The defender ends the dance with a stylized slide tackle that segues into a break-dance spin, following the trend within mainstream sport to assimilate and commercialize youthful subcultures (Beal & Wilson, 2004).

Various players are then shown running around numerous graffiti-strewn streets, the absence of grass and any traditional football pitch both acknowledging the urban plight of the modern football fan while also reinforcing Henry Jenkins’ notion that adolescent boys form notions of masculinity through domination and contestation of their immediate environment:
Video games did not make backyard play spaces disappear; rather, they offer children some way to respond to domestic confinement. . . . Modern-day boys have had to accommodate their domestic confinement with their definitions of masculinity, perhaps accounting, in part, for the hypermasculine and hyperviolent content of the games themselves. The game player has a fundamentally different image than the “bookworm.” . . . In video game culture, children gain recognition for their daring as demonstrated in the virtual worlds of the game, overcoming obstacles, beating bosses, and mastering levels. (Jenkins, 2007, pp.189–193)

In line with this, the avatars are shown to leap and run across the surroundings in a style strongly reminiscent of the urban sport parkour (also known as free running), climbing and jumping along various urban constructions.

The players then move into a flowing, canyonesque setting where gorges are opening and mountains are growing and receding from the ground. The avatars are shown to dominate this plethora of dangerous obstacles, acting as metaphor for the challenge awaiting the gamer, while again speaking to boyhood notions of nature as test, as something to be dominated (Jenkins, 2007).

As the view pans across the valley women are shown cheering and dancing with their gaze presumably set on the players in the distance. The only male spectators visible actually become involved in the action, heading the ball on to one of the footballers. Immediately connoted is the historical paradigm of man as doer and woman as observer, the paradigm’s existence being no more obvious than within the highly segregated world of sport.

Start Menu

As seen in the accompanying image, the PES2008 start menu, though placed within the televisual genre alongside the FIFA series, maintains a wholly separate approach to its menu design; yet the key concepts that thrive within the televisual genre (spectacle, control, and remediation) are equally exhibited.

In the foreground, a swathe of emerald-green grass serves to signify the sport (Figure 6). Yet common components of a soccer match such as stadium architecture, players, team logos, even white lines on the grass to demarcate the boundaries of play are thrown aside to illuminate the core of the game experience: the playing field. Various important connotations are instigated by this: amateurism, sportsmanship and equality, a level playing field so to speak, as sport can be viewed symbolically as the direct opposite to any culture based on inheritance and privilege (Ohl, 2005).

Other more ludocentric ideas are insinuated by the inclusion of the grass in such an informal, unregulated manner; the ad hoc creation of a match among friends on any patch of grass they can find within the modern metropolis: also like the FIFA 08 start menu, the metaphor works on a meta-textual level, identifying with the urbanization of the modern gamer’s environment, perhaps communicating to the gamer the social potential of the product as both multiplayer and online-capable video game.

Juxtaposing the casual, spontaneous attitude invoked by the foreground is the technological spectacle of the background. Spotlights scan the sky as symmetrical
lights flicker in preset patterns, communicating the mediated, spectacular nature that assists the presentation of modern football; it is clearly Showtime.

The first option, though identical to *FIFA 08*’s in terms of function (launching the player into a solitary match), is labeled *exhibition* as opposed to *kick-off*. This reflects Konami’s rhetoric in developing and marketing the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series as authentic simulation of the beautiful game; *Exhibition* implies that the player is in for a treat, mirroring what is noted by Whannel (2002) as the “gift rhetoric” used by presenters on sports programs such as the BBC’s *Match of the Day*: “We have a feast of football for you today” and so on.

While *FIFA 08* creates a determinedly professional, mediated version of sport, the nondiegetic segments of *PES2008* communicates soccer as an avenue of self-expression, self-gratification, and social attraction (Stebbins, 1992, p.94–95).

**FIFA Street 2**

**Introductory Video**

The introduction video for *FIFA Street 2* begins with a collection of “street ballers” running through various urban locales performing impressive skills and tricks with a football, all recorded in an amateurish style that emphasizes the rawness of the footage through the bleaching and burning of the film, alongside the diegetic movie-reel sound as the projection recalibrates itself upon the screen; this also references the documentary motif that is present throughout extreme sports media.
in documentary films such as *DogTown and Z-Boys* (Peralta, 2001), and the user-created content prevalent on Internet sites such as Youtube. Throughout the opening, the movie flickers between real footage and virtual emulation within the *FIFA Street 2* engine, for example a man staring at the camera is suddenly transformed into his virtual self before reverting back to the original footage.

Such blatant comparison made by the developers between real world and virtual indicates the investment that has been made into molding *FIFA Street 2* as a visual spectacle; the talent and panache with which the footballers execute their moves is a spectacle all of its own, and indeed trickery is the centerpiece of both *FIFA Street 2*’s visual spectacle and control game mechanics.

The nondiegetic music is well-known hip-hop artist *Coldcut* featuring *Root Manuva*, performing the track “True Skool”; the hip-hop influence upon the game extends not only to music but also aesthetics and game design; unlocking new street wear and gameplay challenges such as “beat battles” are clear allusions to hip-hop culture, a culture that thrives on spectacle and conspicuous consumption (Kellner, 2003), components that are increasingly incorporated into video games (Molesworth & Denegri-Knott, 2007).

Toward the end of the FMV the film ebbs away and now the virtual representations of these footballers present themselves to the viewer, performing similar tricks and skills, yet now within the virtual realm of the *FIFA Street* universe. While *FIFA 08* presents a professional, traditional emulation of football players within its introductory FMV, *FIFA Street 2* revels in portraying a low-budget, amateur, unconventional perspective on football culture that emphasizes flair, amateurism and independence, trademarks of alternative sport as opposed to mainstream, as Beal (1995) writes on the fundamentals of alternative sport, “a desire to individualise the sport as standing apart from corporate sponsorship and thus being a symbol of self-determination and definition” (p.253).

### Start Menu

The clean, professional aesthetic of the televisual genre (in both its diegetic and nondiegetic representational systems) is juxtaposed by the modern, gritty aesthetic of the extreme genre, clearly displayed by the *FIFA Street 2* start menu.

The representational system devised by EA Sports BIG for the *Street* series is a smorgasbord of elements synonymous with urban culture, from the prominent presence of hip-hop and rap music to the garbage-littered streets substituting for the televisual genre’s grand football stadiums. It should also be noted that *FIFA Street* series is the only cycle of games within the soccer genre that consistently removes the emblematic theme of grass from its start menu.

As can be seen, the background of the menu is chaotically splashed with paint, posters, plaster, and graffiti over a red brick wall. While aligning itself with the iconoclastic nature of the main content, this backdrop again speaks to Henry Jenkins’ (2007) notion of boys forming their masculine identity through the domination and customization of their immediate environment.

In the bottom-left of the image can be seen a pop-up notifying the gamer of the current music selection (appearing and disappearing seamlessly with each new music track); music is an intrinsic part of the extreme experience, as witnessed when viewing any extreme-sports video or channel, the fusing of these
extreme actions with music serves to increase spectacle and transform the event from sport demonstration to entertainment product; this is markedly dissimilar to the standardized use of commentary in other sport genres, though both fulfill the same role of enhancing drama and filling gaps in play with entertainment (Comisky, Bryant, & Zillman, 1977).

“Play Now” is the first option presented to the gamer (Figure 7), and again uses different lexis from the previous two games analyzed. Distancing itself from the notion of professional sport and instead aligning itself further with an informal, impromptu approach, “Play Now” illuminates the arcade roots of FIFA Street 2’s gameplay, much like the “Play” option illuminated on an arcade machine.

Regardless of the sport portrayed, extreme genre games all display overt traces of narcissism, whether it be the flamboyant customization of your vehicle in EA’s Need for Speed series (EA Black Box, 1995–present) or the attention-grabbing game mechanics of Activision’s Tony Hawke’s Pro Skater. FIFA Street 2 obliges in this narcissistic indulgence in various ways, but the most obvious within the start menu are the “Creation Zone” and “Rewards” options; “Creation Zone” allows you to create your own character, replete with scars and tattoos, whereas “Rewards,” as mentioned above, permits you to purchase new branded clothing to further customize your avatar through conspicuous consumption.

In summary, the nondiegetic space of FIFA Street 2 presents soccer culture as a juxtaposition of creative expression, urban aggression, and ubiquitous consumerism.
Soccer Video Games

Football Manager 2007

Introductory Video

Considering the tradition of introductory videos in soccer video games, it is strange to note that Football Manager 2007 (hereafter FM2007) does not contain an introductory video; nor do any soccer management games. Through a visual style of hypermediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), the management game seeks to emulate the experience of the modern football manager, creating an ideal subject position that encourages players to be meticulous, logical, and shrewd. Visual spectacle such as an introductory video would detract from this mindset, connoting instant gratification and constant interaction; immediacy instead of hypermediacy (Bolter and Grusin, 1999), which would be misleading as the management genre is stubbornly entrenched as a hypermedia experience, one that revels in its construction as a technological product, and seeks to draw attention to itself as technological obstacle to be overcome in a very deliberate manner, as product for the cerebral operator.

The management simulation is extremely long-winded in comparison with its peers, requiring hours of play sometimes before you even arrive at your first match day, whereupon interaction will be minimal and regulated at certain junctures. Thus the absence of an introductory video actually reinforces the management simulation’s idiosyncratic identity, as game for the “mature” gamer, who above all is patient, dedicated, and systematic.

Start Menu

The FM 2007 start menu is one full of symbolic allusion (see Figure 8). As the management genre contains no grandiose graphical engine to flaunt visual spectacle, it instantly makes this plain to the operator through extensive figurative reference and absence, something used consistently throughout the genre.

Immediately noticeable when looking upon the start menu is the prominence of green. Not only the symbolic striped pattern of the grass featured in the background of the image (alluding to possibly innumerable soccer pitches across the

Figure 8 — The Football Manager 2007 Start Menu.
globe), but even the color of the unknown manager posing on the right-side of the image, saturated with green as if a part of the very pitch itself.

This manager, though unnamed, is instantly recognizable to any soccer fan as reminiscent of Jose Mourinho, up until recently the outspoken, charismatic manager of London’s Chelsea Football Club. The hallmarks of Mourinho’s pitch-side attire are all present: the Armani gray wool coat with the collar turned-up, the Windsor-knotted tie pulled slightly down for the top collar of the white shirt to be unbuttoned, even the five o’clock shadow regularly sported by Mourinho; all ask the gamer to take on the role of the exciting, brash, youthful manager with their own ideas on how the sport should be played.

Again the opening option is different from all previous, “New Game” distancing itself from the instantaneous lexis of the televisual and extreme genres. Instead, New Game designates a completely new beginning, a larger-scale task than the simple kick-off or play now indicates. The symbol used, a classically styled football, again references the core of the experience without any spectacle or officialdom. Folders are used for icons representing the user’s previous game saves, again evoking a more formal mentality than the other genres: The game is play, but it also requires a mature, work-like attitude for success.

Thus the introductory video and start menu of FM2007 present to the player a particularly industrious perspective on soccer culture, as a rational business model that is measurable and predictable, but only to the consummate follower of soccer.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, what do these nondiegetic aspects of soccer video games have to tell us about the relationship between consumer and sport, between user and video games, between sport and video games?

The televisual genre conveys a symbiotic relationship between sport and technology, naturalizing the association and positioning the audience as regular consumer of televised soccer. The “instant action” mantra propagated through the introductory videos and start menus aligns itself with the modern placement of soccer as part of the entertainment industry; a direct, continuous and mediated spectacle.

The extreme genre attempts to break with these cultural norms by situating itself as alternative to the global sports-media complex (Maguire, 1999), suggesting a grassroots, amateur and individualist aesthetic that incorporates other cultural industries, such as hip-hop and extreme sports. It presents a perspective on soccer that, to use a new media term, is a “mashup” of numerous cultures and practices, assimilating various assets of popular culture to provide a decidedly metropolitan ideology of soccer for the player’s consumption.

Finally, the management genre presents both breaks and continuities with the contemporary version of soccer culture. By articulating itself as complicated, laborious process to be undertaken by the dedicated and knowledgeable player, it positions the user as a soccer connoisseur, as intelligent, discerning, and committed, a modern inheritor of the “fantasy football” tradition instigated by newspapers and propagated in the world of new media through soccer Web sites.
and discussion forums. Yet it also breaks from the modern conception of soccer by refusing to include spectacle, dismissed as frivolous and shallow entertainment for the uninitiated.

Yet what do these nondiegetic spaces of the soccer simulation have in common? The answer is very little. Soccer is a multifaceted, polysemic, and globalized product. If, as Sandvoss comments, the modern iteration of the sport is “semiotically open” (2003, p.156), then the video game medium has capitalized on this emptiness by taking a DIY approach to the sport; picking and choosing among the sport’s various components to create what they believe to be the definitive representation of soccer, whether this be mediated spectacle, narcissistic expression, or laborious industry, all provide a unique sporting ideology and subject position for the player to consume and occupy.

While this paper provides an entry point into the nondiegetic world of the sport video game, it is by no means an end. There are still vast areas awaiting exploration within this subject; issues of developer, publisher and licensing agreements and their consequent visual and ludic impact upon the nondiegetic sections of the text are still without discussion, while the barrier between diegetic and nondiegetic elements is quickly blurring, as illustrated by FIFA 08, and will perhaps soon become an unsuitable term for Games Studies.

Sport in video games is a dynamic and evolving subject, with its parameters and culture in constant flux, and by overlooking or dismissing elements such as the start menus and introductory videos as unimportant or superfluous, we are failing to comprehend the significance of these features for both the creator’s and consumer’s understanding of sport.

Notes

1. Diegetic refers to anything within the gameworld, whereas nondiegetic references that which exists outside, or on top of, the gameworld. For example, although the player’s avatar is diegetic, a health bar is nondiegetic because it does not exist within the fictional gameworld.

2. Whether referred to as video game, computer game, or digital game, all terms can be considered as indicative of games played on any capable digital format.

3. In this essay, introductory video is the full-motion video (FMV) sequence initiated by the machine upon the first loading of the game, whereas the “Start Menu” is the option screen that greets the operator upon loading the game or, sometimes, when the player chooses the Start option within the graphical User interface (GUI).

4. Ludic derives from the Latin word for play or playful. It is used here to describe any feature that provides gameplay or configuration.

5. Ergodic (from the Greek ergon, work, and hodos, path) was a term coined by Aarseth (2003) to describe any text that required the user to perform an act of configuration. For example, hypertext fiction is ergodic, as is an online multiuser dungeon (MUD), and of course, any video game.

6. It should be noted, however, that EA Sports will be including a management simulation, NFL Head Coach 09, bundled with Madden NFL 09 (EA Tiburon, 2008).

7. A mashup is the combining of multiple data sources into one GUI (graphical user interface). The term originally stems from music culture and refers to the mixing of separate songs into a single track.
References


